




## “Twitter is Really Therapeutic at Times”: Examination of Black Men’s Twitter Conversations Following Hip-Hop Artist Kid Cudi’s Depression Disclosure

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### ABSTRACT

Mental illness affects a considerable number of African Americans, and Black men bare a heavy burden. Over the past few years, more and more Black male celebrities have publicly discussed their struggles with mental illness, aiming to raise awareness, educate the public, and reduce stigma around mental health in the Black community. In this exploratory study, I investigated Twitter conversations following hip-hop artist Scott “Kid Cudi” Mescudi’s October 2016 depression disclosure. Following the disclosure, the hashtag #YouGoodMan was created to engage Black men on Twitter in conversations about mental health. I used thematic analysis to analyze a sample of 1,482 tweets from the hashtag. Three distinct themes emerged from this study, with implications for mental health communication. The three themes are (a) advocating for mental health disclosure, (b) providing online and offline support, and (c) acknowledging the role and impact of culture and society. The findings are discussed relevant to social representations theory, celebrity influence, and health campaigns.

Mental illness affects a considerable number of African Americans, and Black men bare a heavy burden. Depression is a leading cause of illness among Black men (Watkins, 2012); estimates of the lifetime prevalence of depression in Black men range from 5% to 10% (Ward & Mengesha, 2013). Although Black men are least likely to report daily depressive symptoms compared to White men (Blumberg, Clarke, & Blackwell, 2015), they experience much more persistent and disabling depression symptoms (Hankerson, Suite, & Bailey, 2015). In 2016, suicide was the third leading cause of death among Black men 15–24 years of age (Pathak, 2018). A 2018 study found that among individuals who died by suicide with a diagnosed mental health condition, 75% had depression (Rossen, Hedegaard, Khan, & Warner, 2018). As the number of people dying from suicide has increased almost 30% in the past 20 years (Stone et al., 2018), we must identify strategies to mitigate depression risk and suicide among underserved, at-risk populations, including Black men. Consequently, this study investigated Black men’s discourses about mental health on the social media platform Twitter following a celebrity health announcement. Such an investigation is important because it has the potential to illuminate not only Black men’s mental health experiences but also provide potential tools that could be utilized in mental health interventions for Black men.

### Background and rationale

Three decades of research and theorizing, dating back to media coverage of Nancy Reagan’s breast cancer experience, have shown that celebrity announcements about health and

illness – particularly when unexpected and highly covered by the media – have significant public health and communication outcomes (Brown & Basil, 1995; Lane, Polednak, & Burg, 1989). Other than media coverage, though, the most studied communication outcome following celebrity health announcements is information seeking (Noar, Willoughby, Myrick, & Brown, 2014). We know less about interpersonal communication and online conversations sparked by such events. One study on Earvin “Magic” Johnson’s disclosure of HIV/AIDS showed the event resulted in increased interpersonal communication with friends (Kalichman & Hunter, 1992). This study, however, remains one of the few to examine the effect of celebrity announcements on conversations. Other studies indicate that people are looking for information online after learning about a celebrity’s illness or death and sharing that information with those in their social networks (Dillman Carpentier & Parrott, 2016; Francis, 2018). It is conceivable, then, that individuals are engaging in online and offline conversations as a result of celebrity health announcements.

Online activity increases markedly in the days and weeks after a celebrity diagnosis or death announcement (McClellan, Ali, Mutter, Kroutil, & Landwehr, 2016). For instance, researchers found a statistically significant spike in the volume of Twitter content about depression and suicide following actor and comedian Robin Williams’s death from suicide in August 2014, and the high volume of tweets remained much longer than other planned mental health promotion events (McClellan et al., 2016). Twitter conversations after Robin Williams’s suicide exceeded that of all other planned activities such as World Suicide Prevention Day when online discussions naturally increase (McClellan et al., 2016). What we do

not yet know is the nature of mental health online conversations prompted by celebrity health announcements.

Extant research on Twitter content about depression and suicide offer insights into potential themes that might emerge in conversations following celebrity health announcements. The research to date shows that disclosure of mental health conditions and symptoms and supportive information are prevalent in Twitter content (Berry et al., 2017; Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016). One study estimated that two-thirds of tweets disclosed one or more symptoms of major depressive disorder or communicated thoughts consistent with struggles with depression (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016). Other studies have found that people tweet about mental health for a number of reasons, including to connect with others who have the same or similar condition, to send and receive messages of support, and to share honest experiences without being judged (Berry et al., 2017; Lal, Nguyen, & Theriault, 2016). These findings are consistent with prior research and theorizing on self-disclosure, online social support, and support networks, which found that individuals are not only willing to disclose stigmatized health conditions but also give and get help from members of their online social networks (Wright, 2016).

Over the past few years, more and more African American celebrities have publicly discussed their struggles with mental illness, aiming to raise awareness, educate the public, and reduce stigma around mental health in the Black community (Holmes, 2016, June 16). Several male rap and hip-hop artists have also been outspoken about their mental health experiences. Prominent rappers such as Jay-Z, Kanye West, and David Banner have talked in the media about mental health; other rap artists such as Kendrick Lamar and Lil Wayne have written lyrics about depression and suicide. Male rap and hip-hop artists are known to embody hyper-masculine identities and to indicate preferences for traditional masculine norms (Belle, 2014). In turn, masculinity is associated with a lower likelihood of men seeking help and engaging in mental health services (Seidler, Dawes, Rice, Olliffe, & Dhillon, 2016). However, extant empirical and lay evidence indicates that some prominent male hip-hop artists are countering masculine perceptions in their willingness to include mental health topics in their song lyrics and publicly discuss mental health (Finley, 2016; Travis, 2012). These rappers' willingness to discuss mental health in the media and through their music may be due, in part, to several rappers having attempted suicide or having died by suicide. Rap and hip-hop artists have an outsized influence on young Black men (Elligan, 2001). Furthermore, African Americans see celebrities as role models for mental health (Mishra, Lucksted, Gioia, Barnet, & Baquet, 2009).

### Current study

On October 4, 2016, Kid Cudi – a prominent Black male rapper – announced in a Facebook post that he was diagnosed with depression and had suicidal thoughts, and was beginning treatment (Kid Cudi, 2016). Kid Cudi is a Grammy Award-winning hip-hop artist and a mental health advocate. His Facebook post generated extensive media coverage and social

media engagement, including almost 165,000 likes and more than 40,000 shares within the first 12 hours (Kid Cudi, 2016). The announcement also led to a trending Twitter hashtag #YouGoodMan (Nuckolls, 2016). Prior research found that Kid Cudi's admission affected young Black men's information seeking beliefs and behaviors (Francis, 2018).

This study explores how Kid Cudi's announcement encouraged Black men on Twitter to talk about mental health and the prevailing themes and messages within those conversations. The conceptual model of the impact of public figure announcements on behavioral and disease outcomes provided the guiding framework for the study (Noar et al., 2014). The model identified interpersonal communication as an intermediate outcome of public figure announcements. The present study addresses one research question: What were Black men saying in their Twitter conversations about mental health following Kid Cudi's announcement? An understanding of the content of online discussions generated following celebrity health announcements resonates with renewed interest in health communication on the effects of such events. It also resonates with research examining health-related user-generated content on social media. The study not only provides insights into health-related social media conversations among Black men but also on the role of hip-hop celebrities in facilitating such discussions. The study thus offers a unique contribution to emerging research on mental health content on social media and broader analysis assessing the public health impact of celebrity health announcements.

### Methods

Data for the study were collected over one week between October 5 and 11, 2016. Conversations using the hashtag #YouGoodMan were chosen for analysis. Although most of the Twitter conversation occurred within the first 48 hours, the timeframe accounts for the start of the hashtag conversations and any lagging tweets. A Black woman Twitter user created the #YouGoodMan hashtag on October 5, less than 24 hours after Kid Cudi's announcement, and sought to engage Black men on Twitter in conversations about mental health (Nuckolls, 2016). According to the creator, the purpose of the hashtag was "For Black men to confess, ask for help, vent, or get pointed in the direction of mental health professionals" (Nuckolls, 2016). Further, the creator noted that "#YouGoodMan is a permission slip for vulnerability in a world that hides depression under toxic expression of masculinity" (Nuckolls, 2016). (In offline environments 'You good man' is used among Black men to ask how they are doing.) The #YouGoodMan hashtag emerged around the time when several news outlets were reporting on how Kid Cudi's announcement prompted online and offline discussions about Black men and mental health (Andrews, 2016; Finley, 2016; Harris, 2016; Kornhaber, 2016). For example, Kornhaber's (2016) article in *The Atlantic* was titled, "Kid Cudi Sparks a Conversation on Depression, Race, and Rap." Although several hashtags were used after Kid Cudi's announcement (e.g., #KidCudi) the study included only tweets with #YouGoodMan hashtag because of the focus on content around Black men's mental health.

Tweets containing the hashtag #YouGoodMan were collected using Crimson Hexagon's ForSight software, which has access to Twitter's full data stream. All tweets with the relevant hashtag originating from the United States and in English were collected during the study period. The geographic location of the user and language were determined through the software's filter options. Although the hashtag's creator requested responses from Black men on Twitter, the open nature of social media platforms meant that anyone could respond and be part of the conversation. Nevertheless, there is a high degree of confidence that Black men were the majority users of the hashtag (Brock, 2012; Stevens & Maurantonio, 2017). As other scholars who have studied Black users on Twitter have noted, Black Twitter users are adept at identifying those who do not belong and singling them out (Stevens & Maurantonio, 2017).

The search located a total of 20,232 tweets. The software then generated a random sample of 9,315 tweets (or 46%), which were downloaded and imported into an Excel spreadsheet for data cleaning and organization. During data cleaning, duplicate tweets from the same or other users and retweets were identified and removed. Tweets with only images, videos, or website links were also excluded. Unique tweets with words and phrases relevant to the study aim were retained. This process resulted in a final sample of 1,482 unique tweets.

The study used qualitative analysis to gain insights into the prevailing themes arising from those conversations. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In thematic analysis, data are subjected to six stages of analysis, from coding to theme development to refinement. The analysis was initially data-driven and focused on content about mental health disclosures, supportive information, and mobilizing information (i.e., specific information about getting help). The analyses then moved to uncover hidden aspects of the tweets (i.e., broader patterns and themes). For the first stage of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the author became familiar with the data by reading each tweet several times. The next steps involved generating an initial set of codes and coding the tweets for broad themes across overt and latent aspects of the data. Fourthly, the data were re-coded, and themes were identified that captured broader patterns relevant to the research question. The fifth step involved defining and naming the themes, which are reported below. The purpose of this iterative process was to map out deeper meanings expressed about Black men's mental health experiences during the conversations. The report produced here is the final step in the thematic analysis process. The author and a research assistant coded a subset of tweets ( $n = 149$ ), and reliability analysis was computed. This coding process resulted in 96% agreement and Krippendorff's Alpha of 0.92 between the two coders. This project was reviewed and exempted by the Institutional Review Board for the participating university.

## Results

The study investigated social media conversations about Black men's mental health, prompted by rapper Kid Cudi's depression

disclosure. Three distinct themes emerged from this study. The three themes are: (a) advocating for mental health disclosure, (b) providing online and offline support, and (c) acknowledging the role and impact of culture and society. Each of these themes and subthemes is addressed in detail below.

### **Advocating for mental health disclosure**

About a quarter of the tweets were from Black men who publicly shared details about their mental health conditions. They used multiple strategies during the disclosure process, including explicitly sharing their diagnoses, talking about seeing a mental health professional, or taking medications. Others mentioned feelings of anxiety, panic attacks, and lack of sleep. A small number of tweets also mentioned substance use and abuse in the context of their mental health issues.

Many participants gave explicit details about mental health diagnosis, while others described feelings commonly associated with depression or psychological symptoms. Some examples of explicit disclosure include:

*I have been dealing with major depression, minor anxiety, and minor insomnia for a very long time.*

*One of the most relieving feelings for me was sharing that I had thoughts of suicide. Realizing you aren't the only one helps.*

*Anxiety has had me trapped since childhood. I'm always anxious. It's led to depression and many lost opportunities.*

*Kid Cudi's situation resonates with me because I've admitted myself into rehab before because of depression and suicidal ideation.*

Several participants not only shared their diagnoses but also that they were taking medications to manage their mental illness. In discussing their medications, participants were implicitly acknowledging the multiple ways Black men could disclose their mental health conditions and the options available to those who needed help. Some examples of medication disclosure include:

*I'm taking my depression medication. And it's OK.*

*I hate taking pills for my depression because it makes me feel like it's the only way to get "better." I hate feeling drugged.*

However, not all participants were willing to disclose a specific diagnosis. Some preferred to talk about the treatments they were receiving. Treatment discussions then provided another avenue to discuss ways Black men could reveal their mental health conditions and get help. Some examples of treatment disclosure include:

*Had to get help earlier this year. Best thing I've done as a father & husband. We deserve to speak on the pain we carry!*

*I've been seeing a psychiatrist for ten years. I need unbiased guidance in my life.*

*I've been getting help for over a year for shit that I couldn't tackle alone. Best decision I ever made.*

Beyond discussions of specific diagnoses, medications, or treatment plans, some participants focused on mental health symptoms. Some of the symptoms mentioned included prolonged sleep, feeling bummed out, and staying in a lot:

*I know what it feels like to struggle to get out of bed and put on a brave face when you are hurting.*

*For the longest, I thought I was just a “bummed out” person naturally. Nah, dysthymia explains it all!*

*I was hit hard! Couldn't leave the house, work; didn't care how I looked! Didn't care for myself @ all! I got help though.*

Substance use also emerged as an issue, although it was not extensively discussed.

*I was drinking heavily to run from my problems instead of asking for help or talking about it.*

A few participants talked about suicidal ideations, which was one of the symptoms mentioned by Kid Cudi in his online posting.

*When you can't bring yourself to suicide but speak in passing about setting yourself up to be killed.*

*#YouGoodMan No I'm not. Everyone has to die someday. I feel like when it's my turn, it's going to be because of suicide.*

*One of the most relieving feelings for me was sharing that I had thoughts of suicide. Realizing you aren't the only one helps.*

Finally, while the majority of the disclosure conversations were on the participants' mental health issues, several participants tweeted about male family members with mental health issues. Often, the tweets focused on the negative implications of not being open about one's mental health, including dying by suicide.

*My father suffers from depression. He still doesn't want to burden his children with his emotions. I love you, Daddy.*

*My dad was 23 years old when he committed suicide. He needed so much and just couldn't seem to climb out that darkness.*

*This March, my nephew took his life at 18 years old. I wish he felt he had a place to go. #YouGoodMan is so needed. Kudos & respect, fellas!*

### **Providing online and offline support**

Most of the tweets were supportive of the conversation. The overall sense of support for Kid Cudi as well as the men sharing their mental health struggles was evident through the best wishes expressed and explicit use of words such as “dope,” “heartwarming,” “brave,” and “necessary.” Phrases such as “possibly one of the best hashtags,” “I love this hashtag,” and “exactly what I needed” were also present, which implies strong approval. Supportive tweets could be further grouped into three sub-themes: emotional support, network support, and informational support.

### **Emotional support**

Many participants expressed high levels of empathy and concern for those who have a mental illness. A dominant acknowledgment in the conversations was that Twitter provided a space for Black men to be vulnerable on social media. Sample emotional support tweets include:

*It's okay to be vulnerable. It's okay to feel.*

*Yes, please be vulnerable. I'm here for it. I'm so here for it.*

*We (Black men) really need to be more vulnerable and more honest about how we are feeling. Easier said than done; I know.*

*Addressing mental health among Black men is so important. It's okay to show your emotions. It's okay to be vulnerable.*

*Being strong means getting help when you need it, crying, being vulnerable, being scared. It's strong to admit that #YouGoodMan.*

In that regard, participants showed extensive support for those who disclosed their mental health conditions and showed vulnerability by revealing their emotions. Some examples include:

*Real men do cry. All your feelings and experiences are valid and matter.*

*I am so here for Black men accepting that they have feelings and knowing that they are allowed to show emotions.*

*My fellas, it's ok to be vulnerable, it's ok to speak about the pain and hurt you've experienced. This is a strength, not weakness.*

*Thank you to everyone who shared a piece of themselves with the word by using the #YouGoodMan hashtag. Your story matters & helps others.*

Another standard view was that it was okay for Black men to not be okay and to share on social media that they were not okay. For example:

*It's okay to say you're not okay.*

*#YouGoodMan is a great way to start the conversation. Fellas, it's ok to not be ok all of the time. You are supported and loved.*

Participants wanted Black men to know that it was okay to say ‘no’ in response to the question “#YouGoodMan?” And that they would be provided support if they need it. As such, participants said:

*I'm not good yet, but I'm a lot better than I used to be. This hashtag gives me something to look forward to. Thankful.*

*#YouGoodMan truth be told I'm not good most of the time.*

### **Network support**

Network support focused on letting others know that community is available on Twitter, was shared in many tweets. “You are not alone” appeared multiple times in the conversation. For example:

*To my brothers fighting their own internal struggles and demons, you're not alone.*

Black women who participated in the discussions were instrumental in showing support for Black men. Mainly, Black women expressed support for the overall conversation and concern for Black men who are suffering. In some ways, Black women validated Black men sharing their feelings and mental health conditions on Twitter.

*Black men we love and support your honesty & growth ... we need you to survive! ~signed a concerned Black woman.*

*Man, it is perfectly OKAY to NOT be okay!!! And as a Black woman, I promise I'll be by your side whether #YouGoodMan or not.*



*Black men, please let your emotions and worry out. It's ok to express them because as BW [Black women] we need you. We love you!*

During the conversation, some participants thanked Black women for their support, which implies a reciprocal relationship between Black men and Black women.

*I appreciate all the Black women showing support to us Black men today. You are beloved allies.*

Participants stressed how crucial it was for Black men to get help when needed and expressed support for those who wanted to seek help, with the primary aim of attempting to end the stigma and shame around help-seeking.

*Mental health is so important in our lives. Not having a way to deal with it can be detrimental. Seeking help is ok. Be better.*

*To men who may be struggling, we love you, and we support you. It's OK to seek help when you are not OK.*

*Get help from a licensed mental health practitioner. You'll feel better not carrying the weight and stigma of depression.*

*#YouGoodMan how can I help? Black men, I'm here if you need an ear or a buffer between you and the voices inside #MentalHealthAwareness.*

Several participants sent prayers to Kid Cudi and other Black men as a way of showing support.

*Much prayer & respect to @KidCudi, your music has been the medicine to countless breakdowns. Wouldn't be here without it. #YouGoodMan*

*With the amount of things @KidCudi has helped me thru, praying so hard for his healing now.*

### Informational support

Throughout the conversation, participants provided information to those seeking help. Some participant offered information about mental health resources that are available such as websites, phone numbers, text services, e-mail, mobile apps, and social media sites. One tweet gave the telephone number to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and another gave the number for the Crisis Text Line.

*If you or someone you know needs help, call 1-800-273-8255 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.*

*Hey fellas, it's ok to talk about what's going on inside. Wanna talk it out? @CrisisTextLine can help. Text Hi to 741741.*

Several participants who joined the conversation were mental health professionals; they offered their services or ways to help participants find the help they needed. Some examples include:

*I am a Clinical MH Therapist if you would like to find services in your area and don't know where to begin, ask me. I can help!*

*@KidCudi I'm a crisis worker on suicide prevention lines. I appreciate you as do many others; thank you for being brave.*

### Acknowledging the role and impact of culture and society

Contextual issues around Black men's mental health were not particularly prominent in the discussions. However, a few participants mentioned some cultural and social factors

affecting Black men and their mental health, including the difficulties in discussing mental health with parents and other family members, the negative messages that Black men receive when they talk about their mental health, and how religion can impede getting help.

### Black community and family

Some used the conversations to address how mental health is perceived in the Black community, with the belief that more mental health discussions are needed in the Black community. Sample tweets include:

*Black boys, in particular, are committing suicide at rates that outstrip their peers, and we didn't even discuss it. This must end #YouGoodMan.*

*Depression and anxiety are very real in the Black community, but it's treated like a myth most times.*

*I LOVE the meaning of this hashtag! Mental health is so overlooked and underrated in the Black community.*

*#YouGoodMan is a CRITICAL movement to discuss mental health issues for men in the Black community. You are not alone. You belong. Reach out.*

The conversation also allowed some participants to talk about the Black family's role in Black men's mental health struggles, primarily how Black men are raised not to show emotions or to seek help. For example:

*"Man up" is one of the worst things parents and friends could say to a male. hypermasculinity is killing us.*

*Being raised by Nigerian parents & the only male child, I was always n still chastised for showing emotions.*

Others tweeted about not sharing their mental health treatments with family members due to perceptions that mental health does not affect Black communities.

*Not telling your parents you signed up for therapy because "Black kids" can't have anxiety or depression.*

### Religion and church

The belief of many religious Black people that prayer can cure mental health problems was present in the conversation. For example:

*#YouGoodMan Just Pray about it.*

*Develop a relationship with God, and you'll always know. #YouGoodMan #You're Chosen.*

*Get connected to a life-giving church. Have the courage to get into a small group where people know your name. God loves you!*

Another mentioned one family's response to mental health and the negative implications of a prayer-only approach:

*#YouGoodMan is such an important tag. When son's dad battled w anxiety, his old school fam told us to pray on it -often that's not enough!*

The tension between getting help and prayer was evident in the tweets juxtaposing the two approaches:

*I'm a strong believer in Christ. However, I believe my loved ones only relying on "prayer" to help did more harm than good #YouGoodMan.*

*Black folks say "Pray about it." Prayer is cool, but often not enough. Please seek professional help. It's okay. #realtalk*

*If you are struggling, get the help you need & do the work. Don't let folks tell you that lots of prayer & church will do the trick #YouGoodMan.*

*Don't judge or stigmatize. Empathize and encourage your loved ones to get the help they need (and no church/praying isn't enough).*

Others acknowledge the positive influences that religion and the church can have on one's mental health:

*You can get closer to God & still struggle with your mental health. Seek help and find peace.*

Some conversations about depression and mental illness push you to God so He can ask are #YouGoodMan.

A few participants discussed how the combination of religion, family, and help from the mental health community could bring about positive outcomes.

*Living with a "mental illness" is an everyday learning process. But GOD, family, medicine, & therapy help.*

*I'm a lot better today due to a combination of prayer, meditating, therapy, & medicine. What works for me might not work for you.*

### Masculinity

While discussions around masculinity and vulnerability were few, some used the discussion to address issues that prevent Black men from being vulnerable.

*As a man, it's hard to address mental health if being emotional is frowned upon. Societal stereotypes contribute to hiding.*

*Society tells us that emotions and vulnerability are signs of weakness, but that's false. It doesn't make you less just human.*

*When men are told in our society to be silent, we self-medicate, hold things, and commit suicide.*

A few tweets also talked about John Henryism, the concept that Black men work themselves hard to death and are overly stressed. Those tweets aimed to raise awareness of long-term health issues arising from Black men's low willingness to get help. For example:

*#YouGoodMan (mental wellness) and John Henryism (physical wellness) are specific to Black men.*

*John Henryism wasn't just about normal stress, but prolonged exposure to social norms of discrimination specific to Black men.*

A small number of tweets also drew attention to the intersections of race, gender, and mental health by focusing on the mental health struggles of LGBT and transgender Black men.

*Many Black gay men suffer from depression and suicidal thoughts. Please seek help! We need you in this world.*

*This is an important topic for the Black #LGBT community. Many Black gay men suffer in silence.*

### Influence of rap and hip-hop

Rap and hip-hop music have become major influences on Black men's mental health. As such, one participant asked others to share examples of rap and hip-hop lyrics that addressed mental health. Many responded with the names of songs and artists, especially young Black men, who have written and rapped about mental health. Sample tweets included:

*Heaven and Hell – Kendrick Lamar*

*The Ghetto Boys pretty much did a whole song dedicated to #YouGoodMan, and people still think it's a "Halloween song."*

*Lil Wayne spoke about a suicide attempt in @solangeknowles #ASeatAtTheTable There is nothing to be ashamed of.*

*@kanyewest @kendricklamar Spoke in their lyrics about struggles w/depression & suicidal ideation. Nothing to be ashamed of.*

In general, Black men's willingness to engage in conversations about mental health on Twitter led one participant to note presciently:

*Twitter is really therapeutic at times.*

### Discussion

Black men's openness on social media about their mental health conditions was evident throughout the conversation. Given that many Black men still hold negative beliefs about mental health, that so many were willing to let others in their online social network know about their mental health conditions are noteworthy. In general, Black men are less likely to engage in health talk compared to other groups. Nevertheless, the conversations served as what one researcher called a "judgment-free space" (Wright, 2016); Black Men were supported in their decisions to disclose their mental health conditions publicly.

Much of what we observed in this study could be conceptualized as network support, which is defined as "communication focusing on affirming individuals' belonging to a network, reminding them of support available in the network, and reminding people they are not alone in whatever situation they are facing" (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981). Network support stresses that a network is available to provide social support. Within the conversations, Black men were regularly reminded that they were not alone and that others were there, online and offline, to assist whenever needed, including Black women. The findings suggest we have a lot to learn about what motivates Black men to talk about mental health. The results further indicate that online social networks can offer a supportive and safe environment for Black men to engage in mental health conversations.

This study provides evidence that exposure to mass media health content is associated with conversational practices in online spaces. Social representation theory (SRT) asserts that the convergence of media coverage of a phenomenon, people's attitudes and cognitions, and interpersonal communication combine to create social representations of a phenomenon and, in turn, influence the behaviors of individuals and communities (Morgan, 2009). While SRT is commonly applied to understanding newer issues such as

vaccines, SRT can be used to examine older issues such as mental health when the problem gains saliency among the target population. Black men's mental health has gained heightened interest from celebrities and the public health community. As such, SRT is useful for explaining the relationship between celebrity influence – through the generation of extensive coverage of health announcements – conversations, and ultimately, mental health behaviors and practices.

The research on celebrity health effects has for years revolved around high-profile celebrities such as Charlie Sheen (Francis, Stevens, Noar, & Widman, 2018) and Angelina Jolie (Noar, Althouse, Ayers, Francis, & Ribisl, 2015). A recent turn toward understanding the impact of celebrity announcements by racial and ethnic celebrities on their primary audiences is encouraging (Francis, 2018; Jain, Pandey, & Roy, 2017). Kid Cudi had for several years talked about his depression; he received an award in 2014 for his mental health advocacy. What makes his announcement different from other times was that it became a public event, something that garnered extensive media coverage and led to hundreds of thousands of impressions across social media. What the research is showing is that not only the type of celebrity making the announcements matter for actionable behaviors but so does the nature of the announcements.

While the findings are similar to research evidencing mental health disclosures on social media (Berry et al., 2017; Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016) as well as prior research on public reactions to celebrity health announcements (Dillman Carpentier & Parrott, 2016), this study extends previous research by contextualizing situations which prompt Black men to engage in positive mental health conversations. Indeed, while Robin Williams's death generated a lot of online activity, including on Twitter (Dillman Carpentier & Parrott, 2016), his announcement did not, to my knowledge, lead to a specific hashtag campaign aiming to mobilize a particular group of people. The volume of tweets using the #YouGoodMan hashtag indicates a potential tipping point, a readiness of young Black men on Twitter to have open conversations about mental health. Hip-Hop artists' willingness to use social media to communicate their mental health status and their modeling of positive communication behaviors could also prove prescient regarding use of social media to identify Black men at risk for depression, suicide or other mental health problems. As we developed tools to scan social media content to identify those at risk (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016; McClellan et al., 2016), Black men's mental health disclosures could provide early indicators for reaching and communicating with them about mental health resources.

Research and lay evidence suggest rap and hip-hop sometimes have negative influences on Black men's lives, at times contributing to narrow and persistent normative gender ideas (Mosley, Abreu, Ruderman, & Crowell, 2017). Conversely, a growing body of research indicates that rap music can be a useful mental health treatment tool with young African American men (Elligan, 2001), even contributing to positive masculinity development (Roberts-Douglass & Curtis-Boles, 2013). Scholars from clinical psychology, social work, and health promotion have increasingly acknowledged the prosocial aspects of rap and hip-hop music for behavior change

among African American men (Elligan, 2001; Robinson, Seaman, Montgomery, & Winfrey, 2018; Travis, 2012; Washington, 2018). Given that rap and hip hop's influence in the lives of young African American men, Elligan (2001) proposed rap therapy as a culturally sensitive approach to psychotherapy with African American men. Beyond therapy, rap musicians can model useful interpersonal and community conversations about mental health. Incorporation of rap and hip-hop music and musicians into interventions (Robinson et al., 2018) and programs could be a culturally sensitive approach to health communication with young African American men. Researchers should seek to increase understanding of how rap and hip could be harnessed to reduce risky mental health behaviors among young Black men. Additionally, mental health advocates should tap into hip-hop culture to persuade young Black men to seek information and seek mental health treatment services.

Young African American's extensive use of Twitter has led to discourse about "Black Twitter," the phenomenon of Black users dominating Twitter content and conversations (Brock, 2012; Florini, 2013). The past decade has seen increased scholarly interest in Black Twitter (Brock, 2012; Florini, 2013; Freelon, Lopez, Clark, & Jackson, 2018; Stevens & Maurantonio, 2017). Brock (2012) noted that "Black Twitter's public element revolves around the hashtag, a user-created meta-discourse convention." To my knowledge few, if any, studies have focused on health-related content produced by Black users on Twitter. Thus, the current study is an attempt to advance research in this vital area. The hashtag studied here generated more than 20,000 tweets in less than seven days. The large number of tweets for the #YouGoodMan hashtag shows that engagement was high, particularly when compared with the 132 tweets that researchers found for the month-long #WhyWeTweetMH project (Berry et al., 2017).

Health communicators and program planners should build on celebrity health announcements to develop specific culturally sensitive hashtags, messaging, and social media campaigns to increase awareness of significant mental health issues. The #YouGoodMan hashtag studied here, for instance, could be a central component of a future campaign. Campaigners could also follow-up on the theme of Twitter (or social media at large) being a therapeutic space as a way to engage young Black men. Additionally, a social norms campaign could help destigmatize disclosing one's mental health conditions. Perhaps some of the celebrities who are more open about their mental health on social media could be recruited and trained as mental health social media influencers. Drawing on extensive evidence of the positive impact of entertainment-education (Papa et al., 2000), celebrities could also be encouraged to include more mental health information in their various programming (TV and radio shows, song lyrics, social media posts) as a way of influencing Black men's conversation and information seeking behaviors. The public health community should also publicly advocate for celebrities to continue to disclose and discuss mental health, as these communication behaviors are shown to impact the public's help-seeking practices, including those of young Black men (Francis, 2018). In sum, there is much room for research and

programmatic efforts on how to increase the probability that Black men will talk about mental health in online and offline spaces and seek mental health help, particularly in collaboration with Black celebrities.

Twitter is increasingly used to document, monitor, and assess mental health content (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016; McClellan et al., 2016). Social media also affords numerous opportunities for reaching underserved, minority audiences with health promotion messages. However, we still have a lot to learn about what individuals are saying in their health-related conversations on social media. Analysis of social media content, as formative research, can provide a more in-depth understanding of people's experiences with health and illness as well as their attitudes, beliefs, intentions, and potentially behaviors. Social media content, for example, can be mined to understand people's perspectives on mental health help-seeking. To date, however, there have been limited investigations of health discussions among minority populations on social media. The lack of research represents a missed opportunity. Racial and ethnic minorities make up a substantial presence among social media users (Pew Research Center, 2017) and knowledge of what health messages are discussed and shared on social media can inform future campaigns to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities.

This study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the study focused on a single hashtag. While the #YouGoodMan hashtag provided a rich dataset, analysis of multiple hashtags (e.g., #KidCudi) could have provided a more nuanced understanding of responses to the announcements and the conversations that emerged. As the current study explicitly focused on Black men and mental health, and Kid Cudi's influence extends beyond those domains, the #YouGoodMan hashtag provided a solid case for examination. Second, I did not seek to get demographic data on the participants. Demographic analysis of Twitter participants can be challenging to decipher, as not everyone gives their identity markers (Mislove, Lehmann, Ahn, Onnela, & Rosenquist, 2011, July). However, research on Black Twitter has found that Black users have developed specific language markers to indicate who might be in-group and out-group members (Brock, 2012; Florini, 2013). Third, the study relied on a subset of tweets rather than the full conversation. Although the software used to collect the tweets has access to Twitter's entire data stream, researchers are given a random sample of tweets to analyze and not the total corpus of tweets. While all tweets produced would enable us to have a larger sample size, other studies have found that successful analysis of a random or convenience sample of tweets is sufficient to conduct methodologically sound research (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016).

Despite these limitations, the study has significant strengths. For one, analyzing the data from #YouGoodMan made the study stronger because of the focus on Black men, who often have poor mental health outcomes and low rates of participation in mental health care services. Black Twitter users have become adept at coalescing around and increasing the vitality of specific hashtags. This knowledge increases confidence that the conversation remained predominantly

among members of the target audience – Black men. Examining underlying themes adds nuance to prior research on health-related disclosures on social media. Outreach to Black men regarding mental health has its challenges, but as shown in this paper, social media can be a powerful tool for understanding beliefs and practices among hard-to-reach populations.

In sum, the findings suggest Black men were willing to engage in public discussions about mental health. They were encouraged and supported throughout the conversation. Such an investigation is crucial because it has the potential to illuminate not only Black men's mental health experiences but also provide potential tools that could be utilized in mental health interventions for Black men.

## Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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