



CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF RACE AND ALIENATION IN THE ALBUM *NEGRO SWAN* BY BLOOD ORANGE

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how conceptual metaphors in six songs from Blood Orange's *Negro Swan* album represent themes of racial identity and alienation. Using Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive method to identify and interpret metaphorical expressions found in the lyrics of "Charcoal Baby," "Orlando," "Jewelry," "Dagenham Dream," "Runnin'," and "Minetta Creek." The analysis reveals that metaphors related to race emphasize concepts of otherness, hypervisibility, surveillance, and the social devaluation of Black bodies. Meanwhile, metaphors of alienation are expressed through spatial and emotional imagery, such as downward orientation, confinement, repetitive motion, and identity masking. These metaphors work collectively to frame racialization and marginalization shapes emotional displacement. The findings demonstrate that conceptual metaphors in *Negro Swan* do not function merely as stylistic devices but as cognitive tools that structure how experiences of Blackness and vulnerability are understood. By combining cognitive metaphor theory with the study of contemporary music, this research fills a gap in existing scholarship on racialized experience and alienation in lyrical expression.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Racial Identity, Alienation, Negro Swan

A. INTRODUCTION

Metaphor plays a fundamental role in shaping how individuals conceptualize social, emotional, and cultural experiences. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) challenge the traditional view that metaphor is merely decorative, arguing instead that "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action." Their framework, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), positions metaphor as a cognitive mechanism through which abstract domains—such as identity, marginalization, and alienation—are understood via more concrete experiential structures.



In the current global context, issues of race, marginalization, and alienation have become increasingly urgent due to the persistence of racial inequality, systemic discrimination, and the widespread circulation of Black cultural expression through global media. Despite growing international discourse on racial justice, Black identities across different sociocultural contexts continue to be framed through narratives of otherness, surveillance, and social devaluation. These conditions often result in experiences of emotional displacement, identity fragmentation, and social alienation, making race not only a social issue but also a deeply cognitive and affective experience. As such, examining how these experiences are conceptualized through language, particularly metaphor, becomes essential for understanding how racialized realities are cognitively structured and communicated on a global scale.

The centrality of metaphor in shaping meaning becomes particularly evident in expressive media such as song lyrics. Studies in cognitive linguistics reinforce that conceptual metaphors are essential tools through which musicians communicate emotional depth, identity, and social realities. Nugraheny and Yuwita (2023) note that conceptual metaphors in song lyrics “express messages or emotions uniquely and imaginatively,” generating imagery that engages listeners’ cognitive and emotional responses. Similarly, Fadhila and Juanda (2023) emphasize that metaphors in music carry semantic weight, assisting listeners in conceptualizing emotional experiences that may otherwise be abstract or ineffable. These findings align with broader research showing that metaphors in music serve cognitive, affective, and communicative functions—far beyond mere decoration.

Studies grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) demonstrate that structural, oriental, and ontological metaphors systematically guide meaning-making in song lyrics. Libriananda et al. (2024) identify various image schemas in Sal Priadi’s songs, revealing how identity and emotional experiences are metaphorically structured. Trisnadi & Djuharie (2025) show how metaphors such as LOVE IS LIGHT shape affective interpretation in JVKE’s “Golden Hour,” while Nasution et al. (2024) demonstrate how emotional experience in Lonestar’s “I’m Already There” is mapped through structural and ontological metaphors. Collectively, such studies establish that metaphor in popular music operates as a cognitive framework through which artists articulate complex emotional and social experiences.



Beyond emotional meaning, metaphor in music also relates to embodied cognition. Schaerlaeken et al. (2022) show that listeners consistently rely on metaphorical categories such as Movement, Force, and Flow to organize emotional responses to music. These responses are rooted in the body's simulation of movement and physical experience, demonstrating that listeners understand music through embodied image schemas. Music therefore becomes an arena where emotional identity, bodily grounded cognition, and metaphor interact to create nuanced meaning.

Metaphor also plays a crucial role in existing racialized experience and identity. Popular music often serves as a cultural space where Black artists articulate lived experiences, confront racial injustice, and negotiate identity through symbolic language. In H.E.R.'s "I Can't Breathe," for example, metaphor constructs contrasting representations of the Black ingroup and the violent white outgroup, showing how metaphor communicates emotional realities of racial oppression (Ramadhan & Ariastuti, 2023). Music additionally functions as a site of resistance, allowing marginalized communities to reclaim narratives and challenge oppressive structures through metaphorical and multimodal expression.

Metaphors also illuminate experiences of alienation. Gong and Yu's (2023) analysis of *Nocturnes* shows that music conveys "the connotative meanings of alienation; disillusionment of self-value, self-estrangement, and social isolation," illustrating how metaphor helps articulate psychological and social fragmentation. Metaphorical structures such as downward orientation, confinement, interiority, or wandering capture the lived experience of emotional disconnection in ways that align with embodied cognition.

Across these discussions, one significant gap becomes visible. Although many studies explore metaphors in song lyrics, very few focus on how conceptual metaphors represent race and alienation, particularly within contemporary Black musical expression. Existing scholarship on race and identity in music tends to prioritize sociological, historical, or thematic readings of racial discourse, leaving the underlying cognitive mechanisms of metaphor underexplored. While analyses of Blood Orange's *Negro Swan* often acknowledge its themes of Black identity and vulnerability, they remain largely descriptive and do not apply Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a systematic analytic framework. Moreover, popular music has not been sufficiently



examined as a site where conceptual metaphors shape understandings of Black identity and alienation.

Blood Orange's *Negro Swan* is a culturally significant text that centers Black identity, vulnerability, and the emotional effects of marginalization. These themes are not limited to a single cultural context but resonate internationally, particularly amid global conversations on race, systemic inequality, and Black mental health. As such, the album provides a relevant site for examining how racialized experiences are cognitively structured through metaphor. Devonté Hynes describes the album as a reflection on “black depression” and his own experiences of racial vulnerability. The album title itself functions as a metaphor: the “negro swan” evokes histories of otherness, rarity, and exclusion, marking Blackness as a site of cultural stigma and embodied difference. Because the album intertwines affective language with racialized imagery, it presents an ideal corpus for analyzing how conceptual metaphors construct racial identity and alienation.

Therefore, a systematic analysis of metaphor using Conceptual Metaphor Theory is necessary to understand how race and alienation are cognitively framed in contemporary Black musical expression. Given the gaps in previous research, this study examines conceptual metaphors in six tracks from *Negro Swan* “Charcoal Baby,” “Orlando,” “Jewelry,” “Dagenham Dream,” “Runnin’,” and “Minetta Creek” to address the following research questions:

1. What conceptual metaphors emerge in the lyrics of the *Negro Swan* album to represent racial experiences?
2. What metaphors are used to articulate experiences of alienation throughout the album?
3. How do these underlying metaphorical mappings construct interconnected meanings related to race and alienation?

By applying Lakoff and Johnson (2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this study seeks to provide a systematic analysis of how metaphors function as cognitive tools in expressing Black identity, vulnerability, and displacement. This research aims not only to fill the existing gap in metaphor studies in music but also to highlight how metaphor operates as a socio-cognitive framework through which marginalized experiences are conceptualized and communicated.



B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to examine how conceptual metaphors in selected tracks from Blood Orange's *Negro Swan* album construct meanings related to race and alienation. The selected tracks were chosen based on their explicit engagement with themes of race, Black identity, and alienation, as reflected in their lyrical content. These songs contain recurrent metaphorical expressions related to marginalization, surveillance, emotional displacement, and identity negotiation, which align directly with the research question of the study. By focusing on tracks that are particularly rich in metaphorical language, the analysis is able to systematically identify conceptual metaphor patterns relevant to racialized and alienation experiences.

Qualitative description aligns with naturalistic inquiry, allowing researchers “to study phenomena, events or experiences in their natural state” (Villamin et al., 2025). A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research aims to identify and interpret conceptual patterns embedded in figurative language rather than measure quantifiable variables. Within this qualitative descriptive framework, the analysis draws on Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which provides the framework for identifying metaphorical expressions and mapping their source-target domains. The data consist of the official lyrics of six purposively selected songs from the *Negro Swan* album (2018). Purposive sampling was used to delimit the dataset and maintain analytical focus within a coherent thematic scope. This sampling strategy enhances the credibility of qualitative inquiry, as “purposive sampling procedures are used in most research papers because they... help in ensuring that quality sample is located without biases so as to increase the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings” (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The selected tracks—“Charcoal Baby,” “Orlando,” “Jewelry,” “Dagenham Dream,” “Runnin’,” and “Minetta Creek”—were chosen because they contain explicit and implicit references to Black identity, vulnerability, marginalization, and emotional displacement. The lyrics were obtained from verified platforms including Genius and Apple Music, then cross-checked with official releases for accuracy.

Data collection was conducted through documentation. All lyrical lines were extracted and examined to identify figurative expressions that potentially conceptualize race or alienation.

The selected metaphorical expressions were compiled into a dataset and prepared for systematic analysis.

To clarify the procedural stages of the research, Table 1 summarizes the research steps undertaken in this study.

Table 1. Research Procedure

Step	Research Procedure
1	Selection of the Negro Swan album and purposively selected tracks
2	Collection of official song lyric from verified sources
3	Identification of metaphorical linguistic expressions related to race and alienation
4	Classification of conceptual metaphors based on source-target domain mappings (CMT)
5	Interpretation of metaphorical meanings and their relation to racial experience and alienation
6	Thematic grouping and discussion of the findings

The analysis followed three main steps derived from CMT:

1. Identification of metaphorical linguistic expressions in the lyrics.
2. Classification of metaphors based on the conceptual mapping between source and target domains.
3. Interpretation of how these mappings construct meanings related to racial experience, alienation, and their interconnections.

Additionally, because the analysis organizes findings into conceptual groupings, this study draws upon the clarification that “another concept to clarify is the identification of findings as categories or themes” (Villamin et al., 2025), aligning the treatment of metaphorical patterns with established qualitative descriptive conventions.

Through this procedure, the study aims to reveal the conceptual patterns underlying the album’s metaphorical representations of Black identity and emotional displacement.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis of the selected tracks from the *Negro Swan* album was conducted using Lakoff and Johnson (2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which provides a framework for identifying the source target mappings that organize figurative meaning in the lyrics. Applying this framework reveals a set of recurring metaphorical patterns that work collectively to construct representations of race and alienation throughout the album. These patterns show that metaphors related to Black identity frequently draw on schemas of otherness, hypervisibility, and social devaluation, while metaphors associated with alienation are structured through spatial, emotional, and embodied schemas. Together, these mappings outline a coherent conceptual system through which the album narrates intertwined experiences of racial marginalization and psychological displacement.

Table 2. Conceptual Metaphors in *Negro Swan* by Blood Orange

Song	Lyric Excerpt	Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Target Domain	Thematic Function
Charcoal Baby	“No one wants to be the negro swan”	BLACKNESS IS OTHERNESS	Black swan	Racial marginality	Race
	“No one wants to be the odd one out at times”	DIFFERENCE IS EXCLUSION	Exclusion	Alienation	Alienation
	“Charcoal make it start and make me liked”	BLACKNESS IS RESIDUE	Charcoal	Visible racial identity	Race
	“Lick me till it cleans all of the world”	PURIFICATION OF THE SELF	Cleaning	Erasing stigma	Alienation

Orlando	“Life on the floor”	MARGINALIZED PEOPLE ARE BELOW	Below/dow n	Oppressed position	Alienation
	“First kiss was the floor”	VIOLENCE	Floor	Humiliation	Alienation
	“Beneath the world”	RACIALIZED BODIES ARE BELOW SOCIETY	Below	Exclusion	Race / Alienation
Jewelry	“We were not ever welcomed in... yet we show up”	BLACK PRESENCE IS TRESPASSING	Unauthorize d entry	Reclaiming denied space	Race
	“Cheap on your skin”	SKIN IS A SURFACE FOR VALUE	Cheapness	Devaluation of black bodies	Race
	“Jewels that ring / Shine hit your eyes / Black kiss the ring”	BLACKNESS IS JEWELRY / HIGH-VISIBILITY OBJECT	Jewelry	Black bodies / black identity	Race
	“Red and blue lights on my stone”	POLICE PRESENCE IS SURVEILLANCE	Lights	Threat toward Black bodies	Race
Dagenham Dream	“Had to act like the others to get around”	SURVIVAL IS PERFORMANCE	Acting	Assimilation to avoid harm	Alienation
	“Acted like the boys in the town”	GENDER PERFORMANCE IS MASKING	Acting	Hiding self	Alienation
Runnin’	“Runnin’ in circles”	FUTILITY IS CIRCULAR MOTION	Circles	Entrapment	Alienation
	“Night owns your soul”	DARKNESS IS CONTROL	Night/darkn ess	Oppression	Alienation

Minetta Creek	“Choose your hair”	IDENTITY IS A SELECTABLE OBJECT	Hair	Racial coding	Race
	Nothing is forgiven, black skin and my rhythm”	BLACKNESS IS UNFORGIVENESS	Race	Societal punishment	Race
	“And you know that it’s all at a cost”	RACIALIZED EXISTENCE IS A BURDEN	Cost	Social price of being black	Race

Discussion

The findings indicate that the metaphors appearing across the *Negro Swan* album operate as an interconnected system that collectively shapes how the album narrates experiences of race and alienation. Rather than functioning as isolated figurative expressions, these mappings form a coherent conceptual network through which Black identity is framed in terms of otherness, hypervisibility, and social devaluation. At the same time, feelings of alienation are consistently mapped onto spatial, emotional, and embodied schemas that highlight displacement, constraint, and psychological distance. Together, these metaphorical structures provide the cognitive foundation for understanding how the album constructs the intertwined realities of racialized vulnerability and personal estrangement.

Blackness as a Conceptual Space of Otherness

One of the dominant conceptual patterns emerging from the analysis is the construction of Blackness as otherness and undesirability. This is explicit in the metaphor BLACKNESS IS OTHERNESS from *Charcoal Baby* (“No one wants to be the negro swan”). The figure of the “negro swan” operates as a symbolic inversion of the white swan traditionally associated with purity, grace, and social value. In contrast, the “black swan” metaphor draws on cultural histories of rarity, deviation, and exclusion. The mapping suggests that Black identity is framed as something society marks as undesirable or abnormal.

This aligns with Lakoff and Johnson’s (2003) notion that ontological metaphors often turn abstract social constructs into concrete objects or entities; here, Blackness becomes an



embodied creature coded as deviant. The metaphor thus exposes a cognitive model in which Black identity is perceived through the lens of cultural stigma. Furthermore, expressions such as “Charcoal make it start and make me liked” introduce BLACKNESS IS RESIDUE, in which material like charcoal metaphorically stand for the physical visibility of Black identity—visible, traceable, and socially loaded. These metaphors collectively position racial identity as something that is externally judged and materially inscribed on the body.

The metaphors of race and alienation in the *Negro Swan* album interact to create a unified thematic architecture that mirrors real-world racialized experiences. In the album, race-based metaphors construct Black identity as hyper-visible, surveilled, and socially penalized, while alienation metaphors describe the resulting psychological and social displacement. This dynamic reflects patterns documented in contemporary racial scholarship. Uдах (2023) notes that “participants believe that their skin color/blackness puts them in a position of disadvantage... the discursive constructions of their black identity... work to construct their lived reality of being, becoming and positioned as a racialized subject, leading to their marginalization, exclusion, and disadvantage.”

By mapping racial embodiment onto emotional and spatial metaphors of distance, fragmentation, and displacement, *Negro Swan* album constructs a socio-cognitive model in which alienation is not merely an internal feeling but the direct outcome of systemic racialization—consistent with findings that “deficit racialized discourses and social constructs... confine them to the realm of the unknowing, unknowledgeable Other as well as render them suspects.” Thus, the album’s conceptual mappings do not operate symbolically alone; they reproduce the recursive loop between racialization and alienation documented in contemporary lived-experience research. This demonstrates that metaphor in the *Negro Swan* album functions as a mechanism of meaning-making that articulates the intertwined experiential structures of race, vulnerability, and displacement.

Alienation Structured Through Spatial and Embodied Schemas

Experiences of alienation in the album are constantly expressed through orientational metaphors involving vertically, depth, and physical distance. In *Orlando*, metaphors such as MARGINALIZED PEOPLE ARE BELOW (“Life on the floor,” “Beneath the world”) conceptualize alienation as being physically situated beneath others. This



downward orientation reflects what Lakoff and Johnson (2003) describe as embodied image schemas, where DOWN corresponds to weakness, suppression and inferiority, while UP corresponds to power or acceptance.

Through these spatial metaphors, Hynes portrays alienation not simply as an emotional experience but as a physical and social positionality—being placed “under,” “beneath,” or “below” societal structures. The orientation reinforces the idea that marginalized subjects occupy a lower, disempowered place within the social hierarchy. Similarly, in *Runnin’* the metaphor FUTILITY IS CIRCULAR MOTION (“Runnin’ in circles”) expresses alienation through the absence of forward progress. Circularity signifies entrapment, stagnation, and repetition—highlighting how marginalized individuals may feel trapped within cycles of social and emotional struggle. This aligns with structural metaphors where movement signifies progress; thus, circular movement metaphorically encodes the impossibility of escape.

Pelkey (2023) argues that “even the most habituated form-content relationships in language can be understood as growing out of vital networks of real-world experiential relations, from the personal to the interpersonal,” highlighting how embodied experience underlies linguistic meaning. He further claims that “body and mind can be reunited in lived experience,” suggesting that metaphorical mappings do not merely reflect abstraction but reconstruct meaning through experiential grounding. In this context, the spatial metaphors in *Negro Swan* embody alienation as something physically lived and cognitively structured, reinforcing that metaphors of DOWN or CIRCULARITY are grounded in embodied experience rather than purely symbolic representation.

The album’s spatial metaphors—such as “beneath the world” or “runnin’ in circles” —also align with broader empirical evidence on metaphorical embodiment. Khatin-Zadeh (2023) reviews behavioral, neurocognitive, and corpus-based studies demonstrating that spatial and sensorimotor patterns, including verticality, downward motion, and circularity, systematically structure the way abstract experiences are conceptualized. These findings show that orientational schemas such as DOWN and CIRCULAR PATH are not arbitrary figurative choices but cognitively grounded models through which individuals understand concepts like powerlessness, stagnation, and constraint. Within the *Negro Swan* album, these embodied patterns suggest that alienation functions not only as an emotional response but as a cognitively



structured spatial experience, in which marginalization is understood through bodily-grounded images of downward movement, confinement, and repetitive motion.

Racialized Vulnerability Through Surveillance and Devaluation

The metaphors in *Jewelry* reveal how Black bodies are conceptualized within systems of scrutiny, visibility, and value assignment. The metaphor POLICE PRESENCE IS SURVEILLANCE (“Red and blue lights on my stone”) invokes the racialized fear and threat associated with police lights, mapping them onto the surface of the body (“stone”). This reflects how Black bodies are often hyper-visible and yet socially devalued.

Additionally, metaphors such as SKIN IS A SURFACE FOR VALUE (“Cheap on your skin”) frame racialized bodies as commodified objects whose “value” is determined externally. In Lakoff and Johnson (2003) framework, this represents an ontological metaphor where the body becomes an object subject to pricing, judgment, and inspection. Jewelry-related metaphors (“Jewels that ring... Black kiss the ring”) simultaneously elevate and commodify Blackness—suggesting a tension between empowerment and objectification.

The metaphors of surveillance and bodily valuation in *Jewelry* parallel documented racialized experiences in contemporary research, in which institutional structures construct certain bodies as hyper-visible, controllable, and inherently suspect. This dynamic is mirrored in the finding that “the bodies of racialized migrants are regulated and controlled by politicians, legislation, the Canadian Border Services Agency, and institutions such as the police, the criminal justice system, immigration, and the health care system,” revealing that the scrutiny described metaphorically in the album corresponds with real-world forms of policing and oversight (Ma, 2023). The metaphor POLICE PRESENCE IS SURVEILLANCE resonates strongly with participants’ experiences, particularly where Ma (2023) note that “The police have harassed Vietnamese people, asking for their identity... this harassment also extends to mall security staff and false accusations of shoplifting.” This structure of racialized visibility reinforces the cognitive mapping in which Blackness becomes a site of threat, exposure, and involuntary attention.

Alongside surveillance, metaphors of bodily value, such as SKIN IS A SURFACE FOR VALUE, correspond to broader racialized discourses that frame racialized groups as problems



requiring control, as noted: “migration is... requiring a legal and policing solution to control Vietnamese bodies.” These systems operate by positioning racialized bodies as externally interpreted surfaces whose meaning and worth are shaped by institutional power. The metaphorical framing of the body as “stone,” “jewel,” or “surface” thus reflects a socio-cognitive structure in which racial identity is materially inscribed and narratively constrained.

These convergences illustrate that the album’s conceptual mappings are not operating in isolation but replicate the recursive loop between racialization, surveillance, and vulnerability present in lived experience. The metaphors in *Jewelry* therefore function as cognitive tools that expose and critique the processes through which racial identity becomes a locus of scrutiny, regulation, and marginalization extending the album’s thematic architecture of racialized vulnerability into a broader socio-political context documented in contemporary research.

The Role of Performance and Masking in Negotiating Identity

Alienation also appears through metaphors involving performance and masking, especially in *Dagenham Dream*. Expressions such as SURVIVAL IS PERFORMANCE (“Had to act like the others to get around”) reveal how marginalized individuals must alter their behavior to gain acceptance or avoid harm. Here, acting becomes a cognitive model for assimilation, implying that identity itself must be reshaped or concealed in order to safely navigate social environments.

The metaphor GENDER PERFORMANCE IS MASKING (“Acted like the boys in the town”) further extends this idea by illustrating how gendered expectations intersect with racialized alienation. These metaphors highlight alienation as a multilayered experience shaped not only by race but also by gender expression, social class, and environment.

The analysis of performance and masking in *Dagenham Dream* aligns closely with empirical research on identity shifting. Loyd et al. (2023) note that “the current study investigated ways young adults from diverse ethnic/racial groups discussed shifting to fit in with White Americans,” demonstrating that the need to “act like the others” reflects broader social pressures experienced by marginalized groups. Identity shifting is further described as “self-altering strategies that individuals utilize to meet the perceived demands of their social surroundings... altering aspects of one’s self-presentation (e.g., mannerisms, speech) to



accommodate dominant society,” highlighting the performative adjustments individuals make to navigate dominant cultural expectations.

The study also emphasizes that such shifting “may represent an adaptive response to identity-threatening experiences or expectations of discrimination,” underscoring the protective function of masking in environments shaped by racialized power. Additionally, it notes that “outgroup shifting may be prompted by threats in the environment, including discrimination and race-related power dynamics,” reinforcing that these performative strategies arise from the need to avoid harm and maintain social safety.

Black Identity as Burden and Unforgiven Existence

In *Minetta Creek*, metaphors such as BLACKNESS IS UNFORGIVENESS (“Nothing is forgiven, black skin and my rhythm”) and RACIALIZED EXISTENCE IS A BURDEN (“And you know that it’s all at a cost”) conceptualize racial identity as something that inherently incurs social “punishment” or “cost.” The notion of unforgiveness suggests that Blackness is not merely socially stigmatized but treated as a permanent, inescapable mark—an ontological condition that society refuses to absolve.

Through this mapping, alienation becomes intimately tied to racial embodiment. Being Black is framed as carrying a “cost,” meaning that social, cultural, and emotional penalties are tied to racial identity itself. This further reinforces Lakoff and Johnson (2003) theory that moral and political metaphors fundamentally structure how society conceptualizes justice and legitimacy.

These metaphors echo wider scholarly discussions showing how Blackness has long been framed as a burdened and socially penalized identity. Motahane (2025) explains that “the colour black continues to carry the racial burden of American history; hence Africans who migrate to America enter a space and culture where the black race is marked for discrimination and prejudice.” His argument reinforces the song’s portrayal of Blackness as something perceived as already indebted or unforgiven an identity treated as carrying a preexisting weight imposed by historical and cultural forces.

In addition, contemporary empirical research demonstrates how these burdens manifest in institutional contexts. Bell & Gilke (2024) report that “Black email aliases faced significantly



higher administrative burdens in trying to get access to charter schools than White email aliases...” showing that racialized disadvantage appears not only in metaphorical language but also in concrete bureaucratic practices. Together, these studies support the metaphors in *Minetta Creek*, illustrating how racialized embodiment is consistently associated with both cognitive framing and structural limitations that mirror the “cost” articulated in the lyrics.

D. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how conceptual metaphors in selected tracks from Blood Orange’s *Negro Swan* album construct meanings related to race and alienation. By applying Lakoff and Johnson’s (2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the research aimed to identify the dominant metaphorical mappings used to represent racialized experience and to analyze how these mappings interact with metaphors of alienation to form a coherent conceptual system. The analysis successfully achieved this goal by revealing a patterned network of metaphors that structure the album’s narrative of Black identity, vulnerability, and psychological displacement.

The findings demonstrate that metaphors related to race consistently conceptualize Blackness through schemas of otherness, hypervisibility, surveillance, devaluation, and burden. These mappings frame Black identity as something culturally marked, socially scrutinized, and continually negotiated within structures of stigma. At the same time, the metaphors that construct alienation such as those involving downward motion, circularity, and performative masking represent emotional detachment as an embodied condition that cannot be separated from the racial structures producing it. Together, these findings show that race and alienation in the *Negro Swan* album function as mutually reinforcing conceptual domains, where racialized social structures give rise to internal fragmentation, and experiences of alienation reflect the broader sociopolitical context of Black existence.

Theoretically, this research contributes to cognitive linguistics by demonstrating how CMT can illuminate racialized meaning-making in contemporary music an area that has received limited scholarly attention. The study also expands discussions of metaphor in popular music by showing that metaphors do not merely serve expressive or aesthetic purposes, but function as cognitive mechanisms through which marginalized identities and lived experiences are conceptualized. Practically, the findings offer insight for scholars of race, culture, and media



studies by illustrating how music can become a site for articulating, negotiating, and resisting racialized subjectivity. Overall, the analysis indicates that the album's metaphors form an interconnected cognitive framework that actively shapes how audiences make sense of Blackness, vulnerability, and experiences of exclusion, suggesting they function far beyond mere artistic embellishment. The album's metaphorical system makes visible the intertwined realities of racial stigma and emotional displacement, revealing metaphor as a powerful tool for expressing the complexity of marginalized experiences.

Future studies may expand this analysis by incorporating additional songs across Blood Orange's discography to examine whether similar patterns recur, or by comparing metaphorical constructions across different Black artists, genres, or cultural contexts. Additionally, analysis that involving music videos, visual performance, and aesthetic symbolism may offer deeper insight into how metaphor operates beyond lyrics. Finally, audience-based or cognitive-pragmatic approaches could explore how listeners interpret and emotionally respond to these metaphors. Such directions would enrich the understanding of how conceptual metaphor contributes to meaning-making in contemporary music and in the articulation of marginalized experiences.

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