


Analyzing Inner Conflict in “PRIDE.” Through Schema Theory and Metaphor

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ABSTRACT

Kendrick Lamar's 2017 song "PRIDE." from his album DAMN. goes with themes of internal chaos, pride, and regrets. Using a cognitive stylistic method, this study investigates how Lamar's metaphors influence listeners' perceptions and emotional comprehension. It answers two key queries: (1) Which schemas or mental models are activated in the brains of the listeners? and (2) How are complicated feelings like pride and shame expressed through Lamar's metaphors? Drawing on the song's official lyrics, the analysis is based on Schema Theory (Anderson, 1977) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). By examining recurrent patterns of imagery, word choice, and narrative structures that correspond with experiences that are both cognitively and culturally recognizable, schemas may be found in the lyrics. For example, Lamar's use of chronological changes ("I was born like this") and geographical oppositions ("sitting in silence") to illustrate internal struggle activates schemas linked to memory, self-examination, and moral dualism. Metaphors like "empathy as sacrifice" and "pride as death" appeal to common conceptual frameworks in which empathy is linked to vulnerability or redemption and pride to destruction or collapse. Listeners are able to emotionally connect with the abstract problems Lamar offers because these metaphorical expressions suggest larger schemas regarding identity, morality, relationships, and spiritual tension.

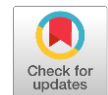
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INTRODUCTION

Language in music—especially in genres like rap and pop—is a powerful tool for expressing emotion, shaping identity, and communicating cultural values. Across musical genres, artists use metaphor not just for artistic flair, but as a way to frame abstract experiences such as love, guilt, anger, or pride. Cognitive stylistics, a field that blends linguistic analysis with cognitive psychology, offers useful tools for unpacking how listeners mentally process such lyrics. Through frameworks like Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Schema Theory (Anderson, 1977), researchers can explore how musical language triggers mental models, emotions, and cultural interpretations. Although many studies focus on metaphor in literature or mainstream pop lyrics, rap music—particularly with its dense, poetic language and socio-political depth—offers rich, underexplored ground for cognitive stylistic analysis.

Kendrick Lamar's song “PRIDE.” from his 2017 Pulitzer Prize-winning album DAMN. delves into themes of inner conflict, pride, guilt, and moral struggle. Unlike his more outwardly political works such as “Alright,” which confronts systemic racism and collective injustice, “PRIDE.” turns the focus inward, offering an introspective journey into Lamar's psyche. The song functions as a lyrical soliloquy—a space where contradictions unfold between ego and humility, detachment and desire, faith and fame. Because of its intimate and

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reflective nature, "PRIDE." is particularly well-suited for analysis through the lens of cognitive stylistics, a discipline that bridges literary linguistics and cognitive psychology to investigate how language reflects, shapes, and structures human thought and emotion.

Cognitive stylistics, sometimes referred to as cognitive poetics, is an interdisciplinary field that explores the mental processes involved in reading or listening to texts. It examines how linguistic patterns interact with cognition to shape the audience's understanding and emotional response. According to Stockwell (2002), cognitive stylistics explores how stylistic choices—such as imagery, metaphor, and narrative structure—create mental representations that influence a reader's or listener's interpretive experience. Gavins & Steen (2003) further argue that stylistic interpretation is rooted in the interplay between textual features and the reader's mental schemas, which include prior knowledge, emotions, and sociocultural background. In the case of "PRIDE.," these tools become crucial for understanding how Lamar's lyrics prompt listeners to confront deep-seated beliefs about identity, morality, and emotional vulnerability.

This study applies two key frameworks from cognitive linguistics: Schema Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Schema Theory, as proposed by Anderson (1977) and expanded by (Bartlett, 1932) and Rumelhart (1980), posits that comprehension is guided by mental structures—schemas—that organize knowledge and help us interpret new experiences. When Kendrick Lamar contrasts "happiness" with "flashiness," for instance, listeners are prompted to access their internal schemas about materialism, fulfillment, and societal values. These schemas are influenced by cultural background, personal experience, and emotional memory, making each listener's interpretation both personal and socially conditioned.

In parallel, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, introduced by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), suggests that abstract domains of thought—such as emotions, morality, or time—are understood through metaphorical mappings from more concrete, bodily experiences. Metaphors like "Pride's gonna be the death of you and me" transform pride from a feeling into a fatal force, allowing listeners to grasp the emotional weight of the concept viscerally. Scholars such as Kövecses (2005) emphasize that metaphors are not just decorative linguistic devices, but fundamental to the way we experience and structure reality. Thus, analyzing metaphors in "PRIDE." reveals how Lamar uses embodied language to communicate complex psychological and social ideas.

Despite the growing academic interest in music and language, most cognitive stylistic analyses have focused on pop music or literature, often overlooking the intricate rhetorical strategies and cognitive complexity found in rap. For instance, Simanjuntak et al. (2023) examined emotional expression in Lewis Capaldi's "Someone You Loved," applying a cognitive stylistic lens to its metaphorical language. Similarly, Sianturi et al. (2024) explored Ariana Grande's "Intro (End of the World)," focusing on its linguistic features rather than deep cultural or psychological dimensions. Fadhila & Juanda (2023) applied CMT to Jay Chang's "Is You," but again within the realm of pop music, where themes were more romantic and less socially charged.

Other Indonesian research, such as Rangkuti & Hafifah (2022) on Lady Gaga's "Born This Way," has focused on socio-political identity through feminist and LGBTQ+ lenses, offering valuable thematic insight but with limited attention to listener cognition or metaphorical framing. These studies collectively highlight the power of music in expressing emotion and identity, yet they tend to simplify or overlook rap's layered engagement with metaphor, cultural identity, and moral complexity. Rap—as a genre rooted in Black oral tradition, resistance, and poetic introspection—offers a unique site for cognitive stylistic inquiry, particularly when analyzing artists like Kendrick Lamar whose work fuses personal narrative with broader socio-cultural critique.

On a global scale, cognitive theories have been applied to literary and rhetorical texts but rarely to rap lyrics. For example, Jaafar (2020) used Schema Theory to interpret narrative structure in African novels, while (Arthur & Mensah, 2021) studied conceptual metaphors in

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traditional Akan proverbs. While valuable, such studies do not fully address how contemporary rap navigates modern issues of race, trauma, and emotional conflict through language. This reveals a critical gap in cognitive stylistic research—especially in terms of how rap lyrics activate schemas and metaphors that resonate with diverse listeners on personal and collective levels.

Given this context, the present study aims to contribute to the field by examining how Kendrick Lamar's "PRIDE." uses schemas and metaphors to represent emotional conflict, cultural identity, and moral introspection. While previous studies have treated pop lyrics as emotionally expressive texts, few have unpacked how listeners cognitively engage with rap lyrics—particularly those rich in contradiction and metaphorical density. This research, therefore, focuses on the following key questions: What mental frameworks (schemas) are activated when people listen to the song? How does Lamar use metaphors to help listeners understand emotions like pride or guilt?

By applying cognitive stylistic analysis to "PRIDE.," this study reveals how Lamar's lyrical choices engage the listener's mind and emotions simultaneously. His metaphors do more than illustrate—they construct meaning, offering a visceral, almost physical understanding of pride, guilt, disconnection, and identity. His schemas are culturally and personally loaded, guiding listeners to reevaluate their own inner frameworks. In doing so, this study not only brings new insights into Lamar's artistry but also highlights the broader potential of cognitive stylistics for interpreting rap as a psychologically and culturally powerful form of art.

METHOD

Respondents

This research uses a qualitative method based on Creswell & Creswell (2018) approach, focusing on how language in Kendrick Lamar's song "PRIDE." reflects thoughts, emotions, and cultural ideas through cognitive stylistics. The aim is to describe and interpret the lyrics using Schema Theory (Anderson, 1977) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Because this study is text-based and interpretive, no human participants are involved; instead, the focus is on how meaning is cognitively constructed and interpreted through language.

Instruments

The primary instrument in this research is the researcher, who plays a central role in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Since this study focuses on lyrical content, the official and verified lyrics of "PRIDE." serve as the main data source. To support the analysis, a thematic coding table was used to highlight key elements such as metaphorical expressions, emotional tones, and culturally loaded phrases. Supporting materials such as scholarly books, journal articles, and previous cognitive stylistic studies provided the theoretical foundation and analytical framework.

Procedures

The research began by selecting Kendrick Lamar's "PRIDE." as the object of study, due to its rich metaphorical and emotional depth. After obtaining the official lyrics, the researcher listened to the song and read the lyrics multiple times to grasp the emotional tone and thematic complexity. During this close reading process, the researcher took notes and manually highlighted specific lines and phrases that reflected metaphorical language, recurring motifs, or deep psychological and cultural meanings. These segments were initially grouped based on emerging themes such as identity, morality, and emotional conflict, and were later connected to relevant cognitive concepts.

Data analysis

The analysis followed the qualitative steps outlined by Creswell & Creswell (2018), adapted to fit the cognitive stylistic framework. First, the lyrics were organized for close reading. Then, a *line-by-line manual analysis* was conducted to detect metaphorical expressions

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and schema-related language. Each line was carefully examined to identify conceptual metaphors (e.g., Pride Is A Killer) and references to mental frameworks or schemas (e.g., self-schema, moral schema, cultural identity schema).

A thematic coding table was used to categorize these elements. Metaphors were interpreted using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), while broader themes were analyzed through Schema Theory (Anderson, 1977). These codes were grouped into categories such as emotional metaphor, self-perception schema, and socio-cultural schema. Finally, the researcher interpreted how these patterns reflect deeper meanings within the song, exploring how Lamar's linguistic choices engage the listener's mind by activating personal experiences, emotional memories, and cultural understanding.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following is an extended analysis of Kendrick Lamar's "PRIDE." within the frameworks of Schema Theory (Anderson, 1977) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which allows us to discover how the song captures intricate emotional, cultural, and spiritual phenomena. The analysis delves into the mental frameworks – or schemas – that drive Lamar's self-assessment, his interaction with others, his sense of belonging to a culture, and his moral compass. Through these cognitive schemas, we see how Lamar's depiction of pride, guilt, and inner turmoil is intermingled with his and sociocultural vécu. The song is something more than artistic expression – it works as a cognitive map of Lamar's worldview, granting listeners access to his inner contradictions and emotional struggles.

Additionally, the study examines how abstract ideas like emotional numbness, structural oppression, and spiritual longing give way to concrete, physical sensations using Conceptual Metaphor Theory. In addition to being ornamental, Lamar's metaphors are essential to the song's development of meaning. By portraying racism as a barrier, pride as poisonous, and shame as selfless, Kendrick creates a rich emotional environment that gives real form to obscure experiences. With metaphors shedding light on the how and schemes exposing the why behind his worldview, this dual paradigm offers a powerful tool for understanding the lyrical and cognitive elements of his lyrics. When taken as a whole, these theories highlight the intricate relationships that exist between language, identity, and cognition in Kendrick Lamar's "PRIDE." This research will also advance our knowledge of rap music as a site of for deep cognitive and cultural expression.

What mental frameworks (schemas) are activated when people listen to the song?

According to Anderson's Schema Theory (1977), our thoughts, behaviors, and interpretations are guided by mental structures – schemas – that are built from personal experience, culture, and social learning. Kendrick Lamar's "PRIDE." is a rich exploration of identity and contradiction, where these schemas surface in lyrical reflections about self, relationships, society, and spirituality. The song becomes a psychological map, tracing how his internalized schemas shape his worldview and his struggle for balance.

By using metaphors, Lamar transforms abstract emotions like pride and guilt into vivid, almost tangible experiences. Metaphors allow him to frame complex emotional states in relatable, sensory terms – making inner conflict something listeners can feel. His use of conceptual metaphor does not merely decorate the lyrics; it drives the emotional weight of the narrative, inviting listeners into his internal landscape.

Table 1. Schema Type in Kendrick Lamar "PRIDE."

Schema Type	Core Themes in "PRIDE."
Self-Schemas	Conflict between ideal vs. real self, emotional detachment, self-critique
Interpersonal Schemas	Trust issues, emotional absence, rejection of social performance, alienation
Cultural Schemas	Race, materialism, systemic oppression, societal reform, hip-hop identity

Spiritual/Moral Schemas	Pride vs. humility, faith vs. fame, religious unity, moral failure and aspiration
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Self-Schemas (How Kendrick Sees Himself)

Kendrick's self-schema in PRIDE. is built on contradiction—he simultaneously recognizes his emotional capacities and his failures to express them. When he says, "Me, I wasn't taught to share, but care," he draws a clear line between feeling empathy and showing it. The metaphor implies a learned emotional suppression, hinting at how childhood environment shapes emotional expression. "Sharing" becomes a metaphor for emotional vulnerability, something he was never taught to do, even though "caring" was present.

His internal conflict deepens with the line "In a perfect world, I would be perfect, world." This play on words serves as both a poetic aspiration and a metaphorical mirror. He envisions an ideal self—untainted, morally whole—but the repetition emphasizes that such a world doesn't exist. He follows up with the admission, "I understand I ain't perfect," grounding the fantasy in self-awareness. The metaphors of perfection and imperfection create a push-pull dynamic that represents a core part of his identity: striving for goodness while confronting moral failure.

Emotionally, he describes himself as "Cold as December," turning emotional detachment into something physical and seasonal. The metaphor of coldness invokes imagery of isolation and numbness, making his emotional disconnection feel visceral. It's a defense mechanism—perhaps developed from trauma or betrayal—but it also serves as a barrier to the warmth he longs for. Through these metaphors, Lamar constructs a self-schema marked by emotional suppression, introspection, and a constant tension between the man he is and the man he wants to be.

Interpersonal Schemas (How Kendrick Relates to Others)

Kendrick's lyrics suggest a relational schema rooted in distrust, withdrawal, and disillusionment. His line, "I don't trust people enough beyond their surface," is a direct admission of scepticism, and the metaphor of "surface" subtly points to the idea that people are often hiding their true selves. This metaphor frames social interaction as a superficial performance—one that he refuses to engage in deeply.

The line "I can't fake humble just 'cause your ass is insecure" intensifies this stance. Here, "fake humble" becomes a metaphor for performative modesty—a social mask worn to appease others' insecurities. Lamar critiques the expectation to perform humility as a form of social negotiation, especially in fame-driven or ego-sensitive environments. His refusal to do so signals a relational schema that values authenticity over appeasement.

Additionally, the refrain "Maybe I wasn't there" functions as both metaphor and confession. It suggests not just physical absence, but emotional unavailability—a ghostliness in his relationships. The ambiguity of the line opens it up to multiple interpretations: it could imply regret, avoidance, or even emotional self-preservation. Altogether, Kendrick's interpersonal metaphors portray him as someone navigating the space between longing for connection and guarding himself from its potential pain.

Cultural Schemas (How Kendrick Understands Society and Identity)

In "PRIDE.", Kendrick constructs a cultural schema rooted in the Black American experience, where survival, identity, and legacy are constantly negotiated in the face of systemic pressures. His line "Hell-raising, wheel-chasing..." metaphorically represents the cycle of struggle and aspiration in marginalized communities. The metaphor of "wheel-chasing" evokes the image of running in circles, constantly striving yet unable to escape a rigged system.

Conversely, the line "Indigenous disposition, feel like we belong here" reflects pride and reclamation. Here, Kendrick uses the metaphor of "indigenous disposition" to assert ancestral resilience and cultural rootedness—qualities that affirm his identity against the erasure and

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displacement often imposed by dominant narratives. It's a metaphor that transforms cultural history into personal empowerment.

His critique deepens in "Race barriers make inferior of you and I," where metaphor turns racism into a spatial force—"barriers"—that actively diminish people's sense of worth. The use of "barriers" implies obstruction, entrapment, and division, reinforcing how racism isn't just emotional but structural. Still, Lamar's hopeful metaphor in "I'll make schools out of prisons" flips a symbol of oppression into one of transformation. By imagining reformation through metaphor, he challenges cultural schemas that equate Blackness with criminality.

Spiritual and Moral Schemas (How Kendrick Thinks About Right, Wrong, and Faith)

Lamar's spiritual and moral metaphors expose the psychological weight of pride and guilt. His declaration, "Pride's gonna be the death of you and me," turns pride into a fatal force—an emotional weapon that threatens to destroy both self and others. It's a metaphor that personifies pride, giving it agency and danger. This metaphor elevates the emotion from personal flaw to spiritual adversary, aligning with religious notions of pride as a deadly sin.

When Lamar says "I put my faith in these lyrics," he replaces traditional religion with artistic expression. The metaphor frames song writing as a sacred act—lyrics become prayers, confessions, and philosophies. This shift reflects a spiritual schema where faith is not confined to religious dogma but found in authentic expression and self-examination.

He also acknowledges the failure of utopian ideals. "A perfect world is never perfect, only filled with lies" turns perfection into a delusion. The metaphor questions the integrity of any system—be it political, social, or moral—that claims to be flawless. His moral schema thus recognizes that human imperfection is inevitable, and that true understanding lies not in idealism, but in honest self-awareness.

How does Lamar use metaphors to help listeners understand emotions like pride or guilt?

These interpretations are grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which says that we understand complex, abstract ideas by linking them to things we know from physical experience. For example, we understand time as a path we walk on, or emotions as things we carry. Kendrick Lamar's "PRIDE." uses this kind of metaphor all throughout the song, helping listeners feel and understand deep emotional and moral struggles in a more physical, relatable way.

Table 2. Abstract Concepts ↔ Concrete Domains in Kendrick Lamar "PRIDE."

Abstract Concept	Concrete Domain (Source)	Example Lyrics	Meaning/Implication
Love / Pride	Danger / Death / War	"Love's gonna get you killed / But pride's gonna be the death of you and me"	Emotions are framed as fatal forces—showing internal conflict with identity and ego.
Morality / Empathy	Body (Sharing, Sacrifice)	"I'm willing to give up a leg and arm to show empathy from"	Moral or emotional growth costs something physical—suggesting empathy requires sacrifice.
Emotional Disconnection	Temperature (Cold / Numbness)	"My feelings might go numb / Cold as December"	Feelings are experienced as coldness—emotional withdrawal framed in physical terms.
Ambition / Desire	Chase / Motion / Heat	"Hell-raising, wheel-chasing..."	Pursuing status or wealth is like a relentless, chaotic journey.
Internal Conflict / Decision-making	Serving / Choosing Sides	"How do you serve the question?"	Decisions are seen as masters we serve—suggesting inner tension.
Human Nature / The Soul	Dissection / Anatomy	"You love 'em or dissect 'em"	Understanding people (or oneself) is like breaking open the body—an invasive act.
Idealism / Utopia	A Perfect World (Imaginary Place)	"In a perfect world, I would be perfect, world"	A moral or spiritual ideal is framed as a location one could live in.
Religion / Unity	Service / Gathering	"Put all the religions in one service"	Religious diversity metaphorically merged into one shared ritual space.
Guilt / Accountability	Pointing / Weaponry	"Point the finger just to make a point"	Blame and criticism visualized as a physical gesture or attack.

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Trauma / Emotional History	Seasons (Winter)	"Cold as December, but never remember what winter did"	Past trauma metaphorically associated with cold seasons—emotional numbness or amnesia.
Social Injustice / Racism	Barriers / Obstructions	"Race barriers make inferior of you and I"	Racism conceptualized as a wall or obstacle—constraining equality or freedom.
Art / Expression	Faith / Religion	"I put my faith in these lyrics..."	Lyrics become a spiritual anchor or religious stand-in—language as salvation.

Kendrick Lamar's "PRIDE." is deeply metaphorical, and through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), we can observe how abstract emotional, spiritual, and moral themes are grounded in concrete, physical experiences. These metaphors not only shape how Kendrick frames his inner conflicts but also allow the listener to feel these abstract ideas on a bodily and intuitive level.

Love / Pride → Danger / Death / War

Lyrics: "Love's gonna get you killed / But pride's gonna be the death of you and me"

In these lines, Kendrick treats emotions like love and pride not as soft or romantic, but as deadly. By linking them to death and killing, he turns emotions into threats—almost like weapons or forces of war. Love becomes something that can make you vulnerable enough to be destroyed, while pride becomes a force that can completely break a relationship or even a person. This metaphor activates the schema of violence and fatal danger, showing that emotions aren't always safe—they can be destructive. It also reveals Kendrick's inner struggle with vulnerability and ego.

Morality / Empathy → Body (Sharing, Sacrifice)

Lyrics: "I'm willing to give up a leg and arm to show empathy from"

Here, Kendrick describes empathy as something that demands real, painful sacrifice. The metaphor compares emotional understanding to losing limbs—parts of yourself. This activates the bodily injury schema, suggesting that moral growth or compassion isn't just emotional, but costs you physically. It's not a casual or easy thing—it hurts. Kendrick uses this metaphor to emphasize how deeply he feels the weight of moral responsibility. Caring for others takes a toll on the self.

Emotional Disconnection → Temperature (Cold / Numbness)

Lyrics: "My feelings might go numb / Cold as December"

Kendrick uses the metaphor of coldness to explain emotional numbness. When people are emotionally disconnected, they often describe it as feeling "cold," and Kendrick captures that perfectly here. This activates the temperature schema, making it easier to understand what it feels like to shut down emotionally. December, a cold winter month, adds to the mood—he's emotionally frozen, detached, maybe even depressed. The metaphor helps listeners physically imagine what emotional disconnection feels like.

Ambition / Desire → Chase / Motion / Heat

Lyrics: "Hell-raising, wheel-chasing..."

Desire and ambition are described as a frantic chase. Kendrick uses the metaphor of movement—like chasing a car or running in circles—to describe the exhausting pursuit of status or success. The words "hell-raising" and "wheel-chasing" activate schemas of chaotic motion and burnout. He suggests that ambition doesn't always bring satisfaction—it just keeps you running endlessly. This metaphor captures the pressure and turmoil of always chasing something more.

Internal Conflict / Decision-Making → Serving / Choosing Sides

Lyrics: "How do you serve the question?"

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Kendrick treats a question – something abstract – as if it's a master or authority figure. This activates the servitude schema, where making choices is not about freedom, but submission. By asking how one "serves" a question, he's showing how decision-making feels like a burden – something controlling him rather than empowering him. It reflects a deep inner tension where choices aren't clear, and each option feels like it demands loyalty. This metaphor shows the emotional weight of indecision.

Human Nature / The Soul → Dissection / Anatomy

Lyrics: "You love 'em or dissect 'em"

Understanding someone deeply is compared to dissection – cutting them open like in a biology lab. Kendrick is activating the anatomical dissection schema, where knowing a person is invasive, even violent. He's raising the question: when you try to "figure someone out," do you lose the love in the process? This metaphor suggests a tension between emotional closeness and analysis – whether overthinking love and identity can ruin them. It also shows fear of being exposed.

Idealism / Utopia → A Perfect World (Imaginary Place)

Lyrics: "In a perfect world, I would be perfect, world"

Kendrick repeats "perfect world" like it's a physical location. This metaphor activates the location schema, where ideals are imagined as places you could travel to or live in. He's acknowledging that perfection is something he longs for, but can't reach. The repetition shows a desire to escape his current flawed world and become something better. But it also shows frustration – he knows that the "perfect world" doesn't really exist. The metaphor highlights his emotional distance from the ideal version of himself.

Religion / Unity → Service / Gathering

Lyrics: "Put all the religions in one service"

Here, Kendrick imagines every religion joining in a single spiritual event. This metaphor activates the gathering or ritual schema, where unity is symbolized by a shared service. Different faiths coming together in one space becomes a hopeful image of peace and cooperation. The metaphor suggests that spiritual differences don't have to divide people. Kendrick is using this metaphor to express a longing for unity, where human connection transcends religious boundaries.

Guilt / Accountability → Pointing / Weaponry

Lyrics: "Point the finger just to make a point"

Blame is turned into a physical act – like aiming a weapon. This activates the gesture and violence schema, where accusations are aggressive and harmful. Kendrick suggests that when people point fingers, they're not just identifying problems – they're attacking. The phrase "make a point" has a double meaning: stating an opinion and stabbing like a sharp object. This metaphor critiques how guilt and moral judgment can be used to hurt, not help.

Trauma / Emotional History → Seasons (Winter)

Lyrics: "Cold as December, but never remember what winter did"

Kendrick links emotional trauma to winter – a cold, harsh time. But he also says he doesn't remember what happened, even though he still feels it. This metaphor activates the seasonal schema, suggesting that painful experiences are like long, cold winters that affect you even after they're over. The emotional memory is unclear, but the numbness remains. This captures how trauma can leave behind emotional scars, even if the details are forgotten.

Social Injustice / Racism → Barriers / Obstructions

Lyrics: "Race barriers make inferior of you and I"

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Kendrick sees racism as a physical wall – something that blocks people from being equal. This makes social injustice easy to picture, like something you can run into or be shut out by. It shows that racism isn't just about feelings – it's about systems and structures that divide people. Racism is described as a barrier – something physical that separates people or keeps them down. This activates the obstruction schema, making injustice easier to visualize. Barriers aren't just emotional – they're structural, like walls that prevent progress or connection. Kendrick shows how racism creates real limitations for people, making them feel lesser. The metaphor turns an abstract issue into something concrete and visible.

Art / Expression → Faith / Religion

Lyrics: "I put my faith in these lyrics..."

Instead of putting his trust in religion or people, Kendrick turns to his music. He treats art like a form of faith – something that guides him, keeps him grounded, and gives his life meaning. For him, writing is a spiritual practice – a way to survive, understand the world, and connect with something bigger than himself. Instead of turning to traditional religion, Kendrick puts his trust in his own lyrics. This metaphor activates the faith schema, where music becomes a sacred or spiritual tool. He's treating writing and art as his personal religion – something that guides him, grounds him, and gives him meaning. Through this metaphor, Kendrick shows how creative expression becomes a source of strength and salvation.

Discussion

This study examined Kendrick Lamar's "PRIDE." through the frameworks of Schema Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory to understand how the song conveys deep emotional and moral struggles. The findings reveal that Lamar uses highly structured mental frameworks (schemas) and rich conceptual metaphors to explore themes of identity, guilt, pride, spirituality, and cultural belonging. These findings contribute new insights to the growing field of cognitive stylistic analysis in music – especially rap – and offer a distinct contrast to earlier research focused on the pop genre or literary texts.

Schema Theory examines the mental frameworks that shape Kendrick's worldview – how his upbringing, cultural background, and personal struggles influence his self-perception and relationships. For example, his lyrics about perfection ("In a perfect world, I would be perfect") reveal a self-schema torn between idealism and self-doubt, while lines like "I don't trust people enough beyond their surface" reflect interpersonal schemas shaped by betrayal or disillusionment. This theory helps explain why Kendrick sees pride as destructive and why he grapples with emotional numbness, framing these conflicts as products of his lived experiences.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, on the other hand, focuses on how Kendrick uses vivid imagery to express abstract emotions. When he says, "Pride's gonna be the death of you and me," he transforms pride into a lethal force, making its danger feel visceral. Similarly, describing emotional detachment as "Cold as December" turns numbness into a physical sensation, while "Race barriers make inferior of you and I" materializes systemic oppression as a literal wall. These metaphors make complex ideas tangible, amplifying their impact. While Schema Theory reveals the roots of Kendrick's thoughts, Conceptual Metaphor Theory shows how he crafts those thoughts into powerful, relatable language – one explains the psychology behind the lyrics, the other their poetic force.

Compared to Simanjuntak et al. (2023) and Sianturi et al. (2024), who applied cognitive stylistics to pop songs like Lewis Capaldi's "Someone You Loved" and Ariana Grande's "Intro (End of the World)", this study expands the genre scope by applying the same theoretical tools to a rap song. While those studies focused on emotional expression through stylistic features, Lamar's "PRIDE." adds layers of complexity by tying emotions like pride and guilt to broader sociocultural and spiritual frameworks. For instance, Lamar doesn't only express sadness or

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longing—he interrogates the roots of those emotions through metaphors of war, anatomy, coldness, and sacrifice.

Similarly, Fadhila & Juanda's (2023) analysis of Jay Chang's "Is You" focused on metaphorical language in pop music but did not explore how those metaphors reflect deeper schemas related to race, systemic oppression, or moral contradiction. In contrast, this study finds that Kendrick's metaphors often connect personal emotions to collective cultural experiences. For example, the metaphor "I'll make schools out of prisons" doesn't just reflect hope—it activates a cultural schema about social justice, systemic reform, and historical trauma.

In relation to Rangkuti & Hafifah's (2022) study of Lady Gaga's "Born This Way," which centered on identity and LGBTQ+ themes, this research echoes the idea that music is a site of self-expression and identity formation. However, Lamar's use of self-schema is more introspective and contradictory. While Gaga's lyrics affirm identity with pride and confidence, Lamar's lyrics reflect a constant tension between who he is and who he wants to be—highlighting the inner conflict that arises from personal, spiritual, and cultural expectations.

Looking beyond genre, Jaafar's (2020) application of Schema Theory to literary texts and Arthur & Mensah's (2021) exploration of metaphor in Akan rhetoric both affirm the relevance of these cognitive frameworks across different types of texts. However, neither study applies these theories to contemporary rap lyrics—a gap that this research helps address. By doing so, it shows that rap is not only a vehicle for storytelling and social critique but also a cognitively rich form of poetic expression that invites deep listener engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explores Kendrick Lamar's "PRIDE." through Schema Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, uncovering the cognitive and emotional structures embedded in the song's lyrics. The analysis identified multiple schema activations that listeners draw upon when engaging with the song, including self-schemas (personal identity, moral conflict), interpersonal schemas (trust and relational tension), cultural schemas (race, oppression, materialism), and spiritual or moral schemas (Christian notions of sin and repentance). These overlapping mental models allow listeners to process Lamar's introspective narratives not only as personal confession but as invitations to reflect critically on their own identities, ethical beliefs, and emotional experiences within broader social and cultural contexts. The study also demonstrated how Lamar's use of metaphor translates abstract emotional and moral concepts into concrete, embodied imagery. Through metaphors such as pride as a fatal force, love as dangerous vulnerability, and empathy as bodily sacrifice, Lamar's lyrics evoke powerful emotional resonance and visceral understanding. These metaphorical structures deepen the listener's engagement with the text by making internal struggles cognitively and emotionally tangible. The findings advocate for the inclusion of rap within the realm of cognitive literary and stylistic analysis, highlighting its capacity to express nuanced psychological and sociocultural realities. Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in recognizing contemporary music as a meaningful site of human cognition, emotional depth, and cultural dialogue.

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