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Article

"Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood": Nina Simone's Africana Womanism

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Abstract

This study sought to move beyond superficial appreciation of Nina Simone's lyrics to identify and contextualize emergent constructs. A qualitative ethnographic content analysis of 44 songs was conducted in order to reach a deeper understanding of the messages in her lyrics. The findings revealed that Nina Simone did not only entertain, rather she helped raise her listeners' consciousness of various sociopolitical issues (e.g., anti-Black oppression and Africana womanist perspective), thus preparing them for political action. Furthermore, her lyrics revealed awareness of, and experience with emotional and psychological issues (e.g., love, stress, and resilience) possibly destigmatizing emotional and psychological pain and suffering. Nina Simone's music constitutes an exceptionally rich site for an investigation of Africana womanist values and has the capacity to communicate particular sociopolitical and psychological perspectives for Africana women's social empowerment. This work attempts to explore and locate the sites and sounds where the voices of Africana women can be heard.

Keywords

Nina Simone, Black women, ethnographic content analysis, Africana womanism

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Music is known to influence emotions (Tamir & Robinson, 2007), cognitions (Krumhansl, 2002), and behavior (Anderson, Carnagey, & Eubanks, 2003). The interplay between music and culture is powerful and yet underexplored, if at all (De Wall, Pond, Campbell, & Twenge, 2011). Artistic icons access public consciousness through their art and deliver powerful messages through their lyrical selections. Nina Simone, born Eunice Kathleen Waymon, was known for her sultry voice and consciousness-raising lyrics. Her songs were written within the political and cultural terrain of Black suffering, disavowal, and rage which we analyze in this article.

The importance of message delivery has been noted by Stephen Duncombe (2002), who states "it is one thing to read lyrics on a page, quite another to hear them sung with emotion or laid over a danceable beat" (p. 6). Duncombe goes on to say that culture (in this case music/lyrics) has political implications. While sometimes it is the artist's intention to become an advocate for a cause or a people, this is not always the case. As Mark Anthony Neal (1999) notes, Simone was aware of her ability to captivate her audience and chose to be an activist as well as an artist. Simone "used her travels on the Chitlin' Circuit to articulate her political commitment" to the Black Liberation Movement (Neal, 1999). In other words, Simone used her talent to go beyond entertainment, to contribute to progressive politics. More importantly, Simone infused the Black Liberation Movement with an Africana Womanist sensibility, illustrating not only her disgust with the unrelenting and persistent racial oppression in America, but also used her music to confront the intersecting dimensions of racism, patriarchy, and class. Furthermore, Simone created "the aesthetic and commercial space for a new generation of womanist voices within the Black popular music tradition" (Neal, 1999, p. 74). To this end, Simone's work represents cultural resistance at its best. Simon's lyrics, or political tomes, "speak truth to power."

Despite her artistic prowess, public appeal, and contributions to the civil rights movement, little is known about the interplay between the sociopolitical and psychological messages in her lyrics, which this article seeks to analyze. More specifically, in this article we demonstrate that Nina Simone's cultural productions are a rich source of Africana womanist theory and praxis.

Popular Culture and Evolution Toward Africana Womanism

In the 1960s and early 1970s, America experienced the rise of the New Left, the Black Power Movement, and a growing presence of Third World feminist critiques, all of which set the stage for radical Black feminist thought. More specifically, the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s provided the context for Black women to build and establish organizations that provided spaces for the critique

of capitalism, racism, and the sex/gender system (also known as White capitalist patriarchy). These organizations include the Third World Women's Alliance, Black Women Enraged, National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), Combahee River Collective, and others (Kelley, 2002). Typically, these organizations are omitted from the literature on "second wave" feminism, which leads one to conclude that their impact concerning feminist thought and theory was minimal. In fact, not only were these organizations not passive bystanders, they were probably the most sophisticated in their approach and critique of the race/class/gender hierarchy and the most radical. The Combahee River Collective's "Statement," for instance, illustrates that true freedom can only be realized when all systems of oppression are destroyed. In the process of struggle, these organizations would invariably produce new strategies, new tactics, and new analyses.

In 1970, English professor and writer Toni Cade Bambara edited a landmark collection of essays titled *The Black Woman: An Anthology*. Cade's collection broke new ground in feminist thought. Contributors included singer/songwriter Abbey Lincoln, novelist Toni Morrison, among others. By including activists, writers, singers, and songwriters Cade redefined the source of feminist thought and theory.

More recently, many scholars have presented wonderful accounts of how activists and performers produce new knowledge and open new vistas for inquiry and understanding (see Davis, 1999; Pough, 2004; Sudbury, 1998). These scholars force us to sever the often automatic association between feminism and academia. To this end, the voices of feminism, Black feminism, and more specifically Africana womanism can be found in the social milieu that we call popular culture, that is, Africana womanism can be heard in the rhythmic and poetic words of hip-hop divas, rappers, spoken word artists, and sultry singers like Nina Simone.

Originally, associated with the work of Georg Hegel, standpoint theory is founded on the notion that marginal and subordinate members of society have a more comprehensive view and understanding of the world than dominant groups. This is because marginal people have to see both their own subordinate positions and the dominant perspectives. However, as Nancy Harstock (2004) and other feminist standpoint theorists have astutely observed, a standpoint(s) is "achieved rather than obvious, a mediated rather than immediate understanding" (p. 110). In other words, a standpoint cannot be claimed, rather it must be achieved because it arises not just from material life but from reflection on that experience; from political engagement with it, by working for it. Hence, knowledge emerges for the oppressed through struggles they wage against their oppressors.

For bell hooks (1990), developing a standpoint requires three steps. First, women must break their silence about domination and oppression. In other

words, women must become vocal about the oppression they have experienced historically and contemporarily. Second, developing a standpoint requires developing self-reflexive speech, that is, speech that addresses the multiple forms of oppression experience. However, self-reflexive speech must not become ensnared in the advocacy of simple self-reflection because feminist thought and theory must not be contained within the individual. Rather, it must be concerned with a broad range of issues and practices influencing the lives of women. The third and final step is *Talking back*; the "movement from object to subject-the liberated voice" (hooks, 1989, p. 9). Furthermore, as Patricia Hill Collins (1998) states,

> The significance of writing books, making films, recording music, and producing other forms of cultural production lies in their power to foster dialogues among a diverse array of current and future readers, viewers, and listeners. (p. 75)

To this end, feminist standpoint has a larger social purpose, that is, to validate marginal knowledge, making those who are marginalized powerful.

Collins' (1990) standpoint theory infused with intersectionality theory creates a stronger, dynamic, and robust standpoint, which allowsBlack women to have a shared, although not uniform, location within hierarchical power relations. To this end, members become aware of their group identity only by achieving a shared understanding of their predicament with other group members (Collins, 1990; Harding, 2004; Jagger, 1983). Such a standpoint identifies the ways in which race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on constructs relationships among Black women as a group. Furthermore, these standpoints reflect how these intersections frame Black women's distinctive history in the United States and globally, shaping a more extensive consciousness that is essential to the feminist movement writ large (Carby, 1999).

Despite the contributions of feminism, Black feminism, standpoint, and intersectionality theories to the empowerment of Black women, some argue that they are a mislabeling of the experience of the Africana woman (Hudson-Weems, 2003; Verner, 1994). According to Clenora Hudson-Weems (2003), Africana womanists are "family centered . . . self-namer and self-definer, genuine sisterhood, strong, in concert with male in struggle, whole, authentic, flexible role player, respected, recognized, spiritual, male compatible, respectful of elders, adaptable, ambitious, mothering and nurturing" (p. 207).

One of the main arguments Hudson-Weems (2003) makes for why Africana womanism is a more appropriate framework is based on the values behind the label "feminism" which place gender-based empowerment at the

forefront; however, Africana womanism is based on the belief that gender empowerment and equality cannot exist in a context of racial oppression. That is not to say that feminism is not interested in ameliorating racial oppression, but that the power of the legacy of slavery and subsequent solidarity between communities of Black women, men, and children is more accurately represented by Africana womanism and what it stands for. The historical mishandling of race matters by White feminists has also led many women of color to disassociate with the "feminist" label. In other words, feminists sought to create a community based on commonality of experience, a community which has been less resonant for Black women, given the historical lack of attention paid to racial oppression (hooks, 2000). Furthermore, Black women have developed a sense of community based on racial identity and as a survival strategy against oppression (Collins, 1991).

As espoused by Hudson-Weems (2003), Africana womanism is an inductively derived label created by Africana women to represent their values and experience. The evolution of theories attempting to capture Africana women's experiences leads us to the power of the Black woman to name and define herself. In short, Black women have historically added their energy and insight to such movements. With the development of new forums, through which to voice their love and joy, as well as, their anger and outrage against the matrix of domination, the range of their influence is extended and their effectiveness enhanced.

Positioning

Observing the art people consume lies within the psychological domain. However, consistent with Africana womanism, our stance is that psychological knowledge and sociopolitical activism does not reside solely in the domain of academia. More specifically, the populous produces and consumes products that are meaningful and fulfilling usually without the contribution of academia. These products help to potentially raise the consciousness of many people and may determine the readiness for action. For example, an analysis of protest songs and their relationship to community action indicates that community psychology activism and the community action of protest songs have more in common than we might normally consider (Olsen, 2005). In other words, popular music serves as social cement by producing, while simultaneously empowering a cultural community.

We also believe that an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the realities that define the lives of people is more informative and reflective of reality. People do not experience problems one at a time; rather our lives are a series of complex, layered, non-linear, and intersecting experiences that

collide in unique and sometimes incomprehensible ways. As such, conceptualizing Nina Simone's lyrics in the context of the intersection of sociopolitical, historical, psychological, and popular culture studies seems fitting. The aforementioned belief is consistent with our social constructionist stance, which indicates that there are multiple realities that are determined by the meaning society ascribes to a given set of circumstances (Rosenblum & Travis, 2003). Qualitative research, ethnographic content analysis in particular, was the most suitable analytic strategy given the nature of the data (i.e., lyrics), our interdisciplinary approach, and constructionist stance.

We did not approach the lyrics with any theoretical framework from which to view the data, other than giving special attention to sociopolitical and psychological constructs. While we approached this analysis with no preconceived notion of what we might find in the lyrics, the stances we have noted above are expected to influence our interpretation of the lyrical material.

Method

Strategy of Inquiry

Ethnographic content analysis was used in order to reach a greater depth in understanding Simone's lyrics. Traditional content analysis is a qualitative research method often used to analyze and achieve a deeper understanding of qualitative data. In traditional content analysis, the researchers usually remain distant from the data by observing the frequency and types of concepts/constructs that appear in the data (Altheide, 1987). The main difference between traditional and ethnographic content analysis is the role of the reflexive researcher (Altheide, 1987). Additionally, ethnographic content analysis enables the researcher to allow the constructs to emerge from the data, rather than approaching the data with a priori theories or expectations (e.g., predetermined coding schemes). Furthermore, ethnographic content analysis attempts to take into account the context of the findings instead of looking at the findings as isolated constructs.

Procedures

Given the vastness of her artistic work, we limited our song selection to follow the approach of Mark Anthony Neal (2003), who has demonstrated the sociopolitical impacts of several of Simone's songs on the Black Liberation Movement. We chose to analyze each complete album in which the songs selected by Neal appeared. Instrumental songs were excluded resulting in eight albums with a total of 44 songs which are displayed in Table 1. The

Table 1. Lyrical Selection for Ethnographic Content Analysis.

Album (year)	Song title
Jazz as Played in an Exclusive Side Street Club (1958)	1. Mood indigo
	2. He needs me
	3. Little girl blue
	4. Love me or leave me
	5. My baby just cares for me
Broadway Blues Ballads (1964)	6. Don't let me be misunderstood
	7. I am blessed
	8. Our love (will see us through)
	9. Night song
	10. Nobody
	11. Last rose of summer
	12. See-line woman
Wild is the Wind (1966)	13. Wild is the wind
	14. If I should lose you
	15. Four women
	16. Lilac wine
	17. That's all I ask
	18. Break down and let it all out
In Concert (1964)	19. I loves you porgy
	20. Plain gold ring
	21. Pirate Jenny
	22. Old Jim Crow
	23. Don't smoke in bed
	24. Go limp
	25. Mississippi Goddam
I Put a Spell on You (1965)	26. I put a spell on you
	27. Marriage is for old folks
	28. Feeling good
	29. Beautiful land
	30. Take care of business
Silk and Soul (1967)	31. Love o'love
	32. Consummation
	33. Go to hell
	34. Turning point
	35. I wish I knew how it would feel to be free
'Nuff Said (1968)	36. Backlash blues
	37. Please read me
	38. Gin house blues
	39. In the morning
	40. Do what you gotta do
Black Gold (1970)	41. Black is the color of my true love's hair
	42. Ain't got no/I got life
	43. Assignment sequence
	44. To be young, gifted and Black

lyrics were obtained and imported to Nvivo, a qualitative software program used to organize and code qualitative data.

Data Analysis

The principal aim of this study was to identify and contextualize emergent themes in the lyrics of the preeminent artist, Nina Simone, to garner a deep and rich understanding of the sociocultural messages embedded within. Reading the transcripts multiple times established adequate familiarity with the data. The lyrics were analyzed using an open coding strategy borrowed from the strategy of inquiry, grounded theory. Open coding enables the researcher to discern the information both in the details and broader context of the transcripts. Using this approach, any constructs that emerged from the lyrics were coded; special attention was given to sociopolitical and psychological constructs particular to Black life.

Memos created along the entire process of the analysis were reviewed and checked against the actual transcripts to ensure that all theoretical speculations were grounded in what appeared on the transcripts. Our speculations on contextual factors and interpretations were also recorded in the memos.

Evaluating Qualitative Research: Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures confidence in the findings. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with the data (Bowleg, Lucas, & Tschann, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability, providing readers with sufficient information to make the judgment regarding applicability to other contexts, was addressed by outlining study procedures (Bowleg et al., 2004; Merrick, 1999). Dependability, the data-driven nature of research, was established by use of memos and cross-checking findings (Merrick, 1999). Finally, confirmability, in other words clarity about the research process, was established through transparency herein (Bowleg et al., 2004; Merrick, 1999). We believe that the set of strategies selected for application adequately establish the trustworthiness of the research.

Findings and Discussion

A variety of themes were identified that pertained first and foremost to love, oppression, psychological and emotional vulnerabilities, strengths, and Africana Womanist perspectives. Descriptions of the themes, sources of evidence for these themes, and potential implications are discussed below. Table 1

displays the song titles, albums, and release dates corresponding to the songs included in the analysis.

Dialectics of Love

Love songs abound in the world of music and Nina Simone's songs are no exception. Indeed, at least 24 out of the 44 songs depicted positive or negative love experiences and actions.

Positive experiences of love. While there were 24 songs with accounts of positive or negative experiences related to love and romantic relationships, exactly 12 passages referred to an inspiring, uplifting, and gratifying type of love. In other words, songs featured romantic love, motherly love, and Black self-love. This pattern of love-related lyrics was evident in all eight albums analyzed. This finding is not surprising as this has been the general pattern of female blues singers dating back to the 1920s and 1930s (Lewis, 2003). One can capture the depth and meaning in these love relationships in the sound of Nina Simone's voice, but also in the content of lyrics of songs such as "Young Gifted and Black," "I Am Blessed," and "Wild Is the Wind." In "Wild Is the Wind," the power of love is evident in lyrics such as "Love me love me love me say you do, let me fly away with you, for my love is like the wind, and wild is the wind."

Love gone wrong. In contrast to the positive experiences depicted in many of her songs, Nina Simone also created a vivid picture of times when love relationships fail. In most cases, she is presented as the partner who experiences a loss after the other did something unacceptable or unthinkable, for example, in "Break Down and Let It All Out," her lyrics include "I've held back my tears just as long as I could, but now my eyes can see it's all over for you and me, and holding back ain't gonna do no good." The dialectics of love experiences comprise the largest number of passages as noted above, in that love songs were undergirded by hopes of intimacy and romance but also pain and sorrow. Whether positive or negative, the theme of love within Simone's artistic work is both a feeling and action, thus highlighting the transformative nature of love. The simple fact that love was the focus of the majority of the songs does not mean that the songs lack power. In other words, a female singer does not have to reproduce stereotypically male perspectives in order to be powerful. Furthermore, even in the lyrics about love experiences, Nina Simone presents a range of positions including the strong, unforgiving woman. To quote Angela Davis (1999), "The blues woman challenges in her own way the imposition of gender-based inferiority when she paints blues

portraits of tough woman, she offers psychic defenses and interrupts and discredits the routine internalization of male dominance" (p. 36). Nina Simone's characterization of her female voice did not stand for abuse or disrespect. Davis also stated that blues women "forged and memorialized images of tough, resilient and independent woman who were afraid neither of their own vulnerability nor of defending their right to be respected and autonomous human beings" (p. 41). Being tough or feeling hurt in the face of love loss, both fit the description of what it means to be a woman.

Experiences of Oppression

During the decades that Nina Simone performed her songs, blatant structural racism and anti-Black violence was rampant. There were a total of 15 passages indicating varied experiences with racial violence. We have categorized the forms of structural oppression that were observable in Nina Simone's lyrics as (a) gendered racism, (b) anti-Black oppression, and (c) revenge for oppression. This categorization captures slightly different experiences which all come together to form the common experience of marginalized, disavowed peoples.

Gendered racism. While the message of the experience of hardship beyond her share is not quantifiably frequent (four passages in three albums), it is quite salient as expressed in the lyrics of several of her songs. While it is expected that all people experience loss, disappointment, and hardship, her lyrics, for instance in "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood," imply a level of pain and hardship beyond normal expectations. In her lyrics, it is implied that these difficult circumstances may be related to the fact that she is not only Black, but also a woman. For example, in "Pirate Jenny," lyrics such as, "You gentlemen can say, 'Hey gal, finish them floors! Get upstairs! What's wrong with you? Earn your keep here!'" indicate that she is working in a stereotypical female job, and beyond her cleaning responsibilities she is expected to also satisfy sexual requests. The Gendered Racism theme is also evident in her song, "Four Women," where Simone explored the tensions between racial and gender equality through the stories of four Black women, and in so doing broke the silence and validated the experiences of many Black women in America.

Anti-Black oppression. Nina Simone's lyrics encompass references of various experiences of oppression. One of the most predominant forms of oppression highlighted in her lyrics is related to racially based discrimination and oppression of which there were seven passages. Some examples of such oppression include the lyrics of songs such as "Backlash Blues," "Old Jim Crow," "Four

Women," and "Mississippi Goddam." In "Mississippi Goddam," Simone notes the physical bondage of Southern Blacks. She expresses disgust for anti-Black violence, and the false promises of integration. For example, "Mississippi Goddam" lyrics include, "Picket lines, school boy cots, they try to say it's a communist plot, all I want is equality for my sister my brother my people and me."

Revenge for oppression. Beyond the experiences of adversity and oppression a theme of revenge and/or consequences for the injustices delivered to oppressed groups was evident in her lyrics. At least four passages in three albums were detected as delivering messages to the oppressors. Both "Backlash Blues" and "Pirate Jenny," for example, evoke fantasies of revenge sustained by Black female rage. As she muses in "Backlash Blues," the day will come when the "Black freighter" comes and destroys everything in front of their eyes.

Through her lyrics Nina Simone engaged in sociopolitical consciousness raising, which assisted in planting the seed for community action. Davis (1999) suggests that while music is not a direct call to action, the people cannot be ready to act without the consciousness raising that some songs provide. For example, Nina Simone's outrage with unjust and intolerable social conditions gave her listeners permission to get in touch with these experiences personally, or at least empathize with those experiencing such oppression.

Psychological and Emotional Vulnerabilities

Another set of experiences vividly portrayed in Nina Simone's music relates to the endurance of psychological stress. It is important to note that the experiences of love and oppression are also psychological experiences and that the fact that we placed them in a separate category above does not imply that they are not psychological. The purpose of the separation of constructs is entirely for ease of presentation.

Various indications of familiarity with mental illness were observed in the lyrics. While the lyrics do not utilize the categorized, specialized, and sometimes distant language of psychological diagnosis, the lyrics portray the lived experience with disorders such as, (a) depression, (b) anxiety, (c) alcohol abuse and dependence, (d) co-dependent relationships, and (e) suicide. It is important to recognize the positive outcomes of depicting these experiences in popular music. More specifically, normalizing psychological and emotional problems may help reduce the stigma associated with seeking psychological services.

Depression. Five passages in three albums evidenced symptoms of depression. Depression is a common experience, but remains stigmatized. In U.S. society (and others), those with mental illness are often judged as having a character weakness rather than a common human experience. Examples of songs with lyrics that indicate depression include "Night Song" and "Mood Indigo." In "Mood Indigo," she notes "You ain't never been blue 'till you've had that mood indigo, that feeling goes stealing down to my shoes while I just sit here and sigh, go along blues."

Suicide. There were three passages that illustrated subtle and explicit suicidal ideation. At first glance, one might not notice the references to end of life due to an emotionally painful interpersonal disappointment, because they are often couched in metaphor, as in "The Last Rose of Summer." Suicidal ideation and suicide attempts are experiences that profoundly impact the individual, families, and the broader community. For example, this song concludes with, "When true hearts lie wither'd and fond ones are flown, oh, who would inhabit this bleak world alone?" Education about the signs of suicidal ideation is critical in order to treat the affected individual in the most effective manner.

Alcohol abuse and dependence. Undoubtedly, substance abuse may often be the source or the symptom experienced by an individual dealing with mental illness. People often ineffectively use substances as a means of coping with stress, anxiety, depression, disappointment, and so on due to a lack of internal and external resources to appropriately cope with emotional stress. For example, in "Gin House Blues," lyrics such as "Oh when I'm feeling high I don't have nothing to do just fill me full of good liquor I'll sure be nice to you," demonstrate some socially accepted views about alcohol abuse that may be detrimental to the individual trying to overcome the loss of someone or something of value in his/her life.

In some ways, the psychological and emotional vulnerabilities noted in Simone's lyrics are common to all racial groups (e.g., depression, suicidal ideation, substance abuse). However, the contextual elements, including racism and oppression, lead to a qualitatively different experience (e.g., higher mortality rates; Atkinson, 2004) including the limited access and low quality of mental health services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Furthermore, when Blacks are diagnosed with mental illness, the diagnoses tend to be more severe than those of their White counterparts (Wicker & Brodie, 2003) possibly due to the complicating factors related to chronic oppression in concert with higher rates of poverty. The presence of topics related to mental illness in Simone's lyrics encourages a breaking of the

silence and normalizing mental illness experiences, thus increasing the acceptability of support and mental health services.

Psychological Strengths

A number of psychological strengths were evident in the lyrics of the songs analyzed, which should be highlighted and celebrated as examples of emotional resources and ways of coping with gravely inappropriate social and political conditions.

Resilience. Evidence of exposure, awareness, and motivation for resilience abounds in her lyrics. The songs "The Last Rose of Summer" and "Don't Smoke in Bed" both illustrate resiliency. In "Don't Smoke in Bed," there is a sense of betrayal, but more importantly, confidence in herself; for example, lyrics include "I left a note on his dresser and my old wedding ring . . . I'm packing you in like I said." Resilience can be defined as the ability to recover quickly from illness, change, or misfortune. Considering the extent of the psychological trauma inflicted on Black people as a result of slavery, followed by various forms of oppression; resilience is an understatement for the growth of this population.

Value and appreciation for life. In addition to resilience, value and appreciation for life was apparent in at least two of her songs. The lyrics present a positive and hopeful perspective that is conducive to a healthy outlook on life. That is not to say that it is healthy to accept poor treatment, rather seeing the beauty in our environment in spite of the injustices that surround us as evidenced in "Ain't Got No/I Got Life" Where the lyrics culminate with, "Got life, I got my life."

Positive Black identity. Not only is a sense of resilience and positive outlook evident, as noted above, but also a sense of Black identity as positive and desirable is apparent in her lyrics. An unwavering, solid, and reliable sense of one's identity can be indicative of psychological strength and may contribute to the positive development of an individual and group of people. In four passages in two albums references were explicitly made or implied that Black is good, positive, strong, and promising (e.g., "To Be Young, Gifted and Black"). This song is filled with associations of positive qualities of Blackness. She attempts to build self-esteem in a society where images of "Black is bad" abound. She also challenges issues related to age, such as youth being pinned as troublemakers and rebels. She takes on a role of a mentor by making sure she spreads the message and encourages others to do the same. For

example, lyrics to this effect include, "To be young, gifted and Black oh what a lovely precious dream, to be young, gifted and Black open your heart to what I mean."

Feminist versus Africana womanist perspective. A feminist perspective emerges in Simone's lyrics challenging the status quo. Feminist perspectives empowers men and women to consider breaking from traditional patriarchal structures in search for self-definition. Examples of passages that illustrate a celebration of what it means to be a sexual, powerful, and self-reliant person include, "Ain't Got No/I Got Life," "Assignment Sequence," and "Marriage Is for Old Folks." In "Marriage Is for Old Folks," Simone expresses her desire to be free from marriage, which for her, equals constraint and boredom. She boldly offers that women can also play with casual relationships, does not want to conform to societal expectations and refuses to engage in traditionally female tasks. She clearly states that she does not want to belong nor be controlled by a man, rather by herself. This independent streak is juxtaposed in her lyrics by an articulated desire for positive male companionship, which is consistent with the Africana Womanist perspective and something Simone desired in her own life. The value for positive companionship is expressed in "I Am Blessed" lyrics including, "I who cried to the moon see only sunshine because darling you're mine, I am blessed with wealth untold, a love worth more than gold."

Psychological strengths buffer the negative effects of individual, institutional, and cultural racism (Jones, 1997). Recognizing resilience, as well as, identifying and bolstering the buffering effects of psychological strengths is critical in consideration of findings which indicate that chronic exposure racism is associated with compromised psychological and physical health (Utsey & Payne, 2000). Several studies have reported on the beneficial effects of a positive Black identity (Bridges, 2010; Gurin & Epps, 1975; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003) and feminist identity (DeBleare & Bertesch, 2013) as noted in Simone's lyrics.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to reach a deeper understanding of the messages contained in the lyrics of the artist known as Nina Simone. For this purpose, ethnographic content analysis was employed to analyze the lyrics in 44 of her songs. Findings revealed constructs relevant to oppression and anti-Black sentiments as well as psychological vulnerabilities and strengths.

Nina Simone's work crossed multiple genres' including pop, spirituals, opera, folk, classical, and protest songs (Kernodle, 2008). Simone gradually

experienced a political awakening initially expressed through her writing of "Mississippi Goddam" written in 1963 and released in 1964. She was inspired by the untimely death of four girls in a Birmingham Alabama Baptist church bombed by individuals fueled by anti-Black sentiments. In this song, Simone blatantly named the oppressive anti-Black structures of her time. According to Tammy Kernodle (2008), "Searching for an outlet for her anger, Simone went to the piano and in an hour wrote "Mississippi Goddam," her first protest song" (p. 301). Kernodle convincingly argues that Simone was an instrumental figure who set in motion the process of "redefinition of the freedom songs in the mid-60's" (p. 315).

Simone's artistic and activist endeavors were "deeply intertwined" (Feldstein, 2005, p. 1352). Simone's political awakening was spurred on by her special friend and Black writer (author of *A Raisin in the Sun*) Lorainne Hansberry. In reference to this period, Simone states in her autobiography, "I started thinking about myself as a Black person in a country run by white people and a woman in a world run by men" (Simone & Cleary, 1991, p. 87). As her involvement in the civil rights movement increased, her lyrics also evolved a political tone. For example, Ruth Feldstein (2005) highlighted the impact of Simone's gendered politics as noted in her discussion of Simone's release of "Four Women" in 1964, which, she argues predates second wave feminism. In "Four Women" Simone points to the marginalization experiences associated with multiple and intersecting statuses (e.g., race, ethnicity, social class, sex, sexual identity/orientation, and ability/disability), many of which were, and still are, under appreciated in U.S. society today (Collins, 2006). Put differently, the lyrics illustrate the centrality of gendered racial politics in everyday Black life.

Simone also offered many more subtle messages of disapproval of inequity and injustice. On various occasions she inserted messages for those who were listening to the lyrics closely. An example of an implied message supportive of Black beauty is in the song titled, "My Baby Just Cares for Me," where she notes that White standards of beauty are not his style. The presentation of her lyrics are in line with an Africana womanism perspective as evidenced by the prominence of messages against race-based oppression for the betterment of Black men, women, and children alike. Another example of Africana womanism as an accurate frame for messages lies in her stated desire for a healthy relationship that validated her experiences as Black and a woman. For Simone, the desire to contribute to the "Black struggle" was preeminent to "women's liberation" (1991, p. 117).

Nina Simone was an activist by choice and intention as illustrated by her pro-Black lyrics and civil rights activism, as well as by her decision to place herself in, what some would call, "self-imposed" exile in various Caribbean,

African, and European countries (Zuberi, 2004). While some would call her exile "self-imposed," one may interpret this action as a result of having no option, given the intolerable conditions of racial violence in the United States.

With respect to psychological issues, we determine that psychology needs ambassadors in the community and music helps to get the message of normalizing and destigmatizing emotional and psychological concerns. Analysis revealed various manifestations of depression, anxiety, alcohol abuse and dependence, co-dependent relationships, and suicide. Mental illness was not foreign to Simone as, was revealed late in her career, she struggled with bipolar disorder and substance abuse (Cohodas, 2010). On the other hand, Simone found ways to harness and secure support to cope with her mental illness, which is also notable. In fact, the various psychological strengths depicted in her lyrics, including resilience, appreciation for life, positive Black identity, and Africana womanism perspective, represent strategies for directly coping with psychological stressors emanating from sociopolitical oppression and mental illness.

Various issues limit the results of this study. Nina Simone did not write all of her lyrics, although she wrote some of her songs and was probably involved in the selection of others. Our intention is not to gloss over this basic fact, but to point out that this fact alone is not sufficient to discredit the power of a collection of intentionally selected pieces. Additionally, the songs analyzed in this article do not represent a comprehensive collection of Simone's songs. Future research should consider analysis of every single song recorded, written, and performed. Additional analyses might identify songs she wrote or co-wrote and compare results with songs she was contracted to perform. That said, let us recognize Nina Simone's creative contributions to society, for their affective resonance.

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