

Blond or Blonde?
Frank Ocean and Identity Construction

Kerri Lynn Rafferty
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After winning two Grammys for his previous album, *Channel Orange*, and producing the third-highest selling album of the year, Frank Ocean declined to participate in the 2017 awards ceremony: “That institution certainly has nostalgic importance. It just doesn’t seem to be representing very well for people who come from where I come from, and hold down what I hold down.”¹ Throughout his career, Ocean has had a fraught relationship with the music industry, most notably in his confrontation with identity and genre categories. Scholarship has widely acknowledged (false) assumptions that the musical practices of an individual reflect their social identity. Identity politics, as music scholar Shana Goldin-Perschbacher argues, “inherently reinvests in intertwining heteropatriarchal, racist, and classist formations,” and neglects to take into account “concepts of performative, contextual, and shifting articulations of self.”² However, journalism surrounding Frank Ocean exhibits a continual investment in identity and genre categories, producing a limited interpretation of his work. Articles such as “A Closer Look at Frank Ocean’s Coming Out Letter,” and “How Ocean’s *Blonde* Redefines Pop Queerness,” demonstrate interpretations of Ocean’s music that rely on an investment in identity politics, while neglecting broader, more interesting themes present throughout his latest album, *Blonde*.

In this paper, I will provide a brief overview of Ocean's previous albums, examining how identity and genre categories have elicited a limited interpretation of his music. Then I explore how *Blonde* produces a sense of detachment from identity and genre categories by extending and expanding upon previous musical and lyrical elements present on his previous albums in tracks

¹ Colin Stutz, “Frank Ocean Explains His Decision to Sit Out 2017 Grammys,” *Billboard*, November 15, 2016, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/7580396/frank-ocean-explains-sitting-out-2017-grammys>.

² Shana Goldin-Perschbacher, “The World Has Made Me the Man of My Dreams: Meshell Ndegeocello and the ‘problem’ of Black female masculinity,” *Popular Music* 32, no. 3 (2013): 471-496. doi: 10.1017/S0261143013000329

“Nikes,” “Nights,” “Solo,” and “Solo Reprise.” Through means of developing a diverse range of characters and collaborating with other artists, Ocean is able to construct varying performances of self in his album *Blonde* to subvert identity and genre categories that had previously restricted interpretation of his music.

Frank Ocean’s first album, *Nostalgia, Ultra* (2011), released independently and without promotion, was met with overwhelming critical acclaim. The album anticipates the musical and lyrical material featured on his subsequent albums, *Channel Orange* (Def Jam Recordings, 2012) and *Blonde* (Boys Don’t Cry, 2016), although Ocean’s debut expresses his political opinions more explicitly than his other works. In a rebellious move, Ocean chose to categorize the album as bluegrass and death metal, stating in interviews that genre labels were arbitrary, outdated, and prompted inaccurate interpretation of his music. Further, he commented that, if sung by a white artist, *Nostalgia, Ultra* might have been received in a less limited fashion by journalists:

If I was of your complexion, singing “Novacane,” we’d be having a different conversation right now. Especially if that song was embodied in an album like *Nostalgia, Ultra* and I was your complexion, and I sang that whole collection, people would listen to it and be like “Yeah, he borrowed from R&B but it’s not just R&B - it’s a lot of things, and you can’t just call it R&B.”³

Press surrounding *Nostalgia, Ultra* acknowledges the album’s multi-genre references, which features covers and reinterpretations of songs by white rock bands including The Eagles, Coldplay, and MGMT. Yet, the same journalism neatly categorizes the album as “alternative R&B.” So, why does journalism maintain such neat genre categorization, despite recognizing Ocean’s use of a multitude of genres? Sociologist Beverly Skeggs explains that identity is “a metaphoric space in which to store and display resources,” where “some...use the classifications

³ Melissa Bradshaw, “‘Imagery, And A Little Bit Of Satire’: An Interview With Frank Ocean,” *The Quietus*, November 22, 2011, <http://thequietus.com/articles/07450-frank-ocean-interview/>.

and characteristics of race, sexuality, class, and gender as resources even as others are denied their use because they are positioned as those classifications and are fixed by them.”⁴ Ocean implies in his statement that white artists resource racialized musical genres to create a distinct post-genre sound, whereas he is fixed by identity and genre classifications. Further, music philosopher Robin James argues, “Claims to genre transcendence are credible when they are made by artists who... appear free of any particular social identity. In order to sound post-genre, one has to seem post-identity.”⁵ Ocean often refers to himself as a singer/songwriter as opposed to an R&B artist (the label given to him by journalists), stating that an R&B label limits interpretations of his music to a reading based in identity politics, while ignoring his use of hip-hop, rock, and pop influences or the narrative that he creates lyrically.

His second album, *Channel Orange*, prompted Ocean to publicly discuss his love life after journalism speculative of his use of male-gendered pronouns was to be published. In response to questions regarding his sexuality, Ocean further refused categorization and expressed:

I had Skyped into a listening session that Def Jam was hosting for *Channel Orange*, and one of the journalists, very harmlessly—quotation gestures in the air, “very harmlessly”—wrote a piece and mentioned [the use of male-gendered pronouns].

I’ll respectfully say that life is dynamic and comes along with dynamic experiences, and the same sentiment that I have towards genres of music, I have towards a lot of labels and bos and shit. I’m in this business to be creative—I’ll even diminish it and say to be a content provider... People should pay attention to that in the letter: I didn’t need to label it for it to have impact. Because people realize everything that I say is so relatable, because when you’re talking about romantic love, both sides in all scenarios feel the same shit. As a writer, as a creator, I’m giving you my experiences.⁶

⁴ Beverley Skeggs. “Uneasy Alignments, Resourcing Respectable Subjectivity.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004): 291-298. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

⁵ Robin James, “Is the post- in post-identity the post- in post-genre?,” *Popular Music* 36, no. 1 (2017): doi: 10.1017/S0261143016000647

⁶ Amy Wallace, “Frank Ocean: On Channel Orange, Meeting Odd Future, and His Tumblr Letter,” *GQ Magazine*, 2012, <http://www.gq.com/story/frank-ocean-interview-gq-december-2012>.

Ocean had originally intended to include the letter he makes reference to in the liner notes for the album, but felt compelled by what he (legitimately) perceived as intrusion by the journalist to create a sense of self-representation (presumably before the journalist did it for him). His strategy for creating this self-representation takes a critical approach to both identity and genre categories in favor of dynamism and autobiographical experience. Echoing his previous stance, he notes the relation of identity and genre categories and how these categories invite musical and personal misinterpretation. As Goldin-Perschbacher notes in a study of a similarly misinterpreted black queer musician, “curiosity about queer and/or Black people’s individual sexual ‘deviance’ masks the deep structural roots of White supremacy and heteropatriarchy, the systems responsible for pathologising [queer and Black individuals] and representing them as violent, promiscuous, and unhealthy.”⁷ Ocean has been subject to this pathologizing by journalists questioning the use of male-gendered pronouns in his songs, in an attempt to read his music solely in terms of identity politics. However, his ambiguous responses of self-representation serve to undermine this pathologizing, and further, readings of his music based only in identity politics.

In February 2013, Ocean appeared in an interview with BBC Radio after *Channel Orange* had won a Grammy Award for Best Urban Contemporary album. Ocean revealed that he was “ten, eleven songs into this new thing,” and that the record would be cohesive and conceptual, extending musical and lyrical themes present throughout his last release.⁸ An image

⁷ Shana Goldin-Perschbacher, 2013, 479.

⁸ The category of “Best Urban Contemporary Album” was created for “albums containing at least 51 percent playing time of newly recorded contemporary vocal tracks derivative of R&B. [It] is intended for artists whose music includes the more contemporary elements of R&B and may incorporate production elements found in urban pop, urban Euro-pop, urban rock, and urban alternative.” Ocean was the first recipient of this award at the 55th Grammy Awards Ceremony.

posted on Ocean's personal blog two years after the interview hinted at, for the first time, what this concept might be: sitting pensively, Ocean is pictured holding copies of a magazine that reads "Boys Don't Cry." The image is posted above an exact copy of itself, and the caption declares, "I got two versions. I got twooo versions..."⁹ The blog post immediately sparked speculation among fans about the album's concept: it would almost definitely confront issues surrounding masculinity and perhaps duality, but otherwise the picture was rather ambiguous in a manner that is characteristic of Ocean.

These concepts of duality and ambiguity materialize through much of *Blonde* and allude to the complex manner in which Ocean constructs identity. The most notable duality exists in the very title of the album: both Apple and Spotify catalogue the album as the feminine *Blonde*, whereas the album cover reads *Blond*. Further, the liner notes for *Blonde* lists his birth name (Christopher Breaux) as the songwriter and his stage name (Frank Ocean) as the producer. While Ocean has consistently explored the performativity of identity throughout his prior albums, *Blonde* denotes an important change in the ways in which identity performance takes place. Both *Nostalgia*, *Ultra*, and *Channel Orange* seem to lack autobiographical detail, instead exploring identity through a series of diverse male characters. As scholars Frederik Dhaenens and Sander De Ridder note, the depiction of male characters Frank Ocean creates are wide-ranging, representing traditional portrayals of masculinity alongside depictions of men who reevaluate their masculine identities or abandon notions of masculinity altogether. The commonalities between the male characters exist in their craving for realness and their struggle with emotion. Only those transgressing the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity succeed in finding something

⁹ The album was first advertised as *Boys Don't Cry*, but was released with the title *Blonde*. The release was accompanied by *Endless*, a 45-minute visual album, and *Boys Don't Cry*, a magazine.

real.¹⁰ *Blonde* presents these characters alongside autobiographical details about Ocean, creating an ambiguity as to whether characters are representative of Ocean or simply another character in his stories.

The first track, “Nikes,” acts an overture for the album; presenting the conceptual themes throughout, the track provides a perspective with which to analyze subsequent songs. Harkening back to the ambiguous, hotly debated blog post that announced the album and presented the theme of duality, this particular track has two versions.¹¹ The track was released as a single with an accompanying music video that features three “voices,” two of which are pitch-altered, but all sung by Ocean.¹² These voices include a higher-pitched voice, a lower-pitched voice, and Ocean’s unaltered voice. The track that appears on the album omits the lower-pitched voice, which interjects with spoken phrases in the music video single.

In both versions, the higher-pitched voice sings almost the entirety of the song until it is dispelled by Ocean’s unaltered voice which states “We’ll let you guys prophesize/We gon’ see the future first.” This rupture in the plot imbues the track with a metadiegetic narrative where the voices present multiple narratives that Ocean then comments on in the process of creating another, related narrative. That is, Ocean seems to interrupt the narrative, speaking as himself and addressing us, the audience, directly. However, as the song progresses in Ocean’s unaltered voice, it becomes clear that we are still concretely in a story and that Ocean's unaltered voice is just as much a character as his altered voices.

¹⁰ Frederik Dhaenens and Sander De Ridder, “Resistant masculinities in alternative R&B? Understanding Frank Ocean and the Weeknd’s representations of gender,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2014): 283-299, doi: 10.1177/1367549414526730

¹¹ On September 4, 2017, Ocean released a third version of the track. This version was a video of a studio recording, an electric keyboard accompanying Ocean, whose voice is unaltered.

¹² The music video can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/179791907>

As rock critic Greg Kot observes, “Ocean uses distorting devices on his voice to add emotional texture and to enhance the characters he briefly embodies... They're all little slices of Ocean's personality.”¹³ Kot's observation is contentious: it might reflect Ocean's inability to resource subjectivity, or it might demonstrate the complex manner in which Ocean constructs identity. It is unclear as to whether the narratives presented on *Blonde* apply exclusively to Ocean, prompting an anti-essentialist reading of his work where Ocean can seemingly abandon identity categories that previously restricted interpretation of his music.

If the presence and timbre of multiple voices or characters demonstrates themes of duality and ambiguity, the lyrics serve to further explicate these themes. “These bitches want Nikes/They lookin’ for a check/Tell ‘em it ain’t likely/Said she need a ring like Carmello/Must be on that white like Othello/All you want is Nikes/But the real ones/Just like you/Just like me.” In the opening lyrics of the album, Ocean unapologetically questions the construction of authenticity. Ocean’s interjection “We’ll let you guys prophesize/We gon’ see the future first,” anticipates or perhaps prophesizes criticisms of his “authenticity” in response to his subversive use of subjectivity. Scholar and journalist Jason King articulates this skepticism of Ocean’s authenticity:

Moreover, in a song like "Nikes," he shouts-out felled influences like A\$AP Yams and Pimp C (rest in peace) and even Trayvon Martin — but there's no similar mention of slain LGB and trans folk...I say this not to police what Frank Ocean can or should say, nor how he should say it — only to mention there is a long venerable tradition where queer artists (in or out of the closet) engage in pre-emptive heteronormativity in the effort to avoid stigma and to fully crossover to straight audiences.¹⁴

¹³ Greg Kot, "Review: Frank Ocean's 'Blonde' worth the wait," Chicago Tribune, August 21, 2016, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/music/kot/ct-frank-ocean-blonde-review-ent-0822-20160821-column.html>.

¹⁴ Ann Powers and Jason King, "Detangling Frank Ocean's 'Blonde': What It Is And Isn't," NPR, August 22, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2016/08/22/490918270/detangling-frank-oceans-blonde-what-it-is-and-isnt>.

King's observations demonstrate an expectation of authenticity as determined by R&B and hip-hop genre conventions. For King, Ocean appears to be inauthentic for his more subtle and nuanced negotiation of identity, which contrasts with his overt criticisms of the institution of marriage in "American Wedding" (*Nostalgia, Ultra*, 2011) or his struggle over an unrequited, same-sex love in "Bad Religion" (*Channel Orange*, 2013). Because *Blonde* does not explicitly comment on the Black Lives Matter movement or the Orlando Massacre, Ocean appears to be inauthentic, a "reluctant pop-star" concerned only with his "crossover super-ambition." The lyrics King references are the lines "Pour up for A\$AP/RIP Pimp C/RIP Trayvon, that nigga look just like me." King later posits, "the album as a whole impressionistically [argues] for the importance of black life." Although King ultimately negates this interpretation, this is the function of the referenced lyrics. If "Nikes" functions as an overture to *Blonde*, then this homage to Black musical artists is meant to implicate a theme of Black identity throughout the album in a manner that does not essentialize Ocean or other Black individuals. Thus, "Nikes," acting as an overture to *Blonde*, prefigures themes of ambiguity, duality, authenticity, Black identity, and masculinity in subsequent tracks.

"Nights" further complicates the notion of authenticity and demonstrates the equivocal nature of *Blonde*, crafting two characters who may or may not be representative of Ocean. The track features two distinct sections, discerned by a clear contrast in the accompaniment from a steady, hypnotic guitar transitioning to a languid piano. This shift serves to reinforce the two distinct characters Ocean creates through his vocalizations. Ocean raps on themes of failed relationships and working night shifts in the first section, while the second depicts Ocean's relocation from New Orleans to Los Angeles, his voice pitched two semitones higher. We might

expect an unaltered voice to depict a more “authentic” representation of an artist; however, Ocean subverts this expectation using a manipulated voice to present autobiographical information. In this way, “Nights” presents a conflict with “Nikes.” Whereas Ocean’s unaltered voice represented a character in a narrative that we assume is not autobiographical in “Nikes,” “Nights” presents autobiographical information through an altered voice that is necessarily interpreted as a character, or perhaps inauthentic. Ocean varies the methods by which he creates characters both lyrically and sonically throughout *Blonde*, creating further ambiguity as to whether the narrative can be attributed to Ocean himself. These varied methods of constructing narratives denote a change in how Ocean creates characters within his music. While in his previous albums each song presented a single new character, usually discerned lyrically, tracks from *Blonde* often feature multiple characters who instead rely on both lyric and sonic elements (such as vocal distortion) to differentiate characters.

Similarly, Ocean uses collaboration in tracks “Solo” and “Solo Reprise” to obscure who the narrative belongs to, and in doing so, creates a commentary on masculinity. The tracks are connected through their titles, instrumentation, and thematic material. “Solo” features Ocean over an organ played in block chords and “Solo Reprise” features famous American rapper André 3000, best known for his work in the band Outkast, as a guest on this track, rapping over a piano played in blocked chords, with more colorful harmony. This creates a sense of response and progression from “Solo” to “Solo Reprise.” Although the cause of strife beyond a failed relationship in “Solo” is unclear, the internal conflict André 3000 presents is more clearly defined: he struggles with the notion of authenticity surrounding acts of masculinity and musical performance, revealing or clarifying the internal conflict presented in “Solo.” The performances of hegemonic masculinity in these tracks are expressed in various ways. In “Solo Reprise,”

André 3000 confronts women with unfair and sexist expectations surrounding authenticity. He raps, “Bending backwards after half of these hoes had work done/Saying they want something real from a man/Just saying it, we being real persons.” In “Solo,” Ocean depicts a man fleeing from the responsibility of raising a child and supporting the mother.¹⁶ He sings, “Now your baby momma ain’t so vicious, all she want is her Pickett fence/And you protest and picket sign, but them courts won’t side with you/Won’t let you fly solo.” These lyrics illustrate Dhaenens and De Ridder's observation that the male characters depicted in Ocean's music struggle with their emotions and succeed in finding something real only once they have transgressed the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity.¹⁷ If Dhaenens and De Ridder consider this to apply to the characters in Ocean's songs, should we then consider André 3000 merely a character (and not himself) in Ocean's narrative? Further, considering Kot's analysis of *Blonde*, is this a character that is embodied by Ocean? Thus, collaboration obscures who the narrative belongs to and creates a commentary on masculinity.¹⁸ Neither Ocean nor André 3000 succeed in “finding something real,” or “transgressing the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity.” Instead, they are isolated by their performances of traditional masculinity, when potentially the characters could have found solace in each other's loneliness. In this way, "Solo" and "Solo Reprise" demonstrate the

¹⁶ Here, I juxtapose “Solo” and “Solo Reprise.” I could have compared “Solo” with “Sierra Leone,” (*Channel Orange*, 2011), to demonstrate how the concept of duality permeates the entirety of Ocean's work. “Sierra Leone” presents almost the exact narrative as “Solo”: a man has unprotected sex, resulting in his partner's pregnancy. However, in "Sierra Leone," the character chooses to raise the child and support the mother in contrast to the outcome of the character in "Solo," who abandons both child and mother. This example further supports Dhaenens and De Ridder in their conclusion that Ocean's characters who transgress hegemonic masculinity find resolution, while those participating in hegemonic masculinity are left struggling. “Sierra Leone” ends peacefully like a modern lullaby, while the piano in “Solo” continues the character's thoughts that are now too futile to sing.

¹⁷ Dhaenens and De Ridder, 2014, 293.

¹⁸ Here, I use collaboration to mean Ocean's direct collaboration with André 3000. However, collaboration later refers to this example of collaboration, in addition to Ocean's use of sampling.

damaging effects of hegemonic masculinity.

More broadly, collaboration is often characterized as feminine in music discourse, as observed by music scholar Fred Maus in his 1993 feminist analysis of the gendered discourse of music theory.¹⁹ Likewise, collaboration in musical performance is often viewed as feminine. Dhaenens and De Ridder argue that hegemonic R&B and hip hop masculinity is grafted onto a history of racism and systematic oppression and that Black men employ strategies such as objectifying women or celebrating sexual activities without responsibility to preserve a normative Black male identity.²⁰ The hegemonic lyrics presented by the characters in “Solo” and “Solo Reprise,” are an attempt to make up for the perceived femininity of collaboration and their emotional vulnerability, in order to retain a normative Black male identity. Journalism covering *Blonde* demonstrates an investment in the essentialist view that collaboration is feminine. For example, King questions Ocean's musicianship through a disparaging comparison, arguing:

Blonde also owes some debt to Meshell Ndegeocello...Like Ocean, Ndegeocello is black and queer, and raps and sings, and has always had an interest in alternative imaginings of masculinity in the context of either/or identities...But bassist Meshell is known as a musician's musician with technical chops, whereas Ocean comes by much of his conventional musicianship externally, via collaborators.²¹

King again articulates an expectation of independence in connection with identity and genre categories, questioning Ocean's musicianship in a comparison in which collaboration is seen as emasculating. André 3000's verse ends with the lyrics “After 20 years in, I'm so naïve/ I was under the impression that everyone wrote they own verse/ It's comin' back different and, yeah, that shit hurts me/I'm hummin' and whistlin' to those not deserving/ I've stumbled and lived

¹⁹ Fred Everett Maus, “Masculine Discourse in Music Theory,” *Perspectives of New Music* 31, no. 2 (1993): 266, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/833390>.

²⁰ Dhaenens and De Ridder, 2014, 285.

²¹ Ann Powers and Jason King, 2016.

every word/Was I working just way too hard?,” anticipating expectations set forth by R&B and hip-hop genres to articulate an “authentic” performance of masculinity. In this way, “Solo” and “Solo Reprise” similarly explore themes of authenticity first presented in “Nikes.” That is, the tracks acknowledge expectations of independence and biographical lyrics from Black artists. While the tracks exhibit hegemonic masculinity, they simultaneously reveal that this performance of hegemonic masculinity is damaging and rooted in the expectation of independence and “authenticity” as a marker for successful musicianship and ultimately, a successful performance of masculinity as defined by R&B or hip-hop genre conventions.

Since *Blonde*, Ocean has released four individual tracks.²² Reviews of Ocean’s new releases reject readings linked to identity politics and signal Ocean’s successful renegotiation of identity and genre categories. A fan, posting in an unofficial online forum poked fun at “Rapgenius,” a website that offers lyric interpretation, for its tendency to relate lyrics to Ocean’s sexuality. Another responded, “i mean it’s a big enough part of who he is that he still consistently sings about it but from this distanced ontological perspective [sic].”²³ While Ocean’s music comments on his social identities, namely his race and sexuality, he consistently examines how these identity categories shape his personal experience and further, questions the legitimacy of these labels. Similarly, *The Fader* published an article concerning the release of single “Chanel,” which begins “My guy pretty like a girl, and he got fight stories to tell. I see both sides

²² The titles of the songs, in the order they have been released, are “Biking,” “Chanel,” “Lens,” and “Provider.” Some consider “Slide,” a collaborative track by Calvin Harris and Ocean, to be primarily Ocean’s single, although Ocean is often listed as a guest featured on the track. These singles were released as part of a series of live playlists hosted by Apple Music. Prior to *Blonde*, Ocean had never released a single apart from an album release.

²³ TheRedJoker93, April 27, 2017, comment on “all u hoes,” *Frank Ocean Subreddit*, https://www.reddit.com/r/FrankOcean/comments/67w4f5/all_u_hoes/.

like Chanel.” While some media outlets heralded the track as a “bi-sexual anthem,”²⁴ Michael Arceneaux asks listeners to understand Ocean as a bold individual living outside of rigid categorization, as opposed to a representation of Black and queer communities that journalism surrounding Ocean is known to promote.²⁵

Perhaps my argument seems hypocritical. After all, I have called for journalists and scholars to place less emphasis on Ocean’s identities and yet I have offered song analyses that examine only themes of identity. I could have instead chosen to examine the album in terms of its existential or consumerist themes, for example. However, I have analyzed just a portion of *Blonde*, an album that was designed in part to confront issues of identity categories. The tracks I have selected—“Nikes,” “Nights,” “Solo,” and “Solo Reprise”—represent tracks that overtly address race, gender, and class. Likewise, I have chosen to exclude tracks such as “Pink + White” or “White Ferrari” from my analyses for their lack of commentary on identity categories. While these tracks may demonstrate themes of love, existentialism, or consumerism—themes that might shape or construct one’s identity—their commentary should not be framed exclusively in terms of identity politics.

Thus, by developing a diverse range of male characters alongside autobiographical and collaborating with other artists like André 3000, Ocean destabilizes identity and genre categories. This is further accomplished by presenting songs that comment on his social identities alongside songs that explore themes of love, existentialism, or consumerism. While his first two albums

²⁴ It is somewhat unclear as to where the term “bisexual anthem” was first published, but a quick online search reveals countless sources that use this phrase. It is exemplified elsewhere in headlines such as “I See Both Sides Like Chanel’: Frank Ocean Makes a Bold Bi Statement” and “Here’s Why Frank Ocean’s Song “Chanel” Is A Celebration of Bisexuality.”

²⁵ Michael Arceneaux, “Frank Ocean Is Not Your Symbol,” *The Fader*, March 31, 2017, <http://www.thefader.com/2017/03/31/frank-ocean-chanel-sexual-identity-essay>.

exemplify the restrictive nature of genre and identity labels, *Blonde* demonstrates a nuanced renegotiation of these labels; by obscuring who possesses the narrative in songs, Ocean produces a sense of detachment from genre and identity labels, allowing for more interesting and complex interpretations of his music.

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