

Research Paper

“Ashe and Identity Registers”

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Applying psychological ideas like identity registers to Ashe's songs including, "Save Myself," "Immature," "Another Man's Jeans," "Please Don't Fall in Love with Me," "Helter Skelter," "Devil Herself" and "Ashe" shows that her music works not only as emotional expression but as a structured psychological process that helps both her and her listeners navigate and relate to feelings of identity confusion. Parroting her disclosure: "Back then I wasn't thinking clearly — I didn't really know who I was." These are all songs by singer/songwriter Ashlyn Rae Willson, more popularly known as Ashe. Her songs deal with a wide array of psychological concepts but identity seems to be the most prominent one. According to Mark Bracher, "All human behavior is ultimately motivated by the need to maintain one's identity." This is only proven further by Ashe's deeply emotional, eloquent and captivating song lyrics.

The first identity register is called *Affective Physiology*. This register refers to physical functioning, sensory information processing, vitality effects and emotional stimulation. In order to maintain optimal states in this register, there are numerous techniques that one may follow. One specific technique is altering substances: drugs, alcohol, sugar, caffeine, etc. In Ashe's song "Save Myself," we see an example of this; "We were cocaine, playing milk and honey. Dysfunctional, I was a junkie." Though this line is most likely symbolic, it still encompasses the addictive nature of Affective Physiology. This line depicts Ashe to be completely reliant on a substance, the idea of something or more than likely, a person. With the symbolism aside, Ashe speaks about how she was a "junkie," someone with an obsessive dependency on something, which is an identity of its own. The next example is from her song, "Immature:" "[...]while I count my days in coffee rings, a sucker for my sympathy." This line refers to an individual whose only notable part of their day is having that jolt of caffeine, especially while being drowned in self pity. This line depicts Ashe as being depressed and overcome with self pity. Another

technique in body stimulation. This refers to actions like sex, exercise, risk taking, etc. An example of this is in “Another Man’s Jeans;” “When it was right, it wasn't wrong. It wasn't right very long, but it was good while it was, and it was fun and it was sex.” This line refers not only to Ashe being a lover, but being proud of it. She exudes much confidence in this song and sings in a lustful way. So, in this song, she portrays herself as a sensualist. In order for Ashe to seek an optimal state of Affective Physiology, she includes her usage in drugs, stimulants and sex. These all allude to three conflicting identities of her being portrayed as a “junkie,” a self pitier and a sensualist.

The second identity register is called *Imagistic Identity*. This refers to a sense of coherent self as an entity in the physical world. In order to maintain optimal states in this identity register there are three different components that have to be met. The first component acts as a sense of boundary and personal security. “Please stop calling me your hero” is a line from Ashes song, “Please Don’t Fall in Love with Me” that exemplifies the first component. This song is quite moving. It is about destroying the expectations that others have built of you because some standards, even if they are positive, can still be exhausting to maintain. In this case, people are referring to Ashe as their “hero.” Being thought of as someone who ‘always saves the day’ is an immense amount of pressure. By including this line, she is setting a boundary within herself that she no longer wants this identity. The second component is the visual image of appearance. The line “I can be the girl in another man's jeans” is a great example of this. As spoken about in the previous paragraph, this song portrays a more confident side of Ashe. It also portrays someone who doesn’t mind seeing themselves committing immoral acts. In this case, the reference to ‘another man’s jeans’ represents someone who has frequent sexual partners. This also alludes to adultery taking place as she speaks previously in the song of how much better she is than other

women. This gives listeners a visual appearance of Ashe 'in another man's jeans' because this is how she chose to be viewed in this particular song. The third component is body agency and efficacy which refers to physical movement and what you can do with your body. An example of this is also in "Another Man's Jeans," "I don't need a bouquet, keep the flowers, let's go dancing." Dancing in this context is a form of partying. She clearly states that she wants nothing to do with love or romance which is symbolized by rejecting the flowers. She just wants to partake in the fun, and more surface level side of life, like going dancing. This portrays Ashe as a party girl. In order for Ashe to seek an optimal state in Imagistic Identity she has to follow the three components. By doing this she depicts herself as a hero, an adulterer, and as a party girl.

The third and last identity register is *Linguistic Identity*. Linguistic Identity refers to how individuals and groups define themselves through language, encompassing dialects, beliefs, etc. The first type of Linguistic identity is words and/or signifiers. An example of this is in her song "Helter Skelter;" "Tantalized, hypnotized, 'You're happy, you're happy,' they say." Words and signifiers can be either positive or negative when it comes to Linguistic Identity. In this example it is negative. These words are spoken by those around her to help influence how she feels about herself and her experiences. People around her are *telling* her to be happy, so on the exterior, she *is*. The second type refers to systems of knowledge or beliefs/religion. An example of this is in Ashe's song "Devil Himself," "I was feeding you the apple, you were swallowing the seeds. You were Adam in the garden, but your ribs were made of me." This song is so powerful. It utilizes numerous religious references from the story of Adam and Eve. The story of Adam and Eve is a traditional biblical story that depicts good and evil. Within this story it is said that Eve was made from the ribs of Adam. In this context, the roles are switched to portray Eve, or the narrator, being the temptress in the story. Adam is depicted as only being sustained off of Eve and follows

her knowingly that he is being manipulated. This is a deep rooted play on the actual story but still depicts traditional religious belief while comparing it to her human experience. The third type of Linguistic Identity is a narrative or life story. A song was written by Ashe earlier this year that was titled her name, "Ashe." This alone shows that the song will be about her in one way or another. The example I chose was, "And no one would know that I used to be someone so great. Oh, no one would know that I used to be someone." This example may seem vague but it actually says a lot. It depicts someone who is grieving over who they once were. It shows that Ashe is, or was "someone," which is essential to what personal identity is: being someone. All in all this depicts her as grieving. In order for Ashe to seek an optimal state in Linguistic Identity, she has to abide by the three types: words/signifiers, beliefs/religion, and life story/narratives. By doing this she depicts herself as happy, a manipulator and as a griever.

Using the three types of identity registers; affective-physiological, imagistic, and linguistic, Ashe explores the complex, exhausting and disorienting nature of identity confusion. Throughout her songs, "Save Myself," "Immature," "Another Man's Jeans," "Please Don't Fall in Love with Me," "Helter Skelter," "Devil Herself" and "Ashe," she takes on a variety of contrasting personas: "junkie," the self pitier, the sensualist, the hero, the adulterer, the party girl, the happy girl, the manipulator and the griever. These identities are all wildly different from each other and truly depict the state of identity confusion while still helping both her and her listeners navigate and relate to it.

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