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Celebrity, Music, and Public Persona: A Case Study of Taylor Swift

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Celebrity, Music, and Public Persona: A Case Study of Taylor Swift

By

Elaina K. M. Junes

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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In

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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This work is dedicated to my grandfather, Keith Christensen, who has taught me by example the importance of life-long learning. I also want to acknowledge all members of my committee for signing onto this project and lending their thoughts and expertise. Particularly my chair, Dr. Paul Prew, for embracing and validating this research, providing excellent guidance, and (hopefully) becoming a fan along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CELEBRITY, MUSIC, AND PUBLIC PERSONA: A CASE STUDY OF TAYLOR SWIFT

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ABSTRACT

Studies have shown that celebrity culture is one of many significant sources of influence that inform the construction of individuals' identities as well as their outlook on work, life ambitions, and accomplishment. Celebrity also offers a unique window with which to examine both how social structures operate in the mainstream, and how social inequalities are reproduced. This study utilizes qualitative research methodology by way of longitudinal content analysis to examine how Taylor Swift's public persona has evolved comparatively throughout the early and late stages of her career, specifically in regard to her gender, age, and music. This study identifies ten narrative themes significant to Swift's constructed public persona in interviews conducted between the years 2009-2022: personality, emotions, music career, making music, aspects of celebrity and fame, personal life, relationships, social and cultural issues, speaking up, and perspective. These findings reinforce the themes found in the literature review and suggest new insights on celebrity, gender and sexism, artist autonomy, commodification, and public persona.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"They tell you while you're young/ 'Girls go out and have your fun'
Then they hunt and slay the ones who actually do it
Criticize the way you fly/ When you're soarin' through the sky
Shoot you down and then they sigh, and say/ 'She looks like she's been through it'
Lord, what will become of me/ Once I've lost my novelty?" [1]

The question of persona is arguably one of the most universal struggles that humans face. Regardless of social conditions like gender, race, class, age, sexuality, and religion, every person in the world— at one point or another— has had to reflect on and grapple with their persona. Who am I, both independently and in relation to others? How much of myself is innately predisposed, and how much is a reflection of the social realities and structures around me? Am I who I think I am, or who others believe me to be? Is there a difference between the two, and how can I tell? When I am required to both put on and shed layers of myself to exist in the world, how do I come to terms with the fact that I might not be able to recognize myself? That I might not like myself?

The main issue this study aims to address is how Taylor Swift's presented public persona has evolved comparatively throughout the early and late stages of her career, specifically regarding her gender, age, and music. This (public) presentation of self is impacted by various factors: her celebrity status, position, and longevity in the American music industry, relationship with autonomy as an artist, experiences being commercialized and commodified (by her superiors as well as the public), and sexist culture and institutions.

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[1] Swift, Taylor. 2021. *Nothing New (feat. Phoebe Bridgers) (Taylor's Version) (From the Vault)*. Republic Records.

The overall purpose of this study is to illustrate the larger, often patriarchal social mechanisms that are employed against women in society.

As one of the most successful musical acts of all time, Taylor Swift has occupied an integral position in pop music. With a variety of professional accolades ranging from Grammy awards to Billboard records, Swift has spent almost two decades at the top of the music charts and released ten critically acclaimed studio albums. With over 336 million across social media platforms, she is an infamous name in the realm of pop culture as well. She is one of few examples of women who have achieved her level of success while navigating systems of sexism and patriarchy. For these reasons and more, Swift's career offers rare insight and thus a rich case study of celebrity, the American music industry, and public persona.

This topic is worth studying firstly because the disparaging and discrediting attitudes and opinions towards pop music made by women is a direct reflection of social attitudes and opinions of women generally by society. Analyzing the positionality and perceptions of one of the largest artists in the history of music can work to reveal complex and nuanced patterns in social thought and public discourse. Often, everyday realities and consequences of sexism and misogyny in patriarchal societies can be invisible to those not equipped with the proper tools to recognize them. Playing out on a larger stage however, these truths become harder and harder to ignore, both as distant realities occurring in the realm of pop culture, and as equally personal experiences in day-to-day life.

Hand-in-hand with the importance of recognizing prejudice towards women is developing multifaceted, dynamic solutions. The importance of this study ultimately lies in its ability to serve as a catalyst for social change that prioritizes gender equity and equality by understanding social structures as entities that foundationally reproduce inequality.

Illustrating inequality as a macro-level issue in turn necessitates systemic evaluation and change that is built for and with subjugated voices.

This topic would significantly add to prior research that focuses on the general interaction women have with oppressive systems, particularly those with misogynistic motivators. A case study also contributes nuance and insight that macro-level analysis innately lacks. I also envision this topic holding importance for social and feminist organizers committed to the dismantling of patriarchal structures and systems. This research is also uniquely accessible (and arguably just as interesting) to the general public, those of whom are at least relatively familiar with pop music and celebrity culture, but commonly less familiar with the ways oppressive mechanisms affect their perceptions.

Each of the following chapters will support the overall objective of the study by contributing in the following ways: the literature review chapter will synthesize previous research and studies, provide background on the topic, and distinguish established themes that have emerged. The methodology chapter will outline how and why the data collection methods were chosen to contextualize the study, as well as address the broader theoretical framework of the analysis. The findings chapter will present the data that was collected, working in tandem with the discussion and conclusions chapters to integrate and review all collected data, concluding with a discussion of how this study could correlate to previous research as well as indicate opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Historical Evolution of the Record Industry as a Social Structure

To fully comprehend the American record industry in a structural sense requires a sociohistorical lens of analysis. Often used synonymously with the term "music industry," the record industry in the United States is one with a rich history (Williamson and Cloonan 2007). For the purposes of this research, the start of the 20th century is where a historical perspective becomes most relevant. This time was especially characterized by the expansion of music dispersion; the increased use of live instrumentals and bands for the purpose of entertainment during the WWI and WWII era was a catalyst for a specific form of standardization of published musical arrangements that could be played by any person, anywhere in the country (Garofalo 1987). This early, the focus of both the artists performing music and the record companies publishing it was neither on legality nor control. Informal regulations were the norm (if there were any at all) when it came to controlling music use or governing music "rights" (Garofalo 1987).

Conjointly, the operation of radio broadcasting as we know it today was firmly established in the 1920s (Stratton 1983). Originally, radio programming came at no cost to those who purchased and used radios, but shortly thereafter radio personnel saw programming as a potential source of advertising and income. A similar pattern can be seen regarding television and film, where the use of music in these forms of media became a substantial source of income over time. These early manifestations of how music dissemination and monetization in society serve as origins for modern models of music consumption and advertising popularized in the 21st century like iTunes and Spotify (Williamson and Cloonan 2007). At this time, the music industry was one that centered the processes, needs, and desires of individual artists.

This changed dramatically with the introduction of rock n' roll music and culture in the 1970s and1980s (Garofalo 1987). The cultural popularization of rock n' roll in the music industry was mirrored in other sociocultural spheres: fashion, mass media, and art all have a distinct aesthetic footprint in American history. With this sizable footprint came ideas on how to monetize it (Whitemore 2016). The mid-late part of the 20th century was when contemporary ideations of the music industry as a structure really emerged. This changed when rock n' roll artists gained nationwide and subsequent global acclaim. Suddenly, the necessitation for comprehensive representation from record companies occurred in order to contain and streamline what coincided with being a popular music star: radio exposure and gigs, tour planning and promotion, booking agencies, representative companies, music media specialists, and public relations (PR) teams (Garofalo 1987).

The music industrial space, once centered around artistic expression and process, quickly transformed into an environment with rigid institutional hierarchies (Sturm 2000). The music industry thus separated in two distinct categories: "major" record companies (those able to internally facilitate their music production and distribution) and "independent" record companies (those who comparatively did not have as many resources and needed to outsource production and distribution). Reflective of other social structures, each record company formed a division of labor. The dissemination of power in this hierarchy is as follows: the company/label CEO at the top, the legal and business affairs departments in supervisory roles, the Vice President of the label, marketing, promotion/publicity, media, A&R, sales, development, and art departments acting in complimentary managerial capacities, and at the bottom are those a part of the actual music-making process, i.e. singers, backing vocalists, writers, producers, sound engineers, and bandmembers (Stratton 1983).

This period in time represented the consolidation of the music industry in American society and culture. However, in the 1990s, record companies faced a formidable hindrance to their previous success— illegal secondhand distribution of recorded music. Soon, copies of music could be made from their original physical sources, duplicated, and shared through a variety of different methods at little to no cost, the most pressing of which were those uploaded to internet sites. Music uploaded to the web for free and accessible to anyone with a computer proved to be a tremendous issue for record labels resulting in missed sales opportunities, while internet sites quickly transitioned into platforms for illegal music distribution. Eventually, the issue was addressed by technological corporations like Apple in the mid-90s when MP3 players and iPods were manufactured as a more legal and mobilized alternative to music on CDs and tapes (Whitemore 2016). Now, not only were third-party technological companies now turning a profit, but other parties benefitted as well: online websites no longer had to worry about legal action for potentially platforming illegal distribution, and record companies could position themselves as an integral part of the streaming process.

From this point on, it is easy to track the linear ways this industry has specifically adapted to the everchanging digital landscape: at the beginning of the 20th century, it was radio; at the end. it was vinyl's and CDs, and now, in the 21st century, physical music has arguably been made obsolete with the introduction of streaming services. With the changes to this landscape being so integral to the way record companies make money, these companies have little choice but to adapt or risk both detrimental fiscal consequences and cultural irrelevance. Today, this is as true as ever; both major and independent record companies alike are organized around the digitalization of music consumption. In the age of social media, the content produced by record labels has increasingly been constructed to fit the diminutive attention span of its

consumers. In practice, this takes the form of labels incentivizing their artists to churn out singles as opposed to albums, up-tempo beats as opposed to sonically minimalistic melodies, and simplistically catchy choruses as opposed to melodically complex works of music. This is all in the hope that a small fraction of the song will compliment popular social media trends, most of which can be found on apps like TikTok and Instagram (Whitemore 2016).

Artist Autonomy

Musical artist autonomy has historically evolved into a concept that hinges upon the establishment of rights as opposed to the actual production of music. Record company profits are systematized around the need to exploit pieces of music (and their creators by proxy) by stripping them down to and viewing them primarily as a host of rights (Frith 1988). The methods through which this is realized go beyond the basic buying/selling producer-and-consumer relationship; music broadcasting (digital, radio, television) and film and commercial/video uses are all means through which exploitation in the name of capital accumulation in the music industry occurs. Musical rights manifest in two all-encompassing ways: copyrights and performance rights (Frith 1988). Copyrights in this sense refer to rights given to the owners of musical content (songs, albums, lyrics, melodies) that give said owner control of both the production and distribution of copies as well as the making of new works. Comparatively, performance rights equip individuals or groups with the right to publicly perform their music, as well as decide at their discretion who is and is not able to make use of that piece of music publicly, online, or over the radio (Kretschmer and Pratt 2009).

Since cemented in the foundational aspects of revenue accumulation, copyrights and performance rights have become monopolized privileges for record companies as opposed to individual artists (Herlihy and Zhang 2016). This is a result of the institutional power and

resources afforded to record companies, particularly market-dominating ones, whose basic structure is organized so that individual artists have no negotiation power over the rights of their own work. Hierarchies of power are structured in record companies so that this is not only enforced but justified: "because we (record companies) have so graciously agreed to represent, fund, and provide you (artist) with a platform, the *least* we are due are the rights to your music." And in such a digital age as the one we are living in today, the idea of copyright or performance right enforcement becomes a daunting and overwhelming concept to individuals and their limited personal teams, often argued to be better handled in the hands of organizations with larger scale resources (Frith 1988).

The agency and autonomy of individual artists is also limited by the record deals they sign with these companies. A record deal, often referred to as record/ing contract, simply refers to the legal agreement between a musical artist/s and a record company that serves as a binding contract where both parties agree to produce a certain number of musical works together, officially referred to as masters (master copies of music) (Frith 1988). A record deal takes on the significance of any other form of legal contract, often outlining specific contractual obligations that both parties must fulfill. Typically, the artist will agree to spearhead the creative aspects of the endeavor, while the record company controls production and distribution of the finished product. These deals are also known to include clauses pertaining to artist codes of conduct, performance obligations, and musical style recommendations and limitations.

While there are various kinds of record deals offered by companies, the legally binding aspect of these deals often make it so that artists are, for all intents and purposes, signing away their copyrights, performance rights, and rights to their masters in exchange for access to representation, publishing, manufacturing, marketing, and public promotion. While there are

many debates on the questionable equitable nature of these exchanges, what is important to understand is that it creates a reality where musical artists occupy subordinate and vulnerable positions compared to the power of the record companies they are represented by (Kretschmer and Pratt 2009). Record companies frame these deals as once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for people who otherwise would be unable to penetrate mainstream culture, but the reality often reflects exploitative misuses of power that leave artists with little in the way of institutional support, empowerment, or control.

Music as a Social Tool

The purposes of music and music-listening are manifold. While primarily considered a passive and individual activity, the consumption of music is an innately dynamic social and cultural phenomenon. Likewise, music production also serves the larger purpose of establishing and perpetuating the commercialization of aesthetic goods. Both have become increasingly true with the advancement of modern technology and its facilitation of music streaming platforms (iTunes, Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora, Soundcloud), making it possible— for the first time in history— to make, download, listen, and share music at the touch of a button. The power of music has held an important and unique place in a variety of historic and modern societies, typically serving as a device for connection, communication, storytelling, development, social transformation, and knowledge-transference (Rabinowitch 2020). Music is a proven unifying force that defies language, culture, race, religion, class, and gender, serving as a great equalizer in terms of social identity and location. How and to what extent music plays a part in and can be utilized by society is central to the question of its social significance.

One of the many purposes that music serves is to facilitate communication. Interpersonally, music can range from passing down culturally specific folklore, to encoding

secret messages (Scaff 1993). A prime example of the former is Native American cultures who utilize both song and dance as a ritualistic practice of preserving stories central to their beliefs and ways of life. Concerning the latter, the use of hymns and songs during slavery in America was one mechanism through which slaves covertly passed along crucial information. Famously, former slave-turned-abolitionist Harriet Tubman hid the locations of Underground Railroad safehouses in songs as a way to both guide and empower men, women, and children to run North in search of freedom.

On a larger scale, music that is professionally produced with any intention of distribution has the potential to transmit thoughts, emotions, opinions, and social correspondence on a macro-level (Manuel 1990). This potential is significant not only because of the intended messaging of those releasing the music, but also (perhaps more importantly) due to the meanings consumers assign to music. Music and vocal style, lyrics, and accompanying aesthetics like music videos all have meaning that they have been created with in mind, but that same meaning is not necessarily what consumers ultimately receive and attribute to it. Music, by nature, is an art form that, like many others, is interpretive and subjective when met by the public, yet simultaneously has the potential to inform collective thought (Scaff 1993).

DeNora (2000) argues that music, particularly in daily life, serves "as a way of organizing one's internal and social world, arguing that music is more than just background to numerous activities but rather helps to continually reconstruct the aim of these activities" (North et al. 2004:43). In this context, music becomes a process more so than an object, guiding individuals through their daily endeavors largely unbeknownst to the listener/s. Research (North and Hargreaves 1996) on the function of music has been conflicting because respondents often have different motivations for listening (calm, sleep, workout, study, party) in different situations

(club, game night, homework session, cleaning). The music one listens to is also dependent on factors such as physical location and proximity to others.

The use of music in social life is also a gendered process. DeNora (2002) details this by arguing that research on music listening habits illustrates how gender roles and stereotypes are reproduced and radiated. The music that men are stereotypically more likely to listen to (hip-hop, rap, R&B) is a reflection of the social norms placed on them, as is true with the listening stereotypes of women. Often, the latter is delegitimized in mainstream discourse because it seemingly reflects traditional femininity and is thus considered antiquated with subordinate taste (Lee 2012).

Music is also used as a place of refuge in social life. Music offers many people space and time to dissociate from the reality of their lives and situations, negative or otherwise. All types of music have the potential to transport listeners, even temporarily, outside of their subjective experiences, into the worlds they create. Often, instruments, melodies, and sounds that music contains suspend daily circumstances and parameters to offer asylum to those listening. Modern technological advancements have made this possible wherever one goes and whenever one wants, offering a place to escape for wellbeing purposes, even when immersed in daily routines (Roy and Dowd 2010).

George Herbert Mead (1926) lays the foundation for understanding the meaning-making experiences of humans and how art and aesthetic experiences can also be used in the process of social identity construction through symbolic communication. He focuses on the individualistic nature of both perception and social activity, serving as an introduction to the basic concepts of how external experiences are internalized to make greater meaning of. In his revolutionary work *The Nature of Aesthetic Experiences*, Mead (1926:387-388) argues that:

In the aesthetic appreciation of the works of great artists, what we are doing is capturing values of enjoyment there, which fill out and interpret our own interests in living and doing. They have permanent value because they are the language of delight into which men can translate the meaning of their own existence. But prerogative fine art has never been the dominant language of men's hearts… and even before the industrial revolution and the introduction of machine production, drudgery occupied most men's hands… It is silly and inept to offer hopeless counsels of perfection, to undertake by the spread of so-called culture to replace the consummatory objects in men's reveries by the imagery of great artists, or to replace machine production by medieval artisanship.

Here, Mead details the intrinsic value aesthetic appreciation has in aiding in the process of individuals making meaning of their lives and surroundings. He also indicates that this process is one that was made easier with the introduction of the industrial (and later technological) revolution; the nature of human labor production made it so that fine arts and culture could not be a priority for the working-class. Only when machines and technology began to bear the brunt of production could this change, making the 21st century arguably the pinnacle of opportunity for artistic and aesthetic appreciation to develop.

Music can also be utilized by individuals as a personality trait, going beyond musical preference to embody specific attributes. Specific music genres also serve as subcultures, where the music taste is just one of many characteristics that make up the subculture. Fashion works in tandem with these music preferences in subcultures, where alternative styles are chosen to stand apart from mainstream commercial culture. These subgroups often do not conform to widely popular trends and can be exceedingly attention-grabbing to set apart from the mainstream trends to further compliment the music. A prime example of this is punk and emo subcultures. Musical subcultures, and subcultures in general, are often made up of those who already feel as though they are outside of established society (minority individuals), and therefore used to accentuate feelings of individualism and uniqueness (Kruse 1993; Shelemay 2011).

Vannini and Waskul (2006) examine music specifically from a symbolic interactionist perspective, describing dramaturgy and narrative analysis as foundations of music in terms of identity. Prioritizing aesthetic as a philosophical concept, a dramaturgical lens offers one explanation for the interactional nature of music as a negotiation process. In this way, music is one of *many* resources that individuals have at their disposal to define selfhood as a co-constructed concept. Musical aspects of identity are thus confirmed and validated in interaction with others, or conversely rejected based on one's perceived commitment.

Celebrity, Musician Culture, and Identity

The basis and construction of celebrity as a social status has been one long studied in sociology. Becoming a celebrity and maintaining that status over a long period of time is considered an endowment of public opinion, predominantly random and unearned, even when based on talent (physical, musical, intellectual, etc.) (Lawler 2010). Musicians in particular construct their public persona through their creative achievements, "but also through impression management practices of… style, body appearance, and life story" (Vannini 2011:50). This reality mirrors Goffman's conception of dramaturgical performance and identity construction and maintenance (Goffman 1959). The impressions musicians emanate are made a reality through performances and interaction with the media, that of which the musicians/their team can control, but impressions are equally influenced by public perception of these performances and the framework audiences utilize to make sense of them (Vannini 2011). This, musicians cannot control. Their public identity is further influenced by multiple factors (women in this context):

This persona is constructed through the negotiation of symbolic meanings pertaining to various codes, including the biographical (her age, career course, life story), the sociostructural (her public status as a celebrity figure), the sexual (her sexual appeal but

also her performance of femininity), the politico- economic (her work status as the employee of a major multinational corporation), and the aesthetic (her worth as a… musician and as a style and fashion follower and trendsetter). (Vannini 2011:50)

Professional musicians are also at the whim of the nature of their industry, where management and production companies have ideals of maximizing profit in a capitalistic economy. These companies are also necessitated from a networking perspective; for a musician to succeed in a mainstream context, they require the tools and outreach that only major representation companies typically have access to. As a result of their goal to maximize profits, these companies are more likely to recognize labor as a tool, and accordingly primarily measure musicians' contribution in terms of monetary gain (Jonas 2022). The results of this process are a separation of musicians from their rights as producers of music, as well as making it difficult for them to rely on their peers and unionize to gain further collective power.

Celebrity also occupies a significant place in social discourse. The social function of celebrity is one that occupies a very singular form of prestige, rarely achievable to the public masses. Celebrities, to varying extents, have the power to "activate" social and cultural norms because of their unique social position (Lindenberg 2011). The influential reality of their social status can be intentional or accidental, and can range in its nature: public service, political, trend setting, or inspiration for mass attitude or belief changes. In fact, music as an art is intrinsically political in nature; "popular music is a complex amalgam of various structural and cultural relations… Whether highbrow, folk, or pop, music as a form of art is embedded in the economy and culture" (Vannini 2018:48). It is a common misconception that individual celebrity influence is limited to only the people who identify with them; in fact, even if individuals do not particularly concern themselves with a certain celebrity or celebrity culture largely, they still

hold significance. Celebrities can occupy a psychological and subconscious presence in the lives of people, and while perhaps not to the extent of changing the way they think or behave, surely reinforcing ideas and beliefs they already hold (Lindenberg 2011).

In order to maintain credibility— and arguably more importantly, relevance— celebrities operate through "claims to authenticity" (Valentinsson 2018:715). The construction and management of an "authentic" celebrity persona is critical to a musician's commercial success, and "used in a socioeconomic sense to refer to the social standing of the musician. It is used to determine what supposed reasons she has for working, whether her primary felt responsibility is to herself, her art, her public, or her bank balance. It is used to bestow integrity, or its lack, on a performer, such that an 'authentic' performer exhibits realism, lack of pretense" (Moore 2002:211). Authenticity of musical artists is thus ascribed by the public, based on their publicly presented persona that is both calculated and controlled. The upkeep of these personas is perfected through celebrity relationships with their fan bases and the media, the former customarily taking precedence over the latter. Social media is the primary home of these relationships to create postures of alignment with fans, while creating the opposite (postures of misalignment) with mass media organizations in journalistic interviews (Vannini 2011). In the 21st century, social media has permanently altered the platforms for and nature of celebrity and fan interaction. Intimate relationships are often constructed with fans online, resulting in fans feeling a sense of closeness to an artist. This strategy momentarily invites fans into the exclusive celebrity sphere of a musician, "metaphorically erasing the invisible boundary separating fans from stars" (Valentinsson 2018:723). However, many musicians work to preserve and enforce— both directly and indirectly— the distinction between the elite realm of celebrity and the conventional, everyday realm of their fans (Valentinsson 2018).

Commercialization and Commodification

Commercialization, for the purposes of this study, can be broadly defined as the process through which something is managed and facilitated with the intent of monetary gain. Garofalo (1999) argues that, "like any culture industry in the market economy, the role of the music business is fundamentally to transform its cultural products into financial rewards" (318). Beyond selling records, the music industry must also be understood as a social institution interested in music dissemination and its wider reception. In a contemporary context, the role of music production in society thus concerns the interdependence of music, artists, and the impact *both* have on popular culture. The technological revolution has elevated this interdependence into a global anomaly, intensifying the affiliation of capital and music, resulting in the need to commodify not only songs and albums, but also the bodies who create them.

In this way, music artists are used as tools by record corporations though which monetary and cultural capital is amassed in order to infiltrate popular discourse and sell product (Finn 2009). Commodification, defined as the process by which something is considered a sheer commodity, is achieved through a variety of commercialization tactics, one such being the specific way music artists are marketed to the public (Finn 2009). An individual's body type, hair color, skin tone, accent, fashion, social presence, pastimes, and background all contribute to how they will be received by society and media, and in turn are mechanisms through which to achieve the "ideal" artist (Wald 1998). These ideals differ to fit specific time periods and genre categorizations, often reflected in both artists and listeners alike; for example, punk music is often physically embodied though or associated with dark clothing, wild hair colors and styles, and body piercings, while rap music is often associated with Black men, street fashion, and materialism.

Often reflective of stereotypes, these ideals serve to reinforce hegemonic ideas of individuals who create music in order to increase marketability. Record labels themselves are behind this specific form of advertising, contractually obligating their music artists to look, sound, and present in specific ways. By crafting and assigning these simplistic and reductive public personas, the industry machine works to pave the path of least resistance from the products they are selling to consumers (Garofalo 1999). Artists also have to adhere to their role as sponsored individuals; funding for touring, performance venues, and music video production often comes from brands that require both advertising responsibilities as well as the upholding behavioral guidelines and values reflective of who they are in collaboration with (Moore 2005). They slowly become products as opposed to people.

Much like how this phenomenon manifests differently in distinct music genres, music commercialization and commodification are illustrated discordantly for men and women. Traditional femininity and masculinity are easily marketable, and accordingly used as tactics to sell music artists. Stereotypical male characteristics like gruffness, physical strength, and dominating/assertive personas are common, that of which directly oppose stereotypical female characteristics like sensitivity, humility, and passivity. Often, male and female artists are marketed with these traditional characteristics at the forefront; as is the reality in wider society, women are more tethered to these gendered stereotypes and specificities, while men are often marketed more broadly and dynamically (Garofalo 1999).

Women, and femininity generally, thus become marketable ideals. Not only are women—like musical artists of all genders— fighting for control of musical content, direction, and presentation, but they are also battling the added layer of historical patterns of sexism in our social environment. Female artists are forced to ask themselves: Who am I? Where do I find

myself amidst what I am in? Is my prescribed identity real? Is it worth my career to find out? They are consequently given two options: fight or assimilate. Rebel or approximate the normative, all in relation to societal standards and critique. Defy or self-objectify. Fight the stereotypes or embody them to survive and succeed. Women are unique in that they have to confront these nuanced realities (both in professional spaces and otherwise) in order to fit into societal molds and aid in the amassing of capital (Wald 1998).

Gender and Sexism

Historically, gender has often been synonymously defined with sex in public discourse. Though once thought to be interchangeable, contemporary definitions of both are predominantly understood as mutually exclusive (West and Zimmerman 1987). To fully understand the role of gendered oppression in any context, it is imperative to first define gender as a social construct *separate* from sex. Gender, in a comparatively modern sense, can be defined as "the pervasive ordering of human activities, practices, and social structures in terms of differentiations between women and men" (Acker 1992:567). Much like conceptions of masculinity and femininity, the perception of gender has changed over time (Armato 2013). Once characterized by biology, gender has been revolutionized by feminist and social theorists and scholars to primarily refer to its social and cultural aspects (West and Zimmerman 1987). Sociologically, the notion of gender, in both academia and larger society, is one now chiefly understood as a "role," or identity (Acker 1992).

Social psychologist Erving Goffman (1959), in his famous work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, illustrates his theorization pertaining to how people and their actions culminate to create and sustain interactional "performances." These performances typically mirror and thus uphold societal norms and values, while simultaneously maintaining their malleability; the self

that is presented is adaptable based on the present audience. In a similar way, gender can be defined as a performance; because gender is a quotidian symbol of power, it extends beyond a characteristic and accordingly transforms into a process, methodological and recurring (Acker 1992). The interactionist perspective of Goffman's theorization is also applicable to gender, where interaction is employed as a mechanism by which gender is "done" with others (West and Zimmerman 1987). Thus, social and cultural ideations of what gender should be or look like are tethered to each and every person functioning within society, often leading to both internal and external conflict. Consequently, gender is exercised to dictate worthiness through public displays of norms and stereotypes, that of which necessitates perpetual policing of the self and others (Barratt 2018).

Policing is a fundamental method utilized to dominate women and their bodies, voices, and agency in order to maintain both traditional and conditional perceptions of femininity (Barratt 2018). Foundational to these perceptions are the collective creation and preservation of male identity/nature as inherently enfranchised versus that of women as antithetically subjugated (Acker 1992). Women are disproportionately tethered by respectability politics, the ideals of which are "prescriptive, defining the parameters of what is meant to be appropriately feminine and… determine how women can live in their bodies and the limits placed on their bodies, especially in terms of appearance and sexuality" (Barratt 2018:18). Respectability politics prioritizes female temperance, amiable manners, sexual immaculacy, decorum, and morality to garner respect from society (Barratt 2018). This "prejudicial chastising" (Barratt 2018) ultimately works to promote sexism.

Sexism, defined as "the endorsement of discriminatory or prejudicial beliefs based on [gender]," is typically equated with stereotypical conceptions of gender-role ideology (Campbell

et al. 1997:89). Sexist language is embedded in culture and is widely considered to be a linguistic

habit, exercised to perpetuate stereotypes and status differentials between women and men

(Swim et al. 2004). Institutional structures in the United States are, and have historically been,

intricately organized along lines of gender, effecting social processes, norms, ideologies, and

power distribution (Acker 1992). These structures include, but are not limited to: laws, politics,

the state, economics, family, education, religion, and entertainment (Acker 1992; Armato 2013).

Though a pervasive, modern idealization of these issues would argue that the preponderance of

their impact is in the past, it is far from obsolete.

This idealization is defined as post-feminism, which argues "that the 'battle' for gender

equality has been won, that sexism toward women and girls is virtually extinct, and that any

lingering inequalities are of little consequence and will take care of themselves" (Calder-Dawe

and Gavey 2016:8). This sensibility takes gender equality for granted and undermines any

comprehensive analysis of sexist cultures (Dubrofsky and Wood 2014). The "gendered

understructure" (Acker 1992) of society and its institutions becomes all the more difficult to

define as a collective phenomenon (Armato 2014). Consequently, it evolves into the

underarticulation of prejudice through the rhetoric of individualistic ideology (Calder-Dawe and

Gavey 2016). Collective consciousness of these issues thus becomes individualistically oriented

and decentralizes the importance of naming and battling nuanced forms of sexism.

Although many social institutions have undergone significant changes— for most,

relatively recently— to bring women into *all* aspects of their structural composition as well as to

recognize their previously extirpated contributions, men still overwhelmingly govern central

institutions and ideologies (Acker 1992:566). Landmark social, political, and economic changes

have defined the last 50 years of United States history concerning gender equality; however, it is

still true that national gender relations are rooted in hegemonic ideas of patriarchy, objectification, and subjugation (Armato 2013). Far from having disappeared completely, the nature of sexism has evolved from overt and easily recognizable to covert and subtle.

Sociologists "Benokraitis and Feagin (1986, 1995) identif[y] three types of sexism that illustrate the manifestation of sexism in our current social-political climate. These three types are overt…, covert, and subtle sexism" (Swim and Cohen 1997:104). While overt forms manifest as analogously visible and are more easily chronicled, covert sexism is more surreptitious. Subtle sexism refers to prejudicial actions or ideas that are largely overlooked because they can often be mistaken as "normal" behavior: nonverbal, internalized, or automatic cognitive responses (Swim and Cohen 1997). The more nuanced, contemporary examples of sexism vary to include specific images, symbols, and seemingly neutral institutional practice, often referred to as "modern" or "enlightened" sexism (Armato 2013; Campbell et al. 1997). This modern/enlightened sexism affects women across social statuses and demographics in both specific and complementary ways.

Because celebrity functions as a gendered phenomenon, it can also confront or reproduce prevalent sexist discourse. Gender is utilized when evaluating the female celebrity as "other," inspiring ardent debates about perceived levels of talent and hard work, a conversation male celebrities are often left out of (Allen and Mendick 2013). Assorted social constructions of modern womanhood also work to promote an idealized form of femininity, simultaneously rewarding those who achieve it and scorning those who do not. Female musicians are most frequently the targets of objectification from the public and are also more likely to objectify themselves in video and lyric compared to their male counterparts (Flynn et al. 2016). Women in

elevated public spaces often must fight to first occupy space in said environment, and then must take on the added work of finding agency within structures that are built to strip them of it.

Women in the music industry are generally also disproportionately affected by ageism and sexualization tactics, and— much like the general society it operates in— the music industry reflects the systematic devaluation of female labor (Jonas 2022). Further, only a fraction of prolifically credited pop music producers are female, yet another illustration of how female voices/narratives/bodies occupy secondary status resulting in "inaccurate portrayals of women and a two-fold implementation in the idea of feminization of the workforce" (Jonas 2022:12).

This "musical patriarchy" and pervasive ideology of femininity is reflected in the understanding that young female musicians have of their own talent and potential (O'Neill 2002). "Making it" in the music industry thus requires the perfect amalgamation of ability, promise, and luck, all of which young women in particular are either at a preluding disadvantage for or held to a much higher standard of. This is one example of how institutions like the American music industry shape constructions of gender on a societal level, reinforcing stereotypes of traditional femininity.

Taylor Swift

WHO IS SHE?

Taylor Alison Swift was born in southeastern Pennsylvania on December 13th, 1989. After moving to the singer/songwriter epicenter of the country— Nashville, Tennessee— at fourteen years old, Swift quickly became immersed in the city's musical culture, where her passion for playing guitar, singing, and writing songs flourished. At age fifteen, she was signed to the startup *Big Machine* record label and released her self-titled debut album a year later, that

of which went on to peak on the U.S. Billboard 200 charts at number five for a record 157 consecutive weeks. This album served as Swift's first commercial success, cementing her as a tour opener for popular country music artists like Tim McGraw, Faith Hill, and George Strait, while also inspiring a slew of various award nominations.

Between then and now, Swift has released a total of ten studio albums: *Taylor Swift* (2006), *Fearless* (2008), *Speak Now* (2010), *Red* (2012), *1989* (2014), *Reputation* (2017), *Lover* (2019), *folklore* (2020), *evermore* (2020), and *Midnights* (2022). Spanning country, pop, rock, and folk genres of music, she has made a name for herself as a reinventive and singular artist, vocalist, instrumentalist, songwriter, director, and producer. Her accolades include, but are not limited to, eighty-four Guinness World Records, forty American Music awards (most awarded in history), twenty-nine Billboard Music awards, fourteen MTV Video awards, twelve Country Music Association awards, twelve Grammy awards, two Brit awards, and one Emmy award. Her songwriting has been acknowledged by the Nashville Songwriters Association, the National Music Publishers Association, and the Songwriter Hall of Fame. Major publications like *Rolling Stone*, *Time*, and *Forbes* magazines have also accredited Swift with varying musical, social, and political achievements across her career. Currently, Swift has garnered over fifty million album sales worldwide and holds the records for most streamed female artist on Spotify in 2022, most global Spotify streams in a single day (200 million), highest-earning North American musical tour of all time (*Reputation World Tour*, $345.7 million), and longest-reigning Billboard 100 artist (fifty-two weeks) She is regarded as one of the largest, most influential pop stars in the world (McDowell 2022).

CASE STUDY

As one of the largest contemporary popular music stars in the world— and arguably in history— Taylor Swift's career serves as a prime example for what it means to evolve from a young girl into a woman in the public eye, specifically in the age of the internet and social media. Swift's life as well as her career have thus been negotiated as public property, this process documented in photos, interviews, and online spanning her near twenty-year career. This strong and unwavering position she has occupied in popular discourse is one of the main reasons why Swift and her career in the music industry offer a unique perspective into what it means to be thrust into the limelight and somehow both decide and be desired to stay there, all while battling what comes with operating in systems that are actively working to subjugate women. In this way, I hope to illustrate how Swift's experience and treatment in her chosen profession (albeit on a heightened level) reflects wider societal patterns of institutional and systematic sexism operating in patriarchal systems.

Additionally, what makes Swift a distinguished artist to focus on for this topic specifically is her outspokenness concerning sexist and misogynistic tactics employed against her, and women in general. Further is her dedication to discussing these dynamics in complex and nuanced ways in her art, both lyrical and visual. For example, in the song and music video for *The Man* (2019), Swift provides a commentary on patriarchy and gender inequality, illustrating how men are often held to different, less critical standards as compared to women in various aspects of social life. In many instances throughout the song and video these patterns are exaggerated to get the message across, but the message itself stays the same: women battle cultural and societal stereotypes and double standards in all aspects of their lives that men are

often free from and be beneficiaries of. It explores society's disposition to prioritize male experiences and narratives while simultaneously excusing or renaming their harmful behaviors.

In the song *Mad Woman* (2020), Swift examines the gendered double standard of women in professional spaces being labelled as overly emotional, hysterical, and reactive while their male counterparts are considered passionate in similar scenarios. She likens herself to a scorpion and a bear to ultimately illustrate how women are poked and prodded until they are finally forced to react to prejudicial treatment, to only have this used against them to serve as justification for why women are ultimately unfit to occupy positions of power. Swift argues here that women are villainized for expressing their full range of emotions in professional spaces, while simultaneously working to name the respectability politics they are tethered by.

Similarly, in *Nothing New* (2021), she grapples with the restrictive and minimizing nature of the entertainment industry when it comes to the career longevity of women. Specifically, Swift explores the complexities that come with a sudden rise in public popularity; how long can I be admired before I am inevitably disdained? What is the lifespan of a female artist before she is arbitrarily discarded? How long until I am replaced by someone younger and more beautiful than me? And will the public still want me when I am no longer an ingénue? Written when she was just twenty-one years old, this song outlines the intensity of the scrutiny Swift was experiencing in tandem with her success, and how even at this age and relatively early stage in her career, she was haunted by the idea of being disowned by the very public that had once elevated her.

These particular songs and many more illustrate not only experiences with sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy, but also a very profound understanding of these concepts that is then expertly translated to music and lyrics, and subsequently heard by millions. In this way, Swift serves as the exception, not the rule, when analyzing trends and topics in contemporary popular

music. Her songwriting skills— each one of these songs, along with the majority of her discography, are self-written— translate her reality, experiences, and observations into art that provokes thought and conversation around social change. The nature of her music has (and continues to) evolve to contemplate the treatment of women, using her lived experience as a lens though which to analyze wider social and cultural dynamics of inequality.

Additionally, Swift is no stranger to being at the center of public incidents-turned-pop-culture-history, specifically when she has had parts of her identity and achievements questioned and taken away from her without consent. Arguably the most significant of these is the master copies of her first six albums made with Big Machine Records being allegedly sold without her knowledge. In 2018, Swift left Big Machine Records, the label she had started her career with as well as assisted in making a name for. After allegedly attempting to negotiate the purchase of her masters for a year following her exit, Big Machine Records was acquired by a third-party music group spearheaded by music manager Scooter Braun. Swift claims that, without any knowledge of or communication to her or her team, the (then) CEO of Big Machine Records, Scott Borchetta, sold Swift's masters to Braun (Aniftos 2020).

The specifics of this incident are largely speculation from the public, but the consequences remain: Swift was and is no longer associated with the record label or individual who acquired the rights to all the albums, music videos, associated art, copyrights, and performance rights affiliated with her work up to 2018. As a result, she receives no direct monetary profit from any use of her previous catalog of music, is not in control of the music she can perform publicly concerning these past works, and has no say in the use of her past music in media, radio, or online. Since, Swift has announced that she will be re-recording all six of the albums that make up these masters and has encouraged her fans and radio executives alike to

stream these (aptly titled "Taylor's Versions") as opposed to the originals to ensure she is the sole owner and beneficiary of them.

Also relevant to any analysis of her career, identity, and interaction with the public is her experience at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards. At the age of twenty, Swift was granted the Video of the Year award and, in the middle of her acceptance speech (broadcasted live), was interrupted by rapper and producer Kanye West (thirty-two years old at the time). West proceeded to grab the microphone, arguing that another artist deserved this specific award, and promptly exited the stage, cutting Swift's acceptance short. This is one example in a perpetual list of incidents where Swift's musical accolades were called into question very publicly, resulting in persistent questioning and accusations that continues to the present— particularly by older men. Besides being personally traumatic, the incessant interrogation into the validity of her achievements as a young woman in the public eye reflects more general patterns of misogyny that make her a compelling case study.

The media's intense obsession with her dating life is another aspect of what makes her a compelling case study, particularly in relation to sexism and a discussion of gender roles and politics. Since she was a teenager all the way to present day, tabloids have been consumed by the need to uncover every intimate aspect of Swift's romantic relationships. The media has gone as far as labelling her "boy-crazy," a "serial dater," and "neurotic" when it comes to her relationships, suggesting that there must be something wrong with her if she is "going through" so many men. This public fixation and media slut-shaming (and its sexist undertones) may provide an important commentary on how young women are held to different societal standards when it comes to their romantic lives.

PERSONAL INTEREST

I was drawn to this topic for a variety of reasons, the first being that popular culture generally has always occupied a substantial part of my personal and academic interests. Personal in terms of a sustained fascination with entertainment— movies, television, music, celebrity culture— and the social norms they perpetuate, and academic in terms of past research. My sociological research history has reflected this personal interest, resulting in previous work that has analyzed socially reproduced inequality in popular discourse. I also identify as a feminist, and accordingly am invested in analyzing and unravelling the social, cultural, and political structures and practices that work to subjugate women and reproduce gender inequality.

Additionally, I identify music as an interactive experience more so than a passive activity. Artists, particularly female ones, whose music I enjoy sonically, lyrics I deconstruct deliberately, and views I share politically have become an increasingly large part of my life. Beyond leisurely listening, music and the artists who create it occupy an ever-expanding space in my day-to-day life. These artists and what they create also establish communities (online mostly, but not exclusively) that are interactive, dynamic, and inclusive, generating powerful network ties and ideas resulting in a profound potential for social change.

In terms of the artist chosen to highlight in this case study, I would consider myself a fan of Taylor Swift, and as such uniquely familiar with the ways she has interacted with and navigated her elevated social position. What started as a casual gravitation to her music has progressively evolved into a strong affinity for and interest in Swift's entire musical discography, fandom, public persona, personal life, and political presence. I am inspired by how she carries herself and her persistent vulnerability, respect and tenderness for fans, and incredibly introspective nature. I feel as though I have grown linearly with her not just in age, but also in

self-discovery and personal growth. Throughout the last decade of my life, Swift has served a multitude of purposes: role model, entertainer, and common ground between both friends and strangers.

The literature reviewed in this section serves to address the overall research question of this case study; how has Taylor Swift's public persona evolved throughout her career, specifically in regard to her gender, age, music? Heretofore, the literature derives a pattern of the music industry as a mechanism that prioritizes historical hierarchies of power while stifling artist autonomy, music as a dynamic social instrument used multifacetedly, musician and celebrity culture as dramaturgical performance that necessitate sophisticated and interactive identity construction and maintenance, the deep-rooted nature of the entertainment industry to commercialize and commodify individuals, and gender and sexism as evolving and aggregate social concepts of control.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Strategy

The research strategy I employed to examine the data collected was a qualitative content analysis, defined as a systematic, inductive research method that focuses on "the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes and patterns" (Hsieh and Shannon 2005:1278). Qualitative content analysis allows for a unique examination of latent patterns and themes across textual sources, facilitating the quantification of meanings and relationships. Mayring (2000) argues that content analysis is one of the most efficient and well-established methodological strategies used in the analysis of media text, documents, and transcripts. Qualitative content analysis compliments both the longitudinal nature of the data collected in this project (Swift's early vs. late career) and the examination and measurement of common themes, categories, and linkages across sources. Possible challenges with qualitative content analysis include, but are not limited to, an absence of traditional variability, statistically non-representative conclusions, subjective coding practices, and time-intensive and non-automated procedures that could increase the likelihood of coding errors.

This project is guided by a directed approach, in that the evaluation is framed by a perspective concerned with theoretical significance and applicable past research and literature that then (in)forms the preparatory coding process. In making use of conceptions of sexism, patriarchy, autonomy, and industry workings, the emerging analysis will elucidate dominant gender perceptions and relations specific to this case study, and conceivably widely applicable to women in general (Glick and Fiske 1997; 2011).

The articles included in this sample are selected from distinguished online music (*Billboard*, *Rolling Stone*, *Apple Music*, *NME, The Country Daily, Apple Music*) and entertainment (*Vogue*, *TIME*, *GQ*, *Vanity Fair*, *Variety*, *Elle, Glamour, The New Yorker, The Guardian*) magazine profiles, chosen firstly due to their long form interviewing style. The one exception to these articles in this sample is Swift's 2020 Netflix documentary, *Miss Americana*; Swift has previously released a combination of concert film and documentary footage, but this 2020 work serves her first official release that functions solely as a documentary. The biographical documentary was included in the sample because it provides the same kind of information as the articles, but in long-form, from a first-person narrative, and in arguably greater detail than can be achieved through interviewing. All of these were chosen to reflect both commentary on Taylor Swift's musical evolution and the general evolving interpersonal social experience of her as a young female celebrity. All articles are digitalized and accessible remotely, published between 2009 and 2022, and available through standard internet access. This sampling strategy prioritized the balance of all around high-profile music *and* entertainment publications to ultimately highlight the evolution of both the professional experience of Swift in the music industry, as well as that of her in a wider social and cultural context. All articles within the sample are a standard interview-style between Swift and reporters, while the documentary follows Swift in a linear, narrative structure.

Analytic Strategy

After garnering a wide variety of sources that meet the general inclusion criteria, twenty-four articles published between 2009-2022 were chosen for in-depth analysis. These twenty-four articles were chosen based on their unambiguous thematic and topical content, broken down in two time periods/categories for comparative purposes. Table 1 shows general information of the

articles included in the early career sample, while Table 2 shows the same information for the late career sample. The analysis was rooted in grounded theory methodology to optimally facilitate the construction of hypotheses throughout analysis process, while simultaneously allowing for a combination of inductive and deductive approaches (Wells 1995).

Table 1: Early Career Sample

Publication	Date	Title
Glamour	June 30th, 2009	Taylor Swift: Bomb-Shell in Blue Jeans
Rolling Stone	January 25th, 2010	Taylor's Time: Catching Up with Taylor Swift
Elle	March 4th, 2010	Taylor Swift: *Elle*'s April Cover Girl on Media Scrutiny, Her Fears, and Those Revealing Lyrics
The New Yorker	October 3rd, 2011	You Belong with Me: How Taylor Swift Made Teen Angst into a Business Empire
Rolling Stone	October 25th, 2012	Taylor Swift in Wonderland
The Country Daily	October 29th, 2012	Taylor Swift Talks Writing, Relationships, Rejects and New Album "Red"
Vanity Fair	March 15th, 2013	Taylor Swift's Telltale Heart
Rolling Stone	September 8th, 2014	The Reinvention of Taylor Swift: Cover Story
Time	November 24th, 2014	Taylor Swift on "1989," Spotify, Her Next Tour and Female Role Models
Glamour	October 8th, 2015	Taylor Swift Talks Nicki Minaj, Kanye West, and Potentially Taking a Break From Music
NME	October 9th, 2015	Taylor Swift: Power, Fame, and the Future
GQ	October 15th, 2015	Taylor Swift on "Bad Blood," Kanye West, and How People Interpret Her Lyrics

Table 2: Late Career Sample

Publication	Date	Title
Vogue	April 14th, 2016	Taylor Swift as You've Never Seen Her Before

Time	December 6th, 2017	'I Was Angry.' Taylor Swift on What Powered Her Sexual Assault Testimony
Elle	March 6th, 2019	30 Things I Learned Before Turning 30
Vogue	August 8th, 2019	Taylor Swift on Sexism, Scrutiny, and Standing Up for Herself
The Guardian	August 24th, 2019	Taylor Swift: 'I Was Literally About to Break'
Rolling Stone	September 18th, 2019	Taylor Swift: The Rolling Stone Interview
Billboard	December 11th, 2019	Billboard Woman of the Decade: 'I Do Want My Music to Live On'
Netflix	January 31st, 2020	Miss Americana
Variety	January 21st, 2020	Taylor Swift: 'No Longer Polite at All Costs'
Apple Music	December 15th, 2020	Taylor Swift's Songwriting Process on 'evermore'
Vanity Fair	February 17th, 2021	How Taylor Swift Found Her Voice for "Only the Young"
Variety	December 12th, 2022	Taylor Swift, Film Director, in Conversation with Martin McDonagh: How They Brought Heartbreak to Life

To begin the coding process, general coding units were used to guide the initial analysis, related to themes of self-identity, autonomy, sexism. Specifically, I started with open-coding, creating codes by reading and transcribing the data paragraph-by-paragraph. Then, I used axial coding by generating themes from the codes that were found, and subsequently rearranged them according to their theme. Finally, I used selective coding by rereading the themes and creating a selection of core theme categories. Memo-writing was also utilized to document reflexive notes about the data, concepts, and relationships, and NVivo data analysis software was used to store, transcribe, organize the data sets, while also simplifying the process of creating codes to identify relevant themes, subthemes, and relationships.

Illustrative quotes were utilized to represent findings from Swift in her own words, while simultaneously presenting the data concisely and in a condensed manner. This particular data presentation method employs the use of quotations to encapsulate the themes/subthemes they are representing, as well as to bring life to the text and offer a visual shift to readers by breaking up the uniformity of the writing. Illustrative quotes were chosen to represent these findings because they support the analytical claims made, uniquely illustrate ideas and portray themes, and (ideally) accentuate the reading experience. The major limitation of illustrative quotes is the presentation of direct quotations out of context, which has been negated to the best of my ability by reintroducing and recontextualizing the manner in which theme quotes were said in my extend analysis.

Transparency

Traditional models of social science research typically recommend the inclusion of a discussion about objectivity, taking shape in a variety of ways to satisfy a similar purpose: both to recognize and counteract (to the best of one's ability) the potential for biased research (Roulston and Shelton 2015). This potential manifests uniquely depending on chosen research methodology and, in the case of this analysis, tends to demonstrate as information, selection, observation, or confirmation bias. For the purposes of this study, an objectivity section will be replaced by one of transparency. I understand social science scholarship to be guided by passionate inquisition; sociological researchers choose topics of analysis for a reason, that reason often being tied to deep levels of personal curiosity and interest. To garner professional and institutional respect, objectivity is often used as a mechanism through which to justify the validity of social research in general, but particularly in relation to the research of other sciences. Often framed as a hinderance to the uncovering of analytical findings (Roulston and Shelton

2015), personal connection of any kind to one's research topic is thus understood as a barrier to rectify.

However, in the case of this study I understand my connection to this topic as a feminist, music-lover, and fan of Taylor Swift to be the great assets of this analysis, not its hinderances. My passions for gender equity, music listening and production, and Swift's musicianship are the reason for the conduction of this analysis, and accordingly frame all aspects of it. The deductive aspect of the coding done in this study is thus guided by my unique perspective as well as findings made in previous literature. I believe my relationship to and excitement for these topics allow me to appreciate this analysis and its findings through a unique lens. Conceiving this study as otherwise impedes its true purpose to add to the scholarship of the sociological discipline while simultaneously providing a commentary on pop culture, sexism, and mass media.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

EARLY CAREER

The analysis of the early career sample revealed multiple narratives present in Taylor Swift's interviews between 2009-2015. The following narratives embodied eight core themes pertaining to the public persona Swift presents through the media: (1) Personality (2) Emotions (3) Music career (4) Making music (5) Aspects of celebrity and fame (6) Personal life (7) Relationships (8) Social and cultural issues. Many of the demonstrated narratives contained elements of more than one theme, suggesting that Swift understands (or at least describes) any of these aspects of her life as overlapping, not mutually exclusive. While other narratives were found in the data analysis process, they did not occur with enough frequency or detail to warrant a persistent theme. The following paragraphs will detail what distinguishes each theme, the subthemes found within each theme, and provide illustrative quotes for aforementioned subthemes to encompass findings.

Personality

The personality theme includes Swift's detailing of who she is, the kind of morality she ascribes to, and what makes up her personality; the subthemes of this narrative, as well as quotes that portray their main idea, are illustrated Table 3. In terms of her character, Swift discusses what she hopes to achieve through intentionality rather than innate characteristics when it comes to the person she is and wanted to become, touching on being compassionate, warm, polite, thoughtful, and unwavering. For humility, she often refers to early milestones in her career as "pinch-me" moments that she never expected to happen to someone at her age. From topics ranging from love to examinations of her tendency to obsess over every small detail of her live

performances, she also labels herself an overthinker. Swift also discusses the responsibility she

feels as a role model when it comes to young girls who idolize her. Specifically, she claims to be

very comfortable taking on such a role, because, "that in particular hasn't been one of my

Table 3: Personality Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Character	"Self-awareness has been such a huge part of what I try to achieve on a daily basis; it's less about reputation management and strategy and vanity than it is about trying to desperately preserve self-awareness, since that seems to be the first thing to go out the door when people find success" (Klosterman 2015, p. 11).
Morality	"It's not about trying to be perfect. Not to try and sound like the good witch in the Wizard of Oz or something, but I really do want to do good things with what I have, and that's it. I don't think my brain could cook up very shocking things for the sake of being shocking" (Eidell 2015, p. 4).
Humility	"I remember the girls who would come to talent shows and say to anyone they met, 'I'm so-and-so — I'm going to be famous someday.' I was never that girl. I would show up with my guitar and say, 'This is a song I wrote about a boy in my class.' And that's what I still do today" (Sandell 2009, p. 4).
Overthinker	"I overthink everything. I overanalyze everything" (Gell 2010, p. 6).
Role model	"[Being cited as a role model] is a compliment on your character that I take seriously" (Widdicombe 2011, p. 3).
Appreciative	"I get some paparazzi, but not enough to make me ever not appreciate what I have. It's like, I wanted one thing [my] whole life… I'm not going to get it and then complain about it" (Sandell 2009, p. 5).
Workaholic	"Yes [I am a workaholic]. I get really restless when I haven't worked for a day and a half" (Sandell 2009, p. 5).
Ambitious	"Do you know when you know someone really well and they can finish your sentences? I'm curious to know what it would be like to have 50,000 people finish my sentences" (Widdicombe 2011, p. 33).
Naïve	"I never wanted to get jaded, because then you get really protective and hard to be around. That's what can happen if you're too aware of people second-guessing every move you make so I try to be as blissfully unaware as possible. 'Please don't ruin it. I'm living in such a happy little world'" (Hiatt 2012, p. 1).

struggles. I've struggled with a lot of things, but the idea that you're living your life and it's impacting other people… some of whom are in their most impressionable times, and they're discovering the music that tells them how they are going to live their lives, and how they should feel and how it's acceptable to feel, I think that that's kind of exciting" (Dickey 2014, p. 11).

When relaying information about her personality, Swift additionally mentions on several different occasions how appreciative she is of her success, discussing how she has a no-complaining attitude when it comes to negative aspects of her elevated status. Being addicted to work was also a relevant indication along with being an ambitious person, the latter of which almost exclusively having to do with her professional career and achievements. Finally, Swift seems to recognize employing a willful ignorance and naivety when it came to outside opinions of who she was, that of which is used as a mechanism to guard herself against becoming jaded in her industry.

Emotions

The emotion's theme includes times when Swift would discuss how she was feeling at the particular moment when each respective interview was done. The majority of emotions that make up the subthemes are negative ones (shown in Table 4), suggesting that this time in her life (2009-2015) was one characterized by adverse feelings. She mentions isolation multiple times, specifying that— on multiple occasions— she felt as though she was a burden to her friends or family because of the baggage that comes with being a recognizable public figure. Fear refers to any time Swift would describe a feeling of impending threat, often one that was just around the corner, usually unpredictable, and coming from an external source. Self-doubt, similarly, encompasses times when Swift would feel impending doom, but in this case it was a sustained feeling, predictable, and coming from an internal questioning of her own talent and capabilities.

Table 4: Emotions Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Isolation	"… There are certain things that I would like to do, but can't. Sometimes I don't get invited to things because my friends know it's going to be a hassle to take me" (Sandell 2009, p. 8).
Fear	"I'm always terrified that somethings going to happen, and I'm not gonna be able to do this anymore and it's gonna all end in one day. Part of the fear comes from loving this so much, and not wanting to lose it" (Haitt 2012, p. 1).
Self-doubt	"[I periodically fall into] rabbit holes of self-doubt…It's a really important thing that I manage my anxiety when it comes to the future" (Dickey 2014, p. 9).
Restlessness	"I sometimes stress myself out, wondering what my trajectory is— like, if I sleep in and wake up at 2PM, because I'm so tired from the night before, sometimes I'll beat myself up, because what if I was supposed to wake up earlier that day and write a song" (Widdicombe 2011, p. 28)?
Guarded	"I haven't started to guard myself in the form of songwriting. I've learned to guard areas of my life that I have to keep for just me, like my personal life" (Price 2012, p. 4).
Insecurity	"I think I should take some time off. I think people might need a break from me" (Stubbs 2015, p. 16).
Contentment	"I really like my life right now. I have friends around me all the time. I've started painting more. I've been working out a lot. I've started to really take pride in being strong. I love the album I made (1989). I love that I moved to New York. So, in terms of being happy, I've never been closer to that" (Eells 2014, p. 1).
Love	"The way I look at love is you have to follow it, and fall hard. You have to forget about what everyone else thinks. It has to be an us-against-the-world mentality. You have to make it work by prioritizing it, and by falling in love, really fast, without thinking too hard" (Hiatt 2012, p. 4-5).

With restlessness, Swift indicates that she is often plagued by the idea of her career

trajectory and longevity, and as a result feels as though she could always be using her time to be

more productive. As a result of her celebrity status and the amount of attention she gets from the

public, she also mentioned feeling guarded in her personal life, which she attributes many failed

relationships (romantic and platonic alike) to. The most frequently mentioned positive emotions were contentment and love, the former referring to a feeling of calm typically having to do with her geographical location and close social circles, while the latter was often detailed as being a reality in the past tense and something she looks back on with fondness.

Music Career

The music career theme encapsulates various aspects of Swift's professional life, the subthemes and illustrative quotes for which can be found in Table 5. Fans were commonly mentioned, both generally and in relation to putting on live shows. When discussing fans of hers, Swift often painted the picture of a symbiotic relationship; ""I feel like my fans have my back and I have theirs" (Haitt 2012, p. 4). Also evident was the prioritization of creating fun environments when it came to live shows for the purpose of fan enjoyment, often achieved through set design, costumes, or surprise guests. She describes the combination of live music and fan interaction as one of her favorite aspects of her job, being able to bring to life music in a collaborative way, where the energy of the crowd plays a crucial role in the shows' coming to life. When discussing performing in general, Swift also describes concerts as a type of performance not unlike Broadway, where she and her team create large stage pieces and use consumes as a way to both compliment and amplify the music.

Table 5: Music Career Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Fans	["My fans show me] extreme, unconditional, wonderful loyalty that I never thought I'd receive in my life, not from a best friend, not from a boyfriend, not from a husband, not from a dog" (Dickey 2014, p. 26).
Fans and live shows	"[My fans and I] have these moments in these memories that bond us, like the time I looked out there and saw everyone dancing… those moments of human interaction that

	happen on tour that you can't get just watching a song climb the charts, sitting in your house" (Dickey 2014, p. 21).
Performances	"I really like for there to be something theatrical about what we do on stage. When I was younger, I was just obsessed with Broadway shows. As much as I can show these audience is an element of that theatrical nature to a performance, I think that it allows them to escape from their lives a little bit more" (Dickey 2014, p. 18).
Touring	"[My team and I] travel an average of three hundred and fifty miles per night. Eighty-two set carts. Ninety instruments— violins, percussion, banjo, a harp. Approximately eight miles of electric cable get put up per day" (Widdicombe 2011, p. 15).
Traveling	"I will be in Japan for Thanksgiving, so I probably won't be having the traditional Thanksgiving dinner at all. Directly after that, I'll be in Australia" (Price 2012, 6).
Streaming	"I think there should be an inherent value placed on art. I didn't see that happening, perception-wise, when I put my music on Spotify. Everybody's complaining about how music sales are shrinking, but nobody's changing the way they're doing things. They keep running towards streaming, which is, for the most part, what has been shrinking the numbers of paid albums sales" (Dickey 2014, p.3).
Not taken seriously as artist	"I remember auditioning for record labels and having them tell me, 'Well, the country radio demographic is the 35-year-old female housewife. Give us a song that relates to the 35-year-old female, and then we'll talk" (Widdicombe 2011, p. 20).
Label pushback	"…I'd go into the label office, and they were like, 'Can we talk about putting a fiddle and a steel guitar solo on 'Shake It Off' to service country radio?' I was trying to make the most honest record I could possibly make, and they were kind of asking me to be a little disingenuous about it: 'Let's capitalize on both markets.' No, let's not. Let's choose a lane" (Klosterman 2015, p. 10).

Touring and (work-related) travel were exclusively discussed in relation to each other, Swift often explaining the touring experience as the closest thing she had at this time in her life that felt like a normal routine, and even then she was going from city-to-city each day. When discussing tour it was often from the vantage point of not just herself as the main performer, but also that of the crew that was moving around, setting up, and tearing down her stage sets every night for weeks/months on end. Many times, Swift expresses appreciation for these crew members given the time away from home and families they all sacrificed.

On multiple occasions, Swift discusses her feelings on streaming music. She argues that music streaming apps like Spotify, who offer their basic services and access to music catalogs for free, are one of the main contributing factors to the shrinking of music sales that go back to the artists directly. By offering up apps like Apple Music and Rhapsody as alternatives— where customers have to pay to listen to music on the platform— Swift ultimately contends that for a perception of value to be placed on artists' music, said music should be on streaming apps that require payment. This way, artists receive direct compensation for allowing their music to be on these platforms, and a clear value is put on their work.

Specifically, when starting her music career as a teenager, Swift recalls multiple occasions where her music was not taken seriously because of its contents and her age. Because she started her career in country music, every one of these stories takes place at either country music radio stations or country record labels. Many unambiguous critiques of her music had to do with its lack of maturity and its target audience, both of which various executives recommend she change before they were able to sign her to a record deal or play her on radio stations. Swift details this experience as a disheartening one, especially as a young girl.

The final subtheme has to do with label pushback, characterized by times Swift felt as though her label— Big Machine Records— did not approve of new musical direction or creations. This subtheme became evident in interviews during and after 2014, all of which center around her *1989* album, that of which was a divergence from her previous work in that it was exclusively pop music. Swift recalls having to fight for this album to deviate from country music, reflecting on how "every single element of this album has been called into question, and I've had to say, 'No, this is how we're doing it'" (Dickey 2014, p. 6). She understood this strong stance on behalf of her label to be primarily about monetary benefit; if the album was comprised

of both pop *and* country music, it could hypothetically be promoted on country music stations that the label and Swift already had established relationships with as well as pop music stations.

Making Music

While the music career theme explored facets of her professional life that resulted from her identity as a musician, the making music theme is a synopsis of Swift's discussion on the intricacies of her music processes (subthemes found in Table 6). Many times, Swift made a point to mention specific people that she categorized as musical inspirations to her. In earlier interviews, these inspirations were largely women in country music like Faith Hill, the Dixie Chicks, and Shania Twain. Comparatively, later interviews more frequently named collaborators and artists/producers Swift had personal relationships with (Max Martin, Jeff Bhaskar, Dan Wilson, Ed Sheeran, Snow Patrol, Haim, Vance Joy, Keith Urban, John Mayer). Swift also mentions on a multitude of occasions her use of satirical prose when constructing songs, lyrically playing into the larger-than-life, jet-setting, boy-crazy, hysterical public persona that was created for her by the media and public. This process is described as an evolutionary one. At first, this persona was difficult for Swift to come to terms with because she felt it was a mischaracterization of her personality, but eventually she adopted it to provide a commentary on popular narratives as well as to craft songs that were grandiose in nature.

Songwriting in general was another present subtheme, where Swift would detail how being a songwriter was an intrinsic aspect of her identity, was a source of confidence, and how the process has changed very little since she began writing music. She conveys learning how to write songs was a process of trial-and-error that began when she was a child, and has been used as a mechanism since then to help her understand her feelings and the world around her. As far

Table 6: Making Music

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Musical inspirations	"[Growing up] I was inspired by Faith Hill, Shania Twain, the Dixie Chicks" (Widdicombe 2011, p. 18).
Satire	"Some of the things I write about on a song like 'Blank Space' are satire. You take your creative license and create things that are larger than life" (Klosterman 2015, p. 9).
Songwriting	"I know how to write a song. I'm not confident about a lot of other aspects of my life, but I know how to write a song" (Klosterman 2015, p. 9).
What informs her music	"I think two years of growth and development and feelings and life intake, love, intake, emotion, output, is my preferred formula for albums right now" (Scaggs 2010, p. 6).
Versatility	"I'm inspired by all kinds of different sounds, and I don't think I'd ever be someone who would say, 'I will never make a song that sounds a certain way, I will never branch outside of genres,' because I think genres are sort of unnecessary walls" (Scaggs 2010, p. 7).
Production	"If you look at the makeup of my previous music, as far as production elements go, there are a lot of live drums, acoustic, guitars, electric guitars, and live bass. And if you look at the landscape of *1989*, it's mostly synths and animated drums, and these kind of big, epic, synth pad sounds, and key base, and layered vocals" (Dickey 2014, p. 17).

as what informs her music, Swift likened people listening to her work to them reading her diary; all of it comes from a deep place of sensitivity and personal experience or perspective, which is why she is the sole songwriter of the majority of her discography.

Additionally, when describing the music she has created, Swift emphasizes how her love for all music genres has influenced her own musical journey in terms of versatility. Between 2009-2015, Swift released albums that were entirely country music, albums of entirely pop music, and albums that were a combination of both. Throughout this time period, she maintained a rejection of rigid style categorization, arguing that is does more to limit musicianship than anything else. Finally, Swift detailed the production aspect of her albums, with whom they were made, and what differentiates each album from the next in terms of constructing sounds. When

explaining the production aspects of her music, Swift regularly used a comparative approach to

explain what her current album sounds like when measured against the ones that have come

before.

Aspects of Celebrity and Fame

Mentions of Swift's celebrity status and the fame that comes with it were recurrent in this

sample. The subthemes of this theme are outlined in Table 7, and reflect strictly negative and/or

stressful facets of celebrity. Scrutiny refers to the large-scale infiltration of Swift's personal life,

bodily presentation, and relationships. Specifically, Swift's dating life was considered to her to

be more of a media spectacle than an intimate part of her life and was the cause of a great deal of

emotional strain. Similarly, privacy— or, more accurately, the lack of it — was a frequent topic

of discussion. From getting ready in the morning with hair and makeup, doing interviews,

putting on live shows, signing autographs, and doing meet-and-greets, Swift details a life in

which she is seldom alone. And when she is, she confesses to a feeling of paranoia that stems

from always feeling like someone is watching her, whether it be fans or paparazzi.

Table 7: Aspects of Celebrity and Fame Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Scrutiny	"This was around 2013, when the only thing anyone wanted to write about me was about me and some guy. It was really damaging. You're thinking, 'Everybody goes on dates when they're 22. It's fine, right?' Nope. Not when you're in the situation, and everything you do is blown out of proportion and expanded upon" (Klosterman 2015, p. 10).
(Lack of) Privacy	There's someone whose entire job it is to figure out things that I don't want the world to see. They look at your career, they look at what you prioritize, and they try to figure out what would be the most revealing or hurtful. Like, I don't take my clothes off in pictures or anything— I'm very private about that. So it scares me how valuable it would be to get a video of me changing. It's sad to have to look for cameras in

	dressing rooms or bathrooms. I don't walk around naked with my windows open, because there's a value on that" (Eells 2014, p. 2-3).
Misconceptions	"… If enough people say the same thing about me, it becomes fact in the general public's mind" (Klosterman 2015, p. 10).
Speculation	"I don't feel there is any injustice when people expand beyond my music and speculate, on who certain songs might be about. I've never named names, so I feel like I still have a sense of power over what people say— even if that *isn't* true, and even if I don't have any power over what people say about me. The fact that I've never confirmed who those songs are about make me feel like there is still one card I'm holding" (Klosterman 2015, p. 7).
(Lack of) Normalcy	"Every outing is documented. So any outing I've been on, you've seen photos of" (Dickey 2014, p. 15).
Criticisms	"It is so refreshing to see people move on from the idea that all I do is sit in my lair and write songs about boys for revenge" (Dickey 2014, p. 22).
Perception	"It's impossible for an artist to control how she is perceived" (Klosterman 2015, p. 8).

Because of the inordinate amount of attention given to every aspect of her life, Swift

argues that many of the things she says or does are misconstrued, paraphrased, and investigated,

resulting in misconceptions and speculations. Many of these are disproportionately about her

dating life and relationship status. Due to these misconceptions, generalizations, and

speculations, she also describes how the public has made a sport of criticizing her choices, from

something as arbitrary as what she wears on any given day, to attacks on her character. All of

this amalgamates to influence the way Swift is perceived in public discourse; on this topic, Swift

has seemingly conceded that perception is something she has limited control over and has opted

to focus more on nurturing her personal life and relationships rather than on what is being said

about them.

Personal Life

The personal life theme encompasses aspects of Swift's self-narrative that are separate from her public life, with subthemes (Table 8) that largely either look back on her early life or envision her future life. Often, Swift would reminisce about her upbringing in both Pennsylvania and Tennessee with fondness, while also describing hard lessons learned from her childhood, specifically concerning friendships and romantic relationships. She also paints a picture of her future family aspirations, envisioning herself carrying her career on as long as possible, and "bowing out" of the industry before she becomes irrelevant. After this, Swift hopes to have a large family with multiple children and (eventually) grandchildren that she is able to dedicate much of her time to, with the hope of replicating all the positive aspects of her own upbringing.

Table 8: Personal Life Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Growing up	"I honestly think my lack of female friendships in high school, and middle school is why my female friendships are so important now. Because I always wanted them. It was just hard for me to have friends" (Klosterman 2015, p. 12).
Family aspirations	"[I would] like a minimum of four [kids]. My fantasy has always been having a bunch of kids running around. I would love to become as dedicated a mom as my mom was" (Hiatt 2012, p. 6).
Free time	"[My favorite thing to do to unwind after a long day is] order takeout food or delivery food and sit there, watching TV with my cat and maybe call my friends that I haven't seen in a while. I spent a lot of time on the phone with my friends" (Price 2012, p. 9).
Partying	"I've never been fascinated by the party lifestyle. Sometimes people look at me like, 'You're 19 and don't want to rebel?' For me, rebelling is done with words" (Sandell 2009, p. 7).

Because Swift's profession requires her to live her life in the public eye, she explains how important it is for her to find ways to decompress in the limited free time she has. When

without professional obligations — normally after long hours in the studio, on tour, or following events — Swift has found that much of her free time is spent alone and late at night. She spends this time watching TV (*Friends* and *Law and Order* are two mentioned favorites), spending time with her cats, and on the phone with friends and family. This free time is especially meaningful because Swift spends so much of her life surrounded by people and in the midst of social interaction, resulting in the quiet times becoming moments of solace. The final subtheme, partying, details Swift's reflection on her high school life, and the decision to opt out of the party lifestyle that characterized the lives of her peers. Before she became famous, Swift attributed this decision to a form of paranoia, always worried that it would be just her luck to get caught and face consequences. After she gained notoriety around age fifteen, her main concern with partying became about the example she was setting for young girls that looked up to her; instead, she channeled her time into creating stories and rebelling through music.

Relationships

The relationship theme reflects Swift's thoughts about all the interpersonal connections she had at and leading up to this point in her life. The most frequently mentioned of the subthemes (listed in Table 9) was romantic relationships and dating. Swift mentions various times that the public attention on and speculation of her dating life had become so extreme to a point where she found it to be damaging to potential boyfriends, so she spent a many years avoiding these relationships all together. The complications to these relationships when they did form were also discussed, mostly having to do with how the nature of her job meant that she was never in one place for long, and even when she was, her work (especially touring) required so much of herself that there was little left over for a romantic relationship.

Table 9: Relationship Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Dating	"I feel like watching my dating life has become a bit of a national pastime, and I'm just not comfortable providing that kind of entertainment anymore. I don't really like seeing slide shows of guys I've apparently dated. I don't like giving comedians the opportunity to make jokes about me at award shows. I don't like when headlines read, 'Careful, Bro, She'll Write a Song About You,' because it trivializes my work. And most of all, I don't like how all these factors add up to build the pressure so high in a new relationship that it gets snuffed out before it even has a chance to start. And so I just don't date" (Eells 2014, p. 11).
Mother	"My mom is, like, all about the worst-case scenario. My brother and I call her Central Intelligence Andrea. If you have a headache, she could tell you 15 different things that could be, all of which end in emergency room, or death. But she also knows how to throw the best party. She's also really compassionate and kind and disciplined, and has a really good head on her shoulders for advice" (Hiatt 2012, p. 7).
Father	"… My dad always thinks in terms of daydreams and, 'How far can we go with this?' I never really went there in my mind that all of this was possible. It's just that my dad always did" (Hiatt 2012, p. 7).
Friends	"It's important to show that losing friendships can be just as damaging to a person as losing a romantic relationships" (Klosterman 2015, p. 14).

Swift also discusss her parents on multiple occasions, and the unique and distinct roles her mother plays in her life as compared to her father. When talking about her mother Andrea, Swift is only ever appreciative and admiring, describing her as incredibly hardworking and very intentional about making Swift's childhood well-rounded. Andrea is also averred to be cool-headed, kind, and a perfect person to go to for advice. Her father Scott, by comparison, she characterizes as hardworking and, above all, supportive of her music career very early on. As part of her managerial team at this time, Swift also explains that Scott is a natural businessman and has been an integral part of her continued success. Other relationships Swift prioritizes are her friendships; she mentioned how these relationships have continued to be the most important and consistent in her life, providing support that other relationships cannot. Swift's emphasis on

friendships— specifically female ones— are said to be important to her because in grade school she lacked them.

Social and Cultural Issues

The social and cultural issues theme includes Swift's observations that provide a larger commentary on macro-level problems (subthemes illustrated in Table 10). Swift often articulates the pressure she has experienced as a young female musician as reflected both in past experiences of other female artists and in wider society to women generally. Sexism was one of the most frequently mentioned social issues; Swift understands the extreme level of public attention placed on her dating life, the question of validity placed on her music that explores romantic relationships, and her industry's obsession with pitting women and their bodies against each other as symptoms of living in a sexist and patriarchal society. She also makes a point to mention that her male peers and friends do not experience the same constant questioning of their work. For example, do they write their own music? If they do, why is it all about girls? Are they obsessive? Conniving? Unable to maintain a relationship? Unstable? The consistent invalidation of displays or detailing's of female emotion Swift understands to be a clear feminist issue.

Table 10: Social and Cultural Issues Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Sexism	"I refuse to buy into these comparisons, because you don't see it happening to men. All you seem to see is, 'Which new mother is sexier?' 'Who's the hotter mama?' 'Who's got the better booty?' If we continue to show young girls that they are being compared to other girls, we're doing ourselves a huge disservice as a society" (Dickey 2014, p. 14).
Feminism	"People need to poke holes in things because of their own stuff. It's not about me. And we all know it's a feminist issue. My friend Ed [Sheeran], no one questions whether he writes everything. In the beginning, I like to think that we were all on the same playing field. And then it became pretty obvious to me that when you have people started questioning the validity of a female songwriter, or making it seem like it's somehow unacceptable to write songs about your real emotions— and that it somehow makes you

	an irrational and overemotional— seeing that over the years changed my view. It's a little discouraging that females have to work so much harder to prove that they do their own things" (Dickey 2014, p. 13-14).
Trivialization of female labor	"In 2010, it was, 'She's too young to get all these awards. Look how annoying she is when she wins. Is she even good?' And then in 2013, it was, 'She just writes songs about guys to get revenge. She's boy crazy. She's a problematic person.' It will probably be something else again this year" (Klosterman 2015, p. 9).
Body image	"I think the reason a lot of celebrities, feel insecure and want to stop eating all together is because they see so many pictures of themselves on a daily basis. It's unhealthy how many times you see your own image— it's just constant. When you see something enough, you're going to tear it down to the point where some days you feel like you're not even pretty" (Sandell 2009, p. 8-9).
Gender and beauty roles	"I just struggle to find a woman in music who hasn't been picked apart by the media, or scrutinized and criticized for aging, or criticized for fighting aging. It just seems much more difficult to be a woman in music and to grow older" (Dickey 2014, p. 10).

Another relevant and recurrent subtheme was the trivialization of female labor, reflected in times when Swift believed the public would reframe her and other women's songwriting, producing, and musical accolades as either unearned or insignificant. She also discusses body image often, but notably never from an individual and personal perspective. Instead, Swift would speak for all celebrities when arguing how unhealthy it is for them to see their own images so frequently, understanding this issue as one that results in insecurity and body dysmorphia. Finally, she spoke on how women in the public eye are one of the most publicly criticized groups when they do not meet unrealistic— and often times unachievable— Western gender and beauty standards. In particular, Swift most frequently mentions how women in her industry are playing a winless game where they can't succeed one way or another; if they naturally age (grow out grey hair, wrinkle, etc.) women are ridiculed and labelled irrelevant, and if they try to counteract aging (hair coloring, Botox, etc.) in any way, they are critiqued for being unnatural and inauthentic.

LATE CAREER

The analysis of the late career sample revealed various narratives present in Taylor Swift's interviews from 2016-2022. The following narratives embodied eight core themes pertaining to the public persona Swift presents through the media, the first seven of which are categorically the same as in the early career sample: (1) Personality (2) Emotions (3) Music career (4) Making music (5) Aspects of celebrity and fame (6) Relationships (7) Social and cultural issues (8) Speaking up (9) Perspective. Similar to the early career sample, other narratives were found in the analytic process, but they did not occur with enough frequency or detail to warrant a persistent theme. The following paragraphs will detail what distinguishes each theme, the subthemes found within each theme, and provide illustrative quotes for aforementioned subthemes to encompass findings.

Personality

The later interview sample includes a discussion of who Swift understands herself to be and character attributes that she recognizes (Table 10). First, Swift admits to — both in the past and present — subscribing to a moral code and belief system of quintessential (female) goodness. This goodness is described as following rules, being agreeable, and being seen by others as kind. Important to this character attribute was being externally validated by others, especially individuals older than her. Also significant in this theme is her work ethic; Swift recognizes her single-minded prioritization of work to be a key aspect of her personality since she was a child, and often expresses thankfulness for it. She believes this has been one of many things that has sustained her career — a focus on her art and craftmanship. On multiple occasions, Swift also explains how she has been an approval seeker since childhood and has found this aspect of her personality to be at odds with her career in many senses. Additionally,

she explains how she has learned the important lesson of humility as she has gotten older. This lesson, Swift realizes, took a long time to learn because her celebrity status means that her ego is constantly being augmented by the public to an extreme extent, so it took some retraining of her mind to understand that how she sees herself can't be exactly how the public sees her. Lastly, Swift details how she is hard on herself and consistently her own worst critic, often punishing and critiquing herself far beyond what others say.

Table 10: Personality Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
"Good girl"	"My entire moral code, as a kid and now, is a need to be thought of as good. It was all I wrote about. It was all I wanted. It was the complete and total belief system I subscribed to as a kid. Do the right thing. Do the good thing. The main thing I tried to be… was the 'good girl'" (Wilson 2020, 1:00).
Work ethic	"I'm only here because I work hard and I'm nice to people. That work ethic… Thank God I had that work ethic" (Wilson 2020, 19:30).
Approval seeker	"For an approval seeker like me, it was an important lesson for me to learn to have my *own* value system of what I actually want" (Swift 2019, p. 6).
Humble	"Apologizing when you have hurt someone who really matters to you takes nothing away from you" (Swift 2019, p. 8).
Critical of self	"My mom always tells me that when I was a little kid, she never had to punish me for misbehaving, because I would punish myself even worse. I'd lock myself in my room and couldn't forgive myself, as a five-year-old" (Swift 2019, p. 21).

Emotions

Again, in this sample Swift makes consistent mention of negative emotions over positive ones (Table 11). Starting with insecurity, she outlines how entertainers as a whole enter the careers they do because they have intrinsic feelings of not being good enough, and she is no exception. Swift reveals that, to combat these feelings, she tends to overcompensate with her

work and abilities. Exhaustion was brought up on several different occasion as well; at this time in her career, she divulges that voices of critique often get too loud for her to ignore, resulting in her feeling like she needs to take a break and step away from making music. Swift is also candid about experiencing self-doubt, and specifically often being in a disaster-scenario state of mind, where— if even the smallest mistake is made— she feels as though her entire world is collapsing. Hurt is another frequently discussed emotion, particularly in and around 2016 (characterized by her hiatus from the public and music). She also makes mention of loneliness on several occasions, detailing how, at the heights of her career and achievements, she was often without a romantic partner to share experiences with. This left her questioning the validity of these achievements if she had no one to share them with. Additionally, Swift explains intense feelings of paranoia in her personal life in terms of her safety and that of the people around her (family, friends, team). Originating as a response to the 2017 Manchester concert bombing, she describes the fear of violent attacks consuming every part of her life.

Table 11: Emotions Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Insecure	"[Entertainers] are people who got in this line of work because we wanted people to like us, because we were intrinsically insecure, because we liked the sound of people clapping, because it made us forget how much we feel like we're not good enough" (Wilson 2020, 35:15).
Exhaustion	"I've been doing this for 15 years and… I'm tired of it. I'm just tired of the… It just feels like it's more than music now at this point. And most days I'm okay, but then sometimes … it just gets loud sometimes" (Wilson 2020, 35:35).
Self-doubt	"[I'm always asking myself] 'How do you learn not to have these phantom disasters in your head that you play out, and how do you stop yourself from sabotage— because the panic mechanism in your brain is telling you that something must go wrong" (Snapes 2019, p. 13).

Hurt	"The reason why that backlash hurt so much, that [adoration] used to be all I had. I felt really alone. I felt really bitter. I felt like a wounded animal lashing out" (Wilson 2020, 37:00).
Loneliness	"I didn't have a partner that I climbed [the mountaintop] with that I could high-five. I didn't have anyone I could talk to who could relate to what I was [going through]. I had my mom, but I just wondered, 'Shouldn't I have someone that I could call right now'" (Wilson 2020, 22:20)?
Paranoia	"My fear of violence has continued into my personal life. I carry QuikClot army grade bandage dressing, which is for gunshots and stab wounds" (Swift 2019, p. 6).
Reframing	"Even though [the public ridicule] was really horrible, I was happy. But I wasn't happy in the way I had been trained to be happy. It was happiness without anyone else's input" (Wilson 2020, 39:20).
Self-assurance	"I know the difference between making art and living your life like a reality star. And then even if it's hard for other people to grasp, my definition is really clear" (Snapes 2019, p. 12).
Freedom	"I feel really good about not feeling muzzled anymore. And it was my own doing. I needed to learn a lot before I spoke to 200 million people. But I've educated myself now, and it's time to take the masking tape off my mouth, like, forever" (Wilson 2020, 1:17:05).

The mention of positive emotions began with the feeling of reframing how Swift understood herself and her happiness in relation to how the public felt about her. In the midst of public ridicule, she discusses the shift from deriving joy from what was being said about her at any given time, to learning how to cultivating her own happiness. Along the same line, Swift fathoms the distinction between doing her job and living the life of a celebrity. She describes feelings of self-assurance, coming to terms with the fact that she has the option to opt out of public life while simultaneously fostering her creativity and working hard. Lastly, Swift grasps the feeling of freedom in many aspects of her life; by feeling liberated in terms of her businesses, art, politics, voice, etc., she is able to feel a release from past versions of herself that were comparatively constrained.

Music Career

Fans were a consistent topic of conversation in this sample period, invariably discussed in a positive light (subthemes illustrated in Table 12). Swift consistently expresses thankfulness for her fans, stating that they have never given her a reason to stop making music. While many aspects of her career prove to be challenging and ever-changing, she makes a point to mention how the people who support her music have been one of the only constants in her life. Swift also recognizes the unsustainable demands of the music industry, and thus her career longevity; holding onto the attention of public she describes as harder and harder after her initial rise to fame. She expresses feeling grateful for the professional opportunities she has been afforded, with an understanding (and seeming acceptance) that it could all be over tomorrow. Additionally, Swift describes the continual pushback from her label about not just the direction of her music, but also her involvement in politics. Where once the issues centered around Swift's transition from country to pop music, now she explains how her outspokenness regarding politics became a large point of concern from her label.

The pressure that comes alongside occupying space in the music industry is another topic of importance to Swift. Particularly when it comes to women, she argues that maintaining relevance to the public and industry alike only gets increasingly harder the older one gets. The mentions of touring tended to focus on logistical and safety concerns, particularly as a result of the 2017 Manchester concert bombing and Vegas concert shooting. Swift often discusses the different protocols put in place with the safety of fans being the ultimate concern, and the additional personnel and expenses that are required for the large venues she performs in around the world. She also brings up the competition that is encouraged in pop music generally between artists, and how it leads to isolation and a lack of peer support networks. Swift defines this issue

Table 12: Music Career Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Fans	"I learned that I have… fans in my life. They don't care if I'm #canceled. They were there in the worst times and they're here now. The fans and their care for me, my well-being, and my music are the ones who pulled me through" (Swift 2019, p. 16-17).
Unsustainability	"For me, the times when I felt like I was going insane was when I was trying to maintain my career in the same way that I ascended. It's easier to get power than to keep it. It's easier to get acclaim than to keep it. It's easier to get attention than to keep it" (Hiatt 2019, p. 18).
Label pushback	"My team's really not happy with me right now. All I've talked about for the last couple of months is the election in Tennessee. It's not that I want to step into this, it's just that I can't *not* at this point" (Wilson 2020, 1:01:10).
Industry pressure	"It's a lot to process because we do exist in this society where women in entertainment are discarded in an elephant graveyard by the time they're 35. Everyone's a shiny new toy for, like, two years… Constantly having to reinvent, constantly finding new facets of yourself that people find to be shiny" (Wilson 2020, 1:09:45).
Touring	"After the Manchester Arena bombing and the Vegas concert shooting, I was completely terrified to go on tour this time because I didn't know how we were going to keep 3 million fans safe over seven months. There is a tremendous amount of planning, expense, and effort put into keeping my fans safe" (Swift 2019, p. 6).
Pop music	"Pop music can feel like it's The Hunger Games, and like we're all gladiators. And you can really lose focus of the fact that that's how it feels because that's how a lot of 'stan' Twitter and tabloids and blogs make it seem— the overanalyzing of everything makes it feel really intense" (Snapes 2019, p. 5).
Achieving success	"I had won Album of the Year at the Grammys for a second time, which I never thought was a possibility. And I remembered thinking afterward, 'Oh my God, that was all you wanted. That was all you focused on.' You get to the mountaintop, and you look around and you're like, 'Oh God, what now" (Wilson 2020, 20:50)?
Inspirations	I'm always trying to learn. I'm learning from everyone. I'm learning when I go see Bruce Springsteen or Madonna do a theater show. And I'm learning from new artists who are coming out right now, just seeing what they're doing and thinking, 'That's really cool'" (Lipshutz 2019, p. 10).

as one that is slowly getting better, and requires individual artists to make a decision to support others publicly. Another topic of discussion is the idea of achieving success, and what that looks like externally versus what it feels like internally. Swift describes the process of grappling with accolades at the same time as being consumed by an industry that is so stuck in validation in short-term thinking: What was the last award? The last song? The last album? Finally, she makes a point to name a few musical inspirations. The majority of these inspirations were older than Swift and chosen based on their stagecraft and ability to captivate large audience.

Making Music

Songwriting was mentioned various times by Swift as an integral part of making music (subthemes outlined in Table 13), often self-credited as the aspect of her music that has kept her relevant in the music industry. She expresses defensiveness concerning her writing, and describes it as an important emotional outlet. Additionally, Swift portrays her music as a tool for marking time, providing a commentary on society, and acting a shield to hide behind. Looking back at previous albums, Swift is able to chronicle her feelings and state of mind through time, which she utilizes as a way to measure her evolution. Her political views are also able to be portrayed in music, that of which she argues can be seen most clearly in *Lover*. Swift also details the need to often shield herself from public ridicule, using her music to cloak her emotions. Finally, the creation and use of characters in music has been a skill Swift has developed in this time. Whether they are based in reality or not, Swift is proud of the fact that she is able to use the narratives and assumptions about her and her life to inform larger-than-life music and storytelling. In particular, she used this process as the foundation for two albums, *folklore* and *evermore*.

Table 13: Making Music Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Songwriting	"I wanted to say to people, 'You realize writing songs is an art and a craft and not, like, an easy thing to do? Or do well?' People would act like it was a weapon I was using. Like a cheap dirty trick" (Aguirre 2019, p. 15).
Music as tool	"Going through different phases is one of my favorite things about fashion. I love how it can mark the passage of time. It's similar to my songs in that way— it all helps identify where I was at different points of my life" (Gay 2016, p. 13).
Creating characters	"For a lot of pop stars, that's a really fun trick, where they're like, "This is my alter ego." I had never played with that before. It's really fun. And it was just so fun to play with on tour — the darkness and the bombast and the bitterness and the love and the ups and the downs of an emotional-turmoil record" (Hiatt 2019, p. 16).

Aspects of Celebrity and Fame

During this time period, Swift details overwhelmingly negative aspects of her fame and celebrity life (subthemes illustrated in Table 14). Public ridicule was mentioned an inordinate number of times, most commonly detailed as taunting across social media and tabloid conjecture. Specifically, she discusses the insular experience of being "canceled," and the overwhelming level of hate coming from all sides of the internet. Similarly, the intense level of scrutiny placed on her and the people in her life was categorized as something Swift has to worry about on a daily basis, resulting in her realizing that placing rigid boundaries in her life was the only way to get through. Swift also explains that, as her celebrity status evolved, she experiences extreme and intrusive invasions of her privacy that have led to personal safety concerns: on several occasions, Swift has had to interact with stalkers and received death threats, all of which has become an increasing worry for her family. Lastly, Swift details feelings of commodified. She understands this issue as getting more intense as her fame has grown, and details feeling out of touch and like an object to consume rather than an individual with real emotions.

Table 14: Aspects of Celebrity and Fame Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Public ridicule	"A mass public shaming, with millions of people saying you are quote-unquote canceled, is a very isolating experience. I don't think there are many people who can actually say they understand what it's like to have millions of people hate you very loudly. When you say someone is canceled, it's not a TV show. It's a human being. You're sending mass amounts of messaging to this person to either shut up, disappear, or it could also be perceived as, 'Kill yourself'" (Aguirre 2019, p. 13).
Scrutiny	"Because my mistakes are very loud. When I make a mistake, it echoes through the canyons of the world. It's clickbait, and it's a part of my life story, and it's a part of my career arc" (Aguirre 2019, p. 11).
(Lack of) Privacy	"Websites and tabloids have taken it upon themselves to post every home address I've ever had online. You get enough stalkers trying to break into your house and you kind of start prepping for bad things" (Swift 2019, p. 6).
Safety	"My dad is terrified of threats against my safety in my life, and he asked to see how many stalkers we deal with on a daily basis, and know that this is his kid" (Willman 2020, p. 7).
Commodification	"The bigger your career gets, the more you struggle with the idea that a lot of people see you the same way they see an iPhone, or a Starbucks. They've been inundated with your name in the media, and you become a brand" (Willman 2020, p. 20).

Relationships

When bringing up relationships in interviews (subthemes illustrated in Table 15), Swift focuses on dating, family, and friends. When discussing dating, Swift never names her partner or provides intimate details about their life together (how they met, how long they have been together, what city they live in, their relationship status, etc.). She recognizes that— by nature of her job— little in her life is truly personal and private, and has thus learned from experience that the only way to give a romantic relationship a chance at surviving is keeping it out of the public eye. To the same point, she reflects on her early life and the scrutiny on her dating; "I went out on a normal amount of dates in my early 20s, and I got absolutely slaughtered for it… I didn't

date for two and a half years. Should I have had to do that? No" (Gay 2016, p. 17). Seeing this as

a lesson learned, she refuses to include the world in this area of her life.

Table 15: Relationships Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Dating	"I've learned that if I do [talk publicly about my relationship], people think it's up for discussion, and our relationship isn't up for discussion" (Snapes 2019, p. 3).
Family	"There was a relapse that happened [with my mother's cancer]. It's something that my family is going through" (Aguirre 2019, p. 21).
Friends	"In my twenties I found myself surrounded by girls who wanted to be my friend. So I shouted it from the rooftops, posted pictures, and celebrated my newfound acceptance into a sisterhood, without realizing that other people might still feel the way I did when I felt so alone" (Swift 2019, p. 12-13).

In terms of her family, the health battles of her mother are a large topic of conversation.

Swift details her mother's experience with recurring tumors spanning years, and portrays this to

be one of the main concerns of her entire family. When discussing friendship, Swift doesn't

name individuals, instead opting to explain how she learned how to be a good friend herself.

When facing scrutiny for her group of friends and their inordinate amount of displays on social

media, Swift defends herself by maintaining that she wasn't popular as a child, and thus has

prioritized (particularly female) friendships in her adult life. This hasn't been easy, she admits,

because it has necessitated a specific discernment when evaluating who wants to be her friend,

and for what reasons.

Social and Cultural Issues

The discussion of social and cultural issues was significantly more frequent and nuanced

in this sample. In almost every interview, Swift discusses politics in many different ways. First,

she addresses how, as a country artist, she was encouraged to not voice her political opinions; "Throughout my whole career, label executives and publishers would say, 'Don't be like the Dixie Chicks" (Swift 2019, 15:20). Several different times, Swift articulates how she was applauded as a young woman, both by the public and her label, for *not* getting involved in politics. Additionally, Swift advocates for Democratic candidates in her home state of Tennessee, critiquing specific Republican candidates like Marsha Blackburn for "disguising their [hateful] policies behind the words 'Tennessee Christian values.'" She expresses feelings of liberation, being inspired to speak up for candidates and policies that are important to her.

Table 17: Social and Cultural Issues Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Politics	"But a nice girl doesn't force their opinions on people. A nice girl smiles and waves and says thank you. A nice girl doesn't make people feel uncomfortable with her views. I was so obsessed with not getting in trouble that I was like, 'I'm just not gonna do anything that anyone could say anything about'" (Wilson 2020, 51:00).
Gender and beauty roles	"There's always some standard of beauty that you aren't meeting. 'Cause if you're thin enough you don't have that ass that everybody wants. But if you have enough weight on you to have an ass, then your stomach isn't flat enough. It's all just fucking impossible" (Wilson 2020, 31:10).
Gender politics	"No one's going to start out being perfectly educated on the intricacies of gender politics. The key is that people are trying to learn, and that's great. No one's going to get it perfect, but, God, please try" (Lipshultz 2019, p. 7-8).
Body image	"I learned to stop hating every ounce of fat on my body. I worked hard to retrain my brain that a little extra weight means curves, shinier hair, and more energy. I think a lot of us push the boundaries of dieting, but taking it too far can be really dangerous. There is no quick fix. I work on accepting my body every day" (Swift 2019, p. 4).
Sexism	"'Be careful, bro, she'll write a song about you. Don't stand near her.' First of all, that's not how it works. Second of all, find me a time when they say that about a male artist: 'Be careful, girl, he'll use his experience with you to get— God forbid— inspiration to make art'" (Aguirre 2019, p. 12-13).

Double standards	"I'm sick of women not being able to say that they have strategic business minds — because male artists are allowed to. And so I'm sick and tired of having to pretend like I don't mastermind my own business" (Hiatt 2019, p. 22).
Sexual assault	"It's my opinion that in cases of sexual assault, I believe the victim. Coming forward is an antagonizing thing to go through. I know because my sexual assault trial was a demoralizing, awful experience. I believe victims because I know firsthand the shame and stigma that comes with raising your hand and saying, 'This happened to me'" (Swift 2019, p. 8-9).
Social media	"Social media can be great, but it can also inundate your brain with images of what you aren't, how you're failing, or who is in a cooler locale than you at any given moment" (Swift 2019, 2).
Privilege	"[I have come to understand] a lot of how my privilege allowed me to not have to learn about white privilege. I didn't know about it as a kid, and that is privilege itself, you know? And that's something I'm still trying to educate myself on every day. How can I see where people are coming from, and understand the pain that comes with the history of our world" (Snapes 2019, p. 7)?

Another social and cultural theme is a discussion of Western gender and beauty roles. Swift explains that as she has gotten older and her body has gone through changes, she is more aware of the gender and beauty roles that constrict women, and the covert mechanisms that work to enforce them. She argues that "women are held to such a ridiculous standard of beauty," one that she finds to be exacerbated by social media (Willman 2020, p. 16). Gender politics, or the discussion about the prescribed social roles of different genders, is brought up multiple times. Swift is transparent about the fact that learning about gender politics has been a process for her, and a topic that she didn't know much about. After going through hard times in her career, she decided that it was important to educate herself as well as encourage others to do the same.

Body image was another important topic for Swift to deconstruct. Because the nature of her job has her photographed every time she steps out of her home, she has had an extremely complicated relationship with her body after having to see photos of herself so frequently. This

scrutiny of her body led Swift to develop an eating disorder characterized by intense exercise and limited food intake that still impacts her relationship to food and exercise long after being in the thick of the disease. She describes being very defensive when asked by anyone about how thin she became, and even talking herself into first ignoring— then justifying— her actions. While she understands her eating disorder as a lifelong battle, Swift (2019) now admits to "work[ing] on accepting my body every day," while reframing how she sees herself in relation to her weight (p. 6).

When discussing sexism and misogyny, Swift focuses on "trying to be as educated as possible on how to respect people, on how to deprogram the misogyny in my own brain" (Wilson 2020, 1:20:00). While she understands this as a personal and internal process, she also encourages others to look at their ideas of gender and question where they come from as well as who they benefit. Another key piece of this discussion Swift makes mention of is how she is often pitted against other women in her industry, a phenomenon acutely specific to female artists; the media and fans alike work to create rivalries that aren't born out of reality and delegitimizes the work of all involved. In addition, Swift interprets her industry as an illustration of how double standards operate in real time. In her own experience and the experiences of female musicians she knows, Swift argues they have been expected to reimagine their careers in terms of "eras" in a way that male musicians are not. They are asked to constantly reinvent, redress, and revamp their image as well as their music. Additionally, Swift discusses how— as she has grown into a woman— she has realized the ways in which she has played down her musical and business expertise, and how men by comparison are not asked to do this in professional spaces.

Amidst and after Swift's 2017 public sexual assault trial, she makes a point to discuss sexual assault in general. She details feeling like her experience with sexual assault was trivialized online and in the media, and this led her to being open about her disposition to "believe victims who come forward" (Snapes 2019, p. 8). She understands her experience with trivialization and invalidation as not being specific to her, but a hurdle that all sexual assault victims confront, only intensifying the already excruciating experience of coming forward and potentially pursuing legal action. The impact social media has in larger society is another issue Swift highlights; while understanding all the positives that come with social media, she feels as though it can also be a vacuum of hatred that is incredibly difficult for her to see a way out of. Swift discusses the constant need to remind herself that the what she sees on social media don't often accurately reflect reality in order to stave away unhealthy thought patterns. Lastly, she is transparent about her privilege in terms of race. Swift describes realizing and addressing her white privilege as a journey that has required consistent education in order to ultimately understand the world she lives in.

Speaking Up

Table 18: Speaking Up Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Learning to use voice	"I'm getting to the point that I can't listen to people telling me, 'No, stay out of it'" (Wilson 2020, 51:20).
Advocacy for other artists	"It was either investing in my past or other artists' future, and I chose the future" (Aguirre 2019, p. 8).
Political advocacy	"I didn't realize until recently that I could advocate for a community that I'm not a part of. It's hard to know how to do that without being so fearful of making a mistake, that you just freeze" (Aguirre 2019, p. 11).

This theme is unique to the late career sample and encapsulates Swift's evolution to feeling free enough to use her voice, advocate for herself, advocate for other artists, and get involved in politics (subthemes illustrated in Table 18). After years of feeling as though the label that represented her encouraged an uncomplicated self-image, Swift is actively learning how to use her voice. Equally important is learning how to advocate for other artists in her industry. After going through the loss of her master's (all the rights associated with her music up until 2018 no longer belong to or benefiting her), Swift dedicated herself to educating her peers on their music rights, as well as encouraging them to recognize their full negotiating power when signing with a label. Political advocacy was another frequently mentioned subtheme; she expresses regret over not becoming involved in politics sooner. Swift describes the weight of scrutiny and adoration alike make it difficult to be outspoken when so many ears are listening, but ultimately considers the change she could inspire as more important than any resistance she could be met with.

Perspective

The last relevant theme is perspective, including times when Swift reflects back on her life to ultimately change her point of view in the present (subthemes illustrated in Table 19). Her shifting priorities were mentioned on several occasions, where she looks back on the things she worried about as a young woman and sees them as arbitrary compared to the more pressing aspects of her life (family health, mental health). Swift describes the process of "disengage[ing] from some part of public perception I used to hang my entire identity on," and instead focusing her energy on those closest to her to receive validation and love from (Haitt 2019, p. 14). She recognizes old patterns of prioritizing public perception as unhealthy and offers an alternative to herself instead.

Table 19: Perspective Subthemes

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
Priorities	"[My mom] got cancer several years ago. That has been really hard for me because she is my favorite person. It woke me up from this life where I used to sweat all these things. But, like, do you really care if the internet doesn't like you today if your mom's sick from her chemo" (Wilson 2020, 25:45)?
Taking a break	"Honestly, I never relax, and I'm excited about being able to relax for the first time in ten years" (Gay 2015, p. 15).

In addition to changing priorities, Swift also examines her career trajectory now that she has occupied a sustained position in pop music, and hints at another hiatus. She admits to having thought about quitting music altogether on multiple occasions because of the relentless nature of the press and public and divulges dreams and goals for her life that don't include creating music. Swift describes wanting to be a "well-rounded person" who has time to dedicated to cultivating new skills, trying new things, and visiting new places. The upward trajectory of her career has left her with little time to escape for long periods of time, and this is one of her largest goals for the immediate future.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Although numerous studies have examined celebrity culture and persona narratives told through mass media, little focus has been given to longitudinal analyses of contemporary artists like Taylor Swift specifically analyzing themes of gender, age, and music simultaneously. Given the popularity of Swift's music, her significant social following, and symbolic cultural relevance, her experience growing up and navigating all that comes with her career told through her own words is able to provide a commentary on more macro-level social patterns. The present study— which explored representations of public persona by Swift over her career split into two time periods— represents a unique contribution to the larger body of scholarship on celebrity studies, feminist praxis, and media studies through the examination of narratives in under-researched genres.

This analysis identified ten distinctive narrative themes prominent in Swift's interviews between the years 2009-2022: personality, emotions, music career, making music, aspects of celebrity and fame, personal life (only observed in early career sample), relationships, social and cultural issues, speaking up (only observed in late career sample), and perspective (only observed in late career sample). While some of these specific themes, and similar ones, have been considered in other studies on celebrities and music, including but not limited to Nina Simone (Feldstein 2005), Rihanna (Bierria 2011-2012), and Missy Elliot and Nicki Minaj (White 2013), their predominance in Swift's narratives of public persona in meaningful in its nuances. It has been argued that celebrity narratives such as these inform "young people [as they] draw upon class and gender distinctions that circulate within celebrity discourses (proper/improper, deserving/undeserving, talented/talentless, respectable/tacky) as they construct their own

identities in relation to notions of work, aspiration and achievement" (Allen and Mendick 2013, p. 1).

The identified narratives from both the early and late career sample point to several possible commentaries, both specific to the case study and generalizable. First, we can deduce the sustained discussions around topics of personality, emotions, music career, making music, aspects of celebrity and fame, relationships, and social and cultural issues across the time period analyzed indicate that Swift is comfortable discussing these themes publicly, as well that the fact that they are significant to her constructed public persona. Additionally, similarities across time periods and their themes are significant. For example, the majority of emotions mentioned by Swift (62% in early career and 67% in late career) were negative, suggesting that these types of emotions like isolation and insecurity are at the front of her mind when doing interviews. Similarly, when mentioning aspects of fame and celebrity Swift described *exclusively* negative subthemes like public speculation and a lack of privacy, indicating that she continuously grapples with her level of celebrity and how it intrudes on all aspects of her life. Her detailing of relationships, particularly romantic ones, also follow this trend across time; whether it be an interview from 2011 or 2022, Swift is adamant about keeping her dating life private as much as possible because of public scrutiny that considers her dating life "a bit of a national pastime."

Another theme that was comparatively consistent across time was her music career, where Swift maintained a love and appreciation for her fans, a distaste for her label's interference with her creative decisions, and an importance of creating fun and safe tour environments. The social and cultural issues theme was another that maintained consistency across time periods, prioritizing conversations about sexism, gender and beauty roles, and body image. This theme and its subthemes developed in a linear fashion, with Swift discussing social

and cultural issues through making mention of her personal experience in the early career sample, then moved beyond her own experience to name broader social and cultural issues ailing society in the late career sample. These broader social and cultural issues, as Swift describes them, reflect previous literature on the inner workings of sexist and misogynistic culture.

Contrastingly, the subthemes that make up the personality narratives mentioned by Swift differ from her early to late career, suggesting that her conception of self and personhood has not remained stagnant over time. Concerning the music making theme, the only consistent subtheme was a discussion of her songwriting, but the nature of that discussion was different in both. In her early career, Swift understands her songwriting as a source of confidence, whereas later she is often defending her writing from critiques of its validity. The subthemes that make up the personal life theme was only mentioned frequently enough to warrant analysis in the early career sample, suggesting that Swift purposefully did not discuss her person life in the late career sample. This is consistent with her comments on the topic, saying she "needed to make boundaries, to figure out what was mine and what was the public's. That old version of me that shares unfailingly and unblinkingly with a world that is probably not fit to be shared with? I think that's gone" (Hiatt 2019, p. 11).

The two themes specific to the late career sample, speaking up and perspective, suggest a similar point; her decision to discuss what led her to use her voice, as well as the issues she chooses to highlight, indicate an empowerment to assert herself publicly that was absent in her earlier life. Correspondingly, this newfound perspective suggests that Swift is making an effort to look back at her career milestones and mishaps as a way to learn from them, while simultaneously reworking what is important to her. These priorities (family and mental health) illustrate how her perspective has shifted in more than just one way and are no longer career-

focused and superficial, reflecting an evolution away from the constraints placed on young female artists explored in previous literature. This reflection is in line with Swift getting older in the late career sample, and thus taking inventory of her life up to a point and actively deciding to see her past as lessons to learn from.

The findings of this study concerning celebrity and public persona relayed in mass media compliments the findings of similar scholarship (McNamora 2009; Valentinsson 2018; Breese 2010) that discuss the nuanced motivations for and expressions of persona as told through various media formats. In terms of this case study, the topics discussed by Swift across the time samples suggest that her age, gender, and music all significantly impacted her self-disclosure. Additionally— as proven by the sustained mention of social and cultural issues throughout interviews— Swift's experiences in her industry concerning sexism, gender and beauty roles, and body image issues all culminate to reflect broader patterns of the reproduction of gender norms and inequality in a Western, patriarchal society. Her experience was also indicative of the age in which it has taken place; the digital aspect of music listening and the industry's transition to streaming is the 21st century is representative of a shift in industry standards when it comes to music production and distribution.

The themes that remained relatively consistent, as well as those that did not, across her career spanning 2009-2022 also tell a story about Swift's public persona conception, providing insight on parts of her life she feels comfortable and uncomfortable disclosing, and in what particular ways at what times. Swift's experience and self-disclosed public persona also reflected past literature related to the unequal power dynamics. This is significant because it is both specific to the music industry and her career as a musical artist, while simultaneously being indicative of exploitative labor relations, commodification, and commercialization. Swift's

relationship to her fanbase was also portrayed to be less concerned about postures of alignment and misalignment as illustrated in previous literature, and more concentrated around mutual support and encouragement that in many ways transcends typical celebrity-fan dynamics. The findings of this study also reflected previous literature on the social aspects of music, particularly in terms of Swift's own understanding of *creating* music as opposed to listening to it, and how she has used music to mark the passage of time in her life, provide commentary on society, and encourage social and political change.

LIMITATIONS

As discussed in the methodology chapter, I understand my personal intrigue and connection to this topic to be one of the great distinctions of this study. That being said, it is possible that another researcher would have chosen different codes and assigned subsequently different meanings to them. Though the deductive analytics strategy of this study allowed my analysis to be informed and guided by previous literature, it is nonetheless conceivable that the end products could vary, as is common in content analyses with similar methodological protocol. Additionally, by prioritizing interviews from notable publications and in long-form, my sample size was limited to 24 articles. Another large-scale analysis including more articles could reveal different themes than found in this study, or different frequencies and patterns that impact conclusions. It is also important to note that Swift is only one artist, and thus can only provide commentary on her specific experiences as a white, upper-class, heterosexual, cisgendered woman. As a result, the experiences of minority individuals beyond the social status of gender are not explored in this study, making the scope of analysis a limited one (common in case studies of any kind).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In addition to having a larger sample, utilizing a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies may also provide additional statistical insights that a solely qualitative study is unable to supply. Additionally, this study establishes how Taylor Swift's public presentation is significantly impacted by her age, gender, and the intricacies of occupying space in the music industry while also creating music, but it also raises questions about the subjectivity of her experience and how more diverse case studies would compare with the same research question. To address this, future research could also explore how narratives of celebrity public persona differ based on various social factors. Studying musicians that identify as non-white, middle- or lower-class, middle-aged or older adults, LGBTQ+, or male/gender nonbinary/gender nonconforming would significantly add to the findings of this study.

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