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Why Won't You Ever Say What You Want To Say: A Lyrical Analysis of Harry Styles

The meaning of lyrics and music is often nuanced by whoever listens to it, which often is the artist's intent. However, many music fans search for the actual meaning behind the artists' use of certain words or vocabulary in lyrics. With his newest album just released a week ago, Harry Styles has broken chart records and captured fans' hearts throughout his solo career as an artist. After leaving the hit boy band, *One Direction*, Harry Styles has been able to add his voice to his music and speak directly to his fans. Within this textual analysis, the themes of his albums and his unique voice are uncovered within his lyrics with hopes to unearth at least part of what Harry Styles is trying to say.

The data used was collected and cleaned by me, Beth Gronski. I scrapped Genius, AZLyrics, and Spotify and added those lyrics to an excel spreadsheet. I chose to collect and clean this data because there was no reliable source of data on this topic. I structured my data by making each row in the dataset a song by Harry Styles, and I then included the lyrics to that song, which album the song is on, how long the song is, and what year the song was released. I chose to structure the data to make different analyses of these songs possible. Limitations of this data collection are that I included some unreleased music and other music written by Harry Styles but for another artist. It is impossible to find and collect all the lyrics that Harry Styles may have written, which could also change the analysis. Although some unreleased songs are included in the dataset, for accuracy, I only examined songs released by Harry Styles.

I used lyric websites such as Genius, AZLyrics, and Spotify to collect the data, and I copied and pasted those lyrics into a Google Spreadsheet to create a corpus of Harry Styles's work. I then cleaned the lyrics to make sure all were correctly formatted as they came from different websites. For information on when the album was released and what album it was on, I used Spotify and Wikipedia for that information. The same information was also available on other sites, so I deemed the information I received from Spotify and Wikipedia to be accurate. After creating my dataset, I downloaded it as a CSV file and uploaded it to RStudio, a statistical computer program. In RStudio, I manipulated the data to be able to perform my analysis. I used methods taught to me by Professor Melanie Walsh from the iSchool to separate each collection of lyrics into single cells containing one word. I then removed common words, or "stopwords," to make examining more "meaningful" words easier in my analysis. I then used R to create scatterplots examining the frequency of words in each album and compared them to other albums released by Harry Styles.

The advantages of using these methods were that they were seemingly effortless, and I could draw from previous learning to create these diagrams and analyze my data. The drawbacks were that I needed to look up each set of lyrics for each song, as I am unaware of how to scrape the internet and have a computer program pull these lyrics for me. Regarding limitations, this analysis only examines the frequency of words between albums rather than songs or being able to compare all three albums together. While I believe I could change my analysis to compare individual songs or look at the frequency of lyrics amongst certain songs, I would not know how to graph a comparison between all three of Harry Styles's albums. This is why I compared each album to the other and therefore produced three graphs.

When we first began talking about our final project, I was reminded of Professor Melanie Walsh's text analysis on Twitter and how we performed some minor text analysis in her class INFO 201. I decided I wanted to incorporate those practices into this class and analyze something for which I am passionate. I am an avid music listener and wanted to analyze song lyrics to understand maybe the unique vocabulary of some of my favorite artists or how their lyrics change over time. I chose to analyze Harry Styles because I knew he was coming out with a new album. He has consistently written music for over five years, so I thought analysis of his music would be more accurate and comprehensive. Additionally, he has only released three albums, and some of my other favorite artists have released 10+, and I thought that analysis would require much more time and effort than I could spare in several weeks.

After performing my analysis and creating my visualizations of the lyrics used in each album, I noticed some trends and uniqueness in each album. As you will be able to read in my report, Harry's most commonly used words are "just" and "know" in each album. This analysis is interesting for a few reasons. Firstly, it is used almost the same amount of times in each album. It is used less in his debut album, but I believe this is due to this album having fewer songs than his two latest albums. Secondly, these are two ubiquitous words, so it can be argued that these are "stopwords" and do not provide a meaningful analysis of Harry's lyrical choices. However, I would disagree. These two words are common, but if you notice in this paper, I have rarely used them. I believe that they add to the uniqueness of Harry Styles's voice, and after discovering how frequently he uses them, I can hear them clearly in every song. Thirdly, I also think it is important to note that he uses these words in almost every song.

Another notable find from my analysis was what words each album had in common. Most important is the comparison I found on Harry's first two albums. The word "home" is used

the same number of times on both albums. I find this interesting because the widely marketed theme for Harry's third album, *Harry's House*, is home. I also find this interesting because this word is used less than half as many times in *Harry's House*. After discovering this, I wondered if this was intentional but found no information that would support or disprove this notion.

Lastly, I enjoyed looking at words used most often on each album but are hard to find on the other albums. For Harry's debut album, I discovered that the word "la" is used 64 times, but I believe this is because of the song *Carolina*. During the chorus, and once towards the end of the song, the word "la" is repeated over and over again. Because this lyric mainly comes from one song, I consider it insignificant to the analysis of this album. However, this case happened repeatedly on this first album. I looked at the words "none" and "angel" and discovered that all uses of these words come from two different songs, *Kiwi* and *Only Angel*. With further analysis, I realized that many of the notable words used by Harry on this album are because they are repeated many times within one song. I noted this pattern rather than the words themselves.

On Harry's sophomore album, *Fine Line*, some of the most common and unique words were "going" and "ever." While it should be noted that these words were often repeated several times within a song, they were much more spread out than the unique words on Harry's debut album. "Ever" is spread out among five songs, while "going" is spread out among only two. Regardless, the word "going" is significant, primarily because it is most commonly followed by "home" on the album. This theme of "going home" was prevalent for this album and one Harry Styles often commented on, especially when he was about to release his next album *Harry's House*.

In *Harry's House,* the most unique words are "got," "cinema," and "love." "Got" is used on several different songs, but this is another instance of debating how common this word is and

if it brings any significance to the meaning behind the album. It is unique that it is used so often on his third album, but I do not believe it reveals any significance to the analysis. In the case of "cinema," this is another instance where Harry repeats one word repeatedly. All of the uses of this word can be found in one song, which is called "Cinema." However, "love" is used on several songs throughout the album and only used once on each previous album. I find this discovery especially significant and believe this to be a theme on Harry's newest album.

For this project, the stakes were in regards to uncovering new knowledge and hoping to simplify such a complex work such as lyrics. Lyrics are like poems, with much left hidden and covered in metaphors and imagery. It is often hard to know what an artist meant to say through their lyrics, and with this analysis, I wanted to uncover some meaning that I was unable to hear. I aimed to learn more about what Harry Styles sings about and the meanings behind his albums. Additionally, I hoped to learn more about his writing style and how his unique voice can be identified in his lyrics. Within each album, I believe I have uncovered something that was not there before, and although I focused on the most used words in my report, I think there are many other points in my analysis that deserve more attention than can be provided in this paper.

"I know that you're scared because I'm so open," sings Harry Styles in his first track on *Fine Line*, Golden. Regardless of what he may say, his lyrics leave a lot up to interpretation, and it can be challenging to understand the meaning behind Harry's angelic voice. Throughout this analysis, I was able to learn more about what words Harry Styles chooses to use and some recurring themes he has on his albums. Nevertheless, there is still much to be left to our imaginations, and maybe that was the true intention all along.

Works Cited

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