

I'm so sick of running as fast as I can: Taylor Swift and the dynamic of pop music

*Estou tão cansada de correr o mais rápido que posso:
Taylor Swift e a dinâmica da música pop*

*Estoy tan cansada de correr tan rápido como puedo:
Taylor Swift y la dinámica de la industria de la música pop*

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Abstract

This article deeply explores the intersection of feminism, sexism, and the music industry by analyzing the career and public image of Taylor Swift. As one of the most influential figures in contemporary pop music, Swift offers a particularly valuable case study for examining how gender roles and expectations influence the professional trajectories and public perceptions of female artists. The study carefully analyzes her song lyrics, public statements, interviews, and professional conflicts, emphasizing the challenges Swift faced while navigating a historically male-dominated industry and the gradual development of her feminist ideology. By placing Swift's personal and professional journey within the broader context of evolving pop music trends, the article demonstrates how her advocacy for women's rights and gender parity directly challenges entrenched structures of male chauvinism and reshapes the cultural and commercial landscape of pop music. Ultimately, the article critically assesses Swift's influence, contributing to the ongoing conversation about feminism in mainstream culture and the continued advances for women within the music industry.

Keywords: Taylor Swift. Feminism. Music Industry. Sexism. Eras.

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Resumo

Este artigo explora a interseção entre feminismo, sexismo e a indústria musical, por meio da análise da carreira e da imagem pública de Taylor Swift. Como uma das figuras mais influentes da música pop contemporânea, Swift oferece um estudo de caso particularmente relevante para examinar como os papéis e expectativas de gênero influenciam as trajetórias profissionais e as percepções públicas de artistas mulheres. O estudo analisa as letras de suas músicas, declarações públicas, entrevistas e conflitos profissionais, enfatizando os desafios enfrentados por Swift ao navegar por uma indústria historicamente dominada por homens e o desenvolvimento gradual de sua ideologia feminista. Ao situar a trajetória pessoal e profissional da cantora no contexto mais amplo das tendências da música pop, o artigo demonstra como sua defesa dos direitos das mulheres e da paridade de gênero desafia diretamente as estruturas enraizadas do machismo e transforma o cenário cultural e comercial da música pop. Por fim, o artigo avalia criticamente a influência de Swift, contribuindo para o debate contínuo sobre o feminismo na cultura mainstream e os avanços das mulheres na indústria musical.

Palavras-chave: *Taylor Swift. Feminismo. Indústria Musical. Sexismo. Eras.*

Resumen

Este artículo explora la intersección entre feminismo, sexismo y la industria musical mediante el análisis de la carrera y la imagen pública de Taylor Swift. Como una de las figuras más influyentes de la música pop contemporánea, Swift constituye un estudio de caso particularmente valioso para examinar cómo los roles y expectativas de género influyen en las trayectorias profesionales y en las percepciones públicas de las artistas femeninas. El estudio analiza con detalle sus letras, declaraciones públicas, entrevistas y conflictos profesionales, destacando los desafíos que Swift enfrentó al desenvolverse en una industria históricamente dominada por hombres y el desarrollo gradual de su ideología feminista. Al situar el recorrido personal y profesional de Swift dentro del contexto más amplio de las transformaciones de la música pop, el artículo demuestra cómo su defensa de los derechos de las mujeres y de la paridad de género desafía directamente las estructuras arraigadas del machismo y reconfigura el panorama cultural y comercial de la música pop. Finalmente, el artículo evalúa críticamente la influencia de Swift, contribuyendo al debate actual sobre feminismo en la cultura mainstream y los avances continuos de las mujeres dentro de la industria musical.

Palabras clave: Taylor Swift. Feminismo. Industria Musical. Sexismo. Eras.

Introduction

Throughout Western history, the identity of women, both in social and personal aspects, has been systematically obscured (Laís, 2023; Nogueira, 2017). Gender binarism, a social construct that rigidly divides roles and characteristics into masculine and feminine, has played a crucial role in this process. This concept, rooted in the rise of patriarchal societies, promoted the idea of female inferiority and the subordination of women. In ancient times, the “eternal feminine” was present in the qualities and entities personified in the Goddess or the Great Mother, but it was gradually eclipsed with the consolidation of patriarchal structures (Robles, 2006; Gimbutas, 1991; Stone, 1976). Moving into the present day, we find traces of this obscuration across various sectors of global society. It is crucial that this issue be addressed within our reflections and investigations to understand how social frameworks are constructed and, more importantly, to adopt measures aimed at minimizing the impact of sexism, misogyny, and other forms of prejudice and violence against women in the field of music production.

This study discusses how these historical dynamics have shaped the expectations and representations of women in the contemporary pop music industry. Specifically, it examines the necessity for pop singers to craft their content into distinct Eras, where each album presents unique themes and imagery to remain relevant in a capitalist market. This phenomenon is exemplified by the career of artists such as Taylor Swift, who continually reinvents herself by releasing albums that explore new themes, sounds, and visuals. This reflects the pressures of an industry that demands continuous innovation to avoid obsolescence and maintain commercial appeal.

The methodology of this research is based on a comprehensive review of key authors on feminism and American pop music, with a specific focus on the figure of Taylor Swift. This approach allows for a detailed analysis of the complex interplay between gender dynamics and the commercial strategies employed by female pop artists. Taylor Swift is chosen as a central case study due to her exemplary trajectory, which illustrates how an artist can use innovation and continuous reinvention to maintain relevance in a highly competitive and capitalist market. The research examines not only Swift’s artistic evolution but also how her strategies reflect and respond to the expectations of an industry that often imposes unequal standards on men and women. By integrating feminist theories and pop music studies, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the pressures shaping female artists’ careers and the structures that perpetuate gender inequalities. Additionally, the work investigates how these strategies of adaptation and reinvention can be seen as responses to the constraints imposed by the market and society, offering valuable insights for the formulation of policies and practices that could promote more equitable and sustainable representation for women in music. This analysis not only contributes to academic understanding of the phenomenon but also serves as a foundation for future research that could explore new approaches to gender equality in the music industry.

The methodology of this research is based on a comprehensive review of key authors on feminism and American pop music, with a focus on the figure of Taylor Swift. This approach allows for a detailed understanding of the interplay between gender dynamics and the commercial strategies employed by female pop artists. This article is situated at the intersection of Popular Music Studies, Gender Studies, and Cultural Studies, adopting an interdisciplinary perspective. By engaging authors from feminist theory, sociology, and musicology, the text seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions in the humanities and social sciences. The methodology consists of a qualitative approach, grounded in cultural criticism

and textual analysis, with a focus on the interpretative frameworks that allow us to understand gender, power, and agency in the context of American pop music.

The woman inferiority

The woman, as a lacking entity, has been relegated to the role of servant to men, responsible for domestic tasks, raising children, and providing unconditional support to the husband in his decisions and actions – this is what modernity wants us to believe (Kolontai, 2011). However, this structure of social relations between men and women is shaped by judeo-christian culture and religion – although it is not a universal truth, it significantly contributes to the association of women with submission and a supposed absence of logic or intelligence (Marinho, 2023).

This gender binarism is a problem arising from a purely philosophical thought. Since Prometheus and Pandora, in the Greek myths, or the Judeo-Christian creation mythology, women have always been placed on the outskirts, on the fringe between the subject-object relationship. Women, in the schools of Greco-ancient thinkers, always appeared, had speeches – Plato dedicated book V of *The Republic* to talk about political equality between men and women (Plato, 2011), however, women, in these contexts, were characters and not *personas*.²

Misogyny, or violence against women, underpins many forms of prejudice and discrimination prevalent in global society. If we can speak of a universal violence, it is the violence directed at the feminine, historically regarded as the “bad”, sinful, and inferior side compared to the masculine, which is seen as strong and dominant. This binary division between male and female creates social acceptance hierarchies that sustain and justify various forms of oppression. Violence against homosexuals illustrates this dynamic: individuals who present in a more “feminine” manner face greater violence and rejection, while those who conform more closely to the Western ideal of masculinity are more accepted. Similarly, in the context of racism, violence against Black women is disproportionately severe compared to that experienced by Black men, who are often stereotyped as vigorous and resilient. These examples highlight how misogyny serves as a foundational axis for hierarchy and marginalization, reinforcing power structures that perpetuate inequality at multiple levels. Thus, the oppression of women is not only a gender issue but a central axis in the structure of injustices and prejudices that permeate society.

This construction of a universal one and the marginalization of others have direct consequences on the way women are treated in society and as is the focus of this work, in the music industry. Music produced by women is often devalued and seen as inferior in quality when compared to music produced by men. This perception is not just a matter of personal taste but is deeply rooted in historical and cultural structures that perpetuate gender binarism and male supremacy.

Historically, music composed and performed by women has been marginalized and excluded from musical canons. However, among the earliest recorded and found compositions are those of a woman, Kassia of Byzantium (810-867 A.D.) (Wellesz, 1962; Panagopoulos, 2015). Also known as Kassiane, she stood out not only as a composer, but

² For an extended discussion on the philosophical and mythological roots of gender binarism in Western thought, see Mignolo (2017), Romfeld (2015), Arvin *et al.* (2013), Robles (2006), Gimbutas (1991), Lerner (1986) and Stone (1976).

also as a poet and abbess. Its music, which consists of liturgical hymns, is still sung in the Eastern Orthodox Church, which demonstrates its enduring influence (Citron, 2000; Moreno, 2025).

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, few women were able to break through the barriers imposed by patriarchal society. Those who did, such as Hildegard von Bingen and Francesca Caccini, faced numerous difficulties and often their contributions were underestimated or attributed to men (Bowers; Tick, 1987; Cusick, 2009). In Romanticism, for example, Clara Schumann, a virtuoso pianist and composer, had her works eclipsed by the work of her husband, Robert Schumann. "For some time after her death, however, her compositions were all but forgotten; on the occasions when they were performed, they were generally considered interesting only in relation to those of her husband" (Reich, 2001, p. 211).

Even today, in the genre of concert music, women do not have much space for performance. In a report by Donne, *Woman in Music* (2022), in the 2021-2022 season, in 111 major orchestras in the world, out of 20,400 pieces played only 7.7% (1,564 pieces) were composed by women.

The few women who have achieved some recognitions have often had to struggle with the perception that their music was less serious or less technical than that of their male counterparts (Halstead, 2017). This reflects that vision of an essentialist and binary ontology of gender; women are seen as inherently emotional and subjective, while men are seen as rational and objective (Werner, 2020).

In contemporary music, this dynamic persists³. Female singers, for example, are often judged not only by their musical abilities but also by their appearance, behavior, and personal life. This additional scrutiny contributes to the perception that women's music is somehow less authentic or less valuable. Additionally, the lyrics and themes explored by women in pop music are often considered trivial or superficial, while the same themes addressed by men can be seen as profound and meaningful.

Scholars have noted that the music industry has historically marginalized women's work through gendered biases that affect how their music is valued and promoted (Citron, 2000; Werner, 2020). Although female artists have always participated in different genres, institutional and market barriers often limited their visibility and recognition. Instead of assuming a universal belief that "women's music doesn't sell," it is more precise to state that unequal access to industry resources and persistent stereotypes have shaped the commercial trajectories of women in music.

This complex web of inequalities and historical/cultural issues brings to light several personalities, such as Taylor Swift, one of the most prominent artists in contemporary pop music. Swift has earned a prominent place in the music industry with records never seen before by the music industry. Next, we will explore how Taylor Swift uses her music and her public image to talk about the issues mentioned above as well as the due problematizations of the industry's use of these same issues.

If i was a man, i'll be the man!

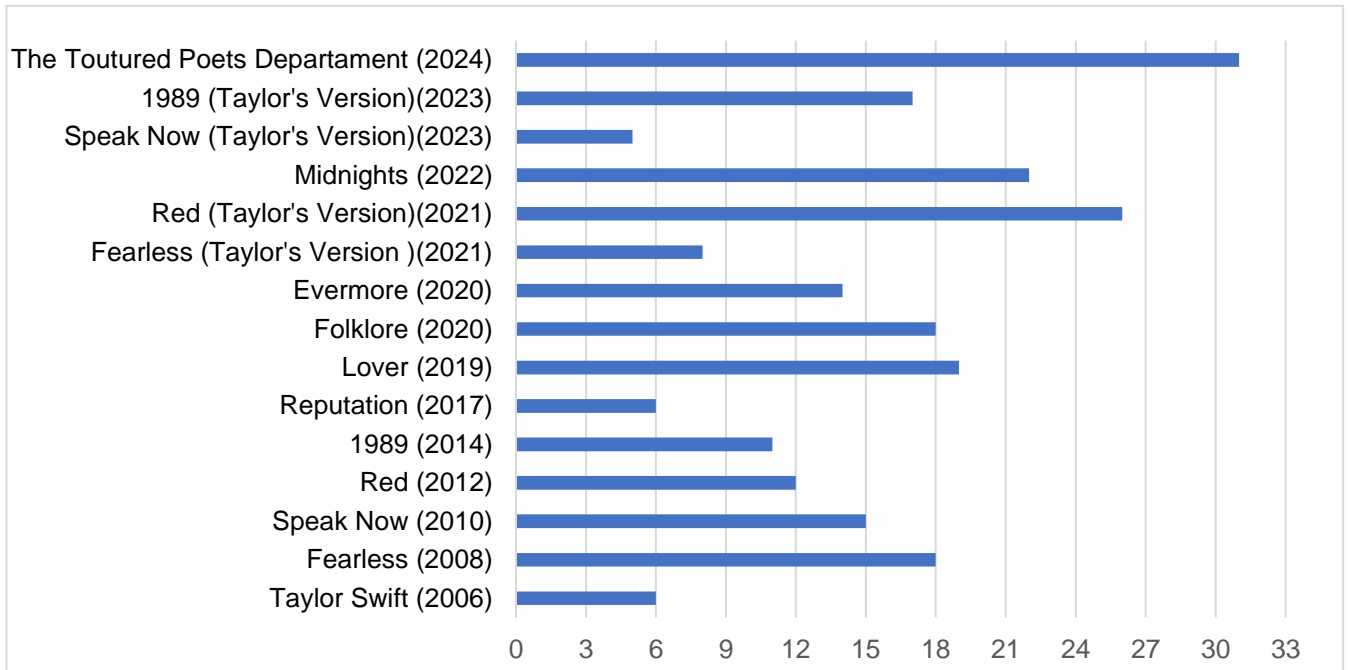
For this research, Taylor Swift shows herself as a unique figure for the analysis of gender disparity in the music industry. Since the beginning of her career, Swift has navigated

³ In the twentieth century, women began to conquer more space in the music industry. Composers such as Amy Beach, Florence Price, and Germaine Tailleferre began to be recognized for their significant contributions. The fight for gender equality in music has intensified, with women demanding recognition and equal opportunities.

the complex dynamics of musical art and faced challenges that reflect broader issues of gender and power. The singer began her artistic career in the mainstreaming of country music when she released her eponymous debut album in 2006, when she was just 16 years old.

Her initial commercial success was shy of what would follow, but this category of shyness only fits when comparing the artist to herself. According to chart 1 data, Taylor, on her first album, has already appeared 6 times on the Billboard Hot 100. Although the chart design makes a wave movement, in which *Taylor's Version*⁴ albums have a smaller presence on the Billboard chart, they are still very relevant appearances.

Chart 1: Number of songs on the Hot 100



Source: Prepared by the author himself based on data from the website <https://www.billboard.com/artist/taylor-swift/chart-history/> Accessed on January 10, 2025.

Taylor has a record-breaking trajectory on Spotify with each (re)release. On October 21, 2022, her tenth studio album, *Midnights*, not only became the most streamed album on Spotify in a single day, but she also broke the record for the most streamed artist in a single day. In 2023 she was Spotify's most listened to artist, Top Global Artist, with more than 26.1 billion streams (Spotify, 2023).

On April 19, *The Tortured Poets Department* became the first album in Spotify history to surpass 300 million streams in a single day. Less than 12 hours after release, it was already the most streamed single-day album in 2024 and surpassed itself. In addition, the album broke another record on the day of release, with *Fortnight (feat. Post Malone)* becoming the most listened to song in a single day in Spotify history.

⁴ Taylor 's *Version* discs are re-recordings of Taylor Swift's previous albums, released after a dispute over the rights to her original recordings. Swift decided to re-record these albums to regain ownership of her recordings and thus diminish the commercial value of the originals that are not under her control.

Since the beginning of her career, Taylor Swift has faced media and public scrutiny that has often reflected gender stereotypes. Her compositions, often based on personal experiences and troubled relationships, have been devalued as adolescent diaries (Pollock, 2014), in contrast to the appreciation of poetic depth attributed to male composers. Swift challenged this perception by asserting the authenticity and importance of her personal narrative, claiming the legitimacy of her artistic voice.

One of Swift's most significant clashes with the music industry involved the fight over the copyright of her songs. In 2019, following Scooter Braun's acquisition of her former label, Big Machine Records, Swift lost control of the master recordings for her first six albums. In response, she decided to re-record these albums, a strategy that sought not only to regain control over her work, but also to highlight issues of power and artistic autonomy in the music industry (Parker; O'Connor, 2024). Since Swift was the primary songwriter of her songs, re-releasing her records on the new label's label was not a difficult task.

In addition, the artist took a stand in the promotion of gender equality. In 2019, she released *The Man*⁵, a song that criticized gender expectations and highlighted how her actions would be perceived differently if she were a man. *The Man* is a scathing critique of double gender expectations and institutionalized sexism in society; while a man can be whatever he wants and be applauded for it, women are subject to a different role in the world.

In the first verse, Swift (2019) sings "I would be complex, I would be cool", highlighting that as a woman, her complexity was often seen as problematic, while for a man it would be considered a positive quality. The coolness that would be attributed to a man was often denied to a woman in a similar position. This excerpt reflects the criticism that society often disqualifies complex women, labeling them negatively, while the same complexity in men is admired. Studies such as the one by Stacy L. Smith *et al.* (2021) show that women in music are often reduced to simplistic stereotypes and are not recognized for their complexity and artistic abilities.

She continues with "They'd say I played the field before I found someone to commit to" commenting on the sexual double standard, where men are praised for having multiple partners before committing, while women are criticized for similar behaviors. In the same vein, Elizabeth A. Armstrong. (2010), discusses how men are often rewarded for behaviors that, in women, are considered unacceptable and immoral. The article "Is hooking up bad for young women?", by the author, works precisely what Taylor sings in the first verses of *The Man* about casual relationships, in which women are much more judged than men.

The chorus encapsulates Swift's frustration with the need to push herself harder than her male counterparts to achieve the same level of success. "I'm so sick of running as fast as I can, wondering if I'd get there quicker if I was a man" reflects his perception that his achievements could have been more easily obtained if he were a man. This sentiment is supported by studies on the gender gap in the music industry found that women need to work harder to gain recognition and success comparable to that of men. The study by Smith *et al.* (2021, p. 6) shows that, from 2013 to 2023, only 13.9% of Grammy nominees were women.

In the second verse, "And they would toast to me, oh, let the players play" Swift reflects on how ambitious and competitive attitudes of men are celebrated, while a woman exhibiting the same behaviors would be seen as aggressive. Society often accepts and

⁵ *The Man* was an interesting milestone in Taylor's career, it came along with *You Need To Calm Down*, in which she sings about the rights of LGBTQIAPN+ people. The years 2018 and 2019 (release of the album *Lover*) was an important moment for the artist's positioning. She posted on her Instagram for the first time, 2018, about the elections, encouraging people to choose candidates who made no distinction between people by race or gender.

celebrates male ambition, while the same trait in women is labeled in a pejorative way. This is discussed by Alice H. Eagly and Steven J. Karau (2002), who examine how expectations of gender roles influence the perception of behaviors in men and women, showing that women often face backlash for assertive behaviors.

"What I was wearing, if I was rude" addresses the hypocrisy of how women's appearance and behavior are more rigorously judged than men's. Assertive women can be labeled as rude, while the same attitude in men is seen as assertive and confident. Women in positions of power are often perceived negatively if they exhibit assertive behaviors that are typically acceptable in men, a phenomenon known as "backlash penalization" (Rudman; Glick, 2002).

In the song's bridge, "If I was out flashing my dollars, I'd be a bitch, not a baller", Swift criticizes how the ostentation of wealth and success is perceived negatively in women but viewed positively in men. Wealthy men are considered ballers, while women in the same position can be called bitch. This excerpt reflects the study by Smith *et al.* (2021), which highlights how the ostentation of success and wealth is treated differently between genders, perpetuating gender inequality in public perception.

Swift even mentions Leonardo DiCaprio in "I'd be just like Leo in Saint-Tropez," symbolizing the hedonistic lifestyle that famous men can have without facing the same public scrutiny. She highlights the freedom and indulgences allowed to men, but rarely to women. This line underlines the disparity between the genders in a way that is easily understood by the public. Male figures are often idealized, and their indulgent behaviors normalized, in contrast to female figures who face greater scrutiny (Connell, 2005).

In 2016, Swift gave an interview to the Vogue YouTube channel, in one of the questions the interviewer asked what she would say to her 19-year-old self, she said "I'd just say, 'hey, you know, you're going to date just like a normal 20 something should be allowed to, but you're going to be a national lightning rod for shaming'" (Vogue, 2016). In other songs, in addition to *The Man*, Swift had already written about her relationships being the subject of articles in newspapers and gossip pages. In *Shake It Off* she says: "I stay out too late, got nothing in my brain, [...] I go on too many dates, but I can't make them stay, that's what people say" (Swift, 2014; Swift 2023). At the time of the album's *1989* release, the artist was on the cover of *Rolling Stone* (2014), interviewed by Josh Eells, said about the media's eagerness about her relationships:

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 like seeing slide shows of guys I've apparently dated. I don't like giving comedians the opportunity to make jokes about me at awards shows. I don't like it 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.

On each record, Swift always had something to say about how the media viewed her as a serial dater; About her ability as a singer-songwriter, dancer and businesswoman has always been questioned. It seems to us that these scrutinies have varied reasons, but as demonstrated in the Netflix documentary, *Miss Americana* (2020), the fact that Taylor had too many public relationships was extremely damaging to her personal image. As for his artistic image, he was fuel for several songs and clips and his eras.

The concept of eras and their necessity in the career of Taylor Swift

Taylor Swift's career can be seen as a series of meticulously crafted eras, each representing a distinct phase with aesthetics, sounds, and themes. This way, while highly effective for Swift, is not unique to her. Many female pop artists adopt similar strategies, such as Madonna, Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, and Katy Perry. (Mjøs, 2012; Ariza, 2018). To maintain its relevance in an ever-changing industry – which seems to be volatile only for females. These eras serve as a strategic response to the demands of a capitalist market that requires constant reinvention and novelty to capture the public's attention and sustain commercial success.

Taylor Swift's career exemplifies a strategic adaptability that aligns with the evolving trends of the American music market. This adaptability is not merely a creative choice but a necessary response to the industry's demands for continuous innovation. Scholars have noted that the music industry, particularly in the United States, is characterized by rapid shifts in consumer preferences and technological advancements, such as the rise of digital streaming platforms (Negus, 2019). These shifts require artists to frequently reinvent themselves to maintain commercial relevance and appeal. Swift's transition from country music to pop, and later to alternative and indie sounds, reflects a calculated adaptation to these market conditions, showcasing her ability to navigate and capitalize on changing industry dynamics (Kribs, 2018).

Swift's approach to diversification is a core component of her sustained success in the music industry. By segmenting her career into distinct 'eras,' each defined by unique aesthetics, sounds, and themes, Swift effectively creates a fresh narrative and brand identity for each album cycle. This strategy aligns with theories of branding and consumer engagement, which suggest that continual reinvention can help maintain fan interest and engagement in a highly competitive market (Holt, 2004). Moreover, this approach also reflects broader marketing strategies observed in the industry where artists are encouraged to build personal brands that are as dynamic and evolving as their musical outputs (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Such strategies are particularly crucial in an environment where audience attention is fragmented across numerous digital platforms.

This approach can be clearly seen in *Lover*'s music video (figure 1), which features the "Lover House," a house that symbolizes the different eras of his career up to that point. Each room in the house represents a specific phase, with colors, decorations and visual elements that refer to Taylor Swift's previous albums.

Figure 1: Lover House



Source: Lover (Official Music Video). Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BjZmE2gtdo>>
Accessed January 15, 2025.

In the American pop music industry, female artists often face the challenge of being considered obsolete much earlier than their male counterparts. Studies indicate that the music industry is steeped in gender biases that favor men, allowing them to age gracefully and become legends, while women are pressured to continually prove their worth through reinvention (Smith *et al.*, 2021; Farrugia, 2012; Green, 1997). This disparity is further emphasized by the fact that women tend to be associated with fewer musical styles and have fewer collaborators, positioning them on the periphery of the industry's collaboration networks.

The deliberate segmentation of Swift's career into different eras can be seen as a strategic response to these industry pressures, however we start from Eric Smialek's (2021) reflection, that the artist is not a person but a company, we are talking about business. As much as Taylor shows herself as a subject, the *Taylor Swift company* is willing to do any marketing to stay in the mainstream. Each era not only showcases her versatility as an artist but aligns with commercial strategies that keep her relevant and in the spotlight. For example, his transition from the country roots of 2008's *Fearless* to the synth-pop sounds of *1989* in 2014 and the darker tones of *Reputation*, during a cancellation in 2017, illustrates a dynamic adaptability that meets the trends of the American music market and the preferences of the public in a supposed evolution and maturation. Swift's transition from the vintage and sweet look of *Speak Now* (2010) to the more mature and glamorous image of *Red* in 2012 exemplifies this visual shift.

Taylor Swift is known for directly engaging her fans by using easter eggs to build anticipation ahead of new releases. Fans play a crucial role in the dynamics of the eras of female pop singers. They not only expect, but demand that their favorite artists continually reinvent themselves. This expectation creates pressure for the artist to not only adapt to

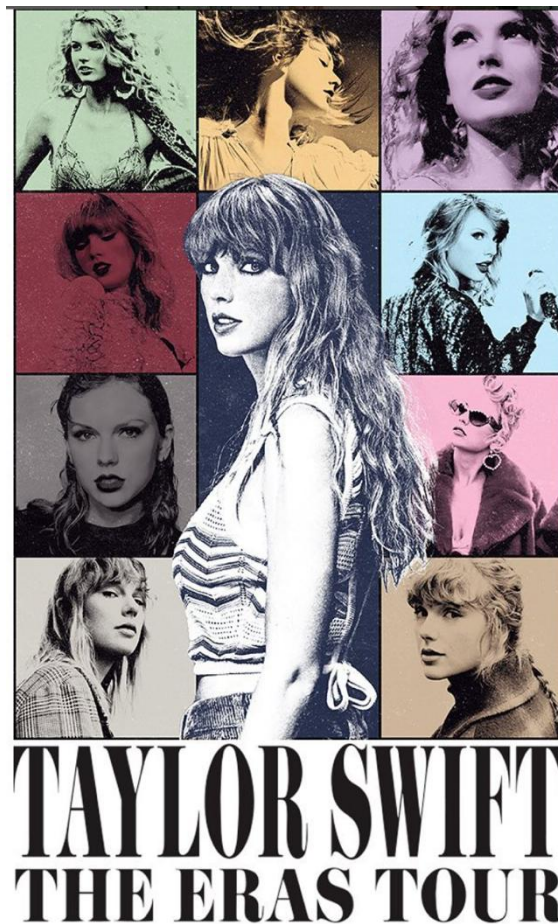
musical and cultural trends, but also offer something new and exciting with each album cycle. In Swift's career, every move is noticed by fans, who theorize absolutely everything. In 2019, when Taylor was about to release the album *Lover*, the color transition was clear on her Instagram page, which certainly made them wonder: what will be the style she will adopt now? Thus, the singer's most recent tour, The Eras Tour, materializes this approach to the fullest.

Taylor Swift deeply understands the power of diversification. Each era has its own set of merchandising products, show themes, and marketing strategies, which significantly broadens your revenue streams. This fragmentation allows her to connect with a wide range of audiences, each with different preferences but united by an appreciation for the various facets of her career. The Eras Tour capitalizes on this strategy to the fullest. The tour is a spectacle that promises to revisit every phase of Swift's career, offering fans a nostalgic and immersive experience. This promise of a complete journey through the artist's career encourages fans to purchase tickets, often for multiple tour dates, in hopes of experiencing different aspects of the performance at each show.

The Eras Tour, the singer's current tour, was crucial for Swift to achieve billionaire status. The tour broke ticket sales records and generated massive revenue not only through the performances themselves, but also through the sale of exclusive merchandise from each era and VIP packages that offered special experiences to fans – or not so special, since the VIP box is just stationery. Swift's ability to diversify and market her eras effectively was directly reflected in the exorbitant profits generated by the tour.

The promotional image of the tour exemplifies this strategy brilliantly. It presents Taylor Swift at various stages of her career, highlighting the diversity of her records through the predominant colors of each record. Each square in the image refers to a specific visual and musical style, creating a collage that visually communicates Swift's artistic changes. This visual representation is an invitation for fans to relive and celebrate each distinct phase of the artist, while also reinforcing the idea of a rich and multifaceted career.

Figure 2: The Eras Tour banner



Source: Taylor Swift's Instagram account. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CkawwhLufL1/?img_index=1 Accessed on J January 20, 2025.

This method of continuous reinvention is not only a creative choice, but a survival tactic in an industry where female artists must work significantly harder than their male counterparts to achieve and maintain success. This is evident in the scrutiny Swift faces regarding her personal life and the double standards applied to her professional achievements. Women who achieve significant success are often judged more harshly, not only for their creative choices but also for their personal lives — as Swift ironically said in *Miss Americana* when she thinks she's talking too loudly to the interviewer — women with power will be questioned for absolutely everything they do. "Like, sorry, was I loud? In my own house that I bought, with the songs that I wrote about my own life" (*Miss Americana*, 2020)

In addition, women are significantly underrepresented in key industry roles such as producers and executives, which contributes to the perpetuation of gender biases and the marginalization of female talent Smith *et al.* (2021). This underrepresentation means that the perspectives and needs of female artists are often ignored in decision-making processes.

Economic forces within the music industry exacerbate these gender disparities. The capitalist structure of the industry prioritizes profit and the commercial factor, often to the detriment of equitable treatment for female artists. This creates a scenario where women must continually reinvent themselves to remain commercially viable. The concept of eras

helps artists like Swift not only stay relevant but also reclaim their narrative and artistic control.

In addressing the broader feminist framework, we can foreground the relationship between Taylor Swift's self-reinvention and Judith Butler's concept of *gender performativity* (Butler, 1990). Butler argues that gender is not an inherent identity but a series of performances, shaped by societal expectations. This lens can be applied to Swift's various eras, particularly in the way she navigates and disrupts the gendered expectations of female artists in a capitalist music industry. Swift's self-reinvention can be seen as a form of gender performativity, where she is compelled to "perform" different versions of femininity—whether as the innocent country singer or the empowered feminist—as dictated by the shifting market demands and societal norms.

Furthermore, this performativity is not neutral but is situated within the power structures of patriarchy and capitalism. Michel Foucault's theory of biopower (Foucault, 1976) provides a useful theoretical tool here. Biopower refers to the regulation of bodies and populations, and in Swift's case, her body and persona become sites of both control and resistance within the music industry. Her era-defining strategies are not just artistic choices but tactical responses to the mechanisms of power that seek to commodify and control her image, as seen in the commodification of female bodies in the media (Gill, 2007). By re-releasing her albums, for instance, Swift reclaims ownership of her labor and production, directly challenging capitalist exploitation in the music industry.

Moreover, drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), we could argue that Swift's trajectory illustrates the "Othering" of women in music. De Beauvoir posits that women have been relegated to the status of the "Other" in a male-dominated society. In the music industry, this Othering is manifested in how women are constantly pushed to reinvent themselves in ways that men are not. Swift's continuous transformations—from country ingénue to pop queen—represent a negotiation with this patriarchal demand for reinvention, positioning her as both a product of the industry's gendered expectations and a subversive agent within it.

It is important to emphasize that Taylor Swift's experience cannot be generalized as the experience of all women in the music industry. As an affluent, white, North American artist, her privileges contrast with the barriers faced by Black, Latinx, or non-Western female artists. An intersectional perspective allows us to recognize how race, class, nationality, and religion shape different forms of inequality and agency. While Swift's career illustrates gendered pressures, it also reflects how privilege affords her strategies and visibility that are not equally available to marginalized groups.

Final ideas

The longevity disparity between male and female artists in the music industry is easily observable. While male artists are often celebrated and continue to thrive well into their later years, female artists face a much steeper decline. This is partly due to the social obsession with youth and beauty, which disproportionately affects women. Older male performers such as Paul McCartney and Mick Jagger are revered and celebrated, while their female counterparts often face ageism and sexism, leading to their premature exclusion from the industry (Connell, 2005).

Ultimately, the longevity disparity between male and female artists is not just a matter of the market, but a reflection of the broader gender inequalities that have permeated society since antiquity, as worked out in the first part of this article. Women in music, be it of any gender, have always had problems, often related to issues that are unrelated to the technique

of musical practice. Of the various ways to stay in the music industry market, Taylor Swift chooses to characterize her career in well-defined eras and keep her fans busy with clues to upcoming releases, which, over time, have increasingly shortened dates.

The strategy of continuous reinvention adopted by artists like Taylor Swift is not merely a creative choice, but a strategic necessity imposed by a music market that favors constant innovation and adherence to prevailing aesthetic standards. This dynamic requires female artists to continually reinvent themselves to remain relevant, a process that is often not equally demanded of their male counterparts. The collateral effect of this demand is a reduction in the longevity and visibility of female careers, which are frequently overlooked or quickly discarded when they do not meet novelty expectations. The resulting cycle of exclusion and invisibility not only marginalizes women in the music industry but also limits the range of musical representations and experiences available to the public. This phenomenon highlights a market structure that not only values youth but also defines female success by rigid adherence to transient trends, rather than a more enduring appreciation of skills and artistic contributions. Consequently, the music industry becomes a field where the authenticity and depth of female contributions are frequently underestimated and suppressed in favor of constant superficial reinvention.

The absence of older female models on the charts illustrates a power structure that not only prioritizes youth but also reinforces a limited and sexist view of women's careers in music. This structure privileges masculinity and youth, creating a hierarchy where women who achieve fame face disproportionate pressure to stay aligned with prevailing fashion trends and aesthetic standards. The lack of older female models reflects the lack of opportunities and recognition that women face throughout their careers. To counter this scenario, it is essential to conduct a critical analysis of the practices and policies of the music industry, identifying how they perpetuate gender inequality. Future studies should delve more deeply into the resistance and adaptation strategies adopted by women in music, as well as explore potential changes in cultural and industrial norms that could promote more equitable representation. Promoting a diversity of voices and experiences is crucial for building a more inclusive and fair music industry, where longevity and experience are valued regardless of gender.

The disparity in longevity between male and female artists transcends market issues and reflects broader and deeper gender inequalities that have historical roots. Since antiquity, women have faced challenges related not only to musical technique but also to a range of social and cultural factors that shape their opportunities and recognition in the industry. Taylor Swift's approach, which characterizes her career in well-defined eras and keeps her fans engaged with clues about upcoming releases, is a strategy aimed at maximizing her relevance and longevity in a market that often does not provide the same level of support for female artists. This method not only allows Swift to adapt her image and style to current trends but also creates a continuous narrative that maintains public interest and strengthens her market position. However, this approach also highlights the need for a critical reassessment of the structures and practices of the music industry.

The need to deepen research on gender inequalities in the music industry is crucial for driving significant change in the pop music scene and beyond. While attention often focuses on female artists, gender disparities affect all musical genres and all levels of the industry, from production to performance. Building a solid academic foundation on this topic is essential for understanding the extent of disparities faced by artists of all genders and identifying effective strategies for overcoming them. Academia plays a key role in this process, not only by fostering critical and interdisciplinary discussions about industry practices and policies but also by providing data and analysis that can inform fairer and more

inclusive policies. Further research can help reveal how power structures perpetuate these inequalities and offer solutions to create a more equitable environment for all artists. Additionally, academic discussions can contribute to training new generations of music professionals with a broader and more critical understanding of gender issues, promoting a music industry that values diversity and equal opportunities.

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