

Deconstructing Taylor Swift's Song Entitled “The Man”: Exploring Gender Issues Through The Lyrics

by Bunga Putri Maulia

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Deconstructing Taylor Swift's Song Entitled "The Man": Exploring Gender Issues Through The Lyrics

Bunga Putri Maulia

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Alamat: Jl. Colombo No.1 Karangmalang Yogyakarta 55281

Korespondensi penulis: bungaputrimaulia13@gmail.com

Abstract. This research discusses the song entitled "The Man" by Taylor Swift from a gender perspective. This song describes women's views on how their lives would be different if they were men. The aim of this research is to determine the specific representation of gender equality in Taylor Swift's song "The Man". This type of research is content analysis with a deconstruction approach; we will delve into the lyrics of this song and analyze how Taylor Swift highlights gender inequality and stereotypes that are still widespread in society. The results show that in her song entitled "The Man", Taylor Swift describes how stereotypes still exist in society regarding gender inequality. The gender equality that Taylor Swift advocates through her songs includes many things such as; freedom to choose a lifestyle, freedom to be a leader, freedom to work without discrimination from the social environment and several other freedoms that are difficult for women to obtain.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Deconstruction, Taylor Swift, The Man

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender is still an interesting issue to discuss. The term "gender" refers to the roles, actions, expectations, and attributes that are socially and culturally produced and allocated to individuals based on their believed or assigned sex. Beyond biological distinctions, gender is a multifaceted idea that includes social expectations and conventions related to being male or female (Caroline et.al, 2023). Despite progress towards gender equality, gender discrimination still occurs in various forms today. Gender discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender identity or expression (Nina page, et al., 2022, p.2). According to the statement by Oswald (2023), gender discrimination has been a significant issue since the past. Due to their gender, women have been denied the opportunity to participate in politics, the workforce, and education. Strong gender stereotypes have restricted women's independence and opportunities to reach their full potential. Furthermore, gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and domestic abuse, is a major issue that many women worldwide must deal with.

On the other hand, Gender-related issues are often voiced in various intermediaries, including music, film, advertising, and social media. Song is one of powerful tool for spreading ideas. The song is an expression of something that was previously heard, seen, or felt. Song writers often modify language and words to express their experiences through songs in a way that is appealing and unusual. Many different emotional states, such as hope, desire, happiness,

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* Bunga Putri Maulia, bungaputrimaulia13@gmail.com

and even craziness, can be captured and evoked by songs. ¹¹ The message is communicated through the song's lyrics. The narrative of this song will serve to convey the message (Damayanti, et al., 2023, p.82). Therefore, a lot of people utilize music to communicate their feelings to other people.

Marlina (2020) stated that many song writers inspired by women to produce a work of art. Many public figures also voiced about gender issues through their works such as a song. One of the figures who voices gender issues through songs is Taylor Swift. Taylor Swift is an American singer-songwriter that was born on December 13, 1989. Taylor Swift has been nominated 541 times and won 250 of them. She is ⁹ the youngest person to receive the highest honour in the history of the music industry, the Grammy Award for Album of the Year. She is the only woman in Grammy history to win album of the year twice. She is also become the only female artist to have 10 songs debut on Billboard Hot 100 at one time. Taylor Swift also is the one of the best-selling music artist in history with record sales more than 200 million worldwide. Her awards include 11 Grammy Awards, 1 Emmy, 58 Guinness World Records, 34 American Music Awards and 29 Billboard Music Awards. She has 11 albums since 2006 until 2024 and 4 re-recorded albums since 2021.

In this case, Taylor Swift has voices about gender issue through her song called "The Man". The song entitled The Man is one of the songs from Taylor Swift's album entitled Lover which was released in 2019. This song was written by Taylor Swift herself based on her experience of often receiving unfair treatment throughout her career just because she was a woman. The theme of the song is the phenomenon of injustice that is often experienced by women. How the world interprets women as "the second class", especially when it comes to work and career. That man has certain advantages over women, whether in terms of social norms or laws which are still gender biased.

As references for this study, some relevant previous studies were reviewed. Laely (2022) write an article entitled The Representation of Feminism in "Tomboy" Song Lyrics by Destiny Rogers. The aims of this study are to find out the kinds of feminism and ¹ the portrayal of women in the song lyrics of "Tomboy" by Destiny Rogers. This study used a qualitative method. The result of this study indicated that in the lyrics contain some words or phrases that contain feminism. In addition, this song portrays women as dominant, talented, productive, beautiful, tomboy and feminine, wealthy, charming, brave, hard worker, and independent human beings. Thus, the portrayal is in line with the title of the song "Tomboy", which defines women as having a manner considered manly or boyish. Moreover, the song lyrics of "Tomboy" by Destiny Rogers indicate that they represent women's freedom.

Lisara used qualitative research particularly descriptive method to drawing the portrayal of women in Katy Perry's Selected Song Lyrics. The result of the present study shows that most of women in One of the Boys album (2008) are portrayed through five portrayals highlighting women's physical appearance, women as sexual subject, women's passive behaviour, and women's attitudes to cover their dependency on men. These portrayals support patriarchal ideology in which women are in accordance with patriarchal society's expectation. The present study also discovers that gendered messages in most of song lyrics in One of the Boys do not show the notion of post feminism by being passive and dependent to men. Nevertheless, several songs explore the theme of sexuality as one of feminism values.

Guo in 2023 write an article entitled Women's Power Reflected in Beyoncé's Song "Run the World (Girls)". Music is a medium that brings together the public to think about the power of women. Power is often referred to as a masculine trait, but Beyoncé breaks the stereotypes that society has long formed about women by supporting the idea that women can realize their worth, that women can build nations and that power can be a social identity for women.

Marlina, et al. in 2020 used is critical discourse analysis to analysis of Post Feminism and Patriarchy in Song "The Teaser" Of Janneta and Maia Estianty's Works. The results of the study show that the song is a media forming the feminist ideology of power, namely strengthening the first woman and marginalizing the second woman. Song writers have the ability to reflect on the ideology of listeners towards post-feminism ideology and patriarchal ideology and use it to encourage oppressed women to continue to struggle to build a new image of women who are strong, firm, and independent in making decisions in their lives.

Aisyah in 2020 used qualitative research approach to identify the different social roles and traits of woman that can be found in Little Mix's Songs; Power. The result of this study found out that a total of five social roles and three traits were found shared among women that were present in the songs. In Little Mix's songs, Women were represented both positively and negatively.

Nia in 2020 used feminism theory entitled to find out liberal feminism theories that are revealed through Meghan Trainor's Songs In Album "Thank You" Through Feminism Theory. The result of the analysis show that women are independent, have freedom to choose what they want and women should be treated with respect.

Rahmawati & Suyudi (2023) utilized qualitative research is using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) to examine the portrayal of feminism in Ariana Grande's God Is a Woman MV. The findings revealed that the God is a Woman MV symbolizes postmodern

feminism ideology, as shown by Ariana as the primary character who has the freedom to express herself, full authority over her body, and the power or strength to confront patriarchy.

Pasopati et al., (2023) exposes analysis of socialist feminism through the song of Lesley Gore entitled *You Don't Own Me* using qualitative methods. The finding stated that women are full of uniqueness that must not be reduced as a toy for men. Women are human beings that are never parts of the capital accumulation of men.

Lestari & Nurochman (2022) used qualitative method to analyze the liberal feminism values contained in the chosen song of the singer Britney Spears. The results of this study indicate that the values of liberal feminism found are being free of the limits set by patriarchal paternalistic and moralistic laws, and having access to options. Also, in this research, the researcher found the most dominant liberal feminism value in Britney Spears's selected songs is which has to be free of the limits set by patriarchal paternalistic and moralistic laws.

Neisya, et al., (2023) used descriptive qualitative through the process of data reduction, data presentation, and the last is drawing conclusions to reveal the meanings and messages implied in the lyrics of Katy Perry's song *Roar* through an analysis of figurative language and imagery from a feminism perspective. The results showed Katy uses 4 types of imagery; visual imagery, auditory imagery, organic imagery, and kinesthetic imagery. All the figurative language and imagery represent Katy's feelings and struggles against the downturn during her relationship with her ex-lover and managed to get up hence she can love herself. This is the message that Katy wants to convey to all women in the world that they are precious beings who have choices in their lives and are able to stand alone without any help from men.

Based on several studies above, it can be seen that problems related to gender discrimination are a serious problem. Many people still confused between gender equality and injustice because many women call out gender injustice either directly or in works such as a song. On the other hand, most of the previous studies about discussed only about feminism and not about gender equality nor gender discrimination. Therefore, this research is important to determine the specific representation of gender equality in Taylor Swift's song called "The Man".

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Deconstruction

Jacques Derrida developed a philosophical approach known as "deconstruction." This concept is applied in various fields such as literature, philosophy, cultural theory, and social studies. Deconstruction aims to reveal the instability, ambiguity, and complexity of meaning in texts or concepts that are considered stable and consistent. Essentially, deconstruction involves analyzing and separating meanings that are assumed to be established or certain in texts or concepts. This approach emphasizes that meaning is never truly stable or fixed; instead, it is always open to multiple interpretations, even contradictory ones. Therefore, deconstruction rejects the idea that a text or concept has a single universally accepted meaning (Krapp, 2016).

Some key principles of deconstruction are as follows: (1) Ambiguity of Meaning: Deconstruction argues that texts and language often contain unavoidable contradictions and ambiguities, as language is not always clear. (2) Hidden Hierarchies: Deconstruction reveals hidden hierarchies or assumptions within texts or concepts that are often unnoticed by readers, including conflicts between ideas that are perceived as opposing or cohesive. (3) Uncertainty of Meaning: Deconstruction demonstrates that texts or concepts can always be interpreted in different ways depending on the context. Interdependence: This approach emphasizes that the meaning of a work or idea depends on its social, cultural, and historical context, and its relationship with other symbols. Derrida rejects the notion that gender categories, such as masculinity and femininity, have fixed and essential essences. Instead, he shows that these categories are constructed through interdependent processes of differentiation, rather than having fixed essences. This gender binary is often used in marriage to establish rigid roles: the husband as the controlling figure and the wife as the passive supporter. According to deconstruction, these roles are derived from social constructions that can be changed, rather than being inherent in nature (Sitorus, & Sitorus, 2024).

b. The Man by Taylor Swift

Taylor Swift is one of the musicians who write feminist songs. She released her seventh album, *Lover*, on August 23, 2019. The album's fourth single, *The Man*, draws from her personal experiences, highlighting how people often dismiss her assertive actions because of her gender. The song's lyrics address sexism and the double

standards women face. In *The Man*, Taylor explores the idea of being a man and how that would make her more accepted in society. She accurately portrays the general experience of being a woman, not just from her perspective. Gender discrimination often forces women to fight for their freedom in such circumstances. As is widely recognized, men typically assume more responsibilities in various aspects of life. Taylor underscores women's strong opposition to this, suggesting that they would enjoy the same benefits as men if they were to become men. Through this song, Taylor Swift voices her concerns about discrimination and gender equality, making feminist theory the most suitable framework for analyzing its lyrics (Damayanti, et al., 2023, p.82).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This type of research is content analysis with a deconstruction approach. Krippendorff in Luqman (2019, p.69) stated that content analysis is a research method used to make conclusions that can be replicated and validated from the text in the context of its use. While, Derrida as cited by Arifin et al., (2019, p.334) stated that a very influential approach in the study of meaning in literature is deconstruction. Deconstruction approach aims to look for the meaning of aporia, namely paradoxical meaning, contradictory meaning, ironic meaning in the literary works (Aprilia & Tomi, 2021, p.66). It can be concluded that content analysis with deconstruction approach is an appropriate method to analyse the specific representation of gender equality in Taylor Swift's song called "The Man" as the participant in this study.

Deconstruction approach that will be applied to the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song called "The Man" through three stages of data collection. The first one is double reading which is related to the critical reading process. Second, the reversal of the text with a new meaning is called decentering. The last is différance, namely the process of thinking, writing and creating based on the traces which aims to create differences in the terms of meaning (Norris, 2002, p.8-10).

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Finding

"The Man"; the title of this song highlights its gender roles. In this song, Taylor Swift imagines how her life would be different if she were a man. This can be seen as a reflection on gender inequality in the music industry and society in general. The song reflects Taylor Swift's consideration of the differential treatment of gender in popular culture and society at large. She uses the song as a platform to highlight the injustices and stereotypes that are often applied to

women, as well as asking questions about how her life would be different if she were a man. Through the lyrics of "The Man", Taylor Swift sharply and introspectively explores gender inequality and stereotypes that still occur in society. This song reinforces the message about the importance of gender equality and the struggles that women still have to face in various areas of life.

4.2 Discussion

Based on the results analysis, it can be discussed by the data below.

Tabel 4.1. The forms of binary opposition in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song The

Man:

Form	The good one	Which is not good/reversal	Example lyrics
Women and freedom	Men have the freedom to live a carefree lifestyle while women have to live according to the rules	Women have a free and complex lifestyle	"I would be complex, I would be cool" "They'd say I played the field before I found someone to commit to" "And that would be okay for me to do" "Every conquest I had made would make me more of a boss to you"
Women and leadership	Leadership roles are more suited to men and women are not suited to lead	Women become leaders	"I'd be a fearless leader" "I'd be an alpha type" "When everyone believes yeah" "What's that like?"
Women and desire	Women have to work hard for something they want while men can easily get what they want	Women get everything they need	"I'm so sick of running as fast as I can" "Wondering if I'd get there quicker if I were a man" "And I'm so sick of them coming at me again" "Cause if I was a man, then I'd be the man" "I'd be the man"
Women and work	Women don't work, only men do	Women work	"They'd say I hustled, put in the work" "They wouldn't shake their heads and question how much of this I deserve" "What I was wearing, if I was rude" "Could all be separated from my good ideas and power moves"
Women and romance	Women don't date casually	Women date whoever they want	"And they would toast to me, oh, let the players play" "I'd be just like Leo in Saint-Tropez"
Women and feelings	Women must restrain their feelings	Women can't hold back their feelings and vent them out	"What's it like to brag about raking in dollars" "And getting bitches and models?" "And it's all good if you're bad" "And it's okay if you're mad"

A. Binary Opposition Spread

1) Women and Freedom

Through the first lyrics of the song "The Man", Taylor Swift describes how men can have the freedom to live their lifestyle freely while women must live according to the rules. When women live a lifestyle that suits their wishes, this will be considered bad by society. Taylor said a man will be able to have more control or control over his life

and destiny. Unlike women who are always faced with choices made by society, for example women are often required to choose a job or take care of a family, choose to get married or continue their education. It is as if women have limitations and are deemed unable to carry out multiple roles. Judging from how societal standards and patriarchy impact the way men and women are viewed and portrayed in the media. Swift also illustrated that there are still many people who think that it is difficult for women to commit and will only be seen as playing around all their lives.

Through these lyrics, the patriarchal culture that exists in society depicts women as creatures who must submit and obey the rules that have been set for them. Women do not have the right to choose what lifestyle they want because that is considered not well.

2) **Women and Leadership**

In the lyrics of the second song, Taylor Swift describes how men are seen as more dominant than women in society. They are seen as "fearless leaders" because men are solid, difficult, masculine, extreme, and think normally. Apart from that, Taylor Swift also uses the word "alpha" to describe that in society, men are considered to have the character of a leader, firm, confident, and able to dominate others.

Through these lyrics, the patriarchal culture that exists in society illustrates that in terms of leadership, women cannot be leaders because they are considered not to have the character of a leader.

3) **Women and Desire**

In these lyrics, Taylor Swift discusses the gender inequality experienced by women. Women have to try extra, harder than men, if they want to achieve their goals or dreams. While men will easily get what they want because of their gender, women will work twice as hard to get what they want.

In these lyrics, Swift also expresses feelings of disgust for people who always interfere in her affairs. The media exposed Taylor's personal life too much to make gossip news so that her achievements as a singer were less prominent and unappreciated. Unlike male singers, people call them talented singers and songwriters despite all the gossip about them.

4) Women and Work

In these lyrics, Taylor Swift expresses how women are always underestimated when it comes to work. If men do a good job, have high ambitions then they will be praised. Meanwhile, if a woman is ambitious to achieve her goals, she does not get support but judgment from her environment. Society considers girls who want to pursue their dreams and get a higher education as a waste because in the end women will take care of the kitchen and family. Women are prevented from pursuing careers so that it is not difficult to find a husband. This assumption does not seem to allow women to be greater than men.

The general view of gender inequality is that men have more advantages in the world of work than women because of applicable laws and social norms. Taylor Swift described how if she were a man, it would definitely be easier for her to be at the peak of her career.

5) Women and Love

Through these lyrics, Taylor Swift describes how society considers her a player because she has many ex-lovers. But when a man is a real "player", they will be considered popular among women. In these lyrics, Taylor Swift uses the name Leo which refers to Leonardo DiCaprio. This is of course not without reason. Leonardo DiCaprio himself is known as a person who likes to date women who are much younger than him. According to society, this is certainly normal. However, when a woman dates a man who is much younger than her, it is considered a bad thing.

Patriarchal culture in society depicts good women only dating men who are appropriate according to society. Women cannot date carelessly while men can freely choose what kind of woman they want to date.

6) Women and Feelings

Through these lyrics, Taylor Swift explains how women must restrain their feelings and create the best image in front of society. If men show their controversial side, the public will not overreact and think it is normal to hide behind the words "his name is also a man" but when the situation is reversed, women will be seen as bad and their actions are unacceptable. It seems that no matter what a man does, his image will not be bad.

This shows that in a patriarchal society, women must be able to restrain their feelings and control their behaviour. When women make the slightest mistake, it will be seen as something bad, no matter what the reason.

Tabel 4.2. Binary opposition reversal:

Form	The good one	Which is not good/reversal	Example lyrics
Women and freedom	Women have the right to choose the lifestyle they want	Women cannot choose their own lifestyle	"I would be complex, I would be cool" "They'd say I played the field before I found someone to commit to" "And that would be okay for me to do" "Every conquest I had made would make me more of a boss to you"
Women and leadership	Women can lead	Women are not allowed to lead	"I'd be a fearless leader" "I'd be an alpha type" "When everyone believes yeah" "What's that like?"
Women and desire	Women can have anything they want	Women should not get anything they want	"I'm so sick of running as fast as I can" "Wondering if I'd get there quicker if I were a man" "And I'm so sick of them coming at me again" "Cause if I was a man, then I'd be the man" "I'd be the man"
Women and work	Women can work	Women are not allowed to work and can only take care of the household	"They'd say I hustled, put in the work" "They wouldn't shake their heads and question how much of this I deserve" "What I was wearing, if I was rude" "Could all be separated from my good ideas and power moves"
Women and romance	Women are free to choose the men they want to date	Women are not allowed to date just anyone	"And they would toast to me, oh, let the players play" "I'd be just like Leo in Saint-Tropez"
Women and feelings	Women are free to express their feelings	Women must restrain their feelings	"What's it like to brag about raking in dollars" "And getting bitches and models?" "And it's all good if you're bad" "And it's okay if you're mad"

B. Binary Opposition Reversal

1) Women and Freedom

In a patriarchal society, women are not allowed to choose a lifestyle that suits their wishes. However, Taylor Swift through these lyrics says that every woman has the opportunity to choose her own path in life. The word "Cool" used is also a hope that women will be free to achieve their dreams and hopes without anyone's interference. Therefore, the understanding of women's freedom emphasizes that women are free to choose the lifestyle they want. Women can be whatever they want without having to be faced with the choices made by society.

2) Women and Leadership

Society always assumes that women are not suitable to be leaders. Women are considered not to have leadership qualities like men. This is of course a highlight for Taylor Swift. The lyrics in the song say that women are also capable of being leaders. Apart from that, women are also able to meet the standards of an "alpha type" like a man. Swift said that women can be pioneers, not just men. Men should not control all women, because women are not toys. The lyrics state that women can lead themselves, not just submit to male leadership, as is the dogma embedded in patriarchal society.

3) Women and Desire

In these lyrics, Taylor Swift discusses the gender inequality experienced by women. Women have to try extra, harder than men, if they want to achieve their goals or dreams. In this case, Swift highlights how society plays with double standards when it comes to men. Taylor Swift highlights that women also have the right to get what they want. Women have the same flexibility as men; they can do everything men need to do, and they can express themselves without any restrictions in society.

4) Women and Work

The general view of gender inequality is that men have more advantages in the world of work than women because of applicable laws and social norms. In this case, Taylor Swift highlights how women are considered unable to work just from their clothes. This certainly shouldn't be done because what women wear is different from their ability to do the job. Taylor Swift revealed that women deserve to have equal rights at work.

Women are often prevented from pursuing a career so that it is not difficult to find a husband. This assumption does not seem to allow women to be greater than men. In fact, women who work and get a good quality education can help their household life later. Helping with living expenses in the household and supporting the moral and character education of their children.

5) Women and Love

In a patriarchal society, women are considered bad if they date men who conform to their desires. Taylor Swift through the lyrics of her song describes how she is considered a bad woman just for dating a man younger than her. In this case, women

have the same right to date whoever they want. Women have the right to choose what is best for themselves without interference from others.

6) Women and Feelings

Society's bias towards men also applies to feelings. Women are thought to have to restrain their feelings in order to create a good image in the eyes of other people. Taylor Swift highlighted this as one of the gender gaps between men and women. Women have the right to express their feelings, just like men. **Women have the same flexibility as men; they can do everything men need to do, and they can express themselves without any restrictions in society.**

5. CONCLUSION

7 The song "The Man" by Taylor Swift can be understood as a social critique of the gender inequality and stereotypes that still exist in society, as well as how it sparked an important discussion about the fair treatment of women. By deconstructing the song "The Man" from a feminist perspective, we can deepen our understanding of gender issues that are still relevant and need to be fought for in today's society. In her song entitled "The Man", Taylor Swift describes how stereotypes still exist in society regarding gender inequality. The gender equality voiced by Taylor Swift through her song covers many things such as; freedom to choose a lifestyle, freedom to be a leader, freedom to work without discrimination from the social environment and several other freedoms that are difficult for women to obtain. It can be concluded that woman has the same freedom as a man.

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