

SELF-RELIANCE CHARACTERISTICS IN TAYLOR SWIFT'S SONGS: A STUDY ON LYRICS AND MESSAGES

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Abstract

This research aims to contribute to the exploration of self-reliance by examining the lyrics of Taylor Swift's songs. This research intends to categorizing the data based on the kinds of self-reliance characteristics in Taylor Swift songs' lyrics and describing the contextual meanings which implied in Taylor Swift's songs' lyrics. The data were collected from Taylor Swift's album "Lover", with a focus on three of her songs, including "The Man", "ME!", and "You Need to Calm Down". The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the data, which was obtained by a thorough examination of the lyrics and close listening to the songs. Subsequently, the data was classified according to the self-reliance concept proposed by Ralph Waldo Emerson. The study findings indicate the existence three different characteristics of self-reliance, including trust in oneself, nonconformity and independent thinking. Significantly, the most dominant of these characteristics was nonconformity, it found four lines of lyrics in all song which has examined. The study also identified two lines of lyrics in "The Man" and "ME!" that express true in oneself characteristics, three lines of lyrics in "ME!" and "You Need to Calm Down" that illustrate the independent thinking. The objective of this study is to make contribution to the current discourse on the important of self-reliance in modern society by examining the self-reliance characteristics found in Taylor Swift's songs' lyrics. Furthermore, the result of this study may have implication for the role of music, art and literary work in promoting values such as individualism, self-reliance and nonconformity.

Keywords: Self-reliance, Taylor Swift, Emerson, Songs, Lyrics

INTRODUCTION

Taylor Alison Swift is a renowned singer and musician from the United States, whose music transcends various genres. Her personal experiences have served as the inspiration for much of her music. At the tender age of fourteen, Swift began exploring country music and went on to secure a song-writing contract with Sony/ATV Music Publishing in 2004. At the age of twenty, she achieved the distinction of being the

youngest artist to ever receive the Grammy Award for Album of the Year. In fact, she is considered the most prominent digital artist in the history of music.

Swift is a gifted songwriter who has penned many of her own songs. Her music expresses a range of emotions related to love, heartbreak, family, friends, and even everyday occurrences. Much like poetry, Swift employs music as a medium for conveying her thoughts and feelings. As Somad (2010) pointed out, "poetry is a poet's medium of expression in expressing thoughts or ideas." The lyrics of a song poetic because they evoke feelings, attract attention, generate clear responses, and cause emotion (Pradopo, 2009). Even further, poetry becomes the most profound way for the poet to express their anxiety in responding to a situation. Luxemburg said the "definition of song lyrics or poems could be considered poetry and vice versa" (Luxemburg et al., 1989). Songs are a powerful tool for communication between the songwriter and the listener, revealing real-life and imaginative stories.

Through her music, Taylor Swift offers messages and emotions that resonate deeply with her listeners, whether during live performances, CD plays, or streaming services. One of the themes she explores is that of female self-reliance, which encompasses her own personal journey to success, overcoming insecurities, and gaining independence. In fact, Hurlock (1980) suggests that "Someone who has self-reliance can influence the way of thinking." According to Emerson (1967), self-reliance is a critical characteristic that each individual requires in order to avoid conformity and false consistency. It is essential for individuals to trust their own instincts, beliefs, and ideas rather than conform to societal standards. Women, in particular, require self-reliance because of the patriarchal structures that have often restricted their opportunities and resources for self-sufficiency, making them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. However, as women have battled for equality and liberty, self-reliance has grown more important to their empowerment. Therefore, there was a prominent feminist who advocated for the idea that women should engage in writing. She was H el ene Cixous, she in her book titled *The Laugh of Medusa* states,

"Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal."
(Cixous et al., 1976; Nurrachman, 2019).

This concept emphasized the need for women to write from their own unique experiences and perspectives rather than trying to fit into a male-dominated literary canon.

Taylor Swift, on the other hand, espouses the same objective as Cixous, as defined in her book. Swift expresses her own ideas through song writing as her medium. Her lyrics effectively convey her emotions and experiences, making her a symbol of empowerment and a role model for other women. She has expressed her views regarding the societal norms and expectations imposed on women, as well as her own struggles with self-doubt. Moreover, her music is recognized for promoting the concept of self-reliance, as famously espoused by Ralph Waldo Emerson. In her songs, she critiques societal expectations of women and shares her own struggles with self-doubt. Although her music touches on themes of love, heartbreak, friendship, and self-discovery, it is her portrayal of women's self-reliance that resonates most deeply with her audience.

The objective of this research is to uncover the self-reliance characteristics present in Taylor Swift's album *Lover*. Self-reliance here refers to how Swift achieves success in the music industry, deals with insecurities, and maintains her independence as a woman. "Self-reliance can be defined as the act of having or expressing reliance on one's own ability, decision, knowledge, etc." (Neilson et al., 1935).

METHOD AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The data utilized in this study was obtained from the lyrics of several Taylor Swift's songs contained in *Lover* Album. The songs which will be analyzed were; "ME!", "You Need to Calm Down" and "The Man". The data was chosen because it represents how she became reliant and able to stand by her own. The data were analyzed using a qualitative approach to examine textual documents, as the data contained within are written and do not require statistical analysis. Qualitative research is a methodology that seeks to explore and understand the significance that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human issue (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is a methodology that examines phenomena within their natural context, with the aim of comprehending and interpreting them through the lens of the meanings that individuals attribute to them (Merriam, 2009). In this paper, the data were collected through some steps. First, listening to the songs in Spotify. Second, reading the songs lyric to get the needed information and organizing or gathering data on the issues mentioned in this study.

Third, choosing the data from the song lyric that corresponds to the topic. Last, compile data into datasheets.

This research uses self-reliance concept from Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay with the same title, "Self-Reliance". Emerson explains that real self-reliance necessitates a strong belief in one's own ability. The concept of self-reliance originally arose in American society during the 1800s as the primary theme within the Transcendentalist movement, a philosophical and literary movement. The rise of Transcendentalism can be referred to its response to the Enlightenment movement that placed significant emphasis on the principles of rationalism and empiricism. The Enlightenment movement placed significant emphasis on the principles of rationalism and empiricism, which prioritized the potency of scientific inquiry and logic. Transcendentalists rejected this reliance on logic in favor of intuition and spiritual experience. The transcendentalists certainly believe that each of the souls of individuals is identically related to the world (Rudy, 2019). Transcendentalists believed that acknowledging the intimate connection between God, humans, and nature was necessary for individuals to realize their greatest potential (Quick, 1999). Throughout the 20th century, the idea of self-reliance went through evolution and adjustment in response to changing social and cultural circumstances.

Self-reliance became closely associated with counterculture movement, which emphasized individual freedom and autonomy. Emerson suggests that if everyone relied entirely on themselves, they would fulfill their dreams, hopes, and goals. He suggests that individuals should follow their instincts rather than conform to society standards. Emerson's writings establish a correlation between self-reliance and self-existence, in which the individual is liberated from societal limitations enforced on behavior, and is able to achieve moral insight and growth, finishing in self-actualization (Kelly & Villaire, 2002). Additionally, Larsson states that the concept self-reliance promotes the concept of trusting one's own opinions and moral intuition (Larsson, 2006). Additionally, Emerson emphasizes several characteristics of self-reliance.

- 1) Trust in oneself or individualism. According to Emerson's perspective, the individual has natural introspective capabilities and a limitless potential for self-creation. The phrase "trust thyself" serves as a constant theme in his discourse on individualism. He said,

"Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles."

(Emerson, 1967, p. 59)

The most successful individuals are the ones that have the courage to have trust in themselves and pursue their own paths, regardless of how they diverge from those of others.

- 2) Nonconformity, Emerson believes people should have the courage to think for themselves and follow their own paths, even if it means opposing social norms and conventions. Individuals should focus on doing what they believe to be correct and true rather than thinking about what others think or say about them, he stated,

"It is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude"

(Emerson, 1967, p. 17).

He said that by following in others' footsteps, we limit our own potential and excessively underestimate our abilities. Instead, Emerson urges his readers to create their own paths, create their own pathways, and never be afraid to take risks.

- 3) Independent thinking, Emerson thought that self-reliant people must be able to engage in independent thinking. He argued that individuals should be able to form their own views and values depending on their own encounters and intuition instead of blindly embracing the beliefs of others, and he stated that they should be able to do so utilizing their own experiences. It is stated in his essay which says,

"A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages."

(Emerson, 1967, p. 8).

Moreover, the character of self-reliance, as presented by Emerson, he emphasizes the importance of self-reliance for women. Emerson believes that individuals should follow their instincts and ideas rather than conform to societal expectations, which is important, especially for women who have historically been denied equal opportunities and constrained by social expectations.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION



The concept of female self-reliance has been widespread in popular culture in recent years. From television series to music, different kinds of media have presented women as self-reliant and independent individuals. One of the influential figures in popular culture is Taylor Swift. Analysing Taylor Swift's music reveals that her songs often deal with themes of self-reliance, independence, and empowerment. Her music is a powerful expression of her experiences and perspectives on these issues. Thus, this paper will examine several songs lyrics from Taylor Swift's Lover Album, and the song which will be analyzed were; "ME!", "You Need to Calm Down" and "The Man". From the data obtained in the songs' lyrics, there are seven sentences or stanza that have characteristics of self-reliance.

Data 1:

"I would be complex, I would be cool

They'd say I played the field before I found someone to commit to."

(Swift & Little, 2019)

The first data comes from song The Man and the song lyrics convey a message of nonconformity by suggesting that if she was a man, she would be praised for her complexity and coolness, rather than being judged for playing her romantic story. By highlighting the unfair prejudices and biases that women often encounter in relationships, the lyric urge listeners to celebrate their individuality and resist to social expectations. The phrase "They'd say I played the field before I found someone to commit to" suggest that the singer is aware of the expectations put on her to settle down and commit to a relationship. Nevertheless, she challenges this idea by implying that she would consider that she would explore her options and be complex and cool before committing to someone. In essence, the singer encourages individual to embrace their distinctive qualities, rather than conforming to social norms.

Data 2:

"I'm so sick of running as fast as I can

Wondering if I'd get there quicker if I was 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."

(Swift & Little, 2019)

The lyric from song The Man was classified as trust in oneself characteristics since the singer emphasizes that women treated more harshly than men for their actions and choices. She urges a will to be recognized for her accomplishments and hard work, no matter what she looks like or what gender she is. She shows that she has faith in herself and her own skills by standing up for herself and seeking acknowledgment for her successes.

Moreover, this line is also classified as nonconformity because it reflects how frustrated she is that women frequently experience when encountering gender discrimination and the double standard existed for men and women. she claims that if women were given equal opportunity and respect as men, they would be able to fulfill their goals without encountering prejudice. However, the singer highlights the value of embracing nonconformity and challenging traditional gender roles and expectations. She also encourages people to be proud of their uniqueness and not conform to societies' pressures.

Data 3:

"I promise that you'll never find another like me"

(Swift et al., 2019)

This opening lyrics from song ME! sung by Taylor Swift featuring Brendon Urie of Panic! At The Disco. The line belongs to independent thinking characteristics, the singer expresses confidence by bragging about her unique qualities and making a bold statement that the listener will never discover another person like her. This shows the singer's ability to think independently and to trust her own judgment on her individuality and value since the core of independent thinking is the ability to form opinions and make decisions based on one's own judgement and reasoning. Furthermore, the song gives the impression that the singer is not conforming to the self-doubt, but rather is expressing her confidence in her own capabilities and traits. This is an important aspect of self-reliance because she has a high feeling of confidence.

Data 4:

"I'm the only one of me, baby, that's the fun of me"

(Swift et al., 2019)

This lyric is from me ME!, the line is classifies as trust in oneself characteristics since the singer is expressing a feeling of self-reliance and self-confidence regarding her

unique qualities. The line implies that the singer possesses a sense of simplicity and fulfillment with her personal identity and does not want to stick to social standards or expectations.

Furthermore, the line “I’m the only one of me” connotes a sense of appreciation for one’s unique identity and acknowledges that she is a one-of-a-kind person and the line “that’s the fun of me” reinforces the idea that she realizes her uniqueness as a positive aspect of her personality, rather than a source of insecurity, self-doubt or the lack of confidence.

Data 5:

“Cause one of these things is not like the others

Livin’ in the winter, I am your summer”

(Swift et al., 2019)

The song is from ME! and the lines belong to independent thinking characteristics of self-reliance. In this lyric the singer is using a metaphor to express her individuality and unique qualities. The phrase “one of these things is not like the others” implies that the singer is giving expression that she is not the same as other people or what is often expected. The phrase “livin’ in the winter, I am your summer” implies that the singer offers warmth and brightness to a cold and dark season which characterized as the person she is address.

Data 6:

“And we see you over there on the internet

Comparing all the girls who are killing it

But we figured you out

We all know we all got crowns

You need to calm down.”

(Swift & Antonoff, 2019)

This lyric comes from song You Need to Calm Down, which released in 2019. This lyric is classified as nonconformity characteristics since the singer is addressing someone who is comparing themselves to another women on the internet and encourages them to stop doing it and accept their own worth and value. The phrase “we figured you out” implies that the singer has noticed that the other person is not completely embracing their own individuality and instead she/he is attempting to conform to social expectation of beauty or even the success. The statement “we all know we all got crowns” emphasizes

the concept that each individual has unique talents and abilities that should be praised rather than compared to others.

Moreover, beside including the nonconformity characteristics the lyrics can also be classified as independent thinking characteristics of self-reliance, the singer highlights the prevalence of hate and judgement on the internet and tells listeners not to compare themselves to another. Instead, she considers that all individuals are special and valuable in their own way, and that everyone should always embrace and appreciate the differences. This demonstrates independent thinking because she encourages her audience to consider and value their own uniqueness as rather than comparing themselves to others.

Data 7:

"And I ain't tryna mess with your self-expression.

But I've learned a lesson that stressin' and obsessin' 'bout somebody else is no fun."

(Swift & Antonoff, 2019)

This lyric is the same song as previous data, You Need to Calm Down. This lyric is classified as nonconformity because the singer acknowledges the other person's right to self-expression and does not attempt to get involved with it. However, the singer acknowledges the necessity of focusing on one's own self rather than constantly worrying about what other people are thinking and doing.

The phrase "I've learned a lesson that stressin' and obsessin' 'bout somebody else in no fun" shows the singer's capacity to think independently and establish their own opinions based on their own experiences. They have realized that always worrying about other people can be a source of stress and anxiety, and she has made the decision to prioritize her own self-expression and her well-being instead.

CONCLUSION

Based on the examination of the study and the preceding discourse, multiple conclusions can be made. Firstly, there are nine lines of lyrics that express the key of self-reliance. Out of the seven data that were analyzed, it was found that the songs "The Man" and "ME!" contained two lyrics that have trust in oneself characteristic of self-reliance. Additionally, four across the songs "The Man" and "You Need to Calm Down" expressed characteristic of nonconformity. Furthermore, regarding the third

characteristic, independent thinking, three lyrics were identified: two in “ME!” and one in “You Need to Calm Down”. The research findings indicate that the nonconformity characteristic was the most prevalent type of self-reliance characteristic.

Secondly, it is essential to acknowledge that Taylor Swift believes a similar perspective to that of Emerson with regards to the value of developing self-reliance. The songs she produces represent this theme and convey messages which encourage the cultivation of self-reliance among its audience. Through her songs, she encourages people to embrace their individuality and trust in themselves. Additionally, the influence of her music on the popular culture highlights the value of art or literary work in promoting values such as self-reliance and individualism. It is hoped that through the analysis of these songs, researchers in the future will be inspired to carry out comparable research. The results of this study might also be used as a guide or example by writers of future works on comparable topics. The themes of self-reliance, self-trust, nonconformity, and independent thinking may be further explored by creating a framework for future study, which will also help us learn further about how music and literary work can encourage self-reliance.

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