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**Boys Will Be Boys, Girls Will Be Not Like Other Girls: A Symbolic
Convergence Theory Examination of “Other Girls”**

by

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Abstract

The fandoms of teenage girls have, historically, been ridiculed by the larger part of American society. The popular interests of teenage girls, such as Taylor Swift, *Twilight*, or the Beatles, have been used to invalidate young women across America, reducing them to the idea of “basic”—someone who thinks they are unique but likes mainstream trends, such as wearing leggings and drinking Starbucks. This idea of “basic” reinforces the idea that in order to perform femininity correctly, girls should be unlike other girls without being drastically different. In fact, the phrase “that’s for teenage girls” is a common insult used to shame those who are not teenage girls for liking things like *Twilight* or Taylor Swift. Swift and her fans, Swifties, fulfill this position in an interesting way because fans are perceived to be stereotypical teenage girls and Swift is invalidated as an artist because of it. Using Symbolic Convergence Theory, I analyzed the Tumblr posts of the Taylor Swift fandom to understand what a large group of “other girls” discusses within their group. The rhetorical vision of fans is created through their characterization of Swift and depends on that shared understanding, while also informing the identity of fans themselves. The conversation of fans is not limited to Taylor Swift, though. Instead, fans have used their platform to learn rhetorical analysis, create content, make friendships, interact with Swift, and discuss social issues with their peers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“She’s not like other girls. She’s not clingy and she doesn’t like any of that girly stuff regular girls like.” While this statement is not from anywhere in particular, versions of it are echoed across popular culture. Books and movies centered on this idea have made millions while reinforcing an ingrained trope about women, specifically young women—that they should strive to be unlike other women. Contemporary society has encouraged girls to be unlike other girls by creating the image of the “basic girl,” often referred to as “basic white girl.” According to *Urban Dictionary*, a crowdsourced dictionary for slang words, a basic white girl is defined as

A teenage girl who conforms to all the latest trends, but says they are so different from everyone else. Being white is not required. White girl starter kit: Uggs, Starbucks, Leggings or Yoga Pants; Clothes from Pink, Forever 21, Aeropostale, etc.; Pumpkin Spice, Makeup, Pop music, Mean girls + Pitch Perfect References; iPhone, Every social media created, Squad, etc. (“Basic white girl” (3))

The other definitions on the page are like this one. All refer to different things that basic girls are known for liking, or things that are considered mainstream. Digging further into the term *basic girl* reveals that it is newer slang for what society previously referred to as an *airhead*. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *airhead* was used to refer to “a foolish, unintelligent, or frivolous person; a scatterbrain,” beginning in the early 1970s (“airhead, n.3.”). Further, according to *Wikipedia*, a crowdsourced online encyclopedia, this term was generally used to refer to middle class white women who are perceived to like popular products, trends, or music. *Airhead* transitioned into *basic bitch* in the 2010s (“Airhead”).

However, to say that *basic* originates from *airhead* would be incorrect. The term is now used in place of *airhead*, but *basic* is one of many strong examples of American society taking a word that originates in a marginalized group and repurposing it for their own use. *Basic girl* originated as *basic bitch*, which became a mainstream term after Kreyashawn released the

song “Gucci Gucci” in 2012, in which she sings “Gucci Gucci, Louis Louis, Fendi Fendi, Prada / Basic bitches wear that shit so I don't even bother.” The term *basic bitch* then became understood as liking popular things, specifically things that other women tend to like. However, as Martenzie Johnson wrote for *The Maneater*, this term was used in hip hop culture before it was appropriated by a white person and popular culture (Johnson). According to *Dictionary.com*, comedians Lil Duval and Spoken Reasons popularized the term first in August of 2009 and it meant “a woman who thinks she is cooler, smarter, more independent, more mature, or more attractive than she really is” (Tudury). The article then states that the first *UrbanDictionary* definition was entered soon after in 2009, defining a basic bitch as “a bum-ass woman who think she the shit but really ain't” (Tudury). The term originated with a different meaning and was then appropriated by a white artist and popularized from there, which eventually led to a lot of articles determining where basic bitches came from. Johnson describes this “discovery” as the Christopher Columbus Syndrome, stating “This is what mainstream media does with black culture. There's the moment of discovery even when the discovered has been around the whole time. Whether it's doing the 'Nae Nae' or twerking or calling someone 'basic,' these practices have been a part of black culture long before a white person became aware of them” (Johnson).¹ Basic bitch is one in a long list of terms taken from black culture and re-appropriated for white use, which is clearly demonstrated in the evolution from *basic bitch* to *basic white girl*.

Basic typecasts women into stereotypical, negative terms. Boys will be boys, but girls can never just be girls. Instead, they are taught to be unlike other girls. Recently, I overheard a conversation at a Target Starbucks between a young girl, likely a pre-teen or early teen, and her dad, who looked to be in his mid-forties:

¹ It was difficult to find articles that really even mentioned Lil Duval or Spoken Reasons as early users, most credited it as something that originated in hip hop culture previously.

Girl: “Dad, can I use your phone? I left mine in the car.”

Dad: “What for?”

G: “I just want to take a quick picture.”

D: “Of what? Please don’t tell me you want to take a picture of your drink [a Frappuccino].”

G: “Why?”

D: “It’s just so...basic.” The statement is accompanied by an eye roll.

This conversation shows how people are casually reinforcing the idea that being like other girls is inherently bad, and it begins at an early age. Rather than just letting his daughter do what she wanted, likely in the interest of being able to show it to her friends, this dad implied that it would be annoying and a bad choice to take a photo of her drink. People across the world take photos of their food and post them on social media regularly but taking photos of a Starbucks drink is too far because that is what a basic girl would do.

The terms used to describe “other girls” are generally negative and spread the idea that people who participate in popular trends, music, or products are not considered smart (Nemko). The popular conception is that they are empty-headed and follow the crowd. However, this phenomenon is not generally observed in products or experiences made for men or boys. Products for women or liked by women are assigned less cultural capital² than things perceived to be for or liked by men, which is why going to the Super Bowl, playing Call of Duty, and waiting in line to buy a new Xbox is cool, but going to a Taylor Swift concert, taking a picture of a drink, and wanting to try the Mermaid Frappuccino at Starbucks

² According to *Oxford Reference*, cultural capital is “A term introduced by Pierre Bourdieu to refer to the symbols, ideas, tastes, and preferences that can be strategically used as resources in social action. He sees this cultural capital as a ‘habitus’, an embodied socialized tendency or disposition to act, think, or feel in a particular way. By analogy with economic capital, such resources can be invested and accumulated and can be converted into other forms” (“Cultural Capital – Oxford Reference”).

is generally not. We imagine that Taylor Swift, a major part of the theoretical examination in this study, and Starbucks are popular among only women and young girls, but they are not considered to be “cool” according to male standards, which is the yardstick American society uses to measure coolness.

The entertainment industry thrives on girls who are characterized as “not like” other girls. *The Hunger Games*, both film and book series, center on Katniss Everdeen. She is described as not like other girls, which she acknowledges as she narrates. Instead of working in the home like other girls her age or worrying about her looks, she is in the woods hunting with her male best friend (*The Hunger Games*). Katniss is neither clingy nor emotional—she actively avoids romantic entanglements. She has no interest in having children and admits in the epilogue of the series that she didn’t want children but her husband, Peeta, had “pined for them” (*Mockingjay*). *Twilight*, which was widely loved by young women across America, features a main character who has a clear disdain for things that are “girly” and goes out of her way to avoid them. Even *Harry Potter* touts Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley as characters unlike other women, which Ron Weasley and Harry Potter both appreciate, even though their main qualities (intelligence and courage) are qualities found in many girls. Hermione and Ginny receive approval from Harry and Ron because they are not focused on boys and relationships, which makes them unlike other girls in the school. This trope easily slips into reinforcing the idea that “other girls” are inherently inferior to girls who are not like other girls.

Telling a woman that she is not like other women is not a compliment. It is commentary on how American society feels about what women like, or how their personalities are perceived and stereotyped. But if women are taught to strive to be unlike other women, who are these mysterious other girls? Why are they so bad? What have they done to deserve this treatment?

The answer to this is teenage girls. American society’s view of women—and particularly young women—based on what they like, is generally negative. For example, *Marvel* movies hold more cultural capital than *Twilight*, even though both have been widely popular. Men and women alike can line up to see the newest *Avengers* movie, but men like Noel Ransome will go to movies deemed as “female” under the guise of being dragged by their girlfriends or other female person in their life, which he discusses in his article “Is It Safe Yet to Admit I Liked the Twilight Movies?” Those, combined with romantic comedies, are said to give women unrealistic expectations of men and relationships.³ However, one area of popular culture is especially looked down upon by most demographics: teenage girl interests. It is important to note that the scope of this study focuses mostly on a stereotypical white teenage girl. Although the formative teenage years of girls of color are important and worth studying, a common misconception of Taylor Swift fans, who form the basis for the theoretical examination in this study, is that they are white teenage girls. For example, Twitter user @blakelvley posted in early 2019, “Literally ALL of Taylor Swift’s fans are white entitled teenage girls and it shows” (aria). Due to this, the girlhood referred to in this study generally focuses on that of white teenage girls.

Teenage girls are catty (*A Cinderella Story*), cliquey (*Mean Girls*), annoying (*Twilight*), basic (*Clueless*), sensitive (*The Kissing Booth*), emotional (*The Last Song*), vain (*Sydney White*), moody (*The Breakfast Club*), dumb (*She’s the Man*), promiscuous (*Easy A*), prudish (*To All The Boys I’ve Loved Before*), dramatic (*High School Musical*), manipulative (*Sierra Burgess is a Loser*), hysterical (*Footloose*), and more.⁴ Generally, the main female character is shown to be different from these characteristics or praised by others in the story for being unlike

³ Googling “romantic comedy gives unrealistic expectations” brings up 513,000 results.

⁴ Curated from my vast knowledge of movies featuring teenage girls because a Google search brings up characteristics of teenagers in general, no matter how many ways I type “character traits associated with teenage girls.”

other girls. However, media representations do this subliminally by presenting the “other” teenage girls as someone not to be like—generally the villain, annoyance, sidekick, or occasional comic relief. Teenage girls, and their interests, are regarded as annoying, which invalidates them. Even though teenage girls are a breeding ground for pop culture trends, the things they like are generally not well-received.⁵ *Twilight* made millions and while it might not be a benchmark of great literature, it was important in American culture because it was so popular with teenage girls⁶ and people were noticing that.⁷ Another example is One Direction, a British boyband who found their fame on *The X Factor*. Before the band’s “hiatus”⁸ in 2015, they were extremely popular in American culture with younger girls (Bromley and Vulpo). Their music was poppy, catchy, and fun. However, the general population looked down on the boyband, stating that they would never be as big or as good as the Beatles.⁹ Now, as solo artists, people are posting about how the members are “actually quite talented,” a fact that young women have known for years but no one wanted to acknowledge (Eloy). The issue at hand here is not whether society invalidates the opinions and intelligence of young women in America, but rather how it happens. Society has created the image of a mythical teenage girl—someone who is emotional, unintelligent, and unable to form valid opinions. Young girls are often sexualized, leading to jokes from men about the legality of a possible sexual partner. When I first started researching, I often searched the term “teenage girls” on Twitter and would encounter multiple pornography accounts posting about videos featuring “teenage girls.” I also found a larger conversation supporting the point

⁵ These are the “guilty pleasures” of many adults.

⁶ *Twilight* was the first book that my female friends gushed about, although many of my group were also into *Harry Potter*. Funnily enough, a young woman in my high school copped to liking *Twilight* but didn’t admit she liked *Harry Potter* until years after we graduated.

⁷ The Wikipedia page for *Twilight* fans states that the large number of female fans caused the older generation of men believe that “*Twilight* ruined comic-con” (“*Twilight* fandom”).

⁸ Read: breakup.

⁹ Marsha Albet was just 14 years old when she kicked off Beatlemania in the United States (Arak).

here—people are discussing the invalidation of teenage girls, recognizing it, and questioning why it has been happening.

Teenage Girls in “Crisis”

The idea of the “other girl” and “basic girls” is perpetuated regularly in our society. The invalidation of teenage girls, however, is not new. In *From the Dance Hall to Facebook: Teen Girls, Mass Media, and Moral Panic in the United States, 1905-2010*, Shayla Thiel-Stern explains how journalistic practices in the United States have historically pushed young women’s voices to the margins of society. If they are quoted in a news story, it is to show them in a negative light, such as foolish or naïve (2). Because journalistic practices generally quote verbatim, including youth slang and an accent or word choice that denotes her race or class, which creates and supports a grand narrative of teenage girls that portrays them negatively and as insignificant characters in terms of their contributions to discourse and society (2). Thiel-Stern argues that certain narratives about teenage girls have positioned them into a constant state of crisis, which can be elevated to moral panic. Thiel-Stern believes, “This is usually a gendered, exaggerated crisis that depends on certain journalistic devices and, in many cases, on the advocacy of experts and authorities whose personal agenda (whether rooted in religion, ethics, politics, economics, personal duty, or occupation) relies on either the preservation of this crisis or its elevation to panic” (12). Other members of society benefit from holding teenage girls in a state of crisis, but it has created a social understanding of young girls that regards them as foolish, hysterical, naïve, and other.

From the Dance Hall to Facebook looks at five instances of young girls performing in a public space, including dance halls and social reform, teenage girls playing “sports of strife” and the perceived problems it created, public demonstration of sexuality and its links to juvenile delinquency during the height of Elvis, the physical rebellion of punk rock teen

girls and the concern that it could lead to moral decay and young women being unable to conform to normal standards of femininity later in life, and, lastly, teen girls' use of social media and the fear that it led to girls claiming excessive sexual agency or being at risk for predation online (12-13). Thiel-Stern states that characterization of young women through these alleged crises were not created solely by the media, but rather it is the fault of the dominant culture in the United States (15). Girls, and females in general, are criticized for straying away from the normalized ideal of feminine because they are not following the ideology that we, as a society, subscribe to (16). Thiel-Stern argues that the five historical snapshots of a large group of teenage girls behaving "incorrectly" have not led to a real moral panic because the media coverage of "deviance" has not reached levels that scholars would define as a true panic (16).

These five crises were fed by the media to maintain power and the social construction of reality embedded with patriarchal ideas (16). The study of historical discrimination against girls and women has led Thiel-Stern to argue that media narratives indicate crisis when girls are not performing femininity to the standards of the dominant discourse (14-17). Thiel-Stern writes,

In the historical snapshots discussed in this book, although the mass media has represented teen girls in something of a constantly cycling historical crisis of whose victim in its coverage, they are not committing crimes but rather enjoying their leisure and experiencing recreation by dancing, running, listening to music, attending live events, and using the Internet to communicate with the world. The fact that these somewhat benign (but public) pursuits were covered so problematically by the mass media solidifies the point that the teen girl is a troubling cultural figure. She is criticized for looking too pretty or sexy or young (all characterizations foisted on her, even though they are also cultural expectations associated with the performance of gender) or seeming too masculine, unladylike—and in both cases she invites trouble. Society is conditioned to see her as a victim who must be policed and saved, and this is the dominant narrative told by a variety of American media from the early twentieth century to contemporary society. (17)

The invalidation of girls by continually placing them in a state of crisis led to a wider narrative that girls are unable to think for themselves. She is either a victim or the villain; she is not smart enough to enjoy something for the sake of enjoying it (17). Rather, the common perception of these girls are people so enraptured by their experiences that, when they no longer perform the societal expectation of girlhood, they are inviting trouble. The dominant narrative of girls then becomes one of vulnerability and invalidation. Girls are not allowed to become too interested in any one subject because it comes from a place of vapidness—they are mindless, unable to form a valid opinion. We must police girls, save them, from their experiences, putting girls in the space of other (17).

Girls have multitudes of societal expectations placed on them and must walk the line of being feminine but not *too* feminine,¹⁰ smart but not *too* smart,¹¹ emotional but not *too* emotional,¹² attractive but unaware,¹³ and more. Girlhood becomes a precarious balancing act in which girls explore their interests without showing that they are too invested in them. Girls must learn to navigate their social sphere while also learning how to manage their interests with their perceived interests—the things they are supposed to like. These demands create a tumultuous time in which girls need to constantly assess how they are supposed to feel about a certain topic to present the correct image. Girls who emote exactly what they are feeling are like the girls described in Thiel-Stern’s book—they are not displaying the proper attributes of femininity prescribed to them.¹⁴

¹⁰ Read: basic

¹¹ Read: nerd

¹² Read: hysterical

¹³ Read: conceited

¹⁴ As an adult, it is much easier for me to express my likes and dislikes to people. As a high school student (2006-2010), the social landscape was so much harder to navigate. It was cool to love *Twilight*, but I was supposed to like it more than *Harry Potter*. I was on the golf team, which I loved, but I knew I couldn’t talk about it like it was actually cool (golf is *not* cool to high schoolers). Further, I loved *Hannah Montana*, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, and other Disney shows but was too old for it to be “cool,” so I learned to describe my interests as guilty pleasures rather than actual interests.

Girlhood is not a singular experience. Girls experience different girlhoods, varied by class, race, nationality, generation, regionality, sexual identity, and so on (18). According to Thiel-Stern, “The mass media in the United States often does represent primarily either the white middle- to upper-class girlhood or the girlhood of those who need to be ‘saved’, which during the Progressive era were immigrant and working-class girls. This makes that type of teen girl seem ‘normalized,’ further marginalizing girls of color and lower socioeconomic means and placing them in the position of ‘Others’” (18). Thiel-Stern further explains that she is making a deliberate choice by using the term *teenage girl*, rather than *adolescent* or *young woman*, because it conjures a specific image for most audiences and by constructing that image, along with limiting the age range to 13-19-year-old girls, she can examine how society constructs that image of the teenage girl (19). Thiel-Stern’s book illustrates how the conversation surrounding teenage girls and their interests is sexist and creates an environment of social invalidation for teenage girls in America.

As Thiel-Stern writes, girlhood is different for girls across the world. The stereotypical teenage girl I have mentioned is often white and middle- to upper-class. White girls are often afforded the presumption of innocence and protection but, according to “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhoods,” a 2017 *Georgetown Law* study by Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia J. Blake, and Thalia Gonzalez, black girls are not afforded those same presumptions. Epstein et al. find that black girls are adultified earlier, starting at five years old. The perception of black girls is that they need less nurturing and protection, and they know more about sex and adult topics (4). Further, because of culturally rooted fantasies of black girls’ sexualization, black girls are sexualized at an earlier age than white girls (5). Black children are assumed to be older, which means they are not afforded the same learning curve as white children, and they are unable to make mistakes at lowered

consequences (6). Epstein et al. find that they are perceived to be more mature and self-reliant than their male counterparts, which leads to the girls' being considered more adult-like. Black girls may also be considered aggressively feminine due to adultification, which may lead to teachers' justifying the restriction of black girls' questions in the classroom (10-11). Epstein et al. cite a study by Monique W. Morris, titled "Push Out: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools," in which Morris describes a teacher's response to a black girl's question. The teacher states, "you already know that; you are just asking to get attention" (11). The adultification of black girls has many repercussions regarding their social and educational environments, as well as how they navigate their interests. Taylor Swift's fans are stereotyped not just as teenage girls, but as white teenage girls, regardless of the reality. The adultification of black girls, and the girlhoods of other non-stereotypical teenage girls, is important but beyond the scope of this study.

In the last chapter of her book, Shayla Thiel-Stern looks at teenage girls' habits online, specifically on Facebook. Thiel-Stern writes that the accessibility of the internet has empowered girls to question the hegemonic representations of gender, represent themselves in their own way, and produce and publish their own content (Thiel-Stern 151). Historically, girls have always been the *represented* in popular media, and the internet was their first change to be the *representors* and become content creators (152). Thiel-Stern cites a Pew study, writing "According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 64 percent of online U.S. teenagers ages twelve to seventeen engage in at least one type of content creation—writing a blog, creating online videos, posting photos and other visual content—and adolescent girls are far more likely to participate in content creation online than boys" (152). However, girls online are generally represented as engaging in enacting sex online rather than as content creators (152). Teenage girls are often represented as victims of sexual

predators and cyberbullying, as well as being the perpetrators of cyberbullying (165). Thiel-Stern argues that cyberbullying is a gendered discourse because although both teen boys and girls were found guilty of cyberbullying another teen girl, causing her to commit suicide, the mention of the boys' involvement was always secondary (165). Teenage girls online are rarely interviewed and are, instead, talked about (171). According to Thiel-Stern, there is a clear disconnect between what girls are actually doing online and what they are perceived to be doing online. Even though girls see the internet as a place for "making connections, communicating, articulating identity, and creating and distributing their own media," the mass media and general public continue perpetuate a narrative of teenage girls as victims (172). This victimization of girls leads to the devaluation of their intelligence and opinions.

Using the lens of Taylor Swift, former American teenage girl and most successful crossover artist in country music history (Harris), and her fans, I examine a group that has been regularly undermined by society to understand what they are discussing in their online conversations through the perspective symbolic convergence theory. I have found that Taylor Swift fans, a group of online content creators, come in all ages, races, shapes, and sizes. I have chosen this group because Taylor Swift fans are generally understood to be stereotypical white teenage girls, a group that has historically been placed in a state of constant crisis and whose interests are regularly insulted by much of the population. I aimed to examine their conversations and determine what they are talking about. I found that not only are fans having conversations about Taylor Swift, which include a general appreciation for the popstar, rhetorical analysis of lyrics, images, statements, and music videos; and exploring the idea and implications of narratives, they are also discussing social issues such as body positivity and race.

Chapter 2: Symbolic Convergence Theory

Ernest G. Bormann, John F. Cragan, and Donald C. Shields' 2001 "Three Decades of Developing, Grounding, and Using Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT)" explains how groups work to create a shared idea system among their members. SCT describes how groups create a sense of cohesion among members through the sharing of narrative(s), which SCT refers to as fantasies. The sharing of these fantasies creates a group consciousness or shared reality through a common understanding of context provided by meanings, emotions, values, and motives of characters involved. First developed and proposed by Ernest Bormann in 1972, SCT is a communication theory. SCT posits that groups have shared fantasies that form a shared rhetorical vision, created through communication in a public sharing space (Bormann 290). The article was published in *Communication Yearbook* in 2001 in order to highlight its concepts, depict its utility, and synthesize the answers to its major criticisms.

Rhetorical Vision

A rhetorical vision is a common symbolic reality shared by members of a group (Bormann et al. 285). A rhetorical vision spurs its participants to action through the creation of a group consciousness, in which the participants learn which actions to take in order to fulfill the group's purpose. The four main parts of a rhetorical vision are characters (*dramatis personae*), actions (plot lines), setting (scene), and legitimizer (sanctioning agent) (285). According to "The Use of Symbolic Convergence Theory: A Case Study" by John F. Cragan and Daniel C. Shields, the *dramatis personae* are the people who create and bring the story to life, attributing qualities to the characters or placing them in a scene, including heroic, villainous, and supporting actors (Cragan and Shields). A shared rhetorical vision creates a common ground for group members and through characterization, plotlines, settings, and legitimizers, groups create a reality for themselves.

Rhetorical visions are built on fantasy, which in SCT defines as a “dramatizing message that depicts characters engaged in action in a setting that accounts for and explains human action” (Bormann et al. 282). According to SCT, group members use a fantasy to explain one single instance and combine many fantasies to create a whole rhetorical vision. A fantasy is a short narrative of an event or interaction, which means many smaller narratives combine to create one overarching narrative—the rhetorical vision—of a group. Within one group consciousness, the whole rhetorical vision can splinter slightly between each member because, with each new fantasy, every member can explain or interpret an event differently. Humans have a need to understand why something happens and are often found searching for the way to make sense of their experiences and to provide a suitable explanation for something that happened in real life.

A shared rhetorical vision can be as simple or as complicated as needed, which is determined by the people involved in it. The rhetorical vision is what groups use to motivate others and explain their purpose. The rhetorical vision I will be examining is the persona of Taylor Swift as understood by her fans, as well as the media.¹⁵ I believe it is important to use Taylor Swift as the cultural artifact *because* she started her career as a teenage girl.¹⁶ Swift’s validity as an artist was regularly questioned when she first started in country music because many believed it unlikely that she wrote her own songs. Rather than believing Swift was the

¹⁵ Taylor Swift’s relationship with critics and publications like *Time* and *People* magazine are generally positive. In this study, the entity referred to as “the media” refers to sites such as *TMZ*, *Buzzfeed*, and other similar sites. These sites are entertainment-based and often feature clickbait/tabloid media, which thrives on divisive and sometimes misleading headlines, think pieces, and any other method that will convince readers to click through to their article.

¹⁶ Swift started writing songs when she was a child and, at the age of 12, when her parents realized she was serious about her career, they moved to Nashville. Swift said before the move, she and her mother would take trips from Pennsylvania to Nashville and Swift would walk into record companies and give them demos of her singing Dolly Parton and Dixie Chicks songs and tell them “Hi, I’m Taylor, I’m 11, and I want a record deal” (“Taylor Swift: Road to Reputation”). Swift signed a record deal with Big Machine Records at the age of 14 when Scott Borchetta, owner, contacted her at the Bluebird Café in Nashville and wanted her on his label, telling Swift she would write her own songs. Swift described the experience of putting her first album out and traveling to radio stations across the country, begging radio DJs to put her on air, and, according to Swift, it worked (“Taylor Swift: Road to Reputation”).

catalyst for her art, she was relegated to the position of showpiece. Further, Swift's career highlights the differences in how Americans value the opinions of men over the opinions of women, and even further devalue the opinions of young women. Swift has been publicly shamed for her relationships, while men of her same status are praised for theirs. Oftentimes, it is said that Swift's music is for teenage girls, meaning it focuses on relationships, crushes, and other "insignificant" topics, because the perception is that her fanbase is young and female. For example, *Marie Claire* tweeted a link to an article and wrote "Why Is The Weeknd Praised for Singing About His Exes When Taylor Swift Is Punished for It?" (*Marie Claire*). Twitter user @OGRod retweeted with a quote and answered, "Cause Taylor Swift 30 still making music for teenage girls with acne" (Rod).¹⁷

Taylor Swift is unusually substantial as an artist and, in her 13th year, her public persona has gone through many iterations, which means the rhetorical vision Swifties¹⁸ created has adapted through each version of Swift. Swift is known for each album cycle being a new experience and openly changes her style, both publicly and musically. Swift's changing style is reminiscent of David Bowie and Madonna —artists who have used stylistic and musical changes to their advantage. Their careers can be bookmarked by the different styles, similar to how Swift's fans understand Swift's narrative¹⁹ through album cycles. Her fans regularly compare images of her through the years with her quote, "I'll never change, but I'll never stay the same either" (flyawayswift). Most importantly, though, I have chosen

¹⁷ For the record, Taylor Swift was born December 13, 1989. The Weeknd (Abel Tesfaye) was born on February 16, 1990.

¹⁸ The official name for fans of Taylor Swift.

¹⁹ The idea of "narrative" has become a common signal phrase in the Swiftie fandom. It became common in 2017, when Swift released her album, *reputation*. Swifties use the term *narrative* or *taking back the narrative* to acknowledge Swift's refusal to participate in the public perception of her, in which she was characterized as a lying, inauthentic, man-eating, greedy celebrity who uses ex-boyfriends and feuds to play the victim and write songs about it. Swift stopped giving interviews and released an album without ever speaking about her reputation, instead focusing on her interactions with her fans. By refusing to engage with the media sites who had characterized her negatively, Swifties believed that Swift was taking back the narrative of her autonomy, career, persona, body, and image through control of her public interactions.

Swift because multitudes of conversations occur about her at any given time. Swift's fame is at a level most will not achieve—even when she is out of the public eye, people ask where Swift was.²⁰ Most celebrities can drop off the radar with little to no media coverage, but Swift cannot. Fans of Taylor Swift also work hard to predict where Swift is or what she is working on and, after six albums, it has become a game for her fanbase.

Using Symbolic Convergence Theory, I will describe how Taylor Swift has been understood by fantasizers, specifically the Swifties, throughout the eras and has directly interacted with the rhetorical vision Swifties have created. Swift is a crossover popstar who has achieved fame and financial success in her music career. Her debut album *Taylor Swift* sold 40,000 copies in its first week in 2006 (“Hannah Montana”). Since then, Swift is the only artist to have four albums sell one million copies in their first week (McIntyre). Hugh McIntyre in *Forbes* writes, “Only three other acts have been able to move at least a million copies of more than one title. Eminem, ‘Nsync, and the Backstreet Boys are up there with Swift in at least [this] one regard,” (McIntyre). Swift is the only female artist, and the newest artist, to have accomplished this feat. According to *Billboard*, Swift's most recent album, *reputation*, sold 1.2 million copies in its first week, and outsold the highest selling album of 2017 in its first week, making it her fourth album to sell a million copies in its first week (Caulfield). *Forbes* reported that, in its first week, *reputation* outsold the other 199 albums on the Billboard 200 chart combined (Hodak). Swift's album was released in November of 2017 and, in an industry whose economics are based on streaming, pure sales is an accomplishment. With this level of fame and success, most people in the United States have

²⁰ In 2017, many posited that Taylor Swift could travel unseen by hiding in a suitcase after photos of bodyguards lifting a suitcase into a car outside Swift's apartment were released. *Buzzfeed* staff member Lauren Yapalater published an article titled “A Deeper Investigation Into Whether Taylor Swift Was Hiding In That Giant Suitcase Or Not” in July 2017.

some familiarity with Taylor Swift. Her media exposure in recent years has led to a divide of those who love Taylor Swift and those who hate her.

Along with her commercial success, Swift has won numerous awards: as of early 2019, she has won 310 awards in her career and has been nominated for 394 (“List of awards and nominations received by Taylor Swift”). Swift has received 10 GRAMMY awards and is the youngest winner for their Album of the Year for *Fearless*. She was the first woman to win Album of the Year at the GRAMMYs twice when she received the award a second time in 2016 (“List of awards and nominations received by Taylor Swift”). Swift was also awarded *Billboard’s* Woman of the Year twice. BMI created an award and named it after Taylor Swift to recognize her talent and influence on music, pop culture, and artistry. This is the second time BMI has created an award named for artist; the first was awarded to Michael Jackson in 1990 (“BMI to Honor”). The “Critical Reception” portion of each *Wikipedia* page for Swift’s albums indicates that all six have received “generally positive reviews” from critics.

Taylor Swift’s evolution as a musician has generally been received positively both commercially and critically, which supports Swifties’ overall rhetorical vision. Notably, Rob Sheffield of *Rolling Stone* writes,

Sister Tay may be the last true rock star on the planet, making brilliant moves (or catastrophic gaffes, because that’s what rock stars do). These are the songs that sum up her wit, her empathy, her flair for emotional excess, her girls-to-the-front bravado, her urge to ransack every corner of pop history, her determination to turn any chorus into a ridiculous spectacle. So let’s step back from the image and pay homage to her one-of-a-kind songbook – because the weirdest and most fascinating thing about Taylor Swift will always be her music. (Sheffield)

Sheffield’s commentary on Swift is a refreshing change from most coverage. Popular coverage of Swift’s music tends to focus on which ex-boyfriend the songs are about, in order to garner clicks, which Swifties disagree with in their rhetorical vision of Swift. Swift’s early reputation as a songwriter who was not afraid to be truthful about her breakups started the

conversation, but the perpetuation of that message ignores the fact that she is a talented songwriter and has a knack for knowing what will succeed on radio play. When looking at Swift's catalogue, it is fair to say that the singles she releases to radio are repetitive and seemingly trivial in nature. Her albums, however, are often home to songs that encompass deeper messages and lyrics. This juxtaposition illustrates how Swift can shrewdly decide what to present to the public because she has a strong sense of what will sell.²¹

For many years, Swifties and the media seemed to have a similar idea of who Taylor Swift was. However, that shared vision has slowly split apart because, in recent years, Swift's crafted public persona has stirred a divisive debate online. In 2016, Swift was involved in a public conflict with rapper Kanye West, which led to less reliable celebrity media sites and the general public alleging that Swift had lied to the public and her image as a "nice girl" was fake. Detractors started an online hashtag stating that Taylor Swift's career was over. Her fans disagreed, which caused a splintering of the rhetorical vision of Taylor Swift. Her "America's Sweetheart" veneer cracked, and the media began to uncover what they called the

²¹ Although Swift's team is likely part of this decision, Swift has the final say in what is released. Before the release of *1989*, Swift's team questioned her decision to cross over into pop music at many points. In an interview with *Billboard*, Swift stated,

When I knew the album had hit its stride, I went to Scott Borchetta and said, 'I have to be honest with you: I did not make a country album. I did not make any semblance of a country album.' And of course he went into a state of semi-panic and went through all the stages of grief—the pleading, the denial. 'Can you give me three country songs? Can we put a fiddle on 'Shake it Off?'' And all my answers were a very firm 'no,' because it felt disingenuous to try to exploit two genres when your album falls in only one. I never want to pull the wool over people's eyes, because people are so much smarter than a lot of marketing professionals give them credit for. (Light)

Swift added that what was most difficult was

Convincing members of my team that [the pop move] was a good call. People seem to love the album, and we're all high-fiving each other, but I remember all the sit-downs in the conference rooms, where I would get kind of called in front of a group of people who have worked with me for years. They said, 'Are you really sure you want to do this? Are you sure you want to call the album *1989*? We think it's a weird title. Are you sure you want to put an album cover out that has less than half of your face on it? Are you positive that you want to take a genre that you cemented yourself in, and switch to one that you are a newcomer to?' And answering all of those questions with 'Yes, I'm sure' really frustrated me at the time—like, 'Guys, don't you understand, this is what I'm dying to do?' The biggest struggle turned into the biggest triumph when it worked out. (Light)

Though some people may doubt the truthfulness of Swift's input, this interview supports the idea that Swift is in control of her musical catalogue and what she releases.

“true” Taylor Swift—the cold, calculating reality that lies underneath her girl-next-door image.

Taylor Swift has experienced invalidation as a teenage girl and is now invalidated as an artist or civic voice because her fanbase is considered to be teenage girls. Regardless of how the media feels about her, Swift’s existence in popular culture has done two notable things: 1. Highlighted how society feels about successful young women²² and 2. Created a

²² Taylor Swift has filled both the position of “other girl” and “unlike other girls” throughout her time in the public. In the *You Belong with Me* music video, Swift literally fills both roles. She plays the part of the nerdy, glasses-wearing, clarinet player in the marching band who pines after her next-door neighbor. Nerdy Taylor maintains that the boy should see that she’s the one for him, not his current girlfriend—a brunette cheerleader who eventually is caught flirting with other boys (*You Belong with Me*). Swift has painted herself in both roles in this video, but in many of her songs it is easy to see her striving to also become “unlike other girls,” especially early on in her career.

Swift’s debut album, *Taylor Swift*, doesn’t touch on this as much. Instead, “A Place in this World” and “The Outside” speak to her experience as an outsider looking for somewhere to belong. “Teardrops on my Guitar” describes her struggle with unrequited love while “Tied Together with a Smile” was written for a girl who struggled with an eating disorder. Swift addressed this in a 2007 interview, stating “There’s one on the album called ‘Tied Together with a Smile’ that I wrote about one of my friends, who is this beauty queen, pageant princess — a gorgeous, popular girl in high school. Every guy wanted to be with her, every girl wanted to be her. I wrote that song the day I found out she had an eating disorder.” (Willman). In the same interview, Swift states that when she turns 18, “I may do something crazy, like go out and vote or something” (Willman). Swift explains that she has never been a “party girl” and noted that popular girls start partying at a young age, and she’s more of a laid-back person who would rather be writing a song or doing something productive for her career (Willman). Swift, at age 17, paints herself as unlike other girls. By “othering” herself, Swift participated in a rhetorical strategy used in many places and is an effective way of painting a person in a more desirable light. Swift attempts to paint herself as a role model here, rather than a party girl. She is not a typical teenage girl, she is responsible—she thinks before she acts, considering the ramifications her actions have on the young girls at her shows.

Although Swift found success in her debut, she still felt the need to distance herself from the so-called “other girls.” An article in *The Boston Globe* characterizes Swift as different from others who are currently on the scene, stating “Youth, it turns out, is the rising country star’s greatest asset. But it’s her knack for dissecting it so honestly that separates her from the pack of teenage starlets who rely on big-name producers, songwriters, and Disney shows for a music career” (Reed). She was cast as different from other young, ambitious, teen girls specifically. Contemporaries such as Selena Gomez, Miley Cyrus, and Demi Lovato were also on their track to fame, but were promoted through their television shows and musical careers with Disney.

Swift continues to do this into her *Fearless* era. In “Hey Stephen,” she sings “All those other girls, well, they’re beautiful / But would they write a song for you?” (“Hey Stephen”). Swift paints herself as unlike other girls by highlighting her unique talents. In the song “Fifteen,” Swift and her best friend Abigail “laugh at other girls who think they’re so cool” (“Fifteen”). At 19, Swift gave an interview with *The Boot* and paints herself as unlike other girls when it comes to relationships: “I’m not typically the girl that dates a lot of guys or is in relationships a lot. Most of my life I’ve been single. If I meet somebody who’s great, I’ll make an exception, but I’m really happy being alone. I’m happy being single. I don’t feel a sense of emptiness if I don’t have a boyfriend” (Newman). One of the many complaints about teenage girls is they are clingy and boy-crazy and, Swift attempts to paint herself as unlike that. Another notable aspect of Swift’s career as a young female artist is that after the success of *Fearless*, the most awarded album in country music history, her efforts as a songwriter were doubted. According to Swift, people doubted that she could have “held my [Swift’s] weight in the writing room” (“Taylor Swift: Road to Reputation”).

platform for people society considers to be young women, also known her fans—the (in)famous Swifties. I have chosen Tumblr, the popular blogging site, because it is home to a wide array of Swifties. Although Swifties are likely on every social media site, Tumblr is home to dedicated Swifties and gives them more posting options. Twitter limits to responding in 280 characters or retweeting. Tumblr does not have a word limit, but rather limits their posts at 250 per day. The post options also come in a wider variety, offering photo, gif, link, chat, audio, video, text, and quote. Tumblr’s “Ask” feature also makes the platform a better option for Swifties. It has been a part of the blogging site longer than the chat function, allowing fans to ask questions on other blogs and wait for the response to be published. Tumblr also makes it easier to track tags and the tagging feature is used as a way to continue the conversation without adding further content to the post itself. Oftentimes, Swifties will reblog a post and in the tags write that they agree, disagree, or any other commentary they would like to make. Although this is doable on Twitter, it is much more user-friendly on Tumblr.

Swifties’ rhetorical vision of Swift is combined of many smaller narratives. For example, each album cycle tells a two-year story of Swift, which all combine to create the

The importance of being unlike other girls doesn’t seem to continue into Swift’s third era, *Speak Now*, which was released when she was 20 years old. Her interviews were focused more on her album, touring, and her writing process. Swift is quoted in *Billboard*, stating, “‘It’s very weird,’ she says of the nuptial undercurrent in her work. ‘I’m not really that girl who dreams about her wedding day. It just seems like the idealistic, happy-ever-after [moment],’” (Roland). While this does echo the theme of being unlike other girls, the proclamation isn’t as powerful as it is in Swift’s past eras. Swift had already carved out a niche for herself as unlike other girls, but at this time Swift was nearly 21. Swift doesn’t need to be unlike other girls because at this stage, she is no longer a “girl.”

Two years later, during promotion for *Red*, Swift was described as “a humble and surprisingly normal girl, who has crushes, falls in love, gets her heart broken... and writes No. 1 songs about it” (Hensel). Here, she is painted as a humble and normal rather than different. At this point in Swift’s fame, it is more important for her to uphold her image of girl-next-door. Throughout her eras, she has consistently maintained her image as a nice girl and her fans are getting a glimpse into her diary. Even though Hensel is in on the joke and knows that Swift is famous for writing chart-topping hits about her ex-boyfriends, she still manages to maintain a semblance of normalcy in her life. During *1989*, Swift’s characterization strayed further from being unlike other girls. Instead, I would argue that Swift embraced “basic,” which made sense because she also embraced the pop genre and released her first official pop album, and pop music is often heavily linked to basic girls.

narrative of Swift's 13-year career. Swifties describe this as Swift's evolution from bold, determined 14-year-old writing songs for her first album, to Swift now, a strong, confident role model who teaches girls to be unafraid to be themselves. The narratives of her failed relationships led Swift to a real love in 2016, something that Swifties' acknowledged Swift was looking for in their rhetorical vision. Further, Swifties emphasize their rhetorical vision through Swift's narrative with her fans. This aspect, which creates a shared belief that Swift is dedicated to her fanbase, has never wavered. Fans often discuss how Swift has always spent hours with fans, starting with her debut album. This rhetorical vision is built through basic concepts, structural concepts, and five stages that describe the life cycle of a rhetorical vision.

Taylor Swift & “The Gendered Carnival of Pop”

I considered multiple fandoms, including Twihards (*Twilight*) and Directioners (One Direction), before choosing Swifties. Directioners are an interesting fanbase because they have accomplished many fan projects, such as Rainbow Direction, which aimed to show support for LGBT+ Directions, and charity drives for band members' birthdays, along with many more (“One Direction Fan Projects”). Although the band is on an indefinite hiatus, fans are still active online. Now that the artists are pursuing solo careers, there is further conversation about the band members themselves and people who had discredited One Direction previously are writing that they are actually, surprisingly, talented.²³ *Twilight* was another choice because it captured the attention of young girls and held it. The mass excitement surrounding *Twilight* was one I had never seen before and was the instance where girls in my age group were passionate about an artifact as a group. However, I have chosen

²³ A Twitter user posted, “Holy shit. This Harry Styles Bloke is actually quite talented for being a refugee puppet from 1Direction And he artistic to boot. Bravo sir.” (eloy)

Swifties because Taylor Swift is still an active artist and her fanbase is extremely active online.

Pop music was a sphere that I wanted to explore because it has historically been relegated as a feminine space, while the rock genre is masculine. In the 2001 article “The Gendered Carnival of Pop,” Diane Railton argues that although rock culture is not high culture, it was linked to the Avant Garde/bohemian internal critique of high culture, which made it distinctly anti-family and anti-woman, and further meant that rock had to distinguish itself from low culture, which was pop music of the 1960s (323-324). Railton further argues that rock culture specifically distinguished itself from a low culture that was defined as distinctly feminine, mirroring the masculinity of the bourgeois public sphere. Although rock music claimed to be revolutionary, it worked by excluding the feminine and reducing the female role to that of sex. Music was supposed to have a deeper meaning and focus on topics other than young love, and it moved to a singer-songwriter perspective rather than relying on songwriters. Railton also explains how music magazines will feature pop artists and condemn them in sexualized terms, further linking the appeal of their music to the hormonal changes of young girls (326). This pattern is found in reviews of female pop artists as well, criticizing them as “slappers,” “tarts,” and other sexualized terms. According to the article, “To be sexual and produce music that is purely commercial easily transforms into prostitution and commercial sex” (327). Artists who do this are often thought of as sellouts and are not producing anything considered real music—instead, they are making music for the masses and it therefore cannot be of importance. Further, by separating rock as art and claiming that it is about serious issues while the feminine low culture is about relationships and trivial issues, a divide was created that art is not for young females—they cannot understand it, nor can they begin to appreciate it.

Railton further argues that pop music is like the carnival experiences of early modern times because pop music is a physical experience, similar to how carnival was a physical experience based in legitimate illegitimacy (327). In early modern times, carnival was a time where the fool could be a scholar, the peasant could be a lord, and otherwise forbidden subjects were discussed—according to Railton, no one was safe from sexual advances (327). The carnival of yore was a day, or a week, of party time, a time for partaking in bodily desires in direct contrast to the fasting of lent or the restrictions of everyday life, which the current iteration of Carnival in Rio de Janeiro pays tribute to (327). Pop music is also often centered upon a bodily experience or spectacle. The performers of pop are often without instruments, meaning their bodies are not hidden (327). Pop shows are high energy, performers are dancers, they are there to be the showpiece, therefore the performance is defined by the physicality (328). The difference in representation continues into publications as well. While genre publications such as *Melody Maker*, a British music dedicated mostly to rock and indie music, that focus outside of the pop genre will show a photo of an artist, generally of their head or upper body covered by an instrument, whereas pictures of men and women that appear in pop publications are often shown in full, with their legs splayed (328). Clothing tends to be suggestive as well, including bodily adornments, lowered trousers, or bared chests (328). Genre publications tend to include interviews, reviews, or other news items with the accompanying photos, but pop publications do not necessarily need to include the same information (328). Pop is there to be looked at, ingested without thought because intellectual stimulation is not a necessary component. However, pop is body centric. According to Railton, “A constant image of fans of this type of music is a girl or young woman, screaming. Out of control, totally absorbed in the bodily experience. And the image that is reproduced time and time again is not usually of *one* girl but of a heaving screaming

‘mass’ of femininity” (328). The pop industry is about being out of control, allowing oneself to be without thought and totally in the moment. Railton’s article echoes *From the Dance Hall to Facebook*, supporting the idea that media representation of young women has worked to create a negative image of that population, which leads society to believe they are in a constant state of crisis and unable to make sound decisions. The media presentation of popstars further cements the fact that girls are not taking in intellectual information because rather than interviewing on the music or news, popstars are asked to talk about their most embarrassing moments or if they still connect to “real life” (329).

“The Gendered Carnival of Pop” concludes that pop music is carnivalesque in the fact that it does turn the world upside down for a short while, in the sense that it caters to the needs of young females rather than those of adult males. Pop music is a space that is inherently seen as feminine and due to this, pop artists and those who make pop music must keep teenage girls at the forefront of their mind in order to deliver what their audience needs. However, girls grow out of this stage and it is embarrassing and unfitting for an adult woman to have a crush on a musical artist. As they get older, girls are taught to leave behind a space of “low culture,” a space determined as feminine, unintelligent, and trivial, because that is what teenage girls are. As girls age, they are taught to be unlike other women because admitting to liking something seen as inherently feminine is one of the gravest mistakes a young woman can make. By doing so, she is relegated to the space of “basic” and therefore is like too much like “other girls.”

“The Gendered Carnival of Pop” highlights why I felt it was so important to examine both a young female artist and her fans, because they are widely considered to be young women. For example, in November 2018, Taylor Swift used her platform to urge her fans to vote. While she stated who she would be supporting in the midterm election race (two

democratic candidates), Swift more often encouraged people to get out and vote regardless of their views. Swift would share photos on Instagram of voters who tagged her and write messages on them encouraging others to get out and do the same, cleverly incentivizing her fans to use their own civic voice. When Tennessee governor Mike Huckabee learned Taylor Swift had endorsed democratic candidates, he tweeted “So @taylorswift13 has every right to be political but it won’t impact election unless we allow 13 yr old girls to vote. Still with #MarshaBlackburn” (Huckabee). Huckabee wanted to spread the idea that what Swift was attempting to do was useless—those in her audience are unable to vote and therefore her voice is completely unnecessary, invalidating both Swift and her fanbase.

Because pop music has been relegated to a space for the young and feminine, I wanted to examine those who fall into that category. Taylor Swift, former American teenage girl, and her fanbase was the perfect spot. I have followed Taylor Swift fans on Tumblr to see their conversations and learn more about the people who make up this group widely considered to be teenage girls. I have chosen Symbolic Convergence Theory as the lens through which I am analyzing it because it breaks down concepts into a group consciousness, which is what I believe Swifties have created. Their common rhetoric on Tumblr has formed a rhetorical vision for Taylor Swift, as well as given them a platform to discuss political and representational issues, create fan art and costumes, and rhetorically analyze songs, photos, music videos, and more. The creation of this narrative has led to a strong support base for Taylor Swift, which Swift interacts with and personally informs.

In 2019, many people on social media are heavily invested in cancel (#canceled) culture. Canceling a person (or a company or concept) is often done in response to their actions or comments, especially when they are viewed as problematic by someone.

According to “Everyone is Canceled” in the *New York Times*, Kanye West has been canceled

for his interactions with President Donald Trump while Bill Gates was canceled by a Twitter user after he tweeted that he drank water made from human feces (Bromwich). In the article, University of Virginia Professor Meredith Clark defines cancelling as “an act of withdrawing from someone whose expression — whether political, artistic or otherwise — was once welcome or at least tolerated, but no longer is” (qtd. in Bromwich). Lisa Nakamura, a professor at the University of Michigan, further defines it as “It’s a cultural boycott. It’s an agreement not to amplify, signal boost, give money to. People talk about the attention economy — when you deprive someone of your attention, you’re depriving them of a livelihood” (qtd. in Bromwich). The people who are susceptible to being cancelled are those who survive on their existence in the attention economy because political figures and business leaders can weigh in on discourse that is outside of online social media culture (Bromwich). Canceling has turned into an online cue meaning that a person has likely done something problematic. From there, it may or may not snowball with others picking up on it. Cancel culture is supported by clickbait media²⁴, which produces articles guaranteed to get clicks through sensationalized stories, shocking or misleading headlines, and pop-culture-based content. Taylor Swift experienced this same phenomenon but Swifties were there to defend her image and continue believing that Swift was the same person all along. By defending Swift, Swifties were further defending themselves, forced to defend their honor and their validity in choosing to continue to support Taylor Swift. While the general public began to believe the worst of her, the Swifties’ rhetorical vision was only strengthened through the “fall” of Taylor Swift. While we can never know the “real Taylor Swift,” the conversation surrounding Swift split into two different positions and widely debated whether

²⁴ Clickbait media is the digital rendition of tabloid journalism, which is defined as “a style of journalism that emphasizes sensational crime stories, gossip columns about celebrities and sports stars, extreme political views and opinions from one perspective, junk food news, and astrology” (“Tabloid journalism”).

or not Swift was “fake”²⁵. Swifties defended their idol, themselves, and their rhetorical vision while others called Swift deceptive, money-hungry, fake, and other negative characteristics.

Basic concepts

Symbolic Convergence Theory is built on a combination of four basic concepts: fantasy themes, symbolic cues, fantasy types, and saga. Fantasy themes attempt to define past events and illustrate present events, fulfilling a psychological or rhetorical need through a creative interpretation of events. Symbolic cues are words, phrases, slogan, gesture, or other nonverbal cues that pull a viewer in a larger shared reality. Fantasy types are shared across many groups and are used to explain events in a new way to members through providing commonly understood references. Lastly, sagas tell and re-tell the accomplishments and events of a person, group, nation, or other entity. These four basic concepts break down the basics of SCT and explain the motives, meanings, values, and emotions in the communicative contexts of the group.

Fantasy Themes

Fantasy themes work to create a symbolic reality for members of different groups. The story they share explains how the group views events and gives the actions context. Fantasies are the building blocks of SCT, the base unit used to understand how a community creates their shared rhetorical vision (Bormann et al. 282). Fantasy themes are not set in stone and are often adjusting as the needs of the community change. A fantasy theme, according to “Three Decades of Symbolic Convergence Theory” is “not something imaginary, but rather it is a ‘creative or imaginative interpretation of events which fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need’ (Bormann, 1983a, p. 434) thus giving meaning to human action” (282). The

²⁵ The top *Urban Dictionary* definition of fake is “Someone who doesn't be themselves around anyone. They try to hard to be liked and relate to you. You can tell they are fake because it seems like EVERYTHING they do is about trying to be liked” (“Fake”).

fantasy theme is meant to explain and make sense of a human experience. The three main types of fantasy themes are setting, action, and character. Setting describes the where events happen, or where actors play their roles. An action theme describes the storyline of the action and character themes work to describe the actor or actors. The character theme assumes each actor has certain characteristics based on the qualities and motives assigned to them (Jackson). Every rhetorical vision typically has a setting, action, and character involved, but the main fantasy theme of rhetorical visions is determined by what drives the group—is it a person, place, or event? Fans of Taylor Swift have created a rhetorical vision based on a character theme—Swifties assume Swift’s characteristics and motives and assign meaning to Swift’s actions based on how they understand her. Swifties have determined that Swift is, at heart, a good person; she is talented, smart, funny, creative, imaginative, and more.²⁶ Further, Swifties view Swift as someone who holds a strong work ethic, is a talented songwriter, and is no longer afraid to stand up for herself. However, the most important aspect of Swifties’ view of Swift is that they believe that Swift genuinely cares about her fans. Swifties have upheld this argument and shown “proof” in their posts, even as Swift’s detractors loudly stated otherwise. The Swiftie community has developed a character theme based around Taylor Swift because, while Swift does have action storylines and setting themes, it is based in Taylor Swift herself.

The character theme is evident in the Swifties’ discussion of 2016-2017, when Swift was largely out of the public eye due to her feud with Kanye West. West released a song with the lyrics “I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex / Why? I made that bitch famous (God damn) / I made that bitch famous” (West). West stated that Swift was aware of the

²⁶ For example, Your-eyez-look-like-coming-home states, “Sometimes I think about the fact that Taylor is a global superstar, but also the dorkiest dork and the kindest, most bighearted and generous human. She’s all that(!!!). My heart is literally filled to the brim with love for her and everything that she is” (your-eyez-look-like-coming-home).

as Shayla Thiel-Stern wrote, teenage girls are often thrust into victimhood and presented to the public as needing to be saved from their experiences.

Taylor Swift's reputation of "playing the victim" is rooted in her teenage years. Her first radio release, "Tim McGraw," reflected on the end of a relationship in which Swift hopes that when her ex-boyfriend thinks of Tim McGraw, or little black dresses, he thinks of Swift. "Teardrops on My Guitar" chronicles an unrequited love, in which Swift compares herself to another girl and wishes to be more like her. "Picture to Burn," at its heart, is about Swift planning revenge for her wasted time while "Should've Said No" scolds her boyfriend for cheating on her. "Our Song" is about a high school relationship and finding a shared "song" for the couple. In "Cold as You," Swift sings of a past relationship in which she cried for her ex-boyfriend, but he wouldn't have told anyone if she died for him. From *Fearless*, "Love Story" is a modern take on *Romeo and Juliet* in which Swift asks Romeo to save her and they get their happily ever after, while "You Belong with Me" is about unrequited love and Swift, who wears t-shirts and sneakers, paints herself as unlike the other girl, who wears short skirts and high heels. "White Horse" chronicles a past relationship where Swift says she should have known her ex-boyfriend wouldn't rescue her because she wasn't a princess, they aren't in a fairytale, and thinks she must have been naïve to believe he might have rescued her. "Fifteen" speaks to her friendship with Abigail Anderson in high school, where Abigail "gives everything to a boy who changed his mind" and that, at 15, "when someone tells you they love you, you're going to believe them" (Fifteen). Later, in "You're Not Sorry," Swift says that her ex-boyfriend no longer needs to call because she won't pick up the phone—she knows he's not sorry, and she knows believing him again will hurt her. "Forever & Always" asks what happened between the two because one second it was perfect, and the next he's halfway out the door. Swift asks later if she had said something too honest that scared him,

making him “run and hide” (Forever & Always). There are ways to twist these lyrics into Swift creating victimhood, but I have chosen not to, because I am not sure Swift purposefully played the victim. I don’t doubt that she used her early years to be unlike other girls, creating a niche in which she is different from others. However, country music is known for being about heartbreak, and Swift was breaking into that genre. It is also plausible that Swift wrote about heartbreak because it was relevant to her experience and her desired genre, but the victimhood was placed upon her. Thiel-Stern writes that from the early twentieth century to contemporary society, teenage girls are seen as either victims or villains in their experiences, so if Swift wasn’t the villain in her story, she *had* to be the victim in order to fit society’s understanding of teenage girlhood in America.

The victimhood perception was also rooted in Taylor Swift’s initial interaction with Kanye West in 2009, and the reason he claims he made Swift famous. At the Video Music Awards, Swift won Best Female Video for her song, “You Belong with Me.” West interrupted Swift’s acceptance speech and announced that he “would let you [Swift] finish, but Beyoncé has one of the best videos of all time” (Kreps).²⁸ The moment became a meme and entertainment news talked about it at length after. In 2010, Swift released the song “Innocent” about West, which many have pointed to as an early indication of Swift purposely perpetuating the idea that she was his victim. Swift’s reputation of playing the victim was also reinforced in 2014, when she released the song “Bad Blood” about singer Katy Perry after they disagreed on the status of backup dancers on their world tours.²⁹

²⁸ As the kids say, it was the mic drop heard ‘round the world.

²⁹ TLDR: Swift hired a few of Perry’s backup dancers after they were done with her tour and claims that Perry tried to “steal” backup dancers from her *RED* World Tour, while Perry claims that she had purposely told the dancers to include a 30-day contingency in their contract in case they wanted to leave for her tour because she knew her album cycle would be starting.

After the Snapchat video and Swift's statement were released, news outlets were filled with think pieces³⁰ on Taylor Swift, calling her a snake and giving long histories of Swift's perceived history of playing the victim. Shortly after the West incident, Swift broke up with her then-boyfriend, DJ Calvin Harris. After the break up, Swift's representative confirmed that Swift penned the hit song "This is What You Came For," recorded by singer Rihanna and Calvin Harris. *People* reported that Swift wrote the song and recorded a demo of the track on her phone for Harris and later released the track under the pseudonym "Nils Sjoberg." *People* also wrote that Swift was "hurt" after Harris, while promoting the song, told entertainer Ryan Seacrest that he could not foresee ever collaborating with Swift (Chiu). This, along with the ongoing Perry and West/Kardashian West feud, led to the #TaylorSwiftIsOverParty hashtag trending on Twitter. Many detractors on social media speculated that Swift's career was over and that she would not recover from the damage she had just done by revealing her true self. Shortly after these events, Swift disappeared from the public eye until mid-2017, when she returned with *reputation*.

Although the West feud created a divisive conversation online, it never caused Swifties to question their sense of the real Taylor Swift. The *reputation* era³¹ reinforced the character theme that Swift is strong, always authentic in her fan interactions, a competent businesswoman, and not afraid to take back the narrative of her persona, which Swifties view the release of *reputation* to be. Swifties applaud the way Swift stepped out of the public eye, even though it led to months without new content, what they call a drought. Previously, Swift

³⁰ According to *Wiktionary*, a think piece is "(often derogatory) An in-depth article that discusses a topic thoroughly and elaborates the writer's point of view, to inspire deep thought related to the article's subject" ("think piece"). The usage note further explains think pieces are "often pejoratively contrasted with news" and that they're often published in magazines, newspapers, or websites ("think piece"). I often see them circulating on social media and believe it is an effective way to get others to "share" or "like" the piece online. Often, it coincides with a story popular in the news and its topicality nearly ensures that it will garner interest.

³¹ Swifties use the term "era" to denote different album cycles, generally covering a span of two to three years. "Reputation era" refers to the years 2017-2019, in which Swift released and toured for her *reputation* album.

had stuck to a strict two-year album cycle. The release of *reputation* was Swift's first time waiting three years to release an album, but many fans have argued that she needed that time to recover, emotionally and mentally, after having her life spilled across tabloids. After *reputation* was released, Swifties were proud of the music and many argued that it was better than *Red*, which was previously considered to be Swift's lyrical masterpiece.³² Halley, a Swiftie posting under the username away-from-the-crowds, claimed, "THE ALBUM [*reputation*] IS LYRICALLY BETTER THAN SPEAK NOW AND RED COMBINED" (away-from-the-crowds). The "best" album discourse is never ending, with Swifties calling themselves "stans"³³ for different albums and songs across her discography.

Upon the release of "Look What You Made Me Do," the first single from *reputation* and thus the first look into the album, the general public and media sites dubbed it Swift's revenge album. Although the sound was different, fans were supportive of the single and believed it was in line with the character theme Swifties created for Swift. Jelly-bean-jones wrote, "People be out here complaining about how Taylor Swift holds onto grudges for too long but...I think 'THIS is the song I needed after I broke up with my toxic ex boyfriend' and we broke up 3 years ago so if that's petty sign me the fuck up I guess because in my book there's no expiration date on feeling betrayed or broken by someone" (jelly-bean-jones). Fans knew that "Look What You Made Me Do" was Swift's first chance to tell her own side of the story after the break-up with Calvin Harris and the release of "Famous" and supported Swift's decision to come back ready to reclaim her autonomy and removing herself from

³² Tumblr user therewasholyground states, "In general the lyricism on Red is unrivaled by a majority of Taylor's other albums. I could go on and on about the metaphors and world play, but State of Grace, Red, Treacherous, All Too Well, The Lucky One, and Sad Beautiful Tragic include some of her best writing to date." The Tumblr post also states that *Red* is "killer transitional album" and that the song "All Too Well" was "ranked as the #29 best song of the CENTURY" by *Rolling Stone* (therewasholyground).

³³ According to *Urban Dictionary*, a crowd-sourced dictionary for popular terminology, "Stan means you look up to that person, you watch them or you truly love their content. It's another word for saying you idolize someone or something. You would say, "I stan _____" instead of I "I love that person" (strawberrygloss, "Stan").

situations and relationships that she considers toxic. In SCT, a character theme works to describe the actions, motivations, and characteristics of a person through the lens of the group creating it. In the Swifties' character theme of Swift, they believe that her *reputation* era is largely guided by the motive of reclaiming her narrative, a term that stems from Swift's "Famous" statement, in which she asks to be excluded from the West and Kardashian West's narrative. Swifties believe that Swift took hold of her narrative by removing herself from the public eye and the narrative created for her.

The term "narrative" has persisted throughout the character theme because it describes the motive for Swift's fantasy theme. Swifties believe that, during the *reputation* era, Swift's main motive is to interact with her fans and take back her own story, rather than letting media sites, especially clickbait media, continue to create a false perception of her. In the music video for her song "Look What You Made Me Do," Swift brings back some of the "old Taylors" wearing outfits from her past and eventually declares them all "dead" (*Look What You Made Me Do*). Swifties hunted through the video for Easter eggs³⁴ and found many hidden clues. For example, in an early scene, Swift is singing in a bathtub filled with diamonds and other gems. Next to Swift is a single dollar bill, which many Swifties believe represents the dollar Swift won in her lawsuit against David Mueller, a radio DJ who sexually assaulted Swift during a meet and greet.³⁵ Later in the music video, Swift is spotted robbing a

³⁴ According to the "Easter Egg (media)" *Wikipedia* Page, "In computer software and media, an Easter egg is an intentional inside joke, hidden message or image, or secret feature of a work" ("Easter Egg (media)").

³⁵ David Mueller was fired because Swift reported to the radio station that he had groped her during her meet and greet in 2013. Later, he sued Swift for damages of \$3,000,000 because her accusations were false. Swift countersued Mueller for \$1, electing to go to court rather than paying Mueller off (Yahr). Swift was later named as a Silence Breaker for the #MeToo movement. In her testimony, Swift decided forgo courtroom formalities because Mueller hadn't considered formalities when he assaulted her (Yahr). Swift answered questions bluntly, stating "Gabe [Mueller's lawyer], this is a photo of him with his hand up my skirt—with his hand on my ass. You can ask me a million questions. I'm never going to say anything different. I never have said anything different," or, when asked if she was critical of her bodyguard for not interfering, "I'm critical of your client sticking his hand under my skirt and grabbing my ass" (qtd. in Yahr). Swifties followed Swift's trial closely, believing that her refusal to be pushed around in the courtroom and solely refer to her "ass," rather than using a politer term, was empowering.

streaming company, symbolizing the moment in Swift's career where she penned a letter to Apple and declared that she would not be including her discography on their three-month trial of Apple Music because Apple was not paying artists (qtd. in McIntyre). While Swifties believe Swift was genuinely speaking for the artists who depend on that income, the media and the general public thought it was greedy and a ploy to make more money.³⁶ *Look What You Made Me Do* reassured fans that even though Swift had gone through a turbulent time publicly, fans were reassured that Swift would not be leaving her career in music any time soon. In the music video, Swift is seen the background of a scene sawing the wing off an airplane. At first, fans believed this represented Swift's being destructive and careless with money. However, after a second look, Swifties concluded that the character in the background of the scene was orchestrating the other "Taylors" and, instead of destroying a plane for fun, Swift was "subtly" stating that she would not be leaving her career in music, directly refuting the #TaylorSwiftIsOverParty hashtag.

³⁶ In her letter to Apple, Swift states, Swift states,

I'm sure you are aware that Apple Music will be offering a free 3 month trial to anyone who signs up for the service. I'm not sure you know that Apple Music will not be paying writers, producers, or artists for those three months. I find it to be shocking, disappointing, and completely unlike this historically progressive and generous company. This is not about me. Thankfully I am on my fifth album and can support myself, my band, crew, and entire management team by playing live shows. This is about the new artist or band that has just released their first single and will not be paid for its success. This is about the young songwriter who just got his or her first cut and thought that the royalties from that would get them out of debt. This is about the producer who works tirelessly to innovate and create, just like the innovators and creators at Apple are pioneering in their field...but will not get paid for a quarter of a year's worth of plays on his or her songs. These are not the complaints of a spoiled, petulant child. These are the echoed sentiments of every artist, writer and producer in my social circles who are afraid to speak up publicly because we admire and respect Apple so much. We simply do not respect this particular call. I realize that Apple is working towards a goal of paid streaming. I think that is beautiful progress. We know how astronomically successful Apple has been and we know that this incredible company has the money to pay artists, writers and producers for the 3 month trial period... even if it is free for the fans trying it out. Three months is a long time to go unpaid, and it is unfair to ask anyone to work for nothing. (qtd. in McIntyre)

Previously, Swift held her music catalogue from the streaming service Spotify because of the low streaming royalties but allowed the service to stream her catalogue after they adopted a "windowing" policy—meaning that only paid subscribers can access newly released content for a window of time before it is released to everyone (Grady). In 2019, Swift signed a record deal with Universal Music Group and announced that she signed with them after they "generously" agreed to share any profits from selling Spotify shares with their artists, non-recoupable (Grady). Although Swift has consistently stated her belief that artists should be paid for their work, especially artists unlike her who have a greater need for the income, the idea that Swift is doing it solely because she is greedy persists.

Swifties have peeled layers of symbolism out of the video for *Look What You Made Me Do*; it was a meaningful experience because fans believed it had been made for them to decode the “true” meaning behind the scenes. For example, Tumblr user stillgotscars posted,

at the beginning of the video, Taylor crawled out from a grave that was engraved with “here lies Taylor Swift’s reputation,” whilst wearing the out of the woods dress. It’s the one she was running in through several treacherous, chaotic hurdles and situations, feeling like she couldn’t outrun the media/public’s nonsensical opinions, and their exploitation of her personal life.

There’s something profound, important and empowering about the way she mercilessly filled the grave of her “old self” in, alluded to the #taylorswiftisoverparty and buried all of the media’s “little games” they’ve played with all of her past selves. She’s continuously persevered through pain, and she’s channelling it into rising above and reclaiming every joke, caricature and incessant remark that’s been made about her over the course of a decade. She’s wholly taking back control of her life, her narrative and her reputation and she’s stronger than ever. **we’re all so incredibly proud of you, Taylor.** (stillgotscars)

Fans were quick to recognize that the video opened with Taylor Swift in zombie makeup but that, more importantly, the dress she is wearing in the scene seemed to symbolize something deeper. The dress is from the music video for the song “Out of the Woods,” which ends with the secret message from her album lyric booklet, “She lost him but she found herself and somehow that was everything” (1989). Wearing the dress that symbolized Swift finding herself seemed to hold more meaning to fans because she used it to bury the “old Taylor.” Swift is killing her old personas while simultaneously telling the public that the old Taylor Swift no longer existed. However, *Look What You Made Me Do* did not detract from Swifties’ character theme, and instead, as stillgotscars’ post says, fans believed it meant that Swift was shutting the door on media speculation and no longer willing to play media games. Swift was going to manage her career on her own terms.

Fans used the visuals the video and lyrics from the song “Look What You Made Me Do” to further comment on Swift’s position as a woman in the entertainment industry. Tumblr user repugaytions posted,

Holy shit. What if “I hate your tilted stage” is more than what we perceive it to be at face value? What if it’s referencing the fact that because Kanye is a man, he gets a free pass for all the shit he gets away with, so him and Taylor aren’t on even footing when it comes to criticism from the public and the media.

And in the video, when she pulls on the headstone and the entire cemetery evens out, what if that’s a representation for how she’s leveling the playing field and taking back her narrative?

Here, repugaytions is opening a conversation that most people would not think they would find in the Taylor Swift fandom because it is considered to be a group of teenage girls. The popular representation of teenage girls shows girls who are having conversations about boys, clothes, makeup, and other material things. They are shown to be overemotional, dramatic, and obsessive, similar to how Swift is perceived to be this way when she is in relationships or allegedly playing the victim. This representation of teenage girls rarely shows them undertaking real social and political issues and, as Shayla Thiel-Stern writes in *From the Dance Hall to Facebook*, the media rarely represents teenage girls as people who are able to hold these conversations. The post by repugaytions garnered 315 notes, including likes and reblogs, which created a space for discussion. Whether or not Taylor Swift intended for her tilted stage lyric to represent the uneven footing between her and West, fans are finding ways to apply Taylor Swift lyrics to real issues and discuss them.³⁷ By making these issues accessible and able to be discussed in language that is more relatable to younger language, a group of teenage girls is creating a space that has been relegated to feminine low culture and making it about more than “love and kisses.”

Taylor Swift did not give interviews before the release of either the song or music video for *Look What You Made Me Do*. Although Swifties missed her media interactions, they interpreted the silence as Swift’s commentary on her media coverage, further supported

³⁷ It is important acknowledge that repugaytions is speaking in terms of white culture and that, while Swift does have uneven footing because of her gender, West also has uneven footing because he is a black man and Swift is a white woman.

by Swift's album cover. File 1, *reputation* Album Cover, displays the album art for *reputation*, which pictures Swift with a chain around her neck and the name "Taylor Swift" printed to look like newspaper headlines. Swifties tend to agree that the album cover is meant to show her chained in her reputation, with news stories overshadowing Swift. From the release of "Look What You Made Me Do" through the rest of the *reputation* era, in lieu of interviews Swift released her promotion on her own social media and interacted with fans online, as well as doing promotion with AT&T and UPS. Fans were largely supportive of Swift's choice, including whitneylouhoo, who posted "taylor hasn't said one single word and I fucking love that she just gets to sit on her throne and watch this all and not have to deal with all the bullshit because she has TAKEN OVER THE NARRATIVE" (whitneylouhoo). Swifties believe that Swift was treated unfairly by the media, so taking a stance against them was supportive of the character theme built around Swift. Instead of granting interviews, Swift penned and published a poem in *British Vogue*, wrote a statement in *Time* about the #MeToo movement and her involvement in a sexual assault case, and interviewed Pattie Boyd³⁸ for *Harper's Bazaar*.

Swift's music continued to support the Swifties' character theme that Swift is a strong woman, in which her motive is taking control of her own story. By refusing to give fodder to clickbait media, Swifties believed Swift was taking a stance against them and controlling her own image. Swifties believed that the motive of taking back her narrative was what drove Swift throughout the *reputation* era, further illustrated by the song "...Ready for It," which detailed a new relationship. Swift sings that her new lover can be the "Burton to this Taylor" which references the relationship of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, one of the first relationships to be seriously invested in by the public in America. According to the obituary

³⁸ According to *Biography.com*, "Pattie Boyd is a British photographer and former model known for being the muse of her ex-husbands, George Harrison and Eric Clapton" ("Pattie Boyd").

written by Adam Bernstein in *The Washington Post*, Elizabeth Taylor was the one of the first modern celebrities, more famous for being famous than for the films she starred in. Headlines about Elizabeth Taylor were often for her relationships and activities, rather than her accomplishments or her activism. The obituary also quotes film historian Jean Basinger, who states, “No actress ever had a more difficult job in getting critics to accept her onscreen as someone other than Elizabeth Taylor. Her persona ate her alive” (qtd. in Bernstein). Bernstein also writes that Elizabeth Taylor “denounced and courted celebrity. She flashed anger when she was not allowed privacy on her terms.” Swifties believe Swift relates to Elizabeth Taylor because the popular representation of Swift tends to focus on her relationships and her inability to “keep a man”. Swift generally makes headlines for her feuds or her breakups, instead of the music she is releasing. For example, much of Swift’s sexual assault trial was ignored by the general public and clickbait media, similar to how Elizabeth Taylor’s activism was often ignored in favor of the more sensationalized stories.

Another aspect of the character theme for Swift is that Swifties understand Taylor Swift as a talented musician and songwriter. Swift’s *reputation* was viewed by members of the general public as too conventional in its use of pop sounds and many agreed that Swift had traded in her songwriting-edge in an attempt to release a revenge, mean-girl album. *Reputation* was considered less diary-like than Swift’s past albums, but many Swifties disagreed and believed that Swift had masterfully included deep lyrics inside the loud pop album, which the line “Burton to this Taylor” illustrates. Swifties also believe that the “...Ready For It” lyric “Touch me and you’ll never be alone” served two meanings: first, that Swift would never leave her new love and, second, that it was another reference to the media. The line refers to how any time Swift was seen with a man, he was immediately assumed to be a new love interest and headlines would run rampant about the new relationship. The

media obsession with her relationships didn't solely affect Swift; men were regularly asked by interviewers about their seemingly romantic connection to Swift.³⁹

The release of the ...*Ready For It* music video also further supported Swifties' character theme and belief that Swift's motive was to control the narrative of her body and her image. The music video depicts two versions of Swift: the first is a robot version of Swift and the second is a cyborg version. The cyborg Swift is apparently naked (Swift dressed in a nude bodysuit) and trapped in a transparent box. The robot Swift is controlling everything at first, until the cyborg Swift eventually breaks free and escapes while the robot Swift is destroyed (...*Ready For It*). Fans quickly found symbolism in the video, deciding that the two versions of Swift are representative of the public and private versions of Swift. However, Swifties uncovered more meaning in the fact that cyborg Swift presents as naked. The image of Swift seemingly naked was controversial among non-Swifties at first, with many shocked that Swift would present as nude in a music video. Swifties, however, were supportive of Swift's use of her naked image and thought that Swift was purposefully taking it back after having the same image used without her consent. Tumblr user tswiftartcollective wrote,

The BEAUTIFUL thing about the ...Ready for It? music video is that when Kanye put her wax figure in that nauseating, disgusting music video, he was doing it to belittle and shame her. In that video, her body represented vulnerability and how he thought he could do whatever he wanted with it.

In THIS video, she is taking back the narrative and using her body as a thing of BAD-ASS ETHEREAL CYBORG MAGIC POWER that is hers and hers alone and I 🤖💎 AM 🤖💎 OBSESSED 🤖💎 Another incredible way in which she's taking a terrible thing that happened to her over the past few years and reclaiming it for her own art and success. (tswiftartcollective)

Tswiftartcollective is referring to the "Famous" music video, in which a wax figure of Taylor Swift's naked body was displayed along with other celebrities, including Bill Cosby, Kanye

³⁹ Jake Gyllenhaal was still asked about his relationship with Taylor Swift in 2017, seven years after their relationship (Guglielmi).

West, Kim Kardashian West, Donald Trump, and more. In the “...Ready for It?” video, Taylor Swift is taking back her naked image, which had been taken from her, and owning it. Tumblr user owehimnothin had similar ideas about Swift’s use of her naked image in the video. Owehimnothin writes,

me, pouring wine out: and another thing! like taylor swift being in that body suit as a direct response to the usage of her nude form without consent is the very *definition* of empowerment. so many people claim taylor swift only uses feminism to sell records, but i think anyone who uses feminism to hate on taylor swift at this point just hates sexual assault victims because we’re not “feminist” because we were “damaged” and that’s not “empowering”.

[takes a swig of wine] and if an abuse victim decides to don a nude body suit and display their body on their own terms, that’s a reclamation of the narrative. that’s taking back that someone had touched her ass without her consent, that’s taking back that someone put her naked body on display without her consent. it’s saying fuck you, you want a peak so bad? here it is - *but on my terms*. and screw you if you think that isn’t “feminist” enough for you or “empowering” enough for you. women have always been told how to display their body, when to display their body, and what to wear.

taylor swift is having none of it! and she will show whatever she damn well pleases on her own damn terms! her relationship, her body, and her own mind is hers and hers alone. and you get it on her terms, not the terms of some skeevey paparazzi, some jilted friend who hates her for reasons unknown, or some angry ex boyfriend who wants to tell everyone how she’s crazy. reputation is all about a reclamation and that includes the reclamation of her own body.

we don’t think about pop stars having their bodies stripped from them and put on display without consent, but that’s what paparazzi photos vye for (remember how everyone was trying desperately to get a shot of emma watson upskirt the second she turned eighteen? how britney spears even made a reference to the desire to sexualize female pop stars the minute they think they can get away with it in her “piece of me” music video where a paparazzo attempts to photograph her upskirt) and that’s what k*nye did in his f*mous music video. any time a female pop star displays their own nude image in their music video, they’re doing it on their terms because everyone wants a piece of them anyway.

so it’s going to be on HER terms, dammit. (owehimnothin)

Owehimnothin’s post received over 1,600 notes on Tumblr and echoes what Diane Railton wrote in “The Gendered Carnival of Pop.” Swift’s experience had been centralized on her body, much like the tendencies of pop described by Railton. In these interactions, Swift’s story had focused on her naked image or the image of a DJ touching her inappropriately, while her trial was referred to as a butt grab trial. For example, *TMZ* published an article

titled “Taylor Swift Verdict Beats DJ’s Ass in Butt Grab Trial” in 2017. Although ...*Ready For It* showed an image of Swift naked, it was done on her terms instead of the terms of others who were using her body without her consent. The Swifties’ conversation surrounding it shows how a group considered to be teenage girls is talking about issues deeper than what is considered the norm for them. Railton argues that pop music has been relegated to a space of feminine low culture, dealing with trivial issues, and centered around a bodily experience as opposed to rock music, which focuses on the music because it is closer to high culture or “art”. The pop music described by Railton is seen as a visual medium and the artist is the showpiece. In ...*Ready For It*, Swift is more than a showpiece. She is powerful even though she is nude and the conversation surrounding this is not trivial. It spreads an important message through the Swiftie fanbase—Swifties believe Swift’s motive is clear: she wants viewers to know that she owns her image *and* her body.

Swift’s character theme of taking back her narrative was continued into the release of another song from *reputation*. Swift’s fourth single release was titled “Delicate,” which details the early days of a new romantic relationship and the anxiety that comes with it. Swift sings, “This ain’t for the best / my reputation’s never been worse / so you must like me for me,” which fans understand as commentary on the media’s interference with her relationships. Tumblr user Etain, who posts under the username dancinginagetawaycar, wrote:

Can we talk about how much of a bad-ass, narrative controlling move it is for Taylor to release delicate as her next single? A song that details her anxiety and fear about entering new relationships because of the tiring effect the media has had on her reputation? But regardless, she’s alive and able to fall back in love with herself and another person.
I’m here for Taylor taking back her entire media narrative this weekend by owning her reputation as HER OWN and not what others say. (dancinginagetawaycar)

The music video for “Delicate” reiterated for Swifties that this song, and the era overall, was Swift taking back her narrative, specifically the media narrative in which Taylor Swift is seen as a serial dater who writes break up songs and only starts relationships to end them and have content for her next album. To the fans, the *Delicate* video was a treat because they did not expect to see Swift doing an interpretive dance and acting silly while she was invisible to the world. Fans believed this was Swift finding her happiness and “love through all the noise,” and that by owning her reputation, she was able to finally be herself (still-an-innocent). Swift allowed herself to date again—something that she had previously abstained from because of the coverage on her relationships. In “Delicate,” Swifties believe that Swift is being herself by allowing herself to be vulnerable again, just like the “old” Taylor, who Swifties could find on earlier albums such as *Fearless* and *Red*. Swift acknowledges that her reputation has never been worse but, in *Delicate*, she owns it and acts silly anyway.

Swifties use these examples, and others, to show that not only is she a talented songwriter, Swift is a savvy artist. Swifties believe that Swift used *reputation* to take back her own story, reconnect with her fans, and focus on issues that she felt were important. Swifties’ character theme was supported well into 2018, when taking back the narrative of her reputation continued into Taylor Swift’s *reputation* Stadium Tour. Swift reimagined the snake imagery her detractors used against her and embraced it. Throughout the *reputation* era, Swift used snake imagery in multiple places, from calling the VIP area at her concerts the Snake Pit to selling sparkly snake rings as part of her merchandise. Her *reputation* tour featured a 40-foot inflatable snake on stage and others in the arena. Tumblr user imgonnaswift believed that through her tour, Swift’s actions supported her character theme and that Swift was able to express her true self, writing,

but this tour has been the biggest “fuck you” to the media yet because not only did she take back the narrative of being called a snake by making it a theme of her tour, not

only is she selling out more fucking stadiums than ever, she's the happiest she's ever been, which is exactly what the media didn't want. you don't like who Taylor is? watch her be who she is even more. (imgonnaswift)

Swifties character theme states that Swift is always authentic in her interactions with her fans, but *reputation* was the time when Swift felt most authentically herself without fear of ruining her image, because Swift wrote “And in the death of her reputation, she felt truly alive” in a poem with she released with *reputation* (“Why She Disappeared”). Swift’s public persona will always need to be manufactured, but by taking the image and the term snake and using it for her own purposes, Swift’s persona in the *reputation* era seemed more authentic to her fans than previous iterations and did not follow the image that was imposed on her throughout her career.

The *reputation* era was also the era that Swift connected most with her fans, which only reinforced the character theme of Swift placing importance on her relationship with Swifties. Swift started using social media to connect with fans on Tumblr in 2014. Swifties were anxious to gain Swift’s attention online, creating posts in hopes that she would see them. However, her social media presence became more meaningful in 2017 because, although she was not giving interviews, Swift was online and interacting with fans. Swift entered fans’ live videos on the social media site Instagram, through which she could talk to fans personally.⁴⁰ Swift also liked posts on Tumblr, reblogged posts from fans, and commented on them. Fans inferred that the *reputation* era was for the fans. Instead of using her time to give interviews, Swift was spending her time with her fans and finding more ways than ever to connect with them. Swift hosted her second round of Secret Sessions at her homes, during which fans are invited to Swift’s house to listen to her new album before the release date. At the *reputation* tour, fans were also invited backstage to the “Rep Room” to meet Swift for free.

⁴⁰ Swift’s face wasn’t able to be seen, but comments were made with Swift’s account. Swifties believe that it was Swift herself.

Swifties are exceptionally proud of Swift and consider it to be Swift's personal mission to meet as many fans as possible, which is an integral part of their character theme. Swift has built an image of caring for her fans and Swifties believe that Swift's interactions with them are genuine and authentic. Although many believe that Swift is "fake," Swifties disagree because she has spent so many years cultivating a special relationship with her fans. Swifties are often saying "when would your fave ever," "your fave would never," or "we stan one (1) legend."⁴¹ This is in reference to the fact that most artists charge for meet and greets at their shows, during which fans get a quick photo opportunity or an autograph. Swifties believe that Swift is different from other artists in this respect and instead of charging her fans, she values meeting fans and wants everyone to have a chance. Swift also provides free food and drinks during this time, which fans have taken as another sign of Swift making the fan experience a priority rather than profiting off her fans wanting to meet her. Swift has contributed to her character theme. During the *reputation* tour, Swift was recorded saying that fans had changed the meaning of the song "All Too Well" for her (Dugdale). She also stated that she included more songs from her older albums because fans had asked for it. During the *1989* tour, Swift told fans

A couple of years ago, every single magazine and newspaper thought it was cool to say things about me that weren't true and things about me that were mean and things I couldn't correct them on, but YOU did. And I just want you to know that I'm never going to forget what you did. That you showed up for me when my hands were tied behind my back and I couldn't say anything to fight back, you fought back and you kept showing up and kept filling stadiums and here we are. (songwritingswift)

Swifties are quick to defend Swift during times of turmoil and, before the *1989* era, Swift had gone through a lot of negative publicity about her relationships. Although Swift felt she could not address the conversation about her life personally, fans did not feel the same

⁴¹ Actually, I have seen more Swifties say "we stan a legend," but this version is funnier.

restraint. During the *Speak Now* era, Swift released the song “Long Live” for her fans, which has since become a fan favorite. Swift has also shown up to weddings, engagement parties, and sent fans gifts in 2014 for “Swiftmas.”⁴² During Christmas 2018, Swift personally sent a gift to a fan who had set up a Christmas light display at his home and timed the light show to a Swift song. Swift has used Tumblr to post recipes when fans ask for them, as well as give breakup advice to a fan in need. She has reportedly given money to a fan who needed a ride home and says she carries birthday cards in her purse, so she is never without if she runs into someone with a birthday. While preparing to release *TS7*, Swift said while accepting an American Music Award that she is “excited for the next chapter” (Kile). Later, in early 2019 at the iHeartRadio Music Awards, Swift said “I love your passion, I love your attention to detail, I love how much you care. I love seeing all the things you’re posting online. I just wanted to let you know that when there is new music, you will be the first to know” (Bruner). Swifties believe Swift made these statements because the fanbase is well-known for trying to predict what Swift’s new album will sound like or what it will be called, and the statements made by Swift were to “troll” the fans because they have yet to be successful in their predictions. These, along with many other instances, have caused fans to believe that Swift is genuinely dedicated to her fanbase.

Swifties value their ongoing relationship with Swift, which holds together the character theme Swifties have created: Swift is imaginative and hardworking, striving to top herself with each era. Not only that, she is creative with each music video, letting Swifties find clues and hidden meanings within them. She is not afraid to take back her own narrative, standing up to the media who had criticized her every move and called her fake and manipulative. But, most importantly, she is dedicated to her fans. Swifties post often about

⁴² According to *Billboard*, this is an event in which Taylor Swift sent fans surprise Christmas gifts, prompting fans to dub it “Swiftmas” (Wang).

their “best friend” Taylor and talk about how she is like an older sister. The fact that Swift has made herself accessible allows her to reinforce the character theme Swifties have created in their rhetorical vision by listening to and taking cues from fans in order to produce a more fan-centric experience for Swifties.

Symbolic Cues

A symbolic cue is a “shorthand indicant or code that stands for a fantasy theme such as a sign, symbol, or an inside joke” (Bormann 283). Bormann uses the example of the terms New, Neo-, or Post- as part of a phrase in a group; for example, Swifties use the term “era” as symbolic cues. These all signal a change in the events of the group, and people understand the cue means it will lead to a change from how things were done previously. Cues are used as a trigger to remind the group of previous actions, and oftentimes improve the cohesiveness of the group by creating common memories among its members (283). Swifties have created many symbolic cues in their rhetorical vision. Swifties on Tumblr share terms, signs, and inside jokes that Swift herself will interact with. Specific symbolic cues include the terms *era* and *drought*, the inside joke “no its becky,” and the term/imagery of *snake*.

Taylor Swift’s album cycles are often referred to as different eras, one of the most prevalent symbolic cues in the fandom. Eras are referred to by the album that Swift released during that cycle, with the exception of her self-titled debut album. Past eras are 1. *Debut* (or *Taylor Swift* in some cases) 2. *Fearless* 3. *Speak Now* 4. *Red* 5. *1989* 6. *reputation* or *rep*. Each era represents a different public version of Swift, who is famous for changing her look and sound each time she releases a new album.⁴³ However, seemingly starting with *1989*,

⁴³ With each album cycle, Swift reinvents herself. These are referred to as “eras” by the media and her fanbase (Braca). Thus far, she has gone through six different reinventions. During her debut, she was often spotted wearing sundresses, headbands, and cowboy boots. Her famous locks were long, blonde, and curly and it was during this era that she began to earn her “good girl” reputation (Braca). Swift’s first album felt like diary entries released to the public. She was not afraid to put real-life details in her songs, including names of boys she had dated or crushed on (Roberts).

fans have started referring to an incoming era as TS(number). For example, searching #ts5 on Tumblr will bring up posts, such as, “Only 90s kids remember when we called 1989 TS5” (newromanticsswift). The tag #ts5 on Tumblr brings up more references to *The Sims 5* than it does Taylor Swift-related posts, but a few posts confirm that the pattern started with *1989*. All the ts# hashtags before *1989* are references to past rather than to current or future Swift projects, but beginning with *1989*, #ts5, the hashtags are used to post about an upcoming

During *Fearless*, Swift literally sparkled on her first headlining tour. Swift wore a lot of princess-style gowns to award shows and glittery outfits during performances (Braca). *Fearless*, a country album, had more pop than her debut album. She also spoke about her experiences more confidently, rather than as an outsider wanting to be liked (Roberts). *Fearless* Swift could be found on tour, singing “Love Story” in front of a castle as her backup dancers circle around her, dramatically revealing the white dress hidden under her princess-esque ballgown, or belting “You Belong With Me” and raising her arms for her dancers to tear away her marching band uniform to reveal a sparkly dress (Mischer).

Speak Now introduced Swift’s signature red lipstick. While she had worn it before, this was the era where it became a staple in her style. Swift’s third era also brought forth more fairytale imagery. Swift was still very much upholding the innocent, good-girl look (Braca). *Speak Now* is folkier than her previous albums, along with being the only album she wrote completely by herself. The songs are more introspective than previous albums, but the lyrics are blunt, telling listeners exactly what Swift wants them to hear (Roberts). *Speak Now* Swift was still drawing 13s on her hand as well as writing lyrics down her arm. Swift’s voiceover addressed the crowd each night on tour, telling fans “I don’t think you should wait, I think you should speak now” (Polito).

Red, Swift’s fourth iteration, signaled her most drastic change yet. She straightened her famous curls and started wearing high-waisted shorts and striped t-shirts. *Red* also signaled a change in her sound, with this being the first era that she openly experimented outside of the country genre (Braca). Songs like “We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together” and “I Knew You Were Trouble” were firmly footed in pop sounds, but other songs like “I Almost Do” and “All Too Well” were classic Swift. The *Red* album serves as a chronological record of the two years between *Speak Now* and the release of *Red*, which Swift uses as a platform to tell her own story about her private life, which was a popular topic on media sites (Roberts).

During *1989*, Swift unexpectedly cut her hair short. Her bob-style was paired with sparkly jumpsuits and an 80s-inspired sound (Braca). *1989* Swift fully crossed over to pop music. Her singles “Shake it Off” and “Blank Space” let listeners know that she’s aware of her public image (Roberts). The lyrics to “Shake it Off” address explicitly what people say about her, including going on too many dates but being unable to make them stay, or that she has nothing in her brain (“Shake it Off”). Swift’s tour was a star-studded event, during which many special guests joined her on stage. Swift also invited various members of what came to be known as her “squad” to walk the catwalk with her while she performed.

Finally, in her most recent iteration, Swift’s *reputation* was at stake and she sported her darkest looks thus far. Snake imagery was present in many of her looks, along with her signature glitter (Braca). However, it isn’t just her look that went dark as Swift prepared to discuss her reputation in the public eye. “Look What You Made Me Do” declared that Swift will be the “actress starring in your bad dreams” and that “the old Taylor is dead” (Roberts). Swift uses the music video to set the scene, opening in a cemetery with a tombstone that reads “Here lies Taylor Swift’s Reputation” before a zombified Swift claws her way out of her grave (*Look What You Made Me Do*). This album also includes songs titled “I Did Something Bad” and “...Ready For It,” which both address Swift’s role in the public eye (*reputation*). *Reputation* was also Swift’s most private era. She was rarely seen in public and didn’t give interviews about her music. Her promotional strategy was also vastly different from previous album cycles. Before the release of *1989*, Swift was everywhere, giving interviews on radio stations and television shows to promote the album. However, fans and media alike experienced radio silence before Swift announced *reputation*. Rather than give interviews, Swift first wiped all social media sites clean and then promoted her album through her own sites (McIntyre).

album. Similarly, searches for TS1, TS2, TS3, and TS4 bring up rare references to Taylor Swift. The tags for previous eras seem to be reference the past rather than new content. The TS# is a second symbolic cue, used to reference each era and it is often used interchangeably with the era name.

Eras and droughts are symbolic cues for Swifties. The term *era* denotes a specific time during Swift's career, and each is significant for different reasons. Although *era* is generally considered a long and significant period of history, Swifties have adapted it to cover the two- to three-year span of album cycles for Swift. They consider each span of time to be significant for various reasons, whether it is personal or related to Swift. Some use it to explain when they found Swift and became a fan, and others relate to that era because Swift went through something they can relate to. *Drought* also seems like a hyperbolic term at first glance because, rather than marking a long period without rainfall, it is a relatively short period of time without new content from or about Swift. However, *era* and *drought* have allowed Swifties to create common memories that are shared among the group, and with which Swift interacts online.

A second symbolic cue is the inside joke "no its becky." In 2014, a meme circled around Tumblr in the Swiftie fandom. As shown in File 2, Swift is pictured in a black and white image, smiling, and wearing a tiara. The caption for the photo states that this is the poster's friend, Becky, who was a happy girl until she snorted marijuana and died. A second Tumblr user responded to the post and wrote they were pretty sure it was Taylor Swift, to which the original poster said, "no its becky." This symbolic cue changed from an inside joke with the fandom to a joke that Taylor Swift participated in when she was seen wearing a yellow t-shirt that had "no its becky" printed on the front. Swift fans were elated at her participation in the joke. File 2 further shows additional text by Simplifans, who writes, "WE HAVE A

PRIVATE JOKE WITH TAYLOR ABOUT BECKY AND IT HAS NOT EVEN BEEN TWO WEEKS OF TUMBLR AND WE MADE IT ON A SHIRT. WHO ELSE DOES THIS?!” The year 2014 was significant for Swifties because it signaled the start of *1989* and during this era, Swift’s fan interaction increased dramatically. Swift became very active on Tumblr, followed fans, and used the social media platform to interact with her fans regularly, evidenced by the “no its becky” t-shirt. Swifties were comfortable posting about their idol, asking her questions, and basically doing their best to get some sort of engagement from Swift herself, whether it was a reblog, liked post, or a response. The “no its becky” shirt told fans—and social media, entertainment news sites, and the general public—that she was in on the joke. The t-shirt allowed media outlets to report that Taylor Swift was engaged with her fans. Swift has always prided herself on her relationship with her fans, and even released the song “Long Live” about her band and fans during the *Speak Now* era. Swift sings,

Will you take a moment?
 Promise me this
 That you'll stand by me forever
 But if, God forbid, fate should step in
 And force us into a goodbye
 If you have children some day
 When they point to the pictures
 Please tell them my name
 Tell them how the crowds went wild
 Tell them how I hope they shine
 Long live the walls we crashed through
 I had the time of my life, with you. (“Long Live”)

“Long Live” is meaningful to fans and oftentimes serves as a reminder for why they love Swift. Before the *reputation* Stadium Tour in 2018, Swift asked fans what they wanted to hear on tour and Swift said she received a lot of requests for old songs (Dugdale). Swift played a different surprise song from past albums each night, but “Long Live” was on the setlist for the entire tour because it so clearly signifies the special relationship Swifties have with Swift. Not only do they get to interact with her, fans believe that Swift honestly cares

about them and values their relationship. As shown in File 3, the-mess-tht-you-wanted posted about Swift's mashup of "Long Live" with "New Year's Day"⁴⁴ on her *reputation* Tour in 2018, writing that "Long Live" is about how the fans stayed by Swift's side and supported her throughout the years, and mashing it with "New Year's Day" implies that Swift will be there to support her fans as well, no matter what happens. Although this occurred four years after Swift publicly sported the "no its becky" shirt, the shirt still serves as a reminder that Swift sees her fans online and continuously curates the idea that she is accessible and listening to her fans. Swift fans are still posting about it as recently as 31 January 2019. Nearly five years later, this joke is still remembered and referenced within the fandom. The symbolic cue started as an inside joke with fans and became a much larger cultural artifact when Taylor Swift interacted with it publicly.

Symbolic cues are small instances and when combined, they help create the overall story told in the rhetorical vision, which is a general narrative understood by group members. Along with eras and droughts, inside jokes such as "no its becky" all work to contribute to the rhetorical vision of the group. "No its becky" most notably implies that Swift is engaged with her fanbase and fans use it as a reminder that she sees what they are posting. Cues like this have formed an environment that Swift herself can help inform and interact with. The Swifties' rhetorical vision is built around Swift's fan engagement, and these symbolic cues support the character theme Swifties have created, in which they have characterized Swift as genuine in her interactions with her fans.

A third example of a symbolic cue in the Swiftie fandom is the image of a snake. The snake image spread across social media when the #TaylorSwiftIsOverParty hashtag trended on Twitter. However, during *reputation*, Swift took back the term *snake*. She gave a speech at

⁴⁴ In "New Year's Day," Swift sings, "Hold on to the memories, they will hold on to you / and I will hold on to you" ("New Year's Day").

the opening night of her *reputation* tour about name-calling and how what others say about people doesn't compare to the opinion of those who know and love them (Woodward). Swift further explained why she used snakes, stating, "I guess with the snakes, I wanted to send a message to you that if someone uses name-calling to bully you on social media, or even if a lot of people jump on board with it, it doesn't have to defeat you. It can strengthen you instead" (qtd. in Woodward). Swift wanted to reclaim the image to show fans that they can overcome bullying and hurtful words, as well as take control of their image.

Fans have also embraced *snake* because it represents Swift taking hold of her own narrative in multiple facets, but specifically her image and reputation. Swift's statement about the song "Famous" became a meme. People online took Swift's words and found a way to poke fun at her, but fans also used it—and continue to use it—as a joke among the fandom. By using the snake imagery in her own album and show, Swift acknowledged the narrative of her reputation and reclaimed it by choosing to repurpose the term. The snake image held deeper meaning for Swifties as well. Fans are able to poke fun at the term by posting photos of snakes and captioning it as if it a photograph of Swift. File 4 shows a small snake in front of a microphone, which Tumblr user panicatthetaylorswiftconcert has captioned as "Taylor Swift doing press for reputation (2017)." Other examples include a snake wearing a cowboy hat, which was used to represent the *Debut* era, or pairing a photo of a snake with a photo of Swift because her outfit was similar to the pattern on the snake. More importantly, though, fans found a deeper meaning because they believed Swift, just like a real snake, had managed to shed her skin. By shedding her fear of a bad reputation, Swift was able to "kill" her old selves and become an authentic version of herself. Swifties, along with Swift, have embraced the term snake. It has become a symbolic cue that signals a change in Swift. Rather than being

afraid of what the public and media are saying about her, Swift is no longer following their cues.

The *snake* symbolic cue has signaled a change for Swifties' relationship with Swift, Swift's relationship with the media, and Swift's overall view of herself in the world. The term narrative also leans toward a symbolic cue for Swifties and originates in the "Famous" statement released by Taylor Swift. The idea of narrative, as well as the term snake, has created common memories among the Swifties. They are used to tell the story of how Swift started to own her image and her reputation, rather than allowing the media to assign qualities to her. It represents when Swift stopped openly caring what the general public and clickbait media sites thought of her and instead focused on the most important relationship she has ever had—her relationship with her fans.

The group consciousness in the Swiftie fandom is, of course, forgiving of Swift's mistake and sheds the best light on Swift. Rather than interpreting her moves as something that her publicity team plans, as some non-Swifties tend to do, Swift fans have used symbolic cues to inform their image of Swift. However, with Swift's continued engagement online, she has used the information to make her own moves as well. While it is up for debate on whether or not Swift is a cold, calculating businesswoman who manipulates her fans into caring for her or someone who does what she does for the benefit of the fans, it is likely that the answer falls somewhere in between. Swift knows that fan engagement is good publicity, but she seems to also care about her fans and wants to interact with them, especially throughout *reputation*, during which she seemed to either interact with fans or give information on her terms, instead of granting a multitude of interviews. The symbolic cues used in the Swiftie fandom have created a positive, fan-centric persona and character theme for Taylor Swift and have molded common memories of that throughout the eras.

Fantasy Types

Fantasy types are “stock scenarios used to explain new events in a well-known dramatic form such as Watergate, Irangate, and Whitewatergate” (Bormann 283). According to Bormann, the suffix -gate depicts governmental corruption and cover-up (283). Another popular example is Monicagate, referring to the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal (Rich). The -gate phenomenon can also be found in popular culture, such as in the popular television show *Glee* where the surprise pregnancy of Quinn Fabray is referred to as “Babygate” (Falchuck). Using the -gate suffix in popular culture refers to a surprising event or breaking the rules in some way. However, it cues people in to the idea that it was some sort of scandal. Bormann further states that fantasy type is “the workhouse of rhetorical visions” (284) because it allows for members of the community to look at an event with fresh eyes. Fantasy types further the rhetorical vision by *recreating* new lens to view it, rather than people growing bored and moving on to a new fantasy and rhetorical vision. Since most fantasy types are recognizable across a multitude of rhetorical visions, fantasizers can purposefully employ fantasy types to fulfill their own needs and agendas. A common fantasy type is the American dream, a typical from rags to riches success story. Taylor Swift and the Swifties are no strangers to the idea of fantasy types. There are two specific fantasy types that have applied to Swift throughout her career. Swifties have used the -gate suffix to describe a scandalous moment and Swift has been subject to the fantasy type “America’s Sweetheart.”

Swift fans have adapted the -gate suffix in their fandom. A group of Swifties differ in their rhetorical vision and have determined that Swift was in a romantic relationship with her best friend at the time, model Karlie Kloss. These fans are referred to as “Kaylor” because Taylor Swift and Karlie Kloss’s “ship name” (a name given to two people who may or may not really be in a *relationship*) is Kaylor. Swift’s confirmed heterosexual relationships

received ship names as well— “Haylor” refers to Swift’s relationship with One Direction’s Harry Styles, “Tayvin” was used when Swift dated DJ Calvin Harris, and “Hiddleswift” references Swift’s relationship with actor Tom Hiddleston. Shipping is not uncommon among fandoms or the public—for example, Bennifer (Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez), Larry Stylinson (Louis Tomlinson and Harry Styles), and Kimye (Kim Kardashian West and Kanye West) are all examples of celebrity couple names. Ship names can be used to describe a legitimate couple or an “OTP,” or “one true pairing” which fans use to describe couples that are not together, but they would like to be in a relationship. Kaylor falls under the second category—it is an imagined relationship between Kloss and Swift. Some fans would like for it to be true, but others believe that Swift is hiding a non-straight relationship in order to keep up her image.

The Kaylor⁴⁵ theory is widely debated in the Swift fan and many go up in arms over “kissgate.” Kissgate refers to a video taken of Kloss and Swift at a The 1975 concert in 2014. The images are grainy, but people believe it shows Swift and Kloss kissing, which led to many media outlets picking up on the theory and asking if Swift was in a relationship with Kloss (femmetay). Swifties who do not support or believe in Kaylor being a real relationship point to the evidence that Swift’s representative denied the rumor and the fact that Kloss was in a relationship with Joshua Kushner, an American businessman, at the time, whom she married in 2018. Kaylor believers believed that Swift’s representative would obviously deny the rumors because Swift has generally been known as a straight woman who serially dates men to write songs about them. Kissgate was proof that Swift is in a same-sex relationship and the

⁴⁵ This “theory” encompasses more than the relationship between Taylor Swift and Karlie Kloss—some fans believe that Swift has been hiding same-sex relationships since early in her career, beginning with Emily Poe, a fiddle player that joined her band in 2006. According to these fans, their relationship (Taymily) ended sometime before *Fearless* was released in 2008. Some fans also believe that Swift and actress Dianna Agron, who starred in *Glee*, had a secret relationship (Swiftgron) sometime around 2012. Fans believe that Swift’s songs “Breathe” and “Holy Ground” are about Poe and Agron respectively.

men she dates serve as “beards” to uphold her straight image. Kushner would be serving the same purpose for Kloss to allow the model and pop star to keep their relationship a secret.

The -gate fantasy type continues to persist in the Swiftie fandom. New posts can still be found in the #kissgate tag on Tumblr, and at the time of writing, the most recent image was posted on 3 February 2019.

The kissgate fantasy type illustrates how a rhetorical vision can splinter between members and people within the same group can hold a similar, but different, understanding of their shared reality. Kissgate also sheds a light on a part of the fandom that is not usually talked about. Taylor Swift fans are widely considered to be teenage girls, who are further considered to be unintelligent, hysterical, basic, manipulative, irrational, and more. It seems irrational that fans would create an entire same-sex relationship “theory” from a woman who has always presented herself as straight, evidenced through her relationships. Further, most of Swift’s lyrics speak to a relationship with a male, based on her use of pronouns, but some do not have pronouns that clearly indicate a male partner. For example, “How You Get The Girl” (2014) speaks from the perspective of a female but never mentions a male pronoun, and “You Belong With Me” (2008) compares Swift to another female figure but the “you” she is singing to is never clearly identified with male pronouns. However, although the speculation is invasive⁴⁶ and presumptuous and non-Kaylors are defensive when “Kaylor” circulates, it also created discussion of LGBT+ issues in the fandom. Fans argue over the Kaylor theory, as well as others that have circulated about other same-sex relationships, because they feel it is wrong or that Swifties should not project sexualities onto Swift. Fans have said that even if

⁴⁶ Swift has never spoken about this, but Louis Tomlinson of One Direction said that having a sexuality and hidden relationship with bandmate Harry Styles projected onto them directly negatively affected their relationship with each other (Wootton).

Swift does identify as LGBT+, it is more disrespectful for Kaylor to force her into coming out before she wants to.

Along with Kissgate, Swift has previously been referred to as “America’s Sweetheart.” America’s Sweetheart is a fantasy type that describes famous women in the United States. *Allure* describes the title as “America just wouldn’t be America without a sweetheart. She’s part girl next door, part world-famous celebrity. Her smile is pure Fourth of July fireworks. And every few years, she passes down her title to the next chosen one” (Rogers). Swift has often been described as America’s Sweetheart, especially early on in her career, which allowed people across most rhetorical visions to understand something about Swift—she is a wholesome, typical, American good girl. She’s famous and genuinely represents America’s positive values. Taylor Swift fit this image for many years—she performed in country music, had a reputation for being a nice girl, and worked hard. Swift even famously threw parties referred to as “Taymerica” for the Fourth of July. Fans were worried that the loss of Swift’s Sweetheart image, as well as declaring the old Taylor dead, would lead to *reputation* flopping in sales. Fans were aware that Swift buying into the Sweetheart image led to a lot of support from people who were not considered Swifties—the general public was more accepting of Swift before she became a pop culture “villain” because her Sweetheart image lent her credibility as a role model and someone to look up to. Swift revealing her *reputation* was a risky move in the eyes of many Swifties, but it was time for Swift to grow out of the “America’s Sweetheart” fantasy type.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Many fans believe Swift’s first publicist, Paula Erickson, was ineffective. According to Tumblr user *recklesstreacherous*, Erickson was hands off and let Swift be “ripped to pieces,” which is why she received so much “hate” about her relationships (*recklesstreacherous*). Further, according to the same post, Swift and Erickson split because Erickson treated Swift like she was still 16, which many fans believed to including how she dressed, which meant she wasn’t able to act more “grown up” as she aged (*recklesstreacherous*).

Swift's first promotional material for *reputation* featured a snake striking at the screen. The *Look What You Made Me Do* music video featured Swift being served tea by snakes, and many entertainment sites and people on social media believed that the inaugural single for the album meant it would be filled with revenge songs for Kim Kardashian West, Kanye West, and others Swift perceived to have wronged her, confirming that she was petty and still trying to "play the victim."⁴⁸ Her merchandise had a snake theme, and, during the *reputation* Tour, inflatable snakes filled the stage for part of the show. Swift embraced the fantasy theme, but fans never believed that is who Swift was a person. Fans have incorporated Swift's newest reputation for the better and strongly believe that the *reputation* era was for the fans, and Swift has become more reclusive in response to the media attention she has received in recent years. Fans acknowledge that removing herself from the public eye was likely Swift's best move. Swifties also seem to believe that fulfilling the role of pop culture villain is a savvy rhetorical and public relations move, but at her heart, Swift still possesses all the qualities that first contributed to the Sweetheart image.

Swift's fans and the media have adapted fantasy themes for Swift. Kissgate describes a new event and is clearly fit into the "scandal" category by using the -gate suffix. Fantasy types are common and easily understood among large groups of people, even when if they do not fall into the same group consciousness, which is why describing Taylor Swift as America's Sweetheart describes and explains her personality to large quantities of people. The term "snake" is a fantasy type applied to Taylor Swift by her detractors, and while Swift embraced it publicly, fans believe that she is still a "Sweetheart."

⁴⁸ Swifties doubted this because often the lead single for an album is slightly jarring, in order to keep the feeling of the actual album a surprise. For example, "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together" (2010) was Swift's poppiest song to date. It was an upbeat breakup song and the music video Swift paired with it was a fun, silly event with her bandmates wearing animal costumes. However, this song is featured on *Red*, which is widely considered to be Swift's saddest album.

Sagas

A saga, according to Bormann, is a “detailed account of the achievements in the life of a person, group, community, organization, or nation ... [the saga] represents the symbolic consciousness of an organization as culture and in doing so may tie together organization members who participate in diverse rhetorical visions” (284). Cragan and Shields write that sagas are familiar in ideals such as “the power of the ballot box” and the American “work ethic” (201). Many are familiar with the ideal of “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” in the United States. Society values a strong work ethic and the idea that working continuously toward a goal and never giving up, no matter the hardships faced, can lead to a successful life. America loves the underdog—the success of starting from the bottom and climbing to the top of that ever-important top.

Swift fans prescribe two sagas for Swift: first, Swift’s hard work led to her fame, and second, the death of Swift’s reputation led to her being the happiest she has ever been. Swifties are often talking about Swift’s work ethic and strongly believe she created her own success, subscribing to the saga that “I [Swift] made myself famous,” for their rhetorical vision. The common belief among fans is that Swift started at the bottom of the music industry and worked her way to the top with her songwriting and ability to put on a show. Swifties believe that Taylor Swift is a savvy business woman and someone who cares about other artists. Swift started her career at a young age, moving to Nashville when she was just 12 years old. At 14, she signed her first record deal with Big Machine Records (“Taylor Swift: Road to Reputation”). Swift has always written her own songs and is credited as a songwriter on everything she has ever released. Ughstory posted about Swift’s early career, writing, “Do you ever think about how hardcore Taylor is? This girl was a teenager singing in bars about boys and crushes with an audience of grown and intimidating looking men and not

giving a damn what anyone thought about her. Tell me that's not badass" (ughstory). The post illustrates how fans perceive Swift early on in her career—committed to her craft and determined to get a record deal. In 2016, Swift's denial of West's statement proved she was conniving liar to the general public, but in 2009, West was the villain and entertainment media sites and the general public supported Swift (Kreps). The interruption arguably pushed Swift to a level she had not been in before, although she was already a figure in the public eye. While Swift was popular with country music listeners and some of her songs had radio play on pop stations (most notable are "Love Story" and "You Belong With Me"), West did give Swift more name recognition in popular culture.

Swifties strongly disagree with the characterization that West made Swift famous and did not let that detract from their saga of Swift's career. When the recorded phone call between Swift and West was released, Swifties on Tumblr were eager to defend Swift. Fans are not willing to consider the idea that West made Swift famous because they believe her determination and talent meant it was inevitable that she would be successful in her career. Swifties and non-Swifties found a space to discuss internalized misogyny upon the release of "Look What You Made Me Do," in which Swift sings that she does not trust anyone and no one trusts her, they (West, Kardashian West, and clickbait media sites, according to fans) asked for a place to sleep and Swift was locked out as they threw a feast, and that the world moves on to another drama but not for Swift ("Look What You Made Me Do"). Entertainment sites and people on social media believed that Swift would spend the entirety of her next album dissing others and stressing about her *reputation*. Tumblr user peetababy argues that Swift is unable to respond to her experiences in a manner that she wants to without backlash:

I *am* saying that most of the reasons people are shitting on her comes from deeply internalized misogyny, no matter how much they deny this.

If you hate TS's new song because you think she's

- a. crying for attention
- b. being immature
- c. being too petty / needs to "get over" kimye / katy perry / whatever

then please, ask yourself why no one ever, ever, ever shits on male musicians for writing songs that not only shit on other artists, but even call them out by their name. Like, Drake vs. Meek Mill or Eminem vs. well, you name it. People go crazy over that shit. These male artists are seen as bad ass and savage for doing something that **YOU'RE ALL SHITTING ON TAYLOR SWIFT FOR DOING.**

Not to mention, no one ever shit on Kanye for demeaning Taylor in his song, "Famous," SEVEN years after the vma award show "incident." He was still going on about it, and no one told him to "move past it." Why? You know why. Because men can respond to their *own* experiences in whatever way they want to. And according to you guys, women can only respond to their *own* experiences in one acceptable way. AKA not being "petty," and just shutting the fuck up. Because like, who wants to hear women talk anyways? lets leave that for the men, right?

Please check your internalized misogyny at the door and allow Taylor Swift to respond to her own experiences in whatever way she wants, because you all allow men that exact same luxury without endlessly shitting on them. (peetababy)

The response to the post, which received over 5,000 notes, was mixed. The discourse ranged from agreement to people vehemently disagreeing and explaining why the situation did not fit into the category internalized misogyny. Peetababy does not show on their Tumblr page whether or not they put themselves into the category of "Swiftie," but their post circulated among Swifties after it was posted, and they had thoughts on both sides of the issue. For example, one ballroomofmymindp writes,

**PREACH IT! LET WOMEN BE ANGRY AND REACT HOW THEY WANT TO!!!
TAYLOR IS NO LONGER LETTING PEOPLE/THE MEDIA WALK ALL OVER
HER ANYMORE. LET HER RESPOND THE WAY THAT SHE WANTS TO. SHE
IS IN NO WAY BEING IMMATURE OR PETTY. SHE'S JUST DONE TRYING
TO "SHAKE IT OFF" SINCE EVERYONE WOULD STILL ATTACK HER
ANYWAY. SHE IS DONE TAKING SHIT FROM OTHERS AND I'M SO PROUD
OF HER FOR TAKING BACK THE NARRATIVE IN SUCH A GENIUS WAY.
(ballroomofmymindp)**

Ballroomofmymindp passionately believed that Swift was not being allowed a fair response.

They were not willing to accept the characterization of Swift as immature and petty.

However, other responders were more willing to hear points from both sides, engaging in discourse on whether or not the response to Swift's song and video was internalized misogyny. It inspired discourse among fans and non-fans alike, with many willing to admit that Swift has made mistakes in the past, especially in terms of her understanding of feminism and her reluctance to endorse candidates or speak out about political issues, but that "Look What You Made Me Do" was Swift's turn to tell her side of the feud.

The response to "Look What You Made Me Do" also further illustrates the saga Swifties have created of Swift. Swifties believe Swift's own hard work put her at the top, evidenced through the staying power of Swift's career. Tumblr user *reputatiovn* posited that the first secret message⁴⁹ of the *reputation* album would be "I made myself famous" (*reputatiovn*). *Reputatiovn*'s post garnered over 2,000 notes, which include replies, responses, and reblogs. Swifties believe Swift's albums have not continued to sell over a million copies with each release because West interrupted one acceptance speech. Instead, Swift's hard work has allowed her to recreate herself with each era and continue to find success. *1989* is a fan-favorite example because Swift crossed over from country to pop. Swift's sound changed with each album, but each one notably held more pop sounds than the last. The release of *1989* is praised by fans because it showcased Swift as the strong business woman they believed her to be. Swift decided to totally cross over to pop and, before releasing *1989*, her record label (Big Machine Records) asked her to include one country song on the album so it could be sold as a pop-country album. Swift declined—she wanted to go in the direction of

⁴⁹ Secret messages refer to Swift's albums, excluding *reputation*, in which she would leave secret messages in the album booklet for fans to decode. In the lyrics for each song, Swift would capitalize different letters throughout the song through which fans could decipher more meaning. For example, in the lyrics for "Begin Again," Swift describes a relationship in which she could never wear high heels because her partner didn't like it. The secret message for this song is "I wear heels now" (*Red*).

pop instead of trying to straddle two genres. Swifties use these stories, and others, to describe how Swift is a savvy businesswoman who made her own success.

A second saga that Swifties have applied to Swift occurs after the release of *reputation*.

Taylor Swift is now, in her most recent years, doing better than ever before (“Call It What You Want”). Swifties take great pride in Swift’s happiness and believe that they are part of the reason for it. During her *reputation* Tour, Swift spoke to fans in the audience about her song “All Too Well,” a song about a heartbreak left Swift devastated. Swift sings, “And I might be okay / But I’m not fine at all,” and later adds “You call me up again just to break me like a promise / So casually cruel in the name of being honest / I’m a crumpled up piece of paper lying here / ‘Cause I remember it all, all, all too well” (“All Too Well”). The song is a fan favorite and is widely considered by fans to be Swift’s lyrical masterpiece because of the imagery and storytelling throughout. The fact that, according to the song “Call It What You Want,” Swift is “doing better than she ever was” is largely tied in with the concept of narrative and the character theme for Swift, in which she takes back narrative by increasing her fan interactions and changing her interactions with media sites to control her image. On her *reputation* Stadium Tour in 2018, Swift played songs from past album each night because the fans asked for it. Each night was generally a different song, but “All Too Well” was played multiple times throughout the tour. On the last night of United States portion of the tour, Swift sang it again. While introducing it, she addressed the audience and told them the song has two lives. In its first life, it was born out of cleansing and trying to process a heartbreak; it was about a hard time in her life and trying to get over something. In its second life, it went out into the world and met the fans (Dugdale). Since then, Swift has created memories of “All Too Well” where fans are screaming the lyrics back at her, tattooing the lyrics on their bodies, and creating a positive experience for Swift. Swift tells fans they have

changed “All Too Well” for her (Dugdale). Now, on *reputation*, Swift sings “I’m doing better than I ever was” (“Call It What You Want”). Further, in the poem “Why She Disappeared,” released in the magazine edition of the *reputation* album, Swift writes, “And in the death of her reputation, she felt truly alive” (“Why She Disappeared”). Swift fans are confident that the *reputation* era is the happiest Swift has ever been.

The saga of Swift’s happiness has taken for Swifties time to develop because of the revelations after *reputation* was released. Previously, Swifties had thought that Swift was happy during her *Speak Now* era and tour. Although Swift had penned melancholy break up songs for her third album, she appeared to be happy on stage. However, during the *reputation* era, a post circulated that point out that Swift had written *Red* during *Speak Now*. *Red*, Swift’s fourth studio album, is most famous for songs such as “I Knew You Were Trouble,” “We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together,” “Red,” and “All Too Well,” all which chronicle Swift’s heartbreak. *Red* is also home to “The Lucky One,” in which Swift tells the story of a star who traded Madison Square from rose gardens and that perhaps the unnamed star is the lucky one for getting out of the spotlight, making fans wonder if Swift was struggling with her fame. Swift’s fourth album also has happier love songs as well, but the overtone of sadness has resonated with fans since *Red*’s release. The realization that *Red* was written during *Speak Now* told fans that Swift could not have been at her happiest—she just succeeded at playing the part. Then, *1989* seemed to be a happy era for Swift. She found friends, had a successful relationship, and broke her records. During most nights of the tour, Swift’s friends or other celebrities were invited onstage with her to perform, strut the catwalk, and share the spotlight. However, in the poem “If You’re Anything Like Me,” Swift writes,

And no amount of friends at 25
Will fill the empty seats
At the lunch tables of your past
The teams that picked you last...

But Darling, you keep trying. (“If You’re Anything Like Me”)

The poem holds a lot of meaning for fans. Tumblr user screamedsooloud writes,

i feel like as a general rule people don’t acknowledge how self-aware taylor is? the reputation poems are super introspective and revealing but ... nobody outside of the fandom cares about them? it would seem all they care about is feuds and relationships? e.g. in *if you’re anything like me* taylor basically admitted some of the commentary surrounding her ‘squad’ was kinda true? ‘And no amount of friends at 25, Will fill the empty seats, At the lunch tables of your past, The teams that picked you last...But Darling, you keep trying.’ like.. are y’all reading this? processing it? digesting it? that is some real shit. (screamedsooloud)

Screamedsooloud is acknowledging that Swift has admitted that the stories written about her can hold a grain of truth. However, in becoming better than she ever was, she is self-aware and knows that her “squad” was trying to fill a type of hole that is left from her childhood. It further reinforces the Swifties’ idea that Swift is open and authentic with her fans, which is an important part of the character theme and saga of Swift. “Why She Disappeared” further supports Swifties’ saga of happiness, with Swift writing,

When she crashed, her clothes disintegrated and blew away
 With the winds that took all of her fair-weather friends
 When she looked around, her skin was spattered with ink
 forming the words of a thousand voices
 Echoes she heard even in her sleep:
 "Whatever you say, it is not right."
 "Whatever you do, it is not enough."
 "Your kindness is fake."
 "Your pain is manipulative." (“Why She Disappeared”)

These poems told Swifties that Swift had likely been in more pain than they realized during 1989. Oftentimes, it seemed like a big party on stage and early on, instead of dating, Swift made a show of finding friends and finally fitting in somewhere. Later, she found someone to love and was in her longest relationship. However, according to Swifties, the poems show that Swift was trying to fill an empty space. She was told repeatedly that her kindness was fake, her pain was manipulative, her words were wrong, and that no matter what she did, it

would never be enough. Swift took an extended break after *1989*, which Swifties believe Swift needed to recover after the era's end.

In the same post that pointed out Swift wrote *Red* during *Speak Now*, Swifties found comfort in the fact that Swift was actually happy in *reputation*. According to the poster, even though all her albums (except *Taylor Swift*) were penned during her previous era, this was not true of *reputation*. Due to her year off, Swift had written a large portion of *reputation* during *reputation*. The album, which holds a few "revenge" songs as the media predicted, is mostly full of love songs. Swifties are called back to *Red* during these songs. Not because the songs are sad, but because in the album notes for *Red*, Swift wrote that although she had experienced a love that was red, she believes true love shines golden (*Red*). In *reputation*, Swift makes multiple references to gold. "Dancing With Our Hands Tied" states "My, my love had been frozen / deep blue, but you painted me golden" while "Dress" states "Made your mark on me / a golden tattoo." Swifties use the lyrics referring to gold to support their belief that Swift's current relationship, and letting go of her reputation, have allowed to find true love and be happy.

The saga of Swift's happiness is ongoing. Swifties are extremely invested in it and often post about how happy she is. They believe that their support is part of what makes Swift so happy, based on Swift's interactions with them during *reputation*. At its base, the narrative of Swift is centered on and hinges upon the fact that fans believe she is authentic in her interactions with them. Their assumption that Swift is always an authentic being is informed by their underlying theory that Swift has played the villain during *reputation* but has never done so with her fans. In "Look What You Made Me Do," Swift sings that she will be the actress starring in their bad dreams. Swifties focused on the word "actress" and inferred that Swift herself is authentic but, for all intents and purposes, her relationship with clickbait and

entertainment media was done. This is supported by the *reputation* album booklet, in which Swift writes, “There will be no further explanation. There will be just reputation” (*reputation*). She would play the part of the villain because that is the role she had been assigned, but it did not matter because Swifties know the real Taylor Swift. Fans believe their narrative of Swift is directly opposing that of the media and the general public. Many of the people in these groups have come to believe that Swift is fake in her interactions and her public persona is like a change of clothing. Everything Swift does is to promote the *idea* that she is genuine, portraying Swift as cold and calculating, and someone who has played the victim and uses her relationships for fame and financial gain.

Although both sides present an intriguing argument, I believe it is likely that Swift falls somewhere in between the two extremes. I do not believe that the kind things she has reportedly done come solely from a place of self-promotion and wanting to be liked. I think Swift understands the effects that becoming accessible to her fandom will have. These interactions happen in a public forum, which means word will spread. However, the fact that she can use social media to her benefit does not mean that her savvy for self-promotion is immediately categorized as ingenuine. It seems that Swift does enjoy meeting and talking to her fans but has found ways to continuously promote her brand through everything she does.

Structural Concepts

Dramatis personae, *plotline*, *scene*, and *sanctioning agent* are the original four main structural concepts in Symbolic Convergence Theory, which all assist in unifying a common symbolic reality, or rhetorical vision, for a group of people (Bormann et al. 285). A fifth structural element, the master analogue, was later added to SCT. *Dramatis personae* are the actors or players who give life to the rhetorical vision, which falls mostly on Taylor Swift. However, Swifties have included themselves in the rhetorical vision, which means that

Swifties are both actors and fantasizers. *Plotline* provides the action of the rhetorical vision, which informs both the character theme and the saga of Swift. *Scene* describes where the rhetorical vision happens and, for Swift, a lot of her setting would be her presence in clickbait media's stories and her involvement with her fanbase on social media. However, the *sanctioning agent* is what legitimizes the rhetorical vision. Swifties have legitimized their rhetorical vision through the idea that Swift supports them and they, in turn, support her. They use the saga of Swift making herself famous, as well as the character theme of authenticity, to spread their message in direct response to the detractors who believe that Swift has not earned her fame.

Master Analogues

After Bormann et al.'s first foray into SCT, a fifth structural element was added—the master analogue, meaning the underlying structure within the rhetorical vision. There are three different structures that a rhetorical vision can fall into: pragmatic, righteous, or social. A pragmatic master analogue works to be simple, practical, cost-effective, efficient, and more (Cragan & Shields 4). A righteous rhetorical vision focuses on being correct and doing things the right way and members are concerned with “right and wrong, superior and inferior, proper and improper, moral and immoral, and just and unjust” (4). Lastly, a social rhetorical vision focuses on “friendship, trust, caring, comradeship, compatibility, family ties, brotherhood, sisterhood, and humaneness” (4). Oftentimes, visions will fall partially in each category. Every group has a social, righteous, and pragmatic aspect—it is necessary in setting up rules and ensuring the continuation of the group. The way SCT determines which is the master analogue, though, is by determining which drives the group. The master analogue is the backbone of the consciousness and it is found by determining which qualities the group members value in terms of function.

The rhetorical vision that best fits Swifties online is the social rhetorical vision. At its most fundamental level, the Swiftie fandom is based in creating friendly relationships online and believing that Swift is a friend to the fandom. Swifties believe that Swift is dedicated to her fanbase and that she is authentic in her interactions with them. A common belief among the fandom is that in “Look What You Made Me Do,” Swift declared the old Taylor dead but that it was not true. The old Taylor is dead in the sense that she is done with the media, but the Swift is still playful, funny, and kind at her core. That Swift, who values her friendships and works hard, is a large part of the social aspect of their rhetorical vision. At the Billboard Music Awards (BBMA) during her *Red* era, Swift accepted the Artist of the Year award and stated during her speech, “To the fans, who come to the shows and buy the albums, I just want you to know this one thing: You are the longest and best relationship I’ve ever had” (“Taylor Swift” *InTouch Weekly*). The *Red* era was when Swift received the most backlash for her public relationships and was commenting on the fact that many had told her she “can’t make ‘em stay” (“Shake It Off”).⁵⁰ Swift used the acceptance speech to further comment on the relationship she appears to value the most—her relationship with her fans.

Swift has consistently spoken of her dedication to her fans. For example, she states, “Fans are my favorite thing in the world. I've never been the type of artist who has that line drawn between their friends and their fans. The line's always been really blurred for me. I'll hang out with them after the show. I'll hang out with them before the show” (Maccabee). The Swifties’ view of her is illustrated in File 5, in which Tumblr user reputayshann follows Swift’s dedication to her fans through the years, starting with *Fearless*. Reputayshann points

⁵⁰ In her debut single for *1989*, “Shake It Off,” Swift sings “I go on too many dates, but I can't make 'em stay / At least that's what people say mmm mmm, that's what people say mmm mmm.” During *1989*, which occurred directly after the *Red* era, Swift used “Shake It Off” and “Blank Space” to show that she was aware her serial dater image. The moment at the BBMA, which was near the end of the *Red* era and when Swift would have been finalizing *1989*, shows that Swift is aware of how her relationship with men is perceived but that she values another love, another relationship, more—the relationship with her fans.

out various highlights, including how Swift would walk through the crowd at concerts and take time to greet, hug, and interact with fans, the Secret Sessions at Swift's house, the song "Ronan" which was written in honor of a Ronan, a four-year-old with cancer, and most importantly, all the times Swift thanked her fans. Reputayshann ends the post by writing that Taylor Swift has always been there for her, made her feel loved and wanted, and introduced her to some of her best friends ever. According to Reputayshann, Swift is not just an artist—she is her best friend. The post is even tagged with "#i love you taylor" and "#best friend". The social master analogue has been strongly created through Swifties' belief that they have a special relationship with Swift.

Many fans look up to Swift as an older sister or best friend figure. *Fansided*, a fan-powered network of sports, entertainment, and lifestyle sites, hosts "Fans of Taylor," which is a dedicated community for fans of Taylor Swift to find news and original content. Kara Johnson, a self-proclaimed Taylor Swift enthusiast, wrote an article for the site titled "The Importance of Taylor Swift's Relationship With Her Fans." Johnson wrote,

Why is this so important? It's important because the fans aren't just those who give Swift money. They are people she can count on and they can count on her. The songstress isn't just a celebrity or an artist, she's a friend. Perhaps this is why she is the biggest star in the world. She's not only the most talented songwriter in the industry, she's the most down to earth artist you can find. She's famous because she connects with the people who love her on a level no other artist has done before. Her relationship with her fans is the most important and she's made this clear time and time again. (Johnson)

Johnson's description of Swift's relationship with her fans explains the social analogue that holds the community together and reinforces the character theme of authenticity for Swift. Swift's fame was inevitable because she is a talented songwriter, down to earth, and connects with people in a way no other artist done. Her ability to form meaningful relationships with her fanbase made Swift famous and, because of this, the people who love Swift went from fans to "stans" and then, finally, to friends.

India Rose, who posts under the username *goodgirlwhoshopeful*, posted about the Secret Sessions and reiterates the importance Swifties place upon their relationship with Swift and their unfailing belief that that importance is reciprocated. File 6: *reputation* Secret Sessions shows Rose's interpretations the interactions between Swift at the Secret Session in London. Swift spoke about her turbulent relationship with the media and the anxiety that it caused, but she still feels safe with her fans. According to Rose, the Secret Sessions were a sacred space and she felt a bond of trust between fans and Swift that, unless the fans break it somehow, is there to stay. Fans continue to inform their social analogue of the fandom based on how Swift interacts with them. Swift's continued fan-based statements and actions, such as the Secret Sessions and opening up about anxiety, have created the feeling of genuine friendship between fans and Swift.

Swifties have created friendships among themselves on Tumblr. There are many instances of fans going to a Swift concert and meeting up with their internet friends while there, posting about how Swift brought them together. Fans have also created an environment of support through their social analogue. Fans value friendship among themselves and will post their seating location at concerts and ask for other Swifties to meet up with them if they are interested. Fans will also post about why they want to meet Swift and other fans will reblog the posts, commenting and tagging Swift to encourage her to meet them. These posts occur at a higher frequency during tours because Swift hosts free meet and greets and fans are often chosen from the crowd. However, Swift or TaylorNation (Swift's team) will see posts online and find fans at their seating location and invite them to the meet and greet. Along with encouraging Swift to meet other fans, Swifties will create posts asking Swift to follow their friends or reblog similar posts.

Swifties have expanded this support further to try and create an online environment that is more inclusive. “Swifties of Color,” a site that presents as a fan-created space for minorities to find a safe space in the fandom, writes in their Frequently Asked Questions section, “Our goal is to support, uplift, and love people of color in this fandom! Unfortunately, we’ve noticed a difference in the way white fans and colored fans are treated, and quite frankly, we’re tired of it. We created this group chat and this blog in order to make the fandom a safer, happier place for people of color,” (“FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS”). The blog started by hosting “POC [people of color] selfie nights,” but has since included LBGT+ selfie nights and disability selfie nights. The site even reported that they are working on including a plus size selfie night in a response to a question. Further, the administrators of the group address what fans can do as a white person:

As a white person, it is important that you do not overstep and speak over us. However, that does not mean you should remain silent. Listen when people of color express a concern, don’t get angry and defensive. Reblog more posts from people of color rather than white people. Make it known that racism and bigotry are not tolerated on your blog. Call racism out when you see it. Most importantly, speak up; if you are silent, you are complicit. If you are complicit, you are the reason why we are doing this. You are part of the problem. (“FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS”)

Finding a Tumblr page dedicated to minorities in a space that is seemingly filled with the “other girls” of America is very eye-opening. Taylor Swift fans, who are often thought of as basic, irrational, or rabid teenage girls, are working to create a safe space of inclusion and awareness for other fans. In a space that many would not expect to find discussions of LGBT+, ableism, and racism, fans are finding ways to bring it to the attention of fans who are not paying attention, and the comfort of addressing concerns displays the social analogue the fandom has built. Following the start of the selfie movement, a second group of Swifties posting with the tag *bodypositiveswifties*, hosted their second Body Positivity Night on Tumblr in early April 2019. The fans are comfortable addressing social issues and believe

that by spreading awareness, they can make change. They are interested in expanding the fandom to be more inclusive and changing the way fans are treated—finding perceived inequalities and working to rectify it, showing how the people society often thinks of as young, hysterical, and vain are actually taking an interest in social matters and trying to create change. Swifties are eager for representation of themselves in the media and on Tumblr and are working to spread a message of inclusivity and representation that they feel is lacking, creating ways to make themselves feel safe and welcome in a space where the public would not expect to find it.

Continuum

Rhetorical visions are measured on different continuums. Rhetorical visions are measured on their ability to change (flexible-to-inflexible), underlying pragmatic, righteous, or social structure (pure-to-mixed), amount of conspiracy underlying them (paranoid-to-healthy), and views on new members (secretive-to-proselytizing) (Bormann 285). A rhetorical vision's spot on each continuum dictates the rhetorical strategies used to sustain the vision. Members are either interested in restoring lost ground and returning to the original position of the founders (restoration), retaining important values, emotions, and motives while integrating change (conservation), and attempting to keep the rhetorical vision unchanged (preservation) (285). Most groups have a place in each continuum and the Swiftie fandom is no different.

On the pure-to-mixed continuum, Swifties fall very far on the pure end. Although there are pragmatic and righteous aspects, the fandom is a social being and grows and reinforces that daily. The fandom clearly holds a social backbone, which is informed by Swift's interactions with them. Fans tend to be self-policing as well—with TS7 on the horizon, fans have started circulating posts speaking to acceptable behavior throughout the

beginning of the era. Swifties believe that Swift will host Secret Sessions at her homes again and have written that fans should not accuse others of having a direct message (DM) from Swift's team, TaylorNation. The process for being invited to a Secret Session is generally getting a message clearly marked as confidential from TaylorNation and invites them to one of Swift's Sessions. By accusing a fan of "hiding" their DM, the fan is put in a tough place because they need to deny it either way due to confidentiality requirements, but also because nearly all fans want to meet Swift and the accusations are just a reminder the fan is not meeting her. Instead, fans are encouraged to reblog posts asking Swift to meet other fans to help others get the opportunity. It is considered better decorum to reblog others' posts rather than self-reblogging your own post to garner attention from Swift or her team. The self-policing shows the social backbone, because it is based in how fans' relationships are affected by various behaviors of other Swifties.

Most aspects of the Swiftie fandom fall on the healthy side of the paranoid-to-healthy continuum. Fans believe that Swift is herself with them. Their narrative of Swift is centered on the idea that Swift is authentic with her fanbase and the media has wronged Swift for her perceived faults. However, the Kaylor of the Swiftie fandom are on the opposite end. Although they love and support Swift, their belief that Swift secretly identifies as a member of the LBGT+ community and only dates men to promote and maintain her image as a straight woman is a conspiracy. These Swifties are not put off by the fact that Swift is believed to be authentic to her fanbase. Rather, their conspiracy is based in the fact that they believe Swift is still authentic with them but hides her true self publicly. Through the analysis of lyrics and images, Kaylor have successfully formed a conspiracy theory. In this case, Kaylor are sustaining the vision through conservation—trying to maintain the base character theme of Taylor Swift while introducing the idea that she may not actually be a straight

woman—while the majority of Swifties are in preservation, in which they are trying to keep the character theme and the friendly feeling of the fanbase intact.

Tumblr Swifties views of new members are sometimes conflicting. While fans seem open to newcomers to the fandom and understand that they are a necessity to the sustained growth of Swift's success, some do look down on new fans. Swiftie elitists, fans who have been in the fandom for many years, can be easily annoyed by change or are jealous and judgmental of new fans who meet Taylor Swift before older fans do. Swifties who have loyally supported Swift occasionally seem to find themselves more "valid" as a fan because of the length of their involvement in the fandom. However, in spite of this, I argue that Swifties fall further onto the proselytizing side of the secretive-to-proselytizing continuum. Although established fans may occasionally be irritated at new fans, Swifties are more committed to advocating for Taylor Swift than they are keeping their fandom a "secret" and creating necessary rituals to join. Swifties are committed to spreading the Swift rhetorical vision and encourage others to see Swift in her best light. The Tumblr tag "#Taylor Swift Defense Squad" is a great example because Swifties use it to defend Swift from various criticisms, and occasionally on other social media platforms, leading to the misconception that Swift's fans are rabid young girls. An article by *TrashTalkTV*, titled "Rabid Taylor Swift Fans Attack Abercrombie Over Tee Shirt," chronicles how Swifties rallied to stop popular clothing brand Abercrombie and Fitch from selling a t-shirt that said "# more boyfriends that t.s." Although Swifties were incensed because they were not interested in perpetuating the narrative that Taylor Swift is a serial dater, media sites described their actions as rabid. Although they were involved in discourse that addressed social issues, the fanbase was still dismissed, reiterating Shayla Thiel-Stern's idea that young girls are presented as in a constant state of crisis in order to delegitimize their voices.

Lastly, Swifties fall into the inflexible side of the inflexible-to-flexible continuum. Although fans are able to acknowledge Swift's wrongdoings, or the things that they perceive as wrongdoings, and accept that she is a flawed individual, they firmly believe that she is authentic with her fanbase. The idea that Taylor Swift is fake or putting on a show when she states that she values her relationship with her fans is unacceptable to Swifties. They firmly believe that their idol interacts positively with them and strives to be authentic to her fans, more like a friend than an out-of-reach celebrity. Her interactions with fans online have only moved Swifties further into the inflexible side.

Stages of Rhetorical Visions

There five stages of the life of a rhetorical vision are consciousness-creating or emergence, consciousness-rising, consciousness-sustaining, vision-declining, and terminus. Bormann, Cragan, and Shields revisit SCT in their 1992 article, "An expansion of the rhetorical vision component of the symbolic convergence theory: The Cold War paradigm case," and explain that there are three streams of consciousness that must happen before the final two stages (Shields et al. 2). Swifties have entered the first three stages, but the final two stages mentioned are not yet applicable to the group.

Consciousness-Creating

The first stage of a rhetorical vision is emergence, also known as consciousness-creating, which is when an event requires an explanation. The creation of the vision is guided by three principles: novelty, explanatory power, and limitation (Shields et al. 3). The *principle of novelty* explains that as vision falls behind the times, second and third generation members will not be intrigued by the rhetorical vision, meaning it attracts fewer new members. The *principle of explanatory power* is used to demonstrate how humans are likely to engage with and share fantasies that provide a plausible account of events when the

storyline becomes confusing (3). Lastly, the *principle of imitation* explains that when fantasizers become bored or confused, they will share fantasies that give a fresh spin to old dramas (3). These three principles combine to create a rhetoric for a certain state of events. In terms of fans, Swift was gaining them throughout each era. In her debut, she found a home on country radio and with young girls with songs like “Picture to Burn” and “Should’ve Said No,” which criticized the actions of boys Swift had dated, along with “Teardrops on my Guitar” and “Tied Together with A Smile,” which touched on unrequited love and seemed to speak honestly about her friendships, social status, and love life. Swift seemed to bring an authenticity to the music. She sang earnestly, looking for somewhere to belong. Many related to Swift early on because her lyrics read like a diary—rather than coming off as an untouchable star, she debuted as a relatable, down-to-earth, nice girl.

When I first started to study the Swifties and Symbolic Convergence Theory, I assumed that emergence would have been in 2009. If a rhetorical vision emerges because an event needs to be explained, the VMAs represent the most high-profile event and what presents as the most obvious choice. West’s shocking proclamation that Beyoncé made the best video of all time filled entertainment news sites and is the first widely publicized controversy that Swift was involved in. My second attempt at understanding the emergence stage assumed it occurred during Swift’s *Fearless* era. “Love Story” and “You Belong With Me” were played often on both pop and country radio which meant Swift was gaining new fans quickly, but the event I thought needed explaining was the critical success of *Fearless*. Swift’s second album is the most awarded album in country music history and caused many to question whether or not Swift had actually been a contributor in writing it, even though she’s credited as a writer on every song. This is the second most obvious event that requires

explaining because no one expected an 18-year-old girl to succeed the way Swift did.

However, Swifties were in emergence before both of these events.

Although there is not an “event” that needs explaining early on, the fantasy theme used in the Swiftie fandom is a character theme. If the vision is explained in terms of Swift, it stands to reason that rather than an event, Swifties emerged to create a rhetorical vision about the debut (or emergence) of Taylor Swift as an artist. The country artists that were popular in 2006, when Swift released her first album, were largely adult males (Trace Adkins, Tim McGraw, Kenny Chesney) or adult females (Miranda Lambert, Carrie Underwood, LeAnn Rimes), with the majority of women in their 20s or older. Taylor Swift was different, which was something that a lot of young country fans connected with. Instead of singing along to songs about adult relationships, they were able to sing along to Swift trying to navigate her teenage years. Emergence happened here, and into *Fearless*, because the rising star of Taylor Swift needed to be explained. What was it about her that so many glommed on to and would not let go? Swift was a breath of fresh air, especially for young girls. Her other-ness was relatable because she, too, did not have many friends at school, swooned after her crushes, and daydreamed about her life. The idea of “Taylor Swift” was the event that needed explanation, and it was provided through explaining her as not like other girls. Swift wrote her own songs, worked hard, and was brazenly calling out the boys who had wrong her. The commercial and critical success of *Fearless* only raised Swift’s name in pop culture. *Fearless* famously includes a song about the Jonas Brothers’ Joe Jonas, whom Swift had publicly dated shortly before the release of *Fearless*. During promotion for the album, Swift stated that Jonas broke up with her in a phone call that lasted less than 30 seconds. She was not afraid to “call him out,” which was an honesty that many found refreshing. Rather than shrinking from the break up, Swift thrived. She soon became known for her breakup songs.

Swift later dated musician John Mayer, who earned the song “Dear John” (2010), in which Swift addresses a man and chides him for playing with her feelings. Entertainment sites often reported about and posted photos of Swift with boyfriends, so when she stepped out with actor Jake Gyllenhaal, paparazzi seemed to find the two everywhere, spreading images of them across magazines and entertainment sites.

In her early years, Swift’s good girl image, combined with the idea that she’ll write a song about boys who cross her, was a novelty. Swifties emerged as they connected with Swift’s catalogue, which read like a diary. The bitter sweetness of “Tim McGraw,” the unrequited love of “Teardrops On My Guitar,” the anger of “Picture To Burn” and “Should’ve Said No,” and the young relationship in “Our Song” were relatable and spoke of emotions that weren’t often geared toward teenage girls at the time, especially in country music. The pop music scene was also largely dominated by adults, so as Swift released pop remixes of her songs and albums with more pop sounds, her fan base expanded. Although girls are expected to be unlike other girls, as an artist, Swift was the most like young girls. She also presented as unlike other girls, and even though she fit the negative stereotype of teenage girls (most notable are boy-crazy and emotional), girls finally had an artist that was their own. Swift understood the problems they faced because she, too, was unlike other girls but struggling to fit in anyway.

Consciousness-Raising

Consciousness-raising is the second stage, which happens as a people begin to share and engage in the fantasies in a way that causes them to become members of the community. Consciousness-raising continues throughout the life of the rhetorical vision, but early on it is the focus of the group (10). According to Shields et al., the *principle of critical mass* explains that rhetorical visions have a period of rapid growth when it reaches critical mass. Critical

mass is reached through potential new members finding comfort in the fantasies, the individuals in the group have commonalities that allow them share the fantasies in the vision, compelling dramatized messages are developed by a rhetorician(s), the vision has staff with the means to perpetuate it, or finally, fantasizers in the group have the means to reach large groups of people (10-11). Swifties reached consciousness-raising in 2009, when Kanye West interrupted Swift on stage at the VMAs. With the influx of her name and an event spurring deeper conversation, the Swiftie fandom was pushed into critical mass. Swift's success grew between *Fearless* and her next album, *Speak Now*. In their debut weeks, *Fearless* sold 592,000 copies ("Fearless (Taylor Swift album)") and *Speak Now* sold 1,047,000 copies ("Speak Now"). The year of 2009-2010 represents the fandom reaching critical mass because potential new members found comfort in the fantasies, a compelling dramatized message was developed, fans had the means to perpetuate it, and most importantly, Swifties finally had a wider audience listening to them. Swifties were able to find comfort in their fantasy that Swift did not deserve the interruption and media outlets largely sided with Swift. The response created a perfect platform to spread the compelling message.

The second time the conversation surrounding Swift reached critical mass was in 2016. Swift's transition to pop, while criticized by many who wanted her to stay in country music, opened her fandom up to new people. For people who did not like country music, Swift's move to pop was a way to convert them to her fandom. The Swiftie fandom grew greatly during 1989, especially internationally, as her music made its way up the charts. During her fifth era, Swift marketed herself as the image of pop perfection. Her face filled media sites. Swift's own social media was filled with photos of Swift and friends have fun, Swift's tour regularly featured special guests on stage with her, and her group of regulars became known as her "squad". This proliferation online and musically led to Swift gaining

more fans than ever before. However, the widespread discussion of Swift also led to more detractors. With the release of the “Famous” song and video and Swift’s statement that she did not agree to the lyrics, anti-Swifties⁵¹ found their critical mass. The conversation about Swift’s alleged her fake persona and ability to play the victim all came to a head. It was the first time that clickbait media sites and the general public sided against Swift. In previous conversations, Swift almost always came out on top—her image, while critiqued, had been nearly untouchable. When she was caught in something that looked to be a lie, the suspicions of many were seemingly confirmed—Swift was a liar and she was officially #cancelled. Swifties and anti-Swifties have both reached a moment of critical mass, but it is interesting to note that they both involved Kanye West. It seems that while West did not “make” Swift famous, their careers have become entwined in a way no one could have foreseen in 2009. In 2019, both Swift and West seem to be moving on from the “Famous” feud, and both Swifties and anti-Swifties have moved out of the consciousness-raising stage.

Consciousness-Sustaining

Consciousness-sustaining, the third phase, focuses on maintaining the members of the group. The focus here is trying to maintain the commitment members have to the rhetorical vision, as well as shielding the vision from counter messages, which is done by ensuring the vision remains largely unchanged (*principle of shielding*) (Shields et al. 13). The *principle of rededication* asserts that visions may be sustained by severely criticizing of counter-rhetoric and strategic positive dramatizations to maintain the vision’s vitality (15). The *principle of reiteration* states that rhetorical visions may be sustained by restating the key fantasy themes and types in new manners that fit within the dramatic structure of the vision, along with framing new information within the old rhetorical forms to maintain explanatory power (16)

⁵¹ Outside of this study, “anti-Swifties” is not a common term.

Swifties have encountered each of these principles since the release of *Speak Now*, but they are especially evident during 2016-2017. While Swift went on hiatus, Swifties were faced with upholding their vision of Swift as an authentic, kind, hardworking person. They were offended that West would try to take credit for her fame and discredited the statement by reiterating that Swift made herself famous through her own hard work. Swifties began to focus more on Swift's interactions with them and the idea that while Swift played a part for the media, she was always authentic with fans, which embodies all three principles of the third stage.

The vision remained mostly unchanged—Swifties did not change their opinion of Swift in a negative manner. The *principle of shielding* worked here because Swifties were able to buckle down and support Swift, with their discussions surrounding around the use of “that bitch” and how Swift correctly stated that no one could control her emotional response to that. The opposition's counter messages were rededicated and Swifties further invested in the “I made myself famous” narrative, with fans writing that that should be the first secret message Swift had in her album booklet. They also turned the whole incident into a positive ordeal for Swift and Swifties because, upon Swift's return to the public eye, she withheld from the media and instead focused on her fans, supporting the narrative that the *rep* era was for the fans, not the media. Swift's increased fan interaction during *reputation* further fits the principle of reiteration because Swifties had rededicated the message by framing new information in their character theme of Swift—that she is authentic with fans but uses the media to promote her own messages.

Currently, Swifties are posting about TS7, similar to how they made predications for *reputation* and *1989*. Before *reputation*'s name was officially released, Swifties were anticipating Swift's newest era by proclaiming their excitement for TS6 (*reputation*). Many

fans believe that *reputation* would be called Eclipse, Stars, or something similar because Swift released an image of a reptile to her social media the day of the solar eclipse in 2017. For example, File 7, a Tumblr post by tshifty, shows that at this point, during the “drought,” Swifties are speculating about the content of Swift’s new album and using what she posted to social media as hints for what the new album might contain. Tshifty wrote that she believed *reputation* would be related to the eclipse, a masquerade, time, noir, or black out and lists reasons for why each might be fitting. In the post, she gives a detailed explanation for why TS6 would be related to each of those things.

Swift is preparing to release her seventh studio album in 2019 and fans are posting their ideas under the tag “#ts7 theories” on Tumblr. Many believe that TS7 will be titled “13” due to it being Swift’s 13th career year. 13 is a significant number to Swift; she considers it her lucky number. Swift was born on December 13th, 1989 and is often referencing the number 13. When Swift promotes music from other artists, she often posts on Instagram with the song paused at 13 seconds. During her earlier eras, Swift would perform with a 13 drawn on her hand, which she repeated during her *reputation* Stadium Tour for her 13th show. The number 13’s symbolism runs deep for Swift, which lead many Swifties to believe it is very plausible Swift’s newest era will be 13. File 8, a Tumblr post by iwasscreaminglongliv, investigates the 2019 calendar Swift released. On various days throughout the year, Swift placed images of wax seals for reasons unknown to fans. However, iwasscreaminglongliv believes that based on the history and symbolism of wax seals, Swifties will get Swift’s most personal album yet, an album that will be Taylor’s story without interference from outside influences. File 9 shows user madeurmarkonme predicting that TS7 will be 70s-themed based on Swift’s 70s fashion and her cover of the song “September” by Earth, Wind, and Fire. These predications all highlight the dedication of Swifties. They are analyzing photos,

calendars, and even Swift's style for clues on what the next era of Swift will hold. It is a way for Swifties to mark time before Swift releases a new album. Rather than suffering, they are finding a way to create their own content from previous Swift posts.

The *principle of reiteration* is specifically evident in Swifties' 2019 album predictions. Swift recently released a new single, "ME!" with a music video and tweeted to her fans that the Easter eggs hidden in the video included the name of the second single and the album (Swift). The video featured a pastel colored snake bursting into butterflies, which reiterates the snake imagery of *reputation*, but it further supports the character theme of Swift. Swifties have always believed that Swift's snake image was for the public and that she is focused on fan interactions. By teasing fans with Easter eggs and turning the snake image into butterflies, Swifties believe that Swift is telling fans she is continuing to do this *for* them by playing into their jokes. Swift is featured wearing pastel colors in the video, calling her cats her "young daughters," and dances around, having fun while she sings that "no one will ever love you like me" (*ME!*). Fans were quick to realize that on *reputation*, Swift sings "reputation precedes me" and believe Swift had been planning TS7 since the release of *reputation*, because it literally precedes "ME!". Swift's use of bright colors, butterflies, cats, and silly dancing all reinforce the character theme for Swifties because they believe this is Swift being authentically, publicly, herself.

The *principle of shielding* and *rededication* are evident in File 10, in which Tumblr user swiftlyreading explains why she loves Taylor Swift. She gives multiple reasons, including that Swift is a "genuine amazing and kind human being" (swiftlyreading). The people who were against Swift didn't "see the kind girl who has worked hard since she was young to become successful. They don't see the girl who invites her fans over to listen to her 1989 secret sessions. They don't see the girl who bakes cookies for her fans, who follows her

fans on Tumblr, who tries to help her fans no matter what” (swiftlyreading). Swiftlyreading posted this under the tag #taylor swift defense squad in July 2016, shortly after Kardashian West released the recorded phone call online. Swifties were quick to shield their rhetorical vision and remind others why Swift’s character theme was still correct, even though Swift had seemingly made a mistake. They rededicated their efforts arguing against the counter-character theme of Swift, continually spreading reminders of her positive qualities and good deeds. Swifties successfully sustained the rhetorical vision through 2016-2017, regularly posting about their idol, especially in light of her absence from the public eye. Swifties were susceptible to falling into the fourth stage, vision-declining, but their vision persisted.

Vision-Declining & Terminus

Vision-declining, the fourth stage, is described as situations in a rhetorical community changing so rapidly that the vision cannot successfully adapt. This decline occurs when a rhetorical vision loses its explanatory power, a significant period of censorship is followed by a flood of counter-rhetoric, or competition from alternate rhetorical visions increases (19-24). Terminus is described as the end of a rhetorical vision, when a combination of the aforementioned problems becomes too large for the vision to explain and it implodes (24). Swifties have not yet reached either of these stages, but it is probable that some former Swifties experienced vision-decline and terminus in 2016, when Swift’s character theme was seemingly no longer supported due to the West “Famous” feud.

Chapter 3: Discussion

The process of researching teenage girls, Swifties, and Taylor Swift, was often surprising and frustrating. It was frustrating because I was often questioned on my choice of research topic—not only did I decide to write about pop culture, a topic that doesn't seem fit for *serious* research at first glance, I further decided to write about teenage girls, a group that is often trivialized and treated as victims of their experiences. However, I was always surprised to find how many women related to the experience of balancing interests with the expectation of performing their femininity properly, as well as often being surprised by the posts I found online. Swifties are commonly misperceived as a large group of “basic” teenage girls. They, and Taylor Swift, are trivialized because the content of the music tends to be based on romantic relationships rather than “real issues”. However, Swifties have created a social platform on which they are confident enough to speak out about equality issues and actively work to create an inclusive space for fans. The discussion of LGBT+, racial, body, and disability issues are conversations that many people wouldn't expect to find in the Swiftie fandom because of the misconceptions of the fandom. Fans are not hysterical or unintelligent, they are excited about their idol and aware of social issues. This group of “other girls”—people who are annoying, basic, and unlikable—are so much more than society makes them out to be.

In the early stages of research, I struggled to find a theoretical approach that really fit what I wanted to do with the information I found on teenage girls and Swifties. Symbolic Convergence Theory eventually became the clear choice because it explains it how a *cohesive* group is formed. Swifties have created a cohesive online environment based in communication processes that have evolved as the group evolved, including their symbolic cues, interactions with Swift, and understanding of behavioral expectations within the group.

Oftentimes, teenage girls are characterized as catty, basic, or vapid and people are quick to assume that teenage girls cannot be interested in something intelligently, let alone create a group based in the common experience of “stanning” Taylor Swift. Although products that are “for teenage girls” are used as an insult and considered inferior, Swifties are dedicated to fostering the positive environment they have created on Tumblr to support Swift and other fans. Sports fans, generally male, can be dedicated to and passionate about their team, but teenage girls are unable to display that same dedication and passion without ridicule.

I do not believe that admitting the Swiftie fandom is comprised of a diverse group of people invalidates my belief that teenage girls are characterized incorrectly. Instead, I think the findings of this study actively invalidate what people assume about the interests and characterization of teenage girls in America. First, it invalidates the idea that *only* teenage girls can be interested in things “for teenage girls” and the continued perpetuation of this characterization actively shames people for liking something that girls like. Second, my findings invalidate the idea that a group of people perceived to be teenage girls are interested only in vapid, “basic” matters, but Swifties are actively discussing and engaging with important social issues in their fandom. This study shows that what we generally consider to be a group of teenage girls is contributing to fandom and social discourse, learning research and argumentation skills, forming a community of friendship online, and more. Rather than seeing unintelligent, naïve, hysterical girls who need to be protected from becoming a victim of her experience, Swifties, and other fandoms consisting of teenage girls, should be seen as content-creators engaging in discourse. Teenage girls are using their online platforms to gain experience interacting with their peers in a way they find valuable and are able to be representors of themselves, rather than being represented by a perpetuated image of teenage girls. This content creation and interaction is especially valued in the Swiftie fandom, where

fans are able to directly inform how the character theme they have created for Taylor Swift through their direct interactions with the popstar. This is, in turn, valuable for Swift because she has sustained her career on her genuine interest in forming and maintaining a close relationship with her fanbase.

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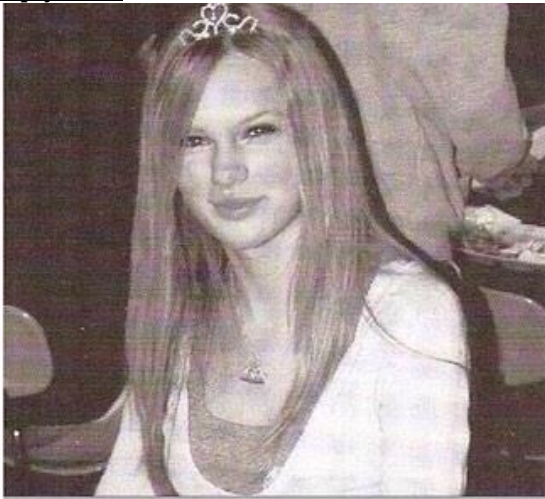
File 1: *reputation* Album Cover



(*reputation*)

File 2: “no its becky” T-shirt

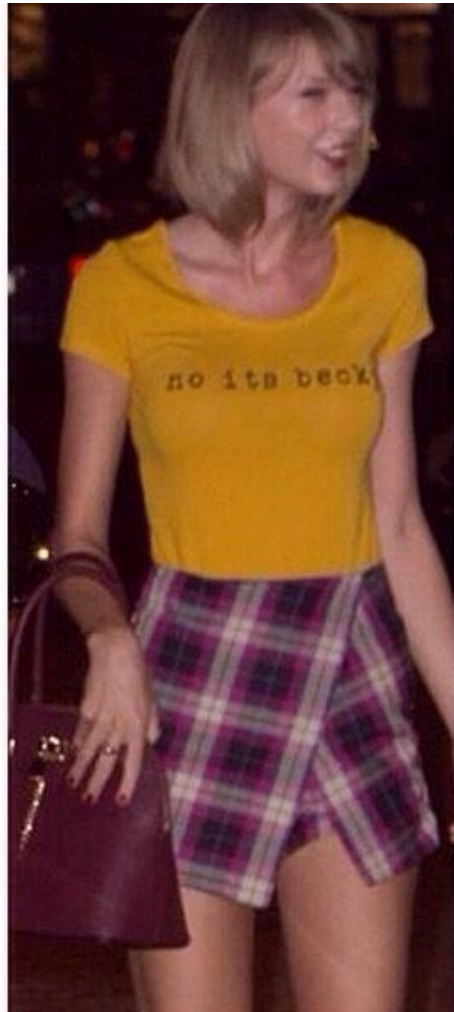
simplyfans



This is a picture of my friend Becky. She used to be a happy, popular girl until one night she snorted marijuana at a party. She died instantly. Please, don't do marijuana. It's the most dangerous drug out there. Please don't wind up like Becky.

pretty sure that's Taylor Swift

no its becky



simplyfans

WE HAVE A PRIVATE JOKE WITH TAYLOR ABOUT BECKY AND IT HAS NOT EVEN BEEN TWO WEEKS OF TUMBLR AND WE MADE IT ON A SHIRT. WHO ELSE DOES THIS?!

File 3: Long Live and New Year's Day Mix

[the-mess-tht-you-wanted](#)

Follow

Long Live and New Year's Day were the perfect songs to mix

Long Live is about how we stayed by her and how support we are of her through everything she does. Whether that be through mixing up her music or genres.

While New Year's Day is likely about a relationship, pairing it with Long Live make it seem that she will always be supportive of us. She will always be here for us and she'll stay...with us. No matter what happens we will have each other and I think that is so beautiful.

[@taylorswift](#) thank you for such a beautiful mash up that no one realized we needed in our lives.

“I had the time of my life....with you”



Originally posted by [ssparksfly](#)

[#taylorswift](#) [#taylor nation](#) [#taylurking](#) [#reputation movie](#)[#reputation stadium tour](#) [#taylor alison swift](#) [#taylor swift](#) [#taylornation](#)[#reputation](#) [#reputation tour](#) [#rep tour](#) [#reptour](#) [#long live](#) [#new years day](#)

8 notes

File 4: Taylor Swift as a Snake



panicatthetaylorconcert Follow



Taylor Swift doing press for reputation (2017)

#taylorswift #taylor swift #snake queen #reputation #meme #funny
#taylor swift meme #snake meme

150 notes



File 5: The Real Taylor Swift

reputayshann

The real Taylor Swift:



April 23rd 2009-July 10th 2010: The Fearless Tour

The Fearless Tour. Taylor decided to walk through the crowds at her shows, greeting fans of all ages, genders and races because SHE wanted to meet the fans that had been supporting her and helping her reach where she is to this day. After each show,

Taylor held a meet and greet called 'The T-Party'. This was a room where fans could go to eat pizza and meet each other and get to know other people and then get to meet Taylor. Taylor would walk around stadiums and hide behind food bars and then surprise fans in the line. Each night she would walk a number of miles to meet as many people as she could.

February 9th 2011-March 18th 2012: The Speak Now Tour



Much like at the Fearless Tour, Taylor said she wanted to continue walking through the crowds during one of her songs at the Speak Now Tour. Taylor hugged as many people as she could and thanked them for coming. Sometimes Taylor would tell her security to move out of the way and to let her hug more people. Taylor continued her 'T-Party' meet and greet. Taylor's team would walk to different areas of the

stadium during the show and hand out free meet and greets to fans who had gone all-out; screaming and dancing the whole time and wearing bold and creative costumes/handmade posters.

September 8th 2012: Ronan



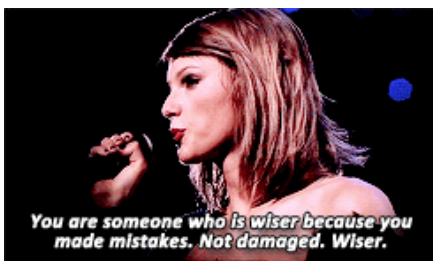
The lyrics to this song are based on a blog she read about a four-year-old boy, Ronan Thompson, who died from neuroblastoma in 2011. Taylor wrote the song by putting together quotes from blog creator Maya Thompson, Ronan's mother. Thompson is credited as a co-writer of the song. Taylor first performed the song live for Stand Up to Cancer in September 2012, and has only performed it

publicly one other time, at the Glendale, Arizona stop of The 1989 World Tour, at which Ronan's mother was in the audience. All proceeds from sales of the single go to help fight cancer.

2014: 1989 Secret Sessions

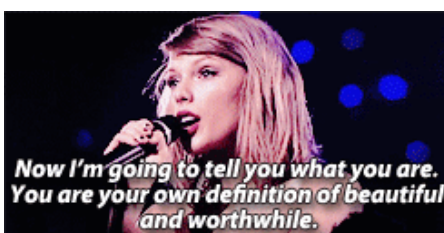


In anticipation of the release of her album, 1989 on October 27, Taylor held a series of “1989 Secret Sessions” over the past few weeks at her various homes across America, where carefully-selected fans were told they were attending some sort of secret event, with no knowledge of what was in store for them. When fans arrived they were told to sit in a room together and wait. Taylor then jumped out and surprised them all and they all got to hear her new album before anyone else. Taylor baked cookies and other goods, fans got to meet Taylor’s cat, Olivia Benson Swift, and they danced together and each got to meet Taylor and just hang out.



May 5th 2015-December 12th 2015: The 1989 Tour

At each 1989 concert, before performing her song ‘clean’, Taylor gave a 3-4 minute inspirational speech, telling fans to love themselves. This is what Taylor said to the crowd of 60,000 at Hyde Park, London on June 27 2015: **‘There are**



people here from all over the world, so if you travelled to be here, thank you so much for coming. And, you know, looking out at you, thinking about the fact that we all come from different places, maybe we all have different accents, we have different hobbies, different backgrounds, whatever. But there’s one thing that we

have in common that I know for sure. That thing is that when we feel a great amount of joy, or

a great amount of pain, we turn to music. That's why we're all at Hyde Park tonight. From talking to you so much, and getting to know you, it's never been more apparent to me how difficult it is to feel okay about yourself in 2015. Real talk. I mean, every single day we go online – and trust me, I love the internet, okay? Love it – but, every day we go online and we scroll through the highlight reel of other people's awesome lives. But we don't see the highlight reel of our awesome lives – all we see is the behind the scenes. We see every single moment, from when we wake up and we're like "oh, God, not feeling my hair today. Not going to be a good day today for the hair". We see our doubts, we see our fears, we see our concerns. You are the only one who is inside your brain feeling all of your anxieties and the voices who are telling you that you can't be who you want to be, or that you're not who you want to be, or that you want to be more like that other person over there. Let me tell you, people are mean to each other, but no voice is as mean as our own voices are to ourselves. Is it true or is it false? It's true, right? Okay, so if there's one thing that you come away from this night remembering, I want it to be this – every day when you look in the mirror, and your mind is telling you all the things you are not – if those things are that you're not cool enough, you're not pretty enough, you're not popular enough, you're not successful enough, you're not special, you're not wanted, you're not unique – those are not the things you are not. Let me tell you the things you are not. Okay? You are not somebody else's opinion. That's what you're not. You are not going nowhere just because you're not where you want to be yet. You are not damaged goods just because you have made mistakes in your life. Those are the things you are not. Let me tell you the things that you are. Would you like to hear the things that you are? You are your own definition of beautiful, and worthwhile, and no one else's definition. You are wiser, stronger, and smarter because you made mistakes in your life, not damaged. And lastly, London, England, you are someone who is probably standing here tonight going through your own battles, fighting your own ghosts, trying to cover your own scars, stressing about your own stresses. But, rather than wallowing in them, you got up, you put on an awesome outfit, and now we're all standing here together having the best time of our lives at a concert on a Saturday night. I realise that it's not about being perfect, it's not about feeling perfect. I think that sometimes it's just about getting on with things and realising that you're happy today. That's all that matters. I just want you to know that one thing I have learned in 25 years, and I'm still learning, is that if you get rained on, you walk through a bunch of storms, life is constantly coming at you – that doesn't make you damaged. It makes you clean.'



May 5th 2015-December 12th 2015: The 1989 Tour (Loft 89)

At Taylor's 1989 concerts, she held a meet and greet called 'Loft 89' where Taylor, again, could hang out with her fans and dance around with them. Taylor met lots of different people including children with disabilities and illnesses. Taylor made sure everyone had a great time and that everyone was included and treated equally.

Christmas 2014/2015: 'Swiftmas'

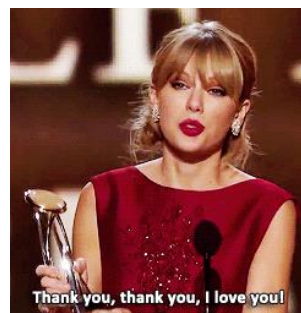


Taylor Swift surprised 13-year-old fan Delaney Clements who was diagnosed with neuroblastoma at the age of seven. Delaney, who is a massive fan of the 26-year-old singer started a

campaign to meet Taylor called #TaylorMeetDelaney and on Saturday (19th December) her wish came true. Taylor surprised the family by turning up unannounced and the afternoon was captured on Instagram and Facebook with Delaney and her Mum posting photos. Taylor became so into the idea of 'Swiftmas' that she also sent a number of other fans packages of merch and other little presents.

Award acceptance speeches

To any award acceptance speech, there is always something directed to Taylor's fans. Taylor thanks her fans for everything because she knows that we are such a big part of her life and she wouldn't be where she is now without us.



FANS ARE MY FAVORITE
THING IN THE WORLD. I'VE
NEVER BEEN THE TYPE OF
ARTIST WHO HAS THAT LINE
DRAWN BETWEEN THEIR
FRIENDS AND FANS.



A very important quote Taylor has said:

Long story short: Taylor is one of those few artists who does nothing but good for her fans and everyone around her yet she gets body shamed and name called everywhere. It really does break my heart.

Taylor has been there for me through everything and I know that she always will be because she has never failed to make us all smile and to make us all feel better about ourselves, She has made me feel loved and wanted and she has introduced me to some of my bestest friends ever. To me, Taylor Swift is not just an artist, she's my best friend.

[@taylorswift](#)

[#taylor swift#taylurking#i love you taylor#best friend](#)

File 6: reputation Secret Sessions**goodgirlwhoshopeful**

- It's crazy to me that after all Taylor has been through, all the anxiety she expressed feeling before and during writing Reputation because of forces and judgements out of her control, she still has it in her heart to trust us one hundred per cent? She called the Secret Sessions a sacred space, and now I totally understand. There was a bond in that room that didn't even need to be spoken. She's so right though, you can't know if you can trust someone.....until you trust them. So unless we break this trust, it's here to stay. We should feel bloody proud of what we've got going, here. It's one of a kind, for sure.

POSTED SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14TH WITH 1,180 NOTES

I WEPT WHEN SHE SAID ABOUT FEEING SO ANXIOUS BECAUSE I FEEL THAY OBVIOUSLY I'M NOT FAMOUS OR BEING STALKED BUT YOU KNOW I LOVE HER SO MUCH P: TAYLOR SWIFT REPUTATION SECRET SESSIONS REPUTATION SECRET SESSIONS LONDON REP SECRET SESSIONS MY BESTSELLERS TAYLOR SWIFT WAS HERE

File 7: My TS6 Theories Masterpost

tshifty

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My TS6 theories masterpost

OKAY so as you guys probably already know I love making theories lmaooo and I have more than one so I'm going to keep updating this post with new information/new theories until TS6 is revealed!!

10/13/17

So this is my original theory that TS6 will drop on Friday October 13th, 2017, because it is the last Friday the 13th this year and Taylor is hella extra™

ECLIPSE THEORY

- Taylor blacked out all of her social media accounts as well as her website, store, youtube, and myspace... during an eclipse, everything blacks out for a period of time
- There's going to be a total solar eclipse across the entire continental united states in a few days for the first time in 99 years
- A total solar eclipse is usually a once in a lifetime thing just like this album
- An eclipse often symbolizes new beginnings and a cleanse, which could make a lot of sense for this album after everything Taylor has been through in the past 3 years
- Eclipses are extremely emotional/moving events, and Taylor has always been known to write about things that move people
- Taylor's tumblr fades from pink to black, which again is in a sense what happens during a solar eclipse: the light fades away to black
- Taylor has posted several pictures while wearing stars on her outfits, as well as her star flash tattoo. Also, the newest TSNOW promo from Taylor Nation looks kinda spacey.
- Taylor sent a CD of 1989 to space and wrote "Going to space!" on it... that could have potentially been a clue!
- Kesha said she was collaborating with another artist and used 13 emojis, so we assumed that it's Taylor. However, the emojis weren't just random, they were stars and meteors (and unicorns)!!
- Before and after the totality period of a total eclipse, shadow snake patterns form on the ground. Taylor's first post since the blackout was a gif of either a rattlesnake or potentially a dragon (see bulletpoint below).
- If the gif was a dragon, it also supports this theory because there is a Chinese myth that states that a solar eclipse is a dragon eating the sun.

MASQUERADE THEORY

- Social media is just one big masquerade when you think about it, full of people essentially wearing masks and pretending to be people they aren't, as well as using it for anonymity
- In that sense social media is also very fake in the sense that nothing about it is tangible and oftentimes it's superficial, just like masquerades

- Taylor could have blacked out her social media and deleted everything to signify that she's done participating in the social media masquerade
- She could have been giving us a hint by participating in the IDWLF music video, where there were fancy masquerade masks present

TIME THEORY

- TS6 could be about time, or in a sense the lack of time... maybe the 13th hour? Because it only exists on the 24-hour clock, which isn't widely used in the united states, so in a sense the 13th hour wouldn't exist
- On one of her posts on instagram the caption was "Til. The. End. Of. Time." so maybe TS6 is about what happens when time ends, or when time stops... such as moments that make time seem to stop or slow down or speed up, or even getting lost in the moment
- Taylor blackout out all of her social media is in a sense erasing her social media history, which could relate to the absence of time
- It could also touch upon how time isn't actually a real tangible thing, and is simply something that we use to explain how we go through life
- Potential titles could be: epoch, chrono
- A song was temporarily released on youtube titled "Timeless" (some people think Taylor released it some people think somebody was impersonating her); there's also a website called timeless.com that says coming soon. The concept of "timeless" ties in perfectly with this theory in the sense of lost time, nonexistent time, or erasing time.
- Scott Borchetta posted pictures about time on his social medias.

NOIR THEORY

- So I came up with this quite a while ago, and it was because of the black and white pictures that Taylor had been posting.
- It could also explain the social media blackout, since noir means black
- The whole noir genre could make for a very conceptually interesting album/era

BLACKOUT THEORY

- So this theory isn't that well developed, but it's simply because Taylor blacked out all of her social medias/websites
- It could also have an interesting meaning as to how she could potentially approach social media in the future if this proves true

[#i will continue to update this bc i love theories lmfaooooooooo#ts6#taylor swift#eclipse#masquerade#time#noir#blackout#mine#ts6 theories#my theories](#)

File 8: TS7 Wax Seal Theory

iwasscreaminglongliv

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WAX SEAL NECKLACE WITH TS DESIGN

Wax Seals in Private Correspondence

Using a wax seal in the way we often think of today — to keep a letter closed, ensure it hasn't been tampered with, and confirm it was indeed written by the supposed sender — was practiced in the Middle Ages, but did not really take off until the post-medieval period. As travel, emigration,

TS7 Wax Seal Theory

Okay guys, ever since Taylor liked that post about dropping hints about TS7 I can't get the wax seals everywhere out of my head!!!

I know we've commented on the seals being placed on specific dates etc etc but then there's also the necklace she released recently???

So I decided to look into the history of wax seals and symbolism / what different coloured seals mean and I have some interesting findings...

TO KEEP A LETTER CLOSED AND ENSURE IT HASN'T BEEN TAMPERED WITH?? ENSURE IT WAS WRITTEN BY THE SENDER?? AN UNBROKEN WAX SEAL MEANING A LETTER HAD BEEN SUCCESSFULLY DELIVERED??

Only in the advent of paper stationery did wax seals become integral to the signing of official documents and the sending and receiving of letters. Each seal would bear its owner's unique design, such as a coat of arms or an emblem, and would have carried the same authority as a written signature has today. Even relatively insignificant documents were stamped with a seal as a simple way of identifying the sender.

Towards the end of the medieval period, wax seals became more popular in private correspondence. Their practicality was even greater when information had to remain confidential: an unbroken wax seal enclosing a letter meant that it had been successfully delivered, whereas a broken one indicated the message had been tampered with along the way.

We're about to get the most personal album yet!!! Taylor's unfiltered, untampered version of events. Straight from her to us - delivered sealed in an envelope - (she has always referred to her songs as being like her diary!!)

Because seals were symbols of power and were used to authenticate a person's wishes, they were typically destroyed after the owner died to prevent posthumous forgeries. For example, when a Pope

Destroyed after the owner died to prevent posthumous forgeries???. Oh I don't know... like the OLD TAYLOR? And "In the death of her reputation, she felt truly alive" - this is Taylor ensuring that nobody can claim her words, her story, her views - she is back, alive and this time she has a new symbol

to authenticate her wishes - so that we know it is really her. She started this in the reputation era with her lack of interviews, she isn't going to let anyone else take credit for her work, to pick apart her songs and allocate them to being about certain people, she isn't going to let the media change and misconstrue her words / her actions / her music - everything is on her terms and is her real story.

during the 20th Century. However, as more and more business correspondence takes place electronically this millennium, the hand-written letter is unexpectedly reclaiming its place as a more intimate way of communicating with loved ones. And, to this day, there's still no more beautiful or uncomplicated way to seal a personal letter to someone important than with your own wax seal.

1. Red wax seals are used in business.
2. Black for mourning.
3. Five tints of blue are made to express all gradations of passion.
4. Pink is for congratulations.
5. White for weddings and invitations.
6. Square envelopes are the fashion, esp when sealed with wax.
7. Either use perfumed wax or perfumed letter, but not both, that would be vulgar.

- White - *Marriages but also surprisingly enough death, funerals and melancholy*
- Black & Violet - *Condolences and for black, notice of death*
- Light Red - *Denotes a happy lover and for Valentines*
- Brown - *Displeasure*
- Chestnut brown - *Dinner invitations*
- Yellow - *Spurned adorers*
- Green - *Hope*
- Pale green - *Reproaches*
- Sky blue - *Constancy*
- Rose colored & Pink - *Appropriate for girls writing one another*
- Gray - *Friendship*
- Flaming Vermilion - *The most common color of wax seals today was used on business letters needing a quick reply*

An INTIMATE WAY OF COMMUNICATING WITH LOVED ONES????? WE ARE GETTING A LOVE ALBUM ERM!!!!

And if you look into the meaning behind the different coloured wax seals!!!! You will notice that 3/5 are light blue - meaning either graduations of passion or constancy!! AKA A LOVE THAT WAS REALLY SOMETHING NOT JUST THE IDEA OF SOMETHING

In France different colored waxes were used for different occasions:

- white for communication relating to weddings
- black for obituaries
- violet for sympathy
- chocolate for dinner invitations
- red for business
- ruby for engaged lovers' letters to one another
- green for letters from lovers who live in hopes
- brown for refusals of marriage offers.
- blue denotes constancy
- yellow jealousy
- pale green reproaches
- pink used by young girls
- grey used between friends

TO CONCLUDE - I think that the wax seals are a massive hint about TS7, not only about the content and the feelings of passion and constancy but I think Taylor will be going a step further than reputation in terms of the honesty in the album - it's no longer "there will be no further explanation, just reputation" this time we're actually going to be getting Taylor's story, free from interference, tampering and outside influence - straight from her to us, sealed.

Stop sleeping on the wax seals, thank you for attending my tedtalk x

(Ps I'm still calling it that the album is called 13)

#taylor swift #ts7 #ts7 theory #ts7 theories #rep #reputation #swiftie#swifties #the swiftie tag #wax seals #taylor #swift #tswift #1989 #red#speak now #debut #fearless #personal

File 9: TS7 is 70s-Inspired Theory

madeurmarkonme

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I mean are we just gonna NOT talk about how all these new aspects of Taylor's wardrobe have been HEAVILY 70s inspired. Or talk about the fact that the ONLY other song we have heard besides songs from tour was "September" which was released in 1978?? I mean she literally dressed like a DISCO BALL TO AN AWARDS SHOW



#ts7 theories



File 10: Why Do I Love Taylor Swift?

swiftlyreading

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WHY DO I LOVE TAYLOR SWIFT?

With all this negativity around, I just wanted to share why I love Taylor with all my heart and will stand by her side no matter what. I do agree that Taylor has made mistakes before, including the one that just happened. But we all make mistakes, no matter how perfect we seem. Maybe I'm blinded by love or am "up Taylor's ass" but just because one thing happened, doesn't mean I'm going to stop loving her. **I am blessed to be a fan of Taylor.** You know why? Because she is a genuine amazing and kind human being. Because she was always there when no one else was there for me. When people think of Taylor, they don't see the same person I see. They don't see the kind girl who has worked hard since she was young to become successful. They don't see the girl who invites her fans over to listen to her 1989 secret sessions. They don't see the girl who bakes cookies for her fans, who follows her fans on Tumblr, who tries to help her fans no matter what. They don't see the girl who lets her fans meet her, for FREE, and treats them like they are all special. They don't see the girl who visits children's hospitals, not for publicity, but because she genuinely cares. They don't know about the song Ronan, which she wrote for a four year old boy who died of cancer. They don't see the girl who had a different variation of the Clean speech every night on her tour. I will never forget that speech. She taught me that I'm not my mistakes, that life is hard but you'll get through it, that I am beautiful the way I am. So maybe you dislike Taylor, okay then. Maybe you're no longer a fan because of recent events. But I love her for so many reasons besides the one I just stated, and **because she is the reason I am alive.**

#okay I'm going to stop talking now #sorry for all this #taylor swift
#positivity #Taylor swift defense squad