

**“FALLIBLE, SENTIMENTAL AND RULED BY CONTRADICTORY IMPULSES”:**

Representations of female pop artists in *The Guardian*'s online news articles

Bachelor's Thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Kieli ja kielenkäytön tavat eli diskurssit vaikuttavat asenteisiin, toimintatapoihin ja todellisuuskäsityksiin yhteiskunnallisellakin tasolla. Koska joukkotiedotusvälineet, kuten sanomalehdet, radio ja televisio, levittävät diskursseja laajalle yleisölle, on tärkeää tutkia, millaisia asenteita, arvoja ja ideologioita median käyttämään kieleen sisältyy. Tällaiseen kielen- ja mediantutkimukseen on hyödyllistä soveltaa kriittistä diskurssianalyysiä, jolla voidaan havainnoida muun muassa vallan väärinkäyttöä, ylivaltaa ja eriarvoisuutta.</p> <p>Media tuottaa kielen kautta representaatioita todellisuudesta. Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena oli määrittää, millaisia representaatioita naispuolisista pop-artisteista luodaan brittiläisen sanomalehden, <i>The Guardianin</i>, verkkouutisissa. Valitsin analyysiä varten uutisartikkeleita, jotka käsittelevät kolmea suosittua naisartistia, Adelea, Beyoncéa ja Keshaa. Pysin myös tutkielmassani arvioimaan naispuolisten pop-artistien representaatioita stereotyyppien ja seksismin näkökulmasta kriittisen diskurssianalyysin avulla.</p> <p>Analyysini ensisijaisena tuloksena sain selville, että tutkimieni naispuolisten pop-artistien representaatiot olivat keskenään hyvinkin samankaltaisia, mikä ei kuitenkaan ollut aiemmasta tutkimuksesta poikkeavaa. <i>The Guardianissa</i> korostettiin Adelen, Beyoncén ja Keshan rooleja äiteinä, vaimoina, tunteellisina naisina, uhreina ja selviytyjinä, vaikka heidän julkisuuskuvansa muutoin eroavat toisistaan. Lisäksi artikkeleista oli havaittavissa, että suurin osa näistä representaatioista pohjautuu stereotyyppiseen ja seksistiseen kielenkäyttöön.</p> <p>Perinteisiä, aiemmissa tutkimuksissa todettuja sukupuolirooleja esiintyy analyysini mukaan naispuolisia pop-artisteja käsittelevissä uutisartikkeleissa. Tästä huolimatta on myös representaatioita, jotka saattavat vaikuttaa naisiin voimaannuttavasti. Tutkimustulosteni perustuessa niukahkoon aineistoon lisätutkimus naispuolisten pop-artistien representaatioista on tarpeen.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The media has the power to convey depictions of reality through language and images to large populations. The representations of reality can be ingrained into the various ways of thinking and acting in everyday life. The news, in particular, is thought to pursue common values of objectivity and truthfulness in reporting. However, the news media, at times, either does not choose to comply with or unintentionally fails to follow the guidelines of equal and versatile coverage for all social groups (Burton 2010: 24, 230, 233). However, by studying the language and the discourses that the media incorporates in its texts and images, the hidden attitudes, power relations, and social roles, which are conveyed to vast audiences, can be unveiled. Hence, language and discourse are closely related to phenomena of the social scale.

In relation to discourse studies, I analyse in this thesis how female pop artists are depicted on the website of a British broadsheet newspaper *The Guardian*. The topic of this study is significant in terms of representations of female pop stars affecting girls' and young women's self-image, as these pop artists are idolised and viewed as role models by young females. The research draws on the approach of critical discourse analysis, which serves as a tool for examining how women are presented, how power relations between women and men manifest themselves, and what types of ideologies and roles are conveyed through media discourse. One of the main aims of this study is to answer the question whether female pop artists are depicted in a stereotypical and sexist manner in *The Guardian's* online news articles, which are consumed by millions of readers worldwide.

Previous research on the representations of female pop artists is close to non-existent. An article by Davies (2001), however, addresses the topic. The article discusses not only the media representation of women in general but especially the representation of women in the music scene. More precisely, Davies (2001) analysed the portrayal of female music artists as well as female fans in the British music press. However, as the Internet has spread to all parts of the world and has become an integral part of people's lives over the past few decades due to its drastic development, it is particularly relevant to study online representations at present. Thus, I conducted this study in order to analyse the current state of *The Guardian's* online media discourse regarding female pop artists.

This thesis begins with discussing the background literature related to the representations of female pop artists in Chapter 2. In this section, I address critical discourse analysis, which is the theoretical approach I apply in the Analysis chapter, as well as media discourse and the representation of women in mass media. In Chapter 3, I present the aim of the study, the research questions, the data, and the methods of the analysis in detail. Chapter 4 covers the analysis, which focuses on the data consisting of news articles about three specific female pop artists published on *The Guardian's* website in 2016. Finally, in the conclusion section, I summarise the results of my research and discuss implications and possible applications, i.e. what can be learned from this study and how could the results be benefited from.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

The background section of this research paper aims to introduce the theoretical perspectives that need to be considered in my study regarding the portrayal of female pop artists in *The Guardian's* online news. I begin with presenting critical discourse analysis, which is the analytical method I apply in my study. In the following sections, I introduce media discourse and representation, as well as the representation of women in the media in order to explain general terms related to the field and discuss previous research.

### **2.1 Critical discourse analysis**

Interaction between people is a social practice that is performed through spoken or written language, which articulates discourse (Fairclough 2003: 21, 25). Discourses are particular ways of representing people, events, and other features of the world (Fairclough 2003: 26); therefore, they affect perceptions of reality. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is based on the notion that discourse reflects elements of social life, such as ideologies, power relations, and social identities. Thus, CDA does not only provide an approach for close analysis of text but also includes the social factors that intertwine with discourse. The multifaceted critical analysis of discourse can be applied into the research fields of different disciplines (Fairclough 2003: 1–3). Fairclough (1989) and van Dijk (2008) discuss different aspects of CDA.

Fairclough (1989: 24–26) introduces three principal elements of discourse, which are text, interaction, and social context. According to Fairclough (1989: 24), the term ‘text’ refers to

the end result of text production. A text is part of the entity of discourse to which social interaction is included as well. Fairclough (1989: 25–26) states that social context comprises of immediate and remote conditions relating to the choices made in terms of language use. For instance, situational context as well as social and institutional structures have a significant effect on discourse. Drawing on these dimensions, critical discourse analysis can be divided into three stages: the description of text, the interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and the explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context (Fairclough 1989: 26).

To add to Fairclough's (1989: 24–26) definition of critical discourse analysis, van Dijk (2008: 87) notifies that CDA lacks a unitary theoretical framework since it is not associated with a specific research discipline. Nonetheless, he emphasises critical discourse analysis as a method for studying social power abuse, dominance, and inequality in social and political contexts. According to him, the primary aim of critical discourse analysis is to reveal, understand, and potentially resist social inequality promoted by text and talk (van Dijk 2008: 85). Moreover, van Dijk (2008: 93–98) lists several areas of research in which critical discourse analysis is often applied. Media discourse has established a strong position among this type of research (van Dijk 2008: 94–95). In the next section, I discuss media discourse and representation in more detail.

## **2.2 Media discourse and representation**

The media is a powerful institution in today's society since it functions as a significant source of information. Consequently, the media and the news have been trusted to depict reality and the world we live in accurately (Burton 2010: 264). Matheson (2005: 6) notes that the media is required to communicate in ways that are understood by the audience and to objectively present and translate information into common knowledge. However, due to the fact that dominating social groups impose their views on the public through mass media, ideology is an established part of mass communication (Matheson 2005: 6). Thus, according to Matheson (2005: 161), the power in mass communication is asymmetrical. It is important to recognise ideologies and power in media content in order to change discourse, power relations, and society. Lexical analysis of word choices, labels, and patterns is crucial in the field of media discourse analysis (Matheson 2005: 19–30).

Media text as a concept is closely connected to media discourse. Burton (2010: 5) states that media texts engage audiences, transfer information, and produce reactions. From the viewpoint of linguistic analysis, media texts include both written and spoken language. Newspaper articles and transcriptions of broadcasts, for instance, are types of media texts (Fairclough 1995: 16–17). Fairclough (1995: 53–102) provides a framework for analysing media texts from a critical perspective. He makes a distinction between two focuses relating to the critical analysis of media texts. The first focus is on communicative events, i.e. to what extent communicative events, such as newspaper articles or podcast episodes, are normative and non-traditional. This perspective is connected to the themes of continuity and change. The second dimension deals with the order of discourse and how it is affected by social context and cultural changes (Fairclough 1995: 56). According to Fairclough (1995: 67), the media order of discourse is fundamentally a domain of cultural power and hegemony.

In addition to communicative events and the order of discourse (Fairclough 1995: 67), one must consider that all media texts bear several meanings – ones that are recognisable as well as ones that are hidden or subliminal. The meanings are constructed by media producers and interpreted by their audiences (Burton 2010: 5, 8). According to Burton (2010: 21), media representations are formed when the reader interacts with media texts and, through personal thought processes, produces ideas that the producer of the media intended. Some media texts are created for ideological purposes, and representations act as the conveyors of ideology. In terms of representing people in the media, people are often divided into social types or groups (Burton 2010: 22). Burton (2010: 24) introduces the term ‘naturalisation’, which refers to the tendency of depicting certain types or groups repeatedly in the same manner because that specific representation is thought to be natural. Thus, naturalisation leads to accepting values and ideologies that ought to be challenged and criticised.

In contrast to Burton’s (2010: 21) view on creating and interpreting representations, Webb (2009: 43–44) lists three modes relating to language and representation. Firstly, one can argue that language is reflective, i.e. meanings of reality exist in language. In fact, language does not entail all meanings since it can be used for creating new meanings and representations. Secondly, language can be thought to be intentional. This approach is based on the assumption that the intended meaning of the communicator is conveyed through any means of communication. However, Webb (2009: 43) indicates that language limits what can be said

and how it can be said. Thirdly, the constructionist approach draws on the idea that meanings are formed in the construction of representations. Therefore, in addition to the communicator, the recipient is similarly involved in the process of meaning-making (Webb 2009: 44).

As I intend to interpret and analyse the representation of female pop artists, the constructionist perspective is in the centre of my study. After covering the topic of media discourse and representation on a general level, I move on to the representation of women in mass media and in the British music press in particular.

### **2.3 The representation of women in mass media**

The mass media's representations of women are often biased and unrealistic. Feminist media theory provides an approach to the representation of women in media. Van Zoonen (1994: 17) reports that women are underrepresented or absent both in the production of media and in media content. Moreover, when the media depicts women, they are often young and attractive and are reduced to social stereotypes. According to van Zoonen (1994: 66), the media allows women to have three roles: woman as caretaker, woman as sex object, and woman striving for beauty in order to please men. These representations may result from the fact that the producers of media are dominantly male and that the society's dominant social values are repeated in media content (van Zoonen 1994: 17). Thus, the media gives a narrow view of women as a gender and does not fulfil its purpose in the equal and truthful representations of social groups.

Burton (2010: 258–259) addresses the evident gender bias in terms of media representation. He lists three conventions through which women are presently depicted in the news. First Burton (2010: 258) notes that women's appearance is more often focused on than men's appearance, and women are described and judged based on their looks. Second, women are evaluated and defined in relation to men. For instance, similar to van Zoonen's (1994: 66) observations, women's relationships to their sons, husbands, and boyfriends result in women being labelled as mothers, wives, girlfriends, and mistresses in news stories. Third, women are sexualised in the news through images and descriptions about their behaviour and external qualities, such as full lips and long legs (Burton 2010: 259). As discourses shape reality,



objectifying women strengthens the conventional view of women's inferiority in society and may impede the equal division of political and economic power between genders.

Davies (2001) studied the representation of women in the British music press including *The Guardian* in the early 2000s. She discovered that the tone female musicians are talked about is analogous to the claims of Burton (2010: 258–259) and van Zoonen (1994: 66), i.e. a sexist and stereotypical tone. In Davies's (2001) article, it is noted that men govern the music press to a large extent and, therefore, female artists are often ignored completely or presented in a sexist manner in media texts. Additionally, when female artists are talked about in the press, they are usually described simply as women omitting the fact that they are also musicians. Furthermore, it is stated that all female performers are thought to be homogenous despite their stylistic differences in music. Other factors that dominate articles about female artists are the prevalence of feminine topics, such as motherhood and feminism, and overt accounts on female musicians' appearance and sexuality. However, the sexuality of female artists, who identify themselves as homosexuals, is not addressed in the press (Davies 2001).

According to Davies (2001), in order to gain press coverage, female artists are required to have a reputation of authenticity and credibility. For example, the British music press frowns upon artists who do not write their own songs, i.e. produce an accurate representation of themselves. However, the women who demand writing their own music or want to control their music careers in other ways can be viewed as uncooperative and difficult personalities. In addition, the music that female artists produce should be serious and intelligent in order to attract the interest of the press. Davies (2001) claims, however, that female performers are depicted as pretentious if they are confident in terms of their intelligence and talent. Lastly, in order to be considered as a credible musician, female artists are pressured to distance themselves from their femininity by acquiring masculine traits and using sexist discourses (Davies 2001).

Critical discourse analysis, media discourse, and the representation of women intertwine in my research. CDA provides tools for the analysis, media discourse is present in my data, and the chosen viewpoint is the representation of women in mass media. As mentioned above, previous research indicates that the representation of female artists is sexist, biased, and inaccurate. I aim to investigate whether this finding is equivalent to current media discourse. In the following chapter, I present my specific aim, research questions, data, and methods.

### 3 THE PRESENT STUDY

#### 3.1 The aim and the research questions

The main object of this thesis is to analyse how three specific female pop artists are presented in *The Guardian's* online news articles. The singers I chose to be the subjects of my study are Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha since these three women represent relatively different popular music genres and have dissimilar looks. Despite their stylistic differences, I aim to examine whether they are talked about in a similar manner in recent online news articles. The questions I focus on in my research are:

1. How are Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha presented in *The Guardian's* online news articles and what are the reoccurring discourses that are used to portray these female pop artists?
2. To what extent are the discourses stereotypical and/or sexist?

Drawing on the background literature presented above, it is likely that these three pop artists are portrayed similarly ignoring their personal qualities as well as in a stereotypical and sexist manner because of their gender. However, I expect the discourses, in which female pop stars are discussed in *The Guardian*, not to limit to sexist and stereotypical discourse but to vary to some extent since the society, including the media, appears to be increasingly aware of feminism and gender equality.

#### 3.2 The data

The data consists of nine news articles about three famous female pop artists. The articles were published on *The Guardian's* news website ([www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)) during the first half of the year 2016. *The Guardian* is a British broadsheet newspaper founded in 1821. In the 1990s, *The Guardian* established a stable position in the British broadsheet market, as it was able to reach a larger number of readers and to become commercially remunerative. Additionally, at the time, *The Guardian* was praised for its innovation in product development and marketing as well as for the quality of its journalism. These factors have contributed to the newspaper's success of present times. Moreover, in 1995, *The Guardian* launched its own website which later became [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com) (The Guardian 2002). The website is one of the

most visited English-language news sites in the world (Sweney 2014); therefore, it is relevant to observe the language used, as it is directed at and received by a large population.

For the purposes of this research paper, I chose three articles about each pop star since they provide a suitable amount of text to analyse. The three female pop artists I chose are Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha. Even though they are all famous, approximately the same age, and in the same line of work, differences between these three women exist. Firstly, Adele is a 28-year-old British musician whose genre of music can be categorised as a mixture of soul and pop music (Biography.com 2016a). A part of Adele's public image is to dress maturely and classically chic. Beyoncé, also known as Beyoncé Knowles, is a female artist in her mid-thirties (Biography.com 2016b), whose music is often described as rhythm and blues (R&B) mixed with pop and hip-hop (Last.fm 2016). As an African-American, Beyoncé's cultural background influences her music. Lastly, the 29-year-old American singer-songwriter Kesha is known for her dance-pop songs (Biography.com 2016c). Colourful clothing and makeup are Kesha's trademarks as a pop artist.

Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha have recently appeared in the news for various reasons. According to France-Press (2016), Adele established a position as the bestselling artist of 2015, and her success, performances, and private life are regularly discussed in the news. Beyoncé, *inter alia*, released a new album in the spring of 2016 (Lynskey 2016) and made a political statement by performing in the half-time show of the Super Bowl (Elgot 2016), which drew a great deal of media attention. In multiple articles, *The Guardian* covered Kesha's court case regarding an appeal of ending her record contract prematurely due to physical and sexual abuse inflicted by her producer (e.g. Gajanan 2016c).

### **3.3 The methods of analysis**

Critical discourse analysis is a research method for studying ideologies, power relations, and inequality conveyed through discourse. Van Dijk (2008: 93–94) states that research in the field of critical discourse analysis is often connected to gender inequality and media discourse. As my research examines the potentially stereotypical and sexist representations of female pop artists on the website of a newspaper as well as the factors and circumstances

behind these categorisations and choices of discourse, critical discourse analysis was chosen as the method of analysis.

Fairclough's (1989) framework on critical discourse analysis was applied during the analysis phase of my research. The three stages constructed by Fairclough (1989: 26) include the description of text, the interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and the explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context. Since the data of my study includes media discourse, Fairclough's (1995: 56) two focuses relating to the critical analysis of media texts, i.e. communicative events and the order of discourse, were essential in the process of analysing the data. In accordance with Matheson's (2005: 19–30) guidelines, the word choices, labels, and patterns in the news articles were taken into account.

In my analysis, I chose to centre solely upon the linguistic aspects of depicting female pop artists in online news because the aims of my research focus on written language. Therefore, the word choices related to the pop stars as well as the word choices referring to their actions were concentrated on. Additionally, I compared the labels that were used about other people mentioned in the articles to the pop artists' labels in order to investigate whether they were different from one another. Due to the limited length of the research paper, image analysis was excluded from the study.

## **4 REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE POP ARTISTS**

In *The Guardian*, the three female pop artists, Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha, are presented from four salient perspectives: through the wife and mother discourse, the emotional woman discourse, the victim discourse, and the survivor and champion discourse. In the context of the news articles, a champion signifies someone who fights or argues for a cause or on behalf of others. Each of the representations is discussed in the following subchapters.

### **4.1 Female pop artist as wife and mother**

The first discourse, which is prominent in *The Guardian's* articles and which aligns with Davies's (2001) previous research as well as with the background literature especially by van Zoonen (1994: 66), is woman as caretaker. In the case of the female pop artists I focus on, the representations centre specifically upon the pop stars' role as wife or mother. Kesha, however,

is not included in the caretaker category, as she is not in a relationship at the moment and does not have any children (Biography.com 2016c). By contrast, according to Biography.com (2016a, 2016b), Adele has a son with her long-term partner, Simon Konecki, and Beyoncé is married to Jay-Z, a successful African-American hip-hop artist, with whom she has a daughter. Interestingly, even though both Adele and Beyoncé are mothers and in established relationships, Adele's role as a parent and Beyoncé's role as a wife were foregrounded in the articles by the Press Association (2016), Elgot (2016), and Schilling (2016).

In an article about Adele's stolen baby scan and other private photos (Press Association 2016), Adele is portrayed as a hard-working but family-oriented mother.

(1) Adele, who closely guards her family's privacy, was said to be angry and upset about the breach. - - Adele is in the middle of a six-night stint at the O2 arena in London as part of a world tour. (Adele hacker 'shared private photos including baby scan', 2016.)

Adele is depicted as protective and loving towards her family and even as angry towards those who inflict harm on those closest to her. Additionally, the controversial role of a working mother is highlighted, when the Press Association (2016) notes that Adele is busy building her career while fulfilling her duties as a parent. In a modern society, many women confront the difficulties of balancing their family life and work. It is probable that the reference to Adele's busy schedule is embedded in the article in order to make Adele seem relatable and, thus, to disguise the sexism in terms of the female gender stereotype and the traditional role of a mother, into which Adele is moulded to fit in the article. As Davies (2001) points out, underlining female artists' feminine qualities and behaviour is one of the factors that contribute to accepting female artists in the music scene and viewing them as non-threatening.

In addition to the role of mother, women in media are presented as wives and girlfriends of men, according to Burton (2010: 258). Beyoncé, in contrast to Adele, is talked about in *The Guardian* in relation to her husband, Jay-Z, and is therefore labelled as a wife in the journalists' (Elgot 2016; Schilling 2016) words.

(2) On Friday, Beyoncé's husband, Jay-Z, announced that he would donate \$1.5m (£1m) raised at a charity concert run by his streaming service Tidal last year to the Black Lives Matter movement and other social justice organisations. (Beyoncé unleashes Black Panthers homage at Super Bowl 50, 2016.)

(3) Beyonce spent years allowing herself to be defined by Jay Z, so much so that she named one of her tours The Mrs Carter Show, in reference to her legal married name. (Beyoncé and Hillary Clinton: How two scorned women moved on, 2016.)

Burton's (2010: 258) view about women being evaluated and defined in relation to men applies to what is said about Beyoncé and Jay-Z in the Examples 2 and 3 because they are addressed individually instead of, for example, as a couple. Moreover, the issue of gender inequality in acquiring wealth is evident in Example 2. Since Beyoncé's monetary contribution to charities is not mentioned, whereas Jay-Z is praised for being generous, the reader is, in a sense, forced to see Jay-Z as the provider of the family and, furthermore, as the stronger individual of the two. Beyoncé is also portrayed as submissive in Example 3, as she is claimed to have allowed herself to be willingly labelled as Jay-Z's wife. In this manner, conventional and unequal gender roles are strengthened and stabilised in society through language.

Gender stereotypes and gender roles, such as the role of mother and wife, are highlighted in *The Guardian's* online news articles about Adele and Beyoncé. The wife and mother discourse is particularly linked to the media's tendency to emphasise women's appearance and to make assumptions based on their looks (Burton 2010: 258). On one hand, it is likely that Adele is presented as a mother because of her appearance, which can be described as sophisticated, mature, and motherly. That is, Adele fits the stereotypical view of a caring mother. Beyoncé, on the other hand, often performs, dresses, and is presented in a way that is seen as sexy and even provocative, which contradicts the traditional perception of a mother in the eyes of society. Therefore, Beyoncé has been assigned the role of a wife instead of a mother in *The Guardian's* news articles. Furthermore, the mother and wife discourse in itself is sexist, as there is little evidence of father or husband discourse regarding male artists in the press, according to Davies (2001).

#### **4.2 Female pop artist as emotional woman**

Female pop artist as emotional woman is the second predominant representation in *The Guardian's* online news articles discussing three female pop artists, Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha. The studied articles include word choices that are closely connected to the emotional

woman discourse. For instance, *cry*, *sob*, *sentimental*, and *upset* are some of the reoccurring expressions found in *The Guardian's* articles in relation to female pop stars. These word choices are highly gendered and often associated with women rather than men, according to Burton (2010: 14). Hence, the word choices included in the articles support a narrow view of both women and men. In addition, parallel with van Zoonen's (1994: 17) findings, the emotional woman discourse in *The Guardian* contributes to reducing female pop artists to social stereotypes. In the next paragraphs, I discuss examples of the emotional woman discourse used on each of the studied pop stars.

Example 4 illustrates the journalist Gajanan's (2016a) depiction of Adele's reaction to her failed Grammy performance, which promotes a stereotypical view of women as the emotional and sensitive gender.

(4) Adele "cried pretty much all day" after her 2016 Grammys performance was marred by technical difficulties, - -. (Adele 'cried all day' after series of Grammys audio mishaps, 2016.)

Throughout the article, Adele's feelings relating to the Grammy incident are highlighted. Feelings of sadness and embarrassment are mentioned, and the verb *feel* is used excessively. Furthermore, Gajanan (2016a) remarks in the article how Adele decided to treat herself to a burger after the Grammy performance. Eating comfort food is a method of handling negative feelings and emotions relating to the perceived failure as well as a means of finding comfort in pleasure. The article suggests that Adele is rather open about sharing her feelings but, at the same time, not able to deal with them effectively, and therefore she requires comforting.

In the spring of 2016, Beyoncé released her latest visual album, *Lemonade*, in which songs are accompanied with music videos (Lynskey 2016). Many songs on the album express Beyoncé's sentiments towards her unfaithful husband, Jay-Z (Schilling 2016). Based on the music videos, Schilling (2016) describes Beyoncé as humane but also as emotional and unable to control her alternating and illogical behaviour (Example 5).

(5) - - Beyoncé appears as real flesh and blood – fallible, sentimental and ruled by contradictory impulses. (Beyoncé and Hillary Clinton: How two scorned women moved on, 2016.)

Firstly, Schilling (2016) describes Beyoncé to be real and fallible, which carry the meaning of the quality of being humane. Secondly, Schilling (2016) makes a claim that Beyoncé is

sentimental and not in control of her own impulses. Conversely, Schilling (2016) implies that Beyoncé's unpredictable impulses control her. The impulses are thought to be the result of destructive and unrestrained feelings. The portrayal of Beyoncé repeats the stereotype of women as the gender that is incapable of controlling themselves or their feelings.

The court case regarding the allegations of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse against Kesha's music producer resulted in a heated discussion in the press and social media. Gajanan (2016b) reported on the verdict and Kesha's reaction to it in *The Guardian*:

(6) Kesha reportedly sobbed as the verdict was announced, and was comforted by her mother who accompanied her to the trial. (Kesha denied legal request to escape contract with man she alleges raped her, 2016.)

In Example 6, Gajanan (2016b) gives weight to the fact that Kesha's reaction to the verdict was emotional and that Kesha received comfort from her mother. Due to the word choices, such as the verb *sob*, the representation of Kesha may be interpreted as child-like or immature, which is reinforced by the part of being comforted in an unpleasant situation. In the article, similar to Examples 4 and 5, the stereotypical view that women cannot deal with their feelings independently or restrain the reactions resulting from them is highlighted. The main factor common to all of the examples above is the general assumption that female pop artists are highly sensitive, impulsive, and in need of comforting.

### **4.3 Female pop artist as victim**

Women are often portrayed as victims by the media. In terms of this study, the role of a victim applies to female pop artists as well. The third reoccurring discourse, the female pop artist as a victim, is present in *The Guardian's* online news articles regarding each of the three female pop artists, Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha. Expressions found in the articles, such as *fall victim to*, *attacked by*, and *abused*, are apparent indicators of the victim discourse. As Davies (2001) and Burton (2010: 22–23) stated, passiveness is one of the stereotypical representations of women that are reinforced by the media. The victim discourse positions female pop artists in a passive and subordinate role. Moreover, it denies them any opportunity of expressing their point of view on the reported situation. Burton (2010: 23) elaborates that representations reveal the underlying ideologies in society. Thus, the victim discourse



exposes, for its part, the inequality between men and women, which is evident in the following examples of the victim discourse regarding female pop artists.

The data collected for the purposes of this research provides a great deal of examples of victim discourse. I selected three examples of victim discourse to analyse in more detail. First, in Example 7, Tran and Jamieson (2016) portray Adele as the victim of Donald Trump, a presidential candidate of the United States, who used Adele's music in his presidential campaign without the artist's official permission. An entertainment lawyer, Steve Gordon, states that the law does not forbid Trump from playing Adele's music without her consent. Second, in an article by Lee (2016) from which Example 8 is taken, Beyoncé is criticised by a South African chief, who was outraged due to rumours concerning Beyoncé's starring role in a film about a renowned South African woman, Saartjie Baartman. Lastly, in Example 9 referenced from an article by Harris (2016), Kesha is victimised in the context of her court case against music producer Lukasz Gottwald, who was accused of physical and sexual abuse towards Kesha.

(7) Now the singer [Adele] has become the latest pop star to tell Trump to stop pinching her tunes for his campaign. (Adele tells Donald Trump to stop pinching her songs for his campaign, 2016.)

(8) Beyoncé has been attacked by a South African chief for her rumoured decision to make a film about a woman enslaved in the country and forced to work in a freak show. (South African chief criticises Beyoncé over rumoured slave movie, 2016.)

(9) - - she [Kesha] filed a civil suit against Gottwald in Los Angeles superior court alleging that he had "sexually, physically, verbally and emotionally abused" her. (Public outcry may help free Kesha from contract with Dr Luke's label, 2016.)

The examples above represent three types of victims: victim of exploitation, victim of public critique and judgement, and victim of physical and emotional abuse. The female pop artists are not able to stand against these representations and discourses because they are prevented from presenting their point of view in *The Guardian*, as they have not been interviewed for the news articles in question. In Example 7, Adele is portrayed as completely helpless against Trump in the eyes of the law. In the article by Lee (2016) from which Example 8 is referenced, the South African chief describes Beyoncé as arrogant and as someone who lacks basic human dignity and, therefore, as not worthy to star as Saartjie Baartman. Moreover, in relation to Example 9, the discussion about Kesha's court case is profoundly based on the

victim discourse, and all the articles addressing the case have foregrounded Kesha as a rape victim even though she lost the case.

*The Guardian* juxtaposes the female pop artists and the men mentioned in the articles containing victim discourse. The men are described in superior terms: Trump is referred to as the Republican presidential frontrunner and the property tycoon, Gottwald as the superproducer, and the South African male simply as a chief. In contrast, Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha are all presented as singers or pop stars. A clear division between the social statuses of the men and the women is thus distinct. The inequality of genders appears to be one of the strongest underlying ideologies that are present in *The Guardian's* online news articles in regard to female pop stars, and the language use is consequently sexist. Female pop artists are the passive party, whereas the men in the articles are active. However, the last discourse present in *The Guardian's* online news articles, female pop artists as survivor and champion, contradicts the victim discourse, which is covered in the next subchapter.

#### **4.4 Female pop artist as survivor and champion**

All the female pop artists in the focus of this study, Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha, are described and portrayed implicitly as survivors or champions in the data. The survivor and champion discourse in the context of this study can be viewed as part of feminist discourse. Fairclough (1989: 229) pointed out that, for example, the wording *rape victim* is not equivalent to *rape survivor* because the word choices differ politically. The expression *rape survivor* emphasises that rape is paralleled with, for instance, natural disasters from which people survive. Additionally, the word *survivor* is associated with someone physically or mentally strong and competent, whereas the word *victim* has connotations such as weak, incapable, and passive. As mentioned previously, in the Analysis chapter of my study, the word 'champion' refers to someone who fights or argues for a cause or on behalf of others. In this section, I present three examples of survivor and champion discourse.

Schilling (2016) portrays Beyoncé as a survivor despite the decision not to file for divorce due to the infidelity of her husband.

(10) Beyoncé is the ultimate survivor, defined by her strength in the face of adversity. (Beyoncé and Hillary Clinton: How two scorned women moved on, 2016.)

Forgiveness in a hurtful relationship is not typically associated with feminism and being a powerful and strong woman, according to Schilling (2016). However, as Beyoncé expresses her anger and frustration towards her husband on her latest album, her decision to forgive Jay-Z seems courageous and even heroic. Reaching the status of a heroine may be the underlying reason for representing Beyoncé in a positive light in this specific context rather than the survivor discourse being the norm for women who have been able to forgive their spouses' unfaithfulness. In addition, Beyoncé's status as a successful and influential female pop artist potentially grants her the advantage to be viewed as someone who should be respected by everyone, including the media.

Gajanan (2016c) presents Kesha from both a survivor perspective and a champion perspective in Example 11. Having suffered through physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, Kesha expresses her support to other abuse survivors, which makes her a survivor and a champion. In Example 12, Adele is portrayed as a champion, who publicly supported Kesha during her court case (Gajanan 2016c).

(11) Kesha said that she wants other survivors of abuse to not be afraid to speak out. (Kesha on Dr Luke contract case: 'I want to make music without being abused', 2016.)

(12) - - Adele, who, during her acceptance speech for best solo female artist at the Brit Awards on Wednesday said: "I'd also like to take this moment to publicly support Kesha." (Kesha on Dr Luke contract case: 'I want to make music without being abused', 2016.)

Adele's statement to support Kesha indicates solidarity among female pop artists. In addition to Adele, other pop stars, such as Kelly Clarkson, Lady Gaga, and Ariana Grande, supported Kesha during the court case (Gajanan 2016c). Harris (2016) emphasises that most of the public figure supporters were women because harassment and abuse in the music industry is mostly directed at women. The champion discourse, thus, reaches many other female pop artists outside the scope of this study.

The survivor and champion discourse as a feminist discourse is embedded in a large portion of the studied news articles selected from *The Guardian's* website. However, the word choice *survivor*, as Fairclough (1989: 229) noted, may be a conscious or a forced linguistic and political decision to promote feminism. Still, as discussed previously, stereotypical and sexist

language, as well as the inequality of genders is detectable in *The Guardian*. It is probable that feminism and gender equality in language use have become increasingly common in the media but, regardless, the ingrained ideology of gender inequality continues to persist at present. Therefore, based on this study, the representations of female pop artists have not considerably altered in comparison to the previous research conducted by Davies (2001).

## 5 CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to analyse how three specific female pop artists, Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha, are portrayed through established discourses in *The Guardian's* news articles. The most often occurred representations of these female pop stars were divided into four categories: female pop artist as wife and mother, as emotional woman, as victim, and as survivor and champion. In the first three aforementioned representations both stereotypical views and sexism were detected. Reducing female pop stars to stereotypical women's roles, such as wife and mother, highlighting them as emotionally weak, and portraying them as the victims of men contributed to the stereotypical representation of women in general. Thus, the views of van Zoonen (1994: 66), Burton (2010: 258–259), and Davies (2001) on the unjust representation of women in the media proved to be valid still.

The fourth representation, i.e. female pop artist as survivor and champion, differed from the representations presented by Davies (2001). Despite the positive tone the survivor and champion discourse could be seen to possess, the representation in question does not necessarily indicate an ideology that supports the empowerment of women. Pointing to Fairclough's (1989: 229) statement on politically loaded word choices, the decision of depicting female pop artists as survivors or champions might be conscious or even forced. Therefore, on these terms, the representation of female pop artists as survivors and champions in *The Guardian's* news might not reflect the true values and ideologies of society. However, the issue requires broader research in the future to make distinct conclusions about why female pop artists or, potentially, other groups of women are depicted in this manner.

The tabloidisation of news has transformed the personal lives and the careers of female pop stars into everyday entertainment. The results of this study are an indication of the need for the media to become more respectful in terms of writing about female pop artists in the news. The stereotypical and sexist language regarding women ought to be rejected and discarded

altogether in order to ground gender equality and respect for people into various media practices. This thesis can be useful to especially journalists and other media workers in encouraging them to become more aware of the discourses they apply when talking about women or female pop artists.

This thesis indicated that the representations of female pop artists are, in fact, stereotypical and sexist depending on the applied discourses. However, the scope of this study restricted the research in such a way that only the representations of three specific female pop artists could be investigated excluding image analysis. In addition, only the most prevalent representations could be accounted for in the analysis of the data. Therefore, all of the representations, which were present in *The Guardian's* online news articles about Adele, Beyoncé, and Kesha, were not included. Nevertheless, as language and representations shape views of reality, the most frequent representations affect attitudes, power relations, and social roles in the most powerful way in consequence. Hence, this thesis can be seen as relevant and applicatory regardless of its limitations.

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