Representations of Taylor Swift in American online entertainment news articles

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Diskurssit eli kielenkäyttötavat liittyvät vahvasti siihen, miten ihmiset hahmottavat todellisuutta sekä erilaisia ilmiöitä. Diskurssit siis rakentavat todellisuutta, mutta samaan aikaan niitä ympäröivä sosiaalinen konteksti muokkaa myös itse diskursseja. Medialla taas on yhteiskunnassa merkittävä rooli, minkä takia sen esille tuomat representaatiot ja näkemykset ovat merkittäviä. Lisäksi naisia kohdellaan mediassa yhä eri tavoin kuin samassa asemassa olevia miehiä. Kriittisen diskurssianalyysin avulla voidaan tutkia median representaatioista löytyviä eriarvoisuuksia sekä vallankäyttöä, sillä se keskittyy usein juuri tällaisten piirteiden tutkimiseen.

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, millaisia representaatioita pop-laulaja Taylor Swiftistä esiintyy yhdysvaltalaisissa viihdeuutismedioissa, jotka julkaisevat sisältöä ilmaiseksi internetissä. Viihdeuutiset valittiin tutkimuksen kohteeksi, sillä niillä on laaja lukijakunta ja on tärkeää pohtia, miten naisartisti esitetään tälle laajalle yleisölle sekä kuinka sukupuoli vaikuttaa näihin representaatioihin. Analyysimetodina tutkimuksessa käytettiin kriittistä diskurssianalyysia ja aineisto koostui kuudesta saman aiheen ympärille kirjoitetusta artikkelista, jotka oli kerätty kolmelta eri uutissivustolta.

Analyysin tärkeimmät löydökset jaettiin neljään eri kategoriaan. Swift esitettiin tunteellisena naisena, vahvana ja itsenäisenä, tilanteen uhrina sekä kritiikin kohteena. Sukupuoli vaikutti kaikkiin löydettyihin representaatioihin, vaikka tunteellisen naisen ja kritiikin kohteena olemisen representaatiot olivatkin voimakkaimmin sukupuolittuneita. Artikkeleiden esittämät representaatiot vaihtelivat ja osa artikkeleista kirjoitti Swiftistä suopeammin ja neutraalimmin kun taas toiset artikkelit esittivät Swiftin hyvinkin kriittisestä näkökulmasta. Analyysini tulokset noudattelivat aiempien tutkimusten löydöksiä naisten stereotyyppisestä esittämisestä mediassa. Pienen aineiston vuoksi musiikin parissa työskentelevien naisten representaatiot kaipaavat kuitenkin lisää laajemmin toteutettua tutkimusta.

Asiasanat – Keywords critical discourse analysis, representation, media, female pop-musician, gender, kriittinen diskurssianalyysi, representaatio, media, naismuusikko, sukupuoli

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1 INTRODUCTION

Media has a significant role in affecting people's ideas and understanding of the world. Theoretically, media produces reliable and objective information to inform audiences about world events. However, there are different media forms with differing goals, and these goals do not always include pure objectivity. Even though the same events take place in the world at each moment, newspapers might define news differently and some platforms, for example tabloids, produce for instance more soft news (Burton 2010: 230). Soft news can mean reporting about celebrities or popular culture and even though they are lighter in factual content and often written for entertainment purposes, they compose a large part of the news media. This is why it is important to investigate what kind of representations these pieces of soft news express to wide audiences and whether they convey prejudices or stereotypes.

The purpose of this thesis is to research media representations of Taylor Swift, a popular American pop-musician. Critical discourse analysis is utilised to examine stereotypes and inequality as well as gender and media discourse. Swift's representations are analysed through three different American online news medias and specifically, through articles about her "record label case". All of the articles chosen for the study can be defined as soft or entertainment news and they are from entertainment news medias. In this study, the record label case means Swift's public disagreements with her old record label that sold her master records without Swift's consent, which led to a series of events and arguments, like Swift re-recording some of her old work to gain the full copyrights. The record label case is a defined example of Swift defending her own interests, which is why it was chosen for the study.

It is essential that media would report topics in a neutral manner since it has such a significant effect on people's views on the world. Media often seems to represent female celebrities in an aesthetic manner rather than through their talents and what they want to say (Kosut 2012: xx; Walsh 2015), which is why it is important to explore a case, where an artist receives attention because of her professional aspirations rather than her looks. Considering the male-dominant history in all aspects of society, this is especially interesting since stereotypically women are not seen as leaders or confident agents. They can also be perceived as dramatic, "bossy" or annoying when they appear

in these positions. Additionally, there has been very little research done on female music stars in media.

This thesis begins with reviewing previous research related to the topic in Chapter 2. The chapter discusses critical discourse analysis, which is also applied in the analysis, as well as media and representation and finally, women in media. Chapter 3 will cover the aim of the study, the research questions, the data and the methods of analysis. Chapter 4 will discuss the findings of this study while Chapter 5 will conclude the contents of the thesis.

2 BACKGROUND

The background section of this thesis introduces key concepts and theories of the present study. I begin with introducing and explaining discourse and the analytical method of the study, critical discourse analysis. Next, I present how media is defined and how media and representations are connected. Finally, I will be discussing women in media and how women are usually represented in media works.

2.1. Critical discourse analysis

Discourse is a complex, multi-layered concept, which is essential to acknowledge when researching language and social factors. Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009: 13, 22) explain that discourse research investigates language as a social activity, which means that while language creates social reality, social reality affects language as well, and language itself possesses both discursive and social qualities. Furthermore, discourse is always strongly connected to the context in which language is used (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009: 22). Fairclough (2010: 3) contemplates that discourse is complicated to define but agrees with how discourse is connected to the relations that create social reality. He also adds that a discourse can be layered with other discourses. The way discourses include other discourses, and the complexity of language are why discourse analysis

functions on several levels and utilises a multitude of methods (Fairclough 2010: 3; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009: 164).

Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary method that examines the relationship between discourse and other elements, such as language use, rather than discourse by itself (Fairclough 2010: 4). According to Fairclough (2010: 8), the aim of critical discourse analysis is to uncover and mend for instance unfair power distributions and injustices, or "social wrongs". Wodak and Meyer (2001: 2) also describe the purposes of critical discourse analysis as critically observing inequality and discrimination. Agreeing with Fairclough (2010: 8), they emphasise how critical discourse analysis investigates the relationship between power and language, and how it often focuses on "institutional, political, gender and media discourses" (Wodak & Meyer 2001: 2).

In the present study, critical discourse analysis is utilised from the point of view of language use. Fairclough (1995b: 54-55) adds how language use is in a "dialectical relationship", with social factors and critical discourse analysis considers both of these aspects, which means that while language use is shaped by society, it can also shape society, much like Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009:13, 22) mentioned when considering discourse. This is why it is essential to research language use in society. Fairclough (1995b: 54) continues that language and power are not explicitly related, but upon a more careful examination language plays a significant role when considering power. Additionally, it is important to consider when language is used conventionally and also when it is used in a new way, either intentionally or unintentionally, because both of these types of language use shape reality (Fairclough 1995b: 55). For example, unconventional language use can be used to change certain social patterns or inequalities.

Furthermore, critical discourse analysis includes three main elements according to Fairclough (1995a: 2). Text, discourse practises and the surrounding societal environment constitute a framework, which is a combination of a Bakhtinian theory of genre and a Gramscian theory of hegemony (Fairclough 1995a: 2). Fairclough (1995a: 2) explains that the genre theory emphasises how texts are based on previous texts as they always imitate each other, and the theory of hegemony explains how power relations affect the production of discourses as well as how some orders of discourse are used more than others. Moreover, discourse assists in placing a text among other

works and defining the relationship between these texts as well as showing how it situates in a wider environment (Fairclough 1995a: 4, 10).

In conclusion, discourse analysis investigates the layers of language as a social construction and the contexts, in which language use occurs. Critical discourse analysis is more specific and considers the inequalities of the world through discourses and for example language. Studying different societal structures and the power dynamics within these structures is typical of critical discourse analysis, which can include the three elements Fairclough has defined.

2.2. Media and representation

Media is currently very powerful and can also be defined in various ways. Kosut (2012: 19) considers that today the word "media" includes for example movies and social media in addition to traditional media, such as newspapers, radio and television. She continues that media is an important source of information, but it also provides entertainment. According to Fairclough (1995b: 39-40), mass media is highly influential and powerful due to large audience sizes, and the influence of media is reinforced by audiences rather rarely being directly able to affect mass media and its contents. Mass media also widely contributes to creating meaning and ways of seeing different topics, and then these views are repeated over time across various platforms (Webb 2009: 116). Furthermore, Breese (2010) agrees with Kosut (2012) that a wide, mainstream audience regularly consumes specifically entertainment and celebrity news texts, which means that this journalistic practise is becoming more central in the field of journalism and as can consequently be assumed, in research as well.

In other words, media has a significant role in society and according to Burton (2010: 1), different media texts include a multitude of representations that can be neutral and truthful but also harmful and stereotypical. Wide audiences consume media texts and they can embrace the views presented in them. So, while media is constantly affected by society, it also contributes greatly to sociocultural changes by spreading new ideas (Fairclough 1995b: 51). This is why it is important to study and consider media representations and how they affect the readers and therefore, the society.

Representations are an essential factor in considering how people view the world. For instance, media representations can convey the attitudes of the writer or the creator about the topic and how it is generally viewed or understood in society or a certain context (Webb 2009: 1). Because language allows people to communicate as well as convey meaning, it has a central role in investigating representations (Webb 2009: 40). Webb (2009: 43-44) continues to introduce three modes of language and representation. The reflective approach on language explains that language only describes something that already exists in the world, but the broader view considers that language also constructs reality. This view is similar to Fairclough (1995b) and Pietikäinen and Mäntynen's (2009) theories about discourse and critical discourse analysis and is therefore utilised in this study. The intentional approach claims that communication always represents what was intended. Finally, the constructionist approach accounts that meaning is constructed while the process of making representations occurs. Additionally, discourse affects representation as well since different discourses contribute to creating different social realities and meanings (Burton 2010: 25; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009: 22).

In summary, media contributes to creating various representations and it is important to consider them since wide audiences consume different works in media and can acquire views that these works create. Mass media, including the increasingly popular entertainment media, are significant factors in spreading new ideas in society. Language and discourse are relevant factors when studying representations and they can be considered through the three modes of language and representation: the reflective, intentional and constructionist approaches, of which the reflective approach is used in this study.

2.3. Women in media

Women are represented in a multitude of ways in media and it can be assumed that, for example, their looks affect the way they are depicted, especially in entertainment news media. In confirmation, Walsh (2015) recounts that women's physical appearance can distract audiences from the comments women are trying to make as well as result in criticism for the way women dress. Often, men do not face this issue leaving women with a more scrutinised position in media

(Walsh 2015). In the history of mass media, men have obtained most upper-level positions in media industries, alongside other societal leadership roles, which has left women, as well as minorities, with a limited role and representation in media works (Kosut 2012: xx). Kosut (2012: xx) continues that this can mean for example largely showing women in the stereotypical and "desirable" social roles of a mother or a caregiver, which then affects the way audiences see women and which roles they should obtain. She also adds that strict gender binary thinking and the stereotypes stemming from that are rooted in heteronormative thinking. The Global Media Monitoring Project (2015: 77) reports additionally that gender stereotypes in news media have remained largely the same during the last ten years, and very few news articles actively challenge them.

Burke and Mazzarella (2008) confirm in their study that journalistic practises emphasise male influence and many news articles in significant American news medias feature males as protagonists and quote them as experts in the articles. According to them, this represents males in the positions of power and knowledge. In their study, D´Heer et al. (2020) also found that while women are underrepresented in news media, they are also represented stereotypically, for example as the victim, and they are used to provide personal experiences and vox pops to the news articles rather than facts. Additionally, studies about political figures have found that media reporting about female candidates often covers more personal matters, such as appearance and family life, and news writing can also be more critical when females express power and assertiveness, both qualities that might traditionally be seen as unsuitable for women (Devere & Davies 2006, as cited in Burke & Mazzarella 2008). It could be assumed that this applies to how women are represented in media generally and in other professions as well.

Furthermore, according to Elliott and Stead's (2018) study, media often represents women in leadership roles as disruptive to the system, which is traditionally masculine, and this means that cultural change is more difficult to implement since the media representation affects how women are seen as leaders in the actual world. This can also be applied to how women who express the qualities of a leader are presented in media. They are not seen as credible as their male counterparts. Elliott and Stead (2018) also bring up the view of representing women as the victim and their own enemy. They state that women in powerful positions can be highlighted in media but they are also shown as victims to possessing "female qualities", not suitable for leaders, as well as not being

able to stand up to stereotypical gender roles and gender-related difficulties. D'Heer et al. (2020) have also noticed the representation of women as victims, though from a different angle. While they have brought up how women's stories about being a victim were utilised, Elliott and Stead (2018) highlight how media works have made women the victim, even though they were originally represented in powerful positions.

Thus, as a whole, it seems that women still face a different status in media than their male counterparts and some medias can portray women stereotypically. The inequal representations can be explicit, such as showing women in traditional roles, or more implicit, such as making women the victims of their own situation as not being men. News articles about women can also contain details, such as criticism towards one's looks, that are not visible in news articles about men. Women are additionally underrepresented as experts being quoted in news articles as well as journalists.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 The aim and the research questions

The aim of this thesis is to analyse what kind of representations are visible in American online newspaper articles about the American pop-musician Taylor Swift and her "record label case". Swift was chosen as the subject of this study because she has traditionally received plenty of criticism in media regarding her appearance, the music she creates as well as decisions regarding her personal life. She also appears traditionally feminine, which might be a relevant factor when considering media representations. Swift's previous record label, Big Machine Records, was sold without her knowledge in 2019, which meant that Swift lost the possibility to gain the full rights to her own music, and the arguments surrounding these events were public (Théberge 2021). I have named these events "the record label case" for the purposes of this study. This specific topic was chosen because it is a defined example of Swift defending her own rights, which might, positively or negatively, affect the way she is seen by media and consequently, by audiences. The questions I will focus on in this study are:

1. How is Taylor Swift represented in the news articles about her record label case and which point of view is shown as the truth?

2. Are the representations stereotypical and sexist, or on the contrary, neutral and supportive?

Based on studies cited above, it is somewhat likely that Swift's choice to defend her own music has led to media representations that criticise and degrade her or show her as overly dramatic. On the other hand, it is possible that the news articles recount Swift's story in a neutral manner that considers the events objectively and she is represented without stereotypes or sexist attitudes. Additionally, the objectivity and the representations surrounding the news subject might vary across different news websites.

3.2 The data

The data for this study consists of six articles from three different online news medias in the United States, all of which have free access to their articles. I chose six articles, that vary in length, since they provide a suitable amount of data for the purposes of this study. The news media were chosen based on their news reporting leaning towards soft news and entertainment news. These specific news media are the focus of this study because they have wide audiences due to general extensive interest in entertainment and celebrities, which is in accordance with Breese (2010) and Kosut (2012). The texts they publish affect how the multitude of readers see the topics and the people represented in the articles. American news medias were selected as Swift herself is American and thus the news coverage about her is likely to be higher, although she is an international celebrity.

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen two articles from each of the news medias. All of the articles will cover roughly the same topic, which enables the comparison of the articles and the representations visible in them. *The U.S. Sun* (the-sun.com) was chosen as the first news media. *The Sun* has only functioned in the US since 2019, but the original UK tabloid was established in 1969 and they state as their goal to produce "engaging, hard-hitting and entertaining" news (Davies 2019). From *The U.S. Sun*, I chose Maloney's (2020) article that thoroughly examines the

disagreement between Swift and her record label as well as Lewis' (2020) shorter article about the latest events in the public argument.

E! News (eonline.com) was selected as the second news media. It produces entertainment, popular culture and lifestyle news as well as video materials for television and online use for audiences consisting of millions of people (E! News n.d.). Grossbart's (2019) article about the phases of the disagreement and Contreras' (2019) article about Swift's plans to re-record her albums were chosen from the *E!News* website. For the third news media, *Variety* (variety.com) was chosen. According to Variety (n.d.), they are an established and trusted provider of "entertainment business news" and the "leading publication" in the field. *Variety* publishes on multiple platforms and caters for an international audience as well as professionals in the entertainment field (Variety n.d.). From the *Variety* website, I chose two articles as well. Both of the articles are by Willman (2019, 2020) and cover Swift's right to play her songs at the American Music Awards and her re-recording the albums as well as confirming the sale of her masters. In conclusion, two articles were chosen from each of the news websites and the articles constituted of roughly one longer and one shorter article. All of the articles were written either in 2019 or 2020 and they circle around the same topic, although with some differences in the point of view for instance.

3.3 The methods of analysis

For the method of analysis, I will be using critical discourse analysis, which focuses on the power distribution and relations as well as any inequalities in society (Fairclough 2010: 8). Furthermore, critical discourse analysis aims to explain the reasons behind these inequalities and injustices and to consider how they could be made right (Fairclough 2010: 8). The aims of critical discourse analysis support the goals of this thesis in finding possible inequalities and harmful representations in media. Gender and media discourses are also some of the most typical areas of critical discourse analysis, which further motivates the use of this method for the study (Wodak & Meyer 2001: 2).

For the analysis, I utilised Fairclough's (1995a) framework for critical discourse analysis. This framework includes three points of view: analysing text and language, considering the orders of discourse and genre and finally connecting the analysis to society and culture (Fairclough 1995a:

2-15). Additionally, I considered Fairclough's (1995b: 57-63) theory about media texts in analysing both communicative events and the order of discourse. In accordance with Matheson (2005: 20-24), word choices, labels and patterns were considered in the analysis. This is important because it is always relevant when one word or label is chosen instead of its alternatives and labels can divide people into social categories that consequently affect how they are seen by the public (Matheson 2005: 20, 24).

My analysis focuses on the linguistic aspects of the data since the aim of my research is to consider written text. I will especially consider word choices and how they create meaning in the articles as well as what kind of ideologies they carry. This is in accordance with Fairclough's (1995a) framework. On a sentence level, I will consider for example phrases and what kind of implicit ideas are expressed through the writing. Audio-visual features will not be included due to the limited length of the study.

4 REPRESENTATIONS OF TAYLOR SWIFT

In the news articles, Taylor Swift was presented through various views. Four main representations found in the articles were Swift as an emotional woman, as a strong and independent woman, as the victim of the situation and finally, as the subject of criticism. Each of the main representations will be covered in the subchapters below.

4.1 Taylor Swift as an emotional woman

The first distinct representation of Swift is her portrayal as emotional in the American news media articles. The articles contain many word choices, such as adjectives, adverbs and verbs, that emphasise emotion over reason or factual information. These word choices include for example *felt*, *furious*, *blasted*, *peeved*, *dismayed*, *passionately, emotional* and *deeply unhappy*, all of which depict various feelings. Next, I will discuss the different emotions that are visible in the articles.

For example, *furious* and *blasted* indicate feelings leaning towards anger. This is significant because being angry can be frowned upon when a woman expresses this feeling. The specific word choices used in the articles have quite heavy undertones of anger, which further not only highlights Swift's assumed reaction, but also the way the writers assume and interpret Swift would have reacted. Choosing these kinds of descriptive words can also be seen as typical of this type of sensational journalism that strives for as many clicks and readers as they can acquire without considering objectivity in the same way as traditional news media. Nevertheless, this representation can also increase criticality towards the female subject, as Devere and Davies (2006, as cited in Burke & Mazzarella 2008) have found. In example 1, Swift's social media post is said to be *fiery*, which additionally highlights Swift's feelings of anger.

> (1) "The pop star called the new ownership her "worst case scenario" in a *fiery* Tumblr letter she posted to fans just after news broke." (Taylor Swift hits back after Scooter Braun sells her masters for $300M following row over music rights, Lewis 2020, emphasis added.)

Additionally, the words *peeved*, *dismayed* and *deeply unhappy* refer to feeling upset and disappointed. The word choices considered here emphasise Swift's reaction to the situation and they are used somewhat often in the articles. According to Burton (2010: 14), certain words such as "emotional" are associated with females, which further explains the use of words describing emotionality in the articles and why Swift's emotions are represented as central to the news situation. The use of *peeved* and *deeply unhappy* are visible in examples 2 and 3.

> (2) "What's not up for dispute, however, is how *peeved* Swift still is that Borchetta sold his company to Braun - -." (Everything that's led to this Taylor Swift and Scooter Braun debacle, Grossbart 2019, emphasis added.)

> (3) "- - as would be expected, she is *deeply unhappy* with the second sale of her master recordings without her consent or involvement in a year and a half." (Taylor Swift confirms sale of her masters, says she is already re-recording her catalog, Willman 2020, emphasis added.)

The word choice *felt* furthermore indicates the writer's criticality towards what Swift has commented: instead of portraying the quote as a fact, the writer expresses the quote as something Swift "feels" has happened. This aligns with Burke and Mazzarella's (2018) notion about quoting men as experts in news articles rather than women and presenting males as protagonists. The use of *felt* can thus explain why Swift's quotes are portrayed as her subjective experience and not the truth. Additionally, this emphasises how other people involved in the situation and possibly also the writer of the article, do not agree with her or believe in what she is saying. The use of *felt* is visible in example 4.

> (4) "And while she *felt* Braun played a role in that particular character assassination it was but one of the issues she had with the 38-year-old - -." (Everything that's led to this Taylor Swift and Scooter Braun debacle, Grossbart 2019, emphasis added)

4.2 Taylor Swift as a strong, independent woman

The second distinct representation of Swift is her as strong and independent. This representation is visible in some articles, but not all of them, despite how they all cover roughly the same topic. Especially Maloney (2020) and Grossbart's (2019) writing brings forward the representation of Swift as strong and independent, which is interesting since these two articles have been published on two different platforms. Thus, the representation could possibly be seen as more universal. Swift's strength and independence is conveyed through word choices, such as *stance*, *furiously*, *soldiered forward* and *fought*, all of which have significant connotations of for example fighting, anger and strength. It is also emphasised how she has made her own decisions in the situation and how these decisions were not easy and simple, but rather hard to make and not necessarily fully to her advantage, which further emphasises Swift's strength. This is visible in examples 5 and 6 which describe Swift as *taking control of her own narrative* and how *she had to walk away*.

> (5) "And though she took control of her own narrative, turning their fan's hissing insults into a record-breaking *reputation* tour - -." (Everything that's led to this Taylor Swift and Scooter Braun debacle, Grossbart 2019, emphasis in original.)

(6) "- - said she had to walk away because she knew Borchetta would sell the label "thereby selling me and my future". (How Taylor Swift took on 'manipulative bully' Scooter Braun over $300m masters sale & divided the music world, Maloney 2020.)

There is also juxtaposition between Swift and men in the articles. The word *men* in this case refers to Scooter Braun and Scott Borchetta and especially Grossbart (2019) uses this juxtaposition between genders to enhance Swift's image as a strong, confident female who has the courage to stand up to men who misuse their power. *Whether or not the men have or had given permission*, *wholly in the control of two men* and *going public might shame the men* are the phrases Grossbart (2019) uses to create contrast between Swift and Braun and Borchetta.

Swift's image of strength and confidence is also emphasised by referring to previous public disagreements and the way she often speaks up about subjects she finds unfair (Théberge 2021). Additionally, it can be considered whether the articles praise Swift for being independent and unafraid to speak up, or whether they frown upon a woman who uses her power this way. As Elliott and Stead (2018) found in their study, women in leadership roles are presented somewhat negatively in media and not as qualified for the role as their male counterparts. This finding could be applied to how Swift is presented in the articles due to using power and speaking up. Examples 7 and 8 highlight Swift's tendency to speak up in media and strongly defend herself through the use of metaphors. It can be considered whether this is presented as a positive or negative feature.

(7) "Never one to take anything lying down, Taylor quickly turned things on her enemies - -." (How Taylor Swift took on 'manipulative bully' Scooter Braun over $300m masters sale & divided the music world, Maloney 2020.)

(8) "Make no mistake, her fangs are at the ready." (Everything that's led to this Taylor Swift and Scooter Braun debacle, Grossbart 2019.)

Finally, Swift is also shown as causing harm to others by making the decision of wanting to control her own works. The company that bought her works does lose money because of Swift's decision to not continue working with them and she is shown as guilty for devaluing the company. It can be considered whether this blaming is necessary and whether it reflects the writer's attitude. Because

only few of the articles highlight this specific business-related issue, they could be seen as unnecessarily blaming her for making this choice. The aspect discussed here can be noticed in example 9.

> (9) "- - it [the company] will be conjoined from licensing syncs and other forms of income with getting publishing rights for the songs, which Swift owns and clearly has no intention of granting Shamrock." (Taylor Swift confirms sale of her masters, says she is already re-recording her catalog, Willman 2020.)

4.3 Taylor Swift as the victim

On the contrary to Swift being shown as strong and independent, she is also presented as the victim of the situation. She is presented as an innocent and dreamy teen who did not know how successful she would become as well as how her career could be altered by the record label. Her innocence is emphasised by remarks of the beginning of her career as in examples 10 and 11.

> (10) "- - the fact that songs she penned in her Nashville bedroom as a teen with a guitar and some big dreams were now wholly in the control of two men who had not helped create them." (Everything that's led to this Taylor Swift and Scooter Braun debacle, Grossbart 2019.)

> (11) "When 15-year-old Taylor Swift signed a recording contract with Scott Borchetta, who was in the process of setting up Big Machine Records, she was over the moon at her rosy future. - - But the very contract that gave her a shot at stardom has come back to bite her – by robbing her of her first six albums, and the pride she felt at their success." (How Taylor Swift took on 'manipulative bully' Scooter Braun over $300m masters sale & divided the music world, Maloney 2020)

These kind of stories about women as victims are often utilised in media (D'Heer et al. 2020). The representation of innocence is mostly embraced by Grossbart (2019), who also mentions how there was *nothing she* [Swift] *could do* and how she *begged to buy her own masters*. This is interesting since Grossbart (2019) also represented Swift as strong and independent, which is somewhat distant from the victim representation. Most of the other articles obtain a more critical or neutral view towards Swift so they do not victimise her but on the contrary, they might express much more criticism. However, representing Swift as the victim and innocent does not necessarily mean that

the article is supporting or pitying Swift. Emphasising Swift's innocence can be seen as either wanting to defend her or allege her for being too trusting when signing the contract. Elliott and Stead (2018) have found that media can have the tendency of representing women in powerful positions also as the victims of "being women" or in this case, being young, which does not advance their treatment as equal to other people.

4.4 Taylor Swift as the subject of criticism

The final distinct representation of Swift is her as the subject of criticism in the articles. This was chosen as the final representation since it is strongly visible in many of the articles. The representation is also connected to the other representations found in the articles and thus can be seen as central when analysing the articles and the other representations. Criticality towards Swift was analysed mostly from the point of view of word choices, in accordance with Matheson (2005).

The reporting verbs in the articles play an especially important role in analysing the writers' views of Swift and the situation, as well as journalistic criticality. Verbs expressing doubt are common among most of the articles, even though some of the writers use them more. For example, *claim*, *accuse*, *allege* and *assert* are used to express doubt and criticality towards Swift and what she has commented. However, many neutral reporting verbs such as *say*, *continue*, *share*, *write* and *bring up* are also utilised, which gives the reader a more objective view on the situation and thus does not take any kind of stand on the topic that is being covered in the articles. Example 12 shows the use of these neutral reporting verbs which endorse objectivity.

> (12) "Having Braun own her work was "my worst case scenario", she *continued*, detailing how she had confided in Borchetta about her bad relationship with the New York native. "He knew what he was doing; they both did," she *summed up*." (Everything that's led to this Taylor Swift and Scooter Braun debacle, Grossbart 2019, emphases added.)

The level of criticism that is necessary in the articles can be debated especially as some of the articles express higher levels of criticality than others. This indicates that the writers have different views about the situation that is being covered in the articles and possibly even Swift herself, or

female pop-musicians in general. For example, the articles by Grossbart (2019) and Contreras (2019), both of which have been published by *E!News*, do not include much explicit criticality towards Swift, whereas especially Lewis (2020) and Willman (2019) use more critical reporting verbs and a doubtful tone, as is visible in examples 13 and 14, which are from the articles written by Willman and Lewis and published in *Variety* and *The U.S. Sun*. This also leads to the observation that the platform in which the articles have been published does not necessarily define what kind of representations are detectable in the articles.

(13) "Normally, performing older material live when the master recordings are held by someone else shouldn't require permission, except Swift *claims* that Borchetta and Braun are *contending* that a performance of them on the AMAs constitutes "re-recording them before I'm allowed next year." (Taylor Swift says Scooter Braun, Scott Borchetta are blocking her from playing old hits at AMAs, Willman 2019, emphases added.)

(14) "The singer also *alleged* the company told her that they had been told by Scooter not to contact her before the sale, or the "deal would be off". (Taylor Swift hits back after Scooter Braun sells her masters for $300M following row over music rights, Lewis 2020, emphasis added.)

According to Devere and Davies (2006, as cited in Burke & Mazzarella 2008), news writing can be more critical when the female subjects have expressed power and assertiveness as these qualities have traditionally been seen as unsuitable for women. Thus, it could be assumed that some of the articles convey this possibly excessive criticism because Swift is communicating these qualities as a woman. While the rest of the articles also express some criticality, it is not as significant and could be interpreted as standard criticality that needs to be practised by the press to produce reliable information. However, it is noteworthy that the level of criticality varies, which decreases objectivity in the articles and brings out the writers' personal choices. This also leads one to the conclusion that the articles further strengthen the lines of previous research where gender affects the way topics are covered in media and how critical reporters are towards them.

5 CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to examine what kind of representations can be found in American online news medias about the pop-musician Taylor Swift in relation to her "record label case". The most significant representations of Swift were divided into four categories: Swift as emotional, as strong and independent, as the victim of the situation and finally, as the subject of criticism. All of these representations seemed to be affected by Swift's gender, which means that the articles included stereotypical, prejudiced and even somewhat sexist views about Swift. Some of the articles also expressed neutral views and even showed support for Swift in her decisions, but additionally she was blamed for making decisions that had financial consequences for others. Thus, none of the articles were completely neutral in representing the situation and Swift herself. Although obviously some aspects relating to these representations can be seen as normal criticality practised in journalism, the way Swift was represented aligned with previous research conducted by Walsh (2015), Burke and Mazzarella (2008), D'Heer et al. (2020) and Elliott and Stead (2018) about women in media.

The first and fourth representations were more harmful in presenting stereotypical and unnecessarily critical views about Swift. In the first representation, she was shown as overly emotional, which is perhaps usually not considered a positive attribute and furthermore, it is a typical way of presenting particularly women. The fourth representation was Swift as the subject of criticism. Many of the articles were somewhat critical towards Swift and what she has said. This critical presenting of Swift can be seen as unnecessary and one can consider whether the possibly unnecessary criticality stems from Swift being assertive and defending as well as using power, which would align with research by Devere and Davies (2006, as cited in Burke & Mazzarella 2008) and also Elliott and Stead's (2018) research about women in leadership roles and how they are not considered qualified enough, and thus face more criticism than males.

Additionally, the second and third representations of Swift were more neutral and supportive, even though they can be criticised as well. Swift as a strong and independent woman was a representation found mostly in two articles that seemed to support Swift and create juxtaposition between her and the men on involved in the situation. Swift as the victim of the situation continued being a

supportive representation as well. However, tones of criticality could be found in this representation as well and were confirmed by Elliott and Stead (2018) and D'Heer et al.'s (2020) studies. Although the representations found in the American news media articles were at least partly harmful, this does not necessarily reflect how society sees female pop-musicians due to the nature of the articles, which is to provide entertainment. Still, certain representations can be harmful even in entertainment-driven news medias since they have a great deal of consumers, which is why these representations should be eradicated from media, or the audiences should at least be given the opportunity to become aware of how language affects their understanding.

In conclusion, this thesis found that harmful representations of a female pop-musician are still visible in entertainment news medias. While this study analysed data from different news platforms, the amount of data was still small, which decreases the reliability of the results, and more research on the topic should be conducted with more extensive data. Additionally, the subject of the analysis was restricted since the analysis was conducted from the point of view of one person and one news topic. In the future, it would be beneficial to study a range of female pop-musicians and possibly also other celebrities from the point of view of media representations to gain more perspective on issues related to gender in media. The results of future research as well as the results of this thesis could have societal impact in reaching a more egalitarian environment since language strongly affects how people view the world. Thus, despite its limitations, this thesis is relevant and could be applied to future research.

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