

**The Representation of Miley Cyrus and Taylor
Swift as Postfeminist Celebrity Musicians: Image,
Text and Audiences**

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Bachelor of Communication

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Abstract

It is hard to escape the phenomenal reach of contemporary pop artists. Their songs are cycled across commercial radio stations, their music videos occupy our screens and we can mostly likely see the artist perform live in our nearest city. This thesis examines two of contemporary pop music's most well-known and successful artists, Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift, in terms of their self-presentation, media representation and audience engagement. Billboard rated Cyrus and Swift in the top 10 artists of 2014 (Billboard 2014). Swift's most recent album, *1989* (2014), "topped iTunes sales charts in over 95 countries on its release and has sold over 8.6 million copies worldwide to date" (IFPI 2015). Cyrus' total album sales stand at 15.9 million, including her work as "Hannah Montana" (Caulfield 2014). This thesis analyses the artists as postfeminist celebrity musicians who present many contradictions in their identities via the assorted channels through which their persona is expressed. Both musicians display the notion of 'slippage' (Genz and Brabon 2009) in relation to their persona, behaviour and creative content; their identities constantly shift and change. I introduce the notion of the postfeminist celebrity musician as a figure that identifies as a feminist, however displays certain behaviours that contest traditional feminist ideals. This thesis analyses Cyrus and Swift as postfeminist celebrity musicians in three main ways. Firstly, a selection of the artists' music videos released between 2009 and 2015 are examined with regards to the artists' choices concerning their image, lyrics and themes of the songs. This thesis also explores the key transitions and various stages of both artists' creative careers. Secondly, the mediated identities of Cyrus and Swift are considered through an analysis of selected magazine feature articles published between 2013 and 2015. The feature articles gauge the artists' presentation in popular print media texts as public feminists and celebrities. Lastly, this thesis investigates audience responses to Cyrus and Swift through an analysis of selected parody videos. Overall, this thesis argues that single representations of identity cannot accurately convey the complete character of the postfeminist celebrity. Cyrus and Swift exemplify postfeminist celebrity musicians as complex and often contradicting individuals.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>THE REPRESENTATION OF MILEY CYRUS AND TAYLOR SWIFT AS POSTFEMINIST CELEBRITY MUSICIANS: IMAGE, TEXT AND AUDIENCES</u>	I
ABSTRACT	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
<u>CHAPTER ONE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE POSTFEMINIST CELEBRITY MUSICIAN</u>	1
INTRODUCTION	1
<u>CHAPTER TWO: THEORISING THE POSTFEMINIST CELEBRITY MUSICIAN</u>	6
INTRODUCTION	6
POSTFEMINISM	6
CELEBRITY	8
THE MUSICIAN	10
THE POSTFEMINIST CELEBRITY MUSICIAN	11
CONCLUSION	12
<u>CHAPTER THREE: THE SELF-PRESENTATION OF THE POSTFEMINIST CELEBRITY MUSICIAN THROUGH THEIR MUSIC VIDEOS</u>	14
INTRODUCTION	14
AMERICA’S SWEETEST AND WILDEST: THE CAREER TRANSITIONS OF CYRUS AND SWIFT AS POSTFEMINIST CELEBRITIES	15
REPRESENTING THE BODY	19
WE CAN DO IT!	23
ROMANCE AND SEXUAL EXPRESSION	24
CONCLUSION	26
<u>CHAPTER FOUR: THE MEDIATED REPRESENTATION OF THE POSTFEMINIST CELEBRITY MUSICIAN</u>	28

INTRODUCTION	28
THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS BAD PUBLICITY?	30
A POP STAR’S REINVENTION	32
STRONG, COMPLEX, AND INDEPENDENT WOMEN	34
CONCLUSION	36
<u>CHAPTER FIVE: AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITH POSTFEMINIST</u>	
<u>CELEBRITY MUSICIANS</u>	<u>38</u>
INTRODUCTION	38
SOMEBODY’S WATCHING ME	40
CONFLICT IN THE INDUSTRY	41
SUCCESS AT THE EXPENSE OF SOMEBODY ELSE	42
CONCLUSION	43
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	<u>44</u>
<u>REFERENCES</u>	<u>46</u>
MUSIC VIDEOS	46
MAGAZINE ARTICLES	47
PARODY VIDEOS	47
REFERENCE LIST	48

Chapter One: The Significance of The Postfeminist Celebrity Musician

Introduction

This thesis critically examines the public image of female celebrity musicians whom identify as feminists. The thesis focuses on three key areas: the self-presentation of the artists, how they are represented in key media texts, and, audience engagement with each artist. Both artists illustrate concerns surrounding the postfeminist celebrity, especially with regards to them as ‘white’, young modern celebrities with idealised bodies. This thesis examines Cyrus and Swift as examples of the female postfeminist celebrity musician. Both artists illustrate postfeminism including the strains and complexities within the theory itself. Gill (2007) defines postfeminism as a ‘sensibility’ comprising of numerous interrelated themes. These include femininity as a bodily property, the sexualisation of culture, empowerment and self-surveillance and lastly, discipline. Through an analysis of Cyrus and Swift as postfeminist celebrities, Gill’s (2007) interconnected themes of postfeminism highlight similarities and differences between both artists’ feminist identities.

Cyrus demonstrates a rebellious image, whereas Swift’s persona engages with notions of innocence. Despite this difference, both artists cross boundaries with regards to their image. Creatively, both Cyrus and Swift show a range of transitions across their albums and live performances. Furthermore, the media represents them as working musicians and in relation to their celebrity status. The media therefore reports on their musical successes, their personal lives and trivial matters such as relationship gossip. The extent to which an artist has creative control over their representation varies depending on the medium. An artist can construct their image in numerous ways, such as via official websites, merchandise, social media, and music videos. An analysis of successful music videos from both Cyrus and Swift in terms of their representation as postfeminist

celebrity musicians is the focus of Chapter Three. Despite controlling the creation of official texts, the artist does not have control over how the media represents their image and actions, nor how the public receives them. The media representation of Cyrus and Swift in selected magazine articles is the focus of Chapter Four.¹ The audience perception of the artists via a selection of YouTube parody videos is the focus of Chapter Five.

Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift share many similarities. Both come from Tennessee, found fame and success from a young age, and both publicly identify as feminists. As well, both have loyal fan bases and a strong brand image through which they continue to build their public personas. Cyrus and Swift share a phenomenal audience reach and are effective businesswomen. They have built up their brand as well as their public image over a number of years and subsequently, have both earned a large fan following.²

The entertainment industry has been a strong element in Cyrus' life since she was young. Born Destiny Hope Cyrus³ in Franklin, Tennessee 23rd November 1992, Cyrus is the oldest daughter of country singer Billy Ray Cyrus.⁴ Miley Cyrus rose to fame in 2006 with the Disney television show *Hannah Montana*. In the show, Cyrus portrays the character "Miley Stewart", a wholesome teenage girl leading a secret double life as a teen pop star. Qiu (2012) compares Cyrus' on screen life to her personal life with regards to her family and music. For example, Billy Ray Cyrus portrays her character's father on screen in *Hannah Montana*. However, Qiu (2012) discusses a number of incidents where Cyrus behaved counter to her wholesome screen image. For example, in contrast to her *Hannah Montana* character, images surfaced claiming to show Cyrus using drugs (Qui 2012, 54).

¹ The selected magazine articles were sourced from online web pages, however each article and magazine is available in hard copy form.

² Cyrus has over 47 million likes on her Facebook page, over 20 million followers on Instagram and a combined total of over 2 billion views on her YouTube channel. Swift has over 71 million likes on her Facebook page, over 31 million followers on Instagram and close to 5 billion views on her YouTube channel.

³ Cyrus' nickname when she was young was Smiley, which she eventually shortened to Miley and adopted as her first name.

⁴ Billy Ray Cyrus is a country music star who had a number of hit songs in the 1990s. His most successful songs include, "Achy Breaky Heart" and "Could've Been Me" from his 1992 album *Some Gave All*.

The shifts between the wholesome and bad girl Cyrus have continued through her more recent career. Professionally, Cyrus signalled her move away from her wholesome Disney image in 2013 with the release of the album *Bangerz*. The album features notable single, “We Can’t Stop” (2013), with currently over 500 million views on YouTube, and “Wrecking Ball” with over 700 million views on YouTube. Since *Bangerz* (2013), Cyrus has reinforced her racy, somewhat risqué image. In 2013, Cyrus performed with male artist Robin Thicke at the VMA awards.⁵ Their performance was controversial due to Cyrus’ revealing outfit, sexually connotative behaviour on stage and Thicke’s offensive song.⁶ This performance grounded Cyrus’ departure from Cyrus the Disney star to the Cyrus that is known for her ‘twerking’⁷ and unusual outfits.

Like Cyrus, Swift has evolved professionally and as a celebrity since she entered the music industry. Swift has a similar background in country music to Cyrus, however her professional career was not aided by close contacts in the industry like Cyrus’. Taylor Alison Swift was born on December 13th 1989 in Reading, Pennsylvania. Swift’s interest in music was clear from a young age. She learned to play the guitar at the age of twelve then began writing her own songs. At the age of fourteen, Swift and her family moved to Nashville, Tennessee in order to pursue her music career.⁸ In 2007, she released her first self-titled album.⁹ Since then, Swift has received many awards and accolades, notably being the youngest artist to win the Grammy Award for Album of the Year in 2009.¹⁰ She is the only artist to have three consecutive albums break record sales and sell over a million copies in their first week. Most recently, Swift featured on the Forbes list of the

5 The VMA (Video Music Award) Show, hosted by MTV in the United States, aims to celebrate the best in the music video medium.

6 Thicke’s song, “Blurred Lines” (2013) has been accused of connotations relating to the sexual assault against women through the lyrics which insinuate that no doesn’t always mean no, as Thicke sings, “I hate these blurred lines, I know you want it”.

7 ‘Twerking’, refers to a dance move that is sexually provocative in nature, involving thrusting hip movements and a low squatting stance, often performed to popular music

8 Nashville, Tennessee is the home of country music in the United States.

9 Taylor Swift has sold over six million copies of her self-titled album as of June 2015.

10 Other artists that have won the Grammy Award for Album of the Year include Frank Sinatra’s *Come Dance With Me* in 1960, Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* in 1989, Adele’s *21* in 2012 and Daft Punk’s *Random Access Memories* in 2014.

100 Most Powerful Women in 2015 at number 64 (Forbes 2015).¹¹ Her most successful video on YouTube is currently “Blank Space” (2014) with over 1.2 billion views, making it the second most viewed video on YouTube.¹² Key to Swift's success is the way that she has expanded her audience demographic to include suburban adolescent girls as well as country music fans. Swift achieved this expansion in part through social networking sites and by utilising confessional teen-diary lyrics. Cyrus and Swift are two of the most successful female musicians today. They are also in the spotlight as celebrities and publicly identify themselves as feminists. This thesis therefore explores the representation of Cyrus and Swift as successful musicians, as celebrities and in terms of their engagement with feminism.

This thesis examines Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift’s complex and shifting identities through an understanding of them as postfeminist celebrity musicians. In Chapter Two, I outline the key theory that will underpin my analysis of both artists. Chapter Three discusses Cyrus and Swift as postfeminist celebrity musicians in relation to four key music videos from each artist. I do so to analyse their self-presentation through a medium that is largely within their control. In Chapter Four, I discuss Cyrus and Swift’s mediated image through an analysis of three feature magazine articles, inclusive of cover photographs, for each artist. I argue that feature magazine articles, often based upon an in-depth interview with the artist, offer Cyrus and Swift a forum for discussing and explaining aspects of their professional and personal identities, including their understanding of feminism. As well, their representation in feature magazine articles shows their desire to display a different, more ‘human’ side to their celebrity persona, while reminding readers that their stardom is inescapable. Chapter Five explores audience responses to Cyrus and Swift through an analysis of selected YouTube parody music videos. Parody videos are created by audience members including fans and non-fans. In terms of representing Cyrus and Swift as postfeminist celebrity musicians, parody videos often focus on one aspect of the artists’ public

11 The Forbes Most Powerful Women List 2015 features politicians, singers and talk show hosts such as Angela Merkel, Hilary Clinton, Beyoncé, Shakira, Oprah and Ellen DeGeneres.

12 The most viewed video on YouTube is “Gangnam Style” by artist Psy with over 2.4 billion views. Swift’s music video for the single, “Shake it Off” (2014) is the fifth most viewed video on YouTube with over 1.1 billion views as of October 2015.

identities. These videos offer insight into how audience members perceive the musicians and interpret their music videos. Overall, this thesis argues that Cyrus and Swift are postfeminist celebrity musicians who slip between being feminist and postfeminist. Moreover, depending on where and how they are represented, one aspect of Cyrus and Swift's identity is often emphasised, either in terms of them giving a voice to feminism, as celebrities, or as successful female musicians.

The following chapter explains the key theoretical areas related to postfeminism, celebrities and female musicians. I will later apply this theory to assess the representations of Cyrus and Swift in their music videos, feature articles about them and audience responses via parody videos.

Chapter Two: Theorising The Postfeminist Celebrity Musician

Introduction

This chapter theorises the postfeminist celebrity musician, initially, as separate concepts. Both concepts, ‘postfeminism’ and ‘celebrity’, are brought together in later discussion to frame an understanding of the term, ‘postfeminist celebrity musician’. In this chapter, I explain key themes of postfeminism and celebrity theory. The theory from this chapter will underpin my discussion of Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift as postfeminist celebrity musicians. I discuss postfeminism including its relationship with feminism, the backlash and the body. With regards to celebrity theory, I draw from the notion of the celebrity as a product.

Postfeminism

Postfeminism is often defined in conjunction with feminism. In its most basic understanding, feminism is simply about equal rights for women. As a movement, feminism, or more specifically the women’s movement, has endeavoured to look at all aspects of life in order to identify elements that may be oppressive towards women, and then suggest alternatives (Scholz 2010, 1). Second wave feminists, most active during the 1960s and 1970s, often rejected traditional notions of femininity (Hollows 2000). It is difficult to contain feminism to a single definition. As Hollows (2000) argues, “it was never a uniform set of ideas” (3). Similarly, Scholz (2010) argues that feminism is and must be understood as, “plural, multiple, and varied” (8). Postfeminism is often the term given to the ‘backlash’ or reaction against feminism and the second wave of the women’s movement (Faludi 1991; McRobbie 2004; McRobbie 2011). Postfeminist theory is complicated because it is comprised of a number of interrelated themes and conflicting notions (Gill 2007). Gill’s (2007) postfeminist sensibility expresses a cultural condition and configuration that operates, “within contemporary gender ideals and relations” (Scott 2010, 458). The intersection of postfeminism with contemporary culture is often myriad and contradictory (Hamad and Taylor 2015,

125). Postfeminism operates in several main areas of contemporary culture, including the sexualisation of culture, the body and the empowerment of women (Gill 2007). Postfeminism attempts to capture the plights that women continue to face whilst also suggesting that in a number of ways, earlier feminist movements have been successful in the fight for equality. However, questions regarding issues of power linger. While some women may consider themselves equal to their male counterparts, this thesis explores the areas in which women may continue to experience inequality, namely as postfeminist celebrity musicians.

Postfeminism encompasses the notion that feminism is no longer needed (McRobbie 2004; Nurka 2002). Some women consider themselves to be equal to men in a number of aspects. However, this view does not take into consideration the oppression that many women still face. For example, those women who live in undeveloped or developing countries or are underprivileged may not have experienced all the rights resulting from feminism thus far. Feminism still plays an important role for many people, as many individuals are still faced with oppression and inequality. However, in contemporary society, feminism is sometimes seen as having 'done its job'. McRobbie (2004) argues that postfeminism exists as a backlash to feminism, including the notion that feminism is no longer needed as women have achieved equality and therefore no longer need to fight for further equality.

Postfeminism expresses an ideal feminine subject (Scott 2010, 458). An individual that is considered to be postfeminist can be understood as having benefited from the accomplishments of past feminist movements whilst actively exemplifying ideals that feminism fought to overturn. Scott (2010) offers three key factors to explain the postfeminist subject. Firstly, the postfeminist subject is, "white, middle-to-upper-class, and western" (Scott 2010, 458). Secondly, "the postfeminist subject possesses control of her body" (Scott 2010, 458). Scott (2010) argues that this factor of self-control via the body reinforces, "hegemonic western beauty standards" (458). Control over the body is also linked to the postfeminist subject's free expressions of their sexuality (Nurka 2002). Finally, Scott (2010) argues that, "the postfeminist subject is liberated" (458-459). Furthermore, Scott (2010) explains that the postfeminist individual does not have

to live their life according to their assigned gender. Rather, they have the agency, “to choose between work or home, butch or femme, straight or bi, virgin or whore” (Scott 2010, 459).

In Chapter Three, I discuss the romantic notions of Cyrus and Swift’s music videos. Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006) discuss postfeminism and romance with regards to the novel and movie, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. They argue that the ideological nature of romantic fiction has been a key area for feminists over the past 40 years (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2006, 490). Romantic fiction is viewed as a trap that, “justified women’s subordination to men” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2006, 490).

Postfeminist celebrities can be considered as having the luxury of choice in many aspects of their personal lives as a result of the past feminist achievements. In later chapters, I apply these themes of postfeminism and characteristics of the postfeminist subject to Cyrus and Swift’s music videos, magazine articles about them and audience made parodies. I argue that both artists exist and shift between feminist and postfeminist identities.

Celebrity

As well as displaying aspects of the contemporary postfeminist subject, Cyrus and Swift are frequently represented as celebrities. Celebrities are a zeitgeist of twenty-first century culture. The term ‘celebrity’ refers to an individual in society that has an elevated public status. Often attributed to their success is a particular talent that has led to their popularity in the public eye. The celebrity is a constructed persona, the result of a number of careful and deliberate decisions. There is a vast web of resources, institutions and teams of skilled individuals that are involved in creating and maintaining the celebrity persona, including managers, public relations advisors, a marketing team and directors (Harmon 2005, 102).

The celebrity operates within a highly visual culture and they are a fundamental component of the media industry (Turner 2014, 145). Due to their reliance on images, the creative work of a celebrity can be overshadowed by their persona.

Therefore, it is important that the visual presentation of a celebrity is resilient due to the artists' and media's dependence upon it. Ferris (2007) argues that the celebrity exists within society either as a 'commodity' or as 'pathology'. The notion of the celebrity as a 'commodity' refers to capitalism's commodification of the individual (Ferris 2007, 376), hence turning the individual into the item for sale. For Ferris (2007) celebrities as a pathology means that they are viewed as an infection or a disease that is damaging society. The existence of the celebrity in both cases is negative. I discuss the celebrity as pathology in Chapter Three, especially in terms of Swift's music video "Blank Space" (2014).

Female celebrities are often interviewed about their understanding of feminism. In some cases, celebrities shy away from discussions of feminism, while others, including Cyrus and Swift, actively refer to themselves as feminists. Critics of a celebrity who identifies as a feminist sometimes note the motives behind their claims of their feminist identity. Keller and Ringrose (2015) for example, highlight the tendency of celebrities such as Beyoncé and Emma Watson to join trends in society, which are deemed as 'fashionable'. Feminism is one such trend. Keller and Ringrose (2015) interviewed five teenage girls who were strongly engaged with various media platforms. The girls were interviewed in a focus group and via individual telephone interviews about their understanding and opinions of celebrity feminists. The participants discussed celebrity feminists in terms of the appropriation of the term, 'feminist', especially the role celebrities play in making the term 'feminist' fashionable. One interviewee stated:

A celebrity does something and people start to notice, but a celebrity will only do that because it's what they have been told to do, for their public image because they are a brand, they are a business themselves.

(Keller and Ringrose 2015, 2)

A celebrity that publicly identifies as a feminist can be a powerful statement, however the role of celebrities as brands must not be overlooked (Keller and Ringrose 2015). Keller and Ringrose's (2015) focus group interview raised a number of important concerns regarding celebrity feminists. It highlighted the significance of the 'economy of celebrity'. The adoption of feminist identities by celebrities displays the nature of celebrity brands with regards to feminism being treated as a momentary fashion, rather than a longstanding commitment to a

movement (Keller and Ringrose 2015, 2). Celebrities that identify as feminists have the opportunity to raise public awareness of feminist issues such as women's healthcare, equal rights, equal pay and workplace inequality. However, given a celebrity's business motivations, their role as a brand and as a product must also be considered when analysing their feminist identity. There is no single, stable definition of a postfeminist celebrity. The complexity of what it means to be a postfeminist celebrity is highlighted through the analysis in later chapters of Cyrus and Swift's self-presentation in music videos, their media representation in feature magazine articles and audience engagement in fan-made parody videos.

The Musician

Popular (pop) music and the constructed personas of female pop artists play a significant role with regards to the wider representations of women in contemporary society. Pop music is a genre that is well liked by the masses; it is made for and appeals to the majority of its large audience. There is a strong female presence in the industry including big name artists Cyrus and Swift, as well as Madonna, Kylie Minogue and Beyoncé. With their fame, successful pop artists have the power to operate as role models. However, their public life is under constant scrutiny from the media. Moreover, their position as celebrities highlights how artists can also function as a commercial product that is intended to create a profit (Ferris 2007).

The role of the musician's image strongly connects to their authenticity, or facade of authenticity. Fans use the notion of authenticity to explore the truthfulness of the celebrity, casting a critical gaze over the individual in a search for proof that the celebrity is, "an authentic being" (Redmond 2013, 30 as cited in Vesey 2015, 7). Pop stars are particularly vulnerable to accusations of inauthenticity due to the nature of pop-music's production methods (Coates 2002, as cited in Vesey 2015, 7). Many pop records are mass-produced and the genre is often perceived as, "artistically bankrupt, and [a] connotatively feminine genre" (Coates 2002 as cited in Vesey 2015, 7). Therefore the inherently feminine nature of the pop industry presents a viable field for a feminist analysis. Pop artists with large audiences and a great deal of power must be analysed for their impact as public feminists.

The Postfeminist Celebrity Musician

The postfeminist celebrity operates within the traditional framework of a celebrity; they must promote their brand and maximise their profit. They also exist within a postfeminist media culture (Gill 2007). The media has become a key site for defining our codes of sexual conduct (McRobbie 2004) and social norms; therefore it is important to explore the contributions of celebrities to this culture. Celebrity feminists have a business agenda. Whilst they identify as a feminist, the celebrity must still please their fans (Keller and Ringrose 2015). It is easy to hastily judge the motives of the celebrity feminist as negative. However, the postfeminist celebrity has increased public awareness of the feminist movement in the twenty-first century.

Whilst acknowledging the problems associated with celebrity feminists, Keller and Ringrose (2015) recognise the benefits of feminist identities and discourses visible in popular culture. Hamad and Taylor (2015) argue that celebrity voices are crucial to popular understandings of feminism. However, a problem arises when the celebrity has the ability to convey feminism to a large audience. Since the meaning of feminism is largely disputed, it is difficult to task one individual with accurately informing others on what it means to be a feminist. It is also difficult to give a single face to feminism; one woman cannot represent the oppression and experiences of all women. This problem is echoed in my choice of celebrity feminist examples. Cyrus and Swift are young, Caucasian, and beautiful by socially constructed standards. Clearly they do not reflect the experiences of all women. Furthermore, while they identify as feminists, their behaviour does not always reflect this identity.

The notion of empowerment is a key aspect of the postfeminist celebrity musician. The musicians are empowered by their talent, material wealth, social status and public image. Many women in the media are currently represented as empowered and in control of her own sexuality and behaviour. These women are considered successful and audience members are led to believe that the explicit images in the media of women are permitted because women are no longer oppressed. Therefore, audience members are positioned to interpret provocative

self-expression as not being objectification. This raises the question of who holds the power. If women are being represented in the media as having control, then it is not consistently objectification; however if the control is shifted to the audience, it is no longer the woman who is empowered. Hence, there appears to be a 'slip' between the artists' identity; how their messages are conveyed and interpreted is dependent upon who is in control. The artists are in a vulnerable position; they do not always benefit from being the subject of objectification. Even though the audience is presented with images of empowered and successful women, especially women that are increasingly being represented within the positive parameters of accomplishment, they partly owe their success to their image. Charles (2012) argues that power and success are, "highly regulatory, and exclusive to bodies that are often white, middle class and (hetero) sexually desirable" (320). This is reflective of Gill's (2007) argument concerning the postfeminist body as a woman's key source of power. A woman can be empowered by her body and her sexuality, so long as it still conforms to society's norms. Furthermore, in postfeminist media culture, women are not straightforwardly objectified. The postfeminist body is presented as active and desiring of objectification (Gill 2007, 258). Frisby and Aubrey (2012) argue that, "much of the sexual objectification of women comes from female artists objectifying their own bodies" (67). Therefore an analysis of female pop artists through a discussion of their self-presentation is important in order to examine how their bodies appear in their own media texts, such as music videos. This can then be compared to how they are represented in the media as public feminists.

The postfeminist celebrity musician expresses a number of conflicting messages with regards to their image and identity. As I discuss in later chapters, their music videos consistently objectify their bodies in idealised ways while magazine articles allow them a platform to discuss their understanding of feminism and appear as more 'human' to readers. Subsequently, postfeminist celebrity musicians such as Cyrus and Swift complicate what it means to be a feminist and raise questions about who can appropriate the term 'feminist'.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored key theories associated with postfeminism, celebrities

and female musicians. Within popular culture, there has recently been a spark in dialogue concerning feminism. A number of notable celebrities have publicly identified themselves as feminists.¹³ The postfeminist celebrity musician plays an important role with regards to disseminating an understanding of what it means to identify as a feminist to their audience, and the public on a wider scale. Given the elevated status of many celebrities, the choices that they make regarding their image and representation will affect their audience's interpretation of them. The postfeminist celebrity musician has a complex and continuously evolving identity.

In the next chapter, I explore the self-presentation of Cyrus and Swift as postfeminist celebrity musicians through a selection of their music videos. Both artists have publicly stated they are feminists, yet, an analysis of some of their most successful music videos shows that what they say does not always connect with how they artistically represent themselves through a medium that they have a significant amount of control over. I explore the music videos in terms of the career transitions of both artists as well as the representation of idealised 'sexy' postfeminist bodies and themes of romance and relationships.

¹³ Other notable celebrity feminists include, Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, Emma Watson, Laverne Cox, Amy Poehler, Tina Fey, Lena Dunham and Mindy Kaling (Alter 2014; Lidner 2014).

Chapter Three: The Self-Presentation of The Postfeminist Celebrity Musician Through Their Music Videos

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the artists' relationship with feminism through the notion of 'showing' as opposed to 'telling' one's feminist identity. Hamad and Taylor (2015) argue that there is merit in celebrities giving their voice to discussions of feminist issues including women's rights, sexism and gender equality. In 2013, Cyrus stated in an interview with BBC Radio 1, that she considered herself to be "one of the biggest feminists on the planet" (Butterfly and Izundu 2013). While Cyrus may tell her audience that she identifies as a feminist, she often contradicts this statement through her actions and behaviour, particularly in her music videos and live performances. Like Cyrus, Swift has discussed her feminist identity in a number of interviews.¹⁴ In 2014, Swift explained that she was comfortable with her understanding of what it meant to be a feminist. Based on his interview with Swift, Josh Eells of *Rolling Stone* stated, "to [Swift], all feminism means is wanting women to have the same opportunities as men" (2014).

In this chapter, I examine the extent to which Cyrus and Swift's feminist identities are present through a selection of their music videos. I do so to explore the slippage between key aspects of the artists' personas as postfeminist celebrity musicians. I analyse four music video texts for each artist. For Cyrus, I analyse; "The Climb" (2009), "Can't Be Tamed" (2010), "We Can't Stop" (2013), and "Wrecking Ball" (2013). For Swift I analyse; "Love Story" (2008), "We Are Never Getting Back Together" (2012), "Blank Space" (2014), and "Bad Blood" (2015). I analyse the image, sound and lyrics of the selected music videos in order

¹⁴ For more details on interviews regarding Swift's feminist identity see Eells 2014; Kreps 2015; Dickey 2014.

to examine how both artists present their image to the public through a medium that they have a significant amount of control over. I focus on the career transitions of both Cyrus and Swift, the representation of the body and themes of romance and relationships.

The complex and contradictory notions of postfeminism play out in the selected music videos of Cyrus and Swift. As I argue in this chapter, Cyrus and Swift cannot be confined to one definition of feminism; rather there is ‘slippage’ between different existing feminist identities (Genz and Brabon 2009; O’Mahony 2015). The postfeminist celebrity has a number of characteristics that contribute to their success. These include that they are predominantly young, white, privileged, feminine, thin and attractive (Scott 2010, 458). The celebrity is reliant upon aesthetics, and is empowered by their image, which contributes to their on-going success. I analyse Cyrus and Swift’s music videos with regards to several key themes related to the postfeminist celebrity musician. These key themes are the career transitions of each artist, the visual representation of the body, motifs of empowerment, and the construction of ideas about romance and relationships. Overall, I argue that the analysis of the artists’ music videos displays the slippage between their identities as celebrities and as postfeminist musicians.

America’s Sweetest and Wildest: The Career Transitions of Cyrus and Swift as Postfeminist Celebrities

In this section, I outline the transformations of Cyrus and Swift over their musical careers and as postfeminist celebrities. Cyrus and Swift have similar roots in country music. As I explained in the Chapter One, Cyrus grew up on screen portraying *Hannah Montana* on the Disney Channel.¹⁵ Portraying “Hannah Montana”, Cyrus established a fan base, image, and brand from a young age. However, with the release of *Bangerz* (2013), she aimed to distance and even

¹⁵ *Hannah Montana* was an American television show that aired on the Disney Channel from 2006 to 2011. Cyrus portrayed the character “Miley Stewart”, a teenager who led a double life as the famous pop singer, “Hannah Montana”. Her double life was only known to her close friends and family.

rebel against her *Hannah Montana* alter ego.¹⁶ The intrigue and shock surrounding Cyrus' new image and style can be attributed to her vast departure from what audiences were used to seeing. *Hannah Montana* aired between 2006 and 2011. During those years, Cyrus portrayed the main character "Miley Stewart", a famous pop singer whose real identity was a secret. The audience was positioned to view Cyrus as an innocent teenager with normal stresses outside of her secret celebrity life such as schoolwork, family and friends. Both aspects of the character portrayed good role models to the show's young audience. Cyrus' transition from child star to pop artist saw her break into a new genre and with it, seek an older audience demographic. Like Cyrus, Swift found fame at a young age. However, her success grew rapidly between the release of her first self-titled album, *Taylor Swift* (2006), to her most recent album, *1989* (2015). Swift has currently established herself as a pop artist with *1989* (2015) dedicated to solely pop anthems.

A definite moment in Cyrus' career was when the audience witnessed her break away from her childhood image into more of an adult celebrity. Before this moment, Cyrus' innocent childhood image appeared in numerous music and video texts related to *Hannah Montana*. Cyrus released "The Climb" in 2009 as a single for *Hannah Montana: The Movie*.¹⁷ "The Climb" (2009) begins by presenting Cyrus playing her guitar. At first, she is shown kneeling on the floor under a spotlight, wearing jeans, a grey t-shirt, minimal jewellery and her long brown wavy hair loose; seemingly she is just a 'normal' teenage girl. In the clip, Cyrus begins singing with her acoustic guitar first on the ground next to her, and then later being carried in a hard case. The camera then shifts to a computer-generated sequence where Cyrus begins a journey on foot. The single utilises the theme of exploration and journeying by showing Cyrus walking down a long straight road

¹⁶ Numerous child Disney stars before Cyrus have sought to breakaway from their Disney personas. Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, Christina Aguilera were childhood stars on the Disney channel. They went on to pursue careers in music. Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato are recent artists that starred on Disney television shows; both have also continued into music careers.

¹⁷ In the movie, *Hannah Montana's* popularity reaches a point where it is taking over her life. Cyrus' character, 'Miley Stewart' is struggling with her alter ego and visits her hometown to find some perspective on her life, including what matters most. Cyrus' character chooses to reveal her true identity during a live show then continues to sing, "The Climb" (2009), however the audience pleads with her to continue performing as 'Hannah Montana'. Cyrus agrees and returns to her double life with a better perspective of herself (IMDb 2009).

with her guitar. Initially, the scene is set with dim lighting; the sky above Cyrus is cloudy. However, as the song builds, Cyrus is presented as travelling under increasingly brightening skies. Through this imagery, the video suggests that while Cyrus begins at a difficult time, it is only temporary. Moreover, the gradual brightening of the video suggests she has to display effort to achieve her goals as she sings, “the chances I’m taking, sometimes might knock me down, but no I’m not breaking” (Cyrus 2009). Cyrus’ message of persistence and determination aims to inspire her audience, thereby showing the potential power of music and musicians to influence audience members.

Miley Cyrus’ image has undergone numerous transformations, including from young wholesome teenager to rebellious celebrity musician. An early transformation occurred one year after “The Climb” (2009) with the release of “Can’t Be Tamed” (2010). The music video for “Can’t Be Tamed” (2010) is set in a museum at an exhibition launch. The exhibition’s host describes Cyrus as a “rare creature”; a hybrid between a dark feathered bird and a human. She is on display to her diegetic audience in the video scene as well as the non-diegetic audience. She causes shock to the exhibition attendees in the video narrative, and the viewing audience outside the video. The exhibition audience act as a guide for the video viewers on how to respond to Cyrus’ character. Cyrus breaks free from the cage in the clip, causing the museum audience to scream and run away. Cyrus sings, “I can’t be tamed”, “don’t change me”, and, “if you try to hold me back I might explode” in order to warn her audiences. In comparison to “The Climb” (2009), “Can’t be Tamed” (2010) is shot with dim lighting that creates many shadows that imply darker motifs. While “The Climb” (2009) features a clean-cut and wholesome teenage Cyrus, “Can’t Be Tamed” (2010) sees Cyrus wearing a revealing corset and knee high leather boots. The video for “Can’t Be Tamed” (2010) marks Cyrus’ distinctive break from her Disney image and persona. Viewers of the music video experience shock as it shows Cyrus’ first step towards a more adult image and career, as well as her cultivation of a celebrity persona.

Cyrus reinforced her new adult image with the release of *Bangerz* (2013). The album frequently references motifs of sex, drugs, alcohol and partying. *Bangerz* (2013) gave Cyrus the opportunity to sport a new appearance. She cut her hair

short, dyed it blonde and donned multiple tattoos. The music videos for *Bangerz* (2013) singles, “We Can’t Stop” (2013) and “Wrecking Ball” (2013) saw Cyrus wearing ever more revealing and risqué clothing such as pale leotards and a white singlet and underwear combination. For example, Cyrus’ single, “We Can’t Stop” (2013), reinforces her initial attempt to rebel from her wholesome image. The music video for “We Can’t Stop” (2013) shows a party growing more out of control as the song progresses. Cyrus wears a similar costume to the one she will later display in, “Wrecking Ball” (2013), a pale revealing leotard. Cyrus’ audience saw her full image change with, “Wrecking Ball” (2013), perhaps her most intentionally shocking music video¹⁸. In “Wrecking Ball” (2013), Cyrus engages in numerous sexually suggestive actions including explicitly kissing a sledgehammer and swinging on a concrete wrecking ball with no visible clothing. While Cyrus shocked many fans and non-fans of her music, she established a new image for herself. The music video for “Wrecking Ball” (2013) broke the record for the most number of views in 24 hours on YouTube.¹⁹ Therefore Cyrus is able to attract a large audience of an older audience demographic through her risqué and provocative image.

Taylor Swift’s period of transition took a different form to Cyrus’. Swift did not have a *Disney* image that she wanted to rebel against. Instead, Swift gained a reputation for primarily writing country songs focusing on the themes of heartbreak and romance. With *1989* (2015), Swift chose to focus the whole album exclusively on pop music, finding inspiration from many 1980s anthems.²⁰ Swift’s transitional period in her life relates to notion of slippage and an ever-evolving identity. While the transition through musical genres and Swift’s appearance presents her transforming identity with regards to her as a celebrity as well as a musician, it is more recently that Swift’s personal views on her feminist identity have featured in her music videos. Swift premiered the video for “Bad Blood” (2015) at the 2015 Billboard Music Awards after teasing her audience

¹⁸ At the time of writing, Cyrus hosted the 2015 VMA award show for MTV. She announced at the end of her performance which closed the show that she was releasing a new album for free on her website titled, *Miley Cyrus & Her Dead Petz*.

¹⁹ This record was surpassed by Nicki Minaj. Minaj’s music video for, “Anaconda” (2014) surpassed 19.6 million views on August 19th 2014.

²⁰ Notable female pop artists from this period include Madonna, Janet Jackson, Kylie Minogue and Cyndi Lauper.

through social media posts about the characters in the video.²¹ The video for “Bad Blood” (2015) features Kendrick Lamar rapping. Swift also chose to cast a number of her famous female friends as her accomplices in the video as she portrayed a character seeking revenge on someone that had betrayed her. Cast as the character “Catastrophe”, the audience sees Swift enduring intense physical training along with the other cast members in order to prepare for a fight. In comparison to Swift’s previous videos, “Bad Blood” (2015) displays Swift in a position of authority and empowerment. She is planning for revenge, whereas the audience has previously been used to light-hearted videos centred on themes of love and relationships.

In summary, it is clear that both artists have experienced various transitions across their careers. Despite Cyrus and Swift having similar roots in country music, their current careers have taken them on dissimilar paths. As both artists’ experienced growing success in their careers their celebrity identity evolved. Cyrus and Swift continue to display an intermingling of their celebrity identity and professional work as celebrity musicians becomes apparent

Representing The Body

To lose confidence in one’s body, is to lose confidence in oneself.
Simone de Beauvoir (1949)

This section explores the representation of ‘the body’ in selected music videos of Cyrus and Swift. Contemporary postfeminist media emphasises attaining a ‘sexy body’ as the key to a woman’s identity (Gill 2007, 149). The postfeminist body is primarily young, thin and ‘sexy’ (Scott 2010, 458). As a construction of society’s ideals, the postfeminist celebrity’s power and success is closely linked to value placed on the body. A female musician’s body and behaviour can be significantly tied to their success; much of an artist’s significance lies within their image and how they present themselves. Physically, Cyrus and Swift both exemplify the contradictory notion of the body through their most popular music videos. The body is centralised in Cyrus’ video for “Wrecking Ball” (2013). Swift presents her

²¹ Swift held the 24-Hour Vevo Record with 20.1 million views after the release of “Bad Blood” on May 17th 2015. However, this record was surpassed by singer Adele’s “Hello” (2015) on 23rd October 2015 with 23.2 million views.

own body in an idealised form as well as the bodies of a number of female supermodels and actresses in “Bad Blood” (2015). This section argues that Cyrus and Swift rely upon their ‘ideal’ bodies for success to a certain degree. However, in Cyrus’ “Wrecking Ball” (2013), I argue that she is not pandering to the male gaze through her revealing scenes. Keller and Ringrose (2015) argue that much of the objectification of women in the music industry is a direct result of women objectifying other women. Rather, “Wrecking Ball” (2013) can be read as Cyrus’ expression of the body ‘slipping’ between objectifying herself and baring all for the audience as well as for the unnamed lover in the lyrics. In the clip, Cyrus is in a vulnerable position and her revealing clothing metaphorically reflects her feelings as a result of the implied relationship breakdown.

As two of pop music’s most recognisable figures, both artists use their image to their advantage in order to preserve their status in the industry. This status as successful celebrity musicians relies to varying degrees on the objectification of the body. Gill (2007) argues that women are no longer objectified in a straightforward manner. Instead, women choose to objectify themselves through an internalisation of the male gaze (Gill 2007, 152).²² A considerable amount of the objectification of successful female musicians results from female artists objectifying their own bodies (Frisby and Aubrey 2012, 67). Frisby and Aubrey (2012) argue that this is a formula that the music industry needs in order to survive, suggesting that when a female artist achieves success, it is partly due to the objectification of her body and encourages “other artists quickly follow suit” (67). Cyrus and Swift’s bodies are fundamental to their success.

Both artists benefit from the presentation of their bodies, as many people recognise their image and brand. However, many audience members reproach Cyrus’ use of her body. Cyrus’ “Wrecking Ball” (2013), intended to shock audiences and provoke discussion. The clip presents Cyrus in scant clothing amongst a demolition site. She attempts to destroy her surroundings then lies

²² Laura Mulvey theorized the notion of the ‘male gaze’ in her 1975 essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, published in the journal *Screen*. Mulvey argues that the male gaze, “projects its fantasy onto the female figure” (17). Women are displayed as a sexual object, playing to and signifying heterosexual male desire.

amongst the debris, still wearing little clothing, continuing to sing. Cyrus' body is the central focus for the music video. In a number of scenes the audience sees a full body shot of Cyrus seemingly wearing no clothing while she swings on a concrete wrecking ball. Therefore, Cyrus' use of her body through this music video suggests an internalised male gaze because she has considered the position of the audience, forcing them to engage with her overtly provocative and sexualised behaviour. However, Cyrus' implied nudity may also be symbolic of vulnerability. The lyrics to "Wrecking Ball" (2013) are often overlooked due to the audience's fixation on Cyrus' visual behaviour. The song is a ballad, which Cyrus filters through her emotions after a break up. The lyrics connote love and heartbreak as Cyrus sings, "a love no one could deny, don't you ever say I just walked away, I will always want you" (Cyrus 2013). Therefore, between the lyrics and the images, there is a disconnection between what is shown and what is sung. Physically, Cyrus can be seen as appearing to cater to the male gaze in how she appears and what her body does. However, the lyrics suggest vulnerability and heartbreak.

Swift's music videos centralise the body in contradictory ways. Swift's audience has seen her become more comfortable with using her body as a focus of her music videos as she has become older and evolved as a musician. In the music video for "Bad Blood", Swift's character exemplifies the notion of the postfeminist celebrity and the postfeminist body. She is displayed as strong as well as feminine. She engages in fight scenes wearing tight leather clothing and high-heeled boots while maintaining perfect hair and make up. Swift included a number of other characters (her real life friends) in the video for "Bad Blood" (2015). The group consists of successful female super models, actresses and singers who are cast as Swift's personal group of highly trained spies. All have a special name, characteristic, are thin, attractive and wear similar clothing to Swift. Swift and her group of attractive and successful friends reinforce the 'sexy' postfeminist body through their juxtaposition of their 'fight' ready appearance and their revealing clothes. However, one of Swift's cast members, Lena Dunham, stands in contrast to the other characters. She is given the least screen time, and the audience does not see a full body shot. Dunham's brief scene occurs at the beginning of the video text; Dunham's character is seated behind a desk, smoking

a cigarette whilst miming Kendrick Lamar's lyrics. Dunham's role in "Bad Blood" (2015) contrasts with Swift and the other female characters. Dunham is a successful actress and writer, as well as a celebrity who identifies publicly as a feminist. However, Dunham's image does not comply with societies standards of the 'ideal body'. She does not possess the 'young, thin and attractive' body of Cyrus and Swift. The video appears to emphasise the active 'sexy' postfeminist body of Swift and her girl gang while deliberately minimising the importance of Dunham's character.

While Cyrus exemplifies the postfeminist body in videos such as "Wrecking Ball" (2013), she also contests traditional notions of femininity through her choices regarding the self-presentation of her body. At times, Cyrus exemplifies aspects of the grotesque body. Gamble (2001) explains 'the grotesque body' in conjunction with 'the classical body'. The 'classical body' is, "transcendent, monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical and sleek", often being associated with 'high' culture (125). However the 'grotesque body' is "open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing" and often associated with 'low' culture (Gamble 2001, 125). While both artists produce pop music, often associated with low or mass culture, Swift's aesthetic presentation of her body in her music videos and mediated persona is constructed to appear disciplined and perfect. Swift embraces her femininity, and it is a clear feature in many of her music videos. Cyrus however, exemplifies the aspects of the 'grotesque body' at different times. She has transformed her image from that of a wholesome Disney star to a rebellious celebrity through her short haircut, tattoos, piercings, lyrics and revealing clothing. This image reflects the 'grotesque body', because it challenges social norms. Cyrus' body is not sleek and contained in this sense; rather, there are aspects of the individual's identity, which they choose to represent on their body. Therefore, Cyrus' current image is confronting; it challenges social norms and is frequently changing. Swift however chooses to conform to more traditional understandings of femininity, including a slim physique, dresses and her role as a female love interest.

We Can Do It!

Choice and empowerment are central to the identity of postfeminist celebrities. Cyrus and Swift exemplify the notion of empowerment, however in different ways. Cyrus communicates her empowerment to the audience through ownership of her sexuality in her more recent music videos. Swift presents empowerment to her audience in terms of relationships and independence. Swift for example in, “We Are Never Getting Back Together” (2012), repeatedly tells the partner that their relationship is over, “this time I’m telling you, I’m telling you, we are never ever ever getting back together” (Swift 2012). She is shown at parties telling her ex-partner how she is better off single. Swift engages with postfeminist notions of independence and female empowerment. She stands up for her independence and shows that she has learned from past relationships; she does not need this particular partner back and is stronger without them. “We are Never Getting Back Together” (2012) suggests that Swift does not need a man in her life. This is reflected multiple times on screen as Swift shows the audience that she is having fun with her friends and continues her life as normal without a relationship. Swift reinforces this notion of independence more and more through her music videos.

Swift’s release of “Bad Blood” (2015), generated lots of discussion in the media about feminism due to the narrative, lyrics, casting and visual content of the text. The cast for “Bad Blood” (2015) is mostly female. All of Swift’s chosen ‘girl gang’ in the clip are close friends of hers; many have found success and fame either as models, musicians, actresses or writers.²³ Swift’s “Bad Blood” (2015), video tells the story of a female protagonist that is wronged by another woman. The music video plays upon revenge motifs. Swift’s group prepare to seek retribution from the other woman. Swift received criticism for the clip because while she aimed to empower women and show a group of successful, strong, individual women in her video banding together for a common cause, the video also pits women against one-another as it allegedly is written about another

²³ Swift’s female cast for, “Bad Blood” (2015), includes, Selena Gomez, Lena Dunham, Karlie Kloss, Martha Hunt, Jessica Alba, Serayah, Hailee Steinfeld, Ellie Goulding, Gigi Hadid, Hayley Williams, Zendaya, Lily Aldridge, Elen Pompeo, Mariska Hargitay, Cara Delevigne and Cindy Crawford.

famous female pop artist that wronged Swift in the past.²⁴ “Bad Blood” (2015) shows how easy it is to slip between the commercially products of a successful musician and her celebrity identity. For some audience members and media commentators, they drew upon rumours from Swift’s personal life as a way to explain and understand the video.

This section has discussed the notion of empowerment with regards to Cyrus and Swift as postfeminist celebrity musicians. The celebrity status of both artists privileges them with a platform from which to discuss their own identities, as well as using it as a medium to address their audience.

Romance and Sexual Expression

Relationships are often the topic of successful songs. Audiences can relate to the emotions that an artist is conveying through their combination of lyrics, music and images. Taylor Swift has a reputation for performing songs predominantly about romantic relationships. Swift has acknowledged and engages with aspects of this reputation through a number of her music videos. As I argue in this section, Swift engages with her reputation for serial dating and a number of unsuccessful relationships in order to parody herself and speak back to the media. She has thereby shifted the power dynamic between herself and the media more in her favour. For example “Blank Space” (2014), can be read largely as a parody of Swift’s reputation in the media for having numerous failed relationships with men (David 2013; Rawden 2012; Souter 2012). Swift’s video and accompanying lyrics for “Blank Space” (2014) allude to the mediated reality of her life. Swift parodies herself as she acknowledges the reputation in the media of her romantic life through the lyrics, “I’ve got a long list of ex-lovers, they tell me I’m insane” (Swift 2014). Such lyrics allude to Swift’s reputation of having many failed relationships, which the media allege result from her personality and behaviour. In “Blank Space” (2014), Swift has a tenuous and escalating relationship with the male protagonist. She begins as a loving partner; the audience sees the couple in romantic scenes at dinner and dancing. However, her behaviour changes to

²⁴ Rumours suggested that Swift wrote “Bad Blood” (2015) after an incident with fellow pop artist, Katy Perry. Both artists were preparing for a tour that began at the same time, and Swift believes that Perry attempted to hire dancers that Swift was using for her tour, and then use them for her (Perry’s) own tour instead (D’Addario 2014)

become increasingly erratic and violent as the video progresses. Swift is seen hanging a portrait of her partner in a long hallway of other portraits (whom the audience assumes are all ex-partners). The lyrics reinforce this idea by referring to her “long list of ex-lovers”. The scene depicting Swift’s collection of ex-lovers’ portraits is also of particular importance because it is a direct parody of her personal life. Swift is often spotlighted by the media as a ‘man-eater’ (Examiner 2013) or as having little luck in her romantic relationships (Tucker 2013, Rawden 2012). Ultimately “Blank Space” (2014), ends with the male character first running away from Swift’s character, then exiting the video in his car, similar to how he entered, only this time his car has been damaged by Swift’s character, and his driving is more chaotic. The male character is clearly disturbed and frightened by Swift’s behaviour. A postfeminist reading of the video suggests that Swift is not adhering to social expectations of monogamy because she has been in many relationships; the implied message is that women cannot be as sexually provocative as men. “Blank Space” (2014) like “Bad Blood” (2015) also shows how a musician’s celebrity identity can influence their creative and commercial texts. In this case, “Blank Space” (2014) speaks back to the popular media and celebrity gossip columnists; the music video in lyrics and image points to the double standard in popular music whereby women are reduced to their success or failure in romantic relationships.

Swift’s early video texts engaged strongly with romance. Swift did not present herself as having ‘scared’ men away. Similar to Cyrus in “The Climb” (2009), Swift engages with notions of innocence and her young age is clear in “Love Story” (2008). In the video for “Love Story” (2008), romance is the key theme. This text can be read as postfeminist with regards to the notion that feminism has done its job and is no longer needed (McRobbie 2004). Swift is romanticising the idea of being rescued by her ‘prince’. The narrative for, “Love Story” (2008), is inspired by Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Drawing from romantic images, Swift’s character sings mostly from the balcony of a castle as presented in the music video. She directly addresses her ‘Romeo’ on several occasions in the lyrics, begging Romeo to stay with her after her father warns him to, “stay away from Juliet”. The lyrics and visuals develop the idea that Swift’s character is missing Romeo and losing hope in the relationship because she sings, “I got tired

of waiting, wondering if you were ever coming around, my faith in you was fading” (Swift 2008). The climax ensues when Romeo is seen running towards the castle before a classic ‘happy ending’ as the couple run into each other’s arms, lean in to kiss and Swift’s character is told to “pick out a white dress” (Swift 2008). The music video for “Love Story” (2008) reinforces romance and heterosexual monogamy as a kind ideal relationship type, something that second wave feminists critiqued and in some cases rejected.

Arguably Cyrus’ most provocative and deliberately shocking music video, “Wrecking Ball” (2013), strongly resonates with the theme of romance and relationships. The music video for “Wrecking Ball” (2013) was released as a second single on Cyrus’ *Bangerz* album in 2013. While it is deliberately sexualised because of Cyrus’ suggestive behaviour and revealing outfits, viewers are left wondering if the clip draws from Cyrus’ experiences in her personal life.²⁵ The audience is presented with a close up of Cyrus from just above her chin to just above her eyebrows. These shots forces the audience to engage with her on a deeper emotional level as during these close up shots, Cyrus is crying and addressing the camera directly while singing. These shots however frequently cut to the wrecking ball and Cyrus either embracing a sledgehammer by appearing to kiss it, or using it to add to the destruction of the scene by using it to break down the concrete walls around her. The cuts between a close up of Cyrus and destruction and then Cyrus embracing a tool designed for destruction suggests confusion and damage for Cyrus throughout the video. This is reflective of Cyrus’ personal struggles around the time of the music video’s release. Like Swift’s “Blank Space” (2014), Cyrus’ “Wrecking Ball” (2013) can be read in conjunction with her celebrity identity in terms of relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the self-presentation of Cyrus and Swift through a selection of their music videos. I have argued that Cyrus and Swift exemplify the postfeminist celebrity. Both artists demonstrate a carefully constructed career and

²⁵ Cyrus was engaged to Australian actor, Liam Hemsworth, however the couple broke up before the release of *Bangerz* (2013). Therefore, the audience may read into the lyrics and accompanying emotionally stimulating video as a recount of Cyrus’ personal life.

celebrity image that has changed and grown as they have matured. Music videos are crucial to constructing their celebrity personas as well as positioning how the audience reads their feminist identities. Cyrus and Swift's self-presentation further demonstrates the complexities and contradictions in postfeminist theory as the artists can tell their audience that they are feminists, however viewers of the artists' content can read their texts in a number of different ways.

The next chapter outlines Cyrus and Swift's mediated representation through an analysis of popular magazine feature articles. In total, six articles are analysed. The chapter focuses on the function and capability of feature articles to portray the artists in such a way that the audience sees a more human aspect to the celebrity persona.

Chapter Four: The Mediated Representation of the Postfeminist Celebrity Musician

There is so much sexism, ageism, you name it. Kendrick Lamar sings about LSD and he's cool. I do it and I'm a druggie whore.

Miley Cyrus as quoted in Glock 2015, *Marie Claire*

I just struggle to find a woman in music who hasn't been completely picked apart by the media, or scrutinized for aging, or criticized for fighting aging.

Taylor Swift as quoted in Dickey 2014, *Time Magazine*

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the mediated representation of Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift in four selected feature magazine articles. Oscar Wilde (1908) once wrote in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that “there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about” (9). This notion strongly resonates within the celebrity sphere. Many celebrities rely upon their status and persona in order to remain relevant. While some celebrities receive negative attention in the media, they are being discussed, therefore their brand and products are benefiting. As two of the pop industry's most recognisable artists, Cyrus and Swift are under significant pressure to maintain their reputation and public image. However, Cyrus and Swift approach their mediated image with different tactics. In this chapter, I examine the media representation of Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift through an analysis of selected magazines feature articles. The chosen magazines are, *Rolling Stone*²⁶, *Paper Magazine*²⁷, *Marie Claire*²⁸ and *Time Magazine*²⁹. Each magazine has a wide circulation and a diverse audience. The chosen feature articles all include a cover photo and pictures accompanying

²⁶ *Rolling Stone* is a magazine founded in the United States that focuses on popular culture, often featuring prominent celebrities and musicians on the cover

²⁷ *Paper Magazine* is known for its controversial work with celebrity reality television star, Kim Kardashian. The cover features Kardashian fully naked.

²⁸ *Marie Claire* is a women's magazine, founded in France. It's content focuses on health, beauty and fashion topics.

²⁹ *Time Magazine* is a magazine published out of New York with a circulation of over 3 million (Alliance for Audited Media 2014) as of 2014. It's content includes a variety of issues ranging from environmental, business, political and popular culture.

the article. The main purpose of a feature article is to entertain, educate, inform and explain (Lamble 2013). Feature articles are often used to bring light to something topical and interesting (Pape and Featherstone 2006) or to provide background to an existing story (Morrison as cited in Pape and Featherstone 2006, 2). In some cases, feature articles add depth and colour to an article with an aspect of human interest. Ranging in length from 600 to 2000 words (Lamble 2013), feature articles allow the author to inform their readers on a topic with sufficient detail. The articles' longer length in comparison to news stories provides a platform for discussion between a journalist and the artist. Rather than speculation, the artists can directly address certain topics and issues, thus having their voice heard across a range of subjects. The structure of a feature article also allows for the journalist to spend more time with the artist in order to construct their story. This is clear in articles chosen for both Cyrus (Eells 2014) and Swift (Eells 2013) as the journalist takes time to describe the time they spent with the artist in order to form a relationship with them.³⁰

In this chapter, I analyse Cyrus' media representation through three articles published in 2013 and 2015 (Eells 2013, Petrusich 2015, Glock 2015) and I analyse Swift's media representation in three feature articles published in 2012 and 2014 (Hiatt 2012, Eells 2014, Dickey 2014). These articles provide an indication of Cyrus and Swift's mediated image across a selection of publications. The selected texts were chosen because of the benefits that a feature article piece of writing and its accompanying photos offer. This chapter argues that the media plays a pivotal role in the cultivated image of postfeminist celebrity musicians such as Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift. The selected feature articles discuss Cyrus and Swift at established points in both artists' careers. The articles chosen give the reader background to their lives and issues and incidents of their recent past. Analysis of the articles also allows a deeper engagement with the artists beyond their music videos, presenting the audience with different aspects of the artists' personal lives as well as their persona in the media. I argue that the feature articles

³⁰ Eells interviewed Cyrus in 2013. During the interview process, he followed Cyrus while she received a tattoo, then described how he spent time with her at her home and finally went skydiving with Cyrus. Eells interviewed Swift in 2014. Eells describes Swift's apartment and notes his experiences of her security team, such as when he joined Swift in a park, then had to hastily leave after crowds began to form, hoping to catch a glimpse of Swift.

aim to present a less commercialised side to Cyrus and Swift's personas and give them space to speak about themselves as musicians and feminists.

There is No Such Thing as Bad Publicity?

This section examines the discussion of negative experiences that Cyrus and Swift have had in their careers as the result of the media. Cyrus for example, danced provocatively on stage, during her performance with Robyn Thicke at the VMA's in 2013. While the act involved both artists, Cyrus uses her interview with Eells (2013) to address the criticism directed at her. Swift has also had a tenuous relationship with the media. Due to her success from a young age and lyrical



Figure 1: Cover Image of Taylor Swift, *Rolling Stone*, November 2014.

topics, Swift's personal relationships appear to be 'fair game' for media gossip. The saying goes that any publicity is good publicity. However the publicity that many celebrities receive is not necessarily to their benefit in all cases. Cyrus has evoked strong reactions from fans and non-fans alike through her provocative music videos and live performances. Moreover, she has been in the media's eye for her personal life and romantic relationships.³¹ The chosen feature magazine texts engage with the artists' on a level of human interest. The authors address issues relevant to Cyrus, such as her 2013 VMAs performance with Robin Thicke, and the reactions that it caused, as well as Swift's poor public reputation for her bad luck with relationships. While the chosen articles are written in the same style of a feature article, there is a difference regarding the representation of each artist in different magazines. For example the content of the article, the symbols and meanings in the cover photograph and the author's writing style all show variations between the media publications and the company publishing them. These concepts can influence the reader's interpretation of the artist. For example, in Figures 1, 2, and 6, the reader

³¹ In 2015, it has been rumoured that Cyrus is dating Victoria's Secret Model Stella Maxwell.

is presented with three different appearances for Swift. The reader is also presented with three different appearances for Cyrus in Figures 3, 4, and . Cyrus displays her slippage between identities through the selected feature article cover photos. As seen in Figures 3, 4 and 5, the cover photographs for the selected texts are representative of the varying nature of Cyrus' image and personality between 2013 and 2015. These changes and layers of her persona can be seen in her career as well, such as her release of "Wrecking Ball" (2013), her provocative live performance at the 2013 VMAs and the establishment of her charity organisation, The Happy Hippie Foundation. The magazine article by Eells (2013) provided Cyrus with a platform through which to address a large and diverse demographic. Not all those who read *Rolling Stone* are necessarily fans of Cyrus; however, after her provocative performance at the 2013 VMAs, the *Rolling Stone* feature article provided Cyrus the opportunity to tell her side of the story to a mass audience. With regards to the reception of Cyrus' performance, she highlights the double standard in the music industry regarding acceptable behaviour for men and women. Cyrus referred to her dancing with Robin Thicke stating, "they're only talking about the one that bent over" (Cyrus as quoted in Eells 2013). She elaborated by discussing the backlash that she received after the performance, "no one is talking about the man behind the ass. It was a lot of Miley 'twerks' on Robin Thicke, but never, Robin Thicke grinds up on Miley" (Cyrus as quoted in



Figure 2: Cover Image of Taylor Swift, *Rolling Stone* October, 2012.

Eells 2013). During the aftermath of Cyrus' performance, Eells (2013) expresses Cyrus' acknowledgement of the impact her performance had and implies her difficulty in facing the volume of criticism: "it's an important time not to Google myself" (Cyrus as quoted in Eells 2013). Hence, Cyrus has acknowledged the impact that one of her performances has had upon her public image. While the female postfeminist celebrity is able to own her sexuality and be empowered by it, Cyrus' actions had powerful consequences for her reputation and image in the media. Cyrus

also uses the opportunity of the magazine article to draw awareness to the music industry double standard that sees female musicians criticised for provocative acts while male co-performers do not.

Taylor Swift has also used magazine article interviews to address concerns about her celebrity identity as a ‘man-eater’ with numerous failed relationships. While Swift features regularly in other media outlets regarding her personal life, Swift was represented in *Rolling Stone* and *Time* as an intelligent musical artist, rather than a young girl with a love life that others choose to joke about at her expense. Swift acknowledged her reputation regarding relationships (Hiatt 2012, Dickey 2014), however the authors chose to highlight Swift’s new outlook on her love life, acknowledging her more private approach to discussing it, "I feel like watching my dating life has become a bit of a national pastime," Swift says. "And I'm just not comfortable providing that kind of entertainment anymore" (Eells 2014). Hence, while Swift has featured regularly in the media regarding her personal life, such exposure kept her as a celebrity relevant in the media. The format of the feature articles gives the artists’ the opportunity to address concerns and criticisms regarding their personal life and professional careers that often circulate in popular celebrity gossip publications.

A Pop Star’s Reinvention

In this section I explore Cyrus and Swift’s transformation across their careers. I argue that both artists have been on a journey to become more comfortable with themselves in terms of their self-expression and personal beliefs. Miley Cyrus has drawn a lot of media attention towards her behaviour after her attempts to distance herself from the image of *Hannah Montana*. Eells’ (2013) article reflects this departure from Cyrus’ familiar character by describing the setting that Eells (2013) begins the interview with Cyrus in. As the cover photo (see Figure 5) illustrates, Cyrus has a number of visible tattoos. Eells (2013) begins, “Miley Cyrus: Confessions of Pop’s Wildest Child” with the topic of her tattoos, therefore highlighting an interplay between the cover photograph and the feature article text. Cyrus commemorates her first interview and cover with *Rolling Stone* by adding to her body art collection; she has the word, “Rolling”, tattooed onto the bottom of her right foot and the word, “Stone” tattooed onto the bottom of her

left foot. Eells' (2013) article then uses the tattoo lead to explore the criticism Cyrus has faced in the media. They discuss her left forearm tattoo that reads, "That his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat". Cyrus explains that it is from a Teddy Roosevelt speech³² and that it is, "about critics" (Eells 2013). Tattoos have often been considered a symbol of rebellion. They are also a form of self-expression and art, hence Eells' (2013) discussion of Cyrus' body art is fitting as Cyrus is breaking free from her childhood image whilst expressing her personality through body art. Importantly, the tattoo is a constant reminder about those who criticise her, whether for her creative or personal choices.

Taylor Swift has also reinvented herself as a musician and a celebrity. Swift found fame as a country music artist, but with the release of *1989* (2014), she delved into an album that was purely a pop compilation. Swift underwent a musical reinvention, a plan that Eells (2014) likened to the secrecy and logistical complexity of a SEAL (The United States Navy's Sea, Air and Land Teams) mission. Swift's album *1989* (2014), "signals a transition from a country star who likes pop, to a straight-up pop star" (Eells 2014). Therefore Swift's shift into a new genre presented her with a new set of obstacles, including a new audience demographic, the possibility of losing established fans, and little experience in the genre of pop. Swift's reinvention is reflected across the cover photographs of the selected feature articles. Between Figure 1 and Figure 2 it is clear that Swift exemplifies the celebrity aspect of her persona. She is shot in such a way that prioritises her body, with sexual connotations that accompany the wet t-shirt in Figure 1, along with her suggestive facial expression. Figure 2 is also sexually suggestive to the audience due to Swift's clothing that reveals her bare legs along with her facial expression. Figure 6 however, presents the audience with a much different type of shot. Swift is photographed from above the shoulders, and she demands the attention of the reader through her direct eye contact. This transition from cover photographs is reflective of Swift's evolving personal identity and her current demands to be taken seriously, given her success in the industry.

³² Cyrus' tattoo is a direct quote from a speech titled, "Citizen in a Republic", however it is also often referred to as, "The Man In The Arena". Roosevelt delivered the speech at the Sorbonne in Paris, France on 23rd April 1910.

The feature articles highlight another aspect of the postfeminist celebrity musician's persona. Cyrus and Swift have been able to talk back to the media through another media publication. However, the feature articles and accompanying photographs present some contradictions. The articles are a platform for the artists to speak back to criticisms regarding their developing careers and identities, however the cover photographs such as Figures 1, 2, and 5, present Cyrus and Swift in such a manner that reinforces their postfeminist celebrity identities. Both artists are catering to the male gaze, further emphasising the aspect of their identity that is a brand, intended to make money.

Strong, Complex, and Independent Women

In this section I discuss Swift in relation to her feminist identity and success in the music industry. Cyrus and Swift have been successful in an incredibly



Figure 3: Cover Image of Miley Cyrus, *Paper Magazine*, June 2015.

competitive, fast paced and demanding industry.

The selected magazine articles explore the feminist identities of both artists. With regards to Cyrus, I explain how she orientates herself to feminism, and uses the magazine article interviews as an opportunity to discuss her charity work. Cyrus and Swift invite conversations regarding women's issues throughout the selected magazine articles. Eells (2014) writes that early in her career, Swift,

“deflected questions about feminism because she didn't want to alienate male fans” (Eells 2014).

However, as Swift has found an understanding of feminism that she is comfortable with, she is now proud to identify herself as a feminist (Eells 2014). As a result of this understanding, aspects of Swift's feminist identity permeate her creative work such as the video for “Bad Blood” (2015) that emphasise the strength and empowerment of women.



Figure 4: Cover Image of Miley Cyrus, *Marie Claire*, August 2015.



Figure 5: Cover Image of Miley Cyrus, *Rolling Stone*, September, 2013

Magazine articles are one method that Miley Cyrus has developed her celebrity persona. Cyrus aims to shock through her personal body choices as well as through her public image; she grows out her armpit hair, takes unedited ‘selfies’³³, and has called out photographers who have extensively retouched her pictures (Glock 2015, 328). Magazine articles about Cyrus also bring awareness to her charity organisation, the Happy Hippie Foundation.³⁴ As Petrusich has explained after his interview with Cyrus, “the foundation treats at-risk kids with art and animal therapies, two proven balms that have been instrumental in Cyrus’ own self-care” (Petrusich 2015). While the article about Cyrus discusses important social issues such as the welfare of LGBTQ³⁵ and homeless youth, the accompanying cover photo offers an image of Cyrus in a provocative manner (Figure 5). Therefore the content of the article explores serious concerns for Cyrus as well as her activism for different interest groups.

With no visible clothing, tattoos and piercings on display, smudged make up and her tongue pressed against her shoulder (Figure 5), Cyrus catches the attention of the reader before they have read accompanying article. The numerous articles writing about Cyrus’ charity campaign are important because the structure of a feature article allows the writer to cover a topic in greater detail. By choosing to

³³ A ‘selfie’ refers to the colloquial term for a self-portrait photograph, often taken by the subject of the photograph using a digital camera or smartphone camera.

³⁴ Inspired partly by the death of Leelah Alcorn, a transgender girl who committed suicide in late 2014 after being forced to undergo “conversion therapy”, Cyrus announced the Happy Hippie Foundation in May 2015 – a charity that is designed to raise funds and awareness for homeless and LGBT youth.

³⁵ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex.

focus an article about Cyrus on her work outside of the music industry, readers are given the opportunity to see another side to a highly successful celebrity. Magazine article features therefore offer Cyrus and Swift a way to develop their public identities beyond their music and beyond celebrity gossip.

The personal struggles of Cyrus and Swift are a theme that the authors (Eells 2013, Glock 2015) chose to include in their writing. Glock (2015) writes about health issues that Cyrus has faced, in particular her struggle with anxiety (329). By writing about Cyrus' personal life and problems she has had to overcome, the reader is positioned to understand an aspect of Cyrus' life beyond her celebrity persona. Therefore, the reader understands Cyrus on a more basic human level.

Swift has a reputation and a voice to be reckoned with in the music industry. Her star power was reflected in the November 2014 issue of *Time Magazine* (Figure 6)



Figure 6: Cover Image of Taylor Swift *Time Magazine* November, 2014

when she featured on the cover along with an extensive feature article. This picture captures Swift looking directly into the camera, therefore staring at the reader. The framing of the photography is unique with its headshot of Swift. Swift commands the reader's eye. Her leadership in the music industry is reinforced by the title, "The Power of Taylor Swift". In comparison to the two other magazine articles that feature Taylor

Swift in this Chapter, Figure 6, the headshot works to de-objectify Swift in terms of her body.

Conclusion

In conclusion this chapter has examined six feature articles about Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift. The selected texts act as a channel for communication between the artist and a wider audience, giving the artist the opportunity to discuss issues of importance to them. Cyrus is presented in light of her activism work. This topic is given priority in the articles, rather than rumormongering in her celebrity life.

Swift's articles aim to frame one of the world's most successful female artists outside of the celebrity sphere. The author interviews her at home, discusses her friendship group and writes about Swift's views on feminism. The feature articles provide the opportunity for the artist to clarify questions, provide in depth answers and exhibit a certain amount of control over the content of the interview. While they cannot completely control their mediated representation, or how they are received or understood by audiences, the structure of a feature article enables artists such as Cyrus and Swift to talk back through the media and address particular aspects of their personas such as Cyrus' charity foundation and Swift's public feminist identity.

In Chapter Five, I examine audience engagement of Cyrus and Swift through a selection of parody videos on YouTube. I analyse a selection of parody videos to explore Cyrus and Swift's representation in terms of feminism, as celebrities and as successful musicians from the perspective of audience members. I argue that parody videos are generally based on a single aspect of the musician's identity especially as celebrities, feminists or successful music artists.

Chapter Five: Audience Engagement With Postfeminist Celebrity Musicians

Introduction

In this chapter, I investigate audience engagement with Cyrus and Swift through a selection of video responses. The selected texts include parody videos of both artists. The parody videos respond to Cyrus' "Wrecking Ball" (2013) through two parodies by different individuals, and Swift's "Blank Space" (2014) and "Bad Blood" (2015). The parody videos exaggerate an aspect of each artist's persona to entertain the YouTube audience. The audience of both artists consists of individuals whom exhibit a range of opinions towards the artists and their work. In order to analyse audience engagement, the video-sharing platform, YouTube, is used as it hosts the artists' videos as well as the video responses. YouTube is a social media platform intended to promote individual content creators and further discussions between different topics and communities. YouTube is a unique video-sharing platform that provides many opportunities for audience participation by way of user-generated content. However, it has a reputation as a site full where abusive comments and trolling are abundant (Burgess and Green 2009, 96 as cited in Wotanis and McMillan 2014, 914). As the platform is web based, the opportunity for anonymity makes it easier for users to post a range of comments including some that are inappropriate.

This chapter discusses the representation of Cyrus and Swift as postfeminist celebrities through an analysis of four audience response parody videos. Musical covers and parodies of popular songs are a recurring feature on YouTube. Parodying or covering a song means giving credit to the original artist(s) whilst adding one's own 'twist' or interpretation to the song. Parodies often feature a comedic element whilst covers are typically remixes or 'stripped back' versions of the original. The different styles of parody videos further demonstrates the complexities in an artists' identity. The creators of parody videos and cover songs

contest one another's engagement with the original artist with regards to the themes that they have chosen to address, such as the artist's image or reputation.

The contemporary media environment is reshaping the opportunities and structures within which audiences can participate (Livingstone 2013, 24). While many audience members act upon these opportunities by chatting, networking, sharing and collaborating, not all members contribute or contribute equally to an increasingly mediated society (Livingstone 2013, 24). YouTube is a participatory culture (Jenkins 2006), hence its' users do not simply act only as consumers as well as contributors and producers. YouTube is unique in allowing audience members to interact with the content creator as well as other audience members.³⁶ This chapter argues that the audience directly engages with various themes of the creative work of artists such as Cyrus and Swift and YouTube³⁷ assists the audience with drawing conclusions regarding their opinion of an artist. Through an analysis of video responses, I examine the contributions that the videos 'uploaders' are providing with regards to the audience's understanding of Cyrus and Swift as postfeminist celebrity musicians.

In this Chapter, I argue that while some audience members exhibit their own talent and creativity whilst engaging in current issues surrounding the artists, the responses take the artists at face value. The responses main agenda is to bring attention and popularity to the responders YouTube channel, rather than addressing issues of importance such as social injustices or significant current topics that Cyrus and Swift engage with throughout their careers. From an analysis of content created by audience members of Cyrus and Swift, this chapter underlines the comic nature and imitations of audience created content. Moreover, parody videos appear to take one aspect of the musician's public persona whether as a celebrity, feminist or successful musician as the basis for their recreation of the original video.

³⁶ YouTube has a feature where the uploader of a video may choose to disable the 'comments' and 'likes' section on their video. Therefore the only visible statistics are the title of the video, the channel name, the upload date of the video and the number of views for the video. This does not allow for many interactions with the viewers of the video text. For the purpose of this study, the music videos selected for both artists feature enabled 'comments' and 'likes'.

³⁷ "Since YouTube's public launch in 2005, public use of the site has exponentially increased, and it is now the third most popular site on the Web (MacDonald 2015, 541).

Somebody's Watching Me

Celebrities are always performing being constantly judged in many aspects of their personal life and professional careers by the media and their audiences. The artists' celebrity lifestyle means that they are always under the watch and scrutiny of the public eye. They perform for their audience in a number of different ways. Each music video, photo-shoot, live performance and public appearance is a function of the celebrity identity. Cyrus and Swift plan their appearance and behaviour for these events so that it reflects their persona as successful celebrity musicians. The video responders who post on YouTube present a performance similar to the original. I argue that the parody responses aim to leverage their content based on the current popularity of the artists' creative work.

Miley Cyrus aims to shock. The combination of the release of "Wrecking Ball" (2013), the impact of Cyrus' video, image, and accompanying live television performance at the VMAs led to a number of parody videos appearing on YouTube. One such parody was by user, "SteveKardynal". He uploaded a comedic parody one year later after the release of "Wrecking Ball" (2013) which has to date received over 145 million views.⁴⁰ During the video response by "SteveKardynal", the viewers are presented with Kardynal dressed similarly to Cyrus in her music video for, "Wrecking Ball" (2013). He wears a white singlet and white underwear. Throughout the parody video, Kardynal aims to also shock his audience, dancing with little clothing, kissing a sledgehammer (similar to Cyrus' in the original clip), and also swinging from a makeshift wrecking ball in order to replicate Cyrus' actions. Kardynal's audience exists in several places. There is his role as an audience member of Cyrus', his audience in the online chat room, and finally his audience viewing the content on YouTube. Kardynal does not critique Cyrus as a postfeminist celebrity musician, rather he parodies her original video purely for the entertainment of his audience instead of offering his opinion on Cyrus or her work.

While Kardynal approaches his parody video in a light-hearted manner, Bart Baker responded to Swift's music video for "Blank Space" (2014) by addressing

⁴⁰ Figure is correct as of October 2015.

her reputation with regards to relationships. Swift is portrayed by Bart Baker (December 2014) as an irrational partner with motifs of violence and insanity. While Swift uses her music video to speak back to the media regarding her reputation with unsuccessful relationships, the parody video does so in an exaggerated manner. Bart Baker's parody acts so as to reinforce the stereotype surrounding Swift and her unsuccessful relationships.

Conflict In The Industry

In this section I explore the complexity of the music industry with regards to the artists' evolving image. The music industry has a significant number of conflicts. These conflicts extend beyond an artist's business intentions or disagreements with their fellow musicians. Conflict can exist between an artist and their audience. An analysis of audience responses to the selection of Cyrus and Swift's music video suggests that audience members have divergent readings of the musicians. The selected parody videos on YouTube choose to highlight certain negative aspects of the artists. The content of the parody videos are key for interpreting an audience's opinion of an artist.

Cyrus' image transition is a topic of great contention. As I explained in Chapter Three, Cyrus has transitioned from the Disney persona of her early career to a more risqué, unpredictable performer who appears to embrace controversy in her artistic and musical productions. Many audience members appear to be divided about Cyrus' career transition. Qiu (2012) argues that there is a visible strain between Cyrus' well known on-screen character, *Hannah Montana*, and her off-screen behaviour. The audience participation is key for this analysis because they have experienced Cyrus at various stages of her career, therefore having grounds for comparison. Cyrus' audience is key to her celebrity persona because she had an established fan base prior to drastically changing her image and music. Cyrus' radical image and genre transformation has motivated an array of parody reactions from her audience members such as the one's discussed from Kardynal and Bart Baker.

Although YouTube as a video-sharing platform has the ability to create a participatory culture (Jenkins 2006) inclusive of multiple individuals with the

opportunity to voice their own opinion and contribute to various discussions. However this ideal is not always achieved (Wotanis and McMillan 2014, 912 – 913). Wotanis and McMillan's (2014) research on the performance of gender on YouTube through an analysis of Jenna Marbles (YouTube's most successful female contributor) found that, "rather than operating democratically in ways that offer males and females similar opportunities, YouTube videos may be subject to "surveillance, judgment, and evaluation—practices signalling consumer agency but simultaneously disciplining and constituting subjects" (Banet-Weiser 2011, 18). Therefore the parody video operates in a similar manner as they pass judgement on and evaluate certain aspects of their subjects' persona.

Success At The Expense of Somebody Else

In this section I discuss the incentives behind making a parody video of Cyrus and Swift. While the parody video is intended to entertain the audience through exaggerating an aspect of the chosen subject's persona, the creator has their own set of motivations. These can include reaching a large audience with their content, generating a monetary income from the video or voicing their opinion on a subject or individual. The parody videos do not always offer a positive image of their chosen subject.

Bart Baker (June 2014) chose to create a parody video of Swift's video for, "Bad Blood" (2015) and engages with Swift in relation to feminism. The responders shot their video using similar angles, outfits and sets in order to capture the essence of Swift's original video. The video chose to have a running theme that explains Swift's sensitivity, bad luck with relationships, and ultimately her and Perry's bad feelings towards one another as consequences of menstruation. The parody video also mocks Swift's previous album title, "Red" (2012), as well as the title, "Bad Blood" (2015). The parody states that both titles allude to menstruation, which is also blamed for Swift's actions throughout the video. While the parody video for, "Bad Blood" (2015), notes Swift's intention to present female empowerment, the creators note that Swift is a feminist, however the release of the video is rumoured to channel Swift's emotions towards another female pop star (Katy Perry). The parody notes that, "you [Swift] only put this catty song out to get revenge" and that, "feminists do not dis chicks" (Bart Baker

June 2014). The parody also addresses Swift's choice to cast a number of her famous friends in the video, stating that it was Swift's intention to make her friends pose in order to boost her own ego. The parody offers a postfeminist reading of the original "Bad Blood" (2015) video by reducing Swift to a victim of her hormones and reinterpreting her attempts to depict women's empowerment as a revenge story about women fighting amongst themselves. Ironically, the parody video's attempt to criticise Swift for not acting like a feminist. However the parody's criticism of Swift reproduces the same anti-feminist sentiments it criticises Swift for.

The parody video (Bart Baker 2013) in response to Cyrus' "Wrecking Ball" (2013), engages with several notions from her personal and professional life. Cyrus is portrayed by a man that mimics her behaviour from her "Wrecking Ball" (2013) music video. The audience sees the parody character singing about Cyrus' transformed image, past relationships and wild behaviour.

Conclusion

To conclude, countless parodies and covers of popular songs can be found on YouTube. Some aim to imitate the original artist(s) in order to show their appreciation, some present the audience with a new interpretation of the original song and others such as Bart Baker's parodies, aim to ridicule the original artist(s) for a feature of their persona. In the selected examples, Cyrus' parody mocks features of her video, however not her persona. Kardynal is the focus of the video as the audience finds amusement in his actions as they are exaggerated and uncommon. However, the parody creators for Swift's "Bad Blood" (2015) video focus on Swift, mocking aspects of her persona such as her romantic relationships, famous friends and disagreements with other celebrities and attempting to offer a feminist critique

In this chapter I have outlined the role that an audience's response to an artist can have. Through an analysis of four selected parody videos, it is clear that audience responses through parody videos rely strongly on comedy and re-identifying traits of the artist's persona that they are already associated with, such as Cyrus' provocative behaviour, and Swift's personal relationships.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Cyrus and Swift exemplify the notion that one's identity is constantly evolving and cannot be contained to one definition. This thesis has discussed the representation of Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift as postfeminist celebrity musicians through their music videos, mediated personas in popular magazine articles and audience responses via parody videos. Clearly, these variable representations show that there are many facets to their identities as celebrities, public self-professed feminists and successful female musicians. Both artists exemplify aspects of the postfeminist celebrity such as their ability to perform in revealing clothing and claim to empower women, whilst retaining their right to identify as a feminist.

This thesis has argued that overall, the identities of Cyrus and Swift as postfeminist celebrity musicians are not fixed. The case study chapters examined the self-presentation in music videos, media representation in selected popular magazines and audience engagement via parody videos of Cyrus and Swift. Chapter Three discussed Cyrus and Swift with regards to their self-presentation and the evolution of both artists' identities, as examined through a selection of their music videos. Chapter Four examined the mediated representation of both artists through a selection of feature magazine articles and their accompanying covers. The feature provided Cyrus and Swift with a platform to voice their views about particular topics with regards to their public persona. It also enabled the artists' to discuss less well-known facts about their identity, offering the reader a more human side to the hugely successful artists. Finally, Chapter Five examined the audience responses to Cyrus and Swift through a selection of four parody videos on YouTube. The parody videos highlighted and exaggerated an aspect of both artists' professional or personal life that is known publicly, such as Cyrus' provocative behaviour, Swift's supposed empowering video "Bad Blood" and Swift's unsuccessful relationships. Overall, it is clear that media representations, whether directly produced by the artist or by a journalist or fan, slip between different aspects of a successful musician's persona.

Cyrus and Swift continue to exemplify their postfeminist identities with their most recent music videos. Swift released a music video for her single, “Wildest Dreams” (2015) from the album *1989* (2015). The video contrasts many of the themes present in her previous music video, “Bad Blood” (2015), as her character indulges in themes of romance and forbidden love once again, similar to her past music videos such as “Love Story” (2008). Swift rejects notions of female empowerment throughout the video, her character bewildered and heartbroken once she finds out her partner is already married, however her lyrics still call to the married man, “say you’ll remember me, standing in a nice dress, staring at the sunset, babe” (Swift 2014). Swift deliberately displayed her feminist identity through the video for “Bad Blood” (2015), empowering her audience with a mostly female cast of successful women in strong roles. The notion of the ideal heterosexual relationship is presented through many of Swift’s music videos, displaying the notion of slippage across her career as she sometimes portrays a persona that is independent and empowering to women, however often slipping back into the themes that are the base to her success. Cyrus released a music video for her single, “Dooo It!” (2015) from her album *Miley Cyrus & Her Dead Petz* (2015). The video is shot to only frame Cyrus’ face from her chin to her eyes. This makes her mouth the focus of the music video. Cyrus sings about her drug use, music and lack of care towards criticism, “yeah I smoke pot, yeah I love peace, but I don’t give a fuck, I ain’t no hippy” (Cyrus 2015). She continues to emphasise her celebrity identity through her performances, displaying the notion that she is capable of such publicly bad behaviour due to her celebrity status. She also juxtaposes the identity that she has created through her charity foundation, raising questions regarding the expectations of celebrities with regards to how an audience’s interpretation of a celebrity through their self-presentation can affect the audience’s expectation of other aspects of a celebrity’s persona. This thesis has argued that Cyrus and Swift exemplify the notion that one’s identity is constantly evolving and cannot be contained to one definition.

As the pop industry continues to grow, the theory and groundwork built upon in this thesis could be used in order to analyse other successful female artists in order to build upon the knowledge of postfeminist celebrity musicians.

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