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"Never Heard Silence Quite This Loud": Silence and Agency in Taylor Swift's Career

Fruzsina Papp

1. Introduction

- 1 The Vox staff started a series titled "Purity Chronicles", which mostly focuses on female celebrities or the disturbing gender roles of the late 90s and the 2000s, exploring how celebrities like Janet Jackson, Christina Aguilera, or Whitney Houston were wronged in their socio-cultural context by the public. It covers the stories of celebrities like Paris Hilton, Aaliyah, Monica Lewinsky, or even Britney Spears, re-evaluating the post-feminist, admittedly hateful, misogynistic stance on celebrities and events of the past in light of more recent trends and movements.
- 2 A similar re-evaluation happened almost organically, starting on the internet and taking over media outlets a couple of years ago. Following the #FreeBritney movement gaining momentum online and the widely followed court case of her fighting for her freedom, the social discourse focused on the agency of female artists in the music industry in particular. This movement happened in tandem with the emerging fourth wave of feminism and the MeToo movement, both of which position female agency and vocalicity as their main tenets. People on the internet lobbied, petitioned, hashtagged, and advocated for Spears to regain her freedom from the coerced conservatorship from her own father. The entire case exemplified not only Spears's ability to take control of her own life, but also how much the tone of internet and media discourse has changed since Spears's infamous "meltdown"¹ happened. As Spears achieved emancipation, she decided to retire from the music industry (Saunders), using her liberation to keep her peace and retire from singing. In her case, resisting oppression and silencing resulted in getting to keep her own silence but this time, on her own accord.

- 3 Taylor Swift's case with silencing seems to be the polar opposite of that of Spears, and although it has not been covered by the Vox series, throughout her career, Swift has been wronged multiple times. She has been adamantly fighting any and all media coverage, social discourse, or her own colleagues that tried to silence her, disrupt or disadvantage her career. However, she has been using these experiences in a radically different manner, turning them into building blocks for her public persona or career moves. The infamous incident in 2009² with Kanye West, and the phone call that later turned into the trending "Taylor Swift is Over Party" on Twitter were both landmarks in Swift's career, impacting her marketing, business, and artistic choices as well. One of the most visible results of her fight for her own vocality is her project of re-releasing her first six albums in order to own the master recordings. By the end of 2024, the success of the Eras Tour³ seems to have proven that she successfully managed to turn the bubble-gum misogynistic views and inherent sexism into unprecedented success. This paper explores the recurring motif of silencing and sexism throughout Swift's career, especially in light of the changing socio-cultural discourse regarding feminism, vocality, and agency, and is an attempt to track the trajectory of Swift's use of vocality or lack thereof as a tool.

2. Feminist Terms: Postfeminist, Neoliberal, Fourth Wave

- 4 In order to understand the notions of silencing, agency, or vocality, the different frameworks of feminism also need to be discussed. For this, the reasons are twofold: first, because these notions are inherently gendered, and are attesting to the misogynistic workings of the music industry as well. Second, Taylor Swift's career started in an era that was vastly different than the one it is thriving in right now, both technologically and in terms of women's rights and movements. These changes also made it possible for Swift to change her own business moves, persona, and responses, as well as the responses received from the audience.
- 5 Postfeminism is just what it sounds like: the assumption that feminism has done enough. It has achieved what it was meant to do, it is merely a "thing of the past"⁴ (Tasker and Negra qtd. in Rivers 4). Rivers also points out that postfeminist discourse allows for the understanding of itself as a contradictory mix of feminist and anti-feminist themes, which, she argues, have resulted in the fourth wave (4). Postfeminism, however, emerged alongside the third wave in the 90s and continues to linger in public discourse. Therefore, as Taylor Swift began her career in 2006, it was at its height. As the Vox staff noted, in the 2000s "we were postfeminists: women had already achieved equality and had become butt-kickers with girl power, and there was nothing left to complain about. ... There was no right way to be a girl. There were only different ways to fail" ("The Bubblegum Misogyny"). As the young teenager she was, Swift was not only consuming pop culture but also shaping it as she entered the music industry. Her public persona was born in a cultural scene that did not tolerate advocacy or someone who was labelled as "difficult."⁵
- 6 Given her early career, it is no surprise that Taylor Swift's celebrity persona is often discussed in feminist discourse under the label of neoliberal feminism. Rosi Braidotti discusses neoliberal feminists as "wealth supremacists" "who identify human nature with capitalism" (45) and continues to argue that they are "less concerned about

solidarity and thrive on the glorification of economic success and the opportunities afforded by the fourth industrial revolution" (45). Braidotti also points out that neoliberal feminism has become the movement where "capitalist individualistic self-empowerment is supported by many female CEOs, also known as 'She-EO,' 'girlboss'" (45). Neoliberal and the currently unfolding fourth wave of feminism clash exactly at these individualistic perspectives: while the representatives of the former tend to focus on their own goals, mostly by manipulating the system in order to fit into positions of power, the latter is highlighting the role of (online) advocacy and is working to dismantle the faulty systems.

- 7 Taylor Swift is often criticised for her clearly capitalistic business models, her private jet usage, or her merch prices.⁶ She is often named as an "economic force of nature"⁷ (Yang) especially after the success of the Eras Tour, as each city she visited saw an economic boost (Lahiri), while also helping Swift become a billionaire almost exclusively based on her work as a singer, songwriter, and performer—a feat that is not often seen in the industry. She has been criticised for overly priced or poor-quality merchandise (Gulerati); however, it is undeniable that she has managed to stay in control of the narrative regarding her music and her business ventures. Even the somewhat critical articles tend to note that her talent is undeniable: "Still, it's Swift's undeniable talent, her resourcefulness and her (blond) ambition that have gotten her where she is—that is to say, the very top. I admit to personally being a begrudging fan, not just of her music, but her incredible sense of enterprise" (Yang).
- 8 In Swift's case there seems to be a direct line from the postfeminist origins to her neoliberal ways. Her formative years were defined and spent during the era of Hollywood and the music industry that were heavily influenced by the idea of being "butt-kickers with girl power" ("The Bubblegum Misogyny"), especially given that she managed to make herself known, famous, and successful in a male-dominated genre. She became the youngest person to win a Grammy for Album of the Year⁸ in 2010 for her second studio album titled *Fearless* ("14 Years Ago"), no small achievement, especially given that it was not a pop or rock album, but a country record. It seems to be a natural consequence that she tends to be on the neoliberal side of feminism as an adult, where she is the "She-EO" of her own company, considering that her entire career was built on the image of the girl who is in charge of her career, her business moves, and is almost unprecedentedly successful in her own right; thus, her postfeminist girlboss self seemed to have transitioned into a neoliberal one.

3. Navigating Silence: From Oppression to Strategy

- 9 As mentioned before, Swift's career took off after the release of *Fearless* in 2008; however, the Grammys were not the only award for which her work got nominated. Her music video for the single "You Belong with Me" was nominated for the Best Female Music Video at the 2009 VMAs. Infamously, while she was delivering her acceptance speech, Kanye West jumped on the stage and took the microphone from Swift, saying: "I'm really happy for you, Imma let you finish, but Beyoncé had one of the best videos of all time" [sic!] (*Miss Americana* 00:17:09-00:17:14). Thus, he not only humiliated Swift but also publicly silenced her on stage as she was receiving an award for using her own voice and writing.

- 10 The incident triggered a series of cyclical instances of silencing Swift has suffered throughout her career, many of them being based on West's actions, but it also must be noted that silencing has been a part of patriarchal societies for centuries, from passages in the Bible teaching that women should be silent (1 Timothy 2.12), to the long history of silencing theorized in feminist literature. For instance, feminist scholar Catherine A. Mackinnon explains that:

when you are powerless, you don't speak differently. ... Your speech is not just differently articulated, it is silenced. ... Not being heard is not just a function of lack of recognition, not just that no one knows how to listen to you, although it is that; it is also silence of the deep kind, the silence of being prevented from having anything to say. (39)
- 11 Later she adds that the "silence that constitutes half of the dialogue makes our half sound like the sound of one hand clapping" (MacKinnon 46). In MacKinnon's writing, therefore, silence appears as this inherently gendered imbalance; a weapon used against women in public spaces. In the West-Swift feud, it appears in the same manner: West, as the older, more established male artist physically took away Swift's voice (in the form of her microphone), relegating her to silence.
- 12 In her Netflix documentary titled *Miss Americana*, Swift recounts the evening, and mentions her experience on the spot. "It was so echoey in there. At the time I didn't know they were booing *him* doing that. I thought that they were booing *me*" (*Miss Americana* 00:18:24 – 00:18:31). She also goes on to mark the VMAs as a formative event in her life and career. Highlighting this moment emphasises the effect of it in her life and self-esteem as well, but it also foregrounds how West's actions echoed throughout the media, and later on in her career. The film features one interview after the award show, where Swift is asked how she felt and whether she had been a fan of West before; it also shows several TV hosts and programmes, like Jimmy Kimmel, the CNN news segment, or even Dr Phil discussing it (00:18:08-00:18:13). The latter mentions that "I can name you ten or fifteen people that he wouldn't have gone up and taken that mic away from. But he did it with a 17-year-old girl because he could" (00:18:12-00:18:13). In the context of the film, and this snippet being framed by several sequences of Swift standing on or being escorted off the stage conveys the thesis of the documentary and maybe even Swift's entire career: that West abused his position when he silenced Swift, and turned the public narrative in his favour in the following years by faking phone calls, or degrading Swift online.
- 13 Although it might seem counterintuitive, Swift has been strategically using her own silence as a way of responding to attacks from the media, reporters, celebrities. One example was shortly after the VMA show, when Swift was promoting her album: she was scheduled to have a radio interview over the phone with FLZ's hosts, who started questioning her about Kanye West and her experience at the VMAs. The host argued that Swift was "exposed" to audiences who had not heard of her before thanks to West's actions (Soteriou). After answering some of the questions, Swift adds that "I would maybe like to move on a little bit" (Soteriou), and after the hosts repeatedly fail to move on to the subject of the interview, Swift steps away from the phone and her publicists finishes the phone call. She excluded herself from a narrative⁹ she did not mean to emphasise or keep in the limelight in order to control what she speaks up about, or control what she is connected to publicly.

- 14 Swift and West remained the topic of tabloids for years: Swift released a song allegedly about West (which also establishes Swift as the victim in the situation), who later apologised to Swift, and they appeared friendly in public, claiming to have made up. Swift presented a lifetime VMA award to West in 2015 (Gavilanes and Dodd), where she referenced West's speech of his interrupting her several years before. However, West released his song "Famous" in 2016, once again abusing his position as an established male performer. In his first solo verse, West starts off by saying:

I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex
Why? I made that bitch famous (Goddamn)
I made that bitch famous.¹⁰ (West 00:01:06-00:01:13)

- 15 West claimed that he had verbal consent from Swift to release the song with this wording over the phone and his claims were later supported by his then-wife Kim Kardashian (Gavilanes and Dodd). Swift's statement was negating these claims (Gavilanes and Dodd), as she was attempting to take control of the narrative for the unfolding scandal aimed to take apart her carefully constructed image. Through a PR statement Swift explained that even though she "understands" that Kardashian is under pressure in this situation in her marriage, it

does not change the fact that much of what Kim is saying is incorrect. Kanye West and Taylor only spoke once on the phone while she was on vacation with her family in January of 2016 and they have never spoken since. Taylor has never denied that conversation took place. It was on that phone call that Kanye West also asked her to release the song on her Twitter account, which she declined to do. (Gavilanes and Dodd)

- 16 Unlike her conscious avoidance of addressing the VMAs incident, she instead strategically reconstructed her vocality: Swift used all her means to word that statement as carefully as it needed to be and published it via her management. This, therefore, marks the first notable shift in her mode of handling mistreatment and abuse, as she directly addressed the public to express her side and practice her agency as well.
- 17 West also made a music video in which a naked Taylor Swift look-alike is seen lying in bed with him, essentially turning the video into what might be called commercialized revenge porn,¹¹ further humiliating, insulting, and even dehumanizing Swift not only as a performer, but also a woman. This ultimately "killed" the good girl, child-like image of Taylor Swift with which she started her career as a teenager. Constance Grady discusses the purity culture that dominated in the US during the Bush administration (during the exact time when Taylor Swift's career started, coinciding with most of her formative years), and how the era of celebrity nude pictures defined the way society perceived female celebrities¹² (Grady, "When celebrity nudes were everywhere"). In the beginning, Swift's image was that of a teenage girl singing about a boy she liked in school, or about idealized love (as seen in the whimsical and child-like art and lyrics of her self-titled debut album). From this, she moved to build on this image by her living out a Romeo and Juliet inspired fairy tale romance (as she does in the music video for "Love Story") and enhancing the fairytale imagery via the aesthetic and lyricism of her third album, *Speak Now*. By 2016, she managed to transition into a somewhat more mature young adult, but her image remained that of a young woman living in New York with her friends (thematized in 1989). West's music video was a transgression of this boundary between innocent and tainted: it destroyed her prior image, even though it was not in fact Swift herself lying there in the video, but her uncanny doll likelihood,

mimicking a sex doll, turning the music video into a perverted and distorted Pygmalion, where instead of nurturing an object to becoming a real woman, West reduced Swift to a dehumanized prop.

18 Swift's strategy in addressing West's work remained the same even as the West-Kardashian couple released videos in which Swift apparently consented to the song. Swift wrote on her own social media accounts that: "You don't get to control someone's emotional response to being called 'that bitch' in front of the entire world. ... Being falsely painted as a liar when I was never given the full story or played any part of the song is character assassination. ... I would very much like to be excluded from this narrative, one that I have never asked to be a part of, since 2009" (Gavilanes and Dodd). Swift's direct response not only negates the claims made against her, but also asserts herself as the positive other, implies that she is the one who is not lying, and calls out West's actions. Therefore, she simultaneously reclaimed her own presence in the public sphere that the video attempted to erase, while attempting to restore her own public image.

19 The next year, Swift also released her sixth studio album titled *reputation*,¹³ which she preceded by "going dark" on her social media accounts (Kaufman). This rather performative act of apparent self-silencing did not prove to be long-lasting (she teased the album three days later) or anything more than a PR stunt, as it garnered the attention of both the fans and the media, in order to hype up the announcement of her new album. The album itself, however, does address the feud with Kanye West both in its themes and in some of the songs. Songs like "I Did Something Bad," "This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things," or the lead single titled "Look What You Made Me Do" address themes such as betrayal, vengeance, and the complexities of public perception. She starts off "I Did Something Bad" by saying:

I never trust a narcissist, but they love me
So I play 'em like a violin
And I make it look, oh, so easy (Swift, "I Did Something Bad")

20 In the context of her infamous feud with West, Swift references him without naming him explicitly, and calls him a narcissist to whom she owes nothing (Swift, "I Did Something Bad"). Later, she switches to the imagery of witches being burned even if they are innocent, positioning herself as the guiltless woman who was blamed for crimes and then burned at the stake (Swift, "I Did Something Bad"). In "This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things," West is painted as the one who ruins everything or everyone's fun; while in "Look What You Made Me Do"¹⁴ Swift takes a vengeful tone to position herself as the victim in the situation while simultaneously maintaining her agency as she is acting out her revenge. At this point, releasing her album and returning to the public scene are Swift's way of regaining her vocality and re-positioning herself as an active participant, rather than the passive victim of a "character assassination." The lead single off of *reputation*, *Look What You Made Me Do* elaborates on this imagery of Swift's old self having been killed, but now she is back from the dead and is taking her stance against West and any who wronged her before.

4. (Taylor's Version): Reclaiming the Narrative

21 In her catalogue of almost three hundred songs, every single one was (co-)written by Swift, using her own words, her own handwriting, expressing her own feelings and life

experiences. As a teenager, she signed with an emerging label named Big Machine Label Group and went on to release six studio albums up until she signed with Universal Music Group after Scooter Braun and his Ithaca Holdings purchased Big Machine, thus also acquiring the master¹⁵ recordings of Swift's first six records. Swift "vocally fought against the acquisition" (Gomez), as she was also interested in purchasing and thus legally owning her masters: her own voice. Later Swift explained on her X account:

As you know, for the past year I've been actively trying to regain ownership of my master recordings. With that goal in mind, my team attempted to enter into negotiations with Scooter Braun. Scooter's team wanted me to sign an ironclad NDA stating I would never say another word about Scooter Braun unless it was positive, before we could even look at the financial records of BMLG¹⁶ (which is always the first step in a purchase of this nature). So I would have to sign a document that would silence me forever before I could even have a chance to bid on my own work. My legal team said that this is absolutely NOT normal, and they've never seen an NDA like this presented unless it was to silence an assault accuser by paying them off. He would never even quote my team a price. These master recordings were not for sale to me. (@taylorswift13)

- 22 Her statement is not only significant in terms of artistic transparency toward her fans, or for emphasising her wish and struggle to own the recordings, her own voice in both its literal and metaphorical, agentic sense. It is also an explicit assertion that the purchase was an active method of silencing her as an artist whose entire life's work was handled without her consent or knowledge. In her acceptance speech for Billboard's first Woman of the Year award, Swift emphasized that Braun and those who funded the purchase made an investment in her (Schiller), further signifying that her position was forcefully reduced to commercial goods, dehumanizing her in the process.
- 23 Swift's transparency on the matter, however, goes against the arguments made by the previously quoted MacKinnon and refuses to let her own part of the dialogue be reduced to silence. Furthermore, she uses her position as an artist to expose the silencing and abusive tendencies of the industry. Thus, her vocal stance against Scooter Braun's attempt to silence and own her through her music shifts Swift from the overly individualistic, neoliberal tendencies, and positions her more as a fourth-wave feminist, even if this shift is in her own best interest from a PR perspective. In her Billboard speech she defines herself as the "resident loud person" (Schiller) who needs to and thus does shed a light on issues such as agency in the industry, fair compensation,¹⁷ and bodily autonomy.¹⁸ Advocating for fellow artists repositions her stance and actions as not only her own, capitalist business strategy, but also as purposefully placed precedent for others to follow. However, an argument can also be made for a neo-liberal, late-stage capitalist reading of her actions, as both acquiring her master recordings or receiving appropriate payment from streaming platforms would and did benefit her financially. On the other hand, the re-recording process directly affected not only the music industry, but the cultural-political conversation as well. Therefore, even if her actions seem to be calculated business strategies benefitting her own bottom-line, her actions shape the industry, especially for upcoming generations.
- 24 In a letter shared by Swift, she warned the representatives of Shamrock Holdings¹⁹: "I will be going forward with my original re-recording schedule and will be embarking on that effort soon. I know this will diminish that value of my old masters, but I hope you will understand that this is my only way of regaining the sense of pride" (@taylorswift13). The letter is an explicit warning about her actions, and her posting it

on her social media account is another act of transparency²⁰ in an attempt to regain her agency.

- 25 In 2021, Swift released her first²¹ re-recorded album, *Fearless (Taylor's Version)*, not setting a precedent of re-releasing her album that replaced the original on the charts (McIntyre). In its introduction displayed on Apple Music, it is mentioned that the most notable change is how "Swift's voice has strengthened and matured in the 13 years since" (Swift, *Fearless [Taylor's Version]*). Coincidentally, this can also be read for her metaphoric voice, her agentic, affective voice as well. She has gained a position established enough that she can re-release her own songs, rewrite the memory of the previous albums and the eras in her life they represent. The re-recording project has thus become a tool to affect the music industry as a whole, and to, through music, reclaim the power and voice she lost while she was younger and in a more vulnerable position as an artist. When *Fearless* became *Fearless (Taylor's Version)*, a new, more mature Swift overwrote the original era, replaced the album in the charts and the public consciousness, and opened the floor for Swift to become the global, record-breaking pop artist she has become.

5. Conclusion

- 26 On May 30, 2025, Taylor Swift posted a letter on her official website, written in a font of her own handwriting, to announce her purchase of her original masters.
- I almost stopped thinking it could ever happen, after 20 years of having the carrot dangled and then yanked away. But that's all in the past now. ... I really get to say these words: All of the music I've ever made... now belongs... to me. ... All I've ever wanted was the opportunity to work hard enough to be able to one day purchase my music outright with no strings attached, no partnership, with full autonomy. (Swift, "My Letter")
- 27 The announcement appears as a (possible) conclusion to the re-recording process, which is named as part of the reason why Swift was able to purchase her own music. She leaves the possibility of re-releasing her debut album and *reputation* as well, but the tone of the letter is clear: by fighting the forced silence and speaking out, Swift managed to do just what she set out to. At the end, being vocal paid off and granted her the possibility of owning her work.
- 28 By June 2025, Taylor Swift has released eleven original studio albums, four re-recorded albums, two hundred and seventy-four songs²². She has over a thousand articles, interviews, reports, speeches, or public appearances that I managed to track down since she released her first album. She was named Person of the Year by *Time Magazine*, went on several tours, appeared in, produced, and released several films, music videos, and short films. Her catalogue has become massive enough to make it almost completely impossible to write a comprehensive paper on it. In this article, I focused on exploring the trajectory of Taylor Swift's career from the point of view of several instances of silencing she suffered throughout her eighteen years in the music industry.
- 29 When releasing *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)* in 2023, in the introduction on Apple Music, Swift notes: "There is a time for silence. There is a time for waiting your turn. But if you know how you feel, and you so clearly know what you need to say, you'll know it" (Swift, *Speak Now [Taylor's Version]*). Although this introduction was never intended to

conceptualize Swift's relation to silencing and vocality, it grasps the changing response with which Swift confronted silencing: at first, she politely turned down commenting on the Kanye West feud, or remained calm during the interviews where she was asked about it, but she did walk away from questionings and reports. As she matured, her response changed to a more vocal, but still somewhat reserved one: her protests and rebuttals were professionally worded and released through PR agents, or they were wrapped in the beneficial ambiguity of musical storytelling.

- 30 By her thirties, Swift has established her career with eleven studio albums, countless awards and records, and has now shifted her response to a more active participation in the social discourse. Her re-recording project demonstrates Swift to be active, vocal. To round back to MacKinnon's arguments, Swift expresses her own feelings and experiences, articulates her side of the story, and does not let her part of the dialogue be reduced to mere silence. And through the transparency she has been showcasing throughout the process, she has also become an active advocate for other artists in the industry, a participant who transforms the music industry to benefit up-and-coming, and mostly female artists.
- 31 As she has been fighting for her own agency, Swift arguably shifted from a neoliberal individualist feminist, as she is usually perceived, to a more inclusive, supportive feminist; although a portion of her public statements and career moves remain business decisions. While Swift has been facing acts of silencing from multiple people and from the industry²³ as a whole, she has also been repositioning her response, and she matured from a teenager easily exploited to an agentic woman and established performer, who successfully reclaimed her music, work, voice, and agency.

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NOTES

1. Britney Spears was placed under the conservatorship of her father for thirteen years after she cut off her hair and attacked a paparazzo in public because of the immense stress she was under both professionally and in her personal life. Multiple documentaries explore the career trajectory of Britney Spears, the reasons and the aftermath of this incident. *Framing Britney Spears* (dir. Samantha Spark, 2021) and *Britney vs. Spears* (dir. Erin Lee Carr, 2021) are two of these films.
2. This will be discussed in detail in "Navigating Silence: From Oppression to Strategy."
3. Swift announced her sixth tour titled The Eras Tour at the end of 2022, a worldwide tour celebrating her entire catalogue. It began the subsequent March, and consisted of 149 shows in five continents, concluding in December 2024, almost two years later (Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour). The concert series broke several records throughout its course, along with the concert film Swift released half-way through the concert series.
4. Some feminist thinkers have also suggested that postfeminism has become redundant as well, especially in the wake of the fourth wave. Nicola Rivers, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, Angela McRobbie, to name a few, have all discussed this debate.
5. Although she is not a singer, Katherine Heigl's career infamously took a turn for the worse once she was rumoured to be difficult to deal with (Starkey).
6. At this point it needs to be noted that currently it seems to be impossible to find an A list celebrity who has accessible and affordable merch and ticket prices, however, others seem to be less attacked for the price of their memorabilia.
7. The choice of words is especially interesting. Swift is also a force of nature in the traditional sense, as multiple of her shows resulted in seismic activity as her fans were cheering and dancing along (Sykes and Rosenbloom).
8. Swift has set the record for winning the most Album of the Year Grammys in 2023, as she is the only singer to have won the award four times: for *Fearless* in 2010, for *1989* in 2016, for *Folklore* in 2021, and for *Midnights* in 2024. At the time of writing this article, her most recent album titled *The Tortured Poets Department* has also been nominated for Album of the Year.
9. A sentiment that is expressed in her music video titled "Look What You Made Me Do." I will elaborate on this later.
10. The same logic was used by the radio hosts in the interview discussed above.
11. An argument could also be made to call the music video "non-consensual porn." As Samantha Bates mentions, not all non-consensual porn is for the sake of revenge, even if some of them are for that reason (2).
12. Grady's article argues that the rise of celebrity nudes and online revenge porn initiated with hackers releasing private pictures of Vanessa Hudgens in 2006. And although the article clearly

connects this instance to the rise of purity culture in the US (Grady, "When celebrity nudes were everywhere"), it must be noted that the first revenge porn that went "viral" was that of Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee. The selling of their personal home tape of their honeymoon in the 1990s, and the subsequent legal matters, arguments, and discourses heavily paved the way for the above-mentioned purity culture. However, a deeper analysis of this phenomenon is outside the scope of this paper.

13. Swift spells the album title in all lower-case letters.

14. The music video for the song is filled with visual references to Kanye West, Kim Kardashian, their disagreements, incidents, along with Swift's previous eras that she now considers as having been assassinated.

15. A master recording is the original recording of a specific song or performance, but ownership of masters does not cover the composition of the material, which is a separate copyright.

16. Abbreviation for Big Machine Label Group, most often used in legal materials.

17. In 2014, Swift pulled her catalogue from Spotify, and the next year, she pulled 1989 from Apple Music, addressing the company in an open letter, arguing for fair compensation for artists. Apple changed its paying policy by the next day (Linshi; "Apple Music changes policy after Taylor Swift stand.")

18. Swift sued David Mueller for sexual assault and groping her. Swift requested a single symbolic dollar in damages, and having won the trial, she issued a statement thanking her attorneys in fighting for her "and anyone who feels silenced by a sexual assault" (Baldrige, Foley, and Morrone) and that she hopes "to help those whose voices should also be heard" (Coffman and Tracey). The trial served as a performative opportunity for Swift to use her platform and resources to publicly fight rape culture and to give voice to those who feel forced into keeping their silence.

19. The private equity that purchased her masters.

20. However, it should also be noted that the letter is part of the business strategy where Swift advertises the re-recordings in an attempt to de-value the original albums.

21. At this point it should be noted that although *Fearless* (Taylor's Version) was the first re-recorded album, originally, it was her second studio album.

22. Swift released her twelfth studio album in October 2025, under the title *The Life of a Showgirl*, adding an extra twelve songs to her catalogue. This study focuses on her catalogue and career prior to this release.

23. Swift is often criticised and thus humiliated or dehumanized for several different reasons, for example her private life or jet use; however, these aspects are outside of the scope of this paper.

ABSTRACTS

Taylor Swift quickly gained fame as a teenager in 2006 for having the ability to express her own lived experience in a way that not only produces catchy songs but also simultaneously captures the experience of millions. When she won a VMA in 2009 for doing exactly what made her

famous, however, Kanye West grabbed her microphone and took the stage from her in a rather misogynist attempt to humiliate her, while also silencing Swift in front of millions. While battling the media about her representation and public perception, West humiliated and silenced Swift once again in what came to be known as the "Snake-gate" or the "Taylor Swift is over party" on Twitter (now X). When, along with her record label, her master recordings were sold to Scooter Braun, it not only meant her discography and her income, but her voice, her handwriting, and lived experience were taken from her. As this silencing of Swift has become periodic and recurring, Swift has turned this into some of the most profitable projects in the music industry: rerecording her music and creating the Eras Tour. Silencing, and the question of vocality, is not a new phenomenon; feminist criticism and gender studies have been addressing the issue of silencing for decades, and it is also a central question of the fourth wave of feminism. Following Catherine MacKinnon's arguments on silencing and Rosi Braidotti's thoughts on neoliberal feminism, this essay explores how silencing and vocality are addressed in Taylor Swift's lyrics, videoclips, films and business ventures.

INDEX

Keywords: Taylor Swift, silencing, feminism, pop culture, music industry, re-recording

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Fruzzina Papp is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Debrecen. Her work focuses on contemporary cinematic representations of the oppression and silencing of women, as well as the impact of feminist waves on the film industry. In addition to her research conducted at the intersection of pop culture, cultural, and posthuman theories, her interests also extend to women's literature, film adaptations, and various aspects of media studies.