

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A. Background Of Study

Gender inequality has long been a focal point in the discourse of liberal feminism, a prominent branch of feminism theory that emphasizes the importance of individual rights and equal opportunities for women within society. Liberal feminism argues that women should have the same political and social freedom as men, aiming to challenge and dismantle the systematic barriers that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and oppression. This approach advocates for reforms within existing societal structures to achieve gender equality, focusing on women's access to education, equal liberty, and political representation. The concept of gender inequality within liberal feminism addresses the unequal treatment and opportunities afforded to individuals based on their gender. It highlights the need for systemic change to create a more equitable society.

According to Rosemarie Tong in her book *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (2009), gender inequality encompasses the systemic and pervasive disparities in power, opportunities, and treatment experienced by individuals based on their gender. Tong emphasizes that these disparities are deeply rooted in societal structures, cultural norms, and institutional practices that perpetuate male dominance and female subordination. From the liberal feminist perspective, she often explores how addressing gender inequality involves advocating for legal and political reforms that ensure equal rights and opportunities for women, promoting individual autonomy, and challenging traditional gender

roles and stereotypes. Tong also highlights the importance of intersectionality, recognizing that gender inequality intersects with other forms of oppression, such as race, class, and sexuality, requiring a comprehensive approach to achieve genuine equality.

Despite women now having the right to work, gender roles often still dictate distinct responsibilities for men and women. While gender is frequently conflated with biological sex, they are different concepts. In daily life, gender roles are expected behaviors tied to one's societal status. Gender roles often spark discussion as they can lead to inequality. Socialization into specific gender roles leads to rigid and inflexible expectations for both genders. Discrimination denies women equal opportunities. However, feminism has a significant impact on challenging and changing these conditions. Beyond familial and environmental influences, the mass media also subtly reinforces these gender roles, portraying men more favorably than women (Lindsey, 2016).

Even though the United States is known for its liberal values, issues of gender discrimination persist. Women find themselves subjected to discrimination, leading to restrictions on their rights due to societal stereotypes. In America, gender inequality is often found in various aspects of life. In the United States, women experience wage disparities compared to men in similar roles. Despite the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which aimed to address this issue, gender pay equality remains elusive. In 2020, women earned 82 cents for every dollar men earned, as the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported. This gender pay gap is not consistent across all racial and ethnic groups, with white women taking an additional 98 days to earn what a

man earns in a year and Black women requiring 214 extra days to achieve the same. While American Indian and Alaska Native women earn 60 Cents, Latinas earn 55 Cents, and Asian American or Pacific Islander women earn an average of 85 per dollar from white male workers and non-Hispanic males (Bleiweis, 2021).

The rise of feminism in the United States is linked to influential public figures who have significantly impacted society. As a result of the widespread support for feminism from various prominent figures, American women have become more vocal in expressing their thoughts. This includes feminist perspectives from well-known women singers, such as Taylor Swift.

In the music industry, the role of women is still often underestimated and doubted. Women in the music industry are subjected to discrimination and misogyny, which can result in unequal pay, limited opportunities, and a lack of support. A study revealed that a staggering 84% of women in the industry felt they were treated differently due to their gender, and 68% believed that gender had a direct impact on their employment prospects and career advancement (Women and Equalities Committee, 2024). These issues have profoundly impacted American female music composers' musical careers and personal lives. The disparity between the experiences of male and female composers is especially pronounced when examining the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in America. Several factors, including differences in educational opportunities, financial resources, gender roles, and societal expectations, influence this disparity. Without the progress achieved through the efforts of activists, female composers would likely

still be constrained to writing songs mainly in small forms and conforming to the gender expectations imposed upon them (Taylor & Bon, 2014).

Taylor Swift mentioned particular gender inequality that exists in her everyday life, especially in the Hollywood music industry in an interview, Swift addresses the accusations that she never wrote a song that did not contain songs about her ex-boyfriends by stating, "Frankly, that is a very sexist angle to take. No one says that about Ed Sheeran, and no one says that about Bruno Mars. They write songs about their exes, their current girlfriends, and their love lives, and no one questioned it" (2DayFMSydney, 2015). Essentially, Swift points out that people criticize women for their dating histories while overlooking the same behavior in men, and she states why she wanted to transform that irritation into a pop hit. Swift's gender inequality refers to how a gender (male or female) is favored and valued differently by others (Neubeck & Glasberg, 2006).

Taylor Swift's music reflects her experiences, offering listeners a deeply intimate look into her life through her lyrics. Employing a biographical theory to analyze her songwriting, one can see how her narrative shapes her artistic side. Swift's journey from a teenage country sensation to a global pop icon is intricately woven into her music, with each album serving as a chapter in her personal story. Her songs frequently address the joys and heartbreaks of relationships, the trials of fame, and her struggles with self-identity. By understanding the biographical context of her work, we gain insight into the motivations and emotions that drive her songwriting. From the heartbreak anthems inspired by her high-profile relationships to the empowerment ballads stemming from her public conflicts, such

as the highly publicized feud with Kanye West, Swift's life experiences are the bedrock of her musical career.

The current development of mass media has changed media culture. Until now, gender inequality has been a topic of conversation. One way to criticize gender inequality and feminism that often exists today is very diverse. For example, web pages such as YouTube, Spotify, Instagram, and Twitter are well-known among the younger generation. One of which is in the form of entertaining songs and engaging videos.

Initially, it was assumed that music had nothing to do with literary works. Before that century, music was simply a song creation without lyrics (Brown, 2000). With time, the presence of music becomes one of the factors that brings a literary work to life. Music is increasingly blended with poetry, so music is no longer instrumental but lyrical. The message is communicated through the song's lyrics. Song lyrics tell a story that will convey the message. This is the point at which music can be considered to depict or indicate events or situations in ordinary life (UK Essays, 2018). A song is a powerful tool for spreading ideas. Something that was previously seen, heard, or experienced is being expressed through the song. Songwriters often manipulate language and words to express their experiences through songs appealingly and distinctively. Many different emotional states, such as hope, desire, happiness, and even craziness, can be captured and evoked by songs.

Taylor Swift, born on December 13, 1989, is an iconic American singer-songwriter who emerged from Reading, Pennsylvania, and at 14, moved to

Nashville, Tennessee, to pursue her musical ambitions. Beginning her career with Big Machine Records, Swift's diverse compositions and musical styles have left an indelible mark on the music industry. Her journey started with country-themed albums like her self-titled debut in 2006 and the widely acclaimed *Fearless* in 2008.

Swift's musical evolution continued as she explored rock influences in *Speak Now* (2010), experimented with electronic elements in *Red* (2012), and shifted to synth-pop in the chart-topping *1989* (2014). Media scrutiny inspired her edgy hip-hop-influenced album *Reputation* (2017). Transitioning to Republic Records in 2018, Swift continued to captivate audiences with the pop-oriented *Lover* (2019) and the revealing documentary *Miss Americana* (2020).

Venturing into indie folk and alternative rock with *Folklore* and *Evermore* in 2020, she explored a more relaxed style in *Midnights* (2022), and her last album, *The Tortured Poets Department*, was released in 2024. Amidst a dispute, she re-recorded four albums as Taylor's Version, spawning chart-toppers like *Cruel Summer*, *Cardigan*, *Willow*, *Anti-Hero*, and the extended version of *All Too Well*. In 2023, Swift embarked on the Eras Tour, coinciding with the release of a concert film. Beyond her music, she showcased her directorial skills in music videos, including *The Man*, and films like *All Too Well: The Short Film* (2021).

Having sold more than 200 million records globally, Swift is one of the best-selling musicians, the most streamed woman on Spotify, the first billionaire with music as her primary source of income, and the only artist to have six albums in their first week of sales of over one million copies in the US. She has been featured on lists such as Rolling Stone's 100 Greatest Songwriters of All Time, Billboard's

Greatest Artists of All Time, Time 100, and Forbes Celebrity 100. Among her accolades are 12 Grammy Awards (including three Album of the Year wins), a Primetime Emmy Award, 40 American Music Awards, 29 Billboard Music Awards, 23 MTV Video Music Awards, three IFPI Global Recording Artist of the Year awards, and 101 Guinness World Records. Honored as Artist of the Decade and Woman of the Decade, Swift advocates for artists' rights and women's empowerment (Musicboard, 2024).

In Billboard 2019, Taylor shared how her experiences as a person, artist, and public figure in the music industry would be different if she were a man. Because, from experience, women have to work harder than men to achieve success in their work. Taylor Swift's seventh album, *Lover*, was released via Republic Records on August 23, 2019. The fourth single from this album is *The Man*, which she wrote based on her personal experience. The song Taylor Swift packaged *The Man* itself as a music video.

Taylor Swift's song entitled *The Man* is attractive to study because Taylor Swift's song *The Man* takes the perspective of a man who answers her concerns about gender inequality. Furthermore, in her lyrics and music video, Taylor Swift vividly illustrates the stark societal contrasts in how men and women are treated. She eloquently portrays how her experiences within the music industry would significantly differ if she were a man, shedding light on the inherent privileges and advantages afforded to men. Swift candidly narrates her encounters within the industry, confronting biases and inequalities that permeate her career. Her poignant lyrics articulate the disparities in treatment and opportunities, emphasizing the

obstacles she faces as a woman in a male-dominated industry. Through her powerful storytelling, Swift not only exposes the systemic gender inequality but also initiates a crucial conversation about the uneven playing field women encounter, underscoring the urgency for change in societal perceptions and practices.

In this research, the examination was carried out with a focus on the song *The Man*, which was performed, written, and directed by Taylor Swift. The analysis explores gender inequality, double standards, gender stereotypes, and sexism. Swift's diverse roles in creating songs and accompanying visual representations offer a unique lens through which to explore the intersection of music and social commentary. This research aims to reveal the messages in *The Man*, highlighting Taylor Swift's perspective on gender dynamics and societal expectations. Through a comprehensive exploration of the song's lyrics and visual elements, this research seeks to provide insight into the artist's creative expression and the socio-cultural commentary woven into his work's fabric.

In the song *The Man*, Taylor Swift includes many examples of gender inequality between men and women. This can be proven through the information in her interview. Taylor Swift said, "The presence of *The Man* music is a form of criticism of the media or those who often treat men and women differently" (Billboard, 2019). This different treatment is obtained when Taylor Swift goes online and hears stories from her fans talking about their experiences in the world of work or even at school. The more it is discussed, the better off we are, and Taylor Swift wants to make it enjoyable so that it sticks in people's heads about the song gender inequality. Taylor Swift said it was a good day (Lipshutz, Jason. 2019).

Based on the song *The Man* by Taylor Swift, the researcher has an interest in conducting research and examining more deeply the message that describes gender inequality that is still rooted in our environment. Taylor Swift's life experience in the song inspires her to write the song and inspire other people to stand up against inequality. *The Man* song on *YouTube* has over 100 million views and more than 2 million likes. Her music video was nominated for Video of the Year, Video for Good, and Best Direction at the 2020 MTV Video Music Awards, winning the latter award and making her the first solo female artist in VMA history to win the category (MTV, 2020). This means that her view is essential for this topic of research. The researcher used descriptive research with a qualitative method and American Studies as an interdisciplinary approach, including liberal feminism and biographical theory.

B. Problem Formulation

Based on the description stated above, it can be concluded that the formulation of this research problem is:

1. How is gender inequality represented in Taylor Swift's song *The Man*?
2. How does Taylor Swift's song *The Man* represent her life experience?

C. Objective Of The Study

Based on the problem formulation above, this research aims to:

1. To analyze gender inequality, represented in *The Man* music video and lyrics.
2. To reveal Taylor Swift's song *The Man* represents her life experience.

D. Scope Of The Study

The limitations of this research were established to ensure that the focus remains narrow and not wide-ranging. The focus of this research only covers Taylor Swift's song *The Man*. The study analyzes gender inequality and how the song represents Taylor Swift's life experience. Applying liberal feminist perspectives and biographical criticism theory, the study will explore the gender double standards and their manifestation in her lived experiences.

E. Review Of Related Study

This research, indeed, cannot be separated from previous research. This is because the author considers there are no similarities in conducting research and as reference material. In this section, the author provides four journals that are considered suitable to prove that gender double standards can indeed still be found and, therefore, are still worth researching again. The results of the review by the author are as follows:

The first research related to this study is *Liberal Feminism As Seen In Christina Aguilera's Song Lyrics In Stripped Album* by Rosfika Ulfianti (2020), an undergraduate thesis from Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. The issue of gender equality, particularly in the context of feminism, is actively discussed and has become a significant concern for advocates. Supporters of feminism use various platforms, including music, to express their views on this matter. Christina Aguilera, a known feminist, uses her music to support this cause. This research employs a qualitative method with an interdisciplinary approach involving culture and social studies to analyze the liberal feminist values in Christina's songs, such as *Beautiful*, *Can't*

Hold Us Down, I'm OK, Stripped Intro, Make Over, Soar, and The Voice Within. The research aims to connect these values and Christina's life experiences. The findings indicate that Christina's songs encompass liberal feminist values, emphasizing equality in education, politics, economic opportunities, and gender equality. These values resonate with her personal history, reflecting a desire for equal opportunities and an improved quality of life for women, free from the challenges she has faced. In this previous study, researchers used the same liberal feminism theory by Rosemarie Tong to find gender inequality in Taylor Swift's song *The Man*. To set this research apart, the author uses the lyrics and music video for Taylor Swift's song *The Man* as objects and biographical criticism theory by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren.

Second, the previous study in this research is *Taylor Swift's Feminist Perspective As Seen In Her Song Lyrics 1989 Album*, an undergraduate thesis from Universitas Ahmad Dahlan written by Annisa Farida Rachman (2019). The aims of this undergraduate thesis are to analyze the values of feminism reflected in the song lyrics of the 1989 album and to analyze the relationship between Taylor Swift's song lyrics of the 1989 album and her life experience. This undergraduate thesis used the descriptive qualitative method, in which data is not in the form of numbers. It is also supported by American Studies and uses an interdisciplinary approach. It means that it is not only based on one discipline but could be more. This research used two disciplines, they are pop culture and feminism. The results of this study show that, First, there are four feminist values conveyed in the six songs in the 1989 album: being independent (*Welcome to New York*), being courageous (*Bad Blood*),

being self-determination (*Style and Wildest Dream*), and being free (*Shake it off* and *New Romantics*). Second, there is a relationship between her life experience and the song lyrics in the 1989 album. Taylor wrote her life experience to keep her memory alive because life experience is valuable. The difference between this previous study and this is the topic and the theory. Liberal feminism is one of the theories used in this research. The object is Taylor Swift but with a different album and song. The researcher also uses the biographical theory by Warren and Wellek to analyze this research further.

Third, *Women Inequality as Reflected In Louisa May Alcott's Little Women: A Liberal Feminist Theory* by Fatimah Pungkasari (2022) from Ahmad Dahlan University. The research investigates gender inequality during the 19th century in America, using the novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. Employing a descriptive qualitative analysis method, the study is grounded in the liberal feminism theories of Mary Wollstonecraft and Rosemarie Tong. Primary data is extracted from the novel, supplemented by information from relevant books, journals, articles, and the internet. The results highlight that women's roles within families are influenced by their backgrounds, while in education and social spheres, women are often limited to roles such as teaching and domestic work. The characters in the novel exemplify the inequalities women faced during that time, particularly in terms of freedom, access to education, and opportunities. To distinguish this article from earlier ones, the researcher employs liberal feminism by Rosemarie Tong and Biographical Criticism as theoretical frameworks to analyze the lyrics and music video *The Man*. Despite both researchers utilizing

liberal feminism theory, this research only uses Rosemarie Tong's theory as a scholar, focuses on distinct aspects, and incorporates additional theories to enhance the depth of their respective investigations.

Last, *Gender Inequality Experienced By Bel In Alexene Farola's My Mechanical Romance: A Liberal Feminism Study* by Badriyah (2023) from Ahmad Dahlan University. This research aims to analyze the gender stereotype in *My Mechanical Romance* novel and how that creates inequality between men and women in STEM. And describe how liberal feminism is portrayed through the main character, Bel. The study uses the theory of liberal feminism proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft. To analyze the novel, this study used a qualitative descriptive research method. The result of this study is that the inequalities in the novel *My Mechanical Romance* are one example of discrimination against women. To differentiate gender inequality, the researcher used the liberal feminism theory by Rosemarie Tong and the biographical criticism theory as the second theory. The researcher also used a different object, which is a song by Taylor Swift.

F. Research Methodology

Qualitative research adopts a unique viewpoint distinct from quantitative research methods. In contrast to quantitative approaches, qualitative research does not seek to quantify phenomena. Research involves a systematic scientific approach to gather data for a specific purpose and objective. This investigation employs qualitative methods, including generating descriptive data by observing individuals or analyzing written or spoken language.

While diverse qualitative methods may have distinct approaches to examining social or health contexts, they all share the perspective that the world is subjective rather than objective (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This subjectivity implies that the environmental and sociocultural context of the study significantly influences the research results. Qualitative research recognizes the unattainability of objectivity, emphasizing that findings are inherently shaped by the specific context in which they are derived (Pascale, 2011).

In his book *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, Creswell (2014) delineates two primary research approaches: qualitative and quantitative. Drawing from Braun and Clarke, he characterizes qualitative research as using words as data, collected and analyzed in diverse ways. This contrasts with quantitative methods utilizing measurements or statistics as data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The selected research approach for this study is qualitative, primarily due to its reliance on text and image data.

Creswell goes on to expound on qualitative research methodologies, highlighting that researchers can concentrate on examining individuals through narrative or phenomenology, investigate processes, activities, and events using case studies or grounded theory, or explore the broader culturally shared behavior of individuals or groups through ethnography (Creswell, 2014).

1. Data and Source of Data

In this study, the researcher categorized data sources into primary and support data. The specific details regarding each type of data will be elucidated separately as follows:

a. Main Data

The primary data for this research are obtained from Taylor Swift's song *The Man*, released in 2019, which serves as the object of the study. The researcher intends to analyze the scenes depicting instances of gender inequality thoroughly and to find the correlation with Taylor Swift's life by listening to the music, watching the video on YouTube, and watching the documentary on Netflix more than three times to gain a comprehensive understanding.

b. Supporting Data

The supporting data for this research is sourced from various outlets, including *Miss Americana* (2020) documentary as supporting data, books, interviews, award speeches, the internet, relevant materials, and other theses and journals that share similarities with the discussed topic and theory in this thesis. This diverse array of sources aims to bolster the research on the topic and assist the writer in analyzing the issues under discussion.

2. Method and Technique of Collecting Data

According to Creswell (2014), collecting data involves defining the study's scope, gathering information through unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews, examining documents and visual materials, and establishing a protocol for recording information. Another approach involves reviewing articles and books related to similar topics to supplement the material. Additionally, visits to the Universitas Ahmad Dahlan library and the English Self-Access Centre were made to read other theses and compare them with this research's subject matter.

Therefore, the researcher implemented the following steps to gather the data:

- a. The primary data source selected by the researcher is Taylor Swift's song *The Man*.
- b. The researcher engages in multiple viewings of the lyrics and music video, thoroughly understanding the content to extract data on gender inequality and the song's correlation with Taylor Swift as the songwriter.
- c. The researcher compiles a list of data, and the relevant information is chosen in alignment with the research problems.

3. Method and Technique of Analyzing Data

As per Creswell (2014), data analysis in qualitative research is a continual process that demands constant reflection on the data. This process is termed continuous because it unfolds not only during the interpretation stage but also concurrently throughout data collection, interpretation, and the reporting of results.

The researcher attempts to comprehend gender inequality and their connection to the songwriter's experience after seeing and reading the lyrics and music video for Taylor Swift's song *The Man*. The researcher first arranges the data using liberal feminism and biographical theory, then examines the song's lyrics. The data is then divided into two groups by the researcher: those representing gender inequality values such as equal rights in politics and economics, equal liberty, equal education, and suffrage, and those biographical theory that represent Taylor Swift's personal experience and her inspiration in writing this song. The lyrics accurately capture the feminist movement, particularly in Hollywood and the music industry. The song's central theme is women's experiences with double standards and what they would do if given the same opportunities as males.

G. Presentation

The undergraduate thesis is structured into four main sections by the researcher. The initial chapter serves as an Introduction, encompassing the reasoning behind selecting the study, defining the problem, stating objectives, specifying the study's scope, reviewing related literature, outlining research methods, discussing theoretical perspectives, and presenting the study's layout. The subsequent chapter delves into the theoretical approach and framework. Following that, the third chapter analyzes the research findings of how gender inequality is represented, as seen in Taylor Swift's song *The Man* and how Taylor Swift's song *The Man* represents her life experience. Finally, the fourth and concluding chapter summarizes the research and its outcomes.