



Gender Inequality and Power Imbalance in Taylor Swift's Songs "Dear John" and "All Too Well"

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Abstract: Gender inequality and power imbalance in romantic relationship are recurring themes in both media and society. The aim of this research is to analyze how these issues are portrayed in Taylor Swift's songs *Dear John* and *All Too Well* through lyrical expression and narrative voice. This research uses two theories, Raewyn Connell's Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity and Sylvia Walby's Theory of Patriarchy, to analyze the lyrics of these songs. The research methodology employs qualitative research using content analysis, with a focus on thematic interpretation and close reading of the lyrics. The findings show how traditional ideas of masculinity, like emotional detachment and control, can lead to unfair relationships. The analysis also shows how patriarchy works, including emotional manipulation, male violence, and the cultural acceptance of male dominance. These ideas are shown in the songs' narratives. The conclusion shows how Swift's lyrics strongly comment on the common issues of gender inequality and power imbalance in personal relationships. They challenge traditional ideas of male power and express the experience of women in these situations.

Keywords: *Gender inequality, power imbalance, hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and Taylor Swift*

INTRODUCTION

Gender Inequality and power imbalance in lover relationships manifest in the form of control and emotional manipulation. You can witness these relationships through cultural forms of expression like music and academic literature. Studies reveal that emotional abuse is the most common form of violence within an intimate relationship. Emotional abuse is the practice of making another person feel guilty, gaslighting, humiliation, neglect, and controlling. This kind of abuse is used to control and diminish a person's self-worth and independence (Karakurt et al., 2025). Men's traditional duties and expectations by society

can lead to such power inequalities. Where there is little wealth, men can use violence rooted in emotion in order to show who is in charge due to socially and economically changing situations that make traditional notions of masculinity irrelevant.

Gender inequality and power imbalance also influence who is victimized and who is targeted. Research in Spain and elsewhere shows that financial, psychological, and emotional control mainly targets women in new relationships. Gender stereotypes cause people to apologize for abuse and limit women's choices to leave. Besides, liberal or non-conventional gender perspectives among women may include intense episodes of

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violence, such as sexual manipulation and psychological abuse, since entitled partners react aggressively against perceived threats to male privilege. The large body of evidence supports the fact that cultural norms reinforced by media, relationship scripts, and institutional structures maintain male privilege through coercive and emotionally abusive strategies built into romantic or traditional narratives. Such a dynamic suppresses women's voices and views and therefore exacerbates gender inequality in private as well as public life (Adolph, 2023). Such unequal and discriminatory treatment patterns are witnessed in day-to-day life as well as popular culture, especially in songs. Songs, as a form of literature, allow people to express personal experiences and societal issues. Through literature, people can use words to communicate their ideas and emotions (Priyoto & Zidane, 2025). In such songs, the singers often talk about their personal experiences of emotional abuse and gendered power relations.

Song is a vocal or instrumental piece of music. A song is the gift of quiet to the one who can listen faithfully and generously to it, according to (Ang et al., 2019). A song is also the attempt to impose some order on the sounds that are trying to make themselves heard through the quiet of the silence. Vocal and accompaniment songs form a central part of it whose development has been a subject of interest in academia and industry in recent years. The songwriters communicate the concepts, ideas, and emotions that they derive from the experience and imagination that they have experienced. During the composing of the song itself, they test and try words and languages in order for the resulting song to possess a sense of its own compared to a different song (Herlyna et al., 2024).

Moreover, music is a great platform for people to express themselves and their feelings. Artists can convey emotions that are hard to put into plain words in music. Happy, sad, in love, or heartbroken, songs enable them to convert those feelings into something people can associate with by putting them into words in the form of lyrics. The majority of artists use their songs to shed light on major issues like equality, fairness, and doing what is right. Their music makes people think, feel, and even act on it,

showing that songs can indeed make a difference in the world.

Taylor Swift is a talented songwriter and an amazing singer. She has written so many songs throughout her career based on diverse subjects and themes. Her music touches people because she tends to write about her experiences, feelings, and opinions about life. That is what makes her songs universal to her audience, as they can feel identified with her on a deeper level. Some of her tracks which are very popular include Cruel Summer, Blank Space, Style, Lover, Enchanted, Daylight, August, You Belong With Me, Delicate, Gorgeous, and many more. However, in this research, the writer does not investigate all the songs. The writer only uses these songs with the title "Dear John" and "All Too Well" as the object of research. Because according to the writer this Dear John and All Too Well songs has gender inequality and power imbalance issues.

Taylor Swift is one such artist who does this in such a remarkable manner. She does not simply write about her life through song, she writes music to connect with people on a deeper level. She writes honestly and openly in her music, and they often strike a chord with emotions and feelings that we all have experienced but may not be able to articulate. Meanwhile, she also uses her platform to speak about larger issues such as women's rights and the everyday struggle of women. Her music tells us that we do not have to walk alone, and her music tells us to consider how we can make a difference. She's proof of the ability of music to connect, to bring awareness, and to promote change, while also being something we like to listen to. Taylor addresses issues like women's rights, empowerment, and the struggles women face in society in her music. She uses her platform to champion justice and encourage women to assert themselves.

Based on this explanation, the writer uses Dear John and Too Well as a research object because it is related to gender inequality and power imbalance. Moreover, in this research, the writer uses a feminist approach.

The writer provides three previous studies and shows the differences between this study and each previous study. The first relevant research is conducted by Kim A. Pillado and is entitled "Patriarchy and Women's Struggle in

Selected

Boom and Post-Boom Novels (2023)". The similarity between Pillado's study and that of the writer is the factor of considering women resisting patriarchal oppression. The difference is that her study looks at fictional characters within books, but this study looks at actual life-inspired relationships in real life through Swift's music. Both studies see power imbalances, but the difference is that this study concerns song lyrics.

The second relevant research is conducted by Silvia Putri Anjani entitled "The Analysis of Patriarchy and Feminism of Katherine in The Taming of the Shrew (2024)". The similarity between Anjani's research and this research is the exploration of power dynamics and control in relationships. The difference is that Anjani's study analyzes Katherine's behavior in a Shakespearean play, while the writer examines gender inequality in Swift's *Dear John* and *All Too Well*. Both studies critique power imbalance, but in this research the writer also analyzes gender inequality from the songs.

The third relevant research was conducted by Anita Mardiana and Ambar Andayani entitled "Analysis of Patriarchy in Hanna Lynn's *Athena's Child* (2023)". The similarity between Mardiana and Andayani's research and this research is that both discuss the challenges women face in patriarchal societies such as gender inequality. The difference is that their study focuses on a fictional character's journey to independence, while the writer analyzes Swift's real-life-inspired lyrics. Both focus on the emotional price of patriarchy but in a twist that the author uses lyrical narrative to explore imbalances of power and gender inequality in relationships.

Previous studies on gender inequality and power imbalances have predominantly centered on fictional characters in literary works or theatrical performances. Pillado (2023), for instance, examined women's resistance to patriarchy in novels, while Anjani (2024) explored power dynamics in a Shakespearean play, and Mardiana & Andayani (2023) highlighted a fictional heroine's struggle for independence. While these studies have shed light on patriarchal structures and female resistance, none have explored how gendered power imbalances are expressed through lyrical narratives based on real-life experiences. This

indicates a research gap in analyzing song lyrics, particularly those inspired by actual relationships as powerful texts that reveal how patriarchy operates emotionally and socially. Thus, this study presents a novelty by examining Taylor Swift's *Dear John* and *All Too Well* through the lens of gender inequality and power imbalance in contemporary music discourse, offering a unique bridge between lyrical expression and real-world gender critique.

Related to the things explained above, the writer is interested in using the song from Taylor Swift's entitled "*Dear John*" and "*All Too Well*" as the object of research in writing the article because the writer can find problems related to gender inequality and power imbalance in Taylor's song.

METHODS

In this study examining gender inequality and power imbalance in Taylor Swift's songs "*Dear John*" and "*All Too Well*," a qualitative descriptive approach was used. The approach is well-suited to research that aims to describe an event or phenomenon clearly and in detail, especially where data from text requires interpretation without undue theoretical abstraction.

Qualitative descriptive research is interested in describing experiences or events in the everyday language, making it a handy choice for social research. (Rusandi & Muhammad Rusli, 2021) state that this method keeps researchers closely connected with the true words and experiences being researched, thereby allowing a rich firsthand depiction of the subject matter. It's particularly helpful when one desires to gain profounder and more integrated knowledge about a subject.

The qualitative descriptive method facilitated a critical analysis of the two songs lyrics and that which was learned about the gender relations and power structures shown there. Through a critical reading of the language and vocabularies used in the songs, the research was able to recognize major themes and reflect on the general social messages conveyed through Swift's storytelling.

The data are lyrics and songs entitled "*Dear John*" (2010) and "*All Too Well*" (2012) by Taylor Swift. The writer chose the two

songs as the object of this research. Other sources that help with the research. These include online articles, journals, earlier studies that talk about Taylor Swift's songwriting and the background of the songs. These sources add more information to support the analysis.

For this gender inequality and power imbalance analysis of the Taylor Swift songs "Dear John" and "All Too Well," the writer uses note-taking as the main technique. The research instruments used are a notebook, pen, laptop, and of course, the songs themselves. The writer plays the songs back numerous times, paying close attention to the lyrics and seeing what themes present themselves with power and control. The notebook is used to jot down ideas and observations, and the laptop keeps everything in order and systematic, including the notes and other research or articles. These products enable the writer to collect, research, and make sense of the information in a thoughtful and systematic way.

The data were gathered by repeatedly listening to Taylor Swift's songs "Dear John" and "All Too Well," and carefully listening for lyrics that indicate problems of gender inequality and power imbalance. To continue the analysis, the author also browsed different support materials, including e-journals, articles, and web discussions on Swift's music and the recurring themes of control and power in her stories. In addition, relevant research and academic materials were consulted to gain insight into the theoretical foundation and background of these themes. From there, the writer selected single lyrics most accurately to signal the gender and power dynamics of the songs.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Power imbalance and gender disparity are still prevalent in love relationships and typically rely on social commands that emphasize masculine superiority and undervalue women's labor. Feminist theory describes how these imbalances get reproduced by institutional structures and cultural scripts. For instance, research indicates that men prefer to dominate decisions, while women prefer to do the emotional labor of relationship work. These patterns not only reproduce patriarchal gender scripts but also minimize individual agency. (O'Connor et al., 2019)

This analysis explores the gendered dynamics in Taylor Swift's songs "Dear John" and "All Too Well" through two distinct theoretical lenses. Using Raewyn Connell's Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity (1987), the first theory examines how dominant forms of masculinity reinforce male authority and the subordination of femininity within intimate relationships, the writer investigates the lyrics to uncover representations of male dominance and control. Separately, the second theory applies to Sylvia Walby's Theory of Patriarchy (1990), which identifies the structural mechanisms through which patriarchal power functions. Walby identified six main ways this patriarchal works such as paid work, household work, culture, sexuality, male violence, and the state. In this study, the writer only uses four of the six main ways to analyze the songs. The writer analyzes the songs to reveal how systems such as emotional manipulation, male control, and dominance shape unequal romantic dynamics.

Connell's Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity

(1987)

Emotional Manipulation and Gaslighting

Dear John (2010)

Stanza 3, Line 3:

*Don't you think I was too young to be
messed with?*

This line expresses the sheer pain of having been emotionally manipulated by someone older and more experienced. Taylor Swift's tone here is not just sad, it is hurt, confused, and questioning. She is reflecting on how her youth and emotional openness were not cared for and protected, but used against her. It is a line that sends shivers down the spine as it shines a light on the unevenness at the heart of the relationship, one where power was quietly but deliberately tipped in his favor.

Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory accounts for this dynamic. Connell explains how men are often rewarded by society for exhibiting traits such as dominance, emotional toughness, and control, representing them as natural or even desirable (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The older partner's power here is not just age, it is emotional and psychological, supported by cultural scripts that position men as dominant in relationships. What may seem like maturity or confidence can rather be a controlling habit, one that leaves the

younger partner feeling unstable and insecure.

This emotional distortion is compounded when the individual being gaslit feels that the abuser is making them question their own sanity and value. The lyrics to the song, including the line "Don't you think I was too young to be messed with?" call for justice and also comment on how

traditional definitions of masculinity can sometimes disguise abuse. Society norms make it okay that the older partner controls and does not feel a thing, but to frame that as bad for the younger woman. Feminist critics describe this as not an accident or something that happens every now and then, but as an everyday allocation of power based on gender. The song documents more than a broken individual heart. It also communicates the manner in which cultural norms occasionally allow men to be manipulatively emotional in the name of romance.

Stanza 7, Line 1:

*You're an expert at sorry and keeping
lines
blurry*

She is pointing out that the man she sings about apologizes but doesn't mean anything by it. He also keeps things unclear about what his and her relationship status is. Such a behavior, where someone tries to make you doubt your own emotions and understanding, is a form of emotional deception.

According to Connell's theory of how men typically try to stay in power, this ambivalence is what keeps the man in power. By confusing the woman about what is going on, she starts questioning herself and her feelings. This makes her more likely to acquiesce and less assertive in the emotional game of the relationship.

Masculine Detachment and Narrative Power

All Too Well (2012)

Stanza 4, Line 3 &

4:

*Wind in my hair, I was
there I remember it all
too well.*

Swift inserts herself firmly into the memory of the relationship, refusing to let her experience be erased or erased. It is a subtle but assertive reclaiming of emotional truth. Rather

than allowing the strong story that is often so constructed through male forgetfulness or selective recall erase her account, she holds on to what she knew and felt. This resistance disregards hegemonic masculinity's protocols, as understood by Connell, which work to silence or discount emotional perspectives that do not align with its ideals, most notably those of women. In a culture where male emotional distance is accepted as a symbol of strength, Swift's emotional wholeness is a form of resistance. She insists on being heard in her story, even if it is inconvenient and uncomfortable for everyone else to listen. This lyric is another way of looking at the gendered imbalance in storytelling where men often define what happened in a relationship and their version is taken seriously. In relationships where men are in control, they often decide how the relationship is seen by others. When Swift says, "I was there," she directly challenges that power. Her words act as a form of testimony, reclaiming her emotional experience from being dismissed or distorted by men's emotional detachment. This shows how men often use their emotional distance to avoid responsibility, letting them escape without any consequences. In the process, women are left feeling hurt and with the burden of proving their feelings.

Stanza 8, Line 1 & 2:

*And maybe we got lost in translation
maybe I asked for too much.*

This line reveals an exchange of deep self-doubt. The narrator begins to question whether in some way she was the problem, if she communicated improperly, if her emotional needs were too draining. It is something that a lot of women can relate to: assuming blame when they do not have the compassion of a person who loves them. Her partner's failure to meet her vulnerability with compassion creates an emotional void. Instead of accepting her emotional status, he steps aside and allows her to sift through her actions herself to discover the answers. Connell calls this state of emotional distance a trait of hegemonic masculinity, enabling the male to maintain supremacy without even engaging himself. By maintaining his emotions in check, he sets the tone for the mood of the relationship and its fate. He dictates not only how the relationship appears on the outside, but how the woman

begins to view herself. The imbalance forces her to question her own opinion while he escapes blame, reinforcing a male comfortingly-defined equality instead of emotional truth.

Connell's theory helps illuminate how male emotional detachment operates as a tool of control within gendered power structures. In "All Too Well," the male figure's reluctance to fully engage emotionally reinforces his dominance, leaving the female narrator isolated in her emotional experience. However, her decision to articulate and memorialize this pain through song becomes an act of resistance. By giving voice to the emotional truth of the relationship, she challenges the silence imposed by hegemonic masculinity

and reclaims narrative agency in the face of gender inequality.

***Sylvia Walby's (1990) theory of patriarchy
Male Violence***

Dear John (2010)

Stanza 3, Line 3:

*Don't you think I was too young to be
messed
with?*

This line shows a clear difference in power between the two, based on age, experience, and emotional maturity. The man is emotionally abusive through the rhetorical question, not physically, but still harmful. Walby's definition of male violence includes more than just physical violence. It also includes emotional and psychological domination, especially when the violence is caused by unequal power between men and women.

In Swift's story, the older man uses his age and the fact that he is presumed to be wise to gain power over a younger partner who is less experienced. This puts the younger partner in a position of vulnerability and dependence. The phrase "messed with" suggests gaslighting, emotional manipulation, and even grooming, forms of soft violence that are commonly depicted in romantic stories with a male-dominated perspective.

This line also nods to a broader cultural pattern where young women's voices are usually invalidated or discounted, especially when they resist older male authority. Defending the justice of being "messed with," Swift takes back her narrative and resists being

silenced that usually comes with being emotionally abused. Her account is also both a personal challenge and social critique, highlighting just how normalized and ordinary such power imbalances are within patriarchal structures. Walby's theory explains this experience not as an exception, but as part of a systemic pattern under which male violence is used to assert control. Swift's song is thus a resistance, exposing those insidious, psychological forms of male dominance which too often go unresisted in love relationships.

All Too Well (2012)

Stanza 8, Line 1 &

2:

*And maybe we got lost in translation
Maybe I asked for too much*

This line suggests self-blame and affects disorientation in response to abandonment and invalidation. Swift questions her own behavior and desires, reflecting the psychological toll of a relationship in which emotional needs are undermined or punished. This insidious form of emotional abuse, named in gaslighting, disrespect, and withholding, can be read as non-corporeal but deeply destructive expression of male violence.

Walby's patriarchal hierarchy of male violence extends not just to physical but to psychological and emotional abuse as tactics of patriarchal domination. The behavior of the male authority displaces Swift's emotional sense, leading her to question herself and censor herself. This is the coercive dynamic that many women endure, in which emotional pain is translated into oversensitivity or personal failure. In this lyric, Swift makes visible the gendered nature of emotional harm that too frequently goes unremarked in patriarchal cultures.

Disorientation in the lyric is consistent with what feminist theorist Sara Ahmed refers to as internalization of patriarchal discourses. In *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook* (2023), Ahmed writes about the "feminist killjoy" figure, a term that she employs to refer to one who disrupts social unity by recognizing and challenging injustices. Ahmed says, "When you speak up about a problem, you are a problem," because women who speak up about emotional distress are likely to be made the target of criticism rather than the systems of harm. Swift's tentative phrasing "maybe I asked for

too much" is a manifestation of learned deference, a gentle giving way to male emotional authority. Her emotional confusion is not just personal but systemic: a conditioned response to usual invalidation. As such, the lyric is a microcosm in and of itself of the way women are taught to distrust their emotional realities and dampen their relational pain in order to preserve male comfort.

Finally, the lyric's invocation at once of miscommunication ("lost in translation") and blame ("asked for too much") is an icon of language harm erasure. The translation metaphor is an allusion to the impossibility of achieving emotional competence in a relationship where power is unequal. Her voice, funneled through the interpretive power of the male partner, is made unintelligible, even to herself. "Maybe I asked for too much" is not rhetorical but a conditioned repetition of patriarchal presumption that pathologized women's emotional requests as excessive. In putting this thought into song, Swift not only subverts this erasure but exposes the emotional vulnerability imposed by gendered power.

Sexuality

Dear John (2010)

Stanza 4, Line 5 & 6:

And you'll add my name

*To your long list of traitors who
don't
understand*

This verse is characteristic of the manner in which patriarchal sexuality will encompass domination of emotional narratives and delegitimization of female voice. The male partner, Swift proposes, has had a history of romantic relationships whereby women are blamed for the ending of the relationship, replaying the figure of the over-emotional, irrational woman. Walby argues that patriarchal control of sexuality is often framed in terms of who gets to define the limits of the relationship, who holds the emotional authority, and who gets to exit with dignity. In so doing, the woman is not positioned as a co-equal agent but instead as a provisional subject in a broader pattern of disposability among women. The accusation of betrayal employs guilt and shame to police female autonomy, emphasizing the dominant discourse of the male partner.

This act of narrative recuperation is especially powerful when taken in terms of feminist resistance. Drawing upon the pattern, being called a one of many "betrayers who don't understand" Swift illustrates how patriarchal sexuality relies on repetition and stereotype to keep dissent down. Females who break expectations or reverse male behavior are quickly reduced to categories and stigmatized, denied distinction and credibility. In doing so, patriarchal structures exercise power not merely over relationships, but also over memory and heritage. Swift's poetic defiance shatters this configuration, claiming her right to write her own emotional reality. With Walby's theory, this becomes greater than anecdotal testimony, it is a political statement of refusal against the structures of reference that attempt to silence or misrepresent women's voices in the name of male emotional ascendancy.

All Too Well (2012)

Stanza 8, Line 3:

*But maybe this thing was a masterpiece
'til
you tore it all up*

This line highlights a stark asymmetry of control over narrative and emotional direction of the relationship. Swift presents the relationship as something deeply meaningful, even life-altering, a work of art and yet it is summarily and unilaterally dismantled by the male partner. This suggests that the authority to define and end the relationship lies with him, and Swift's character must be left to pick up the emotional pieces.

According to Sylvia Walby's model of sexuality under patriarchy, sexual and loving relationships are likely to be controlled by male power and privilege. Within this model, men are likely to possess the power to initiate and terminate relationships, with women being emotionally dependent and socially powerless. Swift's lyric memorably captures this dynamic: her emotions and perspective are invalidated the moment he "tore it all up," underscoring the lack of reciprocity, respect, and shared power. The lyric thus exposes how patriarchal gender norms can render women's romantic visibility precarious and subject to masculine authority.

Culture

Dear John (2010)

Stanza 7, Line 7:

*I'm shining like fireworks over your
sad
empty town*

This metaphor is a picture of female resilience and emotional force contrasted with the emotional emptiness of the male partner. The lyric turns around cultural scripts symbolically: while the male presence is assumed by emotional dryness, the woman shines and is expressive even when invalidated.

Walby's understanding of culture in this case is the sociocultural norms and media representations valorizing men's stoicism and penalizing women's expression. Swift examines in this song a culture that values emotionally detached men and ridicules women for expressing pain, need, or complexity. The fireworks metaphor of being short, beautiful, and transient captures how female emotional labor is employed and disposed of, as if entertainment.

In addition, the line implies the woman's identity and emotional expression are performative in a society that refuses to listen to them. It points out how patriarchal culture socializes women as temporary, decorative, and replaceable when they are being emotionally productive.

All Too Well (2012)

Stanza 9, Line 1:

*And you call me up again just to break me
like a promise*

This line is a repeated cycle of emotional harm, as the male figure keeps going back to the relationship so he can continue to hurt. The emotional vulnerability of the speaker is taken advantage of, since the male partner still holds the power of deciding when and how he engages. His ability to go and come as he likes and inflict pain is further supporting a power imbalance in feelings, as his actions have no seeming social cost, whereas the speaker gets to absorb the emotional cost.

Sylvia Walby's cultural model of patriarchy gives a great context for understanding this dynamic. Walby outlines how media, tradition, and the norms of popular culture support gendered expectations in relationships. Men are traditionally given emotional detachment and control, whereas women are expected to be emotionally open, forgiving, and accommodating. This gives an

uneven emotional burden where women are supposed to maintain the emotional integrity of the relationship when they are actually the ones being continuously hurt.

Swift is condemning this inequality by exposing the emotional toll that patriarchal society exacts on women. The lyric emphasizes how the emotional availability of the speaker is used against her, a pervasive cultural practice in which women's emotional work is taken advantage of and dismissed. By doing this, Swift is challenging the social convention of women being required to forgive and maintain time and again, while men are permitted to pull away, return, and hurt without accountability.

The Household

Dear John (2010)

Stanza 4, Line 1 & 2:

Well, maybe it's me

And my blind optimism to blame

This line shows that the woman is guilt-ridden for the outcome of the relationship. The guilt is what is demanded of women from society, that is, they are expected to keep the relationship afloat even if they were not the ones at fault. The "blind optimism" of the speaker is similar to emotional labor, where females are supposed to be optimistic, sympathetic, and forgiving while this takes a toll on their emotions. Sylvia Walby's explanation discusses the way families are managed in a patriarchal society where men enjoy greater power. Her work on gender reveals that females tend to perform unpaid work within the family, such as managing emotions and maintaining relationships. Although the work is not considered actual labor, it is quite significant for family and societal living (Walby, 2020). Such a situation maintains gender inequality since females must perform emotional work, while men do not carry out similar activities.

In the context of *Dear John*, the relationship becomes a symbolic household, where Swift assumes the role of emotional caretaker. Her tendency to internalize fault and sustain emotional effort despite neglect mirrors the invisible labor women perform in patriarchal households. Swift critiques this imbalance, exposing how these traditional roles are replicated even in romantic relationships that do not involve shared domestic space.

All Too Well (2012)

Stanza 7, Line 3 &

4:

*Down the stairs, I was
there I remember it all
too well*

In "All Too Well," Taylor Swift takes on the role of the one who remembers, who holds the emotional weight of a relationship that has long since ended. This line, "I was there, I remember it all too well," might seem simple on the surface, but it speaks volumes about what it means to carry feelings that the other person seems to have forgotten. It echoes Sylvia Walby's idea of the patriarchal household, where women are often expected to do invisible work. But here, instead of housework, it is the quiet, heavy labor of processing grief, reflecting on what went wrong, and holding onto the emotional truth of what happened.

The memory is more than just a flashback; it is a burden. The speaker is not just reminiscing, she is doing something. She is keeping the story alive, even when it hurts. Her remembering is not optional, it feels necessary, maybe even involuntary because someone has to make sense of the silence, the loss, and the disconnect. While he moves on, detached and untouched, she is the one left to untangle the emotions, pick up the pieces, and try to understand it all. That imbalance, where one person walks away and the other carries the emotional aftermath is heartbreakingly familiar to many.

What's striking is that none of this takes place in a shared home or traditional domestic space. Still, the dynamics feel deeply domestic in the emotional sense. The woman becomes the caretaker of feelings, even after the relationship ends. She is doing the emotional labor that often goes unseen, just like the unpaid work women have done for generations. Swift's song gently, but powerfully, shows how these patterns persist: women are expected to feel more, to hold more, and to hurt more quietly. And in singing that pain out loud, the speaker refuses to let it stay invisible.

CONCLUSION

This study clearly shows how Taylor Swift's songs "Dear John" and "All Too Well" portray unfairness among men and women and when one person has more power in a relationship. In

the analysis of the lyrics, there are consistent theme where men who act as though they are better (being cold and controlling) make the relationships unbalanced. The study also found that the way society is commonly organized to advantage men can lead to emotional deception, subtle ways of men being violent through the use of words and emotions, and the attitude that it is acceptable for men to dominate without adequately taking into account the feelings of women.

In this context, the Taylor Swift songs "Dear John" (2010) and "All Too Well" (2012) are related to issues of gender inequality and power imbalances in relationships, and in this research the writer uses a feminism approach with Connell's Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity (1987) and Sylvia Walby's (1990) theory of patriarchy, and the writer uses qualitative methods.

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