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Exposing privilege, performing power: *The Man* by Taylor Swift

While Taylor Swift first became famous as a masterful storyteller and a poet of teen angst, in *The Man* she transforms that sensibility into a broader critique of gendered double standards, shifting from personal frustration to structural analysis. I propose that this music video presents itself as a feminist satire that uses a male alter ego to reveal the mechanisms – or ideologies of power – through which (white) cis male privilege operates within a binary gender framework.

The singer and songwriter transforms herself into Tyler Swift, who embodies a lens through which we are able to see how naturalized it is for cis men to claim or appropriate space and wield power. In this context, “being a white male” refers to possessing a level of social and emotional security that women in our society often lack. The lyrics of *The Man* highlight this asymmetry by addressing gendered interpretations of private life and emotion, the questioning of women's credibility, the gender pay gap and media narratives about success, as well as the objectification of women in assessments of professional competence.

The song also explores the theme of toxic masculinity and patriarchal impulses, which Swift illustrates through several performative scenes: in public space, Tyler engages in *manspreading* -male bodily entitlement that forces women into spatial and bodily restraint; in the spheres of career and romance, he embodies a *Wolf of Wall Street*-like figure who enjoys luxury and serial relationships without the scrutiny often directed at women. Furthermore, in scenes of parenting and sport, he is praised as the 'best dad' for minimal effort and framed as a 'passionate player' after a tennis-court outburst, highlighting how certain male behaviour is normalised or even celebrated.

The video concludes with a meta moment where Swift, as the director, asks the male star to be 'more sexy, more likeable'. By reversing the dynamic that is usually directed towards female performers, she satirizes the industry's gendered expectations. Lastly, while *The Man* operates within a binary framework to offer a sharp and accessible critique of the everyday normalization of cisgender white male privilege in relation to women, it overlooks the more complex inequality of other gender and queer identities.