

**The Performance of Authenticity and Commodified Vulnerability in Taylor Swift's *Miss Americana* and Billie Eilish: *The World's a Little Blurry***

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### Abstract

This textual analysis examines the performance of authenticity displayed through “private” moments within two modern-day music documentaries. Historically, rock documentaries have differed from traditional documentaries by following their subjects through performances, backstage mischief, studio rehearsals, and encounters with fans. Drawing from examples within Taylor Swift's *Miss Americana* and *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry*, I argue that these more contemporary films add new layers of audience access by disclosing open discussions of how taboo topics affect the artists' public stage persona, studio, and home life. I conclude that this openness commodifies their vulnerability as a way to meet increasing expectations of full transparency during the age of cancel culture and consider how their performer identities extend beyond the camera and into social comparison amongst teens.

## Introduction

This study critically analyzes the representation of vulnerability within Taylor Swift's *Miss Americana* and *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry*, focusing on the moments in which the artists disclose personal information, breaking down that information into themes surrounding the artists' public stage persona, studio, and home life. Both Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift got their big break at a young age and immediately became role models to their audiences. Within the last year, both artists were the subject of music documentaries exhibiting their coming-of-age within the industry.

It is essential to study these documentaries because of the influence media has on growing adolescents. Budgeon, 1998 and Kearney, 2006, as cited in Chittenden, 2013, stated, "A young girl's understanding of her place in the social world is, in part, shaped by the cultural and media texts that are available to her." (p. 186). Taylor Swift has released nine studio albums over the 15 years she has been performing. With 176 million followers on Instagram, Swift has a lot of reach with her fanbase (Swift, n.d.). Billie Eilish has only been a relevant name since 2015; she has released two albums since her days on Soundcloud. She is more active on social media, with 92.3 million followers on Instagram (Eilish, n.d.). Both Swift and Eilish do not follow any accounts on their Instagram, mainly using their accounts to post promotional material for albums or tours. Eilish occasionally utilizes the app to post like the average teenager. On the other hand, Swift has placed a limit on her comments, which prevents her fans from contributing to the narrative of what is being told.

Research from March 2020 revealed that Instagram is harmful to teenagers' body image and well-being (Brown, 2021). Instagram allows users to be selective in what they show the

world. Filtered or manipulated images or "photo dumps" create a calculated internet presence, creating an impression of a perfect life. Teens find themselves in social comparisons with influencers and celebrities, comparing themselves to someone who is "better" (Brown, 2021). Users wish to relate and connect with these accounts. Because of this, social media has demonstrated a demand for transparency from users within the apps in the age of cancel culture. Cancel culture places social pressure on an issue and stems from the idea of holding someone accountable and boycotting them because of their previous actions (Romano, 2020).

Following a brief history of reality within rock documentaries and the future of the pop stars, I critique the performance of authenticity within Taylor Swift's *Miss Americana* and *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry*, drawing parallels between both films. I examine the importance of vulnerability within the documentaries regarding the artists' public stage persona, studio, and home life. By understanding the reach of Swift and Eilish and the demand for transparency, the performance of authenticity becomes clear in relation to the influence the artists have on teens today.

## Literature Review

### *Reality in Documentaries*

Historically, rock documentaries followed the artist through performances, backstage mischief, studio rehearsals, and encounters with fans. Direct cinema is used within rockumentaries to exploit the tension between the musicians' public vs. private life; Gimme Shelter exhibits this tension when off stage Mick Jagger and Charlie Watts are shown reacting to the gruesome event that occurred during the Altamont Free Concert (Cohen, 2012). Godmilow & Shapiro (1997) explain that allowing access to a musician's daily life fascinates the average person, but just because it is unscripted does not mean they are entirely truthful. It is often thought that the truth within documentaries is found backstage because we are provided with unmediated glimpses of the "real" person behind the artist. However, when on stage, we are presented with a performer who is less likely to change their behavior for the camera (Cohen, 2012). Cohen (2012) argues that performers need to train to acquire the skills to repeatedly and consistently execute a performance faithfully throughout a tour. During a live performance, a musician's knowledge is automatic, leaving no time to think about what to do next, whereas when backstage in a filmed setting, their demeanor is calculated because it is still a performance and goes through a period of editing after the fact, by the filmmaker, which can change the storyline entirely (Cohen, 2012, p. 17). When there is a mediated form of communication, the artist is aware that this "private" moment behind the scenes is now permanent, previously it would only be retained in memory, but when the camera enters the room, it creates a window to the public and creates an archive of that moment. Danielson (2008) explains that documentaries obtain gaps and jump within the representation because "leaps of time and space and the placement of characters become relatively unimportant compared to the sense of the flow of

evidence." (p. 414). Because of modern technology, we can no longer rely on the trustworthiness of a shaky camera and grainy images to believe that the truth is being displayed to us. Within music documentaries, camera movement offers distraction rather than vitality and has difficulty representing anything other than the performance itself (Cohen, 2012). Documentaries are strategically tailored to encourage viewers' emotions and responses, with music signaling what emotion to feel and when to feel it. Music saturates the images, bonding the shots together and fusing meaning, intensifying the audience engagement (Corner, 2002). Danielsen (2008) supports this claim by explaining that, "Even though we know that the reality effects conveyed by such expressive means provide no guarantee for a one-to-one relationship between music and reality, the songs still manage to convey the impression of an unusually close relation between music and reality." (p. 416).

### ***The Future of Pop***

Disney Channel has manufactured many young pop stars, including Miley Cyrus, Selena Gomez, and the High School Musical cast. Chosen for their popularity on the channel, these stars were handed record deals and generic kid-friendly lyrics to jumpstart their pop artists' careers. Walt Disney Records executive Damon Whiteside described the music produced as "still safe, but it's got a little bit of an edge" (Bickford, 2012). Because of the channel's target audience, these stars had a reputation to protect and represent. They were viewed as an extension of the label and had strict contracts that explained how to dress, act, and speak (Lane, 2020). Boy band star Joe Jonas recalls working with Disney in 2007 during the nude photo scandal of Vanessa Hudgens of High School Musical. He states, "We heard that she had to be in the Disney offices for a whole day because they were trying to figure out how to keep her on lockdown. We'd hear execs talking about it, and they would tell us that they were so proud of us for not making the

same mistakes, which made us feel like we couldn't ever mess up." (Jonas, 2013). Expected to balance the recording of their sitcoms, movies, albums, and tours, many of these stars often spiraled out of control to prove that they were not the squeaky-clean star the label made them out to be (Fiorentino-Swinton, 2021).

On the contrary, during the rise of the Disney Channel pop stardom, Taylor Swift found her voice through songwriting and performing country music and released her first single at 16. Growing up during the rise of young musicians and seemingly following in their footsteps, Billie Eilish released her first song, 'Ocean Eyes,' through Soundcloud at age 13 in 2015. Since then, both Swift and Eilish have established positions in the music industry, expressing themselves differently but frequently overlapping fan bases, although their music often addresses different audiences.

Chittenden (2013) touches on Swift's influence in her article "In My Rearview Mirror," stating that "the fact that younger teens are engaging emotionally (via Swift's songs) with the "remembrance" of events they may have yet to experience brings an important complexity to how these lyrics function to shape teen expectations." (p. 187). Because of Taylor Swift's storytelling country roots, her songs are more relatable to younger audiences despite her age. Pollock (2014) focuses on how Swift's career is centered around her girlhood and her innocence within her performance of normativity (p. 2). From the start, the portrayals within Swift's lyrics and music videos have been driven by fairytales and feel unrealistic to the modern-day teen; genuine relationships are messy and complicated, but to Swift, they are "meant to be" (Pollock, 2014). Taylor Swift's songs have a repetitive nature to them as they rarely stray from the topics of love, revenge, friendship, and fame. Figure 1 shows an infographic made in 2010 representing

the topics that Swift touches on within her songs, many of which focus on the heteronormative nature of her music.



**Figure 1: The Complete Works of Taylor Swift  
(Vega, 2010)**

Because of her country music background, Swift's songs focus on telling stories that often stem from innocence, concentrating on fame, friendship, love, and sometimes revenge.



This infographic was made as "proof" that Taylor Swift cannot convey depth within her songwriting. Pollock (2014) states, "It can be assumed that Swift's songs are written through the experiences she has gone through" this allows her fans to relate as though they are going through the experiences together (p. 26). Through her extravagant live performances and complex music videos, Swift can spin the story she so innocently wants to tell.

On the contrary, Billie Eilish uses a more realistic approach when telling a story through song. While performing, Eilish touches on personal experiences allowing her fanbase to relate and reflect on what they are going through at the moment. Kok (2020) uses Billie Eilish's performance at Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival 2019 to analyze her performer identity to examine the feeling of authenticity within a live performance. During her performance at Coachella 2019, Eilish forgets the second verse of her song, "All the Good Girls Go to Hell," this breaks down a barrier and allows her audience to see her as the seventeen-year-old she once was (Kok, 2020). This debunks the idea that artists have to be perfect to be successful and allows the audience to feel that anybody could replace her because she, too, is human. While communicating with her audience, Eilish explains that she spent the night crying in her hotel room because she "wanted this shit so bad," establishing an unmediated performance (Kok, 2020). Billie Eilish writes songs with her brother Finneas O'Connell and covers love, loss, depression, and self-image throughout her catalog. Many of these topics align with thoughts and experiences that her audience may also deal with daily. Before closing up her Coachella performance, Eilish addresses her audience by saying:

"I just want us all to be in the moment for this song because, like, in life, we tend to do things, and then we are always looking forward to the next thing and the next thing after that. We are never looking at what is happening right now, and this is happening right

now, and this is crazy. We are never going to be in this moment again, no matter what, this exact moment right here, never again, ever. This is the only chance we get to be in the moment, so why don't we be in the moment, yeah?" (Kok, 2020).

By telling her audience to experience the moment, Eilish asks them to witness the vulnerability of the performance she is about to give. Although Coachella is a live performance broadcasted through a live stream for those unable to attend, Eilish wants the crowd to notice the value of them seeing unedited moments in real-time. Kok (2020) explains that Billie Eilish's performer identity allows listeners who face the same issues to feel represented and as though Eilish is speaking directly to them or about their lives.

Both Swift and Eilish are successful and interesting artists because they are inherently different from their predecessors and stray away from the perfect reputation that Disney created. The difference is that Taylor Swift modifies, and Billie Eilish rebels against the mold once known as the Disney Channel pop star.

While Pollock has written about Taylor Swift performing normativity and innocence, Kok has written about Billie Eilish's performer identity, and Cohen has written about playing to the camera, there is a gap in the literature addressing the performance of authenticity between both artists within documentaries. This will be the first study to conduct a comparative analysis between Taylor Swift's *Miss Americana* and *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry* examining the reality of these documentaries that showcase the vulnerable authenticity of both artists. This topic is essential because of the celebrity culture, and influence artists have on young impressionable teens.

## Method & Analysis

This study was conducted through a comparative textual analysis of *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry* compared to Taylor Swift's *Miss Americana*. This sample takes each documentary and identifies performances of authenticity between both pop artists. I watched both films four times each while taking notes, paying particular attention to scenes of self-disclosure. I use the term vulnerable to discuss the scenes where the artists disclosed personal psychological information, breaking them down into themes about the artists' public stage persona, studio, and home life, examining the performance of authenticity behind the presented moments. This analysis then creates a qualitative data set and identifies patterns used based on the moments of vulnerability seen within both documentaries. Using Glaser's inductive method of grounded theory, I developed my analysis and theories after data collection had begun (Grounded Theory Institute, n.d.). I started with a general research topic and began collecting data through the viewing of *Miss Americana* and *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry*. Through my data came the comparative analysis where I developed codes that categorized my findings into themes about the artists' public stage persona, studio, and home life. With this, I wrote down my ideas of the codes and their relationship. Soon after, I integrated the codes into the literature I collected, sorted through my outline, and began writing my analysis. Using this theory, I contextualize how vulnerability and performance of authenticity allow the everyday fan to feel like they can relate to a pop artist.

## Discussion of Findings

Taylor Swift got her start when she moved to Nashville, TN, at the age of 14. With previous experience performing live at ball games, Swift performed a short setlist at The Bluebird Cafe, where she was then discovered by Scott Borchetta of Big Machine Records (The Bluebird Cafe, n.d.). Billie Eilish also began making music from a young age with the help of her family and her choral background. Hillydilly, a website dedicated to finding new music, promoted her song 'Ocean Eyes' on Soundcloud, giving her the push she needed to become the artist she is today, ultimately leading her single to get picked up by Interscope Records (Prah, 2019). Eilish's songs focus on love, loss, depression, and self-image, giving her an authentic approach to songwriting, often challenging the female pop star mold. While some audiences come across these documentaries as an introduction to these artists, my primary focus is how fans encounter and interact with these films. For many fans, parts of these documentaries feel like they are watching reruns because they experienced the moments being mentioned in real-time (Pardes, 2020). Although these moments were documented in real-time, the following documentaries include new revelations regarding the events that took place, factoring into the artists' performance of authenticity.

*Miss Americana* and *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry* follow a direct cinema documentary approach to emphasize the truth that will unfold throughout the film. Direct cinema uses a non-scripted approach that keeps the filmmaker out of the documentary (Cohen, 2012). *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry* follows the typical rockumentary timeline by following Eilish through the making of her debut album 'When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?'. She is seen in the studio with her brother, engaging with fans while on tour and being mischievous backstage, in addition to adding a personal component of delving into her private

home life. Both documentaries include home video footage from when both Eilish and Swift were children. *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry* differs from *Miss Americana* because Eilish's family documented a lot of the footage shown within the documentary. R.J Cutler explained that nearly 15 percent of *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry* was composed of family-shot material, saying:

"Fortunately, for me, for us, and for the world, Billie and Finneas and Maggie and Patrick had this clear sense that something magical was happening in that bedroom [where the O'Connell kids were making the album]," he said. "A GoPro got hung, and ... they turned it on often enough that we had the raw material to be able to tell that part of the story where they're creating the album." (Erbland, 2021).

Cutler goes on to say that footage filmed by the family gave Eilish the chance to feel more comfortable and be herself in front of the camera (Erbland, 2021). Home videos may appear to be more natural; however, as Cohen (2012) has shown, musicians are the most authentic version of themselves on stage as they rarely think about what they have to do next. During the filming of *Miss Americana*, director Lana Wilson followed Taylor Swift everywhere with the intent of capturing what she called "the contrast between the ordinary and extraordinary" of Swift's life (Roth, 2020). *Miss Americana*, at times, strays away from the typical rockumentary timeline. It is centered around Taylor Swift during the making and the release of 'Lover' jumping back to footage of her Reputation tour, supporting Danielson's (2008) statement that time and space are relatively unimportant compared to the sense of flow of evidence. Allowing for the unscripted story to unfold before the camera, Wilson was able to capture Swift on stage, rehearsing unedited songs and her thought process during periods that were unknown to viewers before providing the audience with a coming-of-age story for someone who seems to have never grown up.

## The Public Stage

Both artists exhibit creative control over their work and image, which is revealed through how they express themselves physically and throughout their music. Before she turned 18, Billie Eilish was often seen in baggy, loose clothing to avoid criticism and sexualization of her body, which would overshadow her musical talent, saying, "I never want the world to know everything about me, I mean, that's why I wear big baggy clothes." (Trending Pop Videos, 2019). *Miss Americana* begins with Taylor Swift explaining her moral code growing up, specifying that she has always felt the need to be thought of as good, always doing the right thing and that the main thing she always tried to be was a good girl (Wilson, 2020, 0:01:40).



**Figure 2: Self Presentation**

On left: Taylor Swift on red carpet for MTV's Video Music Awards (Wilson, 2020, 0:31:15)

On right: Billie Eilish during a performance (Cutler, 2021, 1:41:30)

Swift has always expressed herself through more form-fitting clothing, often playing the girly girl role. Swift's moral code allows her to modify the perfect pop star mold that Disney has created. Billie Eilish is more of an unconventional pop star, often redefining the expectations of what a female pop star should sound like, look like and say.



**Figure 3: Production of Music Videos**

On left: Billie Eilish for 'when the party's over' (Cutler, 2021, 0:13:24)

On right: Taylor Swift and Cast of Queer Eye for 'You Need to Calm Down' (Wilson, 2020, 1:17:52)

Within both documentaries are behind-the-scenes footage of the filming of two major music videos. The first image of figure 3 shows a screengrab of Eilish's video that was made for her piano ballad "when the party's over" that recounts the emotions following a break-up, which are shown through her video where she drinks the black liquid and cries black tears. The music video was inspired by a drawing from a fan who drew Eilish with black eyes and ink dripping from them (Smith, 2021). During *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry*, Eilish's mother, Maggie, is seen sitting in a chair at a small table, listening to Eilish's explanations of how she would like the filming process of the music video to go (Cutler, 2021, 0:10:05)—again, showcasing her creative freedom. The second image of figure 3 displays Swift and the cast of Queer Eye during her music video for "You Need to Calm Down," an upbeat sassy song that responds to internet trolls. The music video exhibits multiple LGBTQ celebrities engaging in different activities while an anti-gay protest is occurring. Although she showcased her allyship through this video, Swift was accused of rainbow washing and using her platform to talk about LGBTQ issues only when it benefited her (i.e., the release of her album 'Lover') (Smialek, 2021). Collaborating with the cast of Queer Eye created a discourse surrounding Swift and the queerbaiting within her music video, with many of the members of the Fab Five coming to her

defense in support of her allyship (Ahlgrim, 2019). Both music videos give us a glimpse into Swift and Eilish's personalities. Swift uses the help of LGBTQ celebrities, like the cast of *Queer Eye*, to create this large-scale music video and bring attention to a particular issue, whereas Eilish drew inspiration for her video from fan art by someone who felt as though they could relate and understand the message of the song, capturing the essence within a drawing. Because of their performer identity, Swift's message is relayed through her colorful and extravagant performance, whereas Eilish focuses on a simple, authentic performance. One of the ways Billie Eilish comes across as approachable to her fans is by not referring to them as such. Her documentary opens up with home video footage of her song 'Ocean Eyes' playing on the radio, then cuts to 3 years later to an interaction with her audience. She later states, "I do not think of them as fans, ever. They are not my fans; they are like part of me" (Cutler, 2021, 0:05:49). This stems from the fact that at the age of 14, she went from being a fan (of Justin Bieber) to being a celebrity, but in her head, she was "just someone who made music" (The Drew Barrymore Show, 2021).



**Figure 4: Relationship with Listeners**

Pictured: Billie Eilish with fan in Salt Lake City, Utah (Cutler, 2021, 0:01:18)



Figure 4 shows an interaction with a listener who did not have tickets to Eilish's Salt Lake City show. The listener hands Eilish flowers; she gasps and pulls them in for a hug. Eilish interacts with her audience as though they are friends, which allows her audience to feel appreciated.



**Figure 5: Relationship with Fans**

Pictured: Swift walking out of her home and into a car (Wilson, 2020, 0:29:00)

In contrast, during *Miss Americana* and in figure 5, Swift exits her home and gets into a car. During the documentary, she walks up to the door, and screams erupt from off-camera; Swift walks directly to the car without saying a word to any fans (Wilson, 2020). Once in the car, she looks out the window and says, "Well... So, this is my front yard... and... I am highly aware of the fact that that is not normal." (Wilson, 2020, 0:29:00). That statement alone shows that she does not encourage people to gather by her front door but also comes off as arrogant because the average person cannot relate to that situation. During the film, Swift breaks down while mentioning how she has been performing for 15 years and that she is tired of it because the pressure (from the public) gets to her (Wilson, 2020, 00:35:21). There is an apparent difference in both artists' relationships with fans because of the amount of time they have each spent in the limelight.

## ***Studio***

*Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry* exhibits Eilish coming to terms with her newfound fame. It follows her as she struggles with her depression, self-doubt, and meeting deadlines. Eilish is seen recording in a hotel room while on tour. *Miss Americana* focuses on Taylor Swift as she is seen overcoming the obstacle of not being nominated for the Grammys during her Reputation "era" and creating a new public persona while shifting into the making of her next album, 'Lover.' Swift explains that storytelling is her niche and sets her apart from other artists, without it, she would not be here (Wilson, 2020, 0:11:21). On the contrary, in *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry*, Eilish explains that she hates writing songs because it does not come easily to her and uses the help of her brother Finneas O'Connell (Cutler, 2021, 0:27:53). She becomes overly critical of herself, thinking that "it sounds pretty horrible" and doubting that the album will be complete in time for the deadline; her brother responds by reassuring her they will have the album done as long as they continue working on it and she replies "But it sounds bad! And I sound horrible! And I can't sound good because I'm not good!" (Cutler, 2021, 0:22:19). This moment of vulnerability shows Eilish breaking down a wall that shows how she struggles with her self-criticism. During the scene, she sits slumped in a chair, emphasizing "bad" and "horrible" when referring to her voice. When speaking to their mother, Eilish's brother Finneas O'Connell mentions that "Billie is so 'woke' about her persona on the internet, that she is terrified of anything she makes being hated," therefore affecting the songwriting process for the both of them (Cutler, 2021, 0:26:03). Swift faces similar pressure when creating a new album; she stated through a voiceover, "There's so much pressure going into putting new music out. If I don't beat everything I've done prior, it will be deemed as a colossal failure" (Wilson, 2020, 0:10:43). Because both artists keep up with the discourse about

themselves online, this permits them access to criticize themselves through an "outsider" perspective in order for the outcome to fit the standards deemed acceptable by critics. In *Miss Americana*, Swift is seen anxiously answering a phone call with news that she had not received any nominations for the Grammys (yet). It was revealed later that she was nominated for best pop vocal album. She responds by saying, "This is fine. I just have to make a better record." (Wilson, 2020, 0:07:07). She immediately blames herself for not getting nominated, although the woman on the phone believes that 'Reputation' is a great record and that she had previously won album of the year for '1989' in 2016.



**Figure 6: Grammy Snub**

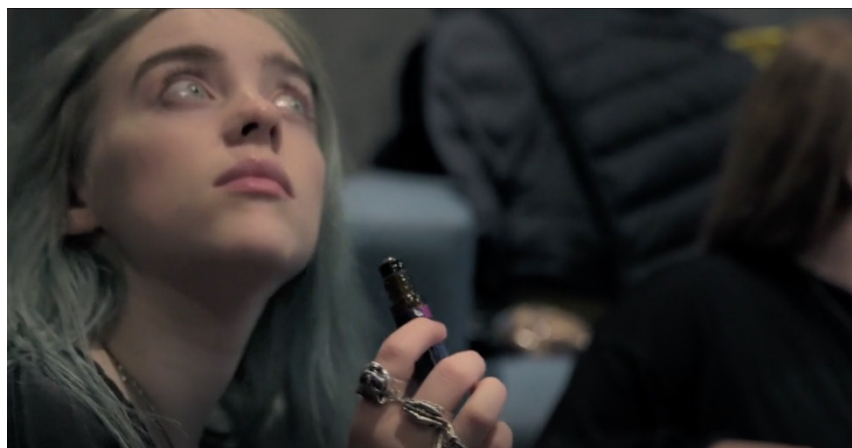
Pictured: Swift sitting on a couch in pajamas on the phone (Wilson, 2020, 0:6:58)

Towards the end of *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry*, Eilish's parents walk into her room to read off the nominations for the 62nd Grammy Awards, where she was nominated for Best New Artist, Song of the Year, Record of the Year, and Album of the Year. Eilish hides under the covers until they announce that her brother, Finneas O'Connell, was nominated for Producer of the Year, showing her excitement for her brother; the family calls him, and they both congratulate each other instead of focusing on their respective nominations (Cutler, 2021, 2:08:18). This authentic moment displays the bond Eilish has with her family and their influence

on her music career. Eilish reflects on her success alone in her car by saying, "I'm nominated for six Grammys. I have my dream car; Finneas has his dream car. It's raining; I have my pooch doggie in the car. I had donuts last night. I'm not in a relationship, thank the lords. My relationship with my family is good. I am pretty, somewhat. I am famous, the fuck!" (Cutler, 2021, 2:10:01).

### ***Home***

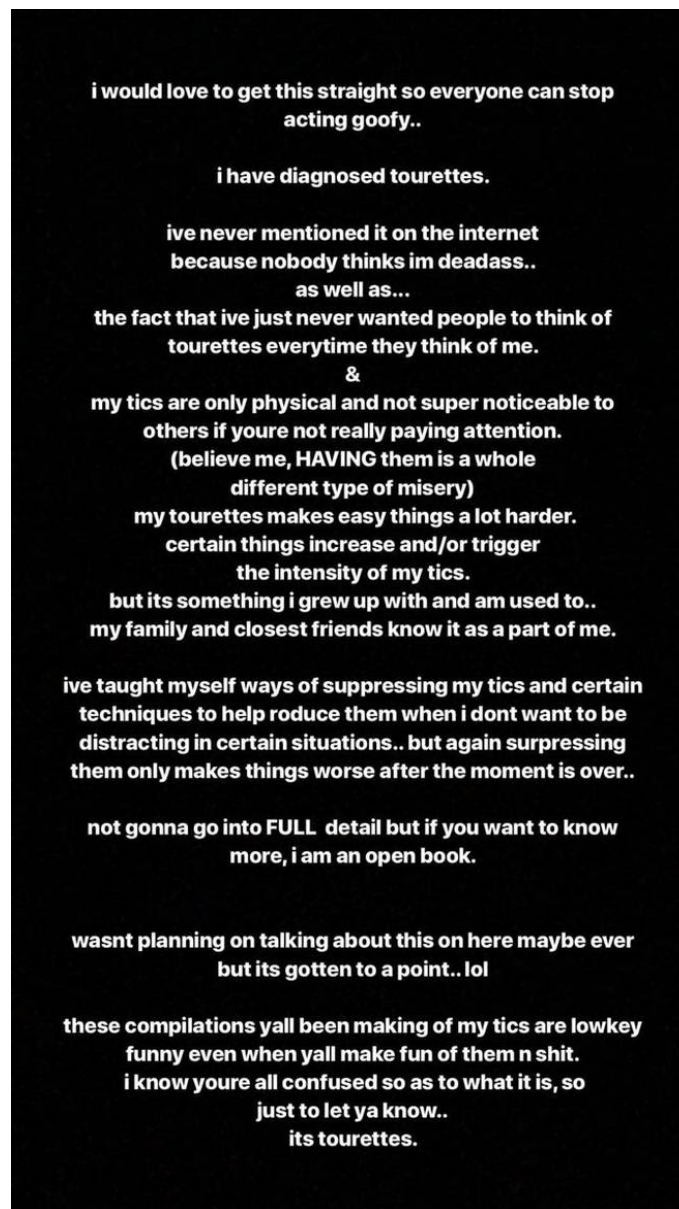
Taylor Swift has become more aware of the media's effect on her in the last couple of years. In *Miss Americana*, she opened up about an eating disorder she was diagnosed with after she continually picked herself apart due to paparazzi photos and comments within the media (Wilson, 2020, 0:29:19). This calculated confession highlights the seriousness of the issue but could have remained a secret because it happened in the past; therefore, Swift can be perceived as giving the director a "scoop" to appeal to the masses as a performance of authenticity. In 2018, Billie Eilish revealed she was diagnosed with Tourette's as a child after a compilation video of her tics went viral.



**Figure 7: Tourette Syndrome**

Pictured: Eilish using essential oils to suppress a tic attack (Cutler, 2021, 0:42:05)

In her documentary, she goes through episodes of tic attacks while filming her music video, when looking at photos of billboard advertisements, and while recording.

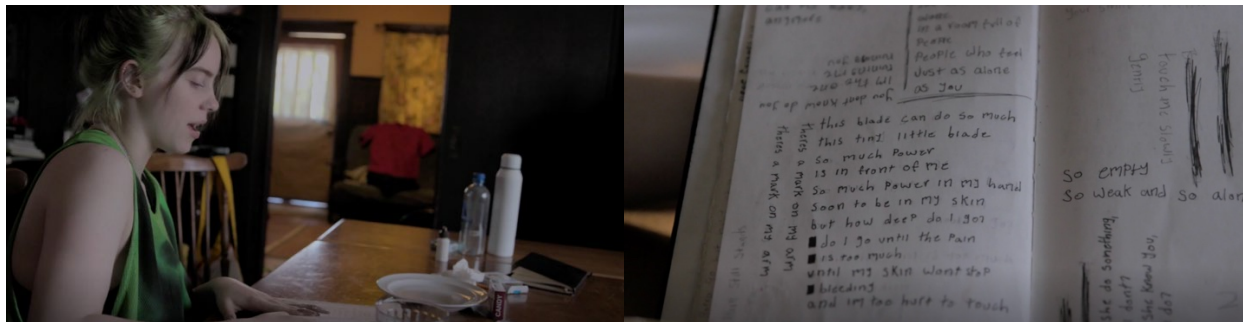


**Figure 8: Tourette Syndrome**

Instagram Story post from Eilish revealing she has diagnosed Tourette's.  
(Idika, 2018)

Figure 8 shows the post Eilish posted on her Instagram story. She explained that she was never planning on talking about her diagnosis because nobody thinks she is serious about it, also stating that she does not want it to be the first thing people think of when they hear her name,

similarly to why she dresses the way she does (Idika, 2018). This self-disclosure of her diagnosis is contradictory in itself; Eilish wrote, “not gonna go into FULL detail, but if you want to know more, I am an open book.” Eilish prides herself on being a semi-private person in the age of self-disclosure, but with this intimate confession, she shares that she is willing to speak more on this topic because she is an “open book” and has nothing to hide. Being candid about serious diagnoses like Tourette’s and an eating disorder shows both fan bases that Swift and Eilish suffer from issues and are not that different from the everyday person.



**Figure 9: Diary Entries**

On left: Eilish is seen sitting at a table reading a page from her diary, that page is seen on the right. (Cutler, 2021, 2:05:22)

Eilish covers many taboo topics within her music, touching on personal topics that allow her to be seen as transparent by fans. She also opens up about how she did not think she would make it to 18 (Cutler, 2021, 2:05:22). In figure 9, Eilish is seen flipping through her diary, where she reflects on past entries, showcasing one particular page that reflects on how dark her thoughts had gotten at the "peak" of her depression. This specific page talks about a razor blade and how much power it holds in her hand. *Miss Americana* has a similar scene where Swift is also seen with a diary. She reads, "May 19, 2003: Oh, I tried to practice my songs, but I completely psyched myself out and broke down crying, I do not know if I can do this. I want it so bad, but I

get so scared of what might happen. Relax. I can handle it. I'm young. I'm talented; they'll see it in me. I've got to hang on." (Wilson, 2020, 1:22:23).



**Figure 10: Reading My Diary**

Pictured: Swift sitting by a window reading her diary (Wilson, 2020, 1:22:31)

That excerpt from her diary is accompanied by home video footage of Swift through the years, proving that she held onto the hope and did not give up on her dream that she was talking about within that diary entry. Although both diary entries contrast drastically, Eilish speaks about her inner demons while Swift gives herself a pep talk, allowing viewers to look into their teenage diary is a big step in vulnerability within both documentaries, which would not be found in a historical rockumentary.

On one level, Eilish and Swift's documentaries are more vulnerable than previous rock documentaries, as we saw with Cohen. They follow the same storytelling outline of a typical rockumentary and add an element of vulnerability by including open discussions about otherwise personal topics. This commodifies their vulnerability as a part of their performance of authenticity, which allows the artists to meet the standards of their fans who ask for full transparency during the age of cancel culture. Within both documentaries, neither artist pushes the camera away, presenting them in a negative light. However, in *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry*, Eilish is seen at a makeshift meet and greet after her show, not wanting to interact



with the people in attendance, complaining to her mom how she can never have a moment to herself (Cutler, 2021, 1:50:21)—providing a little insight into how demanding the pop-star life is.

This textual analysis took both Taylor Swift's *Miss Americana* and *Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry* and examined moments of self-disclosure and categorized those moments into themes of the artists' public stage persona, studio, and home life. I argue that these documentaries and representations of vulnerability exist only for the performance of authenticity, leaving room for social comparison from the teens who these artist's influence. At the 73rd Emmy Awards, Michaela Coel stated,

"Write the tale that scares you, that makes you feel uncertain, that isn't comfortable. I dare you. In a world that entices us to browse through the lives of others to better determine how to feel about ourselves and, in turn, feel the need to be constantly visible for visibility, these days seem to somehow equate to success. Do not be afraid to disappear from it, from us, for a while and see what comes to you in the silence."

(Television Academy, 2021)

If the cameras are constantly running and everyone is looking at you, your vulnerability is calculated no matter how hard you try to come off as authentic. The most authentic thing you can do now is to disappear.



### ***Future Research and Limitations***

One limitation of this study is the age gap between both musicians. Although they were both young artists, they were equally a product of their generation, at different stages in their career displaying vulnerability differently. My research was limited to these two films; future research should consider the performer identity and representations of vulnerability in lyrics, music videos, and social media feeds of young female pop stars. Future research should also consider looking into intellectual ownership and systems of creative control in terms of contracts and obligations along with cinematography and editing to understand how creative control is established and executed within their documentaries. Future research would also benefit from examining the same dynamics used within this study with young male musicians, whether solo musicians or boy bands.

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