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**The Representation of the American Stereotypical Femininity and
Myths Creation in Taylor Swifts 'Blank Space' Song Posters: A
Semiotic Analysis**

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Dedication

To the only one I can rely on,

To my girl, and my superhero,

To my guardian angel,

The “I” is my only dedication, so Dearest I,

I am writing you these words with a melting soul; you have always been alone in this life

bleeding but dreaming and feeling.

In the times when you were choking and drowning, no one could feel, no one could understand and no one could ever see; I was reborn from the ashes thirsty to burn and hungry

to ignite my existence with a rebellious soul.

Graduation has never been my dream; graduation is a selfie and cake! My forever dream is to

be free; and now by the termination of this dissertation I have acclaimed a sort of freedom

from my parents’ complaints.

Certificates are for parents and freedom is for me.

Freedom!

As I have promised you, we now shall fly...

I could not express my happiness literally; finally I can do what I feel alive in.

Few steps left to embrace the colors and ruin!

To femininity and the universe’s rose,

Dear woman,

You exist!

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Abstract

Everywhere we turn, signs surround us, silently communicating messages that shape our perceptions and influence our behavior. Semiotics, therefore, equips us with the necessary tools to decode these signs, unveiling the hidden layers of meaning and cultural realities that lie beneath the surface. In light of this, the present study delves into the representation of American stereotypical femininity depicted in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters through the lens of semiotic analysis, specifically focusing on the concepts of denotation, connotation, myth, and codes. The study adopts a qualitative research approach, drawing upon Barthes' semiotic theory as a guiding framework. The study findings reveal the semiotic elements, such as color schemes, objects, gestures, expressions, and any other relevant visual or textual cues, in which the song posters depict and reinforce American stereotypical femininity, including the notions of beauty, romance, and toxic relationships. Regarding the representation of myth, the posters use storytelling elements, mythical figures, and symbolic motifs that evoke mythical narratives and contribute to the creation of femininity and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. The codes identified within Barthes' framework provide valuable insights into the ways signs are structured and interpreted within a cultural context. These findings not only provide valuable insights into the specific topic at hand but also serve as a foundation for further research, opening up avenues for exploring the intricate interplay between cultural identity, femininity, and popular culture.

Keywords: American stereotypical femininity, Barthes' semiotic theory, denotation, connotation, myth, codes

General Introduction

Background of the Study

Throughout history, signs have been used in various forms to convey messages, encode cultural values, and perpetuate societal norms. From ancient cave paintings, which served as visual signs to communicate narratives and cultural practices (Lewis-Williams, 2002), to contemporary advertising, where signs are employed to promote specific gender roles and stereotypes (Barthes, 1972; Kilbourne, 2000), signs continue to influence our perceptions and shape our understanding of the world and constructing meaning (Saussure, 1916).

The exploration of semiotics, the study of signs and their meanings, provides us with a valuable framework to dissect and make sense of the intricate network of signs, symbols and narratives that envelop our everyday lives. As Prior (2014) asserted, “semiotics is a vast and diverse field that encompasses the examination of a wide range of signs, their transmission through different channels and media, the investigation of socially constructed and evolutionarily developed sign systems, and the analysis of the contextual conditions that shape signification” (p. 1). By delving into semiotics, we gain a deeper understanding of how signs operate, how they convey meaning, and how they influence our perception and interpretation of the world around us. Through the application of semiotic analysis, we can unravel the layers of significance embedded in various cultural artifacts, from visual images to linguistic texts, and uncover the underlying codes and conventions that shape our shared understanding of reality.

Roland Barthes’ semiotic theory, influenced by the works of Ferdinand De Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, offers a rich framework for analyzing signs and their cultural significance. According to Barthes (1972), semiotics is concerned with deciphering the intricate systems of signs that permeate our society and shape our understanding of the world.

He argued that signs are not mere reflections of reality but rather constructs with layers of meaning, influenced by cultural and social contexts. Barthes introduced the concept of denotation, which refers to the literal or surface-level meaning of a sign, and connotation, which encompasses the cultural and symbolic associations attached to the sign. Through this distinction, Barthes invited us to explore the hidden connotations and myths embedded within signs, unraveling the power dynamics and ideologies that underlie their construction (Barthes, 1972).

Building upon Barthes' semiotic theory, the representation of femininity within popular culture emerges as a captivating domain for semiotic analysis. By delving into the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in visual representations, we can effectively unravel the cultural myths and narratives that not only shape but also perpetuate stereotypical notions of femininity. Kilbourne (2000) argued that advertising, as a powerful medium of popular culture, often reinforces traditional gender roles and promotes unrealistic beauty standards, contributing to the construction of stereotypical femininity. Similarly, Gill (2007) explored how media representations, such as television and film, portray femininity through specific tropes and stereotypes. These cultural artifacts, laden with symbolic meanings, become sites for the negotiation and perpetuation of societal norms and expectations surrounding femininity.

Therefore, within the realm of popular culture and utilizing Barthes' semiotic theory, this study aims to investigate the representation of American stereotypical femininity in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters. By examining the denotative and connotative meanings, myths, and codes embedded in these visual representations, the study seeks to uncover how these constructed representations contribute to the perpetuation of traditional gender roles and societal expectations surrounding femininity. Through a semiotic analysis of

these posters, this research endeavors to shed light on the complex interplay between popular culture, semiotics, and the portrayal of femininity in the American context.

Statement of the Problem

The representation of American stereotypical femininity in popular culture has long been a subject of scrutiny and debate. Within this context, Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters serve as intriguing visual artifacts that warrant critical analysis. Despite the widespread popularity of these posters, there is a gap in the scholarly literature regarding their semiotic exploration and their contribution to the presentation of American stereotypical femininity and associated myths. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a semiotic analysis of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters, investigating the underlying signs, symbols, and narratives that construct and reinforce American stereotypical femininity, as well as the potential myths and codes they employ. By examining the visual representations through the lens of Barthes' semiotic theory, this research seeks to deepen our understanding of the complex interplay between popular culture, femininity, and myth, offering insights into the ways in which these representations shape cultural narratives and influence societal perceptions. Through this investigation, the study ultimately aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the construction of femininity in contemporary visual media and provide a foundation for further analysis and critical engagement with popular culture's portrayal of gender stereotypes.

Research Questions and Assumptions

This study addresses the following four research questions:

1. What are the denotative and connotative meanings of the semiotic elements employed in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters?
2. What cultural myths are invoked in these posters?
3. What are the underlying Barthesian codes present in these posters?

4. How do these semiotic elements, myths and codes contribute to construct and communicate the representation of American stereotypical femininity?

In line with these research questions, the following assumptions have been formulated:

1. The semiotic elements employed in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters carry both denotative and connotative meanings.
2. Cultural myths play a significant role in shaping the visual composition and messaging of the posters.
3. The use of Barthesian codes in these posters suggests that the representation of femininity in American popular culture is constructed and communicated through various semiotic strategies, including visual elements, gestures, cultural references, and symbolic associations.
4. The utilized semiotic elements and constructed myths and codes in the posters contribute to construct and communicate the representation of American stereotypical femininity.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The research aim encapsulates the main focus of this study, which is to delve into the denotative and connotative meanings and representations conveyed through the semiotic elements in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters. It also aims to identify the cultural myths and Barthesian codes invoked in these posters and highlight how these semiotic elements, myths, and codes contribute to the representation of American stereotypical femininity.

After establishing the research aim of this study, the following research objectives have been formulated:

1. To analyze and determine the denotative and connotative meanings of the semiotic elements employed in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters.

2. To identify and explore the cultural myths that are invoked in the posters.
3. To identify and analyze the Barthesian codes employed in the posters.
4. To examine and understand how the utilized semiotic elements and constructed myths and codes are used to construct and communicate the representation of American stereotypical femininity in the posters.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding of the representation of American stereotypical femininity and myth in popular culture, specifically through the semiotic analysis of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters. This study:

1. contributes to the field of semiotics by applying its theoretical framework, particularly Barthes' semiotic theory, to the analysis of posters;
2. sheds light on the ways in which cultural norms, values, and myths influence the construction and perpetuation of gender roles and identities;
3. provides insights into the cultural constructs that shape societal expectations and perceptions of femininity;
4. challenges traditional gender stereotypes by critically analyzing the posters and identifying elements that deviate from or challenge stereotypical representations of femininity;
5. offers a critique of how femininity is portrayed and commodified;
6. raises awareness of the potential impact of media representations on individuals' perceptions of gender and contributes to broader discussions on media literacy and representation; and
7. bridges the fields of semiotics, gender studies, cultural studies, and media studies, offering interdisciplinary insights into the intersection of signs, symbols, and femininity in popular culture.

Research Methodology

This study adopts an interpretivist approach, seeking to explore and interpret the embedded meanings and representations in the posters of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song. It follows an inductive approach as the research questions are open-ended, aiming to generate insights and interpretations through the analysis of these posters. The study employs a qualitative research design and utilizes Barthes' semiotic theory to uncover the denotative and connotative meanings, cultural myths, and codes present in the posters. This design enables a comprehensive understanding of the semiotic elements and their contribution to the construction of representations of femininity.

Structure of the Dissertation

This study falls in a binary chaptering division beginning with a general introduction which highlights the research problem, questions, assumptions, aims, objectives, significance, and methodology, and the structure of the dissertation. The first chapter is theoretical and reviews the literature of relevance to semiotics and femininity, while the second chapter is more inclined towards data analysis and discussion.

The first chapter is divided into two sections. The first section provides a brief introduction to semiotics, explaining its origins, key concepts, influential semioticians and their contributions, and its application in various disciplines. Additionally, it focuses on the semiotic theory of Barthes, including the concepts of denotation, connotation, myth, and codes. Finally, it ends with illustrating the application of Barthes' semiotic theory in analyzing cultural artifacts and media. The subsequent section presents the literature on the construction of femininity through semiotic systems. It introduces the concept of femininity and its social and cultural significance. Then, it provides a brief historical overview of the representation of femininity in media and popular culture. Moreover, it shows how semiotic analysis can be applied to the representation of femininity and discusses how signs and

symbols contribute to the construction and communication of femininity in various cultural contexts. It concludes by presenting how specifically American stereotypical femininity can be represented in media and popular culture.

The empirical chapter is also segmented into three sections. The first section outlines the research methodology, encompassing the study design, a description of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters selected for the study, and the data collection and analysis procedures. The second section primarily presents the main findings of the study. The final section discusses the research findings, limitations, implications, and suggestions for further research. The dissertation ends with a general conclusion.

Chapter One: A Theoretical Framework for Semiotics and Femininity

Introduction

Within the vast landscape of signs, the representation of femininity holds a significant place, serving as a captivating domain for semiotic analysis. Understanding how semiotic elements are employed to construct and communicate notions of femininity is crucial in unraveling the cultural myths and codes that contribute to the construction and perpetuation of stereotypical femininity. This theoretical chapter aims to delve into the intricate relationship between semiotics and femininity within the context of popular culture. It is structured into two main sections, each addressing a distinct aspect of the research topic. The first section focuses on providing a comprehensive understanding of semiotics, and mainly Barthes' semiotics, as a theoretical framework. The second section delves into the specific application of semiotics to the representation of femininity.

Section One: Semiotics and Barthes' Theory

This section begins with defining semiotics. Then, it provides an overview of the history and development of semiotics, presents key concepts of signs, signifiers, and signifieds, and highlights influential scholars and their contributions to the field. Additionally, the application of semiotics in various disciplines is discussed. The semiotic theory of Barthes is examined in detail, as it is applied as a methodological approach in this study. Finally, the section illustrates the application of Barthes' semiotics in analyzing cultural artifacts and media.

Definition of Semiotics

Semiotics, also known as *semiology*, is a field of study that examines the nature and functioning of signs within human communication systems. According to Chandler (2007), “semiotics is the study of signs, sign systems, and the way in which meaning is produced and

communicated. It investigates how signs function, how they generate meaning, and how they are used in various cultural and social contexts” (p. 2). Similarly, Sebeok (1994) defined semiotics as “the antique doctrine of signs” (p. 5), and most commonly, Saussure (1916) referred to it as “a science that studies the life of signs within society” (p. 16).

The fundamental concept of the sign in its broadest sense as “a natural or conventional semiotic entity consisting of a sign vehicle connected with meaning” (Nöth, 1990, p. 79) was clarified further by Larsen (1994):

a sign is any object which represents another object. Meaning is the representation of an object in or by another object. The sign or the representing object can have any material manifestation as long as it can fulfill the representational function: a word, a novel, a gesture, a reaction in the brain, a city etc. On the status of the represented object nothing is made explicit by this definition. It may be material or mental, fictitious or factual, fantasized or real, natural or artificial. From this it follows that something which is a sign in one context may be an object in another and vice versa.

Signs do not constitute a class of objects. A sign is a ‘functional’ unit. (p. 3824)

Larsen, in this quote, emphasized the sign’s function as a representation of another object and highlighted the diverse manifestations of signs and their contextual nature, underscoring their role in communication and understanding.

Semiotics encompasses various branches and approaches, including structural semiotics, social semiotics, and cognitive semiotics. Structural semiotics, as proposed by Greimas (1983), focuses on the analysis of narrative structures and the underlying codes that shape meaning. Social semiotics, as explored by Halliday (1978), emphasizes the social and cultural dimensions of signs, considering their role in the construction of identities, ideologies, and power relations. Cognitive semiotics, drawing on the work of Peirce (1931-

1958), investigates the cognitive processes involved in the interpretation and production of signs.

In summary, semiotics provides a framework for understanding how signs function in communication, how meaning is created and interpreted, and how cultural and social factors influence this process. Building upon this understanding of semiotics, the subsequent subsection provides an overview of the history and development of semiotics as a discipline.

An Overview of the History and Development of Semiotics

The roots of semiotics can be traced back to the field of philosophy, where scholars have long grappled with questions of language, meaning, and representation. Ancient philosophers, including Plato and Augustine, demonstrated a keen fascination with signs and their ability to convey and convey meanings. As far back as 397 C.E., Augustine, a Roman linguist and philosopher, advocated for the study of signs, highlighting the vast array of nonverbal communication methods employed by widely recognized entities (Şen, 2014). Additionally, Augustine viewed “signs as a crucial connection between nature and culture, recognizing their significant role in bridging these two realms” (Lester, 2003, p. 53).

Semiotics emerged as a distinct field of study in the early 20th century, with Ferdinand de Saussure playing a crucial role in its development. Saussure’s work on the structure of language and the concept of signs laid the foundation for modern semiotics (Chandler, 2007). During the mid-20th century, structuralism, influenced by Saussure’s ideas, further advanced semiotics. Semioticians like “Algirdas Greimas expanded the scope of semiotics to include narrative analysis and deep structural analysis” (Chandler, 2007, p. 4).

In the late 20th century, semiotics continued to evolve with the contributions of scholars like Michael Halliday. Halliday introduced the concept of systemic functional linguistics, emphasizing the social context of language and the role of semiotics in social interaction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Another influential figure in the development of

semiotics is Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce's work focused on the philosophical foundations of signs and their relationship to meaning and interpretation (Peirce, 1991). These key figures and their contributions have shaped the diverse approaches within semiotics and continue to influence contemporary research in the field.

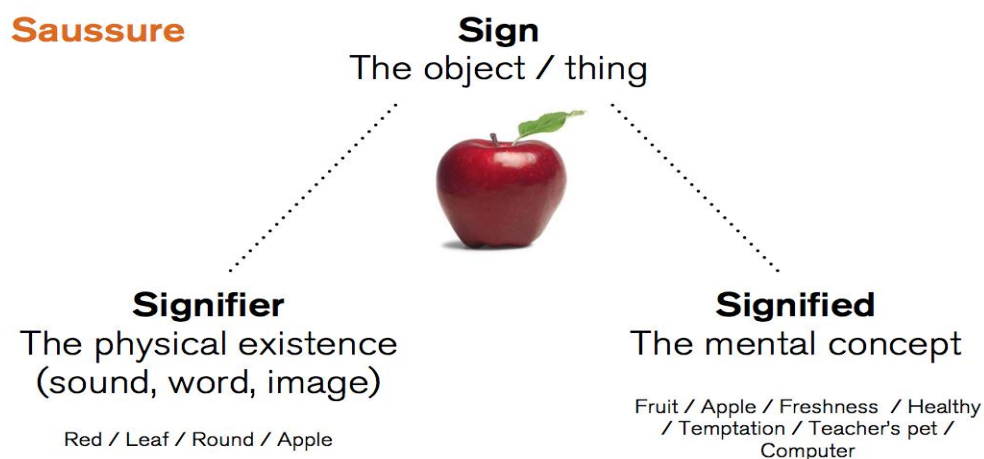
To sum up, the history and development of semiotics have been shaped by influential figures, including Saussure, Greimas, Halliday, and Peirce. Their contributions have expanded the scope of semiotics, incorporating structural analysis, systemic functional linguistics, and philosophical foundations. The next sub-section explores key concepts of semiotics to deepen our understanding of signs and their meanings.

Key Concepts of Semiotics

The key concepts of semiotics revolve around understanding the nature and interpretation of signs. Saussure (1916) proposed the distinction between the *signifier* and the *signified*, where the signifier refers to the physical form or representation of a sign, and the signified refers to the mental concept or meaning associated with that sign (see Figure 1). This duality highlights the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified, emphasizing the role of cultural and social conventions in shaping meaning (Barthes, 1977).

Figure 1

Saussure's Dichotomy: Signifier and Signified

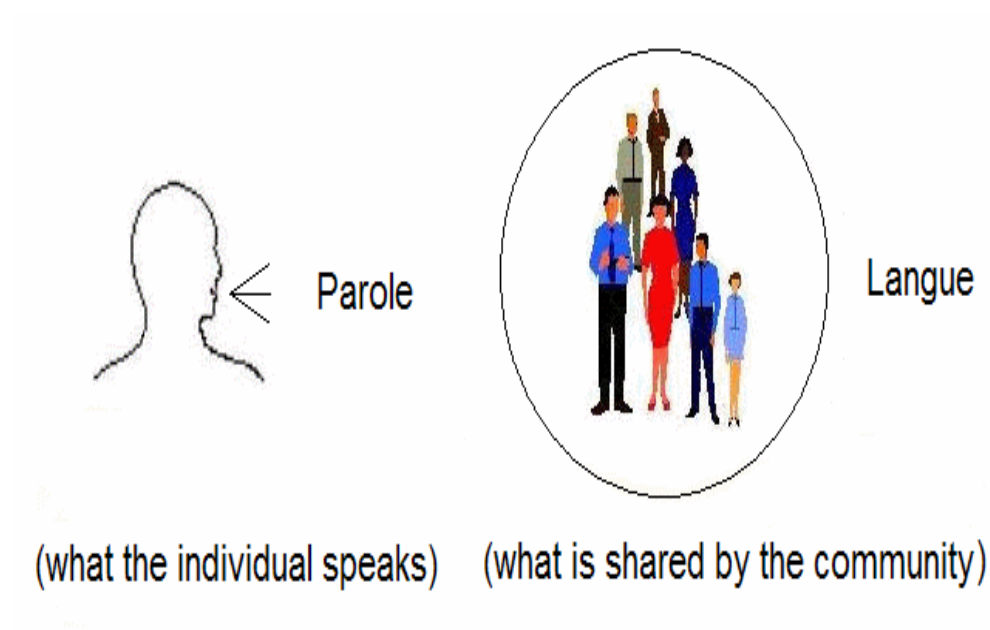


Note. From "European Structuralism" by Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif2 University

Furthermore, Saussure distinguished also between two main senses of language, *langue* and *parole* (Prior, 2014). These terms have obtained a wide approval in modern linguistics, without any specific translations in European languages. *Langue* refers to the abstract system shared by all the speakers of the same language, like English, Arabic, French, etc. It is an underlying system of abstract rules of lexicon, grammar and phonology which is implanted in each individual's mind resulting from his nurture in a given speech community. *Parole* refers to the real speech of the individual, an instance of the use of system. It is the concrete side of language (Prior, 2014).

Figure 2

Saussure's Dichotomy: Langue and Parole



Note. From "European Structuralism" by Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif2 University

In semiotics, signs are governed by *codes* and *conventions* that guide their interpretation. Eco (1976) explored the notion of codes as systems of rules and conventions that enable the decoding and encoding of signs within a particular cultural context. These codes provide a framework for understanding and interpreting signs, allowing individuals to make sense of the world around them. Furthermore, the interpretation of signs involves

considering the cultural, social, and historical context in which they are embedded. This context influences the connotation and denotation of signs, shaping their symbolic meanings and associations (Hall, 1980).

By reviewing the literature on the aforementioned key concepts of semiotics, we gain a deeper understanding of how signs operate, how meaning is constructed, and how cultural and social factors influence our interpretation of signs. Building upon these foundational concepts, it becomes a necessity in what follows to acknowledge the influential scholars who have made significant contributions to the field.

Influential Scholars and Their Contributions

The field of semiotics has been shaped by the significant contributions of influential scholars who have expanded our understanding of signs, meaning, and culture. As mentioned earlier, Saussure introduced the fundamental concepts of the signifier and signified, emphasizing the arbitrary nature of the sign (Saussure, 1916) and his book *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) is a seminal work in the field. Peirce developed a comprehensive semiotic framework and introduced the concept of the sign as a triadic relationship, consisting of the *representamen* (the sign itself), the *object* (what the sign refers to), and the *interpretant* (the meaning produced in the mind of the interpreter (Peirce, 1931-1958). Peirce's work on semiotics can be found in his writings such as *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (1932-1958). According to Nöth (1990), both Saussure, who is commonly referred to as the founder of semiotics and the father of modern linguistics, and Peirce, who is the major figure in the philosophical branch, are the pre-eminent figures in the development of semiotic theory.

The groundbreaking contributions of Saussure and Peirce have not only shaped the field of semiotics but have also influenced numerous 20th-century semioticians. Scholars such as Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes, John Berger, Charles Morris, and Thomas Sebeok were

inspired by the works of Saussure and Peirce, leading to the development of several semiotic theories (Şen, 2014).

Importantly, Barthes explored the cultural and ideological significance of signs and symbols in various contexts, including literature, advertising, and fashion (Barthes, 1972). Barthes' work *Mythologies* (1957) critically analyzed the way signs and myths operate in society. Eco was known for his interdisciplinary approach to semiotics. His work explored the role of signs in communication, culture, and interpretation. Eco's book *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976) is a comprehensive exploration of semiotics and its application to various domains.

After exploring the key concepts of semiotics and the influential scholars who have shaped the field, it is essential to delve into the practical applications of semiotics across various disciplines in the following sub-section.

The Application of Semiotics in Various Disciplines

Semiotics, with its rich theoretical framework and analytical tools, has found application in various disciplines, highlighting its interdisciplinary nature and versatility. Eagleton (1983), for example, emphasized the significance of semiotics in literary theory, stating that “semiotics provides a systematic framework for analyzing the production and interpretation of meaning in language and literature” (p. 15). In visual arts and design, semiotics has provided insights into the production and interpretation of visual signs and symbols (Owen, 2010). Additionally, Ambrožič (2006) explored the role of semiotics in marketing communications, noting that “semiotics provides insights into the ways in which signs and symbols influence consumer behavior and shape brand identities” (p. 105).

Moreover, semiotics has been applied in fields such as linguistics, where it contributes to the study of language as a system of signs (Baldrý & Thibault, 2006). In anthropology, semiotics has shed light on the cultural meanings embedded in rituals, symbols, and practices (Geertz, 1973). In the domain of media and communication, semiotics has provided tools for

analyzing the production and reception of media texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Also, semiotics has influenced disciplines like philosophy, sociology, psychology, and even science and technology studies, enriching our understanding of meaning-making processes in various contexts.

In conclusion, semiotics has found significant application across various disciplines. These applications highlight the versatility and relevance of semiotics in understanding and interpreting signs and symbols in different contexts. For the purpose of this study, however, the focus in what follows is primarily be on Barthes' theory of semiotics as the chosen framework for analyzing the target posters in the current research. Barthes' theory is renowned for its comprehensive approach to semiotic analysis, making it a fitting choice for exploring the meanings and messages embedded in the selected posters.

Barthes' Semiotic Theory

Barthes' semiotic theory is a significant contribution to the field of semiotics. Barthes (1915–1980), a renowned French philosopher, writer, and literary critic, developed a framework for analyzing signs and their meanings in the study of communication, literature, and cultural analysis. According to Barthes (1977), semiotics is “concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign” (p. 15). Barthes is probably the most significant figure to assume the mantle of Saussure, as he emphasized the importance of decoding and interpreting signs to uncover their underlying meanings. He argued that “signs are constructed through a system of signifiers and signifieds” (Barthes, 1977, p. 25). Moreover, Barthes developed concepts that present a profound contribution to the field of modern semiotics. In particular, one of his major contributions is the notion on the three orders of signification, termed ‘connotative’ (or connotation), ‘denotative’ (or denotation), and ‘mythical’ (or myth).

The Orders of Signification. Barthes introduced the concept of orders of signification, which categorizes signs into different levels of meaning. According to Barthes

(1977) at first, there are two orders of signification: the first order, known as the denotative level, and the second order, referred to as the connotative level. He stated, “Denotation is the first meaning, the simplest one, the one that goes immediately ‘to the eyes’” (1977, p. 27). He further added, “The denoted is what the image shows; the connoted is how it is shown” (1977, p. 32). On the one hand, in the denotative level, signs represent their literal and immediate meanings. Barthes (1977) explained, “The denoted meaning is not a natural image; it is an acquired system of values” (p. 33). The denotation allows for a straightforward interpretation of signs based on their physical attributes and immediate references. On the other hand, the connotative level of signification involves the additional layers of cultural, symbolic, and subjective meanings associated with signs. Barthes argued that these connotations are shaped by social, historical, and ideological factors. He noted, “The connotation is what the image tells us about the world” (1977, p. 33). Connotations are open to interpretation and can vary among individuals and cultural contexts.

However, in Barthes’ work *Mythologies* (1972), at the second order of signification relating to content, the sign works through myth. Myth in this term will be obtained after interpreting denotation become connotation meaning because all the result is an advanced interpretation of denotation and connotation that is adapted with condition and culture in society. Barthes (1972) argued that certain signs and symbols in society become naturalized and function as universal truths. These myths serve to reinforce dominant ideologies and social norms. Barthes (1972) explained, “Myth is a type of speech... it transforms history into nature” (p. 109). Through the analysis of myths, we can unveil the hidden ideological messages embedded within cultural texts and the ways in which they shape our understanding of the world. Figure 3 summarizes the signification process as explained by Barthes (1972).

Figure 3

Signification Process Summary

First Order of Signification



The image makes us think of our planet

Second Order of Signification

Our planet conjures up thoughts about our environment and wildlife

Third Order of Signification Myth



Environmentalism and the green movement

Note. From “*Roland Barthes - the Signification Process and Myths*” by Media Studies.com

In nutshell, by examining connotation, denotation, and myth, Barthes’ semiotic theory provides a framework for critically analyzing the intricate relationship between signs, cultural symbols, and their underlying meanings. It allows deciphering the layers of interpretation and ideological implications present in various forms of communication, ranging from visual images to written texts. Building upon this framework, Barthes identified five codes that operate within sign systems to create and convey meaning. These codes, which we explore subsequently in detail, can be seen as manifestations of the orders of signification. They provide specific ways in which meanings are shaped and communicated within a given cultural context.

The Barthesian Codes. Barthes introduced his codes as part of his semiotic theory in his influential work *Elements of Semiology*, which was first published in 1964. This seminal book laid the foundation for his exploration of signs, their meanings, and the ways in which they function in society. In *Elements of Semiology*, Barthes discussed various aspects of semiotics, including the concept of codes as sets of rules and conventions that shape the

production and interpretation of meaning within a specific cultural context. Barthes (1964) identified several codes, each with its own characteristics and implications. Barthes' work on codes has had a significant influence on the field of semiotics and continues to be widely studied and applied in various disciplines, including cultural studies, media studies, and literary analysis.

To delve deeper into the specifics of Barthes' codes and their implications, we present each type in detail, examining their characteristics with examples. By doing so, we can gain a deeper understanding of how signs operate within different codes and how they contribute to the construction and communication of meaning in various cultural contexts:

- **The Hermeneutic Code:** The hermeneutic code refers to the element of mystery or suspense in a text that prompts the reader to seek further understanding and interpretation. Barthes introduced this code to emphasize the role of enigma and the desire for resolution in narrative texts (Barthes, 1977). For example, in a detective novel, the code is activated when a crime is committed, and the audience is compelled to follow the clues and uncover the identity of the perpetrator.
- **The Proairetic Code:** The proairetic code, also known as the "code of actions", relates to the sequence of events or actions in a narrative that create a sense of suspense or anticipation. Barthes argued that this code operates through a cause-and-effect relationship, driving the plot forward (Barthes, 1977). An example would be a car chase scene in a movie, where the actions of the characters and the cause-and-effect relationships between their decisions create suspense and excitement.
- **The Cultural Code:** The cultural code involves the use of cultural references, symbols, and shared knowledge to convey meaning within a specific cultural context. Barthes emphasized that understanding these cultural codes is crucial for interpreting and decoding messages in cultural artifacts (Barthes, 1964). For instance, a red rose is

often culturally associated with love and romance. So, if a character presents a red rose to another character in a film or a novel, it can evoke the cultural code of romantic affection.

- **The Connotative Code:** The connotative code pertains to the additional layers of meaning that are associated with signs beyond their literal or denotative meanings. Barthes argued that connotation is socially constructed and influenced by cultural norms and values (Barthes, 1964). For example, a flag can represent national identity, patriotism, or even political ideologies depending on the context in which it is used.
- **The Symbolic Code:** The symbolic code refers to the use of signs and symbols to represent abstract or metaphysical concepts. Barthes explained that symbols hold cultural significance and can evoke complex meanings that are deeply rooted in societal beliefs and values (Barthes, 1972). For instance, a white dove is often symbolically associated with peace and harmony.

In essence, Barthes' orders of signification and codes are integral components of his semiotic theory, working in tandem to unravel the layers of meaning in signs. The orders of signification establish a framework for comprehending how signs convey meaning, ranging from their literal denotations to more intricate connotations. Simultaneously, Barthes' codes act as interpretive tools that shape our understanding of signs and contribute to the generation of meaning. These codes operate at both individual and cultural levels, influencing the decoding and interpretation of signs. Furthermore, Barthes emphasized that signs are not fixed in meaning but are culturally constructed, indicating that their interpretations are influenced by social and cultural factors. The upcoming sub-section delves deeper into this concept, offering further insights into the relationship between signs, codes, and cultural influences.

Cultural Construction of Meaning. Barthes (1977) argued that signs are not inherently fixed or universal, but rather culturally constructed and contingent upon social and

historical contexts. He emphasized the role of cultural codes in shaping the meaning of signs. According to Barthes (1977), “Every sign is culturally constructed, and its meanings are generated within specific systems of codes” (p. 20).

Barthes (1977) further elaborated on this idea by stating, “Cultural codes dictate the connotations and interpretations of signs, creating a shared understanding within a particular society or community” (p. 21). He emphasized that meaning is not inherent in signs themselves, but rather emerges through the complex interplay between signs and the cultural frameworks in which they are embedded. In his work, Barthes explored how signs and symbols are culturally mediated and produce meaning through the codes and conventions of a given society. He argued that these codes are learned and internalized through socialization and shared cultural experiences.

By acknowledging the cultural construction of signs, Barthes’s semiotic theory becomes useful for analyzing cultural artifacts and media, as they serve as rich sources of signs and symbols that reflect and perpetuate cultural values, ideologies, and narratives. The following sub-section highlights the significance of applying Barthes’ semiotics as a powerful tool for critical analysis and interpretation, shedding light on the intricate relationship between signs, culture, and meaning-making processes in different contexts.

Application of Barthes’ Semiotics. One notable application of Barthes’ theory is in the analysis of advertisements. Advertisements are rich with signs and symbols that communicate messages to the audience. By applying Barthes’ semiotic analysis, researchers (Chandler, 2007; Goffman, 1979; Kress & Leeuwen, 2006; and O’Guinn et al., 2019) have examined how advertisements utilize connotation and denotation to convey specific meanings and messages. Through the analysis of visual elements, language, and symbolic representations in advertisements, they have unveiled the underlying cultural myths, narratives, and ideologies that these advertisements perpetuate.

To further exemplify the application of Barthes' semiotics in analyzing visual representations, cultural symbols, and signs across various contexts, the following examples serve as illustrations. In their study titled *Gender Representations in Advertising: A Semiotic Analysis of Visual Images*, Kress and Leeuwen (2006) applied Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the visual images in advertisements. They examined how gender roles and stereotypes were constructed and perpetuated through the use of signs and symbols in advertising.

Furthermore, in the research article *National Flags as Cultural Symbols: A Semiotic Analysis*, Grayson and Grayson (2003) employed Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the cultural symbols embedded in national flags. They explored the denotative and connotative meanings of the visual elements, colors, and patterns used in flags, uncovering the cultural and historical significance associated with these symbols. Additionally, in their study *Music Videos and the Construction of Cultural Identity: A Semiotic Analysis*, Morgan and Shanahan (2010) used Barthes' semiotic theory to examine the visual representations and symbols in music videos. They explored how cultural identities and narratives were communicated and constructed through the use of signs, gestures, costumes, and settings in music videos.

Also, Zorlutuna and Özkan (2015), in their work *Political Cartoons and the Mythic Signification: A Barthesian Analysis*, applied Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze political cartoons. They examined how political ideologies, cultural myths, and power relations were conveyed and contested through the use of symbols, metaphors, and visual representations in political cartoons. These studies demonstrate the versatility of Barthes' semiotic theory in analyzing various forms of visual representations, cultural symbols, and signs in different contexts, shedding light on their meaning, interpretation, and social implications.

In brief, this theoretical chapter has provided an exploration of the foundational principles of semiotics as a theoretical framework. We traced the historical development of semiotics, from its origins in the works of Saussure to contemporary scholarship. Key

concepts such as signs, signifiers, and signifieds were discussed. We also delved into Barthes' semiotic theory to establish a solid foundation for our subsequent analysis. This section provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of semiotics and its relevance in analyzing cultural artifacts and decoding their meanings. In the following section, we shift our focus specifically towards the construction of femininity and how semiotic systems contribute to its portrayal and perpetuation.

Section Two: The Construction of Femininity Through Semiotic Systems

This section delves into the multifaceted nature of femininity and its depiction through signs and symbols, drawing upon semiotic analysis to unravel the underlying layers of meaning. To begin, we provide a comprehensive definition of femininity. We explore the social and cultural significance of femininity. A brief historical overview of the representation of femininity in media and popular culture follows. Then, we delve into the fundamental concepts of semiotics and its relevance in understanding the representation of femininity in diverse cultural contexts. By examining the visual and textual elements, gestures, body language, and cultural codes used to signify femininity, we aim to unravel the nuanced ways in which femininity is conveyed and interpreted. Furthermore, this section focuses specifically on American stereotypical femininity. We explore the common tropes, symbols, and narratives associated with American femininity, examining how these constructs are constructed and perpetuated through semiotic systems.

Defining Femininity

Femininity is defined as qualities associated with the female sex (Mehta & Henry, 2017 as cited by Darity, 2008). It is argued also that femininity is not biology-bound, nor it is related to gender assigned at birth; conversely, femininity is socially and culturally constructed; it is shaped by culture, time and geopolitical space (Mehta & Henry, 2017 as cited by Darity, 2008). In this regard, femininity is a complex and multifaceted concept that

encompasses a range of social, cultural, and psychological attributes associated with femaleness. Mehta & Henry (2017 as cited by Darity, 2008) added that it is important to note that femininity is not a fixed or inherent quality, but is shaped and negotiated through societal norms, cultural expectations, and individual experiences. According to scholars such as Butler (1990) and Connell (2005), femininity is performative and constructed through a series of gendered practices and discourses.

Butler (1990) argued that femininity, along with masculinity, is a gender performance that individuals continually enact to align with social norms and expectations. Meanwhile, Connell (2005) expanded on this notion, emphasizing the socially constructed nature of femininity and its dynamic relationship with power structures and social hierarchies. Both perspectives highlight the fluidity and contextual nature of femininity, suggesting that it is subject to change across different historical, cultural, and social contexts. Defined in this way, feminine traits and qualities include passivity, submissiveness, gentleness, warmth, helpfulness, compassion, understanding, dependency, emotional expressiveness and the presence of maternal instinct (Mehta & Henry, 2017 as cited by Darity, 2008).

In summary, femininity encompasses a range of social, cultural, and psychological attributes associated with the female sex. It is a complex and socially constructed concept shaped by societal norms, cultural expectations, and individual experiences. In the subsequent sub-section, we shift our attention to the social and cultural significance of femininity.

The Social and Cultural Significance of Femininity

Femininity holds social and cultural significance as it influences many aspects of individuals' lives and societal dynamics. It is intertwined with sets of gender, identity, power, and status. Through the lens of semiotics, we can critically examine the meanings and representations associated with femininity in various social and cultural contexts.

Scholars highlighted the role of femininity in penetrating gender norms and reinforcing societal impositions, for instance, Hooks (2000) argued that femininity, as constructed in patriarchal societies, often promotes submissive and passive qualities, and reinforces woman's segregation and subordination. Similarly, Beauvoir (1949) discussed the social construction of femininity and its impacts on woman's experiences and opportunities in societal settings. Moreover, the cultural significance of femininity can be observed in popular culture and media. Kilbourne (1999) examined the objectification of women in advertising emphasizing how femininity is commodified and underrated to sexualized images.

In brief, femininity is a multifaceted concept that is socially and culturally constructed, influenced by societal norms and individual experiences. It is not a fixed or inherent quality but is shaped and negotiated over time. In the following sub-section, we provide a brief historical overview of how femininity has been represented in media and popular culture.

A Brief Historical Overview of the Representation of Femininity in Media and Popular Culture

The representation of femininity in media and popular culture has gradually evolved reflecting broader social and cultural shifts. A brief historical overview showcases changing patterns and stereotypes associated with femininity, influenced by societal attitudes, norms, and power dynamics. The following insights from scholars shed light on this progression:

- a. Mulvey (1975) examined the concept of the "male gaze" in film, highlighting the objectification and sexualization of woman. She argued that woman in mainstream cinema is often portrayed as a passive object of male desire. Mulvey (1975) stated, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (p. 11).
- b. In her work on the representation of woman in advertising, Kilbourne (1999) traced the historical trajectory of femininity in commercials. She asserted, "Advertisements

sell more than products. They sell values, images, and concepts of success and worth, love and sexuality, popularity and normalcy” (p. 3). Kilbourne highlighted how advertisements have reinforced traditional gender roles and beauty standards.

- c. Gill (2007) explored the ways in which femininity is constructed and perpetuated through media representations. She stated, “Media culture abounds with representations of idealized femininity that evoke ideas of beauty, sexuality, and desirability” (p. 200). Gill emphasized the influence of media on shaping societal ideals of femininity.
- d. Barthes (1972) analyzed the cultural myths surrounding femininity in his work on semiotics. He explained, “Myths are depoliticized speech, emptying political concepts of their meaning and filling them with a false universal essence” (p. 129). Barthes highlighted how myths contribute to the construction of femininity by injecting certain ideals and stereotypes. Building upon this understanding of femininity, the subsequent sub-section provides an overview of the semiotics of femininity.

In short, the representation of femininity in media and popular culture has evolved over time, reflecting societal changes and norms. Additionally, the analysis of cultural myths has revealed their influence on shaping the perception of femininity. In the upcoming sub-section, we delve into the semiotics of femininity, exploring how signs and symbols contribute to its portrayal in different cultural contexts.

Semiotics and the Representation of Femininity

Semiotic analysis provides a valuable framework for critically examining the representation of femininity in media and popular culture. Scholars including Dyer (1982), Rocamora and Smelik (2014), Van Zoonen (1994) and Williamson (1978) have applied semiotic theories to decode the meanings and symbols associated with femininity and

embedded in mediatic inputs. Their contributions emphasize the significance of semiotic analysis in understanding the representation of femininity.

Williamson (1978) explored the use of signs and codes in advertising, emphasizing their role in constructing meanings. She stated, “Meaning is never innocent; it is always part of a system of meaning which is ideological” (p. 26). Williamson’s work demonstrated how advertisements apply semiotic systems to convey specific messages about femininity.

Additionally, Dyer (1982) investigated the semiotics of film and the construction of gender identities. He argued, “Meaning is not in the images themselves but in their use in a system of representation” (p. 7). Dyer’s analysis revealed how films utilize visual and symbolic elements to perpetuate gender stereotypes and cultural notions of femininity.

Van Zoonen (1994) applied semiotic analysis to the representation of woman in popular culture, particularly in television. She stated, “Semiotics offers tools for analyzing the construction of meaning, and thus the ways in which femininity is represented” (p. 32). Van Zoonen’s research illuminated the complex interplay between visual signs, cultural symbols, and the portrayal of femininity. Furthermore, in their study on the semiotics of fashion, Rocamora and Smelik (2014) explored how clothing and style communicate meanings about femininity. They argued, “Fashion operates as a complex semiotic system, creating and communicating cultural meanings about gender” (p. 9). Their analysis demonstrated how fashion choices and trends contribute to the construction of femininity.

In the upcoming section, we delve further into the semiotics of femininity, drawing from the insights of these scholars and exploring how various semiotic elements, such as signs, symbols, and codes, contribute to the construction and communication of femininity in different media contexts.

The Contribution of Signs and Symbols to the Construction of Femininity in Various Cultural Contexts

The construction and communication of femininity in different cultural contexts heavily rely on the use of signs, symbols, visual elements, gestures, body language, and cultural codes. Semiotic analysis provides a valuable lens to understand how these visual elements. Hall (1997) explored the cultural codes and visual representations that contribute to the construction of gender identities. He argued, “Meaning is produced and reproduced within the practice of everyday life and is ‘read off’ signs and symbols” (p. 4). Hall’s work highlights the significance of signs and symbols in shaping cultural meanings and their influence on the construction of femininity. Moreover, Butler (1990) examined the performative aspects of gender and the role of gestures and body language in signifying femininity. She stated, “Gender is an act, which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it” (p. 140). Butler’s analysis underscored how gestures and bodily performances contribute to the cultural understanding of femininity.

Manca and Ranieri (2016) explored the role of visual elements, such as fashion, makeup, and body adornments, in signifying femininity. They stated, “Visual signs communicate messages about femininity and reflect the cultural and social contexts in which they are produced” (p. 195). Their research demonstrated how visual elements serve as powerful signifiers of femininity in different cultural contexts. Besides, Entwistle (2000) examined the cultural codes and symbols associated with femininity and fashion. She argued, “Fashion provides a semiotic system through which cultural values, identities, and differences are articulated and negotiated” (p. 5). Entwistle’s analysis highlighted how fashion and its associated symbols contribute to the construction and communication of femininity.

The construction and communication of femininity rely on visual elements, gestures, body language, and cultural codes. Semiotic analysis helps understand how these elements

shape the representation of femininity in different cultural contexts. In the upcoming section, we delve into the visual and textual elements, gestures, body language, and cultural codes used to signify femininity. Drawing from the insights of these scholars, we explore how these elements contribute to the construction and communication of femininity in various cultural contexts.

The Visual Elements, Gestures, Body Language, and Cultural Codes that are Used to Signify Femininity

The construction and communication of femininity in various cultural contexts rely on a range of visual and textual elements, gestures, body language, and cultural codes that serve as powerful signifiers. These semiotic tools contribute to the representation and understanding of femininity:

- **Visual Elements:** Fashion, makeup, and body adornments are visual elements that carry symbolic meaning in signifying femininity. Manca and Ranieri (2016) emphasized that visual signs communicate messages about femininity and reflect the cultural and social contexts in which they are produced. These visual elements serve as visual cues that contribute to the construction of femininity in different cultural contexts.
- **Textual elements:** They encompass the use of language, written words, and textual signs as semiotic resources in the representation of femininity. According to Barthes (1977), texts (including written, verbal, or visual forms) are integral to the creation and interpretation of meaning. In the realm of femininity, textual elements can convey cultural norms, values, and stereotypes associated with femininity. Language itself is a powerful semiotic system that influences our understanding of femininity. Linguistic choices, such as the use of specific words, tones, and discourses, can shape perceptions and reinforce gendered expectations (Bucholtz & Hall, 2019). Textual

signs, such as slogans, captions, or written messages, also play a significant role in constructing and conveying meanings about femininity. These signs can either reinforce or challenge existing gender stereotypes, depending on their content and context.

- **Gestures and Body Language:** The performative aspects of gender are explored by Butler (1990), who argued that gender is an act that is rehearsed and performed. Gestures and body language play a crucial role in signifying femininity and are culturally constructed. They become part of the semiotic system through which femininity is communicated and understood.
- **Cultural Codes:** Cultural codes shape our understanding of femininity and are embedded in societal norms, values, and beliefs. These codes guide individuals on how to perform and interpret femininity. Entwistle (2000) highlighted that fashion provides a semiotic system through which cultural values, identities, and differences are articulated and negotiated. Cultural codes associated with fashion, beauty standards, and feminine ideals contribute to the construction and communication of femininity.

These examples illustrate how visual and textual elements, gestures, body language, and cultural codes function as semiotic systems that signify femininity. They reflect the cultural context and societal expectations, influencing the portrayal and understanding of femininity. Subsequently, we transit in the next sub-section to American stereotypical femininity and delve into the specific cultural context in which femininity is constructed and represented.

American Stereotypical Femininity

The representation of American stereotypical femininity in media and popular culture has been a subject of scrutiny and analysis. This representation is influenced by a variety of

semiotic elements that contribute to the construction and perpetuation of certain ideals and stereotypes, including visual imagery, gendered roles and behaviors, cultural symbols and icons, and advertising strategies. Let us proceed with each element in detail. In what follows, we proceed with each of these elements to gain a deeper understanding of their significance in the representation of femininity.

Visual imagery in media and popular culture plays a significant role in shaping American stereotypical femininity. Images of women portrayed as slim, attractive, and conforming to beauty standards are prevalent in advertising, film, and television. This perpetuation of the idealized female body has been discussed by Mulvey (1975), who argued that these visual representations perpetuate the “male gaze” and objectify women, reducing them to passive objects of desire. These images contribute to the construction and reinforcement of specific ideals of femininity, influencing societal perceptions and expectations.

Gendered roles and behaviors found in media and popular culture also reinforce American stereotypical femininity. Semiotic analysis reveals the presence of gendered roles and behaviors that further perpetuate traditional gender norms. The portrayal of women as nurturing, submissive, and focused on their appearance contributes to the perpetuation of societal expectations. Wood (1994) argued that media representations often present women in limited and stereotypical roles, reinforcing traditional gender roles and perpetuating cultural norms. These representations of gendered behavior contribute to the construction of American stereotypical femininity and shape how femininity is understood and perceived in society.

Cultural symbols and icons are also influential in the construction of American stereotypical femininity. The standardization of the ideal feminine beauty, portrayed by the image of the “all-American girl” characterized by blonde hair, blue eyes, and a cheerful demeanor, has become an iconic representation of femininity in American popular culture.

These symbols and icons serve as powerful signifiers that shape societal perceptions of femininity. The impact of cultural symbols and icons on the construction of femininity has been explored by various scholars, but their influence can be seen in how certain physical features and attributes are associated with femininity within the cultural context (Mulvey, 1975; Wood, 1994).

Advertising strategies play a significant role in shaping and perpetuating American stereotypical femininity. Through a subtle selection of visuals, language, and messaging, advertisements often reinforce gender stereotypes and promote specific ideals of femininity. Kilbourne (1999) highlighted how advertising manipulates symbols and narratives to associate products with specific gendered attributes, further reinforcing cultural norms. Advertising contributes to the construction of femininity by actively promoting and perpetuating certain ideals and expectations through targeted marketing strategies. The influence of advertising on the construction of American stereotypical femininity is evident in how specific traits, behaviors, and appearances are associated with femininity within the consumer culture (Kilbourne, 1999).

Overall, these examples demonstrate the multifaceted ways in which semiotic systems operate in the representation of American stereotypical femininity in media and popular culture. By critically analyzing these elements, researchers gain insights into the influence of signs, symbols, and cultural codes on the construction and perpetuation of specific notions of femininity (Kilbourne, 1999; Mulvey, 1975; Wood, 1994). Subsequently, we present the common tropes, symbols, and narratives that are associated with American femininity, shedding light on the prevalent cultural representations and societal expectations surrounding femininity in the American context.

The Common Tropes, Symbols, and Narratives Associated with American Femininity. The representation of American femininity in media and popular culture is often shaped by common tropes, symbols, and narratives. One such trope is *the damsel in distress*, which portrays women as vulnerable and in need of rescue (Mulvey, 1975). This narrative reinforces traditional gender roles, positioning women as passive recipients of male protection and support. Symbols like a distressed woman, a knight in shining armor, or a helpless maiden perpetuate the notion of female fragility and dependence.

In contrast to the damsel in distress, *the superwoman* trope presents an idealized version of American femininity (Gill, 2008). This trope showcases women as strong, independent, and capable of balancing multiple roles and responsibilities. Symbols like a powerful businesswoman, a multitasking mother, or a skilled athlete are used to promote the idea that women can “have it all” and excel in various domains.

Another prevalent theme associated with American femininity is *the good girl/bad girl dichotomy* (Bartky, 1990). This narrative juxtaposes femininity into contrasting archetypes: the virtuous, pure, and obedient good girl versus the rebellious, seductive, and assertive bad girl. These symbols and narratives reflect societal expectations and moral judgments imposed on women based on their behavior and adherence to social norms.

The princess fantasy is a pervasive symbol associated with American femininity, often perpetuated through fairy tales, Disney movies, and popular culture (Gill, 2008). This narrative presents women as delicate, beautiful, and in pursuit of romantic love and happily ever after. Symbols such as tiaras, ball gowns, and a longing for a prince charming reinforce traditional gender roles and notions of femininity.

These common tropes, symbols, and narratives associated with American femininity provide a glimpse into the construction and perpetuation of specific ideals and stereotypes within media and popular culture. They play a significant role in shaping societal perceptions

and expectations of femininity (Mulvey, 1975; Gill, 2008; Bartky, 1990). Next, we explore how these semiotic systems contribute to the construction and perpetuation of specific ideals and stereotypes of American femininity, shedding light on the intricate interplay between signs, symbols, and cultural codes in shaping societal perceptions and expectations.

The Construction and Perpetuation of Common Tropes, Symbols, and Narratives are Associated with American Femininity Through Semiotic Systems. Common tropes, symbols, and narratives associated with American femininity are constructed and perpetuated through semiotic systems, which include visual elements, gestures, body language, and cultural codes. These semiotic systems play a crucial role in shaping and communicating the meanings and representations of femininity. Here are some insights about each of these semiotic systems:

- **Visual Elements:** Visual representations play a significant role in constructing and perpetuating common tropes of American femininity. Advertisements, films, television shows, and other media forms utilize visual elements such as colors, clothing, hairstyles, and makeup to signify femininity. For example, the use of pastel colors, flowy dresses, and long, flowing hair can evoke traditional notions of femininity and beauty (Kilbourne, 1999).
- **Gestures and Body Language:** Gestures and body language also contribute to the construction of femininity. The way women are portrayed in media often includes specific poses, facial expressions, and gestures that align with cultural expectations of femininity. These gestures and body language can convey messages of submission, gracefulness, or allure, reinforcing gender stereotypes (Hochschild, 1983).
- **Cultural Codes:** Cultural codes are shared systems of meanings and interpretations that shape how femininity is understood and represented in a specific cultural context. These codes can include societal norms, values, and beliefs that influence the

construction of femininity. For example, the association of domesticity, nurturing, and care giving with femininity can be traced back to cultural codes that position women in specific roles (Bordo, 2003).

- **Narratives and Storytelling:** Narratives and storytelling play a vital role in perpetuating tropes and symbols associated with American femininity. Media narratives often follow specific storylines that reinforce gender roles and expectations. These narratives can depict woman as love interests, caretakers, or objects of desire, perpetuating the idea that femininity revolves around romantic relationships and appearance (Kilbourne, 1999).

Through the use of semiotic systems, including visual and textual elements, gestures, body language, and cultural codes, common tropes, symbols, and narratives associated with American femininity are constructed and perpetuated. These semiotic systems communicate and reinforce societal expectations and norms regarding femininity, contributing to the shaping of cultural identities and understandings of gender.

In conclusion, the analysis of the construction of American femininity through semiotic systems reveals the intricate relationship between signs, symbols, and cultural contexts. We have examined how media and popular culture contribute to the representation of femininity, employing various visual and textual elements, gestures, body language, and cultural codes. Throughout history, common tropes, symbols, and narratives have been utilized to shape and perpetuate specific ideals of American femininity. Semiotic analysis offers valuable insights into the underlying meanings and power dynamics that inform these representations.

Conclusion

Building upon the theoretical foundations established in this chapter, the subsequent section will shift our focus towards empirical research that investigates the representation of

American stereotypical femininity in a specific context. Through a semiotic analysis of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters, we examine how the visual and textual elements, cultural symbols, and narrative elements contribute to the construction and perpetuation of stereotypical femininity. This empirical investigation will provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which semiotic systems are employed to convey and reinforce societal norms and expectations surrounding femininity in contemporary American culture.

Chapter Two: Research Methodology, Analysis, and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter bridges the theoretical groundwork laid in the earlier chapter with practical application by undertaking Barthes' semiotic analysis of the representation of American stereotypical femininity in the posters of Taylor Swift's song titled "Blank Space". The aim of this study is to uncover the denotations, connotations, myths, and codes embedded in both verbal and non-verbal signs within the selected units of study. The chapter is organized into three main sections. The first section presents an overview of the research design and methodology applied in the study. The second section delves into the analysis of the gathered data. Finally, the third section presents a comprehensive discussion of the findings, examines the limitations and implications of the study, and offers recommendations for future research endeavors, highlighting potential avenues for further exploration within the realm of semiotics and gender representation in contemporary media.

Section One: Research Methodology

The purpose of this section is to establish a strong methodological framework for the empirical research. It sets the stages for a rigorous and insightful investigation into the semiotic dimensions of the chosen posters and their implications for the representation of femininity in popular culture. It outlines the research design and methodology following the research onion proposed by Saunders et al. (2007), which is made up of 6 layers that describe the different decisions we applied when developing our research methodology including: research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, choices, time horizon, and techniques and procedures.

Research Philosophy

This study aligned with an interpretivist approach in terms of research philosophy, as we aimed to explore and interpret the meanings and representations embedded in the posters

of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song. Our focus was on understanding the cultural and semiotic aspects of the posters, which requires an interpretive lens.

Research Approach

Within interpretivism, this research followed an inductive approach. Our research questions were open-ended, and we aimed to generate insights and interpretations based on the analysis of the selected posters to explore and understand the phenomenon of American stereotypical femininity in the context of these posters.

Research Strategy

This study adopted a qualitative research design, aiming to explore and interpret the meanings, symbols, and cultural representations evident in the selected posters. The analysis was guided by Barthes' semiotic theory, which provided a conceptual framework for understanding the signifying systems and cultural meanings embedded in the visual elements. The research design allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the posters to uncover the denotative and connotative meanings, myths, and codes, and their contribution to the representation of American stereotypical femininity.

Choices

Considering the nature of this research, as well as the research aims and objectives, we used the mono method i.e. one data type (qualitative).

Time Horizon

In the context of this study, the time horizon refers to the temporal scope of our research. It indicates the time period within which we collected the data. Considering the nature of this research, we used a cross-sectional time horizon as we collected Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters at one point in time (April 28th, 2023) using the online platform Pinterest. These posters were released in 2014 in association with the release of the song.

Techniques and Procedures

Data Collection Techniques and Procedures. A search was conducted on Pinterest to gather a comprehensive set of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters. A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was employed to select these posters. The selection was based on their relevance to the research topic and their potential to provide insights into the representation of American stereotypical femininity. The posters were chosen purposefully based on relevance, quality, and availability of high-resolution images suitable to include a diverse range of visual elements and styles to capture a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Subsequently, we offer pertinent contextual information pertaining to the selected posters, which serve as the focal units for analysis. By elucidating the origins, achievements, artist, and cultural significance of these posters, we aim to provide a comprehensive framework for interpreting their relevance within the scope of our research objectives. It is particularly noteworthy that the dominant presence of the singer herself in these chosen posters further underscores their significance in examining the portrayal of femininity.

Background Information on the Selected Posters. The sample for this study comprises four posters related to Taylor Swift's song "Blank Space". The first poster is the song's official cover, while the second is a Pinterest poster. The remaining two posters were extracted from the song's video teaser. Taylor Swift, an iconic figure in American popular music, represents the embodiment of American femininity and the song's visual representations align with the central theme of portraying American stereotypical femininity, as they contain abundant gendered visual semiotic elements.

Taylor Swift's song "Blank Space" comes from her fifth studio album "1989" on November 10, 2014; technically, it is an electro-pop with a 3:52 minutes length ("Taylor Swift", 2023). Swift co-wrote the song alongside with producers "Max Martin" and "Shellback" ("Taylor Swift", 2023). The background of "Blank Space" is a humorous self-

referential reaction to Taylor's stereotyped reputation as a flirty lady and a serial dater who had a string of love relationships. "Blank Space" spent seven weeks atop the "U.S. Billboard Hot 100" and was certified eight times platinum by the "Recording Industry Association of America" ("Taylor Swift", 2023). It also topped charts in Australia, Canada, Iceland, Scotland, and South Africa. "The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry" reported that "Blank Space" was one of the best-selling singles of 2015 ("Taylor Swift", 2023). The song earned three nominations at the 58th "Grammy Awards", including two general categories: "Record of the Year and Song of the Year". The song's video won "Best Pop Video" and "Best Female Video" at the 2015 "MTV Video Music Awards" ("Taylor Swift", 2023). According to "Taylor Swift" (2023), Swift included "Blank Space" on the set lists for three of her concert tours: the 1989 World Tour (2015), Reputation Stadium Tour (2018), and the Eras tour (2023).

Taylor Swift, born on December 13, 1989, is an American singer-songwriter who has achieved immense success in the music industry. Known for her narrative songwriting style and versatility in genres such as pop and country, Swift has become a prominent figure in popular culture. She gained widespread recognition with her self-titled debut album in 2006 and has since released several critically acclaimed and commercially successful albums. Swift's music often explores themes of love, relationships, and personal experiences, making her songs relatable to a wide audience. She has received numerous awards and accolades throughout her career, including multiple Grammy Awards. Swift's ability to connect with her fans and create a strong fan base has contributed to her enduring popularity. In addition to her musical achievements, Swift has also made headlines for her advocacy work, identifying as a pro-choice feminist and being a founding signatory of the "Time's Up" movement against sexual harassment. She is also known for her struggle particularly in the areas of education,

disaster relief, racial equality, and social justice issues such as police brutality (“Taylor Swift”, 2023).

Swift’s career trajectory, marked by genre transitions and cultural shifts, has forever changed the contemporary music landscape. Her albums have inspired a generation of singer-songwriters and made her a subject of academic study and scholarly media research. Beyond music, Swift’s fashion appeal and street style have received acclaim, with publications recognizing her as an influential figure in sustainable fashion. In addition, Swift has used her platform to encourage civic engagement and political participation. She urged her fans to check their voter registration ahead of elections, resulting in a significant increase in voter registrations. She also endorsed Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in the U.S. presidential election (“Taylor Swift”, 2023).

Data Analysis Techniques and Procedures. Data analysis involves a systematic examination of the semiotic elements, myths, and codes present in the visual posters. Barthes’ semiotic theory is applied to decode and interpret the meanings and representations embedded in the posters. The analysis uncovers the denotative and connotative meanings of the semiotic elements, explores how these elements are utilized to construct and communicate the representation of American stereotypical femininity, identifies the cultural myths and codes invoked in the posters, and analyzes how these constructed myths and codes contribute to the representation of femininity. In what follows, we outline each of these analytical procedures in a step-by-step manner:

1. Denotative and Connotative Analysis:

- Conduct a comprehensive examination of each of the four posters associated with Taylor Swift’s song “Blank Space” individually.

- Examine the denotative meanings of the semiotic elements employed in the posters. Identify and describe the literal or surface-level representations conveyed by the visual elements (both verbal and non-verbal).
- Perform a connotative analysis to uncover the symbolic associations, cultural references, and deeper meanings attached to the semiotic elements. Explore how these connotations contribute to the overall interpretation and representation of femininity.

2. Myth Analysis:

- Investigate the cultural myths that are invoked in the posters.
- Identify archetypal figures, symbolic motifs, or storytelling elements that allude to larger cultural myths.
- Analyze how these myths contribute to shaping and reinforcing the representation of American stereotypical femininity in the posters.

3. Codes analysis:

- Apply Barthes' hermeneutic codes to decipher the underlying meanings and interpretations of the signs.
- Employ proairetic codes to explore the actions, gestures, and movements depicted in the posters and their implications.
- Analyze the cultural codes employed in the posters to understand their symbolic significance and cultural references.
- Examine the connotative codes at play to unravel the implied meanings and associations conveyed by the visual elements.
- Identify and interpret the symbolic codes utilized in the posters to communicate deeper messages and cultural narratives.

5. Analysis of Contribution to Representation:

- Identify the specific visual techniques, symbols, and signifiers used to convey femininity. Explore their cultural significance and the messages they communicate. And examine the visual composition, texts, color schemes, poses, facial expressions, and other elements that contribute to the construction of femininity in the posters.
- Examine how the constructed myths and codes in the posters contribute to representing American stereotypical femininity.
- Explore the ways in which the visual elements, connotations, and semiotic choices reinforce or challenge the prevailing stereotypes of femininity.

In conclusion, this section has provided an overview of the research methodology applied in this study. The selected posters associated with Taylor Swift's song "Blank Space" have been introduced as the study sample, reflecting the influence of Swift as an American music icon and the richness of gendered visual semiotic elements in the song's portrayals. The rationale for the chosen research design has been rationalized, considering the significance of semiotic analysis in uncovering the denotations, connotations, myths, and codes embedded in the visual elements. The subsequent sections delve into the analysis of the data and the discussion of findings, followed by addressing the limitations and implications of the study and offering recommendations for future research endeavors.

In the upcoming section, we shift our focus to the analysis of the collected data. This includes a comprehensive examination of the selected posters associated with Taylor Swift's song "Blank Space" using semiotic analysis.

Section Two: Data Analysis

In this section, we delve into the heart of our study as we embark on the data analysis phase. Having established a solid theoretical foundation and provided an overview of our data analysis methodology, we now turn our attention to the posters of Taylor Swift's "Blank

Space” song. Our objective is to systematically examine the semiotic elements, myths, and codes present in these visual representations, unraveling the intricate meanings and cultural messages they convey. Through the application of Barthes’ semiotic theory, we aim to decode and interpret the underlying constructs that contribute to the construction and communication of American stereotypical femininity.

This section begins with a thorough examination of the denotative and connotative aspects present in each of the four posters. Subsequently, we delve into a comprehensive myth analysis of these posters. Following that, we conduct an in-depth analysis of the codes employed within the visual representations. Finally, we conclude the analysis by assessing the individual contributions of these elements to the broader representation of American femininity.

Denotative and Connotative Analysis

Poster One. The featured poster, displayed in Figure 4, serves as the official cover of the song. In terms of denotation through visual signs, it portrays “Taylor Swift” in two distinct female characters. The first character is depicted at the top of the page, with only half of her face visible. She is blond; she has blond short hair and red lips. Adorned with dark-silver metallic earrings and rings on each hand; her nails are polished in red, and she holds a red apple. Transitioning to the textual signs, the song’s title “Blank Space” is displayed in a white decorative font bordered in black, at the top center of the image. Directly below it, the singer’s name is written in a white “Modern Serif” font. Back to the visual signs, the setting presents a picturesque, sunlit outdoor scene resembling the entrance of a castle gate. The surrounding area is adorned with a double row of green trees. Returning to the visual signs, the second female character portrayed by the singer appears in a full-body depiction. She is wearing a long-sleeved white top, brown pants, and black boots. The character accessorizes with sunglasses and black gloves. Positioned atop a saddled white horse, the character is

shown screaming with her arms extended in a cross-like posture. The white horse is facing towards the right side.

Lastly, the text on the bottom of the poster represents the production and collaboration details related to the creation of the image. It states that the image is a production of “13 Management” in association with “1989 Studios”, both of which are likely associated with Taylor Swift’s management and production teams. The text also indicates that the poster is produced by “Shacketoffs”, which could be the name of a specific production company or a team involved in the poster creation process. Additionally, the text mentions the website “tumblr.com”, which could signify that the image is associated with or has been shared on Taylor Swift’s official Tumblr page.

In terms of connotation, we begin by examining the connotative aspects of the first character, who is intentionally portrayed with only half of her face visible, drawing the viewer’s attention to the lower part of the face, specifically the red lips and earrings. The color red plays a dominant role in this collection of signs and holds multiple symbolic meanings. Positively, red connotes energy, passion, motivation, liveliness, courage, attention, action, and strength. Conversely, it can also carry negative connotations such as death, devil, hell, warning, anger, danger, and revenge. The analysis of the interpretation of the blonde short hair, dark-silver earrings, and dark-silver rings is intentionally deferred to the analysis of the second poster. This is because these visual elements are not as explicit or discernible as they are in the second poster.

Having established the connotations of the red color in general parlance, the shift now is turned into the interpretations of the red lips, red nails and red apple in the context of this study’s central theme and objectives. When worn on the lips and nails, the red color can be interpreted as a bold and striking hue that elicits intense lust, desire, seduction, and sexuality. In addition, there is a sexual connotation being “red leaves a mark”; it shows the

profoundness of this color in leaving signatures alluring extreme female sensuality. In this regard, leaders often adorn themselves in red to signify their dominance.

The aforementioned interpretations lead us to deduce that the first character seems to be a fortifying lady domineering with her loud sexual energy and embracing her feminine power. Furthermore, when paired with the apple in the image, the color red carries various symbolic associations including the heart and heartfelt emotions, love, and blood.

From a secular perspective, the apple symbolizes attributes such as health, knowledge, and wisdom. It connotes innocence and purity; it may suggest a sense of naivety or vulnerability, highlighting the contrast between the perceived innocence and the potential darker undertones of the narrative. It may designate femininity and beauty; the red apple's association with beauty and allure can also tie into traditional notions of femininity. It may represent the attractiveness and desirability of the woman in the poster, reinforcing the themes of love, attraction, and femininity.

The red apple can evoke associations with romantic gestures, such as offering an apple to a beloved as a sign of affection. It may reflect the romantic theme in the song and convey a sense of love and courtship. However, within the American cultural context, the apple holds a specific reference to the Christian religious narrative of "Eden and Eve". Nevertheless, considering the context of "Eden and Eve", the character can be seen as a portrayal of "Eve" holding the symbolic apple of sin. As such, the apple becomes a symbol of temptation and the origin of sin. The apple takes on a mystical and forbidden nature, representing themes of immortality and the downfall of humanity. In the context of gender stereotypes, the image portrays femaleness as toxic, malicious, and alluring.

Besides, the apple holds a connection to the fairytale of "Snow White" in which the apple played a pivotal role as a poisonous object. This introduces a paradoxical contrast between notions of "healthy" and "poisonous". The portrayal of the blonde character in the

image resonates with the depiction of “Snow White” and her encounter with the apple.

Shifting attention towards the song’s title “Blank Space” which is presented in a white decorative font bordered in black that conveys playfulness, childhood, and fun. However, this font can also carry undertones of sarcasm and irony, suggesting something illogical or not to be taken seriously. Meanwhile, the textual “blank space” is noun group that in itself signifies emptiness. The concept of emptiness holds negative connotations, representing loss, despair, instability, and weakness.

In relation to the study’s central theme, when associated with gender stereotypes, the phrasal “blank space” suggests that the female identity is perceived as empty, which posits a doorway to negativity and temptation. The emptiness becomes a catalyst for attracting negative thoughts and is seen as a void to be filled with something malicious. The idea of blankness also implies a sense of nothingness. Describing women as empty suggests a lack of intellect, reasoning, and logic. An empty woman is not perceived as a mature, sentient being. Finally, the black borders of the white “Decorative” font may connote that this blankness is therefore a door to darkness; one might think of the devil.

Next, the name of the singer written in a “Modern Serif” font, refers to the real-life Taylor Swift. This font carries connotations of glamour, luxury, exquisite design, and high fashion. However, this layer of interpretation is unrelated to the toxicity of femaleness depicted in the poster. Instead, it pertains to the singer’s personal persona in real life. This layer of interpretation has to do with the personality of the singer in the real life; it may also describe the music industry of the singer.

The singer’s name represents the archetype of the American white woman. Taylor Swift embodies the idealized concept of “white femininity”. Through her portrayal, Swift reinforces stereotypes associated with idealized girlhood and womanhood, positioning herself as the embodiment of the “girly girl” archetype. Swift symbolizes a gendered construct,

reinforcing assumptions of hyper-sexuality and hyper-femininity. She epitomizes societal expectations of how a girl should behave and presents this image prominently within the music industry.

Moving to the setting presented as a fresh and scenic view connotes elegance and refinement; the presence of well-manicured trees can connote a sense of elegance, sophistication, and attention to detail. It adds to the overall aesthetic appeal and reinforces the luxurious atmosphere portrayed in the poster. It may also indicate privacy and seclusion; the trees act as a natural barrier, creating a sense of privacy and seclusion around the White House. They may imply that the enclosed space within the gate is exclusive and protected, separating it from the outside world.

The setting is a symbol of stability and longevity; trees have long been associated with growth, strength, and resilience. The presence of trees on the borders of the White House gate can symbolize the enduring nature of the institution and its role as a stable foundation of power. Another connotation implies nature's harmony with manmade structures. The juxtaposition of trees against the White House gate can represent the harmonious coexistence of nature and human achievements. It may imply a balance between natural beauty and human endeavors. In context, the metaphorical reference to the Garden of Eden. This further reinforces the semiotic metaphor of Taylor Swift's portrayal as "Eve" in the poster.

On the other side, the second character appears as a woman cavalier who wears a white top, brown pants, sun-glasses, black boots and black gloves. Initiating with the white color, it connotes purity, innocence, cleanness, simplicity, minimalism and so forth. In terms of the study's central theme, the white top may refer to blankness and emptiness; digging deep into the implicit meanings behind the usage of white as the color of the top, the white color in this case is coherent with the previous whiteness of "Blank Space"; this helps to deduce that this white clothing item covers the part of the body where the heart exists. That is

to say, a white top adds a rhetoric signification of blankness to the part of the body responsible of the feelings i.e. the heart; it shows that the second character is someone who is devoid of heart-feelings, and she is empty in her inward.

Additionally, the black gloves may allude to filthy hands committing sin and guilt. Also, the brownness of the pants may signify wood; it can encapsulate a sense of fire and burn. Thinking of a wood-like something connotes a sense of readiness to be burnt and catch fire. The signs and may connote prestige and beauty significations. The following sign to be interpreted is the second character; the character appears as a woman cavalier; the cavalier is an epitome of honor; this person seems to have noticeably special traits such as courage, solitude, faithfulness, sacrifice, humility, truth and glory. In contrast, Taylor Swift has altered the idealized picture of the “cavalier” since she represents a female knight in an unusual naughty way; the woman standing on top of the horse’s saddle screaming.

Initially, the character’s standing position and screaming may be interpreted as an indicator of a hysterical and crazy behavior. The character hereby seems as insane, arrogant, rebellious, wild and unpredictable. Next, the character’s posture being crucifix-like may refer to the Christian context signifying sin and guilt. Since the character is a woman, she is compared to a witch; witches in the medieval ages were tormented by the Christian church in terms of crucifixion as a result of their witchcraft and sin. The portrayal shows that although the character appears crucified, she does not seem scared or humiliated. This showcases an irony of guilt and rudeness.

Moving to the horse, it is an epitome of freedom and dignity. In this context, the white horse looking right-side may connote innocence, virtue and morality. Hence, the lady’s posture on top of the horse in such an ironic way may illustrate that the character underestimates the values and virtues.

Figure 4

Poster One



Note. From “Taylor Swifts posters” by Pinterest (2023).

Poster Two. As depicted in Figure 5, focusing on denotation, the same character as in the previous poster (Poster One) is presented, but this time she is clearly visible. Signs of the previous poster appear here again, namely the blonde short hair, red lips, dark-silver earrings, red nails, dark-silver rings and red apple. The character has a golden short hair, wears a cat-eye eyeliner and gray eye-shadow. With red lips, she has a blank gaze; polished her nails in red, she holds a red apple in her hand. The woman is apparently bejeweled in dark-silver earrings, dark-silver rings and dark-silver chain-like bracelet; she wears a black dress. The poster’s background is gray-colored surrounded with a thick black frame; then, there comes a long textual sign being “Boys only want love if it’s torture” written in different fonts and colors.

In terms of connotation, drawing attention to the dark-silver jewelry that connotes hardness and solidity, a female wearing silver jewelry may be characterized as sharp and stubborn. However, in cultural contexts, silver in Christianity has connotations of corrupt intentions as it symbolizes shame, sorrow, immorality, deception, chaos and disruption. Putting pieces altogether, a female bejeweled in dark-silver may be signified as she has a sullied reputation. Moreover, the dark silver is associated with the moon. The moon is a referential to the feminine energy because of its association with the cyclic changes occurring in nature and the female's body.

Next, the same character of the previous poster appears. The blonde short hair shadows the boldness of the character. When thinking of how shy "Snow White" is in terms of character, this fact excludes the resemblance of character to "Snow White" although she is holding a red apple. As connoted previously, the red apple symbolizes attributes such as health, knowledge, wisdom, femininity, beauty, temptation, poison and so forth.

Besides, the character in the image wears a cat-eye make-up that may indicate a variety of negative connotations since the cat exhibits cultural code linked to demons, witches and Satan; in the American Christian culture, the cat depicts dreadful characters such as greed and selfishness. Next, the gray eye-shadow showcases the forthcoming connotations of the gray color. The gray color stands as aloof, and it lacks depth. This color connotes emotionlessness. Having a blank gaze which associates with the gray color, the character tends to be a devil-like devoid of feelings; she wears a black dress which illustrates darkness and nightmare.

The decoding of the gray background, as previously connoted, the gray color extracts the overall image from the sense of vividness and heartbeats. When a poster is surrounded by a thick black frame, it typically serves to draw attention to the image and create a sense of visual impact. The black frame acts as a boundary that separates the poster from its

surroundings and helps to establish a clear and defined visual presence. Additionally, the use of a black frame can add a touch of sophistication and elegance to the overall presentation of the poster.

Heading towards the signification of the verbal sign “Boys only want love if it’s torture”, this sign entails a semantic code. This sentence reveals a lot of cues in relation to the compilation of signs of the previous poster. To start, “Boys” is used instead of “men” to underestimate the manhood. Second, “Love” is written in a red decorative font; the used font has a playful and fun connotation while the red color signifies blood. The typography of the word “Love” plays a crucial role as a sign encoded to underestimate the concept of love. “Torture” is a key word written in gray like the background of the image. Getting back to the bracelet which looks like a dark-metallic chain demonstrates control and dominance, and it conjuncts with the verbal “Torture” extracted from the verbal sign “Boys only want love if it’s torture”.

Figure 5

Poster Two



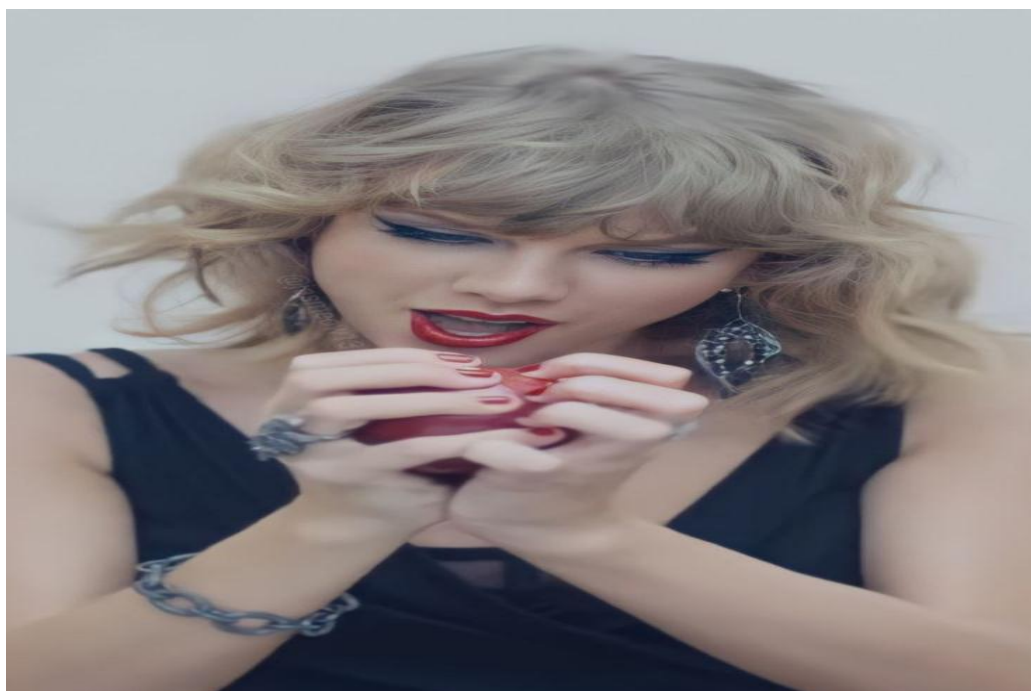
Note. From “Boys Only Want Love if it’s Torture” by Pinterest (2023)

Poster Three. In terms of denotation, as demonstrated in Figure 6, the character appears in a provocative gaze holding the red apple with both hands in a heart-like shape. The shape of one of the dark-silver rings appears clearly resembling the snake.

In terms of connotation, the provocative gaze, holding the red apple with both hands and holding the red apple with one hand may be interpreted as the character is not a victim to be by the poisoned apple; she appears bold and provoking messing with the heart signified by the apple. This may tell that she herself will not eat the poisoned apple, yet she will give it to someone else. She may also be the responsible of poisoning the apple. The dark-silver snake-like ring endorses this interpretation since the snake connotes evil, torture, and death.

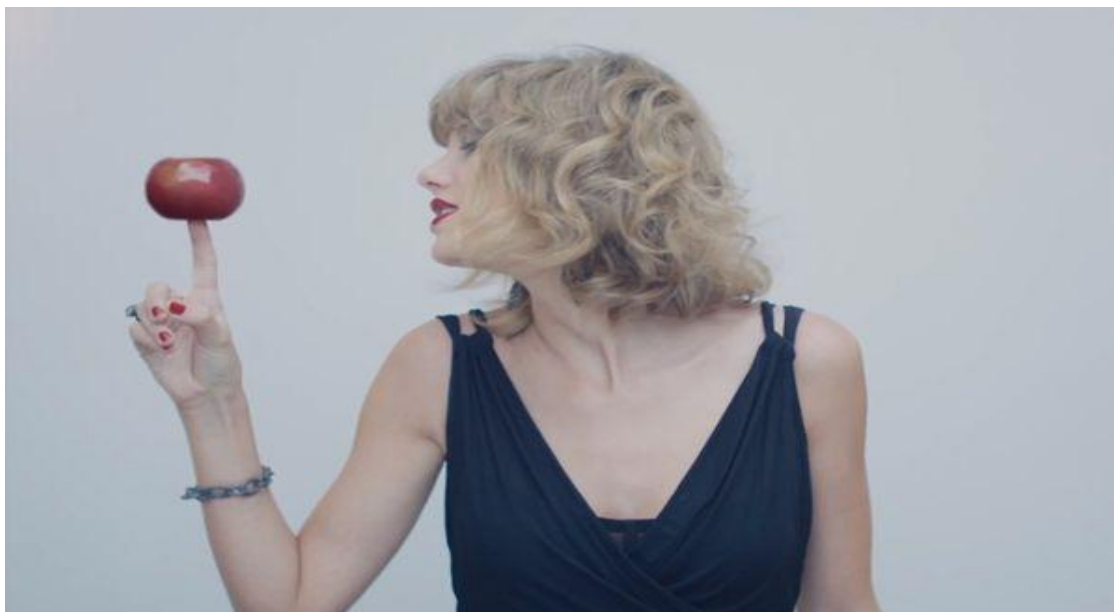
Figure 6

Poster Three



Note. From “*Blank Space Lockscreen*” by Pinterest (2023).

Poster Four. In terms of denotation, the character appears holding the red apple with one hand messing with it as suggested in Figure 7. In terms of connotation, the provocative gaze, holding the red apple with one hand in such a playful way may be interpreted as the character underestimates the heart signified by the apple.

Figure 7*Poster Four*

Note. From *“Is it Taylor Swift a Death Note Fan?”* by Pinterest (2023).

Myth Analysis

Based on the analysis conducted, the connotations within the posters can be categorized into three distinct rubrics: hyper-femininity, toxic femininity, and female toxic love. These rubrics serve as frameworks that capture the underlying cultural myths communicated through the posters. The connotations within each rubric contribute to the construction and reinforcement of specific narratives and representations of femininity, reflecting broader societal beliefs, values, and expectations. By identifying and examining these cultural myths, we gain deeper insights into the ways in which the posters shape and convey notions of femininity, shedding light on the complex interplay between cultural symbols, stereotypes, and the portrayal of women.

Table 1 presents the framework of toxic femininity, illustrating the key elements and characteristics associated with this particular myth. By examining the components within this frame, we gain a comprehensive understanding of how toxic femininity is manifested and

represented within the context of the posters. The table provides a visual representation of the different aspects and attributes that contribute to the construction and portrayal of this myth, shedding light on the complex interplay between cultural symbols, societal expectations, and the depiction of femininity.

Table 1

Categorization of Signs Representing Female Toxic Attributes

Sign	Female Toxic Attribute
Dark-silver jewelry	moody, dramatic, unpredictable
Red apple , setting	tempting
“BLANK SPACE”	irrational, narrow-minded, immature
White top, gaze , Gray color	emotionless, selfish, aloof
Black gloves, posture, make-up, black dress	troublesome
Brown color	impulsive, hard to be dealt with, defensive, overly reactive, aggressive, overcritical, jealous, bitter, ill-tempered
Posture, screaming	insane, hysterical, crazy

Table 2 showcases the development of connotations into three distinct categories: hyper-femininity, toxic femininity, and female toxic love. These categories serve as frameworks for constructing and reinforcing a set of stereotypes that perpetuate sexist myths. Within the table, we can observe the specific connotations associated with each category, offering insights into how these myths are manifested and communicated through the posters. The table provides a visual representation of the interconnected nature of connotations, stereotypes, and the perpetuation of sexist ideologies, highlighting the significance of cultural symbols in shaping societal perceptions of femininity.

Table 2*The Sexist Myths of Femininity Constructed in terms of Connotations*

Connotation	Sexist Myth
Hyper-femininity	accommodating, sexual object
Story-telling, imagination-driven, details-driven, rich description	drama-queen
Immaturity	half-brained
Craziness	hysteria
Emptiness, drama, recklessness, insecurity	gossiper
Temptation, origin of sin	“Eve”
Troublesomeness, evilness	witch
Impulsiveness	complainer
Female toxic love	serial-dater, gold-digger, materialist

Following the categorization of the signs in the posters into distinct cultural myths, our analysis proceeds to explore how these myths play a vital role in constructing and reinforcing the representation of American stereotypical femininity within the posters. Signs are embedded within a code system to construct connoted meanings that are developed to a third order of signification to communicate a cultural context structured through convention. Myth is the context of signification which manifests an ideological representation within a narrative’s framework; that is to say, a myth is a connotation that is developed to reach universality; and it becomes culturally natural. Debunking the third order of significations from the connotations of hyper-femininity, toxic femininity and feminine toxic love, in “Blank Space” posters’ codes unveil sexist myths in terms of American prejudiced femininity.

By examining the relationship between the identified cultural myths and the representation of American stereotypical femininity, we can discern the significant role these

myths play in both constructing and reinforcing the portrayal of femininity within the posters. These myths actively shape the visual and symbolic elements, influencing the viewers' understanding and interpretation of the feminine ideals depicted.

Codes Analysis

Table 3 presents the categorization of signs within Poster One based on their respective code types. The table offers a comprehensive overview of how the signs in the poster align with specific codes, providing a deeper understanding of the underlying meanings and interpretations embedded within the visual and textual elements. By organizing the signs into code categories, we can discern the systematic application of Barthes' codes in decoding and unraveling the intricate layers of representation within the poster. The table serves as a valuable tool for analyzing the relationship between signs and codes, shedding light on the deliberate choices made in communicating specific messages.

Table 3

The Categorization of Poster One Signs in Terms of Codes

Sign	Code type
First character 'the woman's face on the top of the page'	symbolic
Red lips	symbolic
Red nails	symbolic
Red apple	cultural, symbolic, enigmatic, action
"Blank Space"	connotative, enigmatic
"Taylor Swift"	cultural, symbolic
Setting (castle gate, trees on the two borders of the White House gate)	cultural

Woman (second character: the woman standing on horseback)	symbolic
White top	connotative
Brown pants	connotative
Black boots	connotative
Sunglasses	connotative
Black gloves	connotative
Standing position	connotative
Screaming	connotative
Crucifix-like posture	cultural
White horse	symbolic
The text on the bottom of the image	none

Table 4 presents the classification of signs within Poster Two according to their respective code types. The table offers a systematic breakdown of how the signs in the poster align with specific codes, enabling a detailed analysis of their underlying meanings and interpretations. By categorizing the signs into code types, we gain valuable insights into the intentional use of Barthes' codes to construct the visual narrative and convey particular messages.

Table 4

The Categorization of Poster Two Signs in Terms of Codes

Sign	Code type
Golden short hair	connotative
Dark-silver earrings	cultural
Dark-silver rings	cultural

Cat-eye eyeliner	cultural
Gray eye-shadow	connotative
Blank gaze	connotative
Dark-silver chain-like bracelet	connotative
Black dress	connotative
The picture's background	connotative
"Boys only want love if it's torture"	connotative

Table 5 illustrates the categorization of signs within the third and fourth posters based on their respective code types. This table provides a comprehensive overview of how the signs in these posters align with specific codes, allowing for a systematic analysis of their connotations and symbolic meanings. By examining the signs within the framework of Barthes' codes, we gain a deeper understanding of how these visual elements contribute to the overall representation and communication of American stereotypical femininity.

Table 5

The Categorization of Posters Three and Four Signs in Terms Codes

Sign	Code type
Provocative gaze	connotative
Holding the red apple with both hands	connotative
Holding the red apple with one hand	connotative

Having categorized the signs within the posters into different types of codes, we now proceed to apply Barthes' codes individually, systematically decoding the underlying meanings and interpretations embedded within the signs. Each code serves as a unique lens through which we can unveil the intricate layers of meaning within the visual and textual elements of the posters.

The Hermeneutic/Enigma Code. The analyzed posters of “Blank Space” enclose puzzles to be solved in terms of the red apple and “Blank Space”. Enigma codes are present to ignite questions which underlie important clues that reveal the overall meaning beyond the portrayals. This technique is utilized to penetrate a sense of ambiguity, and hook the audience. First, the red apple held by the first character appeared multiply in the four posters; this enigma raises fundamental questions as follows: Will the character consume the apple and face the consequences of its poison? Or, perhaps she intends to offer it to someone else? Besides, there is still an ongoing enigma in the images. “Blank Space” as a textual or verbal sign enlightens the following questions: What is exactly this blank space? What does it consist of? Which space is it? What kind of blankness is it? Will this blank space still be blank? Deciphering these enigmas is the key to unlock the portrayals that are networked, and unchain the connotations and myths embodied to represent American femininity. However, enigma codes are not left unsolved thanks to cultural codes.

The hair color makes a whole connotative difference. From the aforementioned interpretation, the enigmatic code and action code underlying in the apple sign has started to be disclosed. Obviously, the character herself will not eat the apple. In contrast, she may be referred to the reader as “Eve”. It is notable that Posters Three and Four disclose the enigmatic code of the held apple; the interrogations “will she consume the apple and face the consequences of its poison? Or does she intend to offer it to someone else?” are revealed.

The Proairetic Code. The red apple appears as an action code wherein the character in the four images is holding the apple on pause, leaving the audience in suspension wondering “what kind of action will the character involve in holding the fruit?” This interrogation works in conjunction with the aforementioned enigmas, and it is disclosed by the cultural codes.

The Cultural Code. The narrative of the four posters is constructed on the foundation of the cultural codes; that is to say, those codes are the most fundamental signs encoded in the posters. It will be unattainable to reach none of the conclusions if the portrayals are not culturally contextualized. Christianity is the foreground of American culture. Therefore, relying on Biblical significations is critical to restrict the wide range of connotations and filter them in coherence with the research's central theme which is typically female stereotypical representations in "Blank Space". The cultural codes also serve the decoding of the myths represented in the portrayals. Another significance of the cultural codes is the revelation of enigma and action codes.

The Connotative Codes. The connotative codes are very significant in unraveling the implied meanings and associations conveyed by the visual elements, for instance the brown color indulges in framing the toxic traits of femininity in the roots of stereotypes.

The Symbolic Codes. The symbolic codes utilized in the posters communicate deeper messages and cultural narratives, for instance the red lips is a symbol that constructs the frame of hyper-sexuality; the significance of this symbolic code underlies in paving the way to further connotations associated with grooming and sexuality; as a result, stereotypes are ignited to represent femininity as toxic and shameful.

Analysis of Contribution to Representation

In the final step of the analysis, we can examine how the various elements identified in the earlier analysis contribute to the overall representation of American femininity in the posters. By considering the denotations, connotations, myths, and codes present in each poster, we can assess their collective impact on shaping and reinforcing the representation of American stereotypical femininity.

The visual elements that contribute to the construction of femininity in the posters encompass a range of aspects, including the visual composition, texts, color schemes, poses,

and facial expressions. These elements work together to convey specific messages and representations of femininity. One prominent feature is the prevalent use of the color red throughout the posters. The red color scheme holds significant symbolism in relation to femininity, evoking notions of passion, love, and feminine power. Its presence contributes greatly to the overall representation of femininity in the posters. Additionally, the objects portrayed in the posters, such as jewelry, accessories, and makeup, play a crucial role in communicating feminine cues. These elements emphasize the characters' adherence to societal beauty standards and their engagement in practices associated with femininity. The characters in the posters are depicted as well-groomed, projecting a sense of polished femininity. Together, these visual elements come together to construct and reinforce the representation of femininity within the posters, portraying a loud and visually striking femininity.

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representation of femininity within the posters, portraying a loud and visually striking femininity.

The visual elements, connotations, and semiotic choices reinforce the prevailing stereotypes of femininity in terms of three central frames, particularly hyper-femininity, toxic femininity and female toxic love. On the one hand, “hyper-femininity” or it may refer to as extreme femininity is the exaggeration of being feminine. In light of the posters, hyper-femininity is indexed through the over-use of make-up and the red color. The character is stereotypically represented as hyper-feminine as she appears with red lips, red nails and loud eye-liner. A wide range of stereotypes descend from grooming to conceive womanhood as loudly exaggerated and promiscuous.

On the other hand, colors, objects, gestures and postures work altogether to constitute the umbrella of toxic femininity represented in the posters of “Blank Space”. Stereotypically, females are notorious of certain attributes. To start, the representation of silver in the posters succeeds to drop the curtains and quench the lamps revealing a bunch of negative connotations. Silver connotes the moon which represents the feminine energy reflected by the changes in the lunar cycle. When metaphorically linked to the moon, femininity connotes instability. The moon also symbolizes dreams and fantasies. In account of the previous significations, a silver-loving or a silver-wearing female tends to be preconceived as dramatic and moody.

Adding to the connotations of toxic femininity, if femaleness is described as empty, this posits immaturity which results female toxicity. “Blank Space” succeeds to be a strong negative connotation constructing the representation of the forthcoming stereotypes. A female is irrational as she does not act upon logic. A female is narrow-minded; she does not resonate appropriately; she has a restricted standpoint; she is not able to access the full vision. The brown color, as analyzed previously, connotes a “wood-like” personality ready to catch fire

and be burnt; this connotation is very rhetoric as it may designate an impulsive femaleness that cannot control anger, constantly fights and disputes. It is stereotyped that females invest considerable energy to relate to situations, so they are labeled as being overly-reactive. In the same vein, women are known of being defensive, aggressive, overly-critical, jealous, bitter and ill-tempered. In terms of prejudices, women are constantly ragging on others, blaming, complaining and creating problems from scratch; they look for flaws to criticize. In addition, women are insecure and obsessed as a result they indulge in toxic jealousy. When it comes to bitterness, women are reckless, and they verbalize their inward without thinking twice. On the basis of what has been discussed, toxic femininity is framed in terms of traits and personality.

In light of female toxic love, Taylor Swift in “Blank Space” portrayed a female character messing with the red apple. The character of “Blank Space” is constructed to represent hyper-feminine, toxic womanhood and females toxic love. It is interpreted forward that the red apple is poisoned, and it is signally revealed that the song’s character on behalf of femaleness intends to give the fruit as a torture to masculinity in terms of a poisonous love. Here, the red apple designates the heart of masculinity.

This analysis allows us to understand how the visual and textual elements work together to construct specific narratives and portrayals of femininity. We can evaluate the extent to which the posters align with or challenge societal norms and expectations related to femininity. Furthermore, we can explore how the use of specific symbols, cultural references, and visual techniques contribute to the construction of gendered identities and stereotypes.

Through this analysis, we gain insights into the ways in which the posters participate in the cultural discourse surrounding femininity. We can identify the dominant themes, messages, and ideologies that emerge from the posters and consider their potential effects on perceptions and understandings of gender roles.

To sum up, the data analysis section provided a comprehensive examination of the selected posters through denotative and connotative analysis, myth analysis, codes analysis, and an analysis of their contribution to the representation of American femininity. By dissecting the visual and textual signs, exploring underlying myths, and decoding the cultural codes, we gained insights into the complex layers of meaning and symbolism embedded in the posters. The analysis shed light on the construction and communication of representations, highlighting the role of semiotic elements and their contribution to the portrayal of American femininity. The findings from this section lay the foundation for the subsequent discussion and interpretation in the following section.

Section Three: Discussion, Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

In this section, we embark on a comprehensive exploration of the research findings obtained through our research. Building upon the solid foundation of data analysis, we delve into the significance of these findings within the context of our research problem. Through a critical evaluation, we assess the implications of our study and examine how the results contribute to the existing body of knowledge. In light of our research questions and assumptions, we establish meaningful connections between our findings and the broader scholarly discourse. Additionally, we synthesize our findings with previous studies and relevant literature, elucidating any new understandings or insights that have emerged as a result of our investigation. This discussion section serves as a platform to bridge the gap between theory and empirical findings, highlighting the importance of our research and its contribution to advancing knowledge in the field. We conclude this section by acknowledging the limitations of the study, highlighting its implications, and providing recommendations for future research endeavors.

Discussion

The research aim of this study is to delve into the denotative and connotative meanings and representations conveyed through the semiotic elements in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters. Additionally, it seeks to identify the cultural myths and Barthesian codes invoked in these posters and highlight how these semiotic elements, myths, and codes contribute to the representation of American stereotypical femininity. Through the pursuit of these research aims, this study endeavors to offer a thorough analysis and comprehension of the intricate dynamics involved in the portrayal of femininity within American popular culture.

With regards to the first research question, which aims to analyze and determine the denotative and connotative meanings of the semiotic elements employed in the posters, a comprehensive examination of 31 semiotic elements has been conducted. These elements encompass various aspects including colors, objects, postures, gazes, characters, and textual components. Through meticulous analysis, their denotations and connotations have been thoroughly explored. For instance, the non-textual sign "red apple" denotes a fruit while connoting various significations such as health, wisdom, immortality, beauty, love, temptation, and more. Furthermore, the signifier "Blank Space" assumes a noun phrasal structure as its primary signification, while developing secondary significations such as emotional emptiness and personal vulnerability. Based on these findings, the initial research assumption puts forth regarding the semiotic elements used in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters carrying both denotative and connotative meanings is validated.

Regarding the second research question, which focuses on identifying and exploring the cultural myths invoked in the posters, the analysis uncovers the presence of 12 cultural myths that emerge from the portrayed stereotypes of hyper-femininity, toxic femininity, and female toxic love. Through this examination, it becomes evident that these stereotypes themselves embody a mythical essence. According to the interpreted findings, it is set forward

that American cultural mythology is sexist wherein femininity is stigmatized. Christian traditions and beliefs constitute the source of American cultural myths. Among the invoked myths, woman is conventionally referred to “Eve” who is religiously believed as a villain and the origin of sin. Additionally, woman is metaphorically called a witch. Cultural myths are also constructed in terms of labels imposed on woman such as drama-queen, gossip, materialista and so forth. Finally, femininity in America has been positioned in inferiority; sexist myths reinforce contempt against woman. As a result, patriarchy and misogyny are built upon these ideological assumptions. In light of these findings, the second research assumption positing that cultural myths play a substantial role in influencing the visual composition and messaging of the posters is validated.

Shifting our attention to the third research question, which seeks to identify and analyze the Barthesian codes utilized in the posters, the signs are utilized with a subtle rhetoric to represent American stereotypical femininity in terms of personality, action, reaction and love. Admittedly, the usage of signs is reasoned since gender stereotypes are meditatively encoded. Although the existent signs are interdependent as each sign communicates, individually, a set of stereotypes, there is a constructive fraction between the non-verbal and verbal signs which interrelate to bring multi-faceted stereotypes of American femininity. Thus, the third research assumption, which proposes that the representation of femininity in American popular culture is shaped and conveyed through diverse semiotic strategies, including visual elements, gestures, cultural references, and symbolic associations, is substantiated by the utilization of Barthesian codes observed in these posters.

The fourth research question aims to examine and understand how the semiotic elements, constructed myths, and codes in the posters contribute to the construction and communication of American stereotypical femininity. Through a meticulous analysis of the posters, it becomes evident that the chosen semiotic elements such as characters, colors,

objects, postures, gazes and textual components work together to construct a specific image of femininity. These elements, when combined, evoke cultural associations and reinforce stereotypical notions of femininity, including beauty ideals, romanticized relationships, and toxic behaviors. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that the constructed myths and narratives embedded within the posters contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. The posters employ storytelling elements and symbolic motifs that evoke mythical narratives associated with femininity. These constructed myths, intertwined with the semiotic elements, further solidify and communicate the representation of American stereotypical femininity. Overall, the findings support the assumption that the utilized semiotic elements, constructed myths, and codes in the posters work synergistically to construct and communicate the representation of American stereotypical femininity.

In relation to the denotative and connotative meanings of the semiotic elements employed in the posters, the findings of this study align with previous research on the interpretive nature of signs and their cultural connotations (Barthes, 1977; Saussure, 1916). The analysis revealed that the semiotic elements, including characters, colors, objects, postures, gazes, and textual components carry both denotative and connotative meanings. These findings resonate with the notion that signs are not simply literal representations but are imbued with cultural and symbolic associations (Fiske, 1982). For instance, the denotation of the “red apple” as a fruit is accompanied by a range of connotations. This observation aligns with previous studies highlighting the multifaceted nature of signifiers and their capacity to evoke multiple layers of meaning (Chandler, 2007; Hall, 1997).

Furthermore, the analysis of many signifiers in the posters, such as, the “Blank Space” sign demonstrates the intricate relationship between denotation and connotation. While the primary signification of “Blank Space” is a noun phrasal structure, the secondary significations associated with emotional emptiness and personal vulnerability emphasizing the

role of connotation in shaping the interpretation of signs (Barthes, 1977). These findings contribute to the existing literature on the semiotic analysis of American popular culture and its ability to convey nuanced meanings through visual and textual cues (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Williamson, 1978).

Stressing the significance of myths in the construction and representation of reality, Solis (2021) claimed, “Myth is the glue that bonds people into cohesive societies and, at the same time, keeps many of them suspended in a state of passive resignation and submission to a version of truth” (p.9). Solis (2021) described mythology as a social or cultural compass, which is an ideological key to reality since it shapes gender patterns and beliefs, and it reflects societal and cultural attitudes. He added that mythology is a didactic key as it dictates and imposes certain inputs as well as he viewed that American mythology is quite sexist wherein masculinity is glorified whereas femininity is stigmatized, admitting that it bolsters patriarchal and misogynistic nuances. That is to say, American mythology is the source of sexism, and it constitutes a crucial part of the cultural identity of America.

Tracing the origin of American gender mythology, Biblical antecedents are believed to be the source of gender bias and stereotypes. In Christianity, femininity and masculinity hold juxtaposed poles. American femininity is mythically conceived as vicious and devilish in Christian roots. According to Walker (1983), the Christian femininity represented by “Eve” is the mythical injury of the fall of man; fathers of the church including St. Augustine and St. Paul regarded Eve as the premise of female wickedness and damnation of Adam representing all men. Walker (1983) added that the Christian church viewed that female’s sexual magnetism is the origin of sin and devil having brought the primordial crime to men. As a consequence, he noted that the Mother and Daughter figures are damned; however, figures of the Father and Son are revered. Besides, Walker (1983) claimed, “Women were not called daughters of this God, who gave men their souls. In the sixth century, churchmen even denied

that women had any souls” (p. ix). He also admitted, “The link between woman and devil in the patriarchal mind was as old as the Garden of Eden story” (p. x). That is to say, Biblical myths constructed and conquered the mentality of the western culture; thus, sexism is the product of Christian mythology.

According to Walker (1983), Eve, or the “Mother of All Living” is the premise of defiance and disobedience; her figure is attributed to mortality. Therefore, every woman is regarded as the emanation of Eve, and this Christian contempt against femininity is stretched to construct a sexist mythology that permeated all of western society. To elaborate on this claim, Walker (1983) stated:

Eve brought forth death as well as life that is, she brought forth all living forms, all of which were subject to death for the very reason that they were alive. Under patriarchal systems of belief, the fact that every living thing is doomed to die was blamed on the Mother who gave it a finite life. (p. 290)

This quote highlights how patriarchal systems of belief have historically blamed woman for the mortality of human beings. Hence, by denying woman the opportunity to be valued for who she is, instead of her reproductive capabilities, patriarchy perpetuates a deeply ingrained misogyny that devalues and subjugates woman.

Besides, the myth of “witch” is, likewise, sexist and relatively mischievous that has existed in the American culture for centuries. This myth’s roots can be traced back to the Christian church which promoted the belief that woman is intrinsically sinful and prone to temptation. As aforementioned, the story of Eve in the Bible has vigorously fostered this conviction portraying woman as the weaker sex, who is easily led astray, drawing from the story of the serpent that coaxed Eve who eventually persuaded Adam to eat the apple. The myth of “witch” has emerged as a way to further demonize woman and underestimate her status as second-class citizens. Said otherwise, women who were seen as troublesome or who

challenged the patriarchal order were most often accused of witchcraft, and were subjected to brutal punishments, including torture and execution. The conception of witch as a dangerous and malevolent figure has endured in American culture, and has been utilized to legitimize various forms of oppression and violence against femininity.

Other sexist myths of American femininity, that are perpetuated by various cultural forces including the media, popular culture and Christian institutions, have long attributed a variety of vicious, unholy and misogynic perceptions to woman. Woman is often seen as an accommodating sexual object for male's pleasure, making her value determined by her physical appearance and sexual availability, leading to a culture of objectification and sexualization in which femininity is commodified to be consumed and discarded. Added to that, another idea injected in American myths is that woman has long been regarded as inherently less intelligent than men, or labeled as "half-brained" which signifies immaturity. Such a myth is based on outdated and sexist stereotypes about gender roles and abilities, and it has been used to justify all kinds of gender-based discrimination, from denying woman access to education and employment opportunities, to undervaluing her contribution in the workplace and society at large.

Furthermore, in contemporary American female sexism, terms like "drama-queen" and "complainer" are one of the most pervasive sexist impositions used to describe woman. These myths are relatively used to dismiss woman's legitimate concerns and grievances, and to undermine her credibility when it comes to her imagination-driven story-telling or her excessive description as well as her impulsiveness mirrored in complaints. These myths further underpin gender-based discrimination as woman is often marginalized and deprived of holding positions of power and influence because her status is regarded as not valid nor worthy of consideration. Another contemporary stereotype that implies sexism in American femininity is the idea that woman is more likely to gossip than men. Such a sexist myth is

often penetrated in American society as it reinforces the conviction that woman is somehow less trustworthy or confidential than man, which in return connotes that she is likely to be empty-headed, reckless or insecure.

Moreover, historically, American femininity did not spare woman's love from its sexist critiques. Stereotypes such as "serial-dater", "gold-digger" and "materialist" have been induced in American culture to suggest that femininity is merely shallow and only cares about money and status, and it has a firm will to do whatever it takes to achieve these goals including multiple dating and manipulating men for financial gains. Conversely, woman who prioritizes her careers or other interests over romantic relationships, and tends to seek independence has usually been seen as "unfeminine". To sum up, these double-standards manifest gender inequalities and are often used to justify discrimination and bias against women.

Thinking of hyper-femininity ignites a set of interrogations such as the followings: Why would femininity be criticized and attacked for being overly feminine? Why would a woman be attacked for being a loud woman? This study has established that hyper-femininity is stigmatized because it stands against the norms, and it fuels gender stereotypes. This study has also showcased that sexuality is not only communicated through bodily cues (e.g. postures, clothes, nakedness, and so forth); facial cues play an important role in triggering sexuality since wearing makeup (e.g. lipstick, mascara, eyeliner, and so forth) can be a sex stimulus. Reinforcing those results, grooming in American culture is negatively perceived; according to Walker (1983), Christianity projects against woman who acts independently from man in making her own sexual choices. Therefore, hyper-femininity is preconceived as a sex hint. However, psychological and scientific studies suggested that grooming increases female's self-esteem and has a positive effect on feminine energy, woman's sensation and intuition, and woman's interaction with the external world (Kosmala, Wilk & Kassoliv,

2019). In contrast, Walker (1983) noted that in Christianity any means that leads to boost woman's pride and confidence is forbidden since woman is born to be dependent and deprived from the rights to take decisions and actions, and be self-determined.

As discussed previously, a wide range of stereotypes descend from grooming to conceive femininity as loudly exaggerated and promiscuous. It is prejudiced that a hyper-feminine woman is with such a weak personality that she seeks to please men and acclaim her strength from men's validation of her physical appearance and femininity; this type of woman marks her presence sexually per se. Bringing back the connotation of "Blank Space", a blank space in woman's personality is a doorway to weakness. Hereby, woman attempts to compensate this lacuna with an over-concentration on her physical appearance. This shows how signs are networked to develop an overall scheme of meaning. In pursuit of the analysis, it can be elaborated that attention attraction is a female's weapon and tactic to prove her existence. It can also be deduced that hyper-femininity is the product of the patriarchal beliefs in a sense that femininity is blank in its own entity. That is to say, woman is empty of identity and self-determination, so she is conditioned to receive dictations of patriarchy and impositions of dependency; woman has to please man with her femininity to feel herself alive and worth-living.

Moreover, another evolved question includes: "Why would a woman be overly feminine?" In this regard, hyper-femininity may be interpreted as a reaction against male's dominance, in a sense of revenge. Besides, another stereotype labels woman as tempting and seducing, using her femininity to manipulate men. When sexually manipulating man, woman avenges patriarchy reclaiming her power, and projects against dependency acclaiming her control. However, according to Christianity, temptation is a sin; thereby, hyper-femininity is a taboo. Taylor Swift portrayed herself as a hyper-feminine character wearing loud make-up and intensified her look with red cues to represent woman as rebellious, independent and

domineering. This representation ranges a myriad of interpretations; however, the significations in whole contribute to designate a stereotypical female's toxicity.

In juxtaposition, according to Franco, Clare & South (2008), it is agreed upon that a "good girl" is the acceptably desirable archetype of womanhood in social settings; this model of womanhood follows socially-prescribed norms, especially those associated with sexual behaviors, behaves in accordance with a high self-esteem and low sex drive, and is not promiscuous. Franco, et al. (2008) added that a "good girl" is cautious of her outward image and how others perceive her, particularly in regard to her sexuality; this archetype thrives to make and involve in healthy relationships on the basis of good feelings rather than extreme sexuality. The authors noted, additionally, that any other contradictory behavior to a good girl's archetype is socially undesirable as they illustrated that Jennifer Anniston, or at least her public persona that most people are familiar with, is a symbol of the USA's quintessential "good girl".

In terms of toxic femininity, a moody woman is unpredictable and indecisive; thus, it is prejudiced that it is hard to deal with a female. Woman is so-called drama-queen because female's imagination is limitless; story-telling and creating fantasies, femininity is also attributed of not being straightforward, and being details-driven. Franco, et al. (2008) referred to this feminine attribute as "rich description"; it is distinctively a feminine trait in contrast to men, particularly with intense masculinity, who communicate primarily by informing, only. Dramatizing and moodiness are regarded as toxic traits because a woman who acts basing on such attributes is not socially validated and accepted. Additionally, madness has been associated with femininity ever since. To illustrate, depictions appeared in Shakespeare's Ophelia, a famous character, known for her madness and suicide. A woman who does a culturally undesirable behavior, or behaves against the norms is identified as insane and crazy. When asking a person to picture someone insanely crying, or screaming hysterically, they will

picture a woman who is out of control. This gender-biased attribute is entrenched in the posters of “Blank Space” in terms of the character’s screaming and pose atop of the horse.

When tackling feminine toxic love, two frames are to be discussed, namely, manipulation and heart abuse. The question is why would a female involve in such a stigmatized behavior of love’s toxicity? The statement “Boys only want love if it is torture” is a stereotype of males’ love. The masculine love is prejudiced as cruel and savage since it is believed that men do not thrive for healthy peaceful love; instead, they would rather a toxic torturing love full of pain and emotional damage. It can be deduced that woman reacts and avenges against male’s toxic love through playing the same toxic game.

On the one hand, manipulation is a gendered technique utilized by woman in her toxic relationships with men. Franco, et al. (2008) defined manipulation as “the attempt to influence another person’s mind to achieve a certain outcome” (p. 105). The authors added, “Female manipulation can be either creative or destructive, depending on the desired outcome” (p. 106). Woman avenges patriarchy and gender impositions through the tendency of manipulation; both hyper-femininity and toxic femininity are means of manipulating men, having a sexual and psychological influence over them. In American culture, labels including “adventuress” and “materialista” are constructed to portray a gender-bias of feminine manipulation and toxic love. In pursuit of hyper-femininity, the constructed archetypes of bad womanhood indicate that woman involves in toxic love and heart abuse because she tends to be selfish seeking her personal and financial benefits over heartfelt emotions. That is to say, woman tempts and seduces men, sexually, to fulfill her needs.

In terms of manipulation, jealousy may be connoted from the semiotic element of the brown color, as a toxic attribute that contributes to frame feminine toxic love. Franco, et al. (2008), asserted that whether wittingly or unwittingly, jealousy is intrinsically a female attribute used by woman as a means of taking control over men. The authors also asserted,

“This is connected with her drive to maximize the profit she can gain by having a man fall into the role of provider with her” (p. 140). Moreover, according to the authors, “rich description” is one of the manipulative techniques used by woman to hypnotize her surroundings, including men. As discussed previously, a dramatic woman involves in “rich description” when talking to and addressing men, particularly, in order to trap them in the feminine influence. As a result of what has been elaborated, signs decoding interpreted that according to American stereotypes, femininity is regarded as a toxic lover who hurts masculinity.

Besides, the five narrative codes of the Barthesian theory are perceptively present. Findings synthesize that the majority of signs range from twofold, threefold to fourfold code types, for instance the non-verbal sign red apple exhibits a symbolic, cultural, action and enigma codes, and the verbal sign “Blank Space” entails semantic and enigma codes. The cultural codes play a crucial role since the connotations of the prevalent signs fall under the Christian spectrum; that is to say, there is a ubiquity of cultural codes utilized in the images, which are Christianity-bound. The analyzed posters are incisively rich of feminine prejudiced representations communicated through the semiotic elements. The sign mechanism frames the connotations in terms of the hyper-femininity, toxic femininity and feminine toxic love constructing prejudices of American femininity.

The findings of this study shed light on how the utilized semiotic elements, constructed myths, and codes in Taylor Swift’s “Blank Space” song posters contribute to the construction and communication of American stereotypical femininity. These findings align with previous researches that have examined the representation of femininity in popular culture. For instance, Smith and Johnson (2018) conducted a similar analysis of music videos and found that semiotic elements such as clothing, body language, and settings were used to construct and reinforce gender stereotypes. Their study, along with the current research,

highlights the consistent use of semiotic strategies in popular culture to depict and perpetuate traditional notions of femininity. Additionally, Jones et al. (2019) explored the representation of femininity in film posters and identified the presence of cultural myths and symbolic associations that contribute to the construction of gender stereotypes. Their findings are paralleled with the current study, which also identifies the role of constructed myths and symbolic motifs in reinforcing American cultural stereotypes of femininity

This study further seeks to contribute to the existing scholarly literature about how American femininity is stereotypically represented in media through qualitatively implementing Barthes' semiotic theory. Nonetheless, the literature on gender issues is very rich and varied. Semiotics and media has a long tradition. By depicting the similarities and differences of angles between this study and some other research endeavors conducted on the same scope, this discussion provides an insightful lens on how other enquiries examined gendered media and the representation of femininity, and what research methods researchers applied to tackle the representation of femininity and gender stereotypes in media. Comparatively, the representation of femininity in media is examined by Rahmat & Tambunan (2019) in their article; they depicted Barthes' conception of the levels of connotation and denotation to the analysis of the Barbie's "You Can Be Anything" YouTube Channel Campaign regarding female empowerment and femininity.

Contrastively, the representation of femininity in films is a paralleled research scope; Sarah (2021) in her study examined the representation of feminism in a film entitled *Jane Eyre* through elements of Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory of Semiotics using a descriptive qualitative method, the researcher analyzed signs that contain hidden meanings in the film. Besides, in their qualitative research, Dahlal & Fahem (2020) examined the stereotypical representation of gender roles in both Algerian and American billboard advertisements by adopting the Social Semiotic theory 'Visual Grammar' relying on the Representational and

the Interactive Metafunctions and the Social Semiotic Approach developed by Goffman (1979) as a tool for decoding gender behavior and roles.

Adding to the distinctive lens, other researchers implemented Peirce's semiotic theory as it is a constructive engine in qualitative analysis, for instance in her dissertation, Taleb (2020) established a semiotic study of a set of lyrics sung by two female singers from two different cultural environments. The two singers are Billie Holiday, an American Blues singer, and Hnifa, an Algerian Kabyle singer. Taleb selected three themes to be studied that are related to love, gender and social relationships. Her study was based on Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic theory of sign to unveil the hidden meanings of the song lyrics. Besides, in her study, Nziza (2018) investigated the representation of women in the news section of the Print media via an analysis of The New Times and Imvaho Nshya newspapers, through a quantitative content analysis.

Drawing attention to the contagious effect of media in the globalization's era, mass media creates both overt and covert messages that influence peoples' behaviors especially that of young people. Media consumption plays a negative and positive role as it may lead to violent, sexual, and compulsive behaviors, and it may fertilize cultural outlets. Celebrities, hereby, have a visible presence in both of those impacts; they can promote courageous truth telling, hide and prolong social problems (University of Minnesota Libraries, 2016 as cited in Beatty, 2006). In the same vein, Arnold (1991) noted that personalities and backgrounds of content creators are embedded in their productions, and transmitted to the audience in terms of cultural output to be consumed; this constructs volatile and boundaries-free cultural models.

Due to the brutal drawbacks of American popular culture invasion through media and music industry, in fueling and instilling gender stereotypes on young generations, we had better be critical when accessing the visual inputs, interestingly. The sign mechanism in the

music industry might seem innocent for a while; however, it proves to encompass an intense dark-side within it; therefore, media literacy assists in helping the recipients of the visual content in managing how to develop constructive judgments about the different facets of the popular music, and to be able to attentively filter what to access and what to reject in terms of mediatic outputs.

In pursuit of media literacy, Tornero (n. d.) stated, “media literacy is the term used to describe the skills and abilities required for conscious, independent development in the new communication environment – digital, global, and multimedia – of the information society” (p. 103). The author added, according to the European Commission media literacy may be defined as the competence of accessing, analyzing and evaluating what is behind the surface-level of images, sounds and messages which are communicated in media. Tornero (n. d.) added further that according to the European Charter of Media Literacy, there are seven areas of competence (or know-how) related to media literacy which are the followings: Media literacy assists in reaching the effective use of media technologies to access, store, retrieve and share content to meet individual and community needs and interests, accessing and making informed choices about, a wide range of media forms and content from different cultural and institutional sources, understanding how and why media content is produced, critically analyzing the techniques, languages and conventions used by the media, and the messages they convey, creative use of the media to express and communicate ideas, information and opinions, identifying, avoiding and/or challenging, media content and services that may be unsolicited, offensive, or harmful and making effective use of media in the exercise of democratic rights and civil responsibilities.

In conclusion, the data analysis conducted in this study has unraveled the underlying research patterns. The findings shed light on the representation of American cultural stereotypes related to feminine behavior, thinking, actions, and reactions as encoded through

non-textual and textual sign systems in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" posters. Moreover, the study has provided insights into the depiction of ideologies and myths embedded within these representations. Subsequently, this study's limitations should be considered alongside its implications and recommendations, providing a foundation for future research endeavors in the field of gender representation and popular culture.

Limitations

Despite the rigorous methodology and comprehensive analysis employed in this study, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations:

1. This study focuses specifically on the posters of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song and may not encompass the entirety of the song's representations or the artist's broader body of work.
2. The study relies on a non-probability purposive sampling strategy, which may limit the diversity and representativeness of the sample.
3. The analysis is conducted within the framework of Barthes' semiotic theory, and while this offers valuable insights, alternative theoretical perspectives may provide different interpretations.
4. Semiotic analysis involves interpretation and subjective judgment. Different researchers may interpret signs and symbols differently, leading to potential variations in the findings.
5. The study relies on data collected from Pinterest, which introduces a potential limitation in terms of the authenticity and reliability of the materials.
6. Time and resources constraints.

Implications

This research has various implications. It can inform and shape media literacy education initiatives, particularly in the area of visual media analysis. By demonstrating the

application of semiotics in decoding and understanding the meanings embedded in visual posters, it provides a pedagogical tool for educators to teach critical media literacy skills. Furthermore, this study can contribute to gender and identity studies curricula, providing students with insights into the ways in which gender stereotypes are constructed and perpetuated in popular culture. It also may help to promote cultural awareness and sensitivity by examining the intersection of cultural myths, stereotypes, and femininity. Additionally, this study can inspire students, particularly young girls and women, to embrace diverse forms of femininity and challenge societal expectations. By showcasing alternative representations of femininity in popular culture, it empowers students to question and redefine their own identities and encourages self-expression through various forms of media and art.

The research findings have practical implications for media practitioners, advertisers, and content creators, as they highlight the importance of critically examining and challenging gender stereotypes in visual representations. It is the responsibility of these individuals to promote more inclusive and diverse portrayals of femininity, which can contribute to positive social change and foster a more equitable society. By being mindful of the impact of their creations, media professionals can play a significant role in shaping a more inclusive and representative media landscape.

Recommendations for Future Research

As this study provides valuable insights into the representation of femininity in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters, it also opens up avenues for further research in this area. Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations can be suggested for future research in order to deepen our understanding of the complex interplay between semiotics, gender representation, and popular culture. These recommendations include, but are not limited to:

1. Conduct a comparative study to examine the representation of femininity in posters of other popular songs or artists to gain a broader understanding of the cultural and semiotic patterns that shape these representations.
2. Explore the intersectionality of gender with other social categories such as race and class to investigate how multiple identities interact and influence the construction of femininity in popular culture.
3. Investigate the audience's interpretation and reception of the visual posters, conducting qualitative research such as interviews or focus groups to understand how different individuals perceive and make meaning of the representations of femininity.
4. Extend the analysis to include digital media platforms, social media, or online communities to explore how the representation of femininity is shaped and circulated in the digital sphere.
5. Explore the perspectives and practices of media professionals, marketers, and advertisers regarding the representation of femininity in visual imagery, with a focus on understanding their decision-making processes and strategies.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has provided a comprehensive exploration of the research methodology, analysis, discussion, limitations, implications, and recommendations of the study. The analysis of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song followed Barthes' semiotic theory by conducting denotative and connotative analysis, myth analysis, and code analysis to uncover the meanings and representations embedded within the posters. By delving into the intersections of semiotics and gender representation in contemporary media, this study opens up exciting possibilities for further exploration and invites scholars to delve deeper into this dynamic field.

General Conclusion

In contemporary society, signs and symbols play a significant role in shaping our understanding of the world around us. Semiotics, the study of signs and their meanings, provides a framework for analyzing how these signs communicate and influence our perceptions. One prominent figure in the field of semiotics is Roland Barthes, whose semiotic theory explores the layers of meaning embedded within signs and the cultural myths that underlie their construction. Within the realm of popular culture, representations of gender and femininity are often constructed and reinforced through visual signs and symbols. These representations, particularly those related to American stereotypical femininity, have been a subject of scrutiny and analysis through a comprehensive examination of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song posters.

Drawing inspiration from Barthes' semiotic theory, this study aims to uncover the underlying meanings, cultural myths, and Barthesian codes embedded within visual and textual signs found in the posters of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song. The study seeks to address the following research inquiries: 1) Analyzing the denotative and connotative meanings of the semiotic elements in the posters, 2) Identifying the cultural myths invoked by these posters, 3) Examining the presence of Barthesian codes within the posters, and 4) Understanding how these semiotic elements, myths, and codes contribute to the construction and communication of American stereotypical femininity. By addressing these inquiries, this dissertation sheds light on the complexities of gender representation in contemporary media and offers insights into the ways in which popular culture shapes and reinforces societal perceptions of femininity.

The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative in nature, focusing on a semiotic analysis of the posters. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select the posters for analysis. The selection criteria included the posters' relevance to the research

topic, availability, and representation of different aspects of American stereotypical femininity. Four posters from Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" song were chosen from Pinterest as they showcased diverse visual and textual elements that could contribute to the understanding of femininity representation. The chosen posters offered a range of visual cues, cultural symbols, and textual messages that could be analyzed using Barthes' semiotic theory.

The findings of this study highlight the power of visual media in perpetuating societal norms and stereotypes related to femininity. The analysis has revealed the ways in which symbols, colors, poses, and textual elements work together to construct specific representations of femininity. By uncovering the underlying meanings and ideologies embedded within the posters, this research has emphasized the importance of critical visual literacy and the need for media consumers to be aware of the potential impact of visual communication on our perceptions and beliefs.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, including the focus on a specific set of posters and the contextual constraints of time and resources. Future research endeavors could explore a broader range of visual media, incorporate diverse perspectives, and examine the influence of different cultural contexts on the construction of gender representations.

The study's pedagogical implications are significant in terms of curriculum design, media literacy education, promoting diversity and inclusivity, and fostering an environment that celebrates diverse gender identities. By incorporating critical analyses of media representations into education, students can develop a nuanced understanding of how gender stereotypes are constructed and reinforced. This empowers them to be critical consumers of media and challenges the dominant narratives of femininity. Furthermore, promoting diverse and inclusive narratives and creating an environment that validates and supports diverse gender identities contributes to a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

The implications of this research extend beyond academic discourse. The findings have practical implications for media practitioners, advertisers, and content creators, who have a responsibility to critically examine and challenge gender stereotypes in their visual representations. By promoting more inclusive and diverse portrayals of femininity, media can contribute to positive social change and foster a more equitable society.

In conclusion, this dissertation contributes to the growing body of knowledge on semiotics, visual communication, and gender representation. It highlights the significance of visual signs and symbols in shaping our understanding of femininity and underscores the importance of critical engagement with media messages. By continuing to explore and challenge societal norms and stereotypes, we can foster a more inclusive and empowering media landscape that celebrates the diversity of gender identities.

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Résumé

Partout où nous nous tournons, les signes nous entourent, communiquant silencieusement des messages qui façonnent nos perceptions et influencent nos comportements. Ainsi, la sémiotique nous fournit les outils nécessaires pour décoder ces signes, dévoilant les couches de sens cachées et les réalités culturelles qui se cachent sous la surface. Dans cette optique, la présente étude se penche sur la représentation de la féminité stéréotypée américaine dans les affiches de la chanson "Blank Space" de Taylor Swift à travers l'analyse sémiotique, en se concentrant spécifiquement sur les concepts de dénotation, de connotation, de mythe et de codes. L'étude adopte une approche de recherche qualitative, s'appuyant sur la théorie sémiotique de Barthes comme cadre directeur. Les résultats de l'étude révèlent les éléments sémiotiques, tels que les schémas de couleurs, les objets, les gestes, les expressions et toute autre indication visuelle ou textuelle pertinente, par lesquels les affiches de la chanson représentent et renforcent la féminité stéréotypée américaine, y compris les notions de beauté, de romance et de relations toxiques. En ce qui concerne la représentation du mythe, les affiches utilisent des éléments narratifs, des figures mythiques et des motifs symboliques qui évoquent des récits mythiques et contribuent à la création de la féminité et à la perpétuation des stéréotypes de genre. Les codes identifiés dans le cadre de Barthes fournissent des informations précieuses sur la manière dont les signes sont structurés et interprétés dans un contexte culturel. Ces résultats, en plus de fournir des informations précieuses sur le sujet spécifique abordé, servent de base à de futures recherches, ouvrant des perspectives pour explorer l'interaction complexe entre l'identité culturelle, la féminité et la culture populaire.

Mots-clés: féminité stéréotypée américaine, théorie sémiotique de Barthes, dénotation, connotation, mythe, codes

الملخص

في كل مكان ننتقل إليه، تحيط بنا الإشارات، وتنقل بصمت الرسائل التي تشكل تصوراتنا وتؤثر على سلوكنا لذلك، تزودنا السيميائية بالأدوات اللازمة لفك شفرة هذه الإشارات، وتكشف الستار عن الطبقات الخفية للمعنى والحقائق الثقافية التي تكمن تحت السطح. في ضوء ذلك، تتعمق الدراسة الحالية في تمثيل الأنوثة النمطية الأمريكية التي تم تصويرها في ملصقات أغنية "Blank Space" لتايلور سويفت من خلال عدسة التحليل السيميائي، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على مفاهيم الدلالة والمدلول والأسطورة والرموز. تتبنى الدراسة منهجًا بحثيًا نوعيًا، بالاعتماد على نظرية بارت السيميائية كإطار توجيهي. تكشف نتائج الدراسة عن العناصر السيميائية، مثل مخططات الألوان، والأشياء، والإيماءات، والتعبير، وأي إشارات مرئية أو نصية أخرى ذات صلة، حيث تصور ملصقات الأغاني وتعزز الأنوثة النمطية الأمريكية، بما في ذلك مفاهيم الجمال والرومانسية والعلاقات السامة. فيما يتعلق بتمثيل الأسطورة، تستخدم الملصقات عناصر سرد القصص، والشخصيات الأسطورية، والرموز التي تستحضر السرد الأسطورية وتساهم في خلق الأنوثة وتأصيل الصور النمطية للجنس. توفر الرموز المحددة ضمن إطار عمل بارت رؤية قيمة حول كيفية بناء الإشارات وتفسيرها ضمن سياق ثقافي. لا تقدم هذه النتائج رؤية قيمة حول الموضوع المطروح فحسب، بل تعمل أيضًا كأساس لمزيد من البحث، وتفتح السبل لاستكشاف التفاعل المعقد بين الهوية الثقافية والأنوثة والثقافة الشعبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأنوثة النمطية الأمريكية، نظرية بارت السيميائية، الدلالة، المدلول، الأسطورة، الرموز