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Playing the Victim:

Using YouTube Comments to Analyze the Disputed Victimization of Taylor Swift

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Sociology

by

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ABSTRACT

Participants in disputes and conflict often claim membership in some category to justify their actions against their opponents; yet a participant's membership in a category can also be disputed. I examine how the use of categories shows tacit norms associated with those categories and how disputes about membership in categories are used within broader conflicts. Specifically, using a conversation analytic framework adapted to digital interaction data, I analyze how commenters use the phrase "play the victim" in YouTube comments on Taylor Swift's music video "Look What You Made Me Do" to dispute Swift's membership in the category "victim" and how doing so positions them in the larger conflict between Swift and other celebrities, along with their respective fans.

By hosting the music video and allowing members of the community to comment on it, YouTube provides both an occasion for those who claim a moral imperative to sanction Swift and a means to do so, however ineffectually. Without a locally and publically available institutional authority to grant victim status, those who take her actions as a serious claim of victimization can take it upon themselves to sanction her for using the category illegitimately. Such sanctions frequently deploy the phrase "play the victim" which members can use to re-categorize Swift as a special type of offender who has the negative features of both the categories "victim" and "offender." Additionally, commenters can use and subsequently invert the perquisites of victim status afforded to Swift to delegitimize her claim of victim status. This is because members can reinterpret Swift's appeal to and use of victim status to relieve her of responsibility for her injuries as Swift refusing to take responsibility for her actions.

INTRODUCTION

On August 27, 2017, Taylor Swift released the music video to her then-new single “Look What You Made Me Do.” In it, Swift references many antagonistic and widely publicized past events. Her use of these references is ambiguous because the degree to which she uses irony and self-deprecation is unclear. A few days after its release, my friend asked if I had heard it. I had not. This was apparently an error that needed immediate correction. As she found the song on YouTube, she explained that it had a certain kind of venom that she found particularly satisfying and that it was a very striking shift from how Taylor Swift is typically portrayed, specifically how she was taking charge of things and asserting her agency while highlighting and mocking those who have tried to ridicule and vilify her in the past.

Soon after hearing the song, we met up with a mutual friend. When I mentioned the song I had just heard, this friend quickly cut in, expressing how she hated it because it was the exact same type of thing that Taylor Swift had been doing her entire career, specifically hiding behind others and not accepting responsibility for things by continuously playing the victim.

I then watched two of my friends argue about what this song *actually* indicated and what it *actually* told us about who Taylor Swift was as a person. I stood back in confused silence because each of my friends looked at the exact same video and came to diametrically opposed conclusions. I was amazed at the interaction unfolding before me and wondered both why my friends felt so passionately about Swift and if this kind of passionate dispute was unique to them. This thought was apparently somewhat naïve because when I watched the music video later that evening, I saw that it already had

several million views, roughly a million dislikes, and several hundred thousand comments. A cursory glance at those comments showed fans ardently defending Swift against her haters, who attacked her with equal fervor. It felt clear to me that this was more than simply people arguing on the Internet. For those who wrote the nearly half-million comments on the video, engaging with the video by commenting was clearly deeply meaningful.

Since that interaction, I have necessarily become more familiar with Swift and the ongoing disputes that surround her. Many of these disputes are foregrounded by their location on YouTube, which provides an occasion for fans to annotate and interpret popular culture, and their participants' self-assortment into competing fandoms. YouTube provides an occasion for fans to annotate and interpret popular culture. Much like my two friends, one who argued defending Swift and one who argued attacking Swift, YouTube commenters organize themselves as different fandoms publicly disputing celebrity conflicts, such that "fans" defend Swift and "haters" attack her.

One recurrent topic in these conflicts is whether Swift is a victim, particularly in the past events she references in the video. As such, the immediate focus of the disputes I analyze is the interpretation of what the music video means: What is Swift claiming in the music video? What is Swift doing by posting it? Are her claims and actions ironic or genuine? In disputing these questions commenters pull on a great deal of presumed shared background knowledge regarding Swift and her past interactions.¹ One critical feature of these past interactions is how people have used the phrase "play the victim" to discredit and de-legitimize Swift's reported injuries and dispute her claims about how the past

¹ See Appendix for a summary of these interactions. Relevant aspects are cited as needed throughout.

interactions unfolded.

As it happens, the phrase “play the victim” has become associated with Swift. In fact, Swift explicitly references both this phrase and how it has been used to attack her in the music video of “Look What You Made Me Do.” Most notably, the music video ends with a scene featuring several versions of Swift that correspond to different moments in her career. These different Swifts interact with each other by repeating complaints and accusations, often verbatim, that other celebrities have made regarding Swift. One of these accusations is “There she goes, playing the victim. Again.”

The tone and message that the music video sets is also the initial context of the YouTube comments section where any member of the public may write comments in response to the video. By referencing previous attacks over victim status, especially “playing the victim,” Swift provides an occasion for her fans and haters to participate in this dispute, debating her ostensible victimization in the comments section of that same music video. Furthermore, the data suggest that both sides in the conflict overwhelmingly see this scene as Swift responding to those past attacks. The particular discrepancy regarding this scene is whether that response is justified or not--in other words, whether Swift is or is not a legitimate victim. The interactions around this discrepancy can reveal unique insights into the aspects and norms participants connect with being a legitimate victim.

As Holstein and Miller demonstrated, determining whether someone is a legitimate victim is not as simple as demonstrating they were injured, because that person’s claim and the circumstances of their injury must be interactionally interpreted (1990). Thus, in disputing Swift’s victim status, commenters are arguing about what interpretation of events

accurately reflects what happened. Yet, by advancing a particular interpretation of events, commenters do more than make claims about what really happened. Using the phrase “play the victim” advances such an interpretation, which raises the following questions: (1) What do commenters accomplish by deploying the phrase “play the victim” within these specific disputes? and (2) What can these disputes reveal regarding commenter’s use of the categories “victim” and “offender” specifically and practices of competing fandoms in general?

VICTIMIZATION FRAMEWORK

Interactional Victim Assignment

Victim status is administered interactionally, not as a *de facto* consequence of injury (Holstein and Miller 1990; Spencer 2011). Yet some assertion of suffering is still normatively required for victim status and as such, victimization involves interpretative descriptions of events, which “are not disembodied commentaries on ostensibly real states of affairs. Rather, they are reality *projects*—acts of constructing the world.” (Holstein and Miller 1990:105 emphasis original). Thus, victim status is not determined by injury; it is determined by how injury and the circumstances around injury are *interactionally* interpreted to create victims who are not responsible for their suffering. A portion of remedial action granted as a perquisite of victim status is redress from injury. When the suffering is at the hands of some agent, it is often unclear which party is responsible for the harm caused. In such cases, disputes about who is the victim and who is the offender can occur.

Additionally, victim status has requirements and is subject to ongoing gatekeeping,

allowing some individuals to more easily gain this status but prohibiting others, while also occasioning challenges to that same gatekeeping (Hearty 2019; Killeen 2018; MacDowell 2013). Yet the victim status afforded to someone is not immutable because outside of institutional authority (e.g. courts), the interactional process of interpretation is never closed and finalized. Similarly, just because a claimant's status was denied in one setting by one group of people does not mean that they will not be granted victim status at some other time or by some other group.

In the case of Swift, this gatekeeping is within the backdrop of contemporary American culture because she is a highly visible contemporary American pop star. As I discuss in the following sections, in this context “victim” is tacitly associated with other categories, specifically “white” and “woman,” as well as associated features and perquisites. Having one's victim status legitimized also legitimizes one's use of those perquisites, many of which give the victim a measure of social influence over others, often the parties involved in their victimization (Berbrier 2000; Dorr 2000; Holstein and Miller 1990).

Terms

I focused my analysis on the practices that participants accomplish when they dispute victim status on the grounds that Swift plays the victim, often marked with that exact phrase. However, commenters can use numerous variations on this practice that all include the term “victim” along with some item that negates that category (e.g. scarequotes or “pretends”). For clarity, I have included the various labels I used throughout this analysis in Table 1 below. These terms mirror the terms posters use most frequently where possible and are intended to be descriptive, but neutral.

Table 1: Victim Terms

(Victim) Role	The category that a person may or may not occupy
Claim/Apply	The assertion that a given person occupies a role
(Victim) Status	The state of a person's claim being treated as legitimate
Injury	A necessary event for the victim role wherein a person is forced to act or be acted upon and experiences harm therefrom
Victimization	The local interactional processes whereby injury is interpreted and people are granted victim status
"Play the Victim"	A practice participants can use in interaction that pairs "victim" with some item that negates the applicability of the category to a given person in a given situation.

The Victim-Offender Standardized Relational Pair

The terms I have given above are explicitly related to "victim," but that is not the only category that is implicated in the disputes of Swift's victim status. As Sacks observed, people treat categories as belonging together; the term membership categorization device (MCD) refers to such a group of related categories and the rules people use to apply them to a population (Sacks 1972a). One use of MCDs is to categorize *groups* of people. Thus, commenters use the "victim" MCD to categorize not only Swift, but also those that they treat as related to her victimization. The most common person so implicated is a purported

offender. Interactions then often involve interpreting the past actions of the celebrities to determine who is the “victim” and who is the “offender.” Individual categories have category-bound activities and category-bound features that create a reciprocal relationship between how people are categorized and how others interpret their actions (Jayyusi 1984). For example, if someone is categorized as a “victim,” then their actions can be easily seeable as pursuing a remedial interchange, but if that same person is categorized as an “offender,” then those same actions can be easily seeable as blaming or attacking someone else.

In addition to category-bound features, the relationship between categories is also important for disputation because “victim” and “offender” constitute a standardized relational pair (SRP), a pair of categories with associated rights and obligations relative to each other (Sacks 1972b). These rights and obligations are informal and asymmetrical standards between categories, such as a child’s right to receive care and a parent’s obligation to provide that care (Sacks 1992b). With the victim-offender SRP, if someone is the victim, they have the right to redress for their injuries and if someone is an offender, they may be subject to remedial action and in the absence of a formal system anyone can pursue that action (Holstein and Miller 1990; Jankowitz 2018).

Power and Responses to Injury

Victim status revolves around injury, a necessary incident wherein a person is forced to act or be acted upon. Holstein and Miller go so far as to describe injury as “the essence of being a victim” (1990:114). Responding to this injury is implicated in the victim role, largely by virtue of the perquisites of victim status. There are four specific perquisites of being assigned victim status: (1) “deflect responsibility,” the victim is absolved of

blame and categorized as the innocent party, (2) “assign causes,” by categorizing a victim, the source of their harm is also identified, (3) “specify responses and remedies”; typically, harm is identified so that it can be remedied. By categorizing a person as a victim, that person is granted the right to redress (4) “account for failure,”; by categorizing a person as a victim, that person’s actions are explained away as being atypical and not reflective of their character (1990). These perquisites are complicated because victimization can be understood as the process of using these perquisites and victim status is the legitimization of having done so. However, these perquisites, and the victim role, come at a price. The same procedure of victimization that enables these perquisites also provides an occasion to question the victim’s competence (Holstein and Miller 1990). In other words, victim status grants a measure of *social influence* at the cost of *individual agency*.

The data suggest that participants treat that social influence as belonging to whomever claims or applies the victim role. When the claimant and the victim are the same person, they can use the victim role to heighten their projected vulnerability in order to redirect power of others towards an ostensible source of injury. When the categorizer and victim are different people, the categorizer can ascribe victim status to a person to strip them of agency and power, treat something as an injury, and justify their response to that ostensible injury as protecting the victim.

This demonstrates not only how the benefits of victim status mobilize power in response to injury, but also how perquisites can be gained as a result of achieving victim status; however, gaining these benefits may also be a motivation for a person claiming such status in the first place (Parsons 1975). The presumed motivations of a claimant frame their actions and use of the category. These hypothetical/rhetorical questions are real

questions for those disputing Swift's victim status. Does she claim victim status because she has been injured and rightly deserves intervention or is she trying to punish someone by framing them as the source of her injury?

Tacit Associations

In contemporary American culture, "victim" is tacitly associated with "woman" and "white," which enables people to more easily apply the victim role to people they also categorize as women or white and even easier to white women.

Commenters can orient to and use gender as a resource to dispute or defend Swift's victim claim. This reflects the tacit association that those who are categorized as victims can also be categorized as women. This contemporary conceptualization of the category of "victim" is supported by research that demonstrates that many women highlight their femininity when constructing themselves as an "ideal victim" (Jarnkvist and Brännström 2016) and that male victims mitigate aspects of their victimization that threaten their masculinity (Åkerström, Burcar, and Wästerfors 2011; Durfee 2011).

Commenters can also orient to and use race as a resource to dispute or defend Swift's victim claim. In the American context of Swift's disputation, the link between "victim" and "white" is oxymoronically both tenuous, as I discuss here, and historically grounded, as I discuss in the next section. The tenuous connection comes from the catch-22 association between "victim" and innocence; victim status both absolves the victim of responsibility or blame, thus granting them innocence, and requires that the victim be innocent (Holstein and Miller 1990). Thus, there is a strong association between "innocent" and "victim" and scholarship has demonstrated that historically in American culture there is an association between "person of color" and "guilty" (Ogletree 2010;

Pfeifer and Ogloff 1991; Sommers and Ellsworth 2000). In other words, there is an association that people who are not white are also not innocent. Thus, “victim” is tacitly associated with white Americans by virtue of their mutual association with innocence.

Relevant Historical Conceptualizations

Historical narratives and cultural perceptions of the ostensible victimization of white women, specifically in the American South, have been used to control both white women’s sexuality and the bodies of black people (Dorr 1999; Thompson 2009). This can be seen in the widespread and socially condoned raping of black women (Chafe and Behind the Veil Project. 2001; Hill Collins 2004; Jacobs and Williamson 2006; Jennings 1990; Klein and Clinton 2007; McGuire 2010), the history of lynching black men (Rushdy 2012; Wells-Barnett 1894, 2014; Wood 2009), and the existence of “night riders” who terrorized black families (Bowser 2007; Chafe and Behind the Veil Project. 2001; Jacobs and Williamson 2006). The keystone justification for lynching in the reconstruction era South was the ostensible victimization of white women by black men. White men asserted that white women were victims of black men’s sexual attention in order to justify their murdering black Americans as protecting victims (Rushdy 2012; Wells-Barnett 2014; Wood 2009). Additionally, despite having committed the above-cited violence, white perpetrators were declared legally innocent of crime (Chafe and Behind the Veil Project. 2001; Detweiler and Litwack 2006; Gatewood and Litwack 2006; Huie 1956; Jacobs and Williamson 2006; Jones 2008; Talty 2003), but black people were often subject to retaliation if they offered any form of resistance to that same violence (Bowser 2007; Tetzlaff et al. 2010). Thus, under this white supremacy, black people were denied victim status despite the violence they suffered; black women were treated as unrapable, yet they

were being raped; black men were treated as a constant threat, yet they were being murdered; and all black people were held responsible for the violence enacted against them (Foster 2011; Hodes 1993; Thompson-Miller and Picca 2017).

Applying the Analysis of Interactions to Digital Interactional Data

Conversation analysts must appeal to data within the interaction itself, as the participants' background knowledge is unobservable. This aspect of conversation analysis has been the subject of debate. Conversation analysts privilege participants' orientation to things that are procedurally consequential to the interaction rather than imposing analysts' interpretation of the interaction, the theory being that participants will nearly unavoidably display those things in their background that are relevant to any given interaction through what they are observably doing in those interactions (Schegloff 1996b, 1998). However, critics have argued that CA's focus on participant orientation risks becoming overly narrow because participants may orient to the proverbial "elephant in the room," which by definition affects the interaction without displaying evidence of that effect (Wetherell 1998).

This risk of missing relevant information to an interaction because that information is not observable to an analyst may be minimized in YouTube comments. YouTube commenters are disembodied strangers. Thus, commenters do not have common knowledge or familiarity *with each other*, but instead presume a great deal of presumed shared background knowledge *about the video* for which they can and do hold each other accountable. This is a resource for analysts because they can easily and quickly access that presumed knowledge with web searches. Additionally, there are many features that are always *present* in face-to-face interactions (race, gender, age, etc.) that participants index

but may or may not orient to (Zimmerman 1998). In order for those same features to be present in YouTube comments, participants must first display them. Because they must be displayed rather than simply observed, participants' orientation to those features is more likely to be evident in the interaction itself and thus available to both other participants and the analyst. "In other words, the validity of the analysis is afforded by the very (data-internal) features that the participants themselves rely upon to interact with each other, rather than needing to supply interpretive resources that are not demonstrably relevant to the participants" (Whitehead-personal feedback).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Scholarship analyzing digital interactional data is growing (see Paulus, Warren, and Lester 2016 for a literature review). While not unheard of, analyzing text-based polylogues in general and YouTube comments specifically as *interactional* data is still novel (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014; Bou-Franch, Lorenzo-Dus, and Blitvich 2012). Additionally, YouTube has multiple structural features that impact participant interaction, such as allowing posters to comment on others' comments, as well as an application programming interface (API), which allows third parties, such as researchers and application developers, to communicate with YouTube and retrieve and use data. In the following sections, I provide a list of the terms I use in this paper to minimize ambiguity, discuss my method of data collection, explain the structural features of these data including how I have reproduced them in this paper, and finally give a brief overview of my analytic framework.

Table 2: Data Terms

Commenter	The person who writes a comment
OP	“Original Poster” A commonly used term. The commenter who wrote the parent comment
SP	“Subsequent Poster” A poster who wrote a child comment, who is not the OP
Comment	A single chunk of content a poster writes and which appears as a single text element, as indicated by a time stamp
Parent Comment	The first comment in a thread
Child Comment	Comments that follow and are structurally connected to a parent comment
Thread	A single structural interaction composed of a parent comment and all of its child comments
Write	The verb for making a comment (avoids ambiguity with the verbs “comment” and “post”)

Data Collection

I collected the first 493,572 YouTube comments on Taylor Swift’s “Look What You Made Me Do” music video. While screenshots are often used in presenting digital interactional data, the volume of comments on the music video renders such a process

labor intensive to the point of impossibility. Instead, I used a data scrubber written in Python, which was created by my colleague, Devin Cornell, in conjunction with YouTube's API, to download the comments and their associated metadata into a database.

Using SQL in that database, I then isolated the 942 comments containing the word "victim." Applying the comment thread identification of these comments, I then recovered all 1,411 comments that were in a thread containing the word "victim." I then identified parent comments that also had child comments and reformatted them into comment threads. My final data are those 126 full comment threads containing the word "victim" in the parent comment.

Attributes of Data

Any person with a Google account can comment on a comments-enabled video on YouTube. YouTube's formatting allows users to comment on those comments, which creates a comment thread. Each individual comment is indicated with a speaker tag at the beginning and a time stamp at the end. Thus, if a single poster writes multiple comments in a row, each comment will have a speaker tag. For readability, I have included an unnumbered line of space between comments. The contents of the comments are presented in as close to a reproduction of the original format as possible, including the user's punctuation, spacing, and line breaks. There are three notable exceptions, discussed below.

First, while all data are in the public domain and thus available for anyone with Internet access to view, I have chosen to obscure the usernames of the commenters in order to grant some degree of confidentiality. As such, all usernames in my data are pseudonyms. Every pseudonym is intended to be pronounceable, but meaningless. As

such, any potential information about a participant that may be gleaned from their pseudonym is purely accidental. For simplicity, I refer to all my participants with the gender-neutral pronouns “they/them/theirs.”

Second, emojis found within comments have been annotated with a description between brackets. For instance, the emoji that is created as “<3” appears in the data as {Heart}. This is because many emojis cannot be created with keystrokes alone and thus may be difficult or impossible to reproduce, depending on formatting.

Third, I have chosen to censor expletives and slurs, particularly gendered slurs. I have done this by replacing the non-word-boundary vowels of a given slur with dashes equal to the number of letters censored. As such, while the words are censored, anyone reading either the thread or my analysis thereof will still know exactly which word the participant used in any given place. The goal of this is to avoid reproducing the same slurs when I analyze the threads, while preserving analytic transparency and integrity.

Data Analysis

I then adapted and applied a conversation analytic framework in my analysis of these threads. As mentioned previously, CA analyzes participant *action* rather than participant cognition or beliefs or more purely linguistic features of conversation and privileges participants’ orientation to the interaction above importing analytic interpretations (Schegloff 1996a, 1996b, 1997). The first step of analysis was creating a collection of the phenomena. While typically done by hand, the volume of data necessitated I do this computationally by grouping comment threads based on the presence of the word “victim,” as I detailed above. Thus organized, I combed through each individual comment thread to catalogue potentially discreet claims of “play the victim”

within the interaction. This process was inductive and iterative as general patterns became more refined, and it became possible to create sub-collections of variations upon the more general discreet actions.

ANALYSIS

Aims

In the following analysis, I will demonstrate that (1) by both hosting the music video and allowing members of the community to comment on it, YouTube provides an occasion for those who claim a moral imperative to sanction Swift and a means to do so, however ineffectually. (2) Such sanctions frequently deploy the phrase “play the victim,” which members can use to re-categorize Swift as a special type of offender who has the negative features of both the categories “victim” and “offender.” Without a locally and publically available institutional authority to grant victim status, those who take her actions as a serious claim of victimization can take it upon themselves to sanction her for using the category illegitimately. (3) Additionally, commenters can use and subsequently invert the perquisites of victim status afforded to Swift to de-legitimize her claim of victim status. This is because members can reinterpret Swift’s appeal to and use of victim status to relieve her of responsibility for her injuries as Swift refusing to take responsibility for her actions.

Never Read the Comments

By both hosting the music video and allowing members of the community to comment on it, YouTube provides both an occasion for those who claim a moral

imperative to sanction Swift and a means to do so, however ineffectually. YouTube comments provide an occasion for commenters to provide annotations and interpretation of the content of popular culture and display group membership by engaging in public conflicts about that same content. By enabling these public conflicts, YouTube also provides a means for commenters to sanction Swift because they are able to publicly criticize and attack her by annotating her own video. Furthermore, commenters' treatment of their actions as sanctions is evidenced in how commenters design their comments for Swift personally or how they may defend Swift from such sanctions. Yet, attacking Swift on her video unsurprisingly can generate conflict and commenters orient towards their interactions as a sort of contest between competing sides. These sides, or fandoms, are divided between those who support the content (in this case Swift), who can be categorized as 'fans' and those who do not support the content, who can be categorized as 'haters.' Thus, in addition to being able to sanction Swift by designing their comments to her directly, commenters, particularly haters, are able to sanction Swift vicariously by attacking her fans.

Thread 1 illustrates how commenters treat writing a comment on the music video as participating in the ongoing dispute between Swift and others and that by so participating, they further treat their actions as gaining or maintaining an advantage for their side in the dispute despite that dispute remaining unresolved. Relatedly, because commenters overwhelmingly treat their actions as participating in a dispute and by virtue of viewer's maxim (Sacks 1972a), the actions of others are more readily hearable/readable as likewise participating in the dispute and thus displaying membership in one or the other sides.

Thread 1

1 Toj; This girl has a self-victimization problem,
2 somebody help her!
3 It's also so cringeworthy. [Aug 29 03:32]

4 Mir; Toj ikr [Aug 29 03:48]

5 Jud; Toj f-ck u [Aug 29 03:53]

// Omitted

17 Wab; Toj first, she is a victim anyway
18 Second, how is this cringy? The song
19 perfectly represents her anger. She's not
20 about to be silent when everyone is giving
21 her What . The music video is f-cking
22 brilliant. So many metaphors, and hidden
23 symbols. So many allusions were in this. It
24 was very well thought out [Aug 29 03:56]

25 Roz; Wab taylor swifter is not a victim of
26 anything[Aug 29 03:59]

// Omitted

28 Gis; You're still here watching the video aren't

29 you? I'm thinking she's still winning [Aug
29 04:02]

30 Sod; Toj then why are you here [Aug 29 04:02]

// Omitted

The OP, Toj, opens this thread with a multi-faceted claim that the different SPs reveal can be treated as both an attack and a display of group membership. Toj makes a negative assessment of Swift with their first sentence (line 1) and a negative assessment of the song with their second sentence (line 3).

The first two replies reveal that these assessments in the parent comment can be understood by participants as an attack against Swift and her music. Mir's (line 4) and Jud's (line 5), stance-taking in response to Toj suggests that they orient to the parent comment (line 1-3) as Toj not just making a claim but that by making that claim they are participating in the dispute, as evidenced by how they deploy minimal comments to either support or attack Toj. Mir's statement "ikr" [I know right] signals their alignment with Toj and marks the parent comment as sensible. In contrast, Jud deploys "f-ck u" to attack Toj and mark their claim as sanctionable.

Sod's reply (line 30) reveals that participants can treat the parent comment as Toj displaying or claiming membership in one side of the dispute. When Sod replies to Toj, they display their orientation to the possible understanding of Toj's comment as revealing them as a "hater." This is evidenced because Sod doesn't respond to the attack itself with a counterclaim, but rather responds to Toj as the type of person that attacks Swift with the

challenge that such an attack is out of place. This feature of Sod's challenge is evident because the challenge is accomplished using an interrogative (Koshik 2005), which reveals that Sod uses an association between the type of person who attacks Swift and the type of person who watches Swift's music videos and comments on them as incompatible. Colloquially, the type of people who watch Swift's music videos are categorized as "fans" and the type of people who attack Swift are categorized as "haters."

When Gis responds to Toj (line 28-29), they orient to the categories "fans" and "haters" not only as contingent omni-relevant devices (Sacks 1992a; Whitehead and Baldry 2018), but also as categories that are in direct competition with each other. This is evident in how both Gis and Sod tacitly evoke the category "hater" to explain away Toj's attack of Swift. Gis displays how commenters treat the two sides as in conflict further with their assertion that Swift is "winning" (line 30) and how categorizing Toj as a hater defangs their attack as evidenced with their use of "still" in "still winning" (line 30), which suggests that Swift and her fans are unaffected by Toj's actions.

Further evidence that this is a dispute comes from how participants present their purported understanding as unproblematic and treat the ostensible stance of their opponents as fundamentally nonsensical. Commenters are less disputing what the music video means (particularly in regards to Swift's victim status) and more disputing which groups' orientation to the music video (and thus Swift's victim status) correspond to reality, suggesting that these interactions are conflicts rather than a more productive form of disagreement.

As the following two threads will illustrate, by treating the parent comment as nonsensical, the SP diminishes the OP's action. In other words, the SP defends Swift

against the OP by reducing the OP's actions to nonsense, which displays that SP's understanding of the OP's actions as an attack from which they needed to defend Swift. In both threads 2 and 3, the OP makes assertions regarding Swift and her video that contain "play the victim." The SPs challenge the purported view of their opponent as nonsensical, which is marked in these threads with the interrogative "How is she playing the victim?" and provide an alternate explanation of the video.

Thread 2

1 Vec; Tbh ts is just wanting to play victim so people
2 can feel bad for her and like her videos also
3 she used the beat from mean girls [Sept 02
 20:15]

4 Bev; Vec how is she playing the victim? If she sings
5 that she got her karma but others will get it
6 too {Snake} [Sept 02 20:54]

Thread 3

1 Chu; this entire video is a mess, taylor swift can
2 go f-ck herself stop playing the victim [Aug 28
 20:11]

3 Dev; how is she playing the victim? Shes owning her
4 sh-t? tf you talking about? [Aug 28 20:12]

In each thread, when the SP responds to the OP, they challenge the OP's view of reality regarding the music video with the interrogative "How is she playing the victim?" (line 4 and line 3, respectively). By using this as a challenge, the SP treats it as unanswerable and thus the OP's stance (Swift is playing the victim) cannot be supported (Koshik 2005). Furthermore, the SP follows their challenge with an alternate interpretation of the video that corrects the OP's initial assertion and displays their own stance in opposition to the OP.

Thread 3 has one additional piece of evidence that commenters are in conflict with each other and that 'fans' can treat the actions of 'haters' as sanctions of Swift. By closing their comment with "tf [the f-ck] you talking about?" (line 4), Dev challenges Chu's competence to understand the video because it calls for an account. Because this is used as a challenge, it suggests not only that Chu needs to give an account, but that they would be unable to do so, which suggests that Chu's stance is indefensible (Koshik 2005).

In addition to the act of commenting being seeable as participating in a dispute and a commenter's actions within a comment being seeable as displaying group membership as either a fan or a hater where the actions of haters can be treated as sanctions, when commenters engage the ongoing dispute between Swift and others, they orient to the victim-offender SRP, particularly how the categories are treated as mutually exclusive. Thread 4 is an exceptionally explicit example of participants orienting towards the victim-offender SRP and thus mutually exclusive.

Thread 4

1 Aal; You can't be both the bully and the victim
2 Taylor. [Sept 1 20:52]

3 Omitted

4 Jab; she isn't being a bully here, she's rising up
5 from being a victim, but none of what she's
6 saying is uncalled for [Sept 1 21:42]

Aal's use of "bully" and "victim" in line 1 are a clear example of their orientation to the categories as SRP. Their comment is a complaint that Swift is attempting to claim membership in both categories, or rather, that she claims to be one despite being the other. Further, by being a complaint, it directly categorizes Swift as "a bully," which is only possible if the two categories are treated as mutually exclusive. This is evidenced by the SP, Jab, who begins, in line 3, by refuting the claim that Swift is a bully. By refuting that Swift is a bully, Jab shows that Aal's comment did categorize her as a bully. As discussed in the next section, commenters can use this feature to tacitly categorize Swift as an offender by overtly claiming that she is not a victim.

Special Type of Offender

Commenters can use "play the victim" to re-categorize Swift as a particular type of offender with the negative features of both "victim" and "offender." As noted in thread 4 above, commenters treat 'victim' and 'offender' as mutually exclusive categories in any

given situation to recategorize Swift as an offender because she is not a victim. But as we will see below, commenters can also treat Swift's purported use of the victim category as a problematic offence, as indicated by "play the victim" and can further treat that use as indicative of her deficient character. Additionally, "play the victim" can function as a counterclaim that a person reacts to something that is not an injury as if it were. This frames claiming victim status as a sanctionable offense. In the following thread, the OP further specifies this by re-categorizing Swift as a crybaby.

Thread 5

1 Gen; Anyone notice how Taylor is supposedly always the
2 "victim" She's a crybaby [Oct 01 02:32]

3 Zag; Gen I don't see any shortcoming in her! She is a
4 cutebaby, okay????? [Oct 01 02:59]

When Gen disputes Swift's victim status, they also treat her use of the category as a problem. In other words, it isn't just that Swift is not a victim, but that she isn't a victim and by claiming to be one she is doing something wrong. This is evident in how Gen disputes Swift's victim status with "supposedly" (line 1), which marks the assertion as doubtful, and scare quotes around "victim" (line 2). Marking "victim" with scare quotes suggests that the term is inappropriate or otherwise ill-fitting (Predelli 2003), and so by using them here, Gen disputes Swift's claim to be a victim.

When Gen categorizes Swift as a 'crybaby' after disputing Swift's claim (line 2), they tacitly apply negatively valenced category-bound features of crybaby to Swift.

Crybaby claims that the emotional displays of the categorized are inappropriate and unjustified. and by categorizing Swift as such, Gen both justifies their disputing Swift's claim and invites the inference that there is something wrong with Swift for making the claim.

This tacit implication can be seen by how the SP, Zag, replies. Zag's counter-claim asserts that Swift doesn't have "any shortcomings" (line 3), which displays the understanding that Gen claimed that Swift did have shortcomings. Zag further reveals that they treat Gen's categorization of Swift as a 'crybaby' as at least one such potential shortcoming when they re-categorize her as a 'cutebaby' (line 6), which is both derivative of and counter to crybaby.

Thread 6

1 Bal; Seriously. Why is she playing the victim? She is the
2 one who lied about the whole Kanye's lyric fiasco
3 [Aug 30 18:05]

4 Wav; Bal know the truth and then comment. She's not wrong
5 [Aug 30 19:05]

Commenters can display their treatment of Swift's use of the victim category as illegitimate with the phrase "play the victim" and re-categorize Swift as an offender or the offender in past situations. As we saw with thread 5, "play the victim" can be used to suggest that using the victim category is inappropriate and problematic. We also saw with thread 4 that "play the victim" can be used to categorize Swift as an offender. Thread 6

shows how both of these actions can be accomplished while referencing specific details of past events.

When Bal deploys an interrogative that contains “play the victim” (line 1), they interpret Swift’s actions in the music video as both a serious claim and also an unjustified one. Bal’s use of an interrogative mirrors the practice used by Vec and Chu with “How is she playing the victim?” (threads 2 and 3). Bal’s interpretation of Swift’s actions as playing the victim is presupposed in the interrogative and by using it as a sanction, Bal treats it as an unanswerable question (Koshik 2005) and in so doing displays the understanding that Swift’s actions are problematic and sanctionable.

When Bal accuses Swift of lying, they provide justification for why their challenge is unanswerable by recategorizing her as the offender. This is evidenced in how Bal uses “lying,” which has a negative valence and suggests that Swift occupies a negative role, paired with “the one who,” which suggests mutual exclusivity of roles in the more narrow dispute “Kanye’s lyric fiasco” (line 2). Furthermore, by deploying this in contrast to their interrogative, which tacitly asserts that Swift is falsely occupying the victim role, Bal invites the inference that this claim is why Swift is not the victim and therefore is the offender.

As I will show in the following thread, re-categorizing Swift as an offender in the way shown in thread 6 enables commenters to reinterpret otherwise positive features associated with victims as morally negative features associated with offenders and apply them to Swift. The OP, Shi, categorizes Swift using a gendered slur and then sanctions her for the final scene in the music video with claims that Swift is “fake.” The SP, Kub, then responds with the now familiar tactic that Shi’s action of commenting on the video

suggests that they are actually a closeted fan of Swift.

Thread 7

1 Shi; Taylor is a B-TCH! I can't believe what she put at
2 the end of the video! Taylor is a b-tch, she is
3 fake and pretends to be nice, and she always plays
4 the victim! Honestly I already hated Taylor but
5 this makes me hate her more. [Aug 28 20:47]

6 Kub; Shi and yet all you do is watch, comment, and
7 follow Taylor Swift
8 {Snake}{Heart}{Snake}{Heart}{Snake}{Heart}{Snake}
9 [Aug 28 21:32]

10 Shi; Kub um no I saw it on the vma's and I wanted to
11 just say how much of a b-tch she is, {Blushing
12 smiley face} [Aug 28 22:47]

Shi displays their membership in the “hater” category as they (conveniently) make their orientation explicit with the admission that they “already hated Taylor” (line 5), which is the activity for which the category is named. When Kub responds, they display their orientation to Shi’s role as a “hater,” as evidenced by their treating Shi’s act of writing a comment on the YouTube page as evidence that they watched the video. This is a variation of the practice that Gis and Sod used in thread 1 and many more instances of this practice are observed throughout the data.

When Shi says “Taylor is a B-TCH!” (line 1), they sanction/attack/insult her for her actions in the video. This is evident because Shi emphasizes the initial slur, through both all caps and an exclamation point, and associates it with Swift’s past actions by recycling the same slur after referencing Swift’s actions (line 2). Thus, Shi’s use of b-tch is a sanction against Swift for those past actions.

However, slurs are not just a resource with a highly negative valence that commenters can easily deploy in attacks, but also a category that informs people how to interpret the actions of the categorized (Jefferson 1984; Sacks 1992b; Schegloff 2007). By categorizing Swift with a slur before referencing the ending of the music video (lines 1-2), Shi frames Swift’s actions as an attack against others, which is a sanctionable action, rather than Swift rightfully demanding redress, which is a claim of victimization.

For those unfamiliar with the video, the scene Shi references (line 2) features multiple different Swifts who interact by repeating (in)famous quotations from Swift and other celebrities, nearly all of which can be heard as attacking Swift. As mentioned in the introduction, many disputes of Swift’s victimization revolve around whether her actions in the scene are an ironic mockery of Swift’s past or a serious claim of victimization. Assuming her actions are treated as a serious claim, the dispute centers on whether her actions are a justified response to the attacks being quoted or an unjustified attack against celebrities that rightly critiqued Swift in the past. In referencing this scene, Shi asserts the latter interpretation of the scene and thus frames Swift’s actions as a source of injury and casts her as the offender in those past interactions.

Because categories influence how actions are interpreted (Sacks 1972b, 1992b), Shi can use “play the victim” to interpret Swift’s actions as in line with the “offender” category

(e.g., bad, harmful, illegitimate, etc.). This is evident because Shi then deploys a three-part list to further sanction Swift (lines 2-4). This sanction groups the slur and “play the victim” with features that are negations of features associated with victims. These features, “fake” and “pretends to be nice” (line 3), both suggest insincerity and deceit, which is diametrically opposed to the association between victims and authenticity and believability (Holstein and Miller 1990). Furthermore, Shi associates duplicity not only with Swift being not a victim (lines 3-4), but also with her being a bad person, as evidenced by the recycled slur (line 2). In this way, Shi both disputes the association between positive features of ‘victim’ and Swift and also asserts the association between negative features of ‘offender’ and Swift.

Rule-Enabled Negation and Reversal of Claims

As noted earlier, commenters can use “play the victim” to treat Swift’s use of the victim category as problematic (e.g. thread 6) and we can see commenters accomplishing that same action here. Additionally, the following threads show how commenters can display the understanding that Swift’s use of the victim category is problematic on the grounds that she is immature and uses the category for personal gain.

Thread 8

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1 Pin; Seriously Taylor you need to grow up and stop
2 playing the victim here. Deal with your enemies like
3 a grown mature person would do. [Sept 25 22:34]
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When Pin tells Swift to “deal with your enemies” (lines 2-3), they display their

orientation to the perquisites of the “victim” role, specifically how it removes blame from the victim and places it onto the offender. This is evident because Pin’s directive immediately follows their admonishment to “stop playing the victim here” (lines 1-2), which displays the understanding that Swift’s current actions are designed to deal with her enemies, which they have interpreted as playing the victim. This is further evidenced by how Pin contrasts it with “like a grown mature person would do” (line 3), which treats Swift’s current actions as a display of immaturity.

Below we will see that commenters can use and subsequently invert the perquisites of victim status afforded to Swift to de-legitimize her claim of victim status. This is because members can reinterpret Swift’s appeal to and use of victim status to relieve her of responsibility for her injuries as Swift refusing to take responsibility for her actions.

Thread 9

1 Kur; she always plays the victim, even when caught
2 red handed, has to go and make a music video
3 about how she was 'victimized.' no one can ever
4 make you do anything, you have the complete
5 freedom to choose your actions. but with those
6 actions, come consequences and responsibility.
7 you can't always hide behind your clique "SQUAD"
8 or blame the other person without accepting some
9 role in the problem. this is no way a song about
10 empowerment, it is one based off manipulation.
 [Aug 28 19:42]

11 Lep; Couldn't agree more [Aug 28 20:02]

Holstein and Miller noted one of the biggest costs of victim status is that being a victim necessarily entails a vulnerability to the victim's status as "a competent efficacious actor" (1990). This thread shows *how* "play the victim" enables commenters to dispute both Swift's identity as an effective actor *and* her claim to victim status because commenters can orient to the normative requirement that victims are not responsible for the harm they suffered and, so oriented, appeal to common-sense notions of responsibility and related concepts (e.g., agency and maturity) to dispute Swift's victims status.

Kur begins by deploying "play the victim" and then spends the rest of the parent comment constructing what is essentially a complex rebuke of Swift's claim of victim status on the grounds that she is irresponsible. Here, Kur uses "play the victim" as a component of the sanction. The SP, Lep, then affirms Kur's stance by aligning with it as unproblematic.

When Kur draws a connection between (ir)responsibility and "victim" (lines 5-10), they dispute Swift's claim of victim status on the grounds that she claimed victim status. This is evident because the connection they draw reframes the costs and perquisites of victim status as being indicative of irresponsibility.

For instance, one of the biggest perquisites of victim status is that the victim is "absolved of responsibility" for their injury largely because one aspect of the victim-offender SRP is that blame lies entirely with the offender and the victim is completely blameless. In other words, victims rightfully blame their injury on the offender (Holstein and Miller 1990). However, Kur punishes Swift for doing this when they write "you can't always ... blame the other person" (lines 6-8). We can see that Kur treats Swift absolving

herself of responsibility as indicating that she is simply irresponsible and not that she is a victim because they deploy a similar practice to what Vec and CHu used in threads 2 and 3 to treat Swift's ambiguous actions in the video not as a claim of victimization as is normatively required for victim status, but rather as a sanctionable offense (lines 1-3).

Critically, Kur sanctions Swift by deploying common sense notions of responsibility and agency to negate Swift's ostensible claim, in this case with "play the victim" (line 1), reverse the perquisites of victim status of absolving the victim of blame by reassigning blame back to Swift, in this case with the idiom "caught red handed" (line 1-2).

To reiterate the point, (1) victim status isn't a result of harm but must be claimed by either the injured or by someone else, (2) a claim of victim status entails the claim that the injured is not responsible for their injury, and (3) a major perquisite of victim status is the legitimization of both claims, which both recognizes injury and absolves the victim of responsibility, which makes them innocent (Holstein and Miller 1990).

Kur manipulates these features of victim status to dispute Swift's claim by reinterpreting it not as Swift claiming that she is not responsible for her injuries, but instead as Swift refusing to take responsibility for her actions (lines 3-5). This reinterpretation frames Swift's actions both in past interactions and in claiming victim status as problematic and thus sanctionable. We can see this because Kur does sanction Swift for both her actions in the past when they write "but with those actions, come consequences and responsibility" (lines 5-6) and her actions in the video when they write "[the song] is one based off manipulation" (lines 9-10)

Thread 10

1 Rud; Seriously, is she ever gonna stop acting like
2 a little kid? She's refusing to take any
3 responsibility for her own actions and playing
4 the victim. She's like a rich high school girl
5 who can't accept responsibility or reality
6 [Sept 25 04:08]

7 Kop; Rud hey look, a Katy Perry fan!
8 See! Nobody cares [Sept 25 10:01]

9 Del; Rud "I got mine, but you'll all get yours"
10 She was basically owning up to her mistakes,
11 it's like she is saying "I know, I made a
12 mistake, but that doesn't mean you guys won't
13 make any." [Sept 25 10:56]

// Omitted

Like Thread 9, Thread 10 features an OP who disputes Swift's victimization on the grounds that her use of the category is problematic (lines 1-2) because she is using it for personal gain, specifically to avoid responsibility, for which they sanction her (lines 4-5).

Unlike Thread 9, in Thread 10 the SPs oppose the OP. The first, Kop, rejects the entire parent comment by categorizing Rud as a Katy Perry fan, which dismisses their actions as something typical of that category similar to how previous commenters used the

“hater” category to accomplish the same action (e.g. Gis and Sod in Thread 1). However, the second SP, Del, disputes Rud by asserting Swift’s accountability as a counter-claim to Rud’s assertion of Swift’s irresponsibility (lines 9-10), which displays the understanding that Rud’s comment was designed to sanction Swift.

When the SPs respond to Sef, they utilize the ambiguity of Swift’s actions to dismiss Sef on the grounds that they have fundamentally misunderstood the music video and in so doing defend Swift by interpreting her actions as preemptively negating the type of sanction Sef deploys. We can see this in how Gab rebukes them by explaining the meaning of the video (lines 13-14), Mip sanctions them for “spewing hate” (lines 16-17), and Kis insults them by calling them “a stupid git” (line 26).

Additionally, commenters can use “play the victim” to mark purported use of victim-bound perquisites as illegitimate not just by claiming their use is self-serving, as shown in the past three threads, but also by claiming their use is to harm others. In other words, the perquisites that absolves the victim of blame also transfers that blame to the offender and thus the normatively required claim that a victim is blameless can be negated and reversed as the alleged victim attempting to blame, and thus harm, someone else.

Thread 11

1 Sef; Taylor Ur no badass...Ur the girl who cried
2 wolf and is always playing a victim calm
3 down u wont ever be what u think u
4 are... [Aug 28 20:41]

5 Sef; just saying nobody trust u because there

6 scared Ur gonna make them look like there
7 victimizing u [Aug 28 20:42]

8 Gab; Sef She's not that girl anymore, the old
9 Taylor is dead [Aug 28 20:55]

// **omitted**

13 Gab; Sef this is legit what the whole song is
14 about, a new self... duh [Aug 28 20:57]

15 Mip; Sef She literally addresses what you just
16 said in the video. Pay attention instead of
17 spewing hate [Aug 28 20:57]

// **omitted**

25 Kis; She already is what she think she is. And
26 you are the stupid git who doesn't even get
27 what the video is about. [Aug 28 21:03]

// **omitted**

We can see that Sef accomplishes the same action as Kur (Thread 9) and Rud (Thread 10) when they mark Swift's use of the victim category as problematic with both "play the victim" and the idiom "girl who cried wolf" (lines 1-2). However, rather than connecting the problematic category use to irresponsibility and selfishness and Kur and

Rud did, when Sef continues in their second comment they connect the problematic use to harm and maleficence. This is evident in how Sef associates their comment with the video by recycling the lyric “nobody trust u” (line 5) and then claims that people are “scared” before elaborating that it is the possibility that Swift would make false accusations against them that they fear, as indicated by “make them look like” (line 6). This invites the inference that the reason Swift claims victim status is so that she would be able to make such false accusations.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

To return to the questions “What do commenters accomplish by deploying the phrase “play the victim” within these specific disputes?” and “What can these disputes reveal regarding commenter’s use of the categories ‘victim’ and ‘offender’ specifically and practices of competing fandoms in general?” the answer appears to be “quite a lot.”

Regarding the use of the categories, particularly in YouTube comments, by both hosting the music video and allowing members of the community to comment on it, YouTube provides both an occasion for commenters to sanction Swift by deploying these categories and a platform to do so, however ineffectually.

Commenters treat writing a comment on the music video as participating in the ongoing dispute between Swift and others and that by participating, they further treat their actions as gaining or maintaining an advantage for their side in the dispute despite that dispute remaining unresolved. Relatedly, because commenters overwhelmingly treat their actions as participating in a dispute and by virtue of the viewer’s maxim (Sacks 1972a), the actions of others are more readily hearable/readable as likewise participating in the dispute

and thus displaying membership in one or the other sides. These conflicts are disputes about reality with no discrepancy resolution, as seen by how participants present their purported understanding as unproblematic and treat the ostensible stance of their opponents as fundamentally nonsensical.

Regarding what commenters accomplish by deploying “play the victim,” when commenters engage the ongoing dispute between Swift and others, they orient to the victim-offender SRP, particularly how the categories are treated as mutually exclusive. Commenters can deploy “play the victim” to re-categorize Swift as a particular type of offender with the negative features of both “victim” and “offender.”

When commenters do not reference specific events, they can treat Swift’s purported use of the victim category as problematic and can further treat that use as indicative of her deficient character. When they do reference specific events, commenters can display their treatment of Swift’s use of the victim category as illegitimate with the phrase “play the victim” and re-categorize Swift as an offender or the offender in those past situations. Re-categorizing Swift as an offender in this way enables commenters to reinterpret otherwise positive features associated with victims as morally negative features associated with offenders and apply them to Swift

Regarding what these disputes can reveal about the normative use of the categories, commenters can use and subsequently invert the perquisites of victim status afforded to Swift to de-legitimize her claim of victim status. This is because members can reinterpret Swift’s appeal to and use of victim status to relieve her of responsibility for her injuries as Swift refusing to take responsibility for her actions. In other words, commenters can orient to the normative requirement that victims are not responsible for the harm they suffered

and, so oriented, appeal to common-sense notions of responsibility and related concepts (e.g., agency and maturity) to dispute Swift's victims status. This invites the inference that Swift's use of the victim category is problematic on the grounds that she is immature and uses the category for personal gain. Additionally, commenters can use "play the victim" to mark purported use of victim-bound perquisites as illegitimate not just by claiming their use is self-serving, as shown in the past three threads, but also by claiming their use is to harm others.

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APPENDIX: THE FEUD THUS FAR

One key element of the disputes that I analyze is that participants take the details regarding Taylor Swift and her past, including past interactions, as a given. While this is analytically interesting, it also makes understanding some of the finer details of the participants' actions very difficult. This is most noticeable regarding Swift's relationship with Katy Perry and her now-infamous relationship with Kanye West, which in recent history includes Kim Kardashian, West's wife. The aim of this section is to provide those details that participants may take for granted.

Taylor Swift and Katy Perry

In September 2008, both Swift and Perry were nominated for "best new artist" and appeared on stage together. Both lost the award but became friends. Throughout 2009, both Swift and Perry exchanged numerous supportive tweets. In 2010, Swift and Perry performed Perry's "Hot n Cold" together. However, in 2013, three of Swift's dancers left six months into Swift's "Red" tour. All three were hired by Perry who was starting her Prismatic tour and, in an interview, one of the dancers stated "[Taylor Swift] is a great person to work with, but then Katy contacted us."

In 2014, Swift wrote "Bad Blood" stating it was about a friend who did something terrible to her, but that she was not writing it to start gossip. Perry then tweeted a veiled insult directed at Swift calling her "The Regina George in sheep's clothing," a reference to the antagonist in the popular film "Mean Girls." On the album, the lyrics to "Bad Blood" were featured next to a picture of a Grammy. At the time, Swift had won seven while Perry had yet to win any. Furthermore, the antagonist in the Bad Blood music video looked

similar to how Perry looked at the time. In interviews, both Swift and Perry deflected questions regarding their feud.

In 2017, Perry released “Swish Swish,” which many believed to be a diss track directed to Swift. Perry denied this in an interview, but then discussed her feud with Swift on Carpool Karaoke, where she explained that their feud was regarding the three backup dancers and that she, Perry, was ready for the feud to be over. On June 8, 2017, Perry released her album, “Witness.” The same day, Swift returned her music to Spotify, after having pulled it previously, which overshadowed Perry’s album release. “Look What You Made Me Do,” was released Aug 25 2017.

Taylor Swift and Kanye West

At the 2009 Video Music Awards (VMAs), Taylor Swift, then 19 years old, won best female video for “You Belong With Me.” West jumped on stage, interrupted her, took the microphone out of her hand, and claimed that another artist, Beyoncé, should have won the award. Two days later, West apologized on the Jay Leno Show, saying he was rude. West further apologized September 2010 on Twitter before deleting his account. A few days after that apology, Swift debuted her track “Innocent” at the VMAs, which features lyrics many believe were insulting West. In an interview with The New York Times in 2013, West said that he had no regrets over the Swift incident in 2009 and that previous apologies were due to peer pressure. Despite this turnaround, “The Feud” appeared to be over and West and Kim Kardashian, who are collectively referred to as “Kimye,” appeared alongside Swift as friends at various award ceremonies in 2015.

However, in 2016, West released his single “Famous,” which features the line “I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex. Why? I made that b-tch famous.” West

Tweeted that he had Swift's permission, but Swift's representatives stated that Swift was never informed about the b-tch line and that she cautioned him against writing a song with "such a strong misogynistic message." Weeks later, Swift won a Grammy for album of the year. In her speech, she gave what many considered to be a thinly veiled insult to West regarding how she earned her fame.

West released the music video for "Famous," which contained a hyper-realistic wax model of Swift naked in bed with him, Kardashian, and other celebrities. Swift did not respond. Kardashian trolled Swift on Twitter with snake emojis on "National Snake Day," (July 18, 2016), and her fans followed suit in posting snake emojis across Swift's social media platform. Later, Kardashian posted a secret recording on Snapchat of a phone call between West and Swift that she had hinted at in an interview with GQ magazine the previous July. The video was a three-minute thread of the phone call in which Swift and West discussed the line "I feel like Taylor Swift and I might still have sex," which Swift described as "provocative," but there is no discussion of the line "Why? I made that b-tch famous." Taylor posted to Instagram about never being consulted about being called "that b-tch," and says "I would very much like to be excluded from this narrative, one that I have never asked to be part of since 2009."

On August 21, 2017, Swift deleted the content of her Instagram account and then began to post snake videos; two days later, Swift announced that her new album, Reputation, would debut in November 2017. The font was similar to one West used on his merchandise for his Saint Pablo tour. Finally, on August 25, Swift released "Look What You Made Me Do."