

Amanda Bouvette

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## Domestic Bliss? How Taylor Swift's Music Video "Blank Space" Shatters the Image of the Perfect Life

The music video for Taylor Swift's song "Blank Space" is one of the top ten most viewed videos on YouTube, with over two billion views as of the writing of this paper. The song "Blank Space" and its music video tell the story of a girl who has had many boyfriends in the past, and who is willing to date again, even at the risk that the relationship will end badly, as her past relationships have. The video is luxurious, and it seems somewhat straightforward: a rich girl and guy share the perfect romance in the perfect setting, and when their relationship ends, the girl takes as many stereotypical "crazy girlfriend" actions as can be fit into the end of the video. Beyond these surface observations, however, there is more to the video. Taylor Swift's music video "Blank Space" demonstrates that a selfish, purposeless life leads to boredom and misery, no matter how perfect it may otherwise seem. It does this through several subtle details in the acting, the choices of camera shots, and the lyrics of the song. Furthermore, in doing this, the video shatters the notion of a "perfect" life and relationship, showing this idea to be superficial, immature, and, in reality, completely undesirable.

One of the first clues that this video is not all it seems is the acting. At the beginning of the video, the way the girl and guy (Taylor and Sean) move is controlled and graceful, as if staged. For example, when the two meet, Taylor extends her arm to Sean in a slow, exaggerated way. Also, as they dance, they seem to pause between each step. Most of the actions they take are slow and measured, and the scene in which they are doing something fast, running, is shown in slow motion. When they kiss, it is almost motionless.

The expressions on Taylor and Sean's faces are also not what you might expect from a couple who are alone together—they actually look more like two people putting on a public show. Taylor smiles placidly, quietly blissful, but always with control. Sean seems to have little more than one expression, a sort of brooding smolder. Although they are both beautiful people and are surrounded by all sorts of high quality material things, Taylor and Sean seemed subdued. This prompts a question: are they even truly happy in their life and relationship?

When the relationship goes bad, they actually seem to show more passion, drama—and release. The movements Taylor and Sean make are no longer polite and neat. Taylor now moves her arms, throwing and swinging them violently. She stabs portraits and a cake with knives and other sharp objects. The scene in which Taylor and Sean fight is shown at regular or close to regular speed, and the camera rocks around. A scene in which Taylor hits Sean's car repeatedly with a golf club is also shown at regular speed. As Taylor cries, she writhes sexually on the floor by her fireplace. As Taylor kneels over Sean, she gives him a sort of sexy bite-kiss. After hacking their carved initials out of a tree, Taylor seems to throw a stomping tantrum.

These moments and other camera shots in the video tell the story of a couple living out the stereotypical perfect life and romance, only to seem unenthusiastic, and then breaking up in a spectacular, yet childish, fashion. When the relationship is good, Taylor and Sean are shown to spend their time alone, doing various recreational activities. The life Taylor and Sean are living is full of pleasures, and every pleasure they could want they indulge in. At first glance, this sounds like the dream lifestyle: wouldn't it be nice to not have to go to work, to just do fun things all day with the one person you love, away from the pressures of other people? In reality, however, it would get boring after a while to do nothing and have no goals. In the video, Taylor and Sean already have everything they could ever want. They aren't building anything, and they

are only focused on themselves. They are focused on the superficial things that make their life seem perfect, but none of that perfection saves their relationship. When Taylor sees Sean looking at his phone, she becomes irate. It is not shown what Sean is doing on his phone, whether he is actually talking to another girl or just focusing too much attention on the phone and not on Taylor. It doesn't really matter what he was doing on the phone, but that he was messing around on it in the first place could be interpreted as a sign of boredom. Boredom may have been behind Taylor's extreme reaction to his transgression as well, since it gave her an outlet to get into action. With the entrance of conflict, their life became more interesting and exciting, even if it was under angry, rather than happy, circumstances.

All this shows that the relationship was not mature or built on love, but was more of a superficial fairytale caricature of what romance should be. This may be a dream of young people, or one people have when they are in the middle of adversity or perhaps a life that is not all that glamorous, but it is not a realistic or even desirable dream in practice. This is not to say that being poor is better; it's to say that the purposeless life is boring. The mega-rich are not all doomed to have boring, miserable lives because everything is too perfect—they have to find their purpose. Many do this through philanthropy or challenging themselves in new ways in their companies or by seeking higher office.

Finally, the lyrics of the song "Blank Space" support the idea that this relationship was not built on creating a future with a loved one, but on superficial, selfish pleasures. Line after line includes descriptions and details about how handsome Sean is, how much money he has, how much fun he'll be to date, and how much Taylor has to offer as a girlfriend, even if only a temporary one. The song again calls up the idea of a fairytale ending with the words, "You're the king baby I'm your Queen," and Taylor explicitly says that she considers romance to be a game

in the lines, “Love’s a game, want to play?” and “’Cause you know I love the players / And you love the game.” Furthermore, she insists that the drama is part of the fun when she says, “You can tell me when it’s over / If the high was worth the pain” and “Boys only want love if it’s torture.” Taylor also seems to focus on the end of relationships, as if she is collecting ex-boyfriends. It’s not that she isn’t open to the idea of a more permanent relationship—it’s that her idea of a relationship’s course is extreme: “So it’s gonna be forever / Or it’s gonna go down in flames.” She doesn’t leave room for the idea that if the relationship is not right, it could end peacefully. The lyrics don’t mention the marks of a relationship built on love, such as character traits or getting to know each other—they, in fact, say the opposite. In the verses, Taylor mentions madness, sin, and pretty lies, and in the chorus, recklessness. The only way Taylor mentions getting to know her boyfriend is in saying, “Find out what you want / Be that girl for a month.” This isn’t a relationship based on being there for each other and caring about the person under the beautiful face, it’s one made to use for as long as it’s fun and discard when it’s no longer interesting. The dramatic breakup is just part of the excitement!

Taylor Swift’s music video “Blank Space” shows that happy lives and relationships are not built on perfect circumstances, but on people with the right attitudes. It does this by showing in a highly stylized way a couple that seems to have it all, but breaks up violently because they don’t have what matters. It conveys to the audience that they don’t need to have the “perfect” life to be happy in life or in relationships. Glamor is fun, but it doesn’t make you happy or fulfilled. What makes you fulfilled is having a real life—one that doesn’t focus entirely on yourself, but on loving others and together reaching your goals.