‘Does gender inequality still exist in the media in the 21st century?'
Norwich High School for Girls

Why We Chose This Question:

We designed this survey to see how much of an impact stereotypes had on our daily, subconscious beliefs about the media, specifically what qualities we expect in male vs. female singers and superheroes.

How the Survey was Conducted

For our survey we took 26 students from our Year Seven classes and asked them to fill out a form honestly without conferring. The pupils completed the survey anonymously. Pupils were informed that the survey was being carried out for research-purposes and that their names would not be shared in our report or in the media. The 26 participants were divided into two groups based on their tutor groups. Group 1 had 12 participants and Group 2 had 14 participants. Group 1 was given a set of questions about female celebrities. Group 2 was given the same questions but about male celebrities.

Four out of the five survey questions were multiple choice to ensure consistency in the data for analysis purposes. The question that was not multiple choice, requiring participants to draw a picture, was asked first. This ensured that the following questions that referred to gender did not bias the response to this first question.

Research limitations: The survey was conducted in our all-girls independent school, so no male participants' views were included and the demographic range of participants was limited. Participants were all in the 11-12 years age range only.

Findings of the Survey

A: Singers

As mentioned above, we asked Group B questions about male performers, Group A, identical questions about female performers. An example of the different questions is question four, based on the most streamed English language male or female Spotify artists in 2025: ‘In 2025, The Weeknd was one of the most popular musicians of the year on streaming platforms. Tick three qualities that you believe best represent why The Weeknd is a popular musician.’ and ‘In 2025, Taylor Swift was one of the most popular musicians of the year on streaming platforms. Tick three qualities that you believe best represent why Taylor Swift is a popular musician.’.

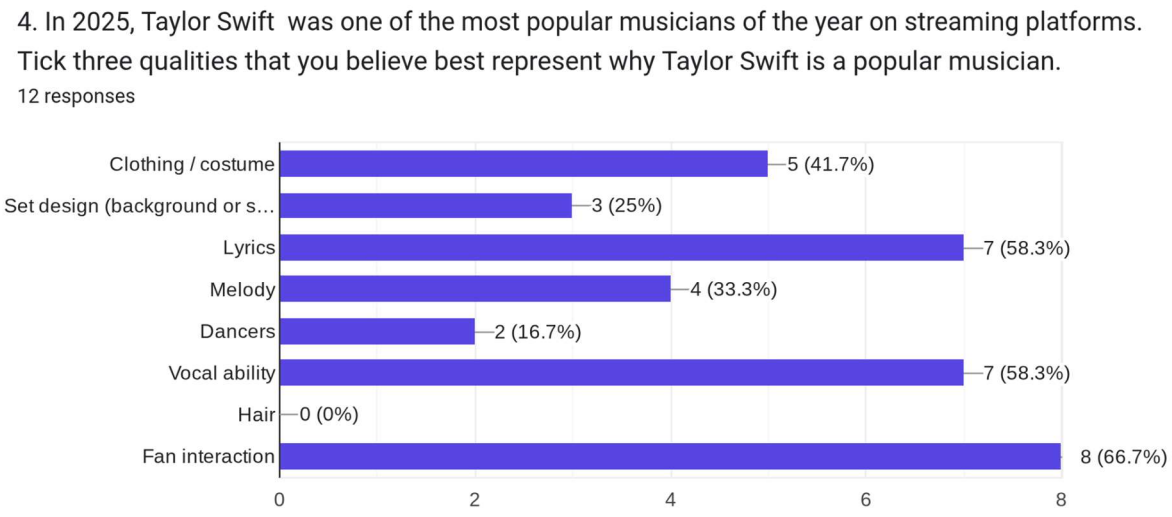


Figure 1: Group A's answers

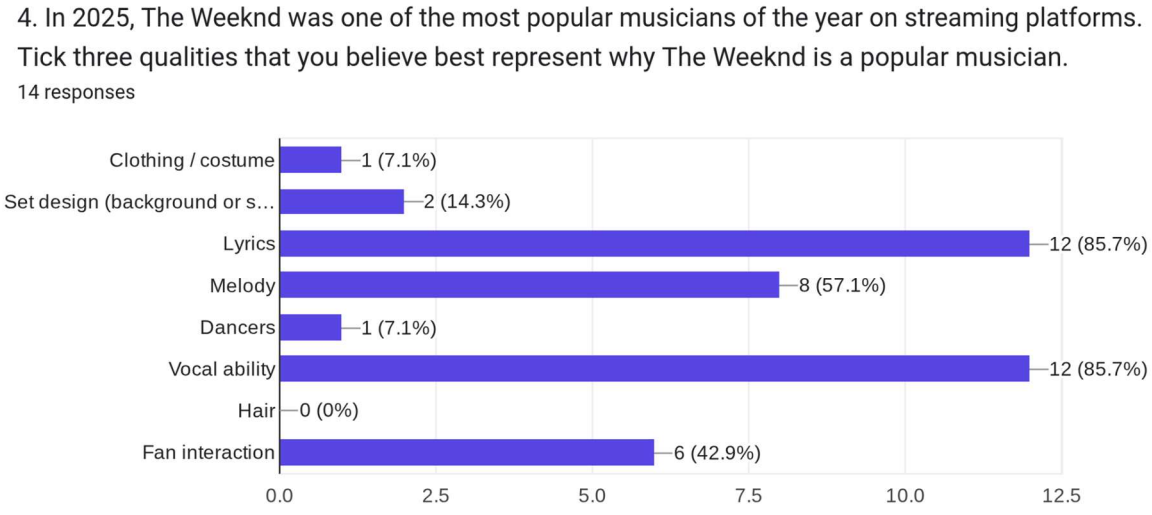


Figure 2: Group B's answers

The responses (Figure 1 and 2) reflect public perceptions of some of the most popular musicians, in this case specifically Taylor Swift and The Weeknd. While this survey question has a focus on musical traits it demonstrates the differences in how male and female singers are perceived and also how audiences prioritise different artistic qualities for each artist. A notable difference is the clothing/costume category where it is apparent that visual presentation is more vital to the "Taylor Swift experience," receiving 41.7% (5 votes) compared to just 7.1% (1 vote) for The Weeknd. This highlights the importance of the public image that Taylor Swift presents compared to The Weeknd.

While the music world feels pretty evenly split between men and women, the data of the survey we ran reveals a distinct gender double standard in how musicians are perceived, showing that female singers face higher expectations to balance visual aesthetics and fan interactions alongside their actual music. We asked students to respond to the following question: In Group A: 'Choose 3 qualities from those below. Tick the ones that are most important, in your opinion, for **female** singers.' and in Group B: Choose 3 qualities from those below. Tick the ones that are most important, in your opinion, for **male** singers.'

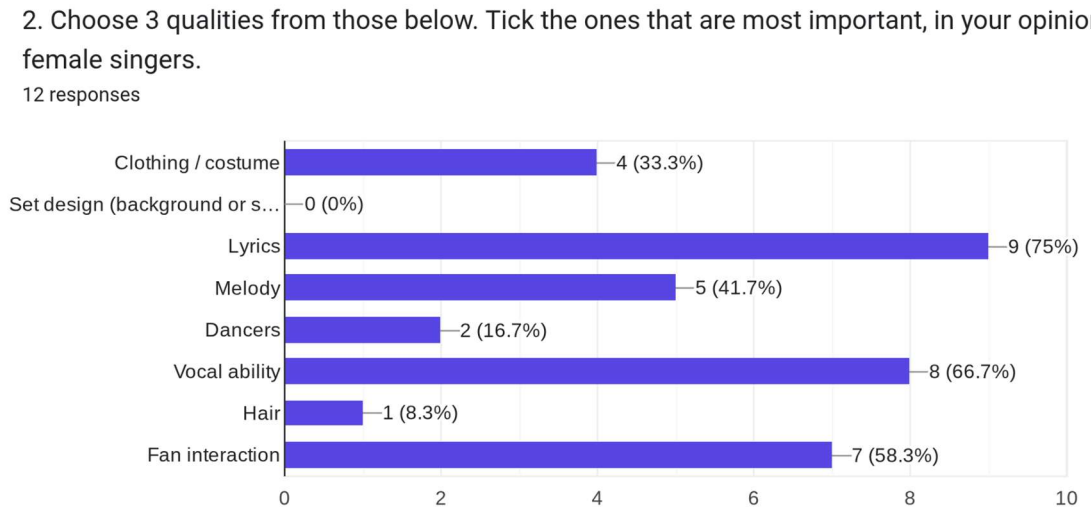


Figure 3: Group A's Responses

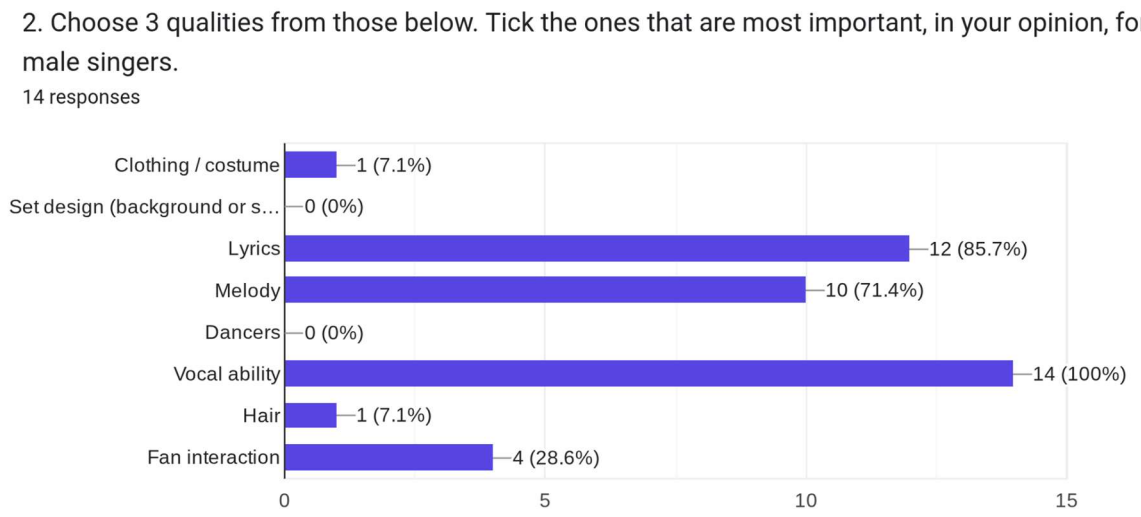


Figure 4: Group B's Responses

For male artists, respondents focused almost entirely on core musical talents: 100% prioritised vocal ability and 85.7% valued lyrics, while with visual components like clothing (7.1%) dancers (0%) were virtually ignored. In contrast, the expectations for female signers were much broader, covering both appearance and performance. Whilst lyrics and vocal ability were still highly rated, visual and relational elements spiked significantly for female artists. With clothing valued at 33.3% and fan interaction at almost 60% (58.3%).

B: Superheroes

While male characters like Superman and Batman have historically dominated superhero movies, reinforcing the idea that strength is primarily a male trait, this trend mirrors the broader gender inequality present in everyday society.

For decades, media representation has favoured men in leader and high action superhero roles, while female characters were often sidelined or downgraded to supporting positions. Highlighted by the under-representation of female leads both on screen and in real world leaders, this imbalance reflects the stereotypes about power and capability that society is only recently starting to dismantle. The creative portion of the survey asked participants to draw a superhero. This exercise offers a fascinating look at how media perceptions are shifting, and the results on this section contradict our predictions. Usually, the superhero genre is generally dominated by male leads, which means these types of drawing questions typically result in male figures. However, our results completely flipped this trend; with a striking number of respondents (69% of our 26 respondents) drawing a female character and a lot less (31%) drawing a male (see Figure 5 for two example drawings).

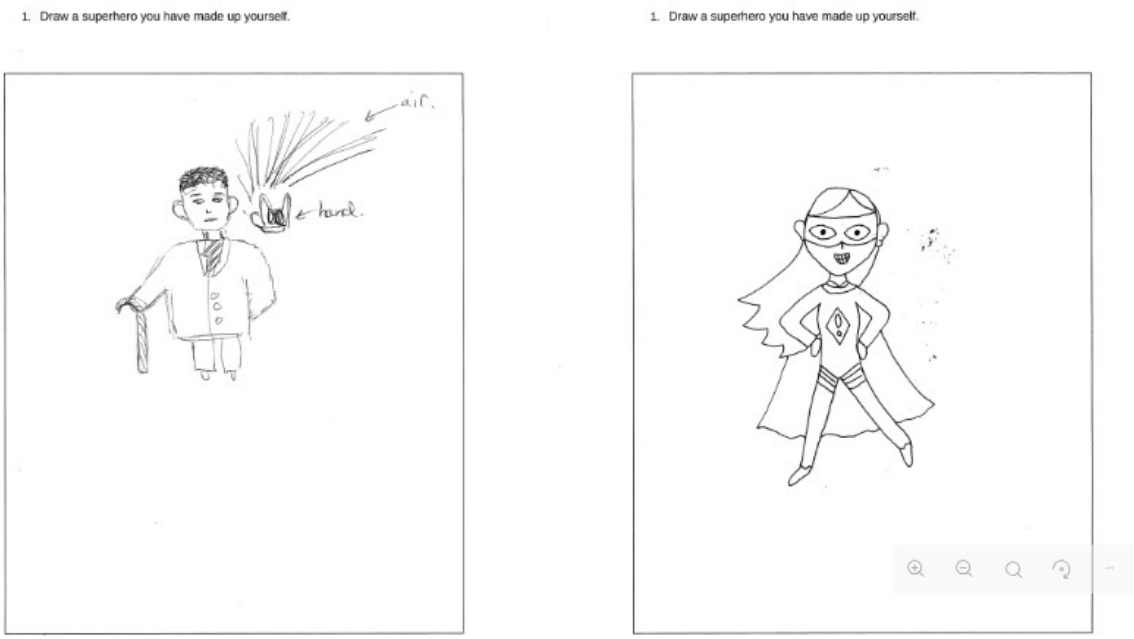


Figure 5: Two of the Superhero Drawings Produced: the Left Discernably Male, the Right Female

While attending an all-girls school likely played a major role by normalising female leadership and capability daily, there are other potential reasons for this surprising outcome. For instance, the result could reflect the recent rise of high-profile, female led superhero films and tv shows in the 21st century, which have given our generation more mainstream female role models. Some examples include Katniss Everdeen (from *The Hunger Games*); she is the ultimate symbol of a fierce, female protector. Also perhaps Wednesday Adams (from *Wednesday* on Netflix), who is a strong, independent and defiant young girl as the central hero solving mysteries.

Conclusion

From our survey, we have seen that for female singers, many young women are still stuck in the 'looks matter most' mindset, and the belief that they should constantly act kindly to fans, rather than focusing on their skill and ability as we do with male singers. Luckily, when it comes to female superheroes they are an inspiration because of their character and because of their continuous perseverance through each challenge they face and their willingness to help others even when life would be easier if they didn't.

Despite the amount of prejudice and stereotypes that exist today slowly but surely the world as a community is working to break all of those.