

# I Bet You Think About Invitational Rhetoric



Taylor Swift ft. Chris Stapleton - I Bet You Think About Me (Taylor's Version) (Official Music Video)

Musical artist Taylor Swift released the music video for her song “I Bet You Think About Me” on November 15th, 2021. This was after Swift re-released her studio album *Red* on November 12th, where the song was featured as a vault track. The song, featuring Chris Stapleton, focuses on Swift and an ex-boyfriend of hers. Through Swift's lyrics, the listener is able to follow along the story of the ex realizing what he had and lost. The dramatic music video allows the audience to visualize how Swift is communicating to her ex, showing him how much she has outgrown him as she is now more powerful and happier alone. Looking at the “I Bet You Think About Me” music video through the lens of Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin's invitational rhetoric allows the reader to analyze the dynamic between Swift and her primary audience, in this case her ex-boyfriend. By studying the video through the rhetorical principle of equality, and the two rhetorical forms of invitational rhetoric, offering perspectives and the creation of external conditions, the

viewer is able to understand Swift's position of authority she establishes herself in through her confidence and presence in the music video.

Swift, through the visual elements she uses in her music video, creates external conditions between her and her ex-boyfriend that do not follow the requirements needed to offer a mutual understanding of perspectives as defined by invitational rhetoric. According to "Beyond persuasion: A proposal for an invitational rhetoric", a mutual understanding between a rhetor and their audience may only be obtained through "an atmosphere in which audience members' perspectives also can be offered" (Foss and Griffin, 10). Swift fails to create this atmosphere as it is not her overall goal. Though the video takes place in the setting of her ex's wedding reception, the music video is meant to be one-sided, with Swift giving her perspective on this relationship long after it has ended. The most blatant showing of this being Swift interrupting a guest's wedding speech to talk about herself, even giving the bride-to-be a gift (I Bet You Think About Me). This show of Swift putting herself in the spotlight at an event that is obviously not meant for her is proof that she does not care to offer her audience their own perspective. The situation she is singing about has lost all its initial significant meaning and Swift is taking the long time that has passed as an opportunity to poke fun at the situation and the regret her ex-boyfriend must be feeling at the moment. The video mirrors Swift's position about this past relationship in her real life, as it shows the ex's blatant awkwardness while Taylor is displayed as confident, having the power even in a situation that she is not expected to. Swift continuously focuses on herself and her perspective, being dressed in bright red for most of the video, standing out against the unusual white wedding attire of the other guests (I Bet You Think About Me). She is purposely making herself stand out, wanting the ex she

is singing to notice her, how she has grown and how her confidence is unaffected by the events that have happened between the two of them. As invitational rhetoric defines the external conditions the rhetor must meet as “safety, value, and freedom”, Swift doesn’t do much to meet these requirements (Foss and Griffin, 10). The act of attending her ex’s wedding doesn’t appear to do much in terms of offering him safety, and the taunting, sarcastic tone of the video and song itself doesn’t show her ex that he or his opinions are valued. This choice expresses Swift’s idea that while her ex may be thinking of her, she doesn’t pay attention to or particularly respect him.



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As has been previously established that Swift doesn’t create a very safe environment where she and her audience are equally valued, it can be further analyzed that she does not view her audience as her equal at all in the context of the video. As stated in invitational rhetoric, “The result of the invitational rhetor’s stance toward the audience is a relationship

of equality, respect, and appreciation.” (Foss and Griffin, 6). This relationship is not reflected between Taylor and her ex. In this video and song, Taylor is seen as superior to her audience of her ex-boyfriend, reflecting the more traditional form of rhetoric that states “rhetors communicate the superiority of their positions and the deficiencies of those of the audience” (Foss and Griffin, 6). Swift is the main focus throughout the whole video. She appears uninvited to the wedding, out of dress code, destroys the wedding cake and is seen influencing the children at the wedding (I Bet You Think About Me). Her whole takeover of the event that she has no place being at really expresses the superiority she feels towards her ex after their relationship has ended. In addition to physically appearing more important than everyone else, the lyrics Swift uses enforce her confident feeling of superiority towards her ex. The repeated line “I bet you think about me”, in the song lets the audience know that Swift is aware of the effect she has on him, and she is using it to taunt him, wanting to make him regret his mistakes, giving herself power while doing so. By doing this, those watching the video are able to witness the higher standard Swift now holds herself to, having been in that relationship in the past, she would never dream of being with that same person again, but she is satisfied knowing that her ex is fixated on what he has lost, while she laughs about what she has outgrown. As opposed to Swift appearing superior in the music video, the lyrics of the song show that at one point, the ex was viewed as superior to Swift. The lines “I tried to fit in with your upper-crust circles”, “You grew up in a silver spoon gated community”, and “Mr. Superior Thinking” informs the audience that in the past, Swift viewed her ex as superior to her as that was the way he presented himself (I Bet You Think About Me). The mocking tone in which these lyrics are performed shows that Swift no longer respects the person she is singing about, viewing

them more as pretentious than impressive. Neither Swift nor her audience are ever on an equal playing field with each other, contrasting one of the most important values of invitational rhetoric. This challenge to the theory of rhetoric proves that in Swift's situation, the rhetor must prove they have power in order to get their message across effectively. The only time the two seem completely on the same playing field is when they are dancing in silence, the ex realizing that he will never be with someone like her again (I Bet You Think About Me). This scene paired with the lyrics, "That the love that you're lookin' for is the love that you had", is Taylor communicating to her audience that it is too late, he will always have regrets, but she is doing just fine without him.

Along with her strategy of challenging certain characteristics of invitational rhetoric to make herself stand out as the rhetor; Swift follows the theory in regard to the offering perspectives approach. Though she takes a powerful stance in the music video, it is evident that Swift's end goal is not persuasion, as she follows the rhetorical form where "The rhetor adopts a 'let me help you, let me enlighten you, let me show you the way' approach" (Foss & Griffin, 3). Swift follows this approach while she is addressing her ex-boyfriend throughout the song, though she takes a sarcastic tone, mocking him, and sort of laughing at the whole situation with the lyrics, "Do you have all the space that you need?", "With your organic shoes and your million dollar couch", "when you say 'oh my god she's insane, she wrote a song about me'" (I Bet You Think About Me). It's as if she is enlightening her ex by pointing out how ridiculous he sounds and how poorly he is making himself look. She is showing her ex how his misguided behavior looks to her, encouraging him to change his ways while she, on the other hand, has only gained confidence and value in herself since the relationship has passed. The events in the music video show Swift adhering to the claim Foss and Griffin

make that “rhetors do not seek to impose their positions on audience members in invitational rhetoric” (Foss & Griffin, 7). Though she is seen wreaking havoc at the wedding ceremony, Swift never actively tries to get in between the bride and the groom. At no point does she make the move to take the place of the bride or appear to be jealous that her ex is marrying someone else. It is clear throughout the video, due to the song lyrics as well as the visuals, that Swift is not trying to convince her ex to get back together with her because she is obviously better off without him. This song is her expressing that she has more than moved on and she is not necessarily trying to convince her ex that he made a mistake, but instead communicating to him that she is confident he will never find someone like her again. By not attempting to persuade her ex-boyfriend to get back into a relationship with her or break up with his current girlfriend, Swift effectively challenges the traditional form of rhetoric. She is showing that she does not need to be aggressive in getting her message across to the point where she feels as if she has something to ‘win’, all she has to do is share her perspective with her music. While she is offering her perspective, Swift is simply attempting to expand her ex’s view that he could have made a mistake in the past but it’s too late to change anything now. This can be seen in one of the final lines “But it turned out I’m harder to forget, than I was to leave” (I Bet You Think About Me). Swift is sure that her ex will not forget about her anytime soon, as she has matured since the relationship but is still able to capture her ex’s attention, even on his own wedding day.

Taylor Swift strategically challenges as well as follows certain aspects of invitational rhetoric in her music video for her song “I Bet You Think About Me” in order to make it clear to her fans that this particular ex of hers is no longer significant in her life, though the same cannot be said for him. By looking at Swift’s video through the lens of invitational

rhetoric, the audience is able to understand the video in a new way. It's not necessarily just an artist singing about an ex-boyfriend in a sarcastic, teasing way, it's Swift giving herself power, putting herself above her past relationships, recognizing that she has changed and grown in a healthy way while the people who are not in her life anymore are still caught up thinking about her. It is not a song of jealousy or anger, but of self-growth and reflection.



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