CHAPTER 4

Celebrity Mental Health: Intimacy, Ordinariness, and Repeated Self-Transformation

While magazines directly (and indirectly) tell us what to do, celebrity reporting functions in a similar pedagogical way by showing audiences how famous people act in certain situations. When celebrities share their personal health struggles, scholars have argued that they serve three main functions: education, inspiration, and activism/advocacy.¹ This is the logic presented at face value by celebrities themselves and those actively telling their stories—that when a famous person comes out and reveals that they are suffering, they communicate to fans that it is okay to feel that way and ideally inspire them to seek help. *Teen Vogue*’s insistence on the importance of speaking out and fighting the stigma discussed in the previous chapter is an example of this. So is Lady Gaga’s statement in conjunction with revealing that she lives with PTSD that “the most inexpensive and perhaps the best medicine in the world is words.”² Other scholars have added that celebrity health narratives also do ideological work in that they present “images and ideas about how we should interpret, manage and value mental illness as well as the identities of those who suffer from it.”³

This chapter focuses on female celebrities⁴ who have spoken out about their own mental illness, by looking at the very public struggles of singers Demi Lovato and Selena Gomez. It also briefly discusses the employment of a sad aesthetic by artist Lana del Rey. These cases and the overall rise in celebrity expressions about mental health can be tied to a turn in celebrity branding around authenticity and intimacy. Together with the previous chapter, it shows how media and pop cultural attention to mental health is linked to changes in branding strategies around relatability. This chapter

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shows that, just as there was an increase in magazine coverage of mental illness from 2015 and on, there was a spike in celebrity confessions about various psychiatric diagnoses around this time.

Within the original time frames of this research project, 2008-2018, 105 female celebrities who had spoken out about various experiences of mental illness were identified. Since the original cut-off point, the list has steadily become longer, with more and more famous individuals sharing their struggles with the world. Among these are people like entertainer Paris Hilton (who revealed a traumatic history of childhood abuse), royal Meghan Markle (who in an infamous Oprah interview shared that she had been suicidal), and athlete Naomi Osaka (who took a break from tennis due to mental health issues).

Just as with this book’s general scope, the focus here is on American celebrities or those with a global appeal. In the original group of celebrities, 78% were white, 12% black, 5% Latinx, and 5% mixed race. In other words, the majority of women celebrities who have spoken out about their mental health are white. The subject that gets to be open about her difficulties, tends to be white or white-passing.

Among the original 105 celebrities, the most common diagnosis mentioned was anxiety, closely followed by depression, as well as those having suffered both anxiety and depression. There were also several accounts of living with postpartum depression and bipolar disorder. Other diagnoses and experiences that occurred were social anxiety, suicidal ideation, self-harm, eating disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Among these categories several overlapped, meaning the same person might have talked about having multiple diagnoses. There were also a few cases where stars had only talked about mental health in general, but still made it to several compilation lists of celebrities speaking out, and they are thus also included here.

**Changes over Time: From Speculations to Confessions**

The majority of these celebrity confessions took place toward the end of the decade, with a clear increase in 2015 and onwards. The stars included here have all spoken firsthand about their own experiences of depression, anxiety, or other diagnoses. These confessions primarily took place in interviews with magazines, but also at times on social media, with stars
revealing diagnoses directly to their fans on their personal accounts, like the case of Cara Delevingne discussed in the previous chapter. Some also happened in memoirs (that were subsequently reported on by media covering celebrities), first-person essays in the popular press, press statements in relation to a rehab or hospital stay, participation in mental health awareness campaigns, on personal apps, and on reality television shows.⁸

Looking at celebrity reporting around 2008–2009, a lot of it was dedicated to female stars who seemed to go through mental distress, but they rarely came forward themselves to speak about what they were dealing with; instead, it was the media speculating about what particular diagnosis someone might have had. This creates a different kind of celebrity health narrative than when the star herself speaks out, since speculations from others always can be denied, but firsthand statements tend to be carefully crafted to fit within the celebrity’s overall brand. Su Holmes and Diane Negra have pointed to the “intensely and negatively scrutinizing public gaze [that] was trained so often on female celebrities in a practice that reached fever pitch in 2008.”⁹ A fever pitch that was not an “accident of historical timing” but a way of misdirecting anxieties and blame for the global financial crisis and instead position “female celebrity as itself an overvalued and depreciating asset.”¹⁰ In this way, famous women took the heat for the public’s anxieties about the financial system and the tabloidized press used its investigative functions to examine female “trainwrecks” rather than economic institutions.

The trainwrecks that received scrutinized attention were often suspected of suffering from mental health challenges. For example, one of the most closely watched public breakdowns at the start of 2008 was that of singer Britney Spears, which (could be said) to have peaked in February 2007 when she shaved her head in front of scores of paparazzi photographers who spread the news worldwide overnight.¹¹ During 2008 Spears was committed to a psychiatric ward twice and then put under a conservatorship in which her father Jamie Spears had ultimate authority over her finances and most personal decisions, something she lived with for over 13 years.¹²

2010-2011 saw the peak of former child actor Lindsay Lohan’s life descending into chaos, with her spending time in rehab and jail multiple times.¹³ Around this time the world also saw singer Amy Winehouse rise to stardom and break down in public, ending with her death by alcohol poisoning in 2011.¹⁴ In 2013 and 2014 former child actor Amanda Bynes went through a very public breakdown involving several highly publicized
drug binges and court battles with her parents.\textsuperscript{15} Several of these female celebrities appeared among the sad girls on Tumblr that I discuss in the following chapter. On this digital platform users would post images of these stars (often in states of distress) in ways that idolized them and reinforced a melancholic notion of sadness as romantic, mystical, and inspirational.\textsuperscript{16}

In most of these cases of public breakdown, the speculations about the famous women’s mental health were done by observers and not by the women themselves. What started to change around 2015 was that celebrities themselves began to “come out” and address their own mental health in large numbers. One example of how attitudes about celebrities and mental illness changed toward the end of the decade is singer Mariah Carey’s revelation of a bipolar II diagnosis to \textit{People} magazine in April 2018 (the coverage of which I discussed in the previous chapter).\textsuperscript{17} Throughout her 25-year career, the singer had gone through two highly publicized marriages, a divorce, and a televised mental breakdown but did not speak out directly about her mental health until 2018, despite having received her diagnosis already in 2001.\textsuperscript{18} The case of actress Brittany Snow is another example. She opened up about her experiences of anorexia and depression to \textit{People} magazine in 2007, but the public’s reaction was so harsh that she decided to take a break from the spotlight.\textsuperscript{19} In an interview with \textit{InStyle} magazine in 2019 she admitted that she had spoken “too early,” saying that “I think there was still a stigma around sharing so much truth, and it kind of got seen as me being self-indulgent or trying to gain attention.”\textsuperscript{20} Something her interviewer describes as “Snow was speaking out about mental health and pulling back the curtain on a deeply personal experience during a time when society was much less receptive to conversations about mental illness.”\textsuperscript{21} This reflects not only an awareness in the media in 2019 about mental health issues and how to write about them, but also an idea of the media at large as now being more responsible than it used to be in regard to these topics. Rather than engage in sensationalist coverage of breakdowns and trainwrecks, celebrity reporting assumed a more careful approach to issues of mental illness, indirectly informed by discourses of mental health awareness and advocacy. The increase in conversations around mental illness in popular media like \textit{Cosmopolitan} and \textit{Teen Vogue}, and among celebrities, served to normalize issues like depression and anxiety. One can imagine that portraying a suffering celebrity as an outrageous trainwreck became less appealing, as it in the process of normalization also is assumed that stars and regular people alike are
afflicted by the issues. Portraying stars who live with mental illness as something to be shocked by (as the sensationalist trainwreck coverage does) assumes that the reader cannot relate to what the celebrity is going through and positions the audience at a distance, gawking at the spectacle of a famous person breaking down. When mental illnesses instead are considered common and something that can affect everyone, the coverage of celebrities going through such things takes a relatable approach that serves to present the famous person as “just like us” in their suffering. This is also indicative of a larger shift toward more ordinariness in celebrity branding and reporting, something propelled by the prevalence of social media, which I discuss further below.

I would also argue that this shift in approach to mental illness, specifically the tendency of celebrities themselves to speak in first person about their struggles, played a large part in mobilizing the #FreeBritney-movement that ultimately led to the dissolution of her conservatorship. The fan-led movement called attention to the wellbeing of Britney Spears under the conservatorship controlled by her father, in which the majority of her life was under his command and decision-making. The image of Britney accessible to her fans was largely mediated through Instagram, which from 2015 and on became a minor cultural phenomenon, leading to the start of a podcast dedicated solely to interpreting the singer’s activity on the platform. At a time when other stars provided firsthand accounts of past troubles and ongoing diagnoses, Britney posted low-res selfies, inspirational quotes, and videos of herself dancing at the same spot in her house, with very little seemingly real info about what was going on in her life. The fans knew she had had a breakdown and then been placed under the conservatorship, but at no point had she herself sat down for a first-person confessional interview, or even produced a social media post in that vein, which in a media landscape ripe with those kinds of confessions stood out. I contend that the discrepancy between the way Britney’s mental health was mediated and the prevalence of celebrity talk about mental illness—in the sense that her psychic wellbeing was NOT directly addressed at a time when this was a popular topic in celebrity media—contributed to the success of the #FreeBritney-movement and the ultimate dissolution of her conservatorship in November 2021.

It is also important to note that celebrities suffering from mental illnesses is not a new phenomenon. In the early modern and romantic period, madness was a sign of the melancholy philosopher-artist and of the genius of the Byronic iconoclastic artist. The connection between
mental distress and creativity and talent continued into the twentieth century, and at the start of the twenty-first century, “psychic turmoil is [still] taken as a sign of artistic authenticity.” Often “suffering, dysfunction or the personal flaw, once concealed but now revealed to the public” are just as important elements to the celebrity story as high achievement. Stories about stars who “make it through” often encourage values of individual autonomy and self-mastery and end up reinforcing “neoliberal ideologies of meritocracy and competitive individualism.”

But narratives of celebrities struggling with mental illnesses have tended to be heavily gendered, working mostly in the favor of male stars. Nina K. Martin notes that the breakdowns of male celebrities often are considered “fascinating, demonstrating behavior that shores up stereotypical hetero-masculinity (promiscuity and cheating, aggression and rage, linked with drugs and alcoholism).” Overcoming scandal in this context is a sign of heroism, while “women’s attempts to overcome their foibles are viewed as signifiers of tragic instability and madness.” Gaston Franssen points out that the same “ideology of competitive individualism” is at play for both male and female breakdowns, but “with clear gendered differences: psychological instability for male artists is associated with perseverance, credibility and authenticity; for female artists, mental breakdown is seen as a sign of failure, inherent instability or a lack of resilience.”

Franssen analyzes Demi Lovato’s celebrity health narrative and argues that it is an exceptional story within the traditionally gendered discourses mentioned above, because the star has managed to incorporate mental distress into their brand in a way that has “ensured that she is perceived as a self-confident artist and a successful entrepreneur of self-care.” I will return to Franssen’s analysis of Lovato below and build upon that with my own. I argue that Lovato’s story (of repeated breakdown, recovery, and reinvention) is becoming less exceptional and more common among female* stars. Stories of trauma and difficulties serve to make celebrities more authentic and relatable, exemplifying a profitable vulnerability where difficult subjects become integral to the star brand.

A Changing Celebrity Media Landscape

It is also worth noting how celebrity reporting itself has changed throughout the 2010s and the role of social media in its evolvement. In 2008 celebrity journalism was dominated by blogs like Perez Hilton and TMZ, which were ready to publish the most sensationalist stories, with little
concern over how it would affect the stars themselves. Celebrity scholar Anne Helen Petersen has described how celebrities experienced this as being (almost) completely out of control, with paparazzi willing to step over dead bodies to get valuable photos of their subjects (a spate of car crashes involving photographers and celebrities underscored this sentiment). As the 2010s progressed, however, stars learned to utilize their own social media channels to circumvent the control of the paparazzi and the unscrupulous gossip blogs. Toward the end of the decade traditional outlets were reporting on what the stars were doing on social media, creating stories based on celebrities’ Instagram posts and tweets.

This goes hand in hand with Marwick and boyd’s analysis of celebrity practice on Twitter, which they argue takes place through “the appearance and performance of ‘backstage’ access.” They conceptualize celebrity as “an organic and ever-changing performative practice” which involves “ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona.” “Micro-celebrities,” individuals who have built up a devoted audience on digital platforms, are pioneers and masters of this practice, but other kinds of celebrities have come to adopt the same methods to maintain their fanbases with the rise of social media.

The performed intimacy is especially important for my discussion here, and Marwick and boyd argue that celebrities reveal seemingly personal information on Twitter to establish “a sense of intimacy between participant and follower.” Heather Nunn and Anita Biressi argue similarly that an “ideology of intimacy” has formed the conditions in which the celebrity, along with other public figures and the ordinary person, now labour as emotional subjects in the public arena.

Since Marwick and boyd’s 2011 article and Nunn and Biressi’s 2010 piece, this way of practicing celebrity has only become more established and takes place not only on Twitter but also on Instagram and other social media platforms. Barker, Gill, and Harvey also argue that “we live in a world suffused and saturated with representations of intimate relationships.” Even though their examination of mediated intimacy primarily concerns romantic relationships and sex, the point about the domineering presence of intimate relationships carries over to issues like mental health, in that it explains the naturalness with which details of previously “personal” and “private” topics are now discussed out in the open.
Defining Celebrity

Another important aspect to keep in mind when discussing celebrity is its role as an economic condition that produces value and profit, and that involves a range of practices beyond the celebrity’s professional employment (i.e. as musician or actor for example). During the first part of the twentieth century, the primary value of the Hollywood celebrity was to differentiate film products and generate attention for a film, but as the studio system collapsed and the entertainment business grew, a whole industry emerged that “found ways to generate value from the celebrity’s whole life on and off the screen, creating lifestyle synergies between stars, products, services and events.”

The monetary value of the celebrity has always been dependent on the audience that it can deliver. Alison Hearn and Stephanie Schoenhoff examine how celebrity has changed as the measurements of audiences have become more and more specified. Various tools have been used to measure audience engagement, from the Nielsen ratings of television viewership, the Q score that measures familiarity and likeability, and the Klout score which claimed to measure and score the totality of a person’s social media impact. Originally, the value a celebrity was able to generate came from box office and record sales. Eventually it moved into a larger field of endorsed products and direct marketing of their own commodities. For example, instead of endorsing or appearing in an ad for a perfume, celebrities began producing their own perfumes (or other wares) for direct sale to audiences, something that became common in the 1990s when celebrities “began to configure themselves explicitly as brands.”

Within celebrity branding, the process of value generation is strengthened “because it relies so completely on the ongoing and infinitely malleable distinctiveness of the celebrity’s ‘personal’ lifestyle.” Here authenticity becomes one of the most important elements determining the value of a celebrity, “beyond the roles played or music created, today’s celebrity brand is predicated on convincing consumers of the authenticity of their inherent ‘being’ beyond the limelight.” This emphasis on authenticity is only heightened when it comes to micro-celebrities and influencers, for whom the “promise of authenticity” is a central aspect of their strong relation to their followers, the strength of which is what determines how much monetary value is invested in them by marketers and advertising agencies. In other words, the increased intimacy between celebrities and fans is closely tied to a longer history of monetizing the celebrity’s whole life by presenting a “real” image.
The “relatability” of *Cosmopolitan*’s mental health coverage, which manages to touch on difficult subjects but does so in a non-threatening and distanced way, fits well into this marketable authenticity. One can presume that a celebrity would want to appear real to convey authenticity and intimacy, but they would not want to do so in a way that presents too much difficulty or pain, because doing so might risk the audience/fan becoming uncomfortable and no longer acting as a consumer of whatever product is being sold in conjunction with the celebrity brand. The audience/fan still has to act as a consumer and generate monetary value, but they might be deterred from doing so if they get too sad or down from hearing about a celebrity’s personal struggle. By presenting difficulties in distanced and relatable ways a celebrity can appear authentic without becoming “too much.”

Additionally, whether or not a social relationship is perceived as authentic or real is often determined based on the strength of the “commitment to the ‘inner psychological concerns of each person.’” The media discourse in which celebrities share their own experiences of depression and anxiety is thus one where fans are expecting greater personal connection to their idols. This creates a context for celebrity practice where disclosing private details is not out of the ordinary, but instead part of the norm. For celebrities, telling the world that you have suffered through depression might no longer be something that taints your image, but in fact improves it by contributing to the authenticity of your performance of self. As such, disclosing details about one’s mental health might even be a strategical choice in order to maintain a close relationship with fans. When looking at the relationship between celebrity and fan in purely economic terms, the incorporation of vulnerability into the public narrative of the star becomes a profitable choice.

The tendency to share issues of mental health is also seen in the world of micro-celebrities, where several of the biggest stars in the world of beauty and lifestyle YouTubers have spoken openly and repeatedly about their struggles with anxiety. Despite the still dominant perception of social media as “an archive of endlessly positive self-documentation,” among micro-celebrities on sites like YouTube the display of negative affect is increasingly common. Rachel Berryman and Misha Kavka present several examples of crying and anxiety vlogs made by YouTubers with large followings and argue that the displays of negative affects here become productive, in that they “cement authenticity, offer (self-)therapy and strengthen ties of intimacy between YouTubers and their followers.”

An
unfiltered and “raw” video of someone crying becomes in this context a sign of realness and vulnerability that reinforces the bonds between micro-celebrity and fan. In relation to the more traditional celebrities I discuss in this chapter, the continued success of micro-celebrities on platforms like YouTube influences the way that more traditional celebrities come to construct their own celebrity image. This includes a heightened (in comparison to previous eras) intimacy between celebrity and fans, that expresses itself in things like more openness about mental health struggles.

Lastly, this shift to more and more intimate channels of communication between celebrity and fans is also part of a turn toward ordinariness in celebrity culture. Joshua Gamson notes that the celebrity narrative that positions the famous as ordinary and “just like us” has long been used to make celebrities more relatable and invite identification with them. The elevation of the ordinary has intensified from the 1990s and onwards, first with the rise of reality TV and its practice of making stars out of ordinary people, and then with the Internet and the possibility to become famous without the traditional celebrity industry. This has only intensified with the rise of self-branding and the emergence of the social media influencer.

### Spotlight on Pop Stars

Both Demi Lovato and Selena Gomez have been prominent mental health advocates that have appeared frequently in my celebrity archive. I chose to focus on the two of them in this chapter because they have spoken about their issues repeatedly in very visible ways. Both of them were also child stars who made their debut on the children’s show *Barney and Friends* (1992-2009). After getting to know each other on the television series, Lovato and Gomez developed a close friendship that became highly publicized—shown on magazine covers, in a series of homemade YouTube videos by the two stars, the made-for-TV-movie *Princess Protection Program*, and several unauthorized biographies about the “BFFs” (best friends forever).

As girls and teen celebrities, Lovato and Gomez were at the center of US media culture’s fascination with girls in the early 2000s. As Anita Harris argues, the girls seen in popular media tend to be either “can-do” girls who are confident and have almost infinite capacity for success, or “at-risk” girls who lack self-esteem and engage in risky behavior. Both of these figures circulate together in media culture as examples to follow—where the at-risk girl functions as a warning to the can-do girl, reminding
her “that failure is an ever-lurking possibility that must be staved off through sustained application.” These two tropes come together in the above mentioned figure of the female trainwreck, a phenomenon Sarah Projansky in her work on girls in media culture calls the “‘crash-and-burn’ girl.” This is the girl who “has it all, but who—through weakness and/or the inability to live with the pressure of celebrity during the process of growing up—makes a mistake and therefore faces a spectacular descent into at-risk status.” In her study of spectacular girls, Projansky puts Lovato in the fold of the “crash-and-burn” girl who had potential but fell into at-risk-status when she was involved in a scandal and subsequently went to rehab (more on that below). Gomez, on the other hand, is defined as a “super can-do girl” who is glamorous but playful and “the kind of girl anyone would want to be around.”

What becomes interesting for this book and the larger discussion of mediated representations of mental illness is that Lovato since their 2010 breakdown and revelation of a bipolar diagnosis, eating disorder and substance abuse has made several comebacks and has managed to successfully incorporate their mental distresses into the Demi Lovato brand in a way that recasts them as a “can-do girl” again. And Gomez has since 2016 been open about her struggles with depression and anxiety, effectively folding those into her image, including in the marketing of her own line of makeup which professes to promote mental wellbeing and has made mental health awareness a cornerstone of its brand. Both Lovato and Gomez have successfully incorporated their mental struggles into their celebrity brands in ways that disrupt the “can-do—at-risk”—binary.

Lovato is an example of someone who first spoke out about their issues earlier in the decade, at a time when it was not as common for (especially female*) celebrities to be outspoken about mental illnesses. Their tell-all documentaries, many statements, and engagements with mental health advocacy have provided a rich archive from which to study how attitudes about mental health have taken shape during the 2010s. Gomez, who has only been open about her struggles since 2016, is instead an example of the mid-2010s openness around mental health issues, and her statements around them reveal the state of the more recent and mental-illness-aware media culture.

In addition to both having been very visible around issues of mental health, their positions in girl culture as crash-and-burn and can-do girls* respectively make their stories illustrative of how a postfeminist media culture that urges girls and women to be confident and empowered grapples...
with issues of mental illness.\textsuperscript{62} In the discussion that follows I intend to show how Lovato and Gomez’s celebrity health narratives, and the numerous confessions from female stars about their own mental health issues from 2015 and onwards, seem to suggest that the ideal postfeminist and neoliberal subject who works on herself constantly to achieve success has some room for failure as long as it is successfully overcome. In this sense the narratives I discuss here are of the same type that Shani Orgad and Rosalind Gill discuss in relation to the confidence cult of contemporary women’s media, where failure is accepted “under the condition that it has been overcome.”\textsuperscript{63} A certain kind of anti-self-help book, where failure is celebrated, has become popular. But Orgad and Gill show how failure is only allowed when it has already been defeated, when it “can be referred to as something that happened and is safely sealed in the past.”\textsuperscript{64} The representation of emotional distress that we see here is thus one that involves a certain kind of distance to the problems at hand, rather than a depiction of the breakdown as it happens. In this sense these narratives also fit into what Angela McRobbie defines as a common trope of late-capitalist media culture: the perfect-imperfect-resilience.\textsuperscript{65} For McRobbie, the perfect encourages women “to succeed meritocratically, while simultaneously introducing heightened competition, constantly redifferentiating and establishing division.”\textsuperscript{66} The imperfect then allows for some expressions of failure and critique of the impossibility of constant success, but it is quickly followed by resilience, which functions as a “bounce-back” mechanism that reinvigorates the aim for the perfect. My argument follows Orgad and Gill and McRobbie, and I contend that Lovato and Gomez present their struggles in a way that exemplifies profitable vulnerability—that is, their ailments add authenticity and relatability to their celebrity brands in profitable ways.

**Demi Lovato: Troubled Star and Expert of Re-invention**

Tell Me You Love Me (2017) and Dancing with the Devil... the Art of Starting Over (2021). In early 2022, the singer’s net worth was reportedly about $40 million. In other words, their artistry is a big business involving a lot of money and employing a big team.

Lovato rose to fame at the age of 16 after starring in the Disney production Camp Rock, leading them to go on tour with the, at the time very popular, boy band the Jonas Brothers, who were also associated with the film and its sequel. In October 2010, after a performance in Columbia, Lovato punched one of their backup dancers and abruptly left the tour to go straight to rehab in Illinois. At the time it was reported that they were seeking treatment for “emotional and physical issues.”68 In April the following year, three months after leaving the treatment center, Lovato revealed in an interview with People magazine that, after seeking care for an eating disorder and self-harm, they had also received a bipolar disorder diagnosis.69 In the trajectory of a celebrity breakdown, the tabloid press often sets the stage for how the audience will respond to the scandal, but the stars themselves have the power to talk back and confess or deny rumors.70 Franssen notes that Lovato went far beyond merely salvaging their reputation, instead they embraced their “mental struggle and diagnosis with bipolar disorder and incorporated them into [their] celebrity narrative.”71 Barely a year after revealing their diagnosis, in March 2012, the documentary Demi Lovato: Stay Strong was released on MTV.72 Here Lovato’s fans got to follow the star as they prepared for and subsequently went on the Unbroken tour, to promote their newly released album. The documentary features several long interviews with Lovato and presents them as a star that has hit rock bottom but has come out stronger on the other side. The image used to promote it, which also frames its commercial breaks, shows the inside of Lovato’s wrists, one of which has “stay” and the other “strong” tattooed on them. The film focuses mostly on the singer’s eating disorder and self-harm behavior, and also mentions the bipolar diagnosis they received while in treatment. Franssen’s analysis of Lovato’s celebrity health narrative focuses primarily on this 2012 documentary. He compellingly identifies three levels on which Lovato’s recovery is narrativized in the film: “it entails a narrative of private struggle, which authenticates her crisis; a narrative of diagnosis, which reifies and externalizes the cause of her breakdown; and a narrative of self-improvement and self-transformation, which recalibrates her celebrity image.”73 I will return to these levels in my analysis of Lovato’s second tell-all documentary, Simply Complicated.
Stay Strong also features several interviews with Lovato’s fans before and after concerts. They talk about how they are inspired by the singer’s honesty about their struggles and express a sentiment of “If Demi can do it so can I.” One fan says “When Demi came out about her issues and about the cutting and the eating disorders I was just really inspired and that’s why I told my parents about it and that’s why I went to treatment,” exemplifying the power of a celebrity telling their story. In this framing Lovato’s mental distress and the willingness to speak openly about it becomes a “positive” aspect of their story, in that it is doing “good work” by inspiring others to get better. This is reflected in a scene where Lovato is seen leading their team in prayer before the start of a show. Here they not only express the hope that “we do our best performance possible,” but also request God to “take whatever pain is inside these audience members [and] let them have fun tonight.” In another scene Lovato is shown performing as their voiceover says “I wasn’t given this voice just to sing” but that “there is a bigger picture and that is to use your voice, inspire people and to get people through their day and problems and to pick people up when they are down.” Lovato’s honesty about their struggles becomes a lifeline to their fans, who through Lovato can acknowledge their own problems.

A few others speak about how inspired they are by Lovato’s show of strength and confidence, echoing the confidence cult(ure) described by Gill and Orgad and foreshadowing Lovato’s 2015 album titled simply Confident. The documentary being titled Stay Strong, the name of the tour featured in the film being Unbroken, and the subsequent album being titled Confident, all reinforce the focus of much popular media culture at the time to encourage women to be strong, empowered, and in charge. And the narrative of Lovato having had a break-down and then recovered fits well into the logic of confidence culture, where the presence of an already overcome vulnerability serves to make the confident subject more relatable. And as Lovato’s career goes on, they mobilize this already-dealt-with vulnerability over and over again, in distinctively profitable ways.

From Crash-and-Burn to Can-Do

In her analysis of three British female celebrities who had been labeled “bad girls” during the 1990s and early 2000s, Emma Bell argues that they used disclosures of mental illness to remove the “bad” label. According to her, “after a period of media antagonism (and subsequent cultural and
market devaluation), ‘bad girl’ celebrities can re-gain public attention and cultural value through revelations of mental illness.” The stars that Bell looks at (“Spice Girl Geri Halliwell, “ladette” Gail Porter, and “wild child” Kerry Katona) gained their original fame in the 1990s as part of the “Girl Power” and “ladette” wave in British popular culture at the time. Their disclosures of mental illness happened in the late 1990s and early 2000s (and were thus not within the scope of my archive here) through autobiographical reality and life products such as memoirs and reality television shows, and were framed as repudiations of the pop-feminism associated with their original claims to fame. Bell describes how the confessions did give these women renewed attention and another shot at stardom, but they were often accompanied by derisions from both tabloid press and serious media. She concludes that “the cultural interest in these women depends on their being simultaneously in and out of control with regard to the circulation and contours of their public images,” where their attempts at regaining control of their public images through mental illness revelations were derided and ridiculed in the media. This makes the celebrities Bell studies different from the cases I have examined, where the stars have largely managed to maintain control over their health narratives. The discrepancies can be attributed both to the variation of national context (I focus on a US context and the British tabloids tend to be more ruthless in their celebrity coverage than American ones) and a shift in the mid-2010s toward more acceptance toward mental health awareness.

Nevertheless, what Lovato does in the 2012 documentary Stay Strong could be read through the lens that Bell describes. The move to put out their own account of the “breakdown” and rehab-stay can be seen as a way to take control over the public narrative about their personal life so as not to be labeled a “bad girl.” By coming out and talking about their struggles, Lovato sidesteps outsider speculations about what may have caused their distress. This documentary also functions as a useful tool for Lovato to step away from the wholesome branding of the Disney channel that was their original claim to fame, and frame the launch of the album Unbroken (2011) with which they are shown touring in the film. This album has a more mature, grown-up, RnB-vibe compared to the singer’s previous two albums which were in a more pop-rock vein (something Lovato discusses in the accompanying audio commentary to Unbroken). The revelation of mental illness struggles serves to cement Lovato’s authenticity as a “real” person behind the wholesomeness of the Disney brand. The title of the album, Unbroken, quite literally reflects the “can-do girl” trope of
confidence, resilience, and independence. It is almost as if Lovato’s team produced the *Stay Strong* documentary to clean up their image and re-do it as a “can-do woman” whose experiences only add to their appeal of strength and confidence. Something that Franssen picks up on in his analysis of the documentary, which he describes as “a representation as well as a performance of a process of self-management, producing an updated, better ‘self’ for Lovato.” This leads to the successful incorporation of their “crash-and-burn” status into a “can-do” narrative, something that the star will do multiple times again with a second documentary, subsequent relapse, and a third documentary.

In the years following the release of *Stay Strong* Lovato kept working and releasing albums at the same time as they established themselves as a mental health advocate. This included things like establishing a scholarship program in the name of their late father to help people pay for treatment at the CAST Recovery center where Lovato had gotten support, and releasing a book of affirmations (*Staying Strong: 365 Days a Year*, 2013) that reached the number one spot in the “Advice, How-to & Miscellaneous”-category of the New York Times bestseller list and was then followed by a companion book (*Staying Strong: A Journal*, 2014). These two books and their success reveal how Lovato and their team managed to fold their painful experiences into the Lovato-brand, further authenticate their struggles, and quite literally profit off of them in book sales. In 2014 Lovato also embarked on the “Mental Health Listening and Engagement Tour,” sponsored by a pharmaceutical company and a few mental health organizations. In 2016 they announced that they would host seminars with fans to discuss mental health issues as part of their tour; then appeared at the Democratic National Convention to give a speech about mental health in conjunction with endorsing Hillary Clinton; and in September they revealed in an interview with CBS that they co-owns part of the rehab center where they received treatment. These are only a few of the many actions taken by Lovato during these years to establish their brand as a mental health advocate. The ease with which this aspect is folded into their celebrity brand shows the profitability of mobilizing vulnerability in this way.

*Simply Complicated*

In October 2017 Lovato released their second “tell-all” documentary, *Demi Lovato: Simply Complicated*, to coincide with the release of the album *Tell Me You Love Me*, this time on YouTube. The fact that Lovato
chose to release their second autobiographical documentary on this platform rather than a traditional distributor shows the leverage of YouTube as a media actor but also the influence of the microcelebrity vloggers who have made the platform what it is today. *Stay Strong* was released on MTV in 2012 and is not freely available anywhere online. *Simply Complicated*, on the other hand, is still available worldwide on YouTube, making this version of Lovato’s celebrity health narrative as accessible to fans as the videos of native YouTube stars.

This documentary starts with Lovato stating: “I actually had anxiety around this interview … because the last time I did an interview this long I was on cocaine,” referring to the 2012 *Stay Strong* documentary. This sets the stage for this newer film to be “rawer” and more “real” than the previous one, which is supported by Lovato’s repeated confessions of manipulating those around them and saying “I wasn’t working my program. I wasn’t ready to get sober. I was sneaking it on planes, sneaking it in bathrooms, sneaking it throughout the night.”

Lovato and their team re-tell the story of the initial breakdown that happened on tour with the Jonas Brothers in more detail than in the earlier documentary and with input from the Jonas Brothers themselves. Their manager, Phil McIntyre, is also featured speaking extensively about the darkness beneath the surface of Lovato’s life during 2012 and 2013, while they were telling the world that they were sober and healed. The life coach Mike Bayer (author of several self-help books and an expert contributor to the Dr Phil television show), who is one of the founders of the CAST-treatment centers and who was hired by McIntyre to help Lovato get out of addiction, is also interviewed in this documentary. McIntyre, Bayer, and Lovato speak at length about how difficult Lovato was to work with during their darkest days, and they all describe the moment when it came to a breaking point. McIntyre, the manager, recounts how he had gotten Lovato’s entire team onboard to stage a kind of intervention, where they told the singer that if they did not commit to getting better, he and the entire team would leave. Lovato responded by crying and asking what they could do, and Bayer tells them to hand over their cellphone. In a montage of McIntyre and Bayer recounting the event, they describe how Lovato smashed their phone and then put it in a glass of water to finalize its destruction. As he is holding Lovato’s old phone, McIntyre says “this was the gateway to everything, this was the wrong people, it was drug dealers, it was a lot of the negative influences in her life were coming through the cellphone.” And as if to emphasize that this was not Lovato
being forced to give up their autonomy, the singer comments next that “I think that approached worked for me because, it sounds silly but it was the beginning of the process of surrendering. At the end of the day it was my decision.” Next, Bayer and McIntyre describe the bizarre circumstances of Lovato’s life at the time, when the star was serving as a judge on the reality television program *X-factor*. Bayer says “Meanwhile she’s a judge on *X-factor*. She’s 19 years old and she’s in her first year of sobriety.” McIntyre continues: “What nobody knows is that while she was a judge she’s living in a sober apartment, with roommates, she’s having to do chores, she has no cellphone. She is completely and totally submitted to the process of recovery.” Next Lovato says: “You really have to lean into the people who are trying to support you. Like my family, like Mike [Bayer] and Phil [McIntyre]. You know you really have to surrender because that’s when the change is gonna happen.” Notably, none of them says anything about why Lovato had to work as a judge on *X-factor* while going through recovery, or why they had to keep churning out albums when they were suffering.

This particular storytelling montage is thrilling for someone interested in Lovato’s personal life, by telling viewers what it was “actually” like during those years they are invited into the symbolical backstage of their life. In giving fans access to this previously closed-off part of Lovato’s life, the documentary engages in the “performative practice” of an effective celebrity narrative.86

In many ways *Simply Complicated* is a complex and multifaceted portrayal of living with bipolar disorder, addiction, and an eating disorder. Lovato reveals to their manager on camera that they had a relapse with their eating disorder related to the recent breakup with their boyfriend of many years. This together with the conversations about how hard it was for them to get sober, paints a picture of recovery and living with mental illness as an ongoing work in progress, something one has to keep working at for the rest of one’s life. This follows the logic of much mental health and addiction advocacy, but it also fits very well into the project of neoliberal and postfeminist subjectivity, where the subject has to continually work on herself to constantly better herself.87 And for all of Lovato’s and their team’s honesty about their struggles, what is left glaringly untouched is why they had to keep working while they were in such a vulnerable place. Following the logic of postfeminism and neoliberalism, the documentary seems to suggest that it is ok to struggle with things like addiction, eating disorders and mental illness, as long as you keep working
against these difficulties and keep producing new things and adding to the labor market. The logic at work in Lovato’s treatment program also reflects Scharff and Gill’s observations about the “psychic life” of neoliberalism and postfeminism, where you have to work at bettering not only your career or physical body but also your affects.  

The same levels of narrativization found in the previous documentary, *Stay Strong*, are present in *Simply Complicated*. There is “a narrative of private struggle, which authenticates her crisis.” Interestingly, most of the private struggles presented in the later film invalidate the authenticity and “realness” of what was presented in the earlier one. This is most starkly exemplified in Lovato’s opening statement in the second film about using cocaine while filming the first one. But this is not presented as something that invalidates the truth and authenticity conveyed by Lovato, rather it serves to reinforce their realness in portraying them as extraordinarily bold in their current honesty.

Also folded into the narrative of the singer’s private struggle in the second film is the pressure under which they were under while working for Disney, touring, and recording an album all at the same time. The fact that Lovato was bullied in school is also mentioned as the cause of their troubles, as is the dysfunctional relationship with their biological father, who is described as an “addict and alcoholic.” But it is the revelation of the bipolar diagnosis that ties it all together, working here as it did in the first documentary to reify and externalize the cause of her issues. At about 20 minutes into the film, just after having recounted the violent incident while on tour in Columbia, another member of Lovato’s team, John Taylor, says “that was when it dawned on me that this was probably a much bigger situation than just a kid who wanted to party.” The “much bigger situation” is implied to be the bipolar diagnosis, which Lovato’s manager recounts them getting in the following scene. Next, the singer explains it as follows:

> When I got diagnosed with bipolar disorder, it just made sense. When I was younger I didn’t know why I would stay up so late writing and playing music. And then I learned about episodes of mania and I realized that that’s probably what it was—I was manic. In a way I knew that it wasn’t my fault anymore. Something was actually off with me.

Here a connection is made between the bipolar diagnosis and Lovato’s creativity, which reflects the reverence in American culture for mania that
Emily Martin identified in her comprehensive study of bipolar disorder in the US.\textsuperscript{91} This is echoed in Franssen’s (2020) analysis of Lovato’s celebrity health narrative, in which he identifies the bipolar diagnosis specifically as fitting “within a broader, distinctly gendered ‘spectacularization’ of female breakdown and ongoing self-improvement.”\textsuperscript{92}

Lovato’s description of the diagnosis as relieving them of fault echoes Eva Illouz’s analysis of therapeutic narratives, which she argues makes the individual responsible for her psychic wellbeing, but does so by “removing any notion of moral fault.”\textsuperscript{93} Illouz contends that this kind of narrative “enables one to mobilize the cultural schemes and values of moral individualism, of change and self-improvement,” but by “transposing these to childhood and to deficient families, one is exonerated from the weight of being at fault for living an unsatisfactory life.”\textsuperscript{94} We see that in the case of Lovato with their alcoholic father and the bullying from classmates, but also with the bipolar diagnosis. This suggests that in therapeutic narratives of the late 2010s, a mental illness diagnosis weighs just as much, if not more, than the dysfunctional family dynamics of the Freudian-dominated narratives of the twentieth century. By adding a medical diagnosis to the mix, Lovato is one step further removed from being at fault for their troubles than if it was “just” their dysfunctional father and bullying. But nevertheless, Lovato’s condition is still something that needs to be continually managed, which is shown in the “recovery montage” toward the end of the film. It is also in this montage that the narrative of self-improvement and self-transformation that “recalibrates her celebrity image” is found.\textsuperscript{95} This part of Simply Complicated is similar to the earlier documentary, but in this version it is amped up, with physical exercise taking center stage as a particular savior.

As the camera pans over a Los Angeles road lined with palm trees, Lovato’s voice says “Everybody has their own path and recovery. For me it’s about going to therapy, working my program, and having an honest relationship with myself and the other people around me.” As the singer is shown working out, sparring with professional boxers and then practicing Jiu-Jitsu, their voice-over says “The gym really helps, and I know I would be in a very dark place without it.” Then we see a montage of very well-lit shots of Lovato exercising to upbeat music as they say “I’m on a journey to discover what it’s like to be free of all demons.” During the gym sequence, Lovato’s life coach Bayer explains how he introduced the star to Jiu-Jitsu specifically because it involves a “reward system that takes many many years to get through,” with the implied effect that they will be
busy advancing within this kind of exercise for a long time to come. Exercise is a remedy commonly prescribed as part of mental illness treatment and it is not surprising that it is part of the singer’s recovery plan. But it is remarkable how well this depiction of the role of exercise in Lovato’s life fits with the neoliberal and postfeminist subject who never stops working on herself. Here the script about the benefits of working out is slightly new in that it is not (only) about getting a desirable body, but about keeping a distressed mind in check.

The last part of the documentary also expresses both a postfeminist and a popular feminist ethos, showing Lovato and their friends discussing dating. At one point the singer says “I’m on a dating app with both guys and girls. I am open to human connection whether that’s through a male or a female that doesn’t matter to me.” Next Lovato’s stylist helps them pick out a date outfit, which turns into a montage of the singer in sexy poses as they say “When I’m comfortable in my own skin I feel confident and when I feel confident I feel sexy and when I feel sexy, watch out.” Then we see Lovato’s friends talk about how fun “single Demi” is, to which the star responds “There’s like a certain stigma around a woman having casual sex and for me I just feel like it’s my body and it’s my choice and it’s exciting and it’s a connection with somebody and it’s fun.” This sequence aligns Lovato with the popular feminism that Sarah Banet-Weiser identifies as a prevalent feature of contemporary media culture. The star is here positioned both as a desirable sexual subject who is up for anything (a postfeminist trope) and by pointing out the double standard for women having casual sex, they also politicize their actions (albeit in the most gentle ways) and aligns them with “feminist expressions and politics [that] are brandable [and] commensurate with market logics.”96 This is a kind of feminism “that focus[es] on the individual body … [and] that emphasize[s] individual attributes such as confidence, self-esteem, and competence as particularly useful to neoliberal self-reliance and capitalist success.”97 The affective position expressed by Lovato here also echoes (again) the confidence cult described by Orgad and Gill, where individual achievement and self-esteem can solve structural issues.98

The notion of recovery as an ongoing process is different from the victim-to-victor narratives that Lisa Blackman describes, in which the journey to recovery starts by acknowledging the illness, followed by the adoption of a psychiatric treatment plan that ultimately cures the person afflicted so that they overcome the trouble once and for all.99 What we see in the case of Lovato is instead a dedication to always be working at
getting and staying better. This is a common aspect of addiction recovery, where the subject, masculine or feminine, is told that their condition will never end but can be eternally managed. What Lovato’s case shows is how well this recovery narrative fits into the notion of the ideal neoliberal and postfeminist subject who constantly works on herself to improve herself at every turn. This is partly because the singer is recovering from not only substance abuse issues, but also an eating disorder and bipolar disorder, which opens up their health narrative for more than just “addicts” to identify with. Lovato’s story celebrates and confirms a neoliberal ideology of meritocracy, where overcoming repeated crises and setbacks while remaining productive “even under the pressures of the media, the market and mental illness” positions them as “a shining example of the neoliberal, self-managing subject.”

That Lovato as a female* celebrity is able to inhabit this position, where traditionally it has mostly been famous men who have been able to reinvent themselves after scandal (as discussed above), becomes less exceptional when one takes into account the feminist media studies work on women as ideal neoliberal subjects. What Lovato’s celebrity health narrative and the numerous confessions from female stars about their own mental health issues from 2015 and onwards seem to suggest, is that the ideal postfeminist and neoliberal subject who works on herself constantly to achieve success has some room for failure as long as it is successfully overcome. This, again, fits well into Orgad and Gill’s analysis of a confidence culture in which vulnerability is allowed when it appears as something that is in the past. By combining the process of addiction recovery with mental illness recovery, Lovato’s narrative indirectly challenges the victim-to-victor narrative and reconfigures the idea of being completely cured of mental illness into one of more continual maintenance. This is on the one hand truer to how managing mental illness works for most people, but it also reveals that the presence of traumatic events is not a taint on a celebrity’s image but rather an opportunity to strengthen the profitability of the celebrity brand through shared vulnerability.

The Public Acknowledgment of a Relapse

That the process of recovery is never complete was seen for Lovato the year after *Simply Complicated* was released. On June 21, 2018, the singer released a single titled “Sober,” which was introduced on Twitter as simply “My truth.” The lyrics seemed to suggest a relapse into substance
abuse, with the chorus going “Mama, I’m so sorry I’m not sober anymore/ And daddy please forgive me for the drinks spilled on the floor/ To the ones who never left me, we’ve been down this road before/ I’m so sorry/ I’m not sober anymore.” A few days later it was reported that Lovato was in a feud with life coach Bayer and that every photo and mention of their name had been wiped from the website of the CAST-center that he runs and which Lovato had previously been a co-owner of. And on July 24, a little over a month after the release of “Sober,” Lovato was rushed to the hospital after an overdose that almost killed them. About two weeks after the incident Lovato posted a note to their fans on Instagram, in which they said “I have always been transparent about my journey with addiction. What I’ve learned is that this illness is not something that disappears or fades with time. It is something I must continue to overcome and have not done yet.” Here again is the notion of addiction and mental illness as something that needs to be constantly worked at.

The release of “Sober” can on the one hand be read as an honest way of portraying the struggle of addiction and the very common experience of relapsing. But on the other hand, it can be seen as a way of incorporating Lovato’s struggles into their brand and literally profiting off of them (Sober was certified Gold by The Recording Industry Association of America in August 2019). Or a less cynical reading of the situation might be that the release of the single and the confession of their relapse was not, as might have been the case in other eras and with other artists, a taint on their brand but instead fit neatly into the larger “Lovato product” and almost functioned as confirmation of their authenticity.

Another thing to note in relation to Lovato’s relapse is the outpouring of support from fans. A day after the report about the overdose, a fan account on Twitter started the hashtag #HowDemiHasHelpedMe, urging other fans to “share your stories and positive things so hopefully Demi sees positive things if she comes online.” The hashtag was trending on Twitter as fans began posting their stories and it was covered by several media outlets. One notable example of a fan contribution was the following:

The night I attempted suicide Demi had a performance on tv. My dad was watching it and not me. I was upstairs in my room taking pills to overdose. I heard [Lovato’s song] skyscraper from my room so I told my mom I took pills and checked into a hospital for 8 Days.
Other fans have responded to this tweet with things like “You are so strong! I hope you are better now,” “So glad that you are still here,” and “I’m sending you a long tight hug. Thank you for sharing your story.” Like this the fans show support not just for Lovato, but also for each other.

The reciprocal acts by the fans in sharing how Lovato has helped them might be a way to help each other through the public display of vulnerability on social media, something I discuss more in the following chapter. Because even if they purport to write to Lovato, the immediate audience is not the singer themselves (the assumption on social media is that stars usually do not read everything that is said about them, exemplified in what an occasion it is for fans when they do get a response from their idol), but other fans. In this way the outpouring of support for the celebrity becomes in itself a forum for sharing experiences and making each other feel less alone.

Another example of the outpouring of support from Lovato’s fans at the time was a group of fans gathering in Atlantic City on the night when the singer was supposed to perform but had canceled due to the overdose. A group of over 60 “Lovatics” (what their fans call themselves) gathered to sing their songs together to show their support for the singer. One fan wrote on Twitter about the gathering: “Omg the people in Atlantic City for the Demi tribute are in a circle talking about how Demi has helped them and some of them even started crying :( the bond we have over Demi is so special.” Here Lovato’s openness about their issues becomes a way for fans to share their own experiences with each other and get support.

Since the 2018 relapse Lovato has made a large-scale comeback, first at the 2020 Grammys with a performance that was widely praised for its display of vulnerability. In the spring of 2021 they released their third tell-all documentary (this time in the form of a four-part YouTube series) in conjunction with the release of a new album, both of which were titled *Dancing with the Devil*. In the docuseries Lovato and their team bare it all, revealing that the singer had been using heroin and crack cocaine, and that the overdose involved “aftermarket pills” laced with the extremely strong opioid Fentanyl that nearly killed them. At the same time they released a music video that featured Lovato in a fictional reenactment of the overdose and the hospital stay that followed it. In this way it is clear that the cyclical nature of Lovato’s bipolar disorder and the always present risk of relapse into substance abuse or eating disorder are not the dire threats to their life and career as they might have been in previous eras. Instead, Lovato’s struggles and their overcoming them serve to strengthen their brand as “pop’s self-help princess.”
Selena Gomez: Can-Do Girl Turned Mental Health Advocate

Like Lovato, Selena Gomez had her acting debut on the children’s show *Barney & Friends*, where she appeared during 2002–2004 from age 10 to 12. She then gained wider fame as the lead on the Disney channel show *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007–2012) and subsequently starred in a multitude of films, some aimed at the Disney audience and others being more controversial, like Harmony Korine’s *Spring Breakers* (2012) and Woody Allen’s *A Rainy Day in New York* (2019). Beyond her acting work she has released three albums with her former band *Selena Gomez and the Scene*: *Kiss & Tell* (2009), *A Year Without Rain* (2010), and *When the Sun Goes Down* (2011), all of which attained gold certifications and reached the top ten in the US. She has also released three albums as a solo artist: *Stars Dance* (2013), *Revival* (2015), and *Rare* (2020), all of which debuted at number one in the US. Additionally, she has executive produced the Netflix drama show *13 Reasons Why* (2017-2020) and the documentary series *Living Undocumented* (2019). In early 2022, Gomez’s net worth is reportedly $75 million.

Gomez’s brand is thus, like Lovato’s, a big enterprise involving a lot of money and employing a large number of people.

As mentioned above, Gomez had an overall more wholesome persona than Lovato, staying away from the kind of scandal that the latter singer was involved in (even if Gomez was in an on-and-off relationship with fellow young artist Justin Bieber from 2010-2018 that led to a lot of speculations from fans and the media, those rumors were primarily about the state of their partnership). In 2013 Gomez canceled the end of a planned tour to “spend some time” on herself, and in early 2014 she checked in to an Arizona rehab facility. This led to tabloid speculation about drug or alcohol abuse, but when she chose to speak about the events the following year she revealed that she had been diagnosed with the autoimmune disease lupus and had been receiving chemotherapy for it at the time. It was not until in August 2016, also in relation to the cancelation of a planned tour, that she revealed that she was suffering from anxiety and depression. In a statement to *People* magazine, she said that she had “discovered that anxiety, panic attacks and depression can be side effects of lupus, which can present their own challenges.” Adding, “I want to be proactive and focus on maintaining my health and happiness and have decided that the best way forward is to take some time off … I know I am not alone by sharing this, I hope others will be encouraged to address their
own issues.” Here again the logic is that if Gomez with her large audience speaks out, it will inspire others to seek help. Additionally, in the People magazine story about the break a “source close to Gomez” tells the outlet that it is “absolutely not related to alcohol or substance abuse’ and was prompted after she “hadn’t felt like herself” over the last couple of months.” Here a clear demarcation is made against addiction issues, which indirectly serves to separate the anxiety and depression that Gomez was suffering from, from any assumption about the misuse of alcohol or drugs. This can be read as Gomez’s team trying to deny rumors about her abusing substances and make clear that she is not like one of the many other starlets whose troubles are the result of too much partying (like in the case of many of the “trainwrecks” mentioned earlier). Even if addiction issues are increasingly considered to be a disease that is out of the control of the person suffering them, there is still a level of irresponsibility attached to the notion of someone getting addicted, as it presumes an engagement with illicit drugs or excessive amounts of alcohol at some point. By coming out as suffering from anxiety and depression as a result of her lupus, Gomez’s issues are indirectly defined as rooted in a biomedical paradigm beyond her control.

A few months after initially announcing that she was taking a break to focus on her mental health, Gomez appeared at the American Music Awards (AMAs) in November 2016. In the acceptance speech for Best Female Artist in the Pop/Rock genre, the singer addressed the break, saying “I had everything and I was absolutely broken inside. And I kept it all together enough to never let you down, but I kept too much together, to where I let myself down.” She thanked her fans for their loyalty during this time and added “if you are broken, you do not have to stay broken.” The speech at the AMAs was widely praised for its sincerity and honesty, with many media outlets pointing out that Gomez held back the tears while delivering it, as well as how other celebrities in attendance at the awards show seemed to appreciate what she was saying.

After initially opening up about her mental health issues, Gomez repeatedly spoke out for mental illness awareness, prompting Vogue to describe her as “a compelling new voice for a generation of young women … [who is] breaking down conversational barriers surrounding emotional health” in March 2017. In this interview she mentions rehab, group therapy, and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) as elements that have helped her, revealing that she sees her therapist five times a week.
In a cover story for the September 2017 issue of *InStyle* magazine, titled “Selena Gomez Is Grown Up, in Love, and Taking Control of Her Mental Health,” the journalist describes Gomez as having “a particularly potent power: Her celebrity comes not just from what she creates, how she looks, and whom she dates but from how she has suffered and how she has picked herself up.”¹²⁸ In the interview accompanying the piece Gomez talks about her 90-day stay in a treatment center the previous year, how insecurity is something she works on in therapy, and how she is learning to stand up for herself. Here, just like in Lovato’s health narrative, Gomez is portrayed as having successfully overcome, or rather as successfully managing, her mental health issues. The journalist’s description of this experience as giving her “a particularly potent power” marks Gomez’s suffering as something that adds to her celebrity and star power. That she has been to rehab is not a negative point on her resume; on the other hand, it seems to be a valuable experience that gives Gomez a maturity and frankness that only adds to the authenticity of her brand.

Just like with Lovato, Gomez’s struggles were recurring. Later in 2017, it was revealed that she had a kidney transplant from a close friend and subsequently “laid low” for a while, not promoting her work or posting on social media. Then in January 2018 she checked into a “two-week wellness” program to regroup as a preventative measure for her mental health.¹²⁹ A few months later, she said in an interview in *Harper’s Bazaar* that her struggle with depression and anxiety is “not something I feel I’ll ever overcome” adding that “it’s a battle I’m gonna have to face for the rest of my life, and I’m okay with that because I know that I’m choosing myself over anything else.”¹³⁰ Here she reflects the notion of mental illness recovery as a constant struggle, as displayed also in Lovato’s health narrative. Additionally, the phrase “choosing myself over anything else” fits well into a hyper-individualized neoliberal and postfeminist culture that positions the self as something to work on and prioritize at all costs.

The state of Gomez’s mental health became a widely discussed topic again in the fall of 2018, first when she announced that she would be taking a social media break (at the time she was the most followed person on Instagram) and a few months later when she was reportedly hospitalized twice in two weeks with issues related to the kidney transplant.¹³¹ These hospitalizations caused her to have an “emotional breakdown” which led to her checking into a mental health facility to receive DBT.¹³² This breakdown was not portrayed, as it might have been in other eras, as a sign of “failure, inherent instability or a lack of resilience,” but instead it was
incorporated into her health narrative of struggle and maintenance of mental health.\textsuperscript{133}

She then broke her silence in January of 2019 with a post on Instagram to reflect on the previous year, one “of self-reflection, challenges and growth.”\textsuperscript{134} In September 2019 Gomez received an award for furthering “the public’s understanding of psychiatric illness and mental health” from the McLean Hospital, known for its psychiatric expertise and associated with Harvard Medical School.\textsuperscript{135} In conjunction with accepting the award the singer also revealed that she herself had received treatment there for mental health issues, and in April 2020 she disclosed that while there she had received a bipolar diagnosis.\textsuperscript{136,137}

This latter revelation happened not in an interview with a magazine or even on her own social media channels, but on the Instagram live talk show Bright Minded, hosted by fellow former child actor and musician Miley Cyrus during the initial COVID-19 lockdown.\textsuperscript{138} The news was widely reported in multiple media outlets.\textsuperscript{139} When asked why she had decided to tell the world about her diagnosis in this format instead of in a traditional interview, Gomez said that she “liked the rawness of the show” and felt comfortable to share her diagnosis with Cyrus because of the casual atmosphere.\textsuperscript{140} This confirms the increased intimacy and ordinariness of contemporary celebrity and in their communication with fans.

Gomez has not done any big tell-all documentaries, like Lovato has. Instead the communication around her mental health happens in interviews, through her (and her peer’s) social media channels, and indirectly in her work as an artist, which broaches mental illness and sadness in general.

Gomez was an executive producer of the Netflix show \textit{13 Reasons Why} (2017-2020), which follows a high school in the aftermath of a student’s suicide (and that was subject to heavy coverage by \textit{Teen Vogue}). As mentioned in Chap. 3, the show became immensely popular with its target demographic but received harsh critique from suicide prevention organizations, teachers, and parents, who argued that it glorifies suicide and simplifies complex mental health issues.\textsuperscript{141} The fact that Gomez has produced a television show that goes against the message of traditional mental illness awareness and suicide prevention organizations casts an interesting light on her advocacy for mental illness sufferers.

Additionally, in the Spotify music video for her May 2017 single “Bad Liar” Gomez portrays what can be called a “sad aesthetic.”\textsuperscript{142} The photo promoting the single shows Gomez lying down on a disheveled bed,
staring at the viewer with a look full of sadness and hopelessness. Her hands are held together by a white silk rope, on one wrist she is wearing a yellow hospital bracelet spelling out the word “risk,” and further up on the same arm a band-aid. Fans started speculating in the comments section on Gomez’s Instagram about whether the bracelet and the band-aid were supposed to symbolize a suicide attempt. The photographer Petra Collins clarified (also on Instagram) that it had nothing to do with suicide, but that Gomez had come straight from a lupus-related hospital visit to the photo shoot. Even if this is the real story behind the photograph, leaving the bracelet and the band-aid on results in an image that connotes self-harm and suicide for most people who do not know the back story. Interestingly, the above video is no longer available on Spotify and on Gomez’s YouTube channel another, much lighter, video is listed as the official one for the song. The second, official version, takes place in a 1970s high school setting where Gomez plays several different characters in a family drama with unclear outcomes. An audio-only video of “Bad Liar” that has the still image from the above-described video as its background is still available, but the full moving image film is nowhere to be found on the star’s YouTube or Spotify sites. This seems to be mostly due to the fact that the video with Spotify was an exclusive collaboration with that platform, but nevertheless it is notable that the more melancholic and self-destructive aspects of the first video are completely absent in the official one that remains available on the singer’s channels.

Playing with this self-harming aesthetic positions Gomez somewhat off-center of the “victim to victor” narrative and the idea of overcoming struggles through perseverance displayed in much of Lovato’s celebrity health narrative. In interviews, she acknowledges that things like rehab and therapy have helped her, but then she nearly glorifies feeling bad in her work as an artist and TV producer. Here she is flirting with the “sad girl” aesthetic embraced by self-identified sad girls on sites like Tumblr and Instagram, which I will address further in the next chapter.

**Postfeminist Sadness**

I want to mention artist Lana del Rey here as a means of understanding the trends that circulated on the music scene during the 2010s. The style of del Rey’s music and visual representations is similar to the sad aesthetic that Gomez is experimenting with in some of her work. Del Rey, however, has not spoken about specific diagnoses like Lovato and Gomez, and she
is absent from the compilation lists of celebrities speaking about mental illnesses. What she has spoken about is a period of heavy drinking in her early teens that led to her being sent to boarding school at age 14 and then getting sober at 18.\textsuperscript{146} Instead of saying that she suffers from depression, anxiety, or any other established diagnosis, the singer has said that she thinks “ceaselessly of death” and that she has dealt with panic attacks but only attended therapy three times because she is “really most comfortable sitting in that chair in the studio, writing or singing.”\textsuperscript{147} And most notoriously, she said “I wish I was dead already” while citing Amy Winehouse and Kurt Cobain as her heroes, both of whom died at the age of 27.\textsuperscript{148} Del Rey’s official statements put her more in the role of having created a persona of being sad, rather than adopting the language of mental health advocacy in the way that Lovato and Gomez have.

Del Rey sings about female weakness and dependence in a way that makes it seem like she is enjoying it. These themes are present in much of her work (her first record having the apt title “Born to Die”), but is especially visible on her 2014 album “Ultraviolence” which is dominated by themes of submission and self-destructiveness in relation to various men. One line that particularly seems to encourage the abusive relationships portrayed throughout the album is a quote from a 1962 Carol King and Gerry Goffin song: “he hit me and it felt like a kiss,” sung on the title track “Ultraviolence.” The persona del Rey communicates on this record is one that takes melancholic pleasure in not getting what she wants and sometimes hints at deriving pleasure from abuse.

As discussed in Chap. 1, del Rey’s 2011 debut provoked many by portraying a woman who did not know what she wanted in a popular music landscape filled with women brimming over with confidence and determination.\textsuperscript{149} When she released “Ultraviolence” in 2014 she was critiqued as outright anti-feminist on the grounds of glorifying female weakness and dependency.\textsuperscript{150} This was also around the same time as pop stars like Beyonce and Taylor Swift embraced a popular feminism that encourages female strength and independence. Del Rey’s message of female weakness and dependence seemed to go directly counter to the strength advocated by popular feminism at the time.

In contrast, when Gomez spoke about her choice to be open about her depression and anxiety three years later, in 2017, she told Vogue: “We girls, we’re taught to be almost too resilient, to be strong and sexy and cool and laid-back … We also need to feel allowed to fall apart.”\textsuperscript{151} Here she speaks the language of (post)feminist empowerment, but instead of
empowering women to be strong she wants to empower them to feel vulnerable. Something changed during the time between del Rey’s emergence on the music scene and Gomez’s call for girls to be vulnerable.

Scholars like Catherine Vigier noted already in 2012, when del Rey was a highly contested artist, that she gave “expression to some of the profound dissatisfactions that women continue to feel” despite having “followed mainstream society’s prescriptions for success in what has been called a post-feminist world, but who find that real liberation and genuine satisfaction elude them.” During this time other celebrities expressed similar sentiments and were similarly contested. For example, Lena Dunham’s show Girls premiered in 2012 and became the focus of many contested debates about whether or not the dysfunctional and dissatisfied characters she brought to the screen were feminist or not. Zoe Alderton makes an analysis of del Rey in relation to the critique of her as non-feminist, noting that she “represents narratives of female weakness, sadness, and failure” and “speaks to a generation who feel cut out of their forebears’ market economy.” Alderton specifically states that the acknowledgment of weakness should not be something that hurts the feminist cause:

Admitting that we are depressed or hurt should not make us less of a feminist. Natural human desires for those who hurt us, or for ill-conceived romances, should not make us feel as though we have betrayed our gender or let down the feminist cause.

The sentiment Gomez expresses in her call for girls to be allowed to fall apart is the same as Alderton expresses here in relation to feminism. Even if Gomez does not name feminism directly, the reference to girls being asked to be “resilient … strong and sexy and cool and laid-back” reflects the demands of a popular feminism “that focus[es] on the individual body … [and] that emphasize[s] individual attributes such as confidence, self-esteem, and competence as particularly useful to neoliberal self-reliance and capitalist success.” Both del Rey and Gomez, then, seem to respond to a media culture that demands overt positivity and confidence of young women.

Rather than suggest that either of them was the singular catalyst for more sadness in popular culture, I understand them both as giving expression to sentiments circulating in the shared culture and their success in delivering a certain message being dependent on the yearning of
audiences to hear about those issues. These themes will be further explored in the next chapter, where I examine the figure of the sad girl, that in some iterations is closely tied to del Rey.

A 2019 analysis of del Rey’s impact on music in conjunction with the release of her album *Norman Fucking Rockwell* credited the singer with making mainstream music more sad. This is based not only on the writer’s own observations (as is common in music journalism) but also on a 2018 study from researchers at the University of California at Irvine, which analyzed 500,000 popular songs released in the UK from 1985 to 2015 and classified them according to mood. According to this research, there was “a clear downward trend in ‘happiness’ and ‘brightness’, as well as a slight upward trend in ‘sadness,’” indicating that mainstream music has become statistically sadder. This shift has only become more felt since then, with the artist Billie Eilish taking the world by storm with her sad and melancholic sound, winning five Grammys at the 2020 awards ceremony and composing the theme song for the 2021 Bond film.

In the above mentioned analysis of del Rey’s impact on music, Al Horner traces the roots of del Rey’s sound to the niche music genre of “torch songs,” defined as “a form of pop that is traditionally by and about downtrodden women who suffer at the hands of emotionally abusive men, but continue to love them devotionally anyways.” So while del Rey definitely did not invent this sad genre of music, she was instrumental in bringing it into the contemporary mainstream and use it to express “a very 21st-century sadness.” Horner also connects the shift toward a sad sound with the changed conversations around mental health and illness, stating that “in 2019, there’s infinitely more room for discussions about depression in chart music than 10 years ago, mirroring wider social trends.” So even if Horner ascribes del Rey a lot of agency in making this happen, I do not necessarily think it was only del Rey who was driving this change, but rather that she was part of a wider social shift toward more sadness in popular culture, that came as a response to an overtly upbeat and empowerment focused feminine media culture.

The “sad aesthetic” displayed in the work of artists like Del Rey and Gomez, combined with the multiple celebrities speaking out about their mental health issues, reveals a complex media ecology. A star like Gomez can announce that she wants to empower women to feel allowed to fail while simultaneously creating art that flirts with romantic notions of suicide and psychic suffering.
On the one hand, Gomez speaking out about her issues and encouraging people to seek help can be considered as part of the postfeminist confidence trope. Encouraging women to “feel allowed to fall apart” can be another way of “empowering” them to take responsibility for their own lives. Even more so if the help one is encouraged to seek is to turn to the traditional psychiatric system, following the victim-to-victor narrative and understanding one’s sadness as caused entirely by neurological components. This approach does require a reaching out for help, but not in a messy, (directly) interpersonal way. The trust in the psychiatric system maintains mental illness as something singular to be taken care of just as a “traditional” physical disease. If the subject takes care of her issues through medical channels, she can remain a “no-needs woman” in all other areas of her life.

On the other hand, the increased presence of sadness and the raised awareness of mental illness as something that affects a lot of people can be seen as an acknowledgment of the impossibility of constant confidence and independence. Are Lovato, Gomez, Del Rey, and others signs that the self-disciplining of emotions, the need to be independent and strong is disappearing or loosening up? Is the makeup of the postfeminist and neoliberal subject changing so as to include (certain kinds of) vulnerability?

What is clear is that female celebrities suffering emotionally and sharing that with fans is not as much of a tarnish on their personal brands as such revelations once were. Instead an openness about mental health struggles can add to the authenticity of a celebrity brand, especially if the star herself is shown as working diligently to become better. In the case of Lovato and Gomez, the fact that they keep encountering obstacles and subsequently go into treatment, only makes them more authentic and relatable to their fans. The popularity of del Rey’s persona and her sad music influenced and paved the way for the more straightforward sadness of a later artist like Billie Eilish.

Employing the lens of Orgad and Gill’s confidence culture, the expression of vulnerability seen in these media narratives primarily serves to make the confident woman relatable and add authenticity. And in McRobbie’s understanding of the perfect-imperfect-resilience triad, the imperfect is only a limited expression of the constraints of the perfect, that always leads to a resilient bounce-back to perfection. This does apply to Lovato and Gomez in the sense that their stories of weakness ultimately feed back into their celebrity brands as strong, independent women* and artists. But when it comes to del Rey, I would argue that it is a bit more complicated.
Opening up the artistic exploration of themes of dependency and vulnerability provides a space, however narrow, for sitting with the negative feelings instead of immediately trying to get rid of them. This aspect of sadness’ emergence in the mainstream pop cultural landscape is further explored in the next chapter, where I examine how social media sad girls provide more spacious ways of feeling bad.

**Conclusion**

Celebrities are an important part of the pop cultural landscape and the ways they approach mental health function as models for how to think about such issues in culture at large. The shift from media speculation about what ailments a celebrity might suffer from (often in sensationalist ways) to a climate where stars themselves speak firsthand about their experiences indicates a turn toward more mental health-aware, intimate, and relatable celebrity branding strategies.

The case of Demi Lovato shows how celebrity health narratives around mental illness have changed throughout the 2010s. Their first tell-all documentary from 2012 was focused largely on presenting a star who had overcome difficulties and emerged stronger on the other side (down to the title of the film being *Stay Strong*). Even if Lovato showed some vulnerability, the focus was on how they had emerged from past difficulties, resembling the victim-to-victor narrative in which a diagnosis is made, treatment is had, and the subject is declared a winner over the disease. Their second tell-all documentary, released five years later, presents a more complicated picture of mental illness and recovery (and aptly titled *Simply Complicated*). The original illness narrative is questioned in the confession about Lovato being under the influence while filming the first documentary, and the viewer is subsequently presented with an individual who is flawed and constantly working on their issues, which appear as always in need of management. This suggests that the ideal neoliberal and postfeminist subject now has room for some failure and weakness, but these have to be worked at to be repeatedly overcome. Lovato’s 2018 relapse, the profitable release of the single Sober, and the subsequent comeback in 2020 cement Lovato’s narrative as one of successful self-transformation and reinvention. This was only heightened with the third tell-all documentary series about the singer’s overdose that was released in 2021 (where Lovato’s struggles with their inner demons were hinted at in the title *Dancing with the devil*). While the celebrities who managed to go
through public breakdowns and come out stronger on the other side in previous eras tended to be male, Lovato’s narrative suggests that this is no longer the case and that female* stars can now also recast themselves as successful masters of their own lives by overcoming difficulties. The gendered aspect of the celebrity mental illness narrative is now not configured so as to invalidate female celebrities who suffer, instead the female star who is depressed or anxious and successfully manages it fits well into the dominant “psychic life” of neoliberalism, postfeminism, and a market-friendly popular feminism. The fact that Lovato has since defined her gender identity as non-binary does not take away from the gendered meaning of their celebrity health narrative. Instead it shows that sharing experiences of traumatic events and having them strengthen one’s authenticity is available to celebrities across the gender spectrum.

The female illness narrative is emphasized in the case of Selena Gomez, who at the start of the decade was defined as a “super can-do girl” who stayed far away from scandal, but then opened up about her experience of depression and anxiety in 2016. She has largely been cast as a mental health advocate and responsible role model, and her case shows the viability/marketability of mental health advocacy for a celebrity brand at that point in time. This has been further highlighted in Gomez’s makeup line, Rare, which is marketed as a mental health aware brand where 1% of sales go to support mental health. The line even includes the “Stay Vulnerable Liquid Eyeshadow” which Gomez herself describes as celebrating “the soft, flushed look we get when we feel the most vulnerable.” In this instance it is quite literally vulnerability that is being sold, down to the description of how one might look after a day of crying.

At the same time, Gomez has played with a sad aesthetic in her work as an artist and television producer. Comparing how her work was received with Lana del Rey’s debut in 2011-2012 revealed the shifting attitudes toward expressions of female sadness and weakness. The subsequent success of del Rey and the broader turn in popular culture toward more sad expressions suggest a dissatisfaction with overtly positive empowerment narratives and a yearning by audiences for representations of negative affects like sadness. Something I discuss further in the following chapter, which looks at the worlds of social media and how mental illness and sadness have been discussed there.

Lovato and Gomez are examples of profitable vulnerability, while del Rey is more aligned with the sad girl culture I discuss in the following chapter, since her expression of sadness is not something already overcome in the past but is being explored as it is experienced.
Notes

4. In May 2021 Demi Lovato came out as non-binary and announced that they will use the pronouns they/them, Blistein, “Demi Lovato Comes Out as Gender Non-Binary.” Despite this, I have kept Lovato as an example of how female celebrities mediate their mental health because the singer was a key figure in popular girl culture for the majority of their career up until this announcement. I am using the pronouns they/them to refer to Lovato in the text, but I have not changed the pronouns in older quotes referring to the star as she/her. I hope this slippage will not disturb the reader, but instead serve as a reminder of the fluidity of the gender spectrum.

7. 33 celebrities (31%) said they struggled with anxiety; 28 stars (27%) said they have experienced depression; 12 (11%) talked about having both depression and anxiety; 10 (10%) named postpartum depression; and 7 (7%) mentioned bipolar disorder.

8. Multiple of the stars have spoken about their issues several times, but I have only counted them once, and the numbers per year refer to when they talked about it the first time. I made this decision based on the assumption that the first time someone spoke out indicates what the perceptions around mental health and illness looked like in popular culture at the time.


10. Ibid, 5.

11. Luckett, “Toxic: The Implosion of Britney Spears’s Star Image.”

12. Melas, “Britney Spears’ 13 year conservatorship has finally ended.”


18. Marwick and boyd, “To see and be seen,” 150.

19. Ingrassia, “My Nine-Year Struggle with Anorexia by Brittany Snow.”


21. Ibid.

22. Newberry, “Britney Spears hasn’t fully controlled her life for years.”

23. Farrow and Tolentino, “Britney Spears’s Conservatorship Nightmare.”

24. Melas, “Britney Spears’ 13 year conservatorship has finally ended;” Newberry, “Britney Spears hasn’t fully controlled her life for years.”


29. Lerner, When Illness Goes Public, 8.
36. Ibid.
37. Marwick and boyd, “To see and be seen,” 139.
38. Ibid, 140, italicization in original.
39. Ibid, 139.
41. Barker, Gill and Harvey, Mediated intimacy, 24, italicization in original.
42. Hearn and Schoenhoff, “From Celebrity to Influencer,” 197-198.
43. Ibid, 200.
44. Ibid, 200.
45. Ibid, 200.
47. Orgad and Gill (2022) discuss the inverse of this, in the sense that some vulnerability is shared by confident women so as to make them relatable (p. 71).
50. Berryman and Kavka, “‘I Guess A Lot of People See Me as a Big Sister or a Friend,’” 85.
51. Ibid, 87.
52. Gamson, “The Unwatched Life Is Not Worth Living.”
53. Ibid, 1065-1067.
55. Projansky, Spectacular Girls, 73-75; Ryals, Best Friends Forever; Rutherford, Demi Lovato & Selena Gomez; Willen, “Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato’s friendship timeline.”
56. Harris, *Future Girl*.
57. Ibid, 27.
60. Ibid, 75, 93. Projansky also discusses the racialized aspect of Gomez’s celebrity at length, arguing that her Mexican-American identity is downplayed in most media coverage, but her visibility still “potentially opens up reflection on mixed identities and provides a potential point of identification for mixed audiences.”
61. Stables, “With Rare Beauty, Selena Gomez Has Rewritten the Script for Start-Ups.”
62. Even though Lovato now identifies as non-binary, they were still an integral part of popular girl culture during the first part of their career.
64. Ibid, 96.
65. McRobbie, *Feminism and the Politics of Resilience*.
66. Ibid, 43.
69. Cotliar, “Demi Lovato Has Bipolar Disorder.”
70. Bell, “The Insanity Plea;” Holmes, “Little Lena’s a Big Girl Now.”
73. Ibid, 96.
74. Gill and Orgad, “The Confidence Cult(ure),” Orgad and Gill, *Confidence Culture*.
75. Orgad and Gill, *Confidence Culture*.
76. Bell, “The Insanity Plea.”
77. Ibid, 199.
78. Ibid, 201.
79. Ibid, 221.
80. Harris, *Future Girl*.
83. Stutz, “Demi Lovato Releases Bipolar PSA, Announces Mental Health Listening & Engagement Tour.”

86. Warick and boyd, “To see and be seen.”

87. Du Gay, Consumption and identity at work; Gill, “Postfeminist media culture;” Ringrose and Walkerdine, “Regulating The Abject.”


90. Ibid, 96.

91. Martin, Bipolar Expeditions.


93. Illouz, Cold Intimacies, 55.

94. Ibid, 55.


98. Orgad and Gill, Confidence Culture.

99. Blackman, “Psychiatric culture and bodies of resistance.”


102. Orgad and Gill, Confidence Culture.


104. Romano, “Demi Lovato’s Sober song reveals singer relapsed after six years.”

105. RadarStaff, “Demi Lovato at War With Her Rehab Center Amid Relapse Confession.”


112. Ibid.


115. Demi Lovato, “Demi Lovato: Dancing With the Devil, YouTube Series, accessed June 22, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLy4Kg0J0TkearxiMrCsHih5xJzttUe8JC.

116. Spanos, “‘Demi Lovato: Dancing With the Devil.’”


119. Caulfield, “Selena Gomez Earns Third No. 1 Album on Billboard 200 Chart With ‘Rare.’”


123. Chiu, “Selena Gomez Taking Time Off After Dealing with ‘Anxiety, Panic Attacks and Depression’ Due to Her Lupus Diagnosis.”

124. Ibid.

125. Mei, “Watch Selena Gomez’s Empowering, Emotional Acceptance Speech at the AMAs.”


129. Willis and Drysdale, “Selena Gomez Hospitalized For Mental Health.”
134. Dodson, “Selena Gomez Broke Her Instagram Silence to Reflect on 2018.”
137. Incidentally, this was the same hospital that Sylvia Plath stayed at in the 1950s and later chronicled in The Bell Jar. Other famous former patients include poet Anne Sexton and singer Marianne Faithfull; Conradt, “10 Famous Residents of McLean Psychiatric Hospital.”
140. Luu, “Selena Gomez Explained Why She Revealed Her Bipolar Disorder Diagnosis On Miley Cyrus’s Show.”
141. Saint Louis, “For Families of Teens at Suicide Risk, ‘13 Reasons’ Raises Concerns.”
143. Carlin, “The Powerful Meaning Behind Selena Gomez’s Bracelet In Her ‘Bad Liar’ Photo.”
144. Plaugic, “Selena Gomez releases new vertical music video you can only watch on Spotify’s mobile app.”
146. Heaf, “Woman Of The Year: Lana Del Rey.”
147. Cassan, ”Lana Del Rey:’Je me sens l’âme d’une guerrière;”” Wagner, “Billboard Cover: Lana Del Rey on Why Her Pop Stardom ‘Could Easily Not Have Happened.’”
148. Jonze, “Lana Del Rey: ‘I wish I was dead already.’”
149. Schrodt, “Lana Del Rey’s Feminist Problem;” Vigier, ”The Meaning of Lana Del Rey.”
150. Shugerman, “Lana Del Rey: Not A Feminist.”
154. Ibid, 100.
157. Horner, “This is how Lana Del Rey kickstarted a sad-pop revolution.”
158. Interiano et al, “Musical trends and predictability of success in contemporary songs in and out of the top charts.”
159. Ibid, 1.
161. Horner, “This is how Lana Del Rey kickstarted a sad-pop revolution.”
162. Ibid.
163. Ibid.
164. Orgad and Gill, *Confidence Culture*.
165. McRobbie, *Feminism and the politics of resilience*.
167. Stables, “With Rare Beauty, Selena Gomez Has Rewritten the Script for Start-Ups.”

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