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## **Tracing the Changes in Attitude with Ageing in Adele's Select Songs**

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### **Abstract:**

Adele is one of the culture defining contemporary pop culture phenomena known for her vocal prowess and songwriting skills that relate with a wide range of audience. Noted for her mature lyricism and her simplistic yet compelling songwriting skills, she can easily influence emotions. The British songstress is known for producing albums, all of which are based on her age at the time of writing. This paper aims to critically analyze her writing to see her attitude change over time as she matured from a young adult to an adult in her late twenties. Her journey from her first heartache to motherhood to finding her individuality as a grown-up woman has been traced throughout the paper. Tyler and Scuhller's paper on aging and attitude is used as an aiding study for this paper. It formulates the hypothesis that attitude change is dependent on aging as it seems to vary with varying experiences and subsequent age numbers.

**Keywords:** Popular culture, attitude, aging, songwriting, New Media, Adele.

Alexandra Shulman, the editor of the British magazine *Vogue* claimed, "Adele has won over the world with her heartbreaking voice and her ability to seem as she is very much herself" in 2011, when Adele was a breakthrough force in the music industry with her

groundbreaking sophomore album *21*. The reported statement is eloquent enough to figure out how honest Adele is as a songwriter and how great she is as a vocalist. Her record-breaking albums, singles and her heart touching voice has established her as once in a generation phenomenon and one of the greater singer-songwriters of the contemporary generation. By 2021, she has released four chart topping albums, all of whom have broken several records, namely, *19*, *21*, *25* and *30*. Known for her unique vocals and soul-touching songs, Adele has named all her albums closer to her age at the time of the writing and release. She has perfectly recorded her feelings at that particular age and her experiences during that time period. The sixteen times Grammy winner, as of 2023, was born in May, 1988, in London. She signed her first record deal with XL Recordings in 2006 and released her first hit single “Hometown Glory” in 2007 from her debut album *19*. She became a global success later with her Grammy grab for Best New Artist and Best Female Pop Vocalist in 2009. Her sophomore album, *21* made her a household name and an international success for its record-breaking sales, hit singles, and its Grammy swipe of six awards in a single night. Her album went on to win various other accolades throughout its lifetime in the awards categories. Later, after a significant hiatus, she returned with her highest selling record album, *25*, that again went on to grab eyes for its songwriting, rawness, vocals and production, hence earning her multiple accolades. Her next album, after a long break of five years, turned out to be titled *30*, continuing her age number phenomenon, that spawned the hit single “Easy on Me” and it continued her legacy as one of the rawest vocalist and artist of all times. Her ability to transform her heartfelt experiences into her songwriting has been noticed by the critics and the audience alike. A BBC article published on her life in 2016 reports about her songwriting skills, “Her approach to writing typically involves her hand taking direct instruction from her broken heart—sometimes in the form of a “drunk diary”—and then, more often than not, being honed with an established

lyricist such as Eg White, Paul Epworth, or Ryan Tedder. The idea is to make them as "personal as possible", according to Dan Wilson, co-writer of "Someone Like You."

Openness to attitude change is understood by two models in Psychology, being the Impressionable years model and the lifelong openness model. The former one tries to explain attitude as something open to change throughout the youth only, while the latter explains attitude change as a lifelong activity as it is open to change throughout life. Tom R. Tyler and Regina A. Schuller are two scholars at Yale University and University of York, working in the Department of Law and Department of Psychology actively who tried to examine this relationship testing these two models. They published their findings in their joint paper "Aging and Attitude Change". They found a demonstration that younger people's attitude change more compared to the older ones because they are more impressionable to change and their experiences are more change-inductive as well. However, their study concluded that even older people are open to attitude change like the younger ones, hence, supporting the lifelong openness model. Thereby, rejecting the Impressionable years model, they have established a research that follows the fact that attitude change is subjected to lifelong experiences. There is no distinguishing factor or slowing down or resistance that can be found in attitude change when it comes to age. Hence, a positive correlation is established between these two variables, as per the model and this research. This paper, though, does not have to do with the old age factor, but the openness to attitude change throughout the years that pass by, as one grows, is a matter of fact. As it is easily noticeable that attitude changes with the growing age, it can also be figured out that over time, the same feelings experienced by an individual might have different outlooks owing to varied attitude change. Adele's albums and discography can prove this too, subjected to this argument regarding attitude change, as her expression and reaction can be found changing through the years, whenever she suffers heartbreak. This argument

forms the bulk of this paper as it is explored further in the paper. A few select songs have been picked from each of her albums that share common themes like heartbreak and motherhood.

## 21 (Album)

Adele's sophomore album came out in 2011 right after her major breakup with her then partner and hence explore themes of anguish, agony, heartbreak, introspection, forgiveness and moving on. Becoming one of the best selling albums of all times, it went on to draw critics in her favor and earned her a huge fanbase all over the world. Its opening track "Rolling in the Deep" had a stormy and tearful anguish hidden in the narrative. The angsty production and the writing of the song undoubtedly shows the very first reaction of an individual after a significant break up filled with feelings of sadness and rage. The song push starts with an outrageous beginning as she can see her temperature soaring and her heart racing angrily. She begins with the lines, "There's a fire starting in my heart/ reaching a fever pitch and it's bringing me out the dark" (Rolling in the Deep 00:00:05-00:00:13) and further moves forward to say that she was able to get the clarity after all of this as she warns him:

Finally I can see you crystal clear

Just go ahead and sell me out and I'll lay your shit bare

See how I'll leave with every piece of you

Don't underestimate the things that I would do. (Rolling in the Deep

00:00:14-00:00:31)

With these lines, it is visible how much rage she has inside of her after all of the betrayal that she has faced and her warning to her ex-lover shows her agency as a grown up woman then who is unafraid and clear with her thoughts and motives. She has revenge in her mind and she further clarifies in her pre-chorus as she declares:

The scars of your love remind me of us

They keep me thinking that I almost had it all

The scars of your love they leave me breathless

I can't help feeling. (Rolling in the Deep 00:00:42-00:00:58)

Getting more personal, she quite catches the right feeling after the first significant heartbreak where even though the person might have rage inside, yet they cannot help feeling helpless because of the flashbacks that follow and the feelings of anxiety that come with the panic mode of breathlessness. Later in the chorus she clarifies how their relation was rolling deep as they almost had both of them. It was beautiful once and could have ended well, too. They both were there in times of need and had each other's back, yet something was missing, as clear with the expression 'Rolling in the Deep'. He let her into her personal life so much that he had entire control of her and hence could play her heart to the right beat. Feelings of pain and anxiety are constant beneath the narrative as she screams here in the chorus:

We could've had it all (You're gonna wish you)

Rolling in the deep (Tears are gonna fall, rolling in the deep)

You had my heart inside of your hand (You're gonna wish you never had met me)

And you played it to the beat (Tears are gonna fall, rolling in the deep). (Rolling in the Deep 00:00:59-00:01:16)

In the parentheses, she had other words going on which form part of the singing choir in the song, where she is found to be revengeful enough. She furthers this feeling of revenge in the next verse, where she is found to say that she knows enough about him to be revealed to the world that could destroy him. She makes sure that her lover suffers with the same pain that she is suffering, as she goes on to reveal, "Think of me in the depths of your despair/ Make your home down there, as mine sure won't be shared" (Rolling in the Deep 00:01:27-00:01:35) She is certain throughout that she is not going to get back to him. Yet, her feelings of agony and angst are overriding the song clearly too. In the song's bridge, she further encourages him to tell their secrets to everyone because even that would be harming him enough. He should be

counting his blessings on what he had instead of always focusing for the better. She declares that even though she is feeling the ache in her heart, yet she can turn that pain into something worthy enough of her, maybe a better lover that she would find or a record that she would sell.

Throwing her belief in the seeds of *karma*, she explains:

Through your soul through every open door

Count your blessings to find what you looked for

Turn my sorrow into treasured gold

You'll pay me back in kind and reap just what you sow. (Rolling in the Deep

00:02:38-00:02:50)

Hence, by opening the album with such a fiery song, she ascertains the first reaction as a young adult to a break up that is suffused with mixed feelings of pain, heartaches and anger. Nevertheless, into the next song in the album, she gets overly emotional as she enters the later stage of grief where she has started accepting the fact that he is gone. Her feelings of outrage and revenge have transformed into feelings of longing and flashbacks which she cannot get over with. In the song, "Don't You Remember", she admits to her flaws and pleads her ex-lover to recall everything they had. She opens quite emotionally on this track by asking when she would be able to see him again as he bade no goodbye or word when he was leaving. The poignant question furthers with no final kiss and her uncertainty as to what happened between them and why. This transformation from a certain feeling of revenge in the beginning to longing for the ex love to reconcile again with her is another factor of time that changes the perception and requires great will power to overcome it. Adele seems to be giving into the power of this sadness at this point, as is witnessed in the very first verse:

When will I see you again?

You left with no goodbye, not a single word was said

No final kiss to seal any sins

I had no idea of the state we were in. (Don't You Remember 00:00:17-00:00:48)

The morphed feeling from a confident, young-feisty woman to a low-feeling, low-esteem, under-confident young woman now seems to be clear in the pre-chorus, where she finalizes her state of anxiety and distress as she is left with physiological symptoms of dizzy eyes and a heavy heart with feelings of vulnerability and bitterness as she sings, "I know I have a fickle heart and a bitterness/And a wandering eye, and a heaviness in my head" (Don't You Remember 00:00:49-00:01:01). The tormenting flashbacks of her relationship prompts her to raise the titular question in the chorus if he remembers why he loved her before and if he could just remember her once more so that she could fix herself. In the second verse, she enquires her former lover again as to when he could have thought of her the last time. She introspects more into this feeling and starts thinking if he might have erased her from his memory. At the same time, she keeps contemplating out of anxiety where she had gone wrong, but the more she thinks of it, the less she knows about it:

When was the last time that you thought of me?

Or have you completely erased me from your memory?

I often think about where I went wrong

The more I do, the less I know. (Don't You Remember 00:01:37-00:02:08)

Wanting to turn back into a relationship with her beloved, she finally screams in her bridge that she had given him all the space that he needed to breathe and even maintained the distance that he needed to be free while she hopes that he would reconcile with her in the meanwhile and get back to her. This becomes eloquent in the simple yet emotive expression in the bridge:

Gave you the space so you could breathe

I kept my distance so you would be free



I hope that you'd find the missing piece

To bring you back to me. (Don't You Remember 00:02:56-00:03:11)

This feeling of longing and sadness rather evolves next into her further tracks but culminates in the closing track for the album where she finally accepts the feeling that he is gone and she has to bear with the circumstances and like a grown up woman, she can do nothing but merely hope the best for his future. In this slow paced ballad, "Someone Like You" she narrates the story of how she heard it from somewhere that the man that she used to love had settled down with the girl of his match and he is married as of now as well. She does not feel jealous, but anticipates and asserts that she might be giving him all that the songstress had not been able to. She calls him sweetly an 'Old friend', and refrains him from getting shy because she has finally decided to move forward with this pain and come to terms with the fact that passed is past. Hence, she opens up:

I heard that you're settled down

That you found a girl and you're married now

I heard that your dreams came true

Guess she gave you things I didn't give to you

Old friend, why are you so shy

Ain't like you to hold back or hide from the light. (Someone Like You

00:00:13-00:00:49)

She waits for her former man to see her face and will divulge to him the face that she has not perfectly moved on; in fact, she does not state about her state of unwillingness to leave the blues as she says, "I hate to turn up out of the blue, uninvited" (Someone Like You 00:00:57-00:00:59). Finally, in the chorus, she accepts with a bitter feeling that she would be never ever able to find someone like him. All she wants to hope is the best wishes for him, but she begs that he never forgets her, and she repeats twice, "Sometimes it lasts in love, but

sometimes it hurts instead” (Someone Like You 00:01:33-00:01:40). She goes on to explore in the second verse to calculate how does the time fly and it seems to her as if it was only yesterday that her glory days with her lover used to be there:

You know how the time flies

Only yesterday was the time of our lives

We were born and raised in a summer haze

Bound by the surprise of our glory days. (Someone Like You 00:01:50-00:02:17)

In the bridge, she opens about her state of mind that all of the time that they spent together, even if they were full of regrets and mistakes, yet she made memories with him. She feels bittersweet about it because she is glad that once he was a part of her life, but now that he is gone, he is a part of someone else's. In a gloomy tone, here in the bridge, she hence explains:

Nothing compares, no worries no cares

Regrets and mistakes, they're memories made

Who would have known how bittersweet this would taste? (Someone Like You  
00:03:05-00:03:20)

## 25 (Album)

The third album by Adele came after a hiatus of long four years that became a scrapbook of emotions and experiences she faced during those times. Ranging from the divorce and fame to her newly felt motherhood, the album forms to be a repository of more fantastic range of emotions displayed in comparison to her previous album. It thus outsold various albums of the century for its notable lyricism, vocals and production. The first song for study from this album, “All I Ask” is written for a potentially failing relation and how she feels about it. She begins her first verse with the lines:

I will leave my heart at the door

I won't say a word

They've all been said before, you know

So why don't we just play pretend

Like we're not scared of what is coming next

Or scared of having nothing left? (All I Ask 00:00:13-00:00:39)

Here, she is sure of the failed relationship that she knows is not continuing any further, thus they just have one last night left with each other to spend. She admits to no anticipation of the future and no stopping or even bickering anymore because everything has been done before. All they have is the last night, where she asks her lover to treat her more than just a friend and share a memory that can be cherished forever. They had to pretend like lovers because all that matters to her now is not how and why the relationship is failing, but how it is ending. This is visible in the pre chorus and the chorus:

Look, don't get me wrong

I know there is no tomorrow

All I ask is (All I Ask 00:00:40-00:00:52)

She follows the pre-chorus with an enjambment into the chorus:

If this is my last night with you

Hold me like I'm more than just a friend

Give me a memory I can use

Take me by the hand while we do

What lovers do

It matters how this ends

'Cause what if I never love again? (All I Ask 00:00:53-00:01:34)

She could see through her lover's eyes that the passion that once he had for her is diminishing. She is sad about it that he had known her like anything and scared as well as she would not have anyone after this to run to once this relationship is over. She questions

repeatedly in the chorus whether she would be able to love again in the future. Hence, she writes:

I don't need your honesty  
It's already in your eyes  
And I'm sure my eyes, they speak for me  
No one knows me like you do  
And since you're the only one that mattered  
Tell me who do I run to? (All I Ask 00:01:48-00:02:13)

She wants this to be her lesson in love and remember them like the last moment they had. She further says, "And I ain't asking for forgiveness"(All I Ask 00:00:32-00:00:35), but merely one last night together. Therefore, it can be easily seen how she has admitted to the collapsed bond between them and is aiming for nothing anymore but a better separate future and good memories. Her next and the last song in the album, "Sweetest Devotion", is about motherhood and her note to her newborn son. It was all about her kid that changed her life at all. The song has an intro of her kid muttering something which shows her intimacy with her son that she even included his voice note for her song as an intro. She feels that with him she has everything in abundance. They share an unconditional love that she had always been looking for. The way that she is passionate for her son, she can break every rule for him during his growing up. She has always been trying to find the right kind of love in romantic relationships, but now that her son is born, she has everything. This was something she never looked for. All through her previous albums and the time before her son was born, she was looking for something else, but her son showed him the real meaning of love. Hence, she expresses:

With your loving, there ain't nothing  
That I can't adore

The way I'm running, with you, honey

Means we can break every law

I find it funny that you're the only

One I never looked for

There is something in your loving

That tears down my walls. (Sweetest Devotion 00:00:27-00:00:45)

Motherhood was a challenge for her for which she was not ready. However after he was born, she is ready for every challenge. She even believes that he is the one she can eternally belong to, hence ending her feelings of loneliness and alienation, as she sings, "You will only be eternally/The one that I belong to" (Sweetest Devotion). In the chorus, she mentions that her son is the:

The sweetest devotion

Hit me like an explosion

All of my life, I've been frozen

The sweetest devotion I've known. (Sweetest Devotion 00:00:56-00:1:16)

She later explains that she has found something permanent now and can do anything for his clarity. She even goes on to say that he is such a source of positivity and belongingness for her that even when she loses her way now, he will be the reason she will return home to belong with him. Hence, verse two beautifully mentions:

I'll forever be whatever you want me to be

I'll go under and all over for your clarity

When you wonder if I'm gonna lose my way home

Just remember, that come whatever, I'll be yours all along. (Sweetest Devotion

00:01:37-00:01:54)

After multiple failures in the relationship, she felt lost and had been looking for somebody to hold on to but found this surprisingly with her child. She finally feels at home with her baby. She goes on to compare her passion for her kid to be “the right kind of madness” (Sweetest Devotion 00:03:00-00:03:05). She feels as if he is the only one and everything for her. Her powerfully extreme heart-provoking emotions came out to be:

I've been looking for you, baby

In every face that I've ever known

And there is something 'bout the way you love me

That finally feels like home

You're my light, you're my darkness

You're the right kind of madness

And you're my hope, you're my despair

You're my scope, everything, everywhere. (Sweetest Devotion 00:02:36-00:03:11)

30 (Album)

This is the most recent album by Adele that was released in 2021 after she went on a long break for her family and herself. This album explores divorce, motherhood, individuality and her views on life as an adult in late twenties. Her first official single from the album “Easy on Me” was released as a ballad to address her divorce and her request from her son, ex-husband and herself for forgiveness. Her first verse opens her narrating how her marriage had come to a breaking point as she finds no value in the metaphorical river, which refers to her marriage, life and work. Her growing despair is leading her to suffer in silence, as she declares to her son, for whom the album is majorly addressed:

There ain't no gold in this river

That I've been washin' my hands in forever

I know there is hope in these waters

But I can't bring myself to swim

When I am drowning in this silence, baby

Let me in. (Easy on Me 00:00:13-00:00:45)

She asks for forgiveness in the song's chorus from her child for leaving his father. Still, after growing up, she has not understood the world and herself entirely, as she sings:

Go easy on me, baby

I was still a child

Didn't get the chance to

Feel the world around me

I had no time to choose

What I chose to do

So go easy on me. (Easy on Me 00:00:46-00:01:17)

Later in the second verse, she explains how there is no room for making amends as they both had their personalities. Even though she tried hard to put her family first, she could not do anything but separate, and that is why her kid needs to understand her dilemma:

There ain't no room for things to change

When we are both so deeply stuck in our ways

You can't deny how hard I've tried

I changed who I was to put you both first

But now I give up. (Easy on Me 00:01:27-00:01:56)

In the bridge, she tells her son and herself that she had good intentions and highest hopes for him, for her marriage and everything, but it does not seem apparent anymore. Hence, she writes:

I had good intentions

And the highest hopes

But I know right now

It probably doesn't even show. (Easy on Me 00:02:38-00:02:54)

Thus, even after being a mother to a son and a grown-up woman, some things are not under her control and are unfathomable. She accepts things for as they are and that is what she wants to explain to her child throughout the song and the the album. In another song from the album, titled "Hold On", she philosophizes her views as an adult woman and meditates on her notions of heartbreak and her anxieties. She introduces the song's subject in the intro by asserting to herself that she needs to hold on to herself and the time as well because things will align and she will find another love at the right time. She gets dubious about herself in the first verse as if she has not learned anything yet. She wants riddance from the chaos as she feels lost and needs a hand to save her as she cannot wage any war against herself anymore where she has lesser chances to win. She exclaims:

Oh, what have I done yet again?

Have I not learned anything?

I don't want to live in chaos

It's like a ride that I want to get off

It's hard to hold on to who I am

When I'm stumblin' in the dark for a hand

I am so tired of battling with myself

With no chance to win.(Hold On 00:00:47-00:01:33)

In the chorus, she personifies the time and pain and rather than being patient herself, she asks the time to be patient and pain to be gracious. In parentheses, she reasserts herself that she is still strong to bear with all the pain and soon the love will come to her:

(Hold on)

Let time be patient



(You are still strong)

Let pain be gracious

(Love will soon come)

Just hold, hold on.(Hold On 00:01:34-00:02:14)

She figures herself out to be a mess and the more she tries to clear the mess, she instead regresses. She finds herself her nemesis and hates herself. Her anxieties soar when she says that it seems to her as if she will be swallowed by the ground, which figuratively represents her disorientation. This is furthered by her feeling of worthlessness and the entire verse reveals:

I swear to God, I am such a mess

The harder that I try, I regress

I'm my own worst enemy

Right now, I truly hate bein' me

Every day feels like the road I'm on

Might just open up and swallow me whole

How do I feel so mighty small

When I'm struggling to feel at all? (Hold On 00:02:19-00:03:02)

She meditates on her anxiety and distress and figures out that loneliness is the only rest for her; emptiness helps her forget and finds lesson for her that, “forgiveness is easiest in secret”(Hold On 00:04:16-:00:04:24). So all she needs is to hold on and let the time dictate everything.

Adele is a stellar performer and songwriter known for recording the slice of her life in her discography and reflecting on themes of heartbreak majorly. Known for her sentimental yet simplistic lyrics, Adele's maturation and evolution can be traced throughout her discography. Her select songs from three of her albums highlight select thematic concerns that were picked for this study that reflect how her perception and attitude shifted over time for the

same feelings. Her outrage at first heartbreak in “Rolling in the Deep” evolves into despair and longing in the track from the same album, “Don’t you remember”; while a total acceptance with hopes of a better future can be witnessed in “Someone like You” and it finds a different outlook in “All I Ask”; meanwhile this all transmutes for better in “Easy on Me” where she finds solace, forgiveness and understanding from her kid. Her feelings of motherhood also seem to be changed as compared and contrasted in “Sweetest Devotion” and “Easy on Me” as she finds vagueness and exhaustion in the latter. Even her life views change over the time which culminated into feelings of skepticism rather than feeling of uncertainty and confusion as witnessed in her latest single “Hold On”. Her feelings have become more pragmatic and rooted in time, as expected with maturation in age and as per the model perceived by Tyler and Schuller that attitude is impressionable to change at all ages.

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