



The Mirror's Deception a Feminist Analysis of the Song 'Who Says' by Selena Gomez

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Abstract. This study examines feminist values in the lyrics of the song “Who Says” performed by Selena Gomez. This song was chosen because it contains messages about self-confidence, self-acceptance, and rejection of the beauty standards often imposed on women by society. The objectives of this study are to identify the feminist values present in the song’s lyrics, analyze how the song conveys messages about self-confidence and self-acceptance, and determine how the lyrics challenge societal standards regarding women. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a feminist approach. The research data consists of the lyrics of “Who Says,” which were analyzed using content analysis to uncover the feminist meanings and messages embedded within them. The results indicate that this song highlights the importance of women valuing themselves without conforming to society’s beauty standards. Furthermore, the song emphasizes that every individual has inherent value and uniqueness, thereby eliminating the need to feel inferior because of others’ judgments. Through these messages, the song “Who Says” can be interpreted as a form of resistance against the social pressures and stereotypes women frequently face. This study is expected to provide insight into how music can serve as a medium for conveying feminist messages and for building women's self-confidence.

Keywords: Feminism; Self-Acceptance; Self-Confidence; Social Standards; Song Lyrics.

1. BACKGROUND

Literature is a form of human expression that is closely connected to life. Through literature, people can express their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and perspectives on various phenomena that occur in daily life. Literature is often regarded as a reflection of life because it contains depictions of social and cultural realities, as well as the values that develop within society. In other words, literary works serve not only as entertainment but also as a medium for gaining a deeper understanding of human life (Rasmawan et al., 2025; Zahro & Djauhari, 2025).

The relationship between literature and life is evident in how literary works depict various issues society. Through literary works, authors can express social criticism, describe individual experiences, and highlight the various conflicts people face in their lives. Therefore, literature is often used as a means of conveying moral messages, life values, and perspectives on various social phenomena occurring in society (Sulaiman & Djauhari, 2025; Asmara et al., 2025).

In addition, literature shapes society’s perspective on various issues in life. Through literature, readers can understand different points of view and develop empathy for the others experiences. This demonstrates that literature plays a vital role in fostering social awareness and enriching people’s understanding of life (Salsabila, 2025). As times have changed, literary works are no longer limited to written forms such as novels, short stories, or poetry. Advances

in technology and popular culture have given rise to various new forms of literature that can be enjoyed through a variety of media. One form of literature that has emerged within popular culture is song lyrics. Song lyrics can be considered literary works because they employ beautiful, symbolic language and convey meanings that listeners can interpret (Salsabila, 2025; Kurniawan, 2024).

Song lyrics often contain messages related to human experiences, such as love, friendship, life's struggles, self-identity, and other social issues. Through song lyrics, songwriters can convey ideas, feelings, and critiques of social conditions. Therefore, song lyrics can also be analyzed using various approaches in literary studies to understand the meanings. In literary studies, there are various approaches to analyzing a literary work. One approach that is frequently used is the feminist approach. The feminist approach in literature focuses on how women are represented in literary works and how the relationship between gender and power is depicted in the text. This approach also aims to uncover various forms of gender inequality in literary works (Sa'adah et al., 2023; Nabila, 2024).

Interpreting literature from a feminist perspective is important because, in many societies, women often face various forms of discrimination and stereotypes. In some literary works, women are often portrayed as weak, passive, or dependent on men. These portrayals reflect how society's views of women are often shaped by social systems that place women in a position of inequality with men (Siagian, 2024; Sari et al., 2023). Through feminist literary criticism, researchers seek to examine how women are represented in a literary work and how that work can provide a space for women to express their identities and experiences. Feminist literary criticism also seeks to challenge traditional views that limit women's roles in society. Thus, the feminist approach to literature aims not only to understand texts but also to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality.

Feminism is a social movement and school of thought aimed at advocates equality between men and women in various aspects of life. Feminism emerged as a response to the various forms of injustice faced by women in society, including discrimination in education, employment, and social life. The feminist movement emphasizes that women have the same rights as men to fair opportunities and treatment (Pasingsingan, 2025). In addition to fighting for equality in the social and political spheres, feminism also highlights how women often face social pressures related to beauty standards and self-identity. In many cultures, women are often expected to meet certain beauty standards that society considers ideal. These beauty standards are often unrealistic and can put pressure on women to conform to societal expectations.

This pressure is often amplified by the mass media and popular culture, which portray images of women deemed “perfect.” As a result, many women feel insecure or inadequate because they cannot meet these standards. Therefore, one of the key goals of feminism is to encourage women to accept themselves and reject harmful stereotypes. In popular culture, music is a medium that exerts significant influence in shapes public perceptions social issues, including those concerning women. Popular songs often convey specific can shape listeners’ perspectives. Consequently, song lyrics can also serve as a medium to convey messages about women’s empowerment, self-confidence, and self-acceptance.

One song that conveys this message is “Who Says,” performed by Selena Gomez. The song was released in 2011 and became a hit among teenagers and the general public. It is known for the positive message conveyed through its lyrics namely, the importance of self-love and not letting others’ judgments define one’s self-worth. Through its lyrics, “Who Says” conveys the message that every individual has their own uniqueness and value. The song also rejects the idea that one must meet certain beauty standards to be considered valuable. This message is highly relevant to a feminist perspective as it encourages women to accept themselves as they are and to value their own potential.

In addition, this song also depicts how women often face criticism or judgment from others regarding their appearance or abilities. Through the song’s message, listeners are encouraged to recognize that everyone has the right to feel confident and live their lives being influenced by others’ negative judgments. This, the song “Who Says” serves not only as entertainment but also conveys an important social message regarding self-confidence and women’s empowerment. This message makes the song worthy of analysis from a feminist perspective in literary studies. Based on this, this study aims to analyze the feminist values present in the lyrics of the song “Who Says” by Selena Gomez. Through this analysis, we hope to understand how song’s lyrics convey messages self-confidence, self-acceptance, and women’s empowerment

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach and Design

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative methodology, utilizing content analysis as the principal method and a feminist framework as the guiding theoretical orienzation. Content analysis affords the systematic identification, examination, and interpretation the meaning within a text to elucidate underlying massages (Krippendorff, 2018). A qualitative methodology is employed to enable an in-depth examination of meanings embedded in the

lyrics of the song “Who Says” by Selena Gomez. The descriptive design facilitates the systematic depiction of feminist representations within the lyrics without recourse data manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

In the context of this study, song lyrics are viewed as a form of literary work conveys symbolic, emotional, and social meanings. Through content analysis, the researcher seeks to identify themes, messages, and feminist values related to self-confidence, self-acceptance, and resistance to unfair social standards that affect women. A feminist approach is used to analyze how women are represented in song lyrics and how gender relations and forms of resistance to social pressure are portrayed. Thus, a combination of descriptive qualitative and content analysis approaches is deemed appropriate for examining this research subject in depth and within its context

Data and Data Sources

Data is a collection of information obtained by researchers for analysis in order to answer the research question. Data sources are the origins from which the data is obtained (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The data in this study consists of qualitative data, namely words, phrases, clauses, and sentences from the lyrics of the song “Who Says” by Selena Gomez. This data was selected because it contains meanings relevant to feminist values, such as self-confidence, self-acceptance, and criticism of beauty standards. The data sources in this study consist of:

Primary Data

Primary data in the form of official lyrics of the song Who Says obtained from reliable sources, such as digital music platforms and websites providing official song lyrics.

Secondary Data

Secondary data consists of books, academic journals, and articles related to literary theory, feminism, and song lyric analysis. This data is used to support the analysis and strengthen the theoretical foundation of the study (Moleong, 2018). By utilizing both primary and secondary data, this study is expected to produce a comprehensive and in-depth analysis.

Research Data

The data in this study consists of linguistic elements in song lyrics, namely words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. This data was analyzed based on its underlying meaning and its relevance to feminist values. The primary data in this study consists of song lyrics analyzed directly through the listen-and-note technique. The data were then classified into specific themes, such as self-confidence, self-acceptance, and forms of resistance to social norms.

Research Subjects

The subject of this study is the lyrics of the song “Who Says” performed by Selena Gomez. The song’s lyrics were chosen because they convey a powerful message about self-confidence, self-acceptance, and a critique of unrealistic beauty standards. The research subject was selected through purposive sampling because the song is relevant to feminist studies and aligns with the research objectives.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique in this research uses the note-taking and documentation study methods.

Listen-and-Note

The listen-and-note technique involved listening to the song “Who Says” and repeatedly reading its lyrics. The researcher then notes down parts of the lyrics relevant to the research focus (Sudaryanto, 2015).

Documentation Study

The documentation method involves collecting and reviewing documents such as song lyrics and scientific references relevant to the research (Sidiq et al., 2019). The data collection steps include:

- a. Listening to the song repeatedly.
- b. Reading and understanding the song lyrics.
- c. Identifying relevant parts of the lyrics.
- d. Grouping the data based on the theme of feminism.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique used in this study employs the interactive analysis model proposed by (Miles et al., 2014), which includes:

Data Collection (Data Collection)

The researcher collected data in the form of song lyrics relevant to the research focus.

- a. Data Reduction

The data was selected and focused on sections containing feminist values.

- b. Data Display

Data is presented in the form of narrative descriptions based on predetermined themes.

- c. Conclusion Drawing (Conclusion Drawing/Verification)

The researcher draws conclusions based on the analysis results and interprets the data using a feminist perspective.

Through these stages, the study is expected to produce systematic, valid findings capable of addressing the research questions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the analysis of the lyrics of the song “Who Says” in response to the research question: how are feminist values represented through the song’s lyrics? The research data consists of lyric excerpts that convey meanings related to self-confidence, self-acceptance, and resistance to social standards that are unfair to women. Based on the analysis, a number of lyrics were found that directly or indirectly represent feminist values. These lyrics were selected because they contain a strong message regarding the importance of self-love, rejection of beauty standards, and the courage not to submit to social judgment. All the data obtained was then classified into several categories based on the main themes that emerged in the lyrics. Based on this classification, three main categories were identified, namely:

- a. Self-Confidence.
- b. Self-Acceptan.
- c. Resistance to Social Standards (Resistance to Social Standards).

These three categories were selected because they are the most dominant in representing feminist values in the song “Who Says.”

Tabel 1. Classification of Lyrics.

No.	Lirik	Category
1.	“Who says you're not perfect?”	Self-Acceptance
2.	“Who says you're not worth it?”	Self-Confidence
3.	“Who says you're the only one that's hurting?”	Self-Confidence
4.	“Trust me, that's the price of beauty”	Social Standards
5.	“Who says you're not pretty?”	Self-Acceptance
6.	“Who says you're not beautiful?”	Self-Acceptance
7.	“Who says?”	Resistance
8.	“It's such a funny thing, how nothing's funny when it's you”	Social Standards
9.	“You tell 'em what you mean”	Resistance
10.	“You're beautiful the way you are”	Self-Acceptance

Discussion

The song “Who Says” is a popular piece of music that not only serves as entertainment but also conveys a powerful social message, particularly regarding women’s issues and self-identity. In the context of feminism, this song can be understood as a form of resistance against the social pressures often faced by women, especially those related to beauty standards and societal expectations. Through its lyrics, the song seeks to raise awareness that women do not need to meet certain standards to be considered valuable. Instead, an individual’s worth is

determined by themselves, not by others' judgments.

Self-Confidence

The first category identified in the analysis is self-confidence. The lyrics in this category show how individuals, particularly women, are encouraged to believe in themselves without having to rely on external validation.

a. Lyric 2: "Who says you're not worth it?"

This lyric directly challenges the negative views often directed at women. The rhetorical question "Who says" suggests that such judgments lack a solid foundation and should not be accepted at face value. From a feminist perspective, this constitutes a form of resistance against a social system that frequently demeans women.

b. Lyrics 3: "Who says you're the only one that's hurting?"

These lyrics show that experiencing suffering does not make someone weak. On the contrary, it is part of the universal human experience. In the context of feminism, this is important because women are often perceived as more emotional and weaker, so these lyrics aim to challenge that perspective. The self-confidence portrayed in this song is not merely individual in nature but also has a social dimension. By building self-confidence, women can challenge the stereotypes that limit them.

Self-Acceptance

The second category is self-acceptance, which is one of the core values of modern feminism. Self-acceptance means embracing all one's flaws and strengths without having to conform to unrealistic social standards.

a. Lyric 1: "Who says you're not perfect?"

This lyric challenges the concept of perfection, which is often narrowly defined by society. In many cultures, women are expected to meet certain standards to be considered "perfect." However, this song rejects that concept by asserting that every individual is already perfect in their own way.

b. Lyrics 5: "Who says you're not pretty?" and Lyrics 6: "Who says you're not beautiful?"

These two lyrics directly address beauty standards. From a feminist perspective, beauty is not something that should be determined by others. These lyrics emphasize that the definition of beauty is subjective and should not be imposed.

c. Lyric 10: "You're beautiful the way you are"

This lyric is the core of the song's message: self-acceptance. This message is highly relevant to feminist issues, particularly in the context of body positivity and self-love. Women are encouraged to accept themselves without feeling inadequate.

Resistance to Social Standards

The third category is resistance to social standards. In this song, resistance is not expressed in an aggressive manner, but through powerful questions and affirmations.

a. Lyric 7: "Who says?"

The repetition of this phrase serves as a symbolic form of resistance against social norms. By asking "who says," the song encourages listeners not to simply accept existing standards.

b. Lyric 4: "Trust me, that's the price of beauty"

These lyric critiques beauty standards that often demand sacrifice. In many cases, women must endure physical and mental pressure to meet these standards. The song reveals that these standards are unfair and need not be followed.

c. Lyrics 9: "You tell 'em what you mean"

These lyrics encourage women to speak up and express themselves. In feminism, women's voices are often marginalized, so the courage to speak up becomes an important form of resistance.

Overall Interpretation

Based on these three categories, it can be concluded that the song "Who Says" represents feminism through a simple yet effective approach. The song does not use complex language or heavy-handed theory, yet it still manages to convey a powerful message. The feminist values in this song include:

- a. Rejection of unrealistic beauty standards.
- b. Women's empowerment through self-confidence.
- c. Self-acceptance as a form of individual freedom.
- d. Resistance to social pressure.

Furthermore, this song also demonstrates that popular media such as music can be an effective means of conveying social messages. The song is able to reach a wide audience, particularly teenagers, and thus has a significant impact on shaping self-perception.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the analysis of the lyrics in Selena Gomez's song *Who Says*, this study concludes that the song contains strong feminist values related to self-confidence, self-acceptance, and resistance to social standards imposed on women. The lyrics encourage women to appreciate their own worth without depending on society's judgments or unrealistic beauty standards. Through rhetorical expressions and affirming messages, the song challenges patriarchal perspectives that often define women based on physical appearance and public

opinion. The findings also show that popular music can function as a medium for promoting feminist ideas and empowering listeners, especially young women, to develop a positive self-image and confidence in their individuality. Therefore, the song *Who Says* can be interpreted as a representation of feminist resistance expressed through popular culture and music.

However, this study is limited to the analysis of a single song lyric using a feminist literary approach, so the findings cannot be generalized to all forms of popular music or feminist representation in media. In addition, the analysis focuses only on textual interpretation and does not include audience responses or the broader social impact of the song. Future researchers are encouraged to examine feminist values in other songs, music videos, or forms of popular culture using broader approaches such as discourse analysis or audience reception studies. Further studies may also compare feminist representations across different artists or genres to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how music contributes to discussions of gender equality and women's empowerment.

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