

The Portrayal of Womanhood in *I am Woman* Song Lyrics by Emmy Meli

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Abstract: This study examines the portrayal of womanhood in the song *I Am Woman* by Emmy Meli using Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory and a linguistic features approach. The research applies a descriptive qualitative method, with the song lyrics as the primary data. Data were collected through documentation and analyzed by identifying linguistic features such as first-person pronouns, declarative sentences, repetition, evaluative adjectives, and clause structures. These features were interpreted through a feminist literary perspective to explore representations of womanhood. The findings reveal that the song portrays womanhood as empowered, autonomous, and self-defined. Women are represented as conscious subjects who assert agency, resist patriarchal limitations, and construct their identities through self-awareness and existential freedom. The study demonstrates that linguistic choices in contemporary song lyrics can function as feminist discourse that challenges traditional gender stereotypes and redefines womanhood as a process of becoming rather than a biologically determined identity.

Keywords: womanhood, feminist theory, Simone de Beauvoir, linguistic features, song lyrics

INTRODUCTION

Language functions as a central mechanism through which social realities, including gender identities, are constructed and negotiated. In various forms of media, particularly popular music, language not only reflects cultural values but also actively participates in shaping ideological meanings. Historically, women have frequently been represented in media discourse as passive, emotional, or subordinate, thereby reinforcing patriarchal norms that marginalize female voices and experiences. Consequently, the examination of woman portrayal in media has become a central concern within gender studies, linguistics, and literary criticism.

Song lyrics, as a form of popular discourse, exert significant influence due to their emotional resonance and wide circulation. Beyond entertainment, lyrics often serve as platforms for articulating social issues, personal identities, and ideological positions. According to Soleha, et al (2022) said that songs are also an important part of popular culture and can influence and reflect social, political and cultural trends in society. Songs that foreground women's experiences therefore offer valuable insights into how womanhood is linguistically and culturally constructed. One such song is *I Am Woman* by Emmy Meli, which has gained recognition as an anthem of female empowerment.

Emmy Meli is an American R&B pop singer-songwriter and best known for her 2021 viral hit single *I Am Woman*; it became a platinum-certified anthem for self-love and female empowerment. She was born in 1999, she wrote the song as a personal affirmation that resonated globally, particularly on TikTok, celebrating confidence and defying societal restrictions. Emmy Meli not only a singer of *I Am woman*, but she is also a song writer of that song. The lyrics in *I Am Woman* describes the freedom of women and they can do

everything, besides that women also are described controlling of their own life and rejects the women stereotypes.

Unlike many popular songs that portray women through objectification or romantic dependency, *I Am Woman* describes themes of strength, resilience, and self-affirmation. The lyrics emphasize autonomy and self-definition, presenting womanhood as confident and empowered. This representation contrasts with traditional portrayals of women in popular music that frequently reinforce vulnerability and subordination. As such, the song provides a compelling site for examining how womanhood can be reconstructed through empowering language.

Although previous studies have extensively explored gender representation in media, this research focusing on empowering song lyrics from a feminist literary perspective remains limited. Many existing studies prioritize visual or narrative texts, leaving song lyrics underexamined as ideological and discursive sites. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the portrayal of womanhood in *I Am Woman*, highlighting how popular music can function as a medium for feminist discourse and social empowerment.

There are some previous studies which are like this study conducting women empowerment, the first previous study was written by Maemunah and Rahmawati (2025), they wrote a study entitled *Representation of Women in Paris Paloma's Songs: A Gynocritical Literary Analysis*. They analyzed four selected songs from Paris Paloma namely *Labour*, *Drywall*, *As Good a Reason*, and *Last Woman on Earth*. The purpose of their research was to uncover how women's experiences are portrayed through song lyrics and how these representations fit into the gynocritical framework proposed by Elaine Showalter. This study used a qualitative descriptive method and the result showed that the stages of women's consciousness, ranging from survival, resistance, and finally autonomy differently.

The second previous study was from Neisya, et al. (2023), entitled *Women Empowerment through Song Lyrics: Feminism Perspectives of Katy Perry's Roar*. This study aimed to reveal the meanings and messages implied in Katy Perry's song lyrics *Roar* through an analysis of figurative language and imagery from a feminism perspective. The descriptive qualitative method used through the process of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. The results showed that there were 7 types of figurative language: simile, metaphor, personification, synecdoche, symbol, paradox, and hyperbole. In addition, there were found four types of imagery namely visual imagery, auditory imagery, organic imagery, and kinesthetic imagery.

The third previous study was written by Nuriana and Ikrarini (2022), they wrote research entitled *The Representation of Feminism in "Tomboy" Song Lyrics by Destiny Rogers*. The aims of this study were to find out the kinds of feminism using Rosemarie Tong's theory of types of feminists and to find out the portrayal of women in the song lyrics of *Tomboy* by Destiny Rogers. The data were taken from the song lyrics of *Tomboy* sung by Destiny Rogers. This study used a qualitative method to discover the result of this research. The result of this study indicated that there were nineteen data found in the lyrics that contain some words or phrases that support seven types of feminists including liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, care-focused feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, ecofeminism, and post-modern feminism. The findings were *Tomboy* song lyrics representing the freedom of women and supporting feminism.

The last previous study was from Soleha et al. (2022), they analyzed a study about feminism in the lyrics of the song titled *Woman* by Kesha using semiotics perspective. The method used in their study was a descriptive qualitative method and the theory used to analyze the data using semiotic theory by Ferdinand De Saussure where this research

collected the data based on the Signifier consisted on The physical or sound part of a sign that we recognized, such as the written or spoken word, and the Signified related to the concept or meaning associated with the signifier contained in the lyrics of Kesha's song *Woman*.

Based on the previous studies above, the position of this study and the other previous studies are same topic, analyze the woman empowerment in the song lyrics that are sung by women singers. The differences are the approach; this study uses linguistics features and feminist literary theory by Simone de Beauvoir. This study is grounded in feminist literary theory, which conceptualizes literary and cultural texts as spaces where gender identities, power relations, and ideological meanings are constructed and contested. From a feminist perspective, language is not a neutral medium but a powerful instrument through which social realities and gendered subjectivities are shaped. Feminist scholarship emphasizes the importance of examining how women are represented in discourse and how such representations either reinforce or resist patriarchal structures.

Feminist literary criticism examines how literature reflects, reinforces, or challenges the oppression of women. According to feminist theorists, literature has historically been dominated by male perspectives, marginalizing women's voices and experiences. Feminist criticism seeks to reinterpret texts by foregrounding women's agency, subjectivity, and lived realities. Simone de Beauvoir (1953) argues that womanhood is socially constructed, famously stating that one is not born a woman but becomes one. This concept emphasizes that gender identity is shaped through social and cultural processes. Similarly, feminist critics argue that literary texts can either perpetuate or resist these constructions.

Conceptually, this study views womanhood as a socially constructed identity shaped through language, ideology, and lived experience. Popular song lyrics, as cultural texts, contribute to this construction by articulating images of femininity, empowerment, and resistance. Accordingly, the portrayal of womanhood in song lyrics can be understood as an ideological process through which meanings about women are produced and circulated.

The analytical framework integrates some interrelated dimensions: linguistic representation, feminist themes, and ideological construction. Linguistic representation focuses on lexical choices, pronoun use, modality, and evaluative language that signal agency and self-assertion. Feminist themes include empowerment, resilience, autonomy, resistance, and self-definition. These linguistic and thematic elements collectively contribute to the ideological construction of womanhood as an empowered and autonomous identity. Through this framework, *I Am Woman* song lyrics are examined as a feminist cultural text that challenges dominant gender norms and reconstructs womanhood through linguistic features.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Linguistics

Linguistic features refer to formal elements of language such as word choice, sentence structure, and grammatical processes that contribute to meaning construction in a text. Halliday and Hasan (1989) argue that language functions as a resource for making meaning, in which linguistic features play a central role. Furthermore, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) explain that transitivity processes reveal how experience and agency are represented in language. In literary and discourse analysis, linguistic features enable researchers to systematically examine how texts construct identity and ideology (Simpson, 2004). In relation to gender studies, Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that linguistic choices are closely related to power relations and social identities, making linguistic analysis particularly relevant for feminist studies.

Feminist Theory

Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory provides a foundational framework for understanding the portrayal of women in literary and cultural texts. Rooted in existentialist philosophy, Beauvoir's feminism emphasizes freedom, consciousness, and the social construction of gender. Her seminal work, *The Second Sex*, critically examines how women have historically been represented and treated as secondary beings within patriarchal societies (Beauvoir, 1953). This theory is particularly relevant for analyzing the portrayal of womanhood in texts, as it exposes the ideological mechanisms that shape women's identities and representations.

One of Beauvoir's central arguments is that womanhood is not a biological destiny but a socially constructed condition. Her well-known statement, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," highlights the idea that societal norms, cultural expectations, and patriarchal institutions play a crucial role in shaping women's identities (Beauvoir, 1953). In terms of portrayal, this suggests that representations of women in literature, music, and other cultural texts are not neutral reflections of reality, but constructed images influenced by dominant ideologies. Feminist literary criticism, therefore, uses Beauvoir's theory to question how female characters or voices are shaped by social constraints and expectations.

Another key concept in Beauvoir's feminist theory is Otherness. Beauvoir argues that within patriarchal structures, men are positioned as the subject or the norm, while women are defined as the Other—a secondary and dependent entity whose identity is determined in relation to men (Beauvoir, 1953). This concept is central to analyzing the portrayal of women in texts, as female characters are often depicted as passive, silent, or existing primarily in relation to male characters. From a feminist perspective, such portrayals reinforce women's marginalization and deny them agency and autonomy.

Beauvoir also emphasizes the importance of women's consciousness and self-awareness in challenging oppressive representations. Drawing from existentialist philosophy, she argues that liberation begins when women recognize themselves as autonomous subjects capable of making choices and defining their own existence (Beauvoir, 1953). In literary portrayals, this is reflected in representations of women who speak for themselves, assert their identities, and resist imposed gender roles. Such portrayals challenge patriarchal narratives by repositioning women as active agents rather than passive objects.

Furthermore, Beauvoir's concept of becoming underscores that womanhood is a dynamic and ongoing process. Women are not fixed identities but individuals who continuously negotiate their roles and identities within social structures. This concept is particularly useful in feminist literary analysis, as it allows researchers to examine how texts portray women's struggles, transformations, and acts of resistance. Representations that emphasize growth, self-definition, and empowerment align with Beauvoir's vision of authentic womanhood (Beauvoir, 1953).

In addition, Beauvoir criticizes traditional cultural representations that romanticize women's oppression by idealizing femininity as weakness, passivity, or emotional dependence. She argues that such portrayals serve to maintain patriarchal power by normalizing women's subordination (Beauvoir, 1953). Feminist analysis informed by Beauvoir's theory seeks to uncover these ideological patterns and highlight alternative portrayals that promote equality and autonomy.

In conclusion, Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory offers a powerful lens for analyzing the portrayal of women in literary and cultural texts. By emphasizing social construction, Otherness, consciousness, and becoming, Beauvoir provides critical tools for

examining how representations of women either reinforce or challenge patriarchal ideologies. Her theory remains highly relevant in contemporary feminist literary studies, particularly in analyzing texts that seek to redefine womanhood as empowered, autonomous, and self-determined.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design using a feminist literary analysis approach. The qualitative method is selected to enable an in-depth interpretation of linguistic and thematic meanings embedded in the song lyrics. According to Cresswell (2014, p. 4), “qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” This approach is particularly suitable for examining how womanhood is portrayed and ideologically constructed through language. Meanwhile, the purpose of qualitative descriptive research is to provide a rich, straight description of an experience or phenomenon (Lambert & Lambert, 2012, p. 255). In line with this view, this research seeks to describe the portrayal of womanhood in the song lyrics *I Am Woman* by Emmy Meli through a feminist literary approach without quantification or statistical analysis.

The source of data consists of the song lyrics of *I Am Woman* by Emmy Meli. The lyrics are treated as a cultural and literary text. Data collection was conducted through document analysis, involving close reading and segmentation of the lyrics into meaningful units, including words, phrases, and clauses related to the representation of womanhood. Data analysis followed several systematic stages: textual familiarization, identification of important linguistic features, thematic categorization, and interpretative analysis informed by feminist literary theory. The analysis focused on how linguistic patterns and thematic elements interact to construct womanhood as an empowered identity. To ensure credibility, the analytical procedures were conducted transparently and supported by established feminist theoretical frameworks. All the data found were collected through documentation and analyzed using the following steps:

1. Reading and understanding the song lyrics comprehensively.
2. Identifying words, phrases, and lines (linguistic features) related to the portrayal of womanhood.
3. Categorizing the data into thematic representations of womanhood.
4. Interpreting the themes using a feminist literary approach by Simone de Beauvoir.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

After analyzing the data, there are found some data of selected song lyrics *I Am Woman* analyzed using linguistic features and feminist literary approach Simone de Beauvoir that will be shown on the table below:

Tabel 1. Data Findings in *I Am Woman* Song Lyrics

No.	Song Lyrics	Linguistic Features	Feminist Approach	Interpretation
1.	“I am woman, I am fearless”	First-person pronoun I, declarative sentence and repetition	Empowerment (woman as subject)	Womanhood is constructed as confident and fearless, emphasizing

				agency and self-assertion.
2.	"I'm sexy, I'm divine"	Evaluative adjectives, repetition	Self-awareness	Women are portrayed as emotionally and mentally sexy and divine
3.	"I'm anything I want"	parallel clause, negation	Resistance	Womanhood resists societal limitations imposed by patriarchal norms
4.	"I am feminine, I am masculine"	First-person pronoun I, declarative sentence and repetition	Self-defined and Existential freedom	Women are depicted as active subjects who overcome external judgment
5.	"I feel what I want and somehow it finds me""	Self-referential expression	Self-define	Identity is constructed from within, not imposed by society
6.	"I am unbeatable, I'm creative"	Adjective and declarative sentence	Womanhood beyond limitation	Women are portrayed as freedom and can be creative and unbeatable
7.	"I am classy, I'm modern, I live by my own design"	Adjective and declarative sentence	Self-defined and Existential freedom	Women are portrayed as freedom, and they can do everything they want

Discussion

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the song lyrics *I Am Woman* by Emmy Meli portrays womanhood as an empowered, autonomous, and self-defined identity through the strategic use of linguistic features aligned with feminist approach Simone de Beauvoir. The repeated use of the first-person pronoun “I” in the lyric “*I am woman, I am fearless*” functions as a key linguistic marker of subjectivity. According to Halliday and Hasan (1989), first-person pronouns position the speaker as the central subject of discourse. From Simone de Beauvoir’s feminist perspective, this construction challenges the traditional representation of women as the Other, as the woman speaks for herself and asserts agency. The repetition and declarative sentence structure reinforce confidence and authority, constructing womanhood as fearless and self-assured rather than passive or dependent.

Similarly, the lyric “*I’m sexy, I’m divine*” employs evaluative adjectives and repetition to express self-awareness and self-valuation. Linguistically, adjectives such as

“sexy” and “divine” function as positive self-descriptions that redefine femininity beyond physical objectification. Beauvoir (1953) argues that patriarchal discourse often reduces women to objects of male desire. However, in this lyric, women reclaim descriptive power by defining themselves, thus transforming sexuality into a form of self-awareness and empowerment rather than objectification.

The line “*I’m anything I want*” further illustrates resistance against societal limitations. The use of a parallel clause emphasizes limitless possibility, while the implied negation of restriction challenges patriarchal boundaries imposed on women. Beauvoir’s concept of becoming is relevant here, as she emphasizes that womanhood is not a fixed identity, but an ongoing process shaped by choice and freedom (Beauvoir, 1953). Linguistically, the structure of the clause highlights autonomy, reinforcing the idea that women have the freedom to construct their identities without external constraints.

Moreover, the lyric “*I am feminine, I am masculine*” explicitly rejects rigid gender binaries. Through repetition and declarative sentences, the song linguistically balances traditionally gendered traits. Beauvoir critiques the binary opposition between masculinity and femininity, arguing that such divisions are socially constructed to maintain male dominance (Beauvoir, 1953). By embracing both identities, the woman is portrayed as a self-defined subject who transcends socially imposed gender norms, reflecting existential freedom and authenticity.

The self-referential expression in “*I feel what I want and somehow it finds me*” highlights emotional autonomy and internal identity formation. The verb “*feel*” functions as a mental process that indicates consciousness and self-awareness. According to Beauvoir, liberation begins when women recognize their internal experiences as valid sources of identity rather than conforming to external expectations (Beauvoir, 1953). Linguistically, this line emphasizes inward agency, portraying womanhood as constructed from within rather than imposed by society.

Furthermore, the lyric “*I am unbeatable, I’m creative*” employs adjectives and declarative sentences to portray womanhood beyond limitation. These lexical choices linguistically associate women with strength and creativity, qualities traditionally marginalized in female representations. Beauvoir criticizes cultural portrayals that confine women to restrictive roles, arguing that such limitations deny women their existential freedom (Beauvoir, 1953). These lyrics challenge those limitations by presenting women as capable, innovative, and unconstrained.

Finally, the lyric “*I am classy, I’m modern, I live by my own design*” encapsulates the overarching theme of self-definition and existential freedom. The sequence of adjectives and the declarative clause “*I live by my own design*” linguistically foreground independence and agency. This aligns closely with Beauvoir’s assertion that authentic womanhood emerges when women actively design their own lives rather than accepting roles prescribed by patriarchal society (Beauvoir, 1953). The woman is portrayed as a free subject who determines her own values, lifestyle, and identity.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that *I Am Woman* constructs womanhood as empowered, autonomous, and self-determined through the interplay of linguistic features and feminist ideology. By employing first-person pronouns, repetition, evaluative adjectives, and declarative structures, the song reinforces Simone de Beauvoir’s feminist vision of women as conscious subjects engaged in an ongoing process of becoming. The song thus functions as a contemporary feminist text that resists patriarchal representations and redefines womanhood as freedom, agency, and self-expression.

The analysis reveals that womanhood in *I Am Woman* is consistently portrayed as empowered, resilient, and self-defined. The frequent use of first-person pronouns positions

women as speaking subjects with agency, while assertive declarative statements and positive evaluative adjectives reinforce confidence and strength. These linguistic features challenge traditional patriarchal representations that depict women as passive or dependent.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the portrayal of womanhood in *I Am Woman* song lyrics by Emmy Meli through a feminist literary lens. The findings indicate that the lyrics construct womanhood as empowered, resilient, and autonomous, positioning women as active subjects rather than objects within social discourse. By challenging patriarchal representations, the song contributes to the rearticulation of womanhood in popular culture.

Theoretically, this study reinforces feminist literary and linguistic features by demonstrating how popular song lyrics function as sites of ideological negotiation and gender reconstruction. Practically, the findings suggest that empowering music can play a meaningful role in shaping positive perceptions of womanhood and promoting gender awareness. Future research may expand this analysis by employing comparative or multimodal approaches to further explore feminist representation in popular music. Moreover, the lyrics operate as an alternative discursive space that resists socially imposed limitations and gendered expectations. By emphasizing autonomy and self-definition, the song reconstructs womanhood as an active and self-determined identity. This finding aligns with feminist theoretical perspectives that conceptualize identity as discursively formed and politically significant.

Importantly, this study demonstrates that popular music can serve as an accessible and influential medium for feminist expression. Through clear and affirming language, *I Am Woman* communicates feminist values to a broad audience, contributing to the normalization of empowered representations of women in contemporary culture.

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