

GENDER AND POWER REPRESENTATION IN THE *SIT STILL, LOOK PRETTY* BY DAYA: SARA MILLS' CDA

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Abstract

The present research aims to analyze the representation of gender and power in the lyrics of *Sit Still, Look Pretty* by Daya using Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis. This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the social phenomena reflected in the song lyrics and how they shape public perceptions of gender roles and power dynamics. The method used is critical discourse analysis, which emphasizes the relationship between language and power within the lyrics. The data for this study consists of the lyrics of *Sit Still, Look Pretty*, obtained from a valid source. Data collection was carried out through direct observation of the lyrics, which were then categorized based on the themes of gender and power. The data analysis technique employs Sara Mills' theory, focusing on the position of subjects and objects in the lyrics and the perspectives used. The findings reveal that the song portrays resistance to gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms. Daya positions women as independent subjects who reject traditional roles. This study concludes that the song reinforces values of female independence and challenges the patriarchal norms that remain dominant in society.

Keywords: Gender; Power; Critical Discourse Analysis

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi gender dan kekuasaan dalam lirik lagu *Sit Still, Look Pretty* oleh Daya menggunakan analisis wacana kritis Sara Mills. Penelitian ini memilih pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif untuk menggali fenomena sosial yang muncul dalam lirik lagu dan bagaimana lirik tersebut merefleksikan serta membentuk persepsi masyarakat mengenai peran gender dan kekuasaan. Metode yang digunakan adalah analisis wacana kritis yang menekankan hubungan antara bahasa dan kekuasaan dalam lirik. Data penelitian berupa lirik lagu *Sit Still, Look Pretty* yang diperoleh dari sumber yang valid. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi langsung terhadap lirik lagu yang kemudian dikelompokkan berdasarkan tema gender dan kekuasaan. Teknik analisis data menggunakan teori Sara Mills, dengan fokus pada posisi subjek dan objek dalam lirik serta perspektif yang digunakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa lagu ini menggambarkan perlawanan terhadap stereotip gender dan norma patriarki. Daya menempatkan perempuan sebagai subjek independen yang menolak peran tradisional. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa lagu tersebut memperkuat nilai-nilai kemandirian perempuan dan menantang norma patriarki yang masih dominan dalam masyarakat.

Kata kunci: Gender; Kekuasaan; Analisis Wacana Kritis

INTRODUCTION

Popular music has long been an effective medium for expressing views on various social issues, including gender and power. Through music, messages that might be difficult to convey directly can be delivered in a more engaging and accessible way (May et al., 2020). The lyrics of popular songs often reflect societal perspectives on these issues or even serve as a critique of norms that are considered restrictive. These songs can provide artists with a platform to voice their concerns about gender stereotypes, injustices, or power imbalances still present in society (Patience, 2023). In this way, music becomes not only a source of entertainment but also a tool for building awareness and challenging existing social boundaries. Lyrics that highlight themes of gender and power, for example, can open up broader conversations about the roles of men and women and create space for perspectives that may have previously been overlooked (Ruanglertsilp, 2022). As time progresses, music continues to act as both a mirror and a catalyst for social change, allowing society to re-examine its values and reassess views on critical issues.

In the modern era, gender issues are increasingly prevalent in song lyrics which reflecting widespread discontent with rigid and outdated stereotypes. Musicians today are not only writing about love or personal experiences but are also using their songs as a medium to voice their dissatisfaction with restrictive gender constructs (Ramstedt, 2023). Through honest and meaningful lyrics, they aim to challenge traditional perceptions of gender roles and give a voice to those who feel underrepresented in society. These songs have become a powerful platform, not only because of their broad reach but also due to music's ability to resonate deeply with

listeners' emotions (Lin et al., 2024). For example, female musicians often use lyrics to reject stereotypes that confine women to certain roles, such as obedient wives or mothers. Instead, they express freedom, ambition, and the courage to be themselves beyond societal boundaries. Male musicians are also highlighting the importance of rejecting toxic masculinity. In this way, their songs help reshape how we view gender, offering a more inclusive perspective and inspiring change within society.

The song *Sit Still, Look Pretty* by Daya voices resistance against traditional norms that expect women to simply "sit still and look pretty." Through her lyrics, Daya expresses a desire for women to break free from stereotypes that reduce them to passive roles, as if their lives are limited to following others' wishes or waiting to be saved. This song amplifies the voices of women who want to stand on their own, pursue their ambitions, and chart their life paths without gender-based limitations. Daya firmly rejects the notion that a woman's happiness depends on someone else, especially a man. Through lyrics like "*I don't wanna sit still, look pretty*," she asserts women's right to dream, fight, and succeed on their own terms. This song is not merely a personal expression, but a broader message for female listeners to boldly claim their freedom and value themselves as independent individuals.

Critical discourse analysis is essential in understanding how gender representation is formed and expressed in various forms of text, including song lyrics (Qazalbash et al., 2021). This approach provides researchers with tools to delve into hidden or implicit messages related to gender, as well as how the roles and positions of women and men are portrayed in society. Through critical discourse analysis, we can identify how texts influence and

even sustain certain gender power dynamics and hierarchies, for instance, by utilizing stereotypes or narratives that favor one group (Lazar, 2005). In the context of song lyrics, this approach helps unpack whether women are positioned as active subjects or merely passive objects within the narrative. This analysis also reveals how symbols and word choices play a role in either reinforcing or challenging existing gender norms.

Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis theory offers a unique perspective in understanding how gender is represented in texts, particularly by focusing on the positioning of subjects and objects (Mills, 2002, 2003, 2009). This approach not only looks at what is said in the text, but also at how the position of the reader or listener contributes to shaping the understanding of the message. Mills argues that in many texts, women are often placed as passive objects, while men are presented as active and dominant subjects. Through this theory, we can explore how song lyrics—especially those that critique gender norms—create different positions for women and men.

As a theoretical framework, Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis theory is relevant in the analysis of songs like *Sit Still, Look Pretty*, which explicitly rejects traditional female roles. Mills' approach allows us to understand how Daya, through her lyrics, positions women as active and independent subjects. It also helps us see how listeners, particularly women, can respond in ways that empower them, challenge stereotypes, and inspire change. Sara Mills' theory, with its focus on the positioning of subjects and objects, provides deeper insights into the power relations formed through gender representation in popular texts.

Research related to the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach using Sara Mills'

model has been conducted by various scholars. Nur and Riyadi's (2023) study analyzed gender bias in the da'wah texts of *Muslim.or.id*, employing Sara Mills' CDA to explore how gender is represented and positioned in the text. Asheva and Tasyarasita's (2022) research examined the representation of women in news articles, focusing on the subject-object positioning and how this narrative reflects gender ideology. Nurussaadah and Yudhawirawan's (2023) study analyzed the portrayal of women and acts of bullying in the film *Serendipity*, using Sara Mills' CDA to investigate subject-object positioning and viewer perspectives. Ayustin and Christin's (2022) research focused on investigating gender discrimination depicted in the series *Peaky Blinders* through a feminist lens, applying Sara Mills' CDA. Rahayu and Hamdani's (2023) study focused on online news reporting on rape, aiming to analyze the positioning of subjects and objects as well as the roles of writer and reader within the discourse. Lastly, Bungsu's (2020) research explored media bias in the reporting of celebrity news, using Sara Mills' CDA approach to examine how women are often positioned as objects in media discourse.

The present research aims to analyze the representation of gender and power in the lyrics of *Sit Still, Look Pretty* by Daya using Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis approach. The primary focus of this research is to explore how the lyrics of the song depict gender stereotypes and power inequalities. The study also seeks to understand how power and gender norms are maintained through the medium of music. The gap in the research lies in the lack of in-depth analysis regarding gender representation in popular songs using critical discourse theory. The novelty of this research is the application of Sara Mills' theory to analyze a song that

portrays a rejection of traditional gender roles. The benefit of this study is to provide new insights into how songs can serve as tools for critiquing and challenging existing gender norms. This research is also expected to enrich gender studies and critical discourse analysis in the context of popular music.

METHOD

The research approach is a qualitative descriptive method aimed at exploring representations of gender and power in the lyrics of *Sit Still, Look Pretty* by Daya using Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis. This qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand social phenomena that emerge within the song's lyrics and examine how these lyrics reflect and shape societal perceptions of gender roles and power. The study focuses on analyzing the song's text, with consideration of the social and cultural context behind the creation of the lyrics. The research method employed is critical discourse analysis, which emphasizes how language in the song's lyrics reflects power, values, and ideologies present in society. This analysis enables the researcher to explore how gender representation in the song functions as a response to existing norms and whether the lyrics challenge or reinforce traditional gender constructions.

The research data consists of the lyrics of *Sit Still, Look Pretty* by Daya, obtained from legitimate and verified sources. Data collection was conducted through direct observation of the song lyrics, which were then categorized according to themes of gender and power appearing within them. After data collection, the data analysis technique used is Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis, focusing on the relationship between language and power in the text. This analysis will highlight how

the subject and object positions within the lyrics, as well as the perspectives employed, depict social views on gender and power. The findings are presented narratively, describing the analyzed results in a descriptive format to provide a clear picture of how these song lyrics represent women from a stronger and more independent perspective.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research findings on the representation of gender and power in the lyrics of the song "Sit Still, Look Pretty" by Daya. This study connects the findings with previous research and relevant theories. The study uses Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis approach to explore how the language in the lyrics reflects, questions, and challenges the existing power structures.

Table 1: Analysis of the lyrics of *Sit Still, Look Pretty* using Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis model

Lyrics	Subject-Object Position	Perspective	Analysis of Gender and Power Representation
Could dress up, to get love, and guess what? I'm never gonna be that girl who's living in a Barbie world	Subject: Singer ('I') Object: Stereotypical woman ('Barbie girl')	Perspective of rejection toward feminine stereotypes.	The singer rejects gender stereotypes that demand women to conform to the ideal expectations of a 'Barbie world.'
Could wake up, and make up, and play dumb Pretending that I need a boy who's gonna treat me like a toy	Subject: Singer Object: Dominant men	Critical perspective on societal expectations.	Rejects the subordinate position where women are seen as objects for male pleasure.
I know the other girlies wanna wear expensive things, like diamond rings	Subject: Singer Object: Materialistic women	Perspective of critique toward materialistic values in other women.	Expresses disinterest in materialistic values that are commonly accepted among some women.
But I don't wanna be the puppet that you're playing on a string	Subject: Singer Object: Society/ patriarchy	Perspective of rebellion against societal control.	By likening women to puppets, the singer critiques the control society/patriarchy holds over women, a control she opposes.
This queen don't need a king	Subject: Singer Object: The concept of needing a 'king'/man	Independent perspective, rejecting dependence.	Depicts female strength and independence without a man, challenging the norm that women need men as complements.
Oh, I don't know what you've been told But this girl right here's gonna rule the world	Subject: Singer Object: Public opinion	Perspective of confidence and ambition.	Counters the view that women should submit or 'sit still' and asserts her desire for power.
You get off on your 9-to-5 Dream of picket fences and trophy wives	Subject: Society Object: Singer	Critique of traditional household concepts.	Highlights that the traditional role of women as 'trophy wives' is something the singer does not desire.
But no, I'm never gonna be 'cause I don't wanna be No, I don't wanna sit still, look pretty	Subject: Singer Object: Societal norms	Perspective of rebellion against societal expectations.	Rejects the passive role often imposed on women to 'sit still and look pretty.'
Mr. Right could be nice, for one night But then he wanna take control and I would rather fly solo	Subject: Singer Object: Mr. Right/ men	Independent perspective of choosing not to be bound.	Emphasizes independence and the desire to avoid male control in relationships.
That Snow White, she did it right in her life Had seven men to do the chores 'cause that's not what a lady's for	Subject: Snow White Object: Seven men	Questions traditional gender roles.	Reverses traditional gender roles by showing the 'seven men' doing household tasks, challenging the norm that women should handle domestic duties.

The only thing that a boy's gonna give a girl for free's captivity	Subject: Singer Object: Men who restrict	Perspective of critique toward traditional gender roles in relationships.	Emphasizes that women should be cautious of relationships that limit their freedom.
And I might love me some vanilla, but I'm not that sugar sweet Call me HBIC	Subject: Singer Object: Those who think women should be 'sweet'	Perspective of firmness and self-confidence.	Asserts that women need not always be soft or 'sweet,' but can be assertive.
Sure I'm a pretty girl up in a pretty world But they say pretty hurts and I don't wanna sit still	Subject: Singer Object: Painful beautiful world	Critique of harmful beauty demands.	Rejects the passive role demanded of women and acknowledges the social pressure associated with beauty.

In the present research, the lyrics of *Sit Still, Look Pretty* by Daya are analyzed using Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis approach to explore how gender and power representations are articulated. The lyrics showcase a boldness in challenging gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms that often position women as objects, both in personal and social relationships. Sara Mills' approach, which focuses on subject-object positions and point of view, is highly relevant in analyzing how Daya conveys her message, particularly regarding the rejection of traditional societal expectations. In this song, women are not portrayed merely as passive individuals or as "fulfillments" for men, but as independent figures who refuse to conform to norms that limit their freedom and identity.

Daya creates a narrative that frames women as active subjects who have control over their lives. Through lyrics like "*This queen don't need a king*," she challenges the common view that women always need a man's presence to feel complete or valued. Within Sara Mills' theoretical framework, Daya positions herself as an empowered subject, resisting social norms that place women as objects within relationships. This song reverses traditional power dynamics and asserts that women need not be passive or submit to binding social expectations. Daya's

perspective serves as a form of empowerment, reshaping traditional perceptions of gender.

Additionally, the lyrics also critique the concept of women as objects of beauty and pleasure for men. In the line "*Could wake up, and make up, and play dumb*," Daya highlights how women are often expected to look attractive and act sweet to gain attention or love from men. Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis allows us to understand a deeper critique of women being portrayed as "objects" or "decorations" in society. Daya rejects this role, asserting that she will not be a woman who exists solely to satisfy men's visual or emotional expectations. This conveys a critical subject position, challenging gender constructions that pressure women to appear and behave in ways that please men.

On the other hand, Daya also critiques the culture of materialism that often involves women as objects of consumption. Lyrics like "*I know the other girlies wanna wear expensive things, like diamond rings*" satirize the notion that a woman's value is measured by her ability to own or wear luxurious items. In critical discourse analysis, this reveals how women's object positions have been constructed by society to align with materialistic values that are actually unrelated to their true identity. Sara Mills illustrates that positioning women as objects or subjects in such discourse

can reinforce or dismantle certain value systems. In this case, Daya deconstructs the social constructs that view women merely as “display items” or “commodities” in society.

Furthermore, Daya expresses a rejection of the concept of women as “trophy wives,” who serve merely as aesthetic complements to men in marriage. In the lyric *“Dream of picket fences and trophy wives,”* Daya illustrates society’s expectations that often confine women to passive, bound roles. In Sara Mills’ discourse analysis, women positioned as objects frequently lose their authentic identities, as they are only viewed through the lens of male perspectives or social needs. Daya firmly states that she does not wish to be a wife who simply fulfills visual or social expectations. This reflects a rebellion against traditional views that seek to keep women within a framework shaped by patriarchal dominance.

Other lyrics, such as *“But I don’t wanna be the puppet that you’re playing on a string,”* show that Daya refuses to be a puppet or figure controlled by others, especially by men or societal expectations. This conveys a strong stance on women’s freedom and authority over their own lives. In Sara Mills’ analysis, Daya’s subject position reflects a rejection of external control that restricts women. Freedom is a powerful theme in these lyrics, illustrating that women have the right to choose their own path without being subject to others’ control or influence. Through a strong subject position, Daya promotes an important message about women’s right to independently shape their own lives.

Furthermore, the lyric *“That Snow White, she did it right in her life”* suggests a reversal of traditional roles. Daya highlights that the character Snow White is surrounded by seven men who assist her, subverting the stereotype that women must handle domestic matters.

In Sara Mills’ analysis, this demonstrates how gender constructs can be dismantled and reshaped from a more progressive perspective. Daya uses this reference to emphasize that women do not have to be confined to rigid domestic roles, and that it is possible for them to reject roles historically assigned to them. This serves as a symbolic representation of women’s power to choose their own roles in life.

Daya also uses the lyric *“The only thing that a boy’s gonna give a girl for free’s captivity”* to portray relationships that restrict women’s freedom. Daya suggests that relationships with men often limit women, rather than providing them with freedom. In Sara Mills’ analysis, this represents a rejection of relationships based on power imbalances, where women lose control over their freedom and identity. The lyric implies that women should not sacrifice their freedom for the sake of unequal relationships. It emphasizes the importance for women to maintain their freedom and autonomy without feeling pressured by social expectations.

Finally, the lyric *“Sure I’m a pretty girl up in a pretty world, but they say pretty hurts”* illustrates how beauty often becomes a source of pressure for women. Sara Mills’ discourse analysis helps identify that women’s position in this discourse is frequently trapped by the demand to “look pretty” according to societal standards, which can be harmful. Daya acknowledges that beauty is desirable, but she also critiques how it can become a burden. Women not only have to meet visual standards but also face criticism and pressure due to these demands. Through this, Daya highlights how society’s construction of beauty can serve as a tool of control over women, positioning them as visual objects while disregarding their individuality and true qualities.

This study is closely related to previous research examining gender representation in media, particularly in song lyrics. One relevant study is Kiprotich and Chang'orok's (2017) research, which discusses how popular media often creates and reinforces feminine stereotypes, casting women as objects bound by norms of beauty and obedience. In this context, the lyrics of *Sit Still, Look Pretty* by Daya offer a perspective that contrasts with such research. Through her lyrics, Daya expresses dissatisfaction with traditional female roles and challenges societal expectations, promoting a stronger, independent female identity. This study contributes to the understanding of how media can be used to question and reform existing social norms.

This study is connected to the work of Gray (2019), who examines how pop music functions as a tool for conveying social and cultural criticism. Milestone and Meyer (2020) argue that pop music often plays a role in either reinforcing or transforming societal understandings of various issues, including gender. In the lyrics of *Sit Still, Look Pretty*, Daya utilizes the pop music genre to voice a critique of traditional gender roles and offer a more progressive alternative for women. This study extends Milestone and Meyer's understanding by demonstrating how music can serve as an effective tool for empowerment, encouraging women to embrace their strength and reject roles imposed by society.

Furthermore, this study is also related to feminist theories that emphasize the importance of women's voices in media. The theories of Lorber and Farrell (1991) often discuss how gender constructions can reinforce social hierarchies. In this song's lyrics, Daya rejects identities created by patriarchy and portrays women as active agents in determining their own destinies.

Sara Mills' critical discourse approach helps analyze how the language in the lyrics reflects, questions, and challenges the underlying power structures. This underscores that gender representation is not only a reflection of social reality but also a tool for social change.

Finally, this study emphasizes the importance of discourse analysis in understanding the interaction between language, gender, and power. The theory used by Sara Mills, which highlights the relationship between discourse and power, provides a solid framework for analyzing the lyrics of this song. By applying this theory, the study finds that Daya's lyrics not only express a rejection of traditional female roles but also assert a desire to change the established narratives in society. Thus, this research enriches the existing literature by offering new insights into how gender representation in songs can serve as a tool of resistance against patriarchal power, as well as inspire women to embrace their strength and independence.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the lyrics of *Sit Still, Look Pretty* by Daya depict a resistance against gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms through the perspective of Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis. Daya positions women as independent subjects and rejects traditional roles that place them as objects for the benefit of men or society. In terms of power representation, the song highlights women's independence, which is not reliant on male recognition or validation. The song challenges norms that often consider women valuable only in traditional roles, such as wives or aesthetic objects. Daya, as the singer, gives voice to women to define their own identities and strength, free from social

standards that are often unequal. The analysis using Sara Mills' theory reveals that the song promotes values of female independence and strength while challenging the patriarchal norms that still dominate.

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