

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Music has long been recognized as a powerful medium that resonates deeply with individuals, particularly among young adults (Nandi, 2025). Music does not merely entertain, but operates as a symbolic system that carries social values, emotional norms, and identity cues across generations (Rehfeldt et al., 2021). For adolescents and young adults, such narratives often function as reference points through which they learn how intimacy, responsibility, and care are expected to be performed in relationships (Couture et al., 2023). Research on youth romantic experiences shows that young people do not form their expectations of love in isolation, but through repeated exposure to stories and symbols that circulate in popular culture (Couture et al., 2023).

Studies on music as a cultural inheritance system emphasize that songs transmit shared understandings of emotion, relationships, and social behavior by repeatedly associating specific narratives with emotional experiences. These recurring portrayals influence how young individuals interpret emotional conflict, responsibility, and vulnerability within romantic contexts, often normalizing certain relational patterns while marginalizing others. Broader analyses also indicate that gender norms, including expectations surrounding masculinity and emotional competence, are shaped and reinforced through repeated exposure to such representations (Hassan, 2025). When young listeners engage with music

that portrays particular patterns of male behavior in relationships, these portrayals contribute to how ideals of maturity, responsibility, and relational conduct are culturally understood and reproduced.

As a beautiful and meaningful art form, songs are widely enjoyed by individuals and groups alike. Jamalus (1988) defines a song as a vocal work of art performed with musical instruments, while Hornby, in Setiawati & Maryani (2018), describes it as a short poem or series of verses set to music and intended to be sung. Furthermore, Hornby in Kanzunnudin et al. (2022) states that lyrics are a written work created by someone who arranges beautiful words with deep meaning. Through song lyrics, artists can deliver messages that invite listeners to think and feel the messages more deeply. Therefore, understanding song lyrics requires more than just enjoying their melody; it involves interpreting the meaning and emotion behind the words.

A systematic review on song lyrics shows that language in songs often reflects personal and social experiences, making lyrics suitable for linguistic analysis as representations of lived reality (Simbolon, Suhadi, & Pratiwy, 2025). As meanings about relationships and identity are communicated through song lyrics, these texts also construct expectations about individual roles within romantic contexts. One recurring role that emerges in such representations is the male figure in relationships. Media representations play an important role in shaping gender norms by repeatedly presenting certain traits, values, and roles as appropriate for men across different cultural contexts (Hassan, 2025). These portrayals do not appear as direct rules but are communicated through patterns of behavior, emotional

response, and relational positioning. As a result, audiences gradually learn to recognize and evaluate male identity through repeated exposure to these representations.

Repeated media exposure contributes to the internalization of idealized images of masculinity. Research on cultivation effects indicates that continuous engagement with media content influences how individuals perceive ideal masculinity and male identity, particularly in relation to emotional maturity, responsibility, and relational conduct (Clemens, 2013). When similar representations of male behavior appear consistently across media texts, they shape shared expectations about how men should act in romantic relationships. In this process, the ideal man emerges not as a fixed definition but as an accumulated image formed through recurring portrayals.

In romantic narratives, men are often positioned through specific relational roles that carry social expectations. A scoping review of men's experiences in romantic relationships shows that male identity is commonly associated with roles such as partner, emotional regulator, and decision maker within intimate contexts (Himawan et al., 2024). These roles reflect broader cultural assumptions about masculinity and responsibility in relationships. When such relational roles are repeatedly represented in cultural texts, including song lyrics, they contribute to the construction of an implicit ideal man that listeners interpret through language, behavior, and emotional stance rather than through explicit explanation.

According to R. W. Connell (2005), masculinity is best understood as a configuration of practice shaped by gender relations rather than a fixed or natural

trait shared by all men. He explains that masculinity is socially and historically produced, meaning that it changes across time and context. Connell rejects biological explanations such as aggression, arguing that masculinity is socially constructed and shaped by power relations. For Connell, masculinity is relational because it gains meaning only in relation to femininity. Defining masculinity, therefore, involves three linked aspects: a person's position within the gender order, the gendered practices they perform, and the effects of these practices on personality, culture, and lived experience. He situates masculinity within a broader structure of gender relations consisting of power, production, and cathexis. Within this structure, multiple masculinities form a hierarchy, including hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, and marginalised masculinities.

While Connell's framework explains how power relations and patriarchal structures shape masculinity, it is also necessary to consider how these structures are reproduced through everyday actions and representations, rather than existing as an innate identity. Masculinity in this sense is maintained through repeated practices rather than fixed biological traits, an idea that resonates with Butler's (1990) broader observation that gender more generally is sustained through repetition. Media representations play a key role in reinforcing these performances, as recurring portrayals present certain behaviors and emotional responses as appropriate for men (Hassan, 2025). Through repeated exposure, masculine identity becomes associated with patterns of conduct that appear natural and expected in social and relational contexts.

Further developments in queer theory complicate rigid understandings of masculinity by questioning the assumption that masculinity belongs exclusively to male bodies. As discussed by Hassan (2025), scholars such as Halberstam and Sedgwick emphasize that alternative masculinities can exist outside traditional gender binaries. Halberstam's concept of female masculinity illustrates how masculine traits and practices can be performed beyond male embodiment, challenging dominant norms that link masculinity strictly to men (Halberstam, 1998; Hassan, 2025). These perspectives situate media representations of masculinity within a broader discourse on gender fluidity and resistance, supporting the view that masculinity in cultural texts, including song lyrics, is a performative and socially regulated construct rather than a fixed identity.

These perspectives show that the idea of the ideal man in contemporary pop music is not presented as a fixed definition but is constructed through repeated representations of behavior, emotion, and relational roles. Media narratives, particularly song lyrics, communicate meanings about relationships and identity that gradually shape expectations of male conduct among young audiences. Connell's view of masculinity as a socially produced configuration of practice explains how male identity is shaped by power relations, relational positioning, and lived experience, continuously reproduced through repeated actions and representations that follow cultural norms.

When applied to contemporary pop albums, these frameworks allow the ideal man to be understood as an implicit construct that emerges through language rather than explicit instruction. Therefore, to examine how these meanings are built

and circulated in song lyrics, this study requires an analytical approach that focuses on language as a resource for constructing experience, relationships, and identity. For this purpose, Systemic Functional Linguistics is employed to systematically analyze how linguistic patterns in lyrics represent masculinity and the idea of the ideal man.

According to Halliday (2004), Systemic Functional Linguistics views language as a resource for making meaning rather than a set of formal rules. Language is functional because it is shaped by the social purposes it serves and the contexts in which it is used. In this framework, grammar is understood as a system of choices through which speakers and writers construct meaning in texts, and language is considered a form of social semiotics connected to social action, experience, and interaction. Halliday (2004) explains that language simultaneously performs three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction represents experience through processes, participants, and circumstances; the interpersonal metafunction enacts social relationships through mood and modality; and the textual metafunction organizes information through theme and cohesion. These metafunctions operate together in every clause, allowing SFL to provide systematic tools for examining how meanings are constructed and organized in texts.

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In relation to this, song lyrics become a compelling object of analysis because they use language to construct meaning about experience, emotion, and relationships. As creative texts, lyrics organise words in patterned ways that allow listeners to interpret identity and relational roles through language. Scholars such

as Rusdiyanto and Astutik (2018) note that songs communicate psychological states and shape personal understanding, while Maoula, Simanjuntak, and Sihombing (2022) highlight their role in self-actualization. Because song lyrics communicate emotional and relational meanings through language, they provide a suitable medium for examining how masculinity and gender roles are represented.

While the linguistic qualities of song lyrics allow researchers to identify patterns of meaning related to gender representation, a deeper analysis is required to understand how these meanings are constructed through language. Systemic Functional Linguistics provides a framework for examining how language functions to represent experience, enact relationships, and organise meaning within a text (Halliday, 2004). Through this perspective, lyrics can be analysed as texts in which grammatical choices realise experiential meanings, interpersonal positioning, and textual coherence. Connell's (2005) theory of masculinity supports this approach by conceptualising masculinity as a configuration of practice that is socially produced and relational rather than fixed or innate.

When applied to song lyrics, masculinity can be examined as a pattern of practices and positions that are represented through language, including expressions of emotion, responsibility, desire, and relational roles, maintained through repeated linguistic and behavioural patterns that follow cultural norms. This idea aligns with Butler's (1990) broader account of gender. By combining SFL with masculinity theory, this study analyses song lyrics as meaningful texts in which the idea of the ideal man is constructed through patterned language choices, allowing masculinity to be examined as a product of representation and repetition within the text itself.

This study analyzes how a female pop artist, Sabrina Carpenter, represents the idea of the ideal man across the songs in her album *Man's Best Friend*, using Systemic Functional Linguistics to examine masculinity as a representational and performative process within contemporary pop lyrics.

Sabrina Carpenter's seventh studio album, *Man's Best Friend* (2025), marks a significant continuation of her artistic development following the success of the deluxe edition of *Short n' Sweet* (2024). The lead single, "Manchild," released on June 5, 2025, set the tone for the project with its Western-inspired music video that portrayed Carpenter navigating a desert landscape as a confident woman. The songs on this album showcase how Carpenter portrays masculinity through a female perspective. Each track offers a different angle on male behavior, ranging from emotional immaturity and performative confidence to vulnerability, manipulation, and detachment. These songs reveal a consistent underlying theme in which Carpenter examines the ways men navigate desire, responsibility, and emotional expression in modern relationships.

Although existing studies highlight the literary qualities of songs and their ability to communicate emotions, symbols, and cultural meanings, most research focuses on how songs generally represent gendered ideas or how male performers construct masculinity. Prior works explore the emotional and symbolic dimensions of lyrics, the social functions of music, and shifting masculine ideals in various cultural contexts, yet they rarely examine how female artists construct masculinity through their own narrative voice. In addition, earlier studies often emphasize linguistic or thematic analysis without integrating masculinity theory and gender

performativity to examine how masculine identities are constructed through patterned language use. This study addresses this gap by examining how Sabrina Carpenter's *Man's Best Friend* represents the idea of the ideal man in her song lyrics from a female perspective using Systemic Functional Linguistics based on Connell's theory of masculinity.

1.2 Research Question

1. How is the image of the idealized man linguistically represented in the song lyrics of Sabrina Carpenter's *Man's Best Friend* album?

1.3 Purpose of The Study

1. To examine how Sabrina Carpenter's selected song lyrics from *Man's Best Friend* albums linguistically represent the image of the "idealized man" in contemporary pop music.

1.4 Scope of The Study

This study is limited to analyzing song lyrics from Sabrina Carpenter's *Man's Best Friend* (2025), which includes "Manchild," "Tears," "My Man on Willpower," "Sugar Talking," "We Almost Broke Up Again Last Night," "Nobody's Son," "Never Getting Laid," "When Did You Get Hot?" "Go Go Juice," "Don't Worry I'll Make You Worry," "House Tour," and "Goodbye." The analysis focuses on how these lyrics linguistically construct and represent masculinity and the idea of the ideal man from a female artist's perspective. The study applies R. W. Connell's theory of masculinity as an interpretive framework to understand masculinity as a socially produced and relational construct. Systemic Functional

Linguistics is employed as the primary analytical approach to examine how meanings are realized through language, particularly through ideational meanings reflected in grammatical patterns within the lyrics.

Because transitivity primarily reveals what is explicitly represented in a text, it is limited in its capacity to account for meanings that are implied rather than directly stated such as the image of the idealized man, which this study argues exists in the lyrics only as an absent standard rather than an explicitly depicted figure. To partially address this limitation, brief attention is also given to selected instances of modality within the interpersonal metafunction, particularly where they help illuminate the relations of power and emotional stance that support this study's central argument. This attention to modality is limited to select recurring clauses rather than a systematic analysis of mood and modality across the entire corpus.

This research does not examine musical elements such as melody, instrumentation, or performance style. The scope is restricted to textual analysis of song lyrics as linguistic texts, focusing on how language constructs representations of male identity and relational roles within contemporary pop music.

1.5 Significance of The Study

This study holds significance for linguistic and cultural studies by examining how Sabrina Carpenter's *Man's Best Friend* constructs representations of masculinity and the idea of the ideal man from a female narrative perspective, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. By drawing on Connell's theory

of masculinity, the study contributes to a clearer understanding of how different forms of masculinity are represented as relational and socially produced practices within contemporary pop lyrics.

This study contributes to linguistic analysis by demonstrating the applicability of Systemic Functional Linguistics in examining song lyrics as meaningful texts. More specifically, it offers a methodological account of how transitivity analysis can be used to identify an implicit, unstated standard through patterns of contrast and absence rather than direct description, a contribution that may inform similar analyses of implicit representation in other popular music texts. By focusing on language rather than musical elements or broader sociocultural discourse, this research highlights the value of SFL as a systematic tool for analyzing popular music lyrics. Overall, the study enriches discussions in linguistics, gender studies, and popular culture by offering insights into how masculinity is linguistically represented in contemporary pop music through the perspective of a female artist.

1.6 State of The Art

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Studies on song lyrics have increasingly positioned popular music as a site where identity, emotion, and social expectations are shaped through patterned language use. Rahayu, Puspitasari, and Widyaningrum (2026), for instance, analyze *The Greatest Love of All* by Whitney Houston using Systemic Functional

Linguistics (SFL), demonstrating how ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions reflect themes of self-empowerment and responsibility. Similarly, Amalia, Ramadhani, Dewi, and Rosiana (2026) analyze Fix You by Coldplay, showing how declarative clauses and modality realise emotional support and relational positioning. Daryanto (2022) also analyzes interpersonal meaning in a contemporary pop song by The Weeknd, revealing how mood, pronoun use, and modality represent intimacy and vulnerability. These studies demonstrate that SFL provides systematic tools for examining how experiential and interpersonal meanings shape identity and emotional stance within lyrics. However, their focus remains primarily on linguistic structure and individual emotional expression rather than on representations of gendered ideals.

Beyond linguistic analysis, scholarship on masculinity emphasizes that male identity is socially produced and relational. Drawing on R. W. Connell's (2005) theory of masculinity, this study understands masculinity as a set of social practices shaped through gender relations and influenced by power, labour, and emotional relationships. These practices are continuously produced and reinforced through repeated behaviours that are guided by social norms, an idea that aligns with Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. This framework has been widely applied in gender studies to analyze how media texts reproduce hegemonic and alternative masculinities. Studies on media cultivation effects (Clemens, 2013; Hassan, 2025) further show that repeated exposure to gendered representations shapes shared expectations of emotional maturity, responsibility, and relational conduct among young audiences. Nevertheless, much of this research addresses media

representation at a general level and does not systematically connect masculinity theory with detailed linguistic analysis of song lyrics.

Existing research also tends to prioritize male performers when examining masculinity in music, often analyzing how male artists articulate their own masculine identities. While such studies illuminate explicit representations of masculinity, they rarely examine how masculinity is represented implicitly through the narrative voice of female artists. In addition, previous works frequently separate linguistic analysis from gender theory, focusing either on grammatical patterns or on thematic gender representation without integrating SFL and masculinity theory within a single analytical framework. As a result, there remains limited research that analyzes how the idea of the "ideal man" is represented through patterned language in contemporary pop albums, particularly from a female perspective.

This study addresses that gap by analyzing how Sabrina Carpenter images the idea of the ideal man in her album *Man's Best Friend*. By combining Systemic Functional Linguistics, primarily through transitivity analysis, with Connell's theory of masculinity and Hall's theory of representation, this research focuses on how the ideal man is represented through linguistic choices across the songs. Rather than discussing masculinity as an explicit theme, this study analyzes recurring transitivity patterns, supported by brief attention to modality in several recurring clauses, to examine how responsibility, emotional maturity, and relationship behaviour are represented in the lyrics. Through these patterns, the image of the idealized man emerges as an implicit standard, defined through contrast and absence rather than direct description. In doing so, it contributes to the field by

demonstrating how a female artist's narrative voice can construct an implicit standard of masculinity that is never explicitly stated in the text itself.

