



Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction in Stray Kids' Song "Youtiful": An EFL Gender Analysis

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Abstrak

K-pop kini telah menjadi media nonformal bagi pembelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) untuk mempelajari bahasa Inggris di luar kelas, terutama melalui lirik lagu yang bermakna emosional. Penelitian terdahulu mengenai K-pop dalam konteks EFL lebih banyak berfokus pada pembelajaran kosakata, budaya penggemar, atau konsumsi media, sehingga perhatian terhadap bagaimana lirik lagu dapat mendukung afirmasi diri dan pembentukan identitas pembelajar masih terbatas. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana lagu "Youtiful" dari Stray Kids mendukung *Self-Affirmation*, dan *Identity Construction* pada pembelajar EFL perempuan di Indonesia, dilihat dari perspektif gender (*Gender Perspective*). Menggunakan metode analisis isi kualitatif terstruktur yang dilengkapi dengan survei deskriptif, studi ini menggabungkan kuesioner berskala Likert dengan analisis isi kualitatif terhadap lirik resmi berbahasa Inggris dari lagu tersebut (*official English lyrics*). Temuan data kuantitatif menunjukkan respons positif di seluruh aspek, dengan *Self-Affirmation* and *Identity Construction* memperoleh skor rata-rata tertinggi ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.72$), diikuti oleh *EFL Engagement* ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.52$), dan *Gender Perspective* ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.53$). Hasil analisis kualitatif menunjukkan bahwa lagu ini membangun nilai diri melalui bahasa yang bersifat afirmatif, mendorong ikatan emosional melalui ungkapan bahasa Inggris yang mudah dipahami, serta menggambarkan maskulinitas melalui empati, kerentanan, dan dukungan emosional alih-alih jarak emosional. Hasil temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa musik populer yang memberikan dukungan emosional tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sumber daya pembelajaran bahasa, tetapi juga sebagai ruang refleksi emosi dan pengembangan identitas bagi pelajar EFL. Penelitian ini turut menegaskan nilai pedagogis lirik K-pop sebagai teks otentik pembelajaran untuk literasi emosi, eksplorasi identitas, dan keterlibatan berbahasa.

Kata Kunci: afirmasi, analisis gender, analisis konten, K-pop, pelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing

Abstract

K-pop has become an informal medium where English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners engage with English outside the classroom, particularly through emotionally meaningful lyrics. Previous studies on K-pop in EFL contexts have mainly focused on vocabulary learning, fandom culture, or media consumption, with limited attention to how song lyrics contribute to learners' self-affirmation and identity construction. This study examines how Stray Kids' song "Youtiful" supports Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction among Indonesian female EFL learners, viewed through a Gender Perspective. Applying a directed qualitative content analysis complemented by a descriptive survey, the study combined a systematic Likert-scale questionnaire with a descriptive approach and qualitative content analysis of the song's official English lyrics. The quantitative findings showed positive responses across all constructs, with Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction receiving the highest mean scores ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.72$), followed by EFL Engagement ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.52$) and Gender Perspective (GP) ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.53$). The qualitative analysis showed that the song builds self-worth through affirming language, encourages emotional connection through accessible English



expressions, and portrays masculinity through empathy, vulnerability, and emotional support rather than emotional distance. These results suggest that emotionally supportive popular music can help EFL learners reflect on their emotions and build their identities, in addition to serving as a resource for language development. The study also highlights the educational benefits of using K-pop songs as texts for language engagement, identity growth, and emotional literacy in the classroom.

Keywords: Content analysis, EFL learners, gender analysis, K-pop, self-affirmation

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Introduction

Nowadays, pop music is one of the most accessible forms of media that allows adolescent English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to expand their linguistic competence outside the classroom, providing developmental, emotionally engaging exposure rather than relying on systematic memorization (Sakti et al., 2025). Its pedagogical function, however, extends beyond simply teaching vocabulary. As Zahida et al. (2024) demonstrate through comparative lyrical analysis, engagement with global pop allows learners to build personal meaning, adapt their language styles to changing social contexts, and negotiate identities in ways that formal classrooms rarely facilitate.

This informal, affective, and deeply self-directed process of constructing both linguistic and social meaning finds a particularly visible expression in Indonesian adolescents' engagement with K-pop, in which listening to these artists has become a primary way to improve their English skills (Fatika & Wahyuningsih, 2024).

The motivations supporting this practice are not one-dimensional. Looking across recent studies, the reasons learners give for engaging with K-pop in English tend to fall into three overlapping groups. Some studies emphasize the emotional bond between artists and fans, which creates a personal motivation that a formal classroom cannot replace (Munawaro et al., 2025). Others point to K-pop's catchy melodies and multimedia design, which seem to make language learning feel less intimidating, so that comprehension feels more incidental than intentional (Kusumah & Ratri, 2026). Still others highlight how K-pop addresses the emotional pressures, social uncertainty, and emotional complexities of adolescence in ways that formal education cannot accomplish (Lou,

2024). What these studies share is a view of K-pop as more than entertainment. It is an emotional resource that learners use to feel connected, understood, and motivated to keep engaging with English.

Beneath all these factors lies a demographic reality that warrants deeper analytical examination: almost all deeply engaged K-pop listeners are female (Li, 2024). This pattern is not coincidental or simply sociological. It has important implications for how this music functions as a place for language learning, emotional recognition, and identity construction (Karima et al., 2022). Female listeners frequently feel a deep connection to the emotions and vulnerability in the lyrics. This pattern among listeners raises an important hypothesis: gender cannot be treated solely as a category; it is a social system that shapes how individuals experience the world. Risman (2004) explains that this structure operates across three distinct dimensions: the individual dimension (how individuals learn to be a certain gender), the interactional dimension (how society's expectations shape individuals' interactions), and the macro dimension (how large institutions shape individuals' understanding of gender). Applied to media analysis, this structural perspective makes it obvious how deeply fundamental gender roles influence emotional expression and language processing (Ayapbergenova et al., 2025). As Karima et al. (2022) demonstrate in their study of women's narratives, female perspectives are strongly shaped by the cultures in which they live. This makes women more likely to understand and share others' feelings through narrative empathy. They are not only listening to music; they are also trying to understand the figurative language and the artists' feelings in the lyrics, using the lyrics as a tool for connection (Pamungkas et al., 2022).

As K-pop continues to dominate the global music industry, Stray Kids, a South Korean boy group formed under JYP Entertainment in 2017, occupies an unusual position in global pop culture. Their music frequently adopts English as an essential form of expression rather than as a borrowed identity symbol. This is an intentional act of linguistic crossover by artists, where English is as unfamiliar to them as it is to their listeners (Stray Kids, n.d.; Stray Kids, 2026). This difference matters. As Indonesian EFL learners and Stray Kids' listeners, they are not listening to a native English speaker who is a perfect English user. Instead, they listen to English influenced by non-native English speakers, like Stray Kids themselves. The artists have learned English in their own way, with their own accents and styles, which makes it more relatable to their audience, who are also learning the language from the outside (Valerio-Ramos & Hernández-López, 2023). In this framework, English no longer functions as a symbol of Western cultural ownership but rather as a lingua franca. This language serves as a bridge across different cultures or countries, rather than one passed down within a particular culture (Kachru, 1985). These create identification that is not only about aesthetics (Dobrić et al., 2026). The motivation to interact with English changes from necessity to identification when EFL learners see their own non-native status reflected in the artists they admire. Puranto (2025) shows that this change leads to significantly deeper and more consistent linguistic engagement.

Casual listening can become a personal and meaningful experience by deeply feeling the music's emotions. Music is not only something to listen to for adolescents; it functions as a psychological tool, an affirming lyrical discourse that helps listeners process emotions and navigate identity development during a particularly unstable developmental stage (Chen, 2024). An excellent example of this is the song "Youtiful" by Stray Kids. The song was written by the leader Bang Chan, and is directly described as an expression of "warm and comfortable support and reassurance" for listeners who struggle to acknowledge their own worth (Stray Kids, 2023). The lyrics are addressed directly to the listener, making them feel as if someone is genuinely paying attention. It creates a sense of connection with

the singer rather than simply conveying a general message. By doing so, "Youtiful" goes beyond simply saying "love yourself"; it explores how adolescents discover their identities and feel good about them. This happens through language, expressing feelings that individuals may find difficult to express. It is like the song is helping them find their voice and understand their emotions. This process of self-discovery is very important, and the song captures it (Branje et al., 2021).

Taken together, the existing literature on K-pop in EFL contexts tends to stay in the same familiar space. It is preoccupied with fandom dynamics, basic vocabulary development, or visual performance, and it rarely treats the songs themselves as valuable linguistic texts (Fatika & Wahyuningsih, 2024; Kusumah & Ratri, 2026; Munawaro et al., 2025; Puranto, 2025). What is missing from this body of work is attention to affirmative discourse, that is, how the language of a song can support self-affirmation and identity construction among learners. This study addresses that gap. Its theoretical contribution is to bring self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988; Cohen & Sherman, 2014) and the view of gender as a social structure (Risman, 2004) together with directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to read a single English K-pop track, with the survey providing descriptive support for the patterns found in the lyrics. In doing so, it shows how a theory built to explain individual psychology can be used to interpret a cultural text, and how the gendered structure of listening can be examined through the lyrics' language. This extends existing knowledge in EFL and identity studies, which have mostly treated songs as vocabulary input rather than as spaces where learners work out who they are.

To examine these questions, the study applies a directed qualitative content analysis of the song's lyrics, complemented by a descriptive questionnaire-based survey. The analysis focuses on female listeners' emotional and linguistic responses to the song, while also incorporating limited data from male participants as supplementary comparative insight.

The significance of this study is both practical and scholarly. Practically, it gives teachers a concrete example of how a popular song can be used in the EFL classroom, not only for vocabulary drills but also as a prompt for reflective writing, discussion of emotional

vocabulary, and identity exploration. If a song like “Youtiful” can help learners feel affirmed and understood, then teachers have a reason to bring emotionally supportive music into their lessons. From a scholarly perspective, the study adds to the growing body of research on K-pop and language learning by shifting the focus from what learners consume to how they are affected by it, and by showing that the emotional and gendered dimensions of listening deserve as much attention as the linguistic ones.

To understand this state, the research asks how the affirmative discourse in “Youtiful” supports self-affirmation among Indonesian EFL learners, how gender shapes their emotional and linguistic engagement with the lyrics, and how these linguistic features contribute to identity construction in the EFL adolescent context.

Method

Research Design

This study applies a directed qualitative content analysis complemented by a descriptive questionnaire-based survey to examine the intersection of language, identity, and gender (Varsik & Gorochovskij, 2023). The primary methodological focus is a systematic qualitative examination of the song’s lyrics to understand how specific linguistic features construct meaning. To provide context for this textual analysis, a supplementary survey is used to establish a descriptive baseline of listeners’ responses to the affirmative discourse in “Youtiful.” This complementary approach was chosen because addressing how language affects English learners and how gender structures that reception benefits from both deep textual interpretation and a broader understanding of audience resonance.

Rather than functioning as equally integrated phases, the qualitative analysis forms the core of the investigation, while the quantitative survey serves strictly as supporting evidence. The lyrics are analyzed to uncover the psychological and emotional mechanisms at work within the text itself. Simultaneously, the questionnaire captures the breadth of the participants’ emotional responses, offering a broader view of how these themes are actually received. By combining these two types of data hierarchically, the research achieves a more complete and nuanced understanding of how “Youtiful” functions as an educational and

emotional resource for English learners, without claiming a strict explanatory sequence between the datasets.

Data Collection

The target population for this study consisted of Indonesian EFL learners. To ensure relevance to the research objectives, participants were selected based on two primary demographic criteria. First, they had to be actively learning English as a foreign language, either independently or through formal classes, without speaking it as a native language at home. Second, participants needed to be between the ages of late adolescence and young adulthood (17 to 30). This developmental stage is critical for identity formation and represents a period of heightened sensitivity to peer perception. It also closely mirrors the primary demographic of K-pop fans, ensuring the study’s context remains grounded and realistic.

To gather data from this target group, the study distributed the questionnaire digitally using convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which data are collected from a pool of readily accessible participants who are willing to participate (Golzar et al., 2022). The survey was shared openly with the expectation of capturing 30 to 50 active respondents, ultimately yielding a descriptive baseline of 50 participants (40 females and 10 males). While the demographic was naturally skewed toward females—intentionally reflecting the broader gender distribution of deeply engaged K-pop listeners; the organic participation of a small male subsample provided a crucial comparative perspective. Including these male respondents allowed the study to demonstrate that the artist’s expressions of vulnerability and emotional “softness” can also be felt and appreciated by other men, proving that the song’s linguistic and emotional themes resonate across gender boundaries.

Research Instruments

The instrument used to collect data is a structured, 18-item questionnaire utilizing a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), distributed digitally to all participants. The 5-point format was selected because it is the most widely used response format in educational and social science research, offering sufficient sensitivity to capture attitudinal variation while remaining

accessible to respondents (Kusmaryono et al., 2022). The questionnaire is organized into three thematic constructs. The first, Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction, consists of seven items designed to measure the degree to which participants perceive the song's language as affirming their sense of self and supporting identity negotiation. The second, EFL Engagement, consists of six items that measure how participants engage with the English-language features of "Youtiful" as a resource for language learning. The third, the Gender Perspective, consists of five items that explore how participants understand and respond to the lyrical content's emotional and encouraging features, with particular attention to the perspectives of female listeners. In designing Likert-based constructs for EFL contexts, items should reflect the specific psychological and linguistic dimensions of the experience under study rather than generic attitudinal categories (Dauzón-Ledesma & Izquierdo, 2023).

The qualitative data source is the official English lyrics of Stray Kids' 2023 track "Youtiful" (Stray Kids, 2023), treated as the primary literary and pedagogical text. Song lyrics carry linguistic, emotional, and thematic features that make them productive as qualitative data in EFL research, particularly when the study aims to examine how language constructs meaning and identity (Khoirunnisak et al., 2024).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study proceeds in three sequential phases, adapted to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of discourse (Fairclough, 1992). This theoretical framework posits that any communicative event must be analyzed simultaneously at three levels: as a linguistic text, as a discursive practice of audience consumption, and as a broader social practice that shapes cultural structures (Xing, 2024). By aligning the methodology with this model, the analysis answers different layers of the research questions.

First, at the textual dimension (description), the analysis employed Directed Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of the official English lyrical transcription of "Youtiful" (Stray Kids, 2023). Directed content analysis is appropriate when coding categories are derived from existing theory and prior

research (Mayring, 2015; Humble & Mozelius, 2022). Accordingly, the lyrics were analyzed deductively using three predetermined categories aligned with the study's conceptual framework and quantitative constructs: Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction (SAIC), EFL Engagement (EFL), and Gender Perspective (GP). Lyric segments were systematically coded according to their relevance to these categories and interpreted in relation to the song's broader meanings. This approach was selected because popular music lyrics function as cultural texts through which identities, emotions, and social meanings are communicated and negotiated among listeners (Barradas & Sakka, 2022; Ramadhana & Heriyati, 2025).

Second, quantitative survey data were analyzed to examine the discourse practice (interpretation), particularly how listeners engage with and understand the text. The study used quantitative descriptive statistics on Likert-scale responses collected from Indonesian EFL learners, with female participants as the primary analytical demographic. Using IBM SPSS Statistics, reliability testing via Cronbach's alpha was first conducted for each of the three constructs to assess internal consistency, with a coefficient above 0.70 accepted as the reliability threshold (Alkharusi, 2022). Following this, mean scores were calculated for each construct and each item, identifying which specific areas of self-affirmation, EFL engagement, and gendered reception show the highest levels of agreement among respondents. These statistical peaks then serve as the quantitative baseline that guides the last stage of analysis.

Finally, at the level of social practice (explanation), the quantitative and qualitative findings were synthesized to examine the broader context. Construct-level results from the survey were systematically compared with the corresponding content-analysis categories to relate participants' questionnaire responses to the meanings constructed within the lyrical text (Zhou et al., 2024). Rather than serving as formal methodological triangulation, this integration enables a more comprehensive understanding of how the song's discourse relates to identity construction and challenges traditional structures of masculinity among EFL learners.

Result and Discussion

This study employed qualitative content analysis, complemented by a descriptive, questionnaire-based survey, to examine how Indonesian EFL learners engage with the messages in Stray Kids' "Youtiful." Recent studies suggest that K-pop can function beyond entertainment, becoming a space for emotional connection, identity expression, and interpersonal meaning-making among listeners (Handayati & Kurniawan, 2025). Building from this perspective, the findings are organized into three phases. The first phase presents the quantitative results from the questionnaire, focusing on the constructs of Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction (SAIC), EFL Engagement (EFL), and Gender Perspective (GP). The second phase discusses the qualitative content analysis of the song's lyrics, while the third phase integrates both datasets to develop a broader interpretation of the findings.

Before analyzing participants' responses, a reliability analysis was conducted to examine the internal consistency of the questionnaire constructs. All three constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability. The SAIC construct obtained the highest Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (.888), followed by EFL (.846) and GP (.845). Since all values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Alkharusi, 2022), the questionnaire was deemed sufficiently reliable for further descriptive analysis.

Descriptive statistics showed generally positive responses across all three constructs from both female and male participants. As shown in Table 1, the Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction (SAIC) construct

obtained the highest mean score among female respondents ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.72$), followed by EFL Engagement (EFL) ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.52$) and Gender Perspective (GP) ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.53$). A similar pattern appeared in the male responses, with SAIC remaining the highest construct ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.86$), followed by EFL ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.85$) and GP ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.89$). Based on the five-point Likert interpretation scale, all construct means fell into the Agree category. These baseline findings represent the analysis of the discourse practice element. The findings show that listeners mostly responded favorably to the song's themes of self-affirmation and identity. The male group was smaller due to the convenience sampling approach, but their answers were quite similar to those of the female participants. This similarity is important because it suggests that other men can perceive the male artis's emotional softness and vulnerability. Overall, this suggests that the song's positive emotions overcome gender boundaries and are not limited to female listeners.

The construct level shows that participants responded most strongly to Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction, followed by EFL Engagement and then Gender Perspective. Female respondents scored higher than male respondents across all three constructs, yet both groups stayed within the Agree category. The results provide the groundwork for the next phase, where directed qualitative content analysis examines how the lyrics of the song "Youtiful" construct these meanings.

Table1.

Reliability and Construct-Level Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Female Mean (N=40)	Female Std. Deviation	Male Mean (N=10)	Male Std. Deviation	Interpretation
SAIC (Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction)	7	.888	4.17	0.72	3.79	0.86	Agree
EFL (EFL Engagement)	6	.846	4.03	0.52	3.83	0.85	Agree
GP (Gender Perspective)	5	.845	3.94	0.53	3.80	0.89	Agree

Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction (SAIC)

Among all of three constructs, Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction (SAIC) emerged as the dominant theme in the lyrical

content of the song “Youtiful.” This category focuses on expressions of self-worth, emotional reassurance, identity validation, and personal growth. The prominence of this category is consistent with the quantitative findings, where SAIC obtained the highest mean score among participants. Female participants recorded a slightly higher level of agreement than male participants, although both groups responded positively to the song’s affirmational messages. Throughout the lyrics, the singer repeatedly addresses the listener through supportive and encouraging expressions, creating a discourse that promotes self-acceptance while acknowledging feelings of insecurity and self-doubt. At the same time, the song presents identity development as a gradual process of overcoming uncertainty and recognizing one’s personal value, making affirmation the emotional center of the song (Branje et al., 2021).

One important characteristic of the SAIC category is the strong affirmation of the listener’s worth and value. This appears in lines such as “You’re perfect in my eyes,” “Don’t ever doubt yourself,” and “You are a miracle.” These statements function as direct affirmations that challenge feelings of inadequacy and self-criticism. Instead of connecting value to achievement or social standards, the lyrics present self-worth as something already inherent within the individual (Steele, 1988; Cohen & Sherman, 2014). The repeated use of the pronoun “you” strengthens this effect by addressing the listener personally and creating emotional closeness between the singer and the audience (Barradas & Sakka, 2022). Through this direct form of address, the song frames self-worth as something that need not be earned or proven. As a result, the lyrics construct a reassuring discourse in which negative self-perceptions are gradually replaced with acceptance and positive self-recognition.

Besides affirming self-worth, the lyrics also explore identity construction through feelings of uncertainty and alienation. This is evident in the line “I don’t know if I’m ready to show myself,” which reflects hesitation and insecurity about revealing one’s authentic self to others. The sense of isolation becomes even clearer in the phrase “Felt like an alien,” which metaphorically conveys emotional distance and a sense of not belonging. However, the song does not leave the listener in that emotional state. Instead, it introduces the possibility of

growth and transformation. This shift appears in the line “That little star was surely going to become the biggest thing,” where the image of a small star symbolizes hidden potential and future development. Through this progression, the lyrics present identity as something dynamic rather than fixed, suggesting that self-doubt and exclusion can eventually become part of a journey toward confidence, belonging, and self-acceptance (Branje et al., 2021).

Taken together, the lyrical content of “Youtiful” constructs a strong message of self-affirmation, emotional acceptance, and personal growth. The song uses simple but emotionally direct language to reassure listeners of their worth while still recognizing the emotional struggles often involved in identity development. By acknowledging feelings of insecurity and alienation alongside messages of hope and encouragement, the lyrics provide listeners with a supportive framework through which they may reinterpret their own experiences more positively (Steele, 1988). Consequently, the SAIC category becomes the central theme of the song, emphasizing that self-worth and identity growth are closely connected through affirmation, reassurance, and emotional support.

EFL Engagement (EFL)

The EFL Engagement (EFL) category highlights how the use of English in the song helps listeners connect with its message both emotionally and linguistically (Kusumah & Ratri, 2026). Unlike the SAIC category, which primarily focuses on self-worth and identity development, this category emphasizes English as a medium for expressing support, encouragement, and affirmation. The quantitative findings showed positive responses among participants, suggesting that listeners reacted not only to the song’s emotional message but also to the way it was delivered in English. The lyrics use relatively simple vocabulary and sentence structures, making emotionally meaningful ideas easier for listeners learning English as a foreign language to understand (Krashen, 1985; Sakti et al., 2025).

The song conveys its message through direct, emotionally resonant expressions. Lines such as “I’ll tell you that you’re amazing as you are” and “Just know I’m always by your side” use familiar vocabulary and uncomplicated sentence patterns that are accessible to EFL

listeners. Likewise, the phrase “More than beautiful, one of a kind” uses positive descriptive language to emphasize individuality and personal value. The repeated use of the pronoun “you” further strengthens listener engagement by creating the feeling of a personal conversation between the singer and the audience. This direct linguistic approach allows listeners to position themselves as the receiver of the message, making the emotional content feel closer and more personally relevant.

Taken together, these linguistic features show that English functions not only as the language of the song but also as a medium for emotional connection and self-expression (Valerio-Ramos & Hernández-López, 2023). The accessible vocabulary allows supportive messages to be understood without creating additional language barriers, enabling listeners to focus more on the emotional meanings within the lyrics. Through repeated affirmations and direct forms of address, the song encourages listeners to engage with English in personally meaningful ways. As a result, English becomes more than a learning tool; it also becomes a space for encouragement, empathy, and positive self-reflection (Murphey, 2013; Valerio-Ramos & Hernández-López, 2023).

Gender Perspective (GP)

The Gender Perspective (GP) category explores how the lyrics construct masculinity through expressions of empathy, emotional openness, and interpersonal support (Connell, 2005). Rather than presenting a distant or emotionally restrained masculine image, the song introduces a speaker who openly acknowledges emotional struggles while consistently offering reassurance to the listener. The lyrics present a representation of masculinity centered on understanding, vulnerability, and emotional connection, which supports the song’s overall message of comfort and encouragement. Although female participants showed slightly stronger responses in the quantitative findings, male participants also demonstrated generally positive perceptions, suggesting that the song’s emotional themes may resonate with listeners across genders rather than remaining limited to one gender group (Li, 2024).

One noticeable characteristic of this category is the speaker’s willingness to express

emotional vulnerability. This can be seen in the lines “I know that feeling too, I’ve been inside the dark” and “I’ve never been so empty, hopeless,” where the speaker openly shares experiences of emotional struggle and sadness. Instead of hiding these emotions, the lyrics present them directly, creating a sense of shared understanding between the singer and the listener. By expressing experiences of pain and hopelessness, the song moves away from traditional ideas of masculinity that often associate strength with emotional control (Risman, 2004). Instead, emotional openness fosters empathy and connection, allowing the speaker to relate more closely to the listener’s experiences (Karima et al., 2022).

The song also constructs supportive masculinity through expressions of care and reassurance. This appears in lines such as “Just know I’m always by your side” and “Now I’m here to make it end,” which position the speaker as a source of emotional support. Rather than speaking from a place of authority, the lyrics emphasize presence, encouragement, and companionship. The song’s narrative voice consistently offers reassurance rather than dominance, emotional distance, or control. This approach presents support as a willingness to stay with and encourage another person during difficult moments rather than as an expression of power or protection.

Taken together, the GP category presents masculinity as empathetic, emotionally expressive, and supportive. The speaker not only acknowledges emotional struggles but also repeatedly offers understanding and encouragement throughout the song. By prioritizing care and emotional openness over authority and distance, the lyrics provide an alternative representation of masculinity that centers on connection and emotional support. Through this perspective, “Youtiful” reinforces its broader message of comfort while also suggesting different ways masculinity can be expressed through empathy and interpersonal understanding.

Conclusion

This study examined how Stray Kids’ “Youtiful” supports self-affirmation, gendered emotional engagement, and identity construction among Indonesian female EFL learners, using a directed qualitative content

analysis complemented by a descriptive questionnaire-based survey, combining a Likert-scale questionnaire with directed qualitative content analysis of the lyrics. Across both datasets, the Self-Affirmation and Identity Construction (SAIC) construct received the strongest response ($M = 4.17$), and the lyrical analysis showed why: lines such as “You’re perfect in my eyes” and “You are a miracle” frame self-worth as inherent rather than earned, giving listeners a vocabulary for reassurance that does not depend on achievement or external validation.

The second research question, on how gender shapes engagement with the song, was answered largely through the Gender Perspective construct. Rather than the emotionally distant masculinity often assumed in casual listening, “Youtiful” constructs a speaker who names his own struggles directly “I’ve been inside the dark,” “I’ve never been so empty, hopeless,” before offering support: “Just know I’m always by your side.” Female respondents rated this construct slightly higher than male respondents did. Still, both groups responded positively, suggesting the emotional register of the song is not narrowly gendered even though the study’s sampling was.

Regarding the third question, the EFL Engagement results indicate that the song’s simple vocabulary and repeated direct address, “I’ll tell you that you’re amazing as you are,” allow participants to engage with the emotional content without the vocabulary itself becoming a barrier. Put together, the three constructs point to the same conclusion: participants connected with “Youtiful” not because it introduced new English structures, but because familiar, accessible language was used to say something they needed to hear. This suggests the song has classroom potential beyond vocabulary drills, for instance as a prompt for reflective writing or discussion of emotional vocabulary and identity.

The findings should be read against three limitations. The sample was restricted to Indonesian female EFL learners, with male responses serving only as a small comparative reference, which limits generalization across genders and cultural contexts. The analysis covered a single song, so the patterns identified here cannot be assumed to hold across K-pop or English-language pop more broadly. And because the quantitative data relied on self-report, it may not fully capture what

participants experienced while listening. Future work could compare responses across cultural contexts, track engagement over time through longitudinal designs, or extend the content analysis to a larger set of songs to test whether the affirmation-through-vulnerability pattern found here recurs elsewhere in the genre.

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