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## An Analysis Of The Moral Message Of The Song “WHO SAYS” In Selena Gomez Album *When The Sun Goes Down*

<sup>1</sup>Vita Fransiska Devi, <sup>2</sup>Ririn Ambarini, <sup>3</sup>Siti Lestari

<sup>123</sup>Universitas PGRI Semarang Indonesia

### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the moral message contained in the song “Who Says” by Selena Gomez, which is featured on the album *When the Sun Goes Down*, released in 2011. The main objective of this research is to identify and describe the moral values reflected through the song lyrics. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method, focusing on the analysis of the lyrical content as the primary data source. The data were collected from the official lyrics of the song, which were examined using descriptive techniques to interpret the moral messages conveyed by the songwriter. The analysis is guided by the humanistic theory of Carl Rogers, which emphasizes concepts such as self-concept, self-acceptance, and personal growth. The findings reveal that the song conveys four key moral values, namely: self-acceptance, self-worth, empowerment, and resilience. These values are presented through affirmations of individual worth, encouragement to embrace one’s true self, and messages of emotional strength in the face of societal judgment or insecurity. The song is found to deliver a positive moral influence, particularly for young listeners dealing with issues of self-esteem and identity. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how popular music can serve as a medium for promoting psychological and moral development in its audience.

**Keywords:** *Moral Message, Song Lyric, Selena Gomez*

### Introduction

Communication is an essential activity that all humans engage in as long as they live in the world as social beings, allowing them to interact with one another. The purpose of communication is to convey messages to others, ensuring that they understand the intent behind the message and share the same knowledge (Sari & Yusuf, 2020)(Kumala, 2021). Music is one of the most powerful forms of artistic expression, capable of conveying social messages, shaping public opinion, and influencing the emotions of its listeners.

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In today's digital era, pop music has evolved beyond mere entertainment to become a powerful medium for addressing pressing social issues, including bullying, self-acceptance, and mental health. One artist who consistently uses music as a vehicle for delivering moral messages is Selena Gomez, particularly through her 2011 album *When the Sun Goes Down*. The songs featured in this album, especially "Who Says" convey strong messages about the importance of self-love, resisting toxic societal standards, and bravely facing social pressure. The song *Who Says* carries a strong message about self-acceptance, inner beauty, and resisting negative judgments from others. Through simple yet emotionally powerful lyrics, the song encourages listeners, especially young women, to believe in themselves, reject harmful criticism, and embrace their true selves. In an era where body image issues, cyberbullying, and mental health problems are increasingly prevalent among youth (Nurul Umayah, Adi Muhammad Ramadhan, 2024), the moral message of this song becomes highly relevant and meaningful.

Based on this phenomenon, it is worth exploring how the moral messages conveyed in the song "Who Says" from the album "When the Sun Goes Down" can be interpreted as a reflection of the current social conditions faced by today's youth. These songs transcend mere entertainment; they impart moral values that can help listeners navigate life's challenges and cultivate a healthy self-image. In this study, the researcher focused on analysing the moral messages that Selena Gomez sought to convey in her album "When The Sun Goes Down." The approach taken involved qualitative content analysis and semantic studies, which looked at meanings from different viewpoints, as semantics is the study of word meanings. (Andreas Heri Kurniawan, 2021) explains that semantics is a term used in linguistics to describe the relationship between linguistic signs and the meanings they signify. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by providing a focused, moral-oriented analysis of *Who Says*, interpreting each verse and its ethical message, and reflecting on its significance for the listener.

## Literature Review

Research on the analysis of moral messages in song lyrics is part of an interdisciplinary study that combines literary, linguistic, and psychological approaches. This type of research treats songs as a form of modern literary expression that holds significant potential in delivering values, moral teachings, and life lessons. Studies on song lyrics generally aim to uncover the deeper meanings embedded in the text and to identify educational and reflective messages that may influence the mindset and behavior of listeners, particularly adolescents. The song's message encourages listeners to appreciate their individuality and to embrace their flaws.

This study views the song as a rich source of moral content, delivered through emotionally resonant language that can inspire and motivate young people to develop a healthier self-image. By applying a qualitative descriptive approach and using Carl Rogers' self-concept theory as the analytical framework such as: self-acceptance, self-worth, and personal empowerment, authenticity, respect for individuality, resilience. This study aims to

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contribute to a broader understanding of how popular music can serve as a medium for moral reflection and character development. Through the analysis of “*Who Says*”, the research intends to demonstrate that popular music, beyond its aesthetic value, also possesses ethical and psychological dimensions worthy of academic exploration.

## 1. **Self-Acceptance**

Self-acceptance refers to an individual's ability to acknowledge, embrace, and be at peace with all aspects of themselves, including their strengths, weaknesses, flaws, and imperfections. According to Rogers (2018), self-acceptance is a fundamental condition for personal growth and emotional stability. When individuals accept themselves unconditionally, they are more capable of functioning fully and freely in life. This value fosters a non-judgmental and compassionate attitude toward oneself, which is crucial for maintaining psychological well-being.

## 2. **Self-Worth**

Self-worth is the sense of inherent value and dignity that a person attributes to themselves. In Rogers' theory, self-worth develops through experiences of unconditional positive regard, where one is accepted and valued by others without conditions. A person with high self-worth believes that they are worthy of love, respect, and fulfillment. This moral value is crucial in helping individuals build confidence, make ethical choices, and maintain respectful relationships with others.

## 3. **Empowerment**

Empowerment is the process through which individuals gain control over their lives and develop the confidence to make decisions aligned with their authentic selves. According to Rogers (2018), the importance of creating an environment where people feel safe to express themselves and pursue their personal goals is emphasized. Empowerment, as a moral value, encourages autonomy, self-determination, and responsibility. It enables individuals to overcome obstacles and become active agents in shaping their own lives.

## 4. **Authenticity**

Authenticity involves being faithful to one's inner self, values, and feelings, both in thought and action. Rogers believed that a fully functioning person lives in congruence, meaning there is harmony between their internal experiences and outward behavior. Authenticity as a moral value promotes honesty, integrity, and self-awareness. It allows individuals to engage with the world in a genuine and meaningful way, without pretense or social masks.

## 5. **Respect for individuality**

Respect for individuality is the moral principle of recognizing and valuing each person's unique identity, perspective, and life experiences. According to Rogers (2018), every individual is a unique being with their own path toward self-actualization. This value

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encourages tolerance, openness, and an appreciation of diversity. It supports a non-judgmental attitude and the belief that every person has the right to define their values and purpose.

## 6. Resilience

Resilience refers to the inner strength and emotional capacity to recover from difficulties, stress, or adversity. According to Rogers (2018), resilience can flourish when individuals experience consistent emotional support and unconditional acceptance. As a moral value, resilience encourages persistence, optimism, and a proactive attitude in the face of life's challenges. It reflects the belief that individuals can grow through hardship and become stronger as a result.

## Research Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is a descriptive qualitative research approach. As defined by Rogers (2019), qualitative research aims to investigate phenomena as experienced by individuals involved in the study. The use of a descriptive approach in this context enables the researcher to explore and present the meaning of optimism conveyed in the lyrics of Selena Gomez's *"Who Says"* in a comprehensive and in-depth manner. The study applies Rogers' (2018) theory of ethical values as its primary theoretical framework. The analysis focuses on addressing the research questions concerning the types and characteristics of moral values found within the album's lyrics.

The data used in this research consists of the complete lyrics of songs from Selena Gomez's *"When the Sun Goes Down"* album. The primary data is taken from the song *"Who Says"*, which serves as the central object of analysis. Supporting or secondary data is obtained from books, scholarly journals, online articles, and other written references relevant to the topic. The method of data collection employed is document analysis, while the data are processed using qualitative analysis techniques.

## Object of the Research

The primary focus of this study is the song *"Who Says"* by Selena Gomez & the Scene, which is featured on the 2011 album *When the Sun Goes Down*. This particular song was chosen as the primary subject of analysis due to its strong inspirational tone and the moral values it promotes, including self-worth, confidence, and self-acceptance. There are twelve songs in the *"When the Sun Goes Down"* the researcher will analyze that, this album comprises of 12 songs: love you like a love song, bang bang bang, who says, we own the night, hit the lights, whiplash, when the sun goes down, my dilemma, that's more like it, outlaw, middle of nowhere, dices (Spanish version of who says'). The researcher selected the song 'Who Says' for analysis in this study due to its strong moral message and relevance to the research objectives.

## Instrument of the Research

The research data sources used in this research are:

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1. The primary data source is the song lyrics to the album "*When the Sun Goes Down*" by Selena Gomez, which contain 12 songs in the album, there are; Love You Like a Love song, Bang Bang Bang, Who Says, We Own the Night, Hit the Lights, Whiplash, When the Sun Goes Down, My Dilemma, That's More Like it, Outlaw, Middle of Nowhere, Dices (Spanish version of who says'). The researcher retrieved the song lyrics from Google. This research selected the song 'Who Says' for analysis in this study due to its strong moral message and relevance to the research objectives.
2. Secondary data in this study are obtained from relevant literature that supports the analysis, including perspectives or critical insights derived from journal articles, published essays, and theoretical books.

## Method Data Collection

In collecting the data, the researcher employed a qualitative research method. The data were obtained through an analytical process, with the results presented descriptively and without the use of numerical or statistical data. The steps involved in the data collection process are as follows:

1. First, the researcher carefully listened to the songs from the "who says" lyric to grasp the meaning and emotional tone conveyed through the lyrics.
2. Second, the researcher accessed the lyrics from the website or google and thoroughly read the text to gain a better understanding of the moral message conveyed in the song.
3. Third, the researcher reviewed several previous studies, journals, articles, and books related to the moral message to gain a deeper insight into the forms and meanings of such expressions found in the lyrics.
4. Fourth, the researcher identified and categorized the moral messages contained in the lyrics of the song "Who Says" to assist in the analysis and presentation of the data. The coding system was designed to assist researchers as an instrument for conducting research. For this reason, the research formulates a coding system as follows:

No.	Codes	Notes
1	LY	Lyric
2	L	Line
3	LY. L1	Lyric, Line 1
4	LY. L2	Lyric, Line 2

Says" (Rogers, 2018)

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## Findings

This study aims to analyze the moral message conveyed through the song lyrics of "Who Says" by Selena Gomez, as featured on the album *When the Sun Goes Down*. The analysis is conducted using a qualitative descriptive method, based on Carl Rogers' theory of self-acceptance, which emphasizes the importance of accepting oneself unconditionally as a core aspect of psychological well-being (Rogers, 2013). The result of the analysis can be seen in the points and table below:

Table 4.1 The result of moral messages in song lyric "Who Says" Selena Gomez's (LY, L1)

### Selena Gomez's "Who Says" (verse 1)

Moral Message		
No	Line Song Lyrics	Meaning
1	I wouldn't wanna be anybody else,	A strong declaration of self-acceptance and individuality; the speaker refuses to change to gain approval from others.

The verse demonstrates the emotional toll of harsh judgments and societal pressure, showing how these factors can erode a person's self-confidence. The pronoun "you" is used to represent a critical outsider, possibly society or another individual, who casts negative evaluations. Still, the narrator implies that such criticisms are not definitive and should not shape one's self-perception. This aligns with the moral principles of resilience, which include the strength to recover emotionally and self-worth, as well as the belief in one's inherent value despite external disapproval.

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Table 4.2 The result of moral messages in song lyric "Who Says" Selena Gomez's (LY, L1-L5)

## Selena Gomez's "Who Says" (verse 2)

Moral Message		
No	Line Song Lyrics	Meaning
1	You made me insecure, told me I wasn't good enough But who are you to judge? When you're a diamond in the rough	This verse portrays the damage caused by negative judgment and criticism. It also highlights that those who judge are not perfect themselves.

This verse addresses the emotional damage that results from being judged or criticized by external forces, such as individuals or society as a whole. The speaker challenges these negative influences by questioning their authority to determine her value. The phrase "diamond in the rough" subtly suggests that all people, even those who criticize, are flawed and still evolving.

Table 4.3 The result of moral messages in song lyric "Who Says" Selena Gomez's (LY, L6-L9)

## Selena Gomez's "Who Says" (Verse 3)

Moral Message		
No	Line Song Lyrics	Meaning
1	I'm sure you got some things you'd like to change about yourself But when it comes to me, I wouldn't wanna be anybody else	The speaker acknowledges that everyone has flaws, yet she still chooses to love and accept herself fully..

In this part of the song, the speaker shifts her attention to a universal aspect of human nature: the tendency to strive for self-improvement. Despite this, she reaffirms her self-acceptance. By acknowledging that insecurity is a common experience, she conveys that imperfection is natural and should not be a source of shame. This verse promotes a balanced and empathetic perspective on both oneself and others.

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Table 4.4 The result of moral messages in song lyric "Who Says" Selena Gomez's (LY, L10-L13)

## Selena Gomez's "Who Says" (Chorus)

Moral Message		
No	Line Song Lyrics	Meaning
1	Who says you're not perfect? Who says you're not worth it? Who says you're the only one that's hurting?	These lines offer comfort by showing that others also experience pain and self-doubt. They remind us that our feelings are valid and that we are not alone.

The chorus represents the song's emotional high point, where rhetorical questions are used to confront toxic standards imposed by society regarding beauty and personal value. Through these questions, the speaker urges the audience to reflect on why they feel unworthy and to challenge the idea that they must meet unrealistic expectations. These lines offer not just resistance, but also emotional restoration by reaffirming one's inherent worth.

Table 4.6 The result of moral messages in the song lyric "Who Says" by Selena Gomez (LY, L16)

## Selena Gomez's "Who Says" (Bridge)

Moral Message		
No	Line Song Lyrics	Meaning
1	You've got every right to a beautiful life.	Everyone deserves happiness and dignity regardless of appearance or societal status.

This concise yet impactful line emphasizes that all individuals are naturally entitled to experience joy, affection, and a meaningful life. It conveys a universal message that no one needs to achieve perfection or seek external validation to be considered worthy. Instead, it highlights the idea that everyone, regardless of appearance or imperfections, has an inherent right to live with value and optimism.

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Table 4.7 The result of moral messages in song lyric "Who Says" Selena Gomez's (LY, L17-L18)

## Selena Gomez's "Who Says" (final chorus)

Moral Message		
No	Line Song Lyrics	Meaning
1	Who says you're not pretty? Who says you're not beautiful?"	This verse challenges the authority of external voices that dictate beauty standards and promotes self-love.

In the final repetition of the chorus, the speaker firmly reiterates the song's core message by focusing on the topic of physical appearance. These lines address the emotional distress experienced by individuals who are made to feel unattractive. However, by framing such judgments as rhetorical questions, the speaker undermines their credibility. This concluding statement reaffirms the listener's sense of beauty and intrinsic value.

## Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the song "*Who Says*" by Selena Gomez conveys several significant moral values, particularly self-acceptance, empowerment, resilience, and self-worth. These messages are not only emotionally uplifting but also socially relevant, especially in addressing the psychological challenges faced by adolescents. Teenagers today often struggle with feelings of inadequacy, social comparison, bullying, and identity confusion. The moral values embedded in this song offer validation, healing, and encouragement for young people navigating such experiences.

### 1. The Representation of Moral Values in Selena Gomez's "Who Says"

#### a. Self-Acceptance

Self-acceptance is defined as the ability to recognize and embrace all aspects of oneself, including personal flaws and imperfections (Andreas Heri Kurniawan, 2021). It involves treating oneself with kindness and avoiding excessive self-judgment. In "*Who Says*", self-acceptance is reflected in lyrics such as "*I'm just beautiful me*", which promote the idea that worth is not determined by external validation or perfection. For adolescents who frequently face unrealistic expectations, especially on social media, this message encourages them to appreciate their individuality and let go of the pressure to conform.

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## b. Empowerment

Empowerment refers to the process of gaining confidence, strength, and control over one's life and decisions (Patchin et.al, 2015). In the context of the song, empowerment is conveyed through rhetorical questions, such as "*Who says you're not perfect?*" which challenge external criticism and encourage self-belief. This form of lyrical resistance enables teenagers to reject harmful labels and assert their own worth. Empowerment, therefore, is closely linked to the development of self-confidence and independence, both of which are crucial for adolescent identity formation.

## c. Resilience

Resilience is the capacity to recover from difficulties and adapt positively in the face of adversity (Parlof, 2015). Many adolescents encounter rejection, failure, or peer pressure, which can impact their emotional health. "*Who Says*" fosters resilience by presenting a message of hope and strength in the face of judgment. By normalizing imperfections and promoting inner strength, the song helps young listeners develop emotional coping strategies to navigate life's challenges.

## d. Self-Worth

Self-worth is the belief that one is inherently valuable and deserving of respect, love, and dignity (Neff, 2018). This concept is essential during adolescence, a period when individuals are often influenced by peer evaluation and societal standards. The song repeatedly emphasizes that worth does not depend on appearance or approval from others. Lyrics such as "Who says you're not worth it?" remind listeners that they're already enough, just as they're.

## 2. The Significance of Moral Messages in "Who Says" for Adolescent Listeners

The moral messages in "*Who Says*" by Selena Gomez hold considerable significance for listeners, particularly adolescents, due to the song's themes of self-acceptance, empowerment, resilience, and self-worth. These values serve as emotional tools that can guide young people in managing psychological stress, social pressure, and identity formation during a critical period of their development.

During adolescence, individuals face a wide range of emotional challenges, including self-doubt, peer pressure, body dissatisfaction, and bullying (Amin Diwan Waruwu et al., 2022). At this vulnerable stage, positive media messages can serve as external sources of emotional reinforcement. The lyrics in "*Who Says*" directly address these concerns, offering validation and encouraging self-belief. For instance, the line "*I'm just beautiful me*" acts as an affirmation of individuality and acceptance, which can help listeners challenge societal standards and appreciate their intrinsic worth.

The significance of these messages lies in their potential to shape healthy self-perceptions and promote emotional resilience. According to Neff (2018), cultivating

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self-compassion and self-acceptance helps adolescents reduce self-criticism and improve psychological well-being. Similarly, emphasizes that empowerment leads to stronger self-efficacy and a greater sense of control over one's life, which is essential for personal growth and autonomy.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the song “*Who Says*” by Selena Gomez conveys a strong set of moral messages that significantly resonate with adolescents. A close examination of the lyrics reveals that the song promotes essential values, such as self-acceptance, inner strength, resilience, and self-worth, which are crucial for supporting adolescents' emotional growth and mental well-being. The findings also underscore the therapeutic potential of music, particularly when it conveys positive messages. According to Patchin and Hinduja (2019), uplifting media content, including music, can provide emotional support, particularly for teenagers facing bullying, exclusion, or concerns about body image. In this context, “*Who Says*” transcends its entertainment value and serves as a moral voice that addresses the emotional challenges of adolescents, promoting a healthier self-perception. In summary, “*Who Says*” offers an empowering narrative that promotes a more positive self-image, emotional resilience, and the rejection of harmful external judgments. Its impact underscores the vital role of media literacy and the need for positive representation in shaping the psychological and moral development of young audiences.

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