

Kant's Aesthetic Essentiality as Exposed on Selena Gomez's *Who Says*

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ABSTRACT

Beauty for women is crucial as an intersection of their desires, needs, and satisfactions. *Who Says* is a song by Selena Gomez released in 2011 that inspires women to be confident since beauty is actually essential. Immanuel Kant's aesthetic essentiality underlines that beauty is not agreeable since it relies on its own essence. Then, how may Kant's aesthetic essentiality see the position of beauty in Selena Gomez's *Who Says*? Through qualitative method on cultural studies, this article exposes Kant's perspective and Gomez's song. Recent various beauty standards make women feel insecure, but the song encourages girls to be who they are and not let what other people say get to them. All women should ignore forceful beauty standards because any expectation could be detrimental to women's self-esteem. In conclusion, the song shows that beauty is essential and could only be experienced by individuals, not by any beauty standard.

Keywords: Aesthetic Essentiality; Immanuel Kant; Selena Gomez; Who Says; Women's Beauty

INTRODUCTION

For as long as humanity has existed, art and beauty have been part of human's lives. Indeed, beauty has abundant meanings in every human perception. Undoubtedly, beauty can provide the meaning of personal identification of looking good according to different stereotypes that society has set. Today, some women call something beautiful is not the same as calling it an important work of art. For example, a woman should have straight hair, white tone, and a tall-slim body like what people usually find on television or social media. The truth about assessing beauty should be relative since beauty is not perfect at all or does not revolve around any perfection.

There is a slogan that says "beauty is how you feel inside yourself". That slogan is appropriately seen in the song of *Who Says* sung by Selena Gomez with the pop song genre. It has inspirational lyrics about embracing oneself and not letting anyone bring people down. *Who Says* was released on March 14, 2011, as the lead single from the singer's third album, *When the Sun Goes Down* (GeniusMedia, 2011). This song is about loving oneself regardless of what other people say because there is no such thing as a standard of beauty. That is why it is usually said that people can find beauty not only in the person's body, but also in the person's inside (Maharaj, 2013). Therefore, people can also be full of beauty inside because of their values, feelings, and actions. It continues to grow and to develop to express emotions, thoughts and human capacities.

Meanwhile, according to society, beauty has to do with how a person's body looks like. It involves not only being fit, but also having extravagant parts of their body more noticeable than the others do (Berger, 2009). Perspective of it pollutes everyone to criticize irresponsibly what is beautiful and what is not beautiful, when no one can totally prove the true nature of beauty. This is in line with what Immanuel Kant says that beauty is not a necessary condition of the object of art (Maharaj, 2013; Pasopati, et al., 2023). The idea of art is being given wholly over to aesthetic pleasure and delight. Moreover, it is the ultimate freedom of art to exist on its own merits and to be the center of its own world.

Moreover, this article would like to emphasize the understanding of Kant's aesthetic essentiality in the song of Selena Gomez entitled *Who Says*. The research question for this paper is how may Kant's aesthetic essentiality see the position of beauty in Selena Gomez's *Who Says*?. By underlining matter of aesthetic understanding, essential aspect of beauty is a way to shape universal perspective. This matter of being universal is not to be applied to everything, but the essence lies on the flowing of everyday values.

METHOD

By using a qualitative method, data regarding the song *Who Says* is analyzed with the aesthetic theory of essentiality by Immanuel Kant taken from various journals. Data analysis is carried out by listening to songs, understanding the lyrics and their meanings, drafting correlations between song meanings and Kant's theory, writing down the key points from the analysis results, compiling the results of the analysis, and writing a list of references used. In this particular article, the data is Selena Gomez's song and the tool to analyze is Kant's theory.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Chronicles of Beauty in Selena Gomez's *Who Says*

Selena Marie Gomez was born in Grand Prairie, Texas on July 22, 1992. She was named after the Tejano singer Selena Quintanilla-Perez. Her father is Mexican and her mother has Italian ancestry. The song *Who Says* by Selena Gomez has a message for listeners that everyone must be confident whoever he or she is. This song also speaks that people should accept any shortcoming and love themselves regardless of what other people say. The song is also meant to inspire people and to strike back at haters who are particularly involved in cyberbullying. *Who Says* was released on March 14, 2011, as the lead single from the album of *When the Sun Goes Down* (GeniusMedia, 2011). The song is a teen pop song with inspirational lyrics about embracing oneself and not letting anyone bring the people down.

All of those above are well explored in that song. The full lyric of the song is the following;

(Intro)

*I wouldn't wanna be anybody else
Hey*

(Verse 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
I'm sure you got some things
You'd like to change about yourself
But when it comes to me
I wouldn't want to be anybody else*

(Pre-Chorus)

*Na na na Na na na
Na na na Na na na
I'm no beauty queen,
I'm just beautiful me
Na na na Na na na
You've got every right,
To a beautiful life
C'mon*

(Chorus)

*Who says
Who says you're not perfect
Who says you're not worth it
Who says you're the only one that's hurting
Trust me,
That's the price of beauty
Who says you're not pretty
Who says you're not beautiful
Who says*

(Verse 2)

*It's such a funny thing
How nothing's funny when it's you
You tell 'em what you mean
But they keep whiting out the truth
It's like a work of art
That never gets to see the light
Keep you beneath the stars
Won't let you touch the sky*

(Pre-Chorus)

(Chorus)

(Bridge)

*Who says you're not star potential
Who says you're not presidential
Who says you can't be in movies
Listen to me, listen to me
Who says you don't pass the test
Who says you can't be the best
Who said, who said*

*Would you tell me who said that
Yeah, who said*

(Chorus)

(Outro)

*Who says
Who says you're not perfect
Who says you're not worth it
Who says you're the only one that's hurting
Trust me
That's the price of beauty
Who says you're not pretty
Who says you're not beautiful
Who says (GeniusMedia, 2011)*

The song *Who Says* through its lyrics is able to inspire women who have insecure feelings about their bodies to be able to accept themselves. This song tells people to love themselves, have their own perspective of beauty presentation, and ignore any other people's judgments on their own selves. Various verses of the song above which start with the lyrics *Who Says* lead to the highlighted points about beauty with its standards (GeniusMedia, 2011). It implies that in every point of beauty, there is a standard implying if it is not appropriate, it cannot be said as beautiful. This song then states that people do not have to conform to those standards to be beautiful.

The lyrics of the songs point out that every woman has her own version of beauty (GeniusMedia, 2011) who says. Beauty that is made and created differently will also look beautiful in the right eye, just like art. People who understand art will be able to understand such artistic work, in contrast to ordinary people who may interpret art in different ways. In this aspect, the matter of being beautiful is not about social standards, but about aesthetic perspective. It works in the matter of being essential and existential, of being conceptually and contextually beautiful.

What is best mentioned in the lyrics are the perspectives from a girl to the others. Gomez takes the role in the song as her own self that must face any bullying since she is often considered as not beautiful (GeniusMedia, 2011). By singing this song, she would like to show her own confidence and spread it to others as well. By accentuating the aesthetic idea of the song, the singer also shows such empowerment for women especially for the listeners of her song.

The Objectivity of Art in Kant's Perspective

The concept of the power of judgment goes back to the Greek word *phronesis*, which means prudence. The sense of being prudent in Kantian analysis regards the emphasis of cognitive judgment that enables scientific perceptions to come to surface. Kant underlines teleology to show that things should be regarded as unified but in recognizable condition (Allison, 2001; Berger, 2009). In this aspect, purposiveness is normative understanding that correlates claims of universal agreement made in judgment of beauty. It works like unity in diversity, in which particularity is appreciated through its purpose in the matter of being unified. Throughout this base, Kant shaped his further indications of judgment through natural concepts of combined

meaningful soul and body indications in both works of rationalism and empiricism (Pasopati, et al., 2023; Pujimahanani, et al., 2023).

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is the central and influential figure in modern philosophy. He synthesized early modern rationalism and empiricism and continued to exercise a significant influence today in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, and other fields. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant started drastic changes in the field of estimate and teleology (Allison, 2001; Berger, 2009). His idea deals with feeling versus experience, subjectivity versus objectivity, disinterested pleasure, aesthetic universality, free and adherent beauty, aesthetic ideas, beauty as the symbol of morality versus beauty of art (Wenzel, 2009). He held to the belief that it was human thought that filled the experienced world with certain structures.

Kant underlines that human beings have the ability to experience beauty and therefore they could judge its values (Schulting, 2016; Wenzel, 2009). In this aspect, he proposed senses that show experience not as a totally subjective indication, but as such structured and ordered matter of judgment. He also said that stating things in aesthetic meanings would expose its widened understanding on the purposes of the objects in the world. Aesthetics then is not merely about being in general, but also how to assume any particular aspect in the sense of the universal presumptions (Heidemann, 2020; Hughes, 2010). Hereafter, Kant's understanding will bring the maximum point of being universal to measure such values of any particular aesthetic experience of human beings.

Kant revealed that the estimate has a broad meaning, not only regarding beauty and majesty but also pleasure in general (Heidemann, 2020; Hughes, 2007). Aesthetics focuses on pleasure in the context of the characteristics of the subject experiencing pleasure rather than the character of the object. According to Kant, the assessment of beauty is stable because it is essential and universally differentiated from other pleasures (Drees, 2021; Hughes, 2010). The idea of estimation theory by Kant has brought a new perspective on judging beauty. Kant has divided estimate theory into four parts: Disinterestedness, Universality, Essentiality, Appearance of Purpose. Meanwhile, his thoughts of Essentiality theory was to show that everyone can agree on what is beautiful, but each person does not know how that idea could be agreeable (Drees, 2021; Hughes, 2010).

The necessity of beauty says more about humans than objects of beauty. An aesthetic judgment is actually a common sense that does not imply logic or knowledge. Kant calls it a common understanding. For Kant, common sense means every human has an aesthetic ability that operates in the same way (Drees, 2021). It entails that every human being can sense beauty, as if the ability to see beauty is part of the mental, mind, and soul of human beings. Beautiful thought does not need any concept to please any human being. It does not have to agree with people's pleasure of taste, vision, or sound. For instance, one may prefer green apples to red apples, another may prefer rock songs to pop songs, etc. (Sasa, 2019).

Nevertheless, the reality is different, because even though these basic abilities exist in every human being, its development is not the same. Each judgment of beauty is always singular, so that no general rules can ever be formulated from a set of existing single judgments. Anyhow, essentially, if someone sees something as beautiful, then he/she is talking about something that gives pleasure coming from human abilities in general (Drees, 2021; Hughes, 2007). In this particular case, this thought shows that an art that is beautiful to someone, in essence is indeed beautiful. If something can bring

pleasure to one person, then it can also bring pleasure to another, because every human being at some point has the same basic ability for pleasure.

The power of judgment is strongly connected with experience and everyday knowledge (Pasopati, et al., 2023; Pujimahanani, et al., 2023). In matters of woman being, the abilities and their nature have always been a source of inspiration and wonder for artists of every description. In the world of art, women are powerful. Women are beautiful. However, the history shows that real women were being kept out of real narratives and prevented from existing with the same human dignity of men (Kuplen, 2023). Women were forced to live as one-dimensional beings, as concepts whose very existence was at best indulged and at worst made an object of suspicion.

Moreover, the digital era, which has brought wonderful advantages yet has created unexpected troubles, shaped effects on detrimental changes in society's perception of woman's beauty. Teens and adults alike are bombarded by images of the same celebrities who were once glamorized and seemed impossibly distant and different (Pasopati, et al., 2023; Pujimahanani, et al., 2023). This change in society's relationship has changed its view of beauty and given people a sense that they, too, can be like those stars. The bar for men and women has been set unrealistically high by the role models of recent trendsetters. Indeed, that condition includes an increase in negative or obsessive thoughts about appearance (Chang, 2015; Kuplen, 2021). This universal feeling of lack of acceptance is one that exists no matter one's age, sex, or ethnicity. Then, a lack of relationships or socializing naturally produces a desire to find a place where one is truly accepted.

Modern day society creates certain expectations of the perfect experiences and many individuals also set high standards for themselves. Women should walk and talk pretty, have perfect skin, be true on makeup, maintain their weight, and keep up with the newest trends in fashion (Pasopati, et al., 2023; Pujimahanani, et al., 2023). When people are unable to live up to those standards, they can easily lose confidence in themselves or feel left out, which could shape such severe mental health issues such as anxiety or depression (Hughes, 2007; Kuplen, 2023). Women have been taught to be compared for most of their lives. They must always consume the slogan of not being good enough. No matter how much self-confidence one possesses, it is almost impossible to ignore the definition of being beautiful standardized by society (Chang, 2015; Hayn-Leichsenring & Chatterjee, 2019).

Here, Kant confesses a deep appreciation of how aesthetic judgment contributes to social life. Kant agrees that human beings naturally tend to sociability and are often not content with an object if they cannot feel their satisfaction in it in community with others (Kuplen, 2023; Lopes, 2021). Indeed, sociability causes a refinement of pleasure, so that sensations have value only to the extent that they may be universally communicated. Aesthetic judgments claim a necessity that everyone ought to judge. Hence, 'whoever declares something to be beautiful wishes that everyone should approve of the object in question and similarly declare it to be beautiful' (Kuplen, 2023; Lopes, 2021).

In other words, beauty is not a private feeling, but a public feeling (Sasa, 2019). However, if somebody can agree on what is beautiful, he/she could not really understand how to get that agreement. Kant only states that an art that is beautiful to someone, in essence it is beautiful (Hayn-Leichsenring & Chatterjee, 2019; Lopes, 2021). Indeed, this aspect is closely related to deontological understanding in Kantian philosophy. In his sense, anything should be seen as it is since everyone already knows in themselves the values of it. It is beautiful since it is so, that is all in Kantian

formalism. This idea is indeed part of his essentiality of aesthetic components in understanding art, including beauty of the people.

Kant states clearly that the judgment (of beauty) is also called aesthetic precisely because its determining ground is not a concept but the feeling (of inner sense) (Sarmi et al., 2023; Sethi, 2019). The question is, how does an intelligent, attractive woman in today's society adjust to these unrealistic messages around her? Improvement and change are important parts to human's evolving characters, yet the motive behind cosmetic surgery is not constructive. Everyone must admit that a judgment about beauty in which there is the least interest is very partial and not a pure judgment of taste (Millenia et al., 2023; Sethi, 2019). One must not be in the least biased in favor of the existence of the thing, but must be entirely indifferent in this respect in order to play the judge in matters of taste (Hayn-Leichsenring & Chatterjee, 2019).

Demeanor and presentation are important to successful social and professional careers, but assimilating into the homogeneous model of perfection of society will only dictate individuals to forceful indicators (Chang, 2015; Ibrahim et al., 2022). In brief, an object that possesses possessiveness without an end is necessarily judged as beautiful, because it evokes in every person a feeling of disinterested pleasure (Hayn-Leichsenring & Chatterjee, 2019). Kantian aesthetic judgment indicates that any aesthetic idea should be seen in its essentiality. It could be such a universal indicator for everyone. It is indeed beautiful since the idea is understood individually. Societal standards should not be prioritized more than human's formalism on aesthetic condition (Hayn-Leichsenring & Chatterjee, 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2023). Any beauty is stated in individual feelings of pleasure in his or herself, not through dictations of common values.

Aesthetic Essentiality in *Who Says*

Selena Gomez's empowering anthem of *Who Says* resonates with the principles of aesthetic philosophy, particularly the ideas of Kant. The song encourages listeners to embrace their true selves by challenging societal beauty standards and rejecting the judgments of others (GeniusMedia, 2011). It aligns with Kant's emphasis on individuality and self-expression, as well as the concepts of autonomy and the sublime. *Who Says* inspires listeners to recognize their own potentials, to defy limitations, and define their own identities, echoing the principles of aesthetic philosophy in promoting self-acceptance and the celebration of unique beauty. Here are lyrics that contain the principles of aesthetic essentiality:

*I wouldn't wanna be anybody else, hey
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?
I'm sure you got some things you'd like to change about yourself
But when it comes to me, I wouldn't want to be anybody else (GeniusMedia, 2011)*

Intro and Verse 1 of the song convey a profound philosophy of self-acceptance and the rejection of negative judgments from others. The line of *I wouldn't wanna be anybody else* emphasizes the importance of embracing one's true self and appreciating one's own unique qualities. It encourages individuals to resist the desire to be someone else and highlights the value of authenticity. In this sense, being authentic is implicitly being thought of as becoming different from what the others think about the individuals.

The lyrics also address the impact of negative judgments from others. The line of *You made me insecure, told me I wasn't good enough* acknowledges the influence of external forces on one's self-esteem. It highlights the harm caused by such judgments and emphasizes the need to recognize one's own worth, regardless of others' opinions. Being insecure is one of mental disorders that could be light or even severe. The lyric indeed intentionally says that following the expectations of others will only ignore any essential aspects of human beings and shape such disorder to oneself. In this sense, being good is not about ethics, but about how obedient a person is to such various social standards, especially beauty ones here (Attamimi et al., 2023; Aulia et al., 2022). The lyric also shows that women will never stop being obedient to any social standards. Besides, that condition will only bring such harms towards their own selves that are already beautiful before they nod to any standard at all.

Furthermore, the lyrics challenge the authority of those who pass judgment. The line of *But who are you to judge when you're a diamond in the rough?* prompts reflection on the imperfections and potential for growth in everyone, including the ones who judge. It encourages individuals to value their own unique qualities and resist the urge to conform to others' standards. Explicitly, this lyric criticizes those who measure the values of others by fixed beauty standards. Being a judge is so arbitrary that it will only shape such victimization in the process (Attamimi et al., 2023; Aulia et al., 2022). Implicitly, by emphasizing diamond in the rough, Gomez would like to expose that women are actually valuable though the values may be hidden from any beauty standard. No one could judge the beauty of a diamond besides the diamond itself being seen in its essentiality. Therefore, this lyric points out the Kantian essentiality in women's beauty that should be understood not from their obedience to social standards, but from the essence of their own selves.

In wider meanings, Intro and Verse 1 of the song promotes self-acceptance, rejects negative judgments, and encourages individuals to appreciate their own uniqueness. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's worth and resisting the influence of others' opinions on self-perception. Moreover, the one that should be pointed out is about the essential aspect of beauty out of any dictation from various beauty standards.

I'm no beauty queen, I'm just beautiful me
You've got every right to a beautiful life, come on (GeniusMedia, 2011)

The Pre-Chorus of the song above highlights the concept of beauty and self-worth. The line of *I'm no beauty queen, I'm just beautiful me* reflects the idea that one does not need to fit societal beauty standards or be a conventional beauty queen to be beautiful. It encourages embracing one's unique appearance and celebrating one's individuality. The lyric emphasizes the meanings of beauty through the essential aspect of self (Maharaj, 2013; Sethi, 2019). Being beautiful is not meant to follow any procedure or standard, but how it may be understood as the truest understanding of self-definition.

The following line of *You've got every right to a beautiful life, come on* conveys a message of empowerment and self-assertion. It suggests that everyone has the right to live a fulfilling and beautiful life, regardless of external judgments or expectations (Attamimi et al., 2023; Aulia et al., 2022). The lyrics encourage the listener to embrace this notion and seize the opportunity to live their life to the fullest. To be stated as beautiful is not such an achievement by following trendsetters. It is actually the matter

of every woman's right to be said as so. It also relates to the aesthetic understanding of life that its beauty is the reflection of beauty of the people.

Furthermore, the Pre-Chorus promotes self-acceptance and challenges conventional notions of beauty. It emphasizes that beauty comes in various forms and that everyone deserves to lead a beautiful and fulfilling life on their own terms. Women do not always have to nod to every kind of treatment to be indicated as beautiful. It is since any kind of treatment will never end. It is always better for women to appreciate themselves as who they really are. That is the essential point of aesthetic understanding in everyday life too.

*Who says you're not perfect? Who says you're not worth it?
Who says you're the only one that's hurting?
Trust me, that's the price of beauty
Who says you're not pretty? Who says you're not beautiful?* (GeniusMedia, 2011)

The Chorus of the song is the main point of the essential indication of aesthetic judgment. It confronts societal expectations and challenges the notion of perfection. The lyrics question the condition by saying *Who says you're not perfect? Who says you're not worth it?*. This idea highlights the arbitrary nature of judgment and emphasizes that no one has the right to determine someone else's worth or beauty. It encourages listeners to reject the negative opinions of others and embrace their own values. Indeed, the conception of *who says* is not about agreeing, but negating anyone who would like to define and dictate anyone through any standard (GeniusMedia, 2011; Smarandrea et al., 2023). Those who would like to measure the values of others are actually no one at all. It is because any value of a woman is not totally defined by the eyesight of others. Beauty truly lies on the self-worth of being beautiful for women.

The following line of *Who says you're the only one that's hurting?* acknowledges that everyone experiences pain and struggles, regardless of external appearances. It serves as a reminder that no one is alone in their challenges and encourages empathy and understanding towards others. This lyric also would like to correlate what the singer feels to the audience. She would like to strengthen the audience by saying that everyone is hurt because of the beauty standards, so that everyone should remind each other not always say yes to the dictations. By saying the same feeling, Gomez would also like to expose essential aspects of beauty that apply universally to every woman being. No one should be hurt by being not beautiful (Attamimi et al., 2023; Sontag, 1975). Everyone is beautiful and everyone should be happy about that condition no matter what aspect that may come in the future.

The lyrics then assert the line of *Trust me, that's the price of beauty*. This statement challenges the societal pressure to conform to a narrow definition of beauty and suggests that true beauty often comes with its own set of hardships and sacrifices. It invites listeners to reevaluate their perspectives on beauty and appreciate the resilience and strength that can be found within it. The price of beauty means two things; as the ones that must be challenged and the reflection of truest beauty itself. It must be challenged since it is usually being used to differentiate women from one beauty standard to the other. The differentiations are so hierarchical that will let down any decent woman, that is actually beautiful in her own sense. The reflection of truest beauty lies in the price of essentiality itself (Hughes, 2010; Sontag, 1975). Being essential is the absolute value that will never be incorrect at every aspect.

The Chorus concludes with the repetition of the questions of *Who says you're not pretty? Who says you're not beautiful?*. This repetition reinforces the message of challenging societal standards and embracing one's unique beauty. It encourages listeners to reject the negative voices and beliefs that undermine their self-worth and to recognize their inherent beauty. Gomez would like to uplift the values of women beings by shaping their self-esteem (GeniusMedia, 2011). By stating the question, she is changing the meaning from being not pretty to being pretty in its fullest. It also applies to the condition of being beautiful that exists even without being said so by any kind of beauty standard.

Furthermore, the Chorus of the song encourages listeners to question societal judgments, embrace their worth and beauty, and recognize the shared experiences of pain and struggle. It promotes self-acceptance and challenges the notion of perfection while emphasizing the strength and resilience that can be found in embracing one's own unique beauty (Maharaj, 2013; Wijaya et al., 2023). The repetition of words of *who says* is done by Gomez to emphasize that no one will be able to dictate the standard of beauty if the self denies that condition. By promoting the words of *who says*, Gomez also states that women should not always define beauty merely on beauty standard or even any cosmetic product. Women should appreciate their own beauties since those are already essentially indicated in their own existences.

*It's such a funny thing how nothing's funny when it's you
You tell 'em what you mean, but they keep whiting out the truth
It's like a work of art that never gets to see the light
Keep you beneath the stars, won't let you touch the sky* (GeniusMedia, 2011)

The Verse 2 of the song exposes the theme of personal struggle and the challenges of being heard and understood. The line of *It's such a funny thing how nothing's funny when it's you* suggests that when one is experiencing difficulties or facing obstacles, it can be difficult to find humor or lightheartedness in the situation. This line highlights the contrast between the external perception of a situation and the internal emotions and struggles one may be experiencing. The lyric is not about humor, but about the irony of life within beauty standards. While others undermine those who are not valuable to such beauty standards, the condition indeed may harm otherwise to the victim (Attamimi et al., 2023; Smarandreetha et al., 2023). It is not funny at all and it must be omitted by all means.

The following line of *You tell 'em what you mean, but they keep whiting out the truth* reflects the frustration of not being heard or having one's words distorted or ignored. It implies that despite expressing oneself honestly, others may choose to disregard or misinterpret the truth, diminishing the significance of one's experiences or feelings. In this case, the truth is the essential point of beauty itself (Attamimi et al., 2023; Sethi, 2019). It moves not outside of women's beings but walks together with what they embrace everyday. The idea of being beautiful is already stated inside even if women refuse to follow any trendsetter of beauty standards.

The lyrics continue with the metaphorical line of *It's like a work of art that never gets to see the light*. This suggests that one's talents, ideas, or unique qualities may go unrecognized or unappreciated, similar to an artwork that remains hidden or unseen. It conveys a sense of frustration and longing for validation or the opportunity to share one's talents with the world (Hamidah et al., 2023; Maharaj, 2013). In other words, the lyric would assert that beauty of any woman must always be under the spotlight.

Women should always be remembered in their own beauty that is essential in every way of life.

The Verse 2 concludes with the line of *Keep you beneath the stars, won't let you touch the sky*. This metaphorical statement suggests that external forces or circumstances may hold one back from reaching their full potential or pursuing their dreams. It symbolizes the limitations imposed on someone's aspirations or ambitions, preventing them from soaring and achieving their goals. By emphasizing the idea of essentiality, women could find their uniqueness out of any dictation of beauty standard (Hughes, 2010; Sontag, 1975). Being beautiful is essential and formal. Every woman should know that since the values are already intact in everyday life. By imagining and applying that condition, equality could be realized among women beings.

Moreover, verse 2 portrays the challenges of being misunderstood, having one's truth distorted, and facing limitations on personal growth and fulfillment. It highlights the frustration of not being heard or recognized for one's talents and emphasizes the longing to break free from these constraints and reach for the stars. The lyrics underline a matter of metaphorical sense in the idea of irony regarding the title of the song. Gomez would like to show that women are beautiful in any way even if no one agrees with themselves in their own conditions.

Who says you're not star potential? Who says you're not presidential?

Who says you can't be in movies?

Who says you don't pass the test? Who says you can't be the best?

Who said, who said? Won't you tell me who said that? Yeah, who said? (GeniusMedia, 2011)

The Bridge of the song challenges the limiting beliefs and expectations imposed on individuals by others. It begins with a series of questions like *Who says you're not star potential? Who says you're not presidential? Who says you can't be in movies?* These questions challenge the authority of those who doubt or dismiss someone's potential for success and greatness. It encourages individuals to question and reject the negative opinions and limitations placed upon them by others (Hughes, 2010; Maharaj, 2013). This lyric also would like to deny any kind of misogynist perspective and gender bias that are used to undermine the roles of women. In many aspects, women are only considered good if they follow various beauty standards. However, Gomez denies that situation in the song by indicating that any woman deserves to go forward and to realize any dream she wants.

The verse of the Bridge continues with the questions of *Who says you don't pass the test? Who says you can't be the best?*. These questions further challenge the imposed boundaries and doubters, emphasizing that no one has the right to determine one's abilities or limit their aspirations. It encourages individuals to believe in their own capabilities and strive to be the best version of themselves. Passing the test and becoming the best are quite objective achievements and indeed those are essential (Hughes, 2007; Sethi, 2019). In this case, by accentuating essential points of aesthetic ideas, Gomez tries to change perspectives of beauty from matters of beauty standards to the idea of achievement in everyday life.

The repeated phrases of *Who said, who said? Won't you tell me who said that? Yeah, who said?* serve as a rallying call to challenge and confront those who have doubted or underestimated one's potential. It embodies a spirit of defiance and determination, urging individuals to rise above the limiting beliefs and opinions of others and to define their own path and possibilities. Indeed, the lyrics inspire women to go ahead and be

brave to surpass any obstacle in front of them. Women are also told to always keep trying though there are many people that will hinder their way to realize dreams (Kuplen, 2021; Sontag, 1975). Moreover, the Bridge of the song empowers individuals to question and reject the doubts and limitations imposed on them by others. It encourages them to embrace their potential, challenge societal expectations, and strive for greatness. The repeated refrain reinforces the message of defiance and self-belief, urging individuals to rise above the opinions of naysayers and embrace their own power to achieve their dreams.

Speaking of aesthetics is talking about beauty and art. Often aesthetics is seen as a science that studies art as art or commonly described as *l'art pour l'art* (Hughes, 2010). This is indicated as a very rich paradigm of thinking about rationality and human experience. Kant put aesthetics as an independent science but that always relates to ethics and everyday human morality. The perspective works in Kantian transcendental ideas that work like a metaphysics that comprehends every single aspect of life, including women's one (Kuplen, 2023; Sethi, 2019). It is not among human beings, but it works like a foundation for all values of life, especially about aesthetic judgment.

Who Says states that beauty is basically not just physical. Many aspects can create a person's inner beauty from behavior, character, habits, smooth speech, and so on (Sontag, 1975)so. Likewise, the moral that is conveyed in the song is also ethical. In accordance with the theory adopted by essentiality, the beauty of each person is different and people cannot generalize only from the beauty of the face or from the beauty of the body shape, but also from many aspects that other people do not (Sethi, 2019; Sontag, 1975). Many people notice that aspect, but in reality, what happened proves that physical judgments are more certain, rather than behavioral and characteristic assessments. Even so, in that song, Gomez explains the lyrics of *I'm just beautiful me* which means *I'm beautiful as I am* without having to wait for approval from other people whether someone is beautiful or not.

Furthermore, Kant's Aesthetic Essentiality Theory and the song of *Who Says* also shed light on the societal pressure to conform to narrow standards of beauty. Kant argues that true beauty lies in embracing individuality and expressing oneself authentically. Similarly, *Who Says* challenges the notion of beauty dictated by societal norms. Gomez's lyrics advocate for self-acceptance and the rejection of societal expectations, encouraging listeners to embrace their unique qualities (GeniusMedia, 2011). She would like to give freedom to any woman to assert her own situation out of any total obedience to various social beauty standards.

By emphasizing that beauty is not confined to physical attributes, both Kant's theory and the song challenge the prevailing beauty standards that often perpetuate unrealistic ideals (Hayn-Leichsenring & Chatterjee, 2019; Maharaj, 2013). The harmonious link between Kant's philosophy and the empowering message of *Who Says* highlights the importance of self-confidence and the celebration of individual beauty in a society that often imposes rigid beauty standards.

Moreover, being called beautiful is thought to reflect something essential to women's character and concerns (Sontag, 1975). Kant's Aesthetic Essentiality Theory and the song of *Who Says* also emphasize the role of personal judgment in perceiving beauty. According to Kant, aesthetic judgments are subjective and based on an individual's personal experiences and sensibilities. Similarly, the lyrics of *Who Says* convey the message that beauty is ultimately a matter of personal perception. Gomez encourages listeners to trust their own judgment and to define their beauty on their

own terms (GeniusMedia, 2011). This aligns with Kant's idea that beauty is not an objective standard imposed by society but rather a personal and subjective experience.

By empowering individuals to define their own beauty, *Who Says* resonates with Kant's theory and challenges the notion that beauty should be universally defined or dictated by external opinions. Nonetheless, physical beauty remains one of the most delightful and influential qualities, deserving of high esteem and caution against unwarranted disdain (Schulting, 2016; Sontag, 1975). The link between the song of *Who Says* and Kant's theory of the Aesthetic Essentiality is harmonious and appropriate to each other's simultaneous ideas.

CONCLUSION

Society creates certain expectations of the perfect experience and many individuals set high standards for themselves. However, when someone does not live up to those standards, they can easily lose confidence or feel left out and then serious mental health problems like anxiety or depression develop. By examining this view with the estimation of Kant's theory, people should be able to understand that the evaluation of a beauty is not always the same, so there is no formula for a set of existing judgments. Art is beautiful for a person, therefore it is in essence is beautiful. Therefore, Gomez in *Who Says* believes that women beings can be the best and can do the best for their own lives without following any dictation of beauty standard from both inside and outside of them.

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