

## Negotiating Femininity and Masculinity: A Judith Butler Approach to Megan Trainor's 'Dear Future Husband'

Ria Saraswati

English Education Department, Universitas Esa Unggul

**Abstract:** *This study employs Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to analyze Megan Trainor's song "Dear Future Husband," exploring the negotiation of femininity and masculinity within contemporary pop culture. Utilizing a qualitative content analysis method, the research examines lyrical content, musical elements, and visual representations associated with the song to uncover underlying gender norms and performances. The results reveal that "Dear Future Husband" both reinforces and subverts traditional gender roles; while it portrays conventional expectations of femininity and masculinity, it simultaneously introduces nuanced demands for mutual respect and partnership. The discussion highlights the complexity of gender performances in mainstream media, suggesting that Trainor's work reflects a transitional phase in societal understandings of gender dynamics. By applying Butler's framework, the study illustrates how pop songs can serve as sites for both perpetuating and challenging normative gender constructs, offering insights into the evolving landscape of gender identity and expression.*

**Keywords:** *Gender Performativity, Pop Culture, Femininity, Masculinity, Judith Butler.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a broad social movement and ideology that advocates for women's rights and equality in all aspects of life while challenging patriarchal systems and gender-based discrimination. According to Tayson (2006), traditional gender roles portrayed men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive, while women were emotional, weak, nurturing, and submissive. This portrayal reinforces the notion that women are inherently inferior and powerless. Feminist movements have challenged these harmful stereotypes and fought for women's equality in various areas, including education, employment, politics, and social life. By advocating for women's rights and challenging patriarchal structures, feminism seeks to create a more just and equitable society where all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities and are treated with respect. According to Lorber as quoted in Baataar, Agana, & Akapule (2023), Feminism is a social movement whose primary goal is gender equality. Feminism has evolved over time, with each wave addressing a different issue related to gender, equality, and women's societal roles. Fiss (1994) stated that feminism is the idea of social and political movements to reach women's equality. The first wave of feminism emphasized legal rights, such as women's suffrage, whereas the second wave focused on broader issues such as reproductive rights, workplace equality, and challenging traditional gender roles. The third wave, which emerged in the 1990s, emphasized diversity, intersectionality, and the deconstruction of traditional gender roles. The concept of gender performativity, developed by Judith Butler, is one of the most significant contributions to contemporary feminist theory.

Butler as quoted in Morgenroth & Ryan (2018) argues that gender is a series of societally expected performances rather than a fixed or inherent identity. Butler argues that people "perform" gender through repeated behaviours, gestures, and actions that give the impression of a stable gender identity. Cultural norms shape these performances, rather than being biologically determined. By disrupting these performances, individuals can challenge and subvert traditional gender roles. Sutanto (2017) states that women face negative stereotypes in society. Women are often stereotyped as weak, emotional, housewives, or even sexual tools in relationships. Women are often treated as second-class citizens, with limited control over their lives. Through this lens, gender becomes fluid and reinterpretable, allowing for resistance to societal expectations. According to Judith Butler's theory, gender is not innate or essential, but rather something we continuously enact. Cultural expectations, societal norms, and historical contexts all have an impact on these repeated performances, which frequently confine individuals to rigid categories of "male" or "female."

Butler's theory has influenced debates about how gender roles are created and maintained in society. She refutes the idea that men and women are predisposed to behave in certain ways, arguing that these behaviours are learned and reinforced through social interactions. Rubin as quoted in Mikkola (2017) argues that gender differences stem from social interventions that discourage behavior that does not align with one's gender. Furthermore, according to Kimmel (2000), gender roles are not fixed but are influenced by a variety of contextual factors. Feminism, especially in its third-wave and postmodern iterations, employs the concept of performativity to investigate how women can break free from restrictive gender roles and define their identities on their own terms. Mitchell as quoted in Hollway, Mitchell, & Walsh (2015) has stated feminism was organized to improve women's legal rights and social opportunities. Also, Swirsky & Angelone (2016) stated feminism work to fix the social gender imbalance. Based on that definition, we can conclude that feminism is a social movement that seeks gender equality in social and political spheres. Feminism is an effort by women to fight for equal rights and to end gender injustice in the family and society. Feminism aims to elevate and equalize women's rights. The early women's movement drew sympathy from both women and men. The growing support for feminism has led to significant changes in popular culture, as evidenced by the challenges to stereotypes and redefinition of gender roles.

In popular culture, feminism has played an important role in challenging stereotypes and redefining gender roles. Media and gender are large fields that constantly generate new data that can be collected and analyzed in a variety of ways. Each year, a large number of movies and television shows are produced. The media is an important topic of study because it has the ability to represent what is socially acceptable (Carter & Steiner, 2004). Research on

the history of Hollywood film and representation demonstrates that representations are political in nature and hold power (Ryan & Kellner, 1988; Benshoff & Griffin, 2011). Songs, movies, and other forms of media are frequently used to address issues of gender equality, empowerment, and the complexities of modern relationships. As a result, pop culture can have an impact on many aspects of people's daily lives, which is why it is critical to consider, use, and monitor it. Pop culture, like pop feminism, focuses on accessible practices and topics for a broad audience (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2019). This type of feminism addresses simple issues that users can quickly consume in a market-like context. While not all media representations are explicitly feminist, many work with feminist ideas by challenging traditional narratives or providing fresh perspectives on gender and power dynamics. Beyoncé's performance at the MTV Video Music Awards in front of an illuminated screen reading 'FEMINIST' and Taylor Swift's public media relationship with feminism have highlighted the visibility of feminism among young people in response to violence and misogyny (Armstrong, 2021; Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). In recent years, feminist scholarship has documented young people's responses in and around schools, including the formation of high school collectives to challenge rape culture and promote feminist consciousness, and the use of online digital spaces to promote feminist discourse (Armstrong, 2021; Retallack, Ringrose, & Lawrence, 2016). Within this context, Megan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband" can be viewed as a work of popular culture that engages with feminist themes, particularly the negotiation of gender roles and expectations in relationships.

"Dear Future Husband" is a pop song from Megan Trainor's debut album, *Title*, which was released in 2015. The song was a commercial success, charting worldwide and gaining attention for its catchy, upbeat rhythm and doo-wop style, which was reminiscent of 1950s pop music. While the song's sound and melody are light hearted and playful, its lyrics have sparked discussions and debates about gender roles, relationships, and the expectations that women may have of their partners in today's world. Music has a strong influence, particularly among younger generations, and it has become an important socializing and educational component. "Dear Future Husband" is essentially a playful letter to an imagined future spouse in which Trainor outlines her standards and expectations for her partner. Trainor portrays her ideal future husband as a partner who treats her with respect, kindness, and commitment. This characterization aligns with traditional gender roles and expectations from the 1950s. However, a deeper analysis reveals a more nuanced portrayal of gender dynamics and expectations within the context of modern relationships. On the surface, the song has the allure of classic love songs from the 1950s and 1960s, with themes like romance, commitment, and mutual affection. However, as we read deeper into the lyrics, it becomes clear that Trainor is not simply repeating

past gender norms, but also reworking them to fit a more empowered and modern view of relationships. Song lyrics are important socializing materials because they can influence the context of changing social attitudes. They include societally relevant ideas, meanings, values, and functions. Music from various genres can influence young people's beliefs and attitudes through its lyrics. According to , the media influences young people's perceptions of gender roles and sexual orientation. Trainor's song, "Dear Future Husband," contrasts traditional musical elements with modern, assertive lyrics. While the retro style evokes a time when women were often expected to be submissive, Trainor's lyrics defy these stereotypes. She presents herself as a confident and independent woman who seeks respect and equality in relationships. The contrast between traditional sounds and modern, assertive demands adds to the song's appeal and relevance for modern audiences. The song combines traditional femininity and contemporary assertiveness, making it an intriguing subject for examining the conflict between old and new gender roles. However, some have criticized the song for reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes by emphasizing domestic duties and reinforcing the notion that women must "perform" certain roles to keep their partners happy. Others interpret the song as an empowering statement about women setting their own standards and expectations for relationships. This dichotomy makes "Dear Future Husband" an intriguing case for investigating how popular culture negotiates gender expectations in the twenty-first century. However, some have criticized the song for reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes by emphasizing domestic duties and reinforcing the notion that women must "perform" certain roles to keep their partners happy. Others interpret the song as an empowering statement about women setting their own standards and expectations for relationships. This dichotomy makes "Dear Future Husband" an intriguing case for investigating how popular culture negotiates gender expectations in the twenty-first century.

Megan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband" has an intriguing relationship with feminist theory, particularly through the lens of Judith Butler's concept of gender performance. The song's lyrics, while playful and seemingly traditional on the surface, offer a complex negotiation of gender roles that are consistent with feminist ideas about agency, empowerment, and gender performance. Trainor's assertive tone is a key feminist aspect of the song. Rather than passively accepting societal expectations of what a woman should be in a relationship, Trainor takes control of the story by establishing the parameters for her future marriage. This assertiveness exemplifies feminist principles of agency and empowerment, as Trainor positions herself as an equal partner in the relationship with the ability to set her own rules. In doing so, she challenges the traditional notion that women must conform to specific roles in order to please their partners.

Furthermore, the song's playful call for respect and equality echoes feminist critiques of traditional gender dynamics in relationships. Trainor's lyrics imply that, while she may engage in traditional feminine behaviours such as cooking, cleaning, and looking good for her partner, she expects these roles to be returned with love, respect, and equality. This negotiation between traditional domestic roles and modern expectations of equality exemplifies the tension between old and new gender norms that feminist theory frequently investigates. At the same time, the song's humorous tone allows it to engage with feminist ideas in an approachable and relatable manner to a wide audience. Trainor challenges the traditional image of women as passive or submissive in relationships by combining humour and assertive demands, providing a more empowered vision of femininity. In this regard, "Dear Future Husband" can be viewed as a feminist anthem that redefines what it means to be a "perfect" wife by emphasizing the value of mutual respect and collaboration. However, it is important to recognize that the song's approach to feminism is not without complexities. Some critics argue that by referencing traditional domestic roles, "Dear Future Husband" reinforces the gender stereotypes that feminism seeks to dismantle. The references to cooking, cleaning, and looking good for her husband may be interpreted as reinforcing the notion that women are responsible for keeping the house and catering to their partner's needs. From this perspective, the song's feminist message may appear limited or contradictory.

Nonetheless, using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, we can see Trainor's performance of femininity as a deliberate act that both engages with and subverts traditional gender roles. Trainor challenges the idea that gender roles are fixed or natural by embodying certain aspects of femininity, such as domesticity and beauty, while also asserting her agency and demanding equality. Instead, she portrays gender as something that can be negotiated and redefined in the context of contemporary relationships. In this way, "Dear Future Husband" is consistent with feminist ideas about the fluidity and performativity of gender, providing a playful yet powerful commentary on the complexities of gender and power in contemporary culture. By examining Trainor's song through the framework of gender performativity, we can see how gender is not a fixed identity but rather a performance constructed through various social and cultural cues. Trainor's performance of femininity in "Dear Future Husband" both reinforces and subverts traditional expectations, demonstrating the complexity and fluidity of gender in contemporary culture.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **a. Feminism**

Feminism is a social and political movement dedicated to achieving gender equality and dismantling patriarchal structures that oppress women and marginalized genders. As stated by , feminism is the belief that inequalities persist in social, economic, political, and judicial arenas, shaped by certain principles that have historically prioritized men over women. This recognition of ingrained gender-based disparities can be traced back to societies structured by traditional norms, where men's roles were privileged, and women's voices marginalized. From these early observations of imbalance, the roots of the feminist movement began to take shape during the struggle for women's suffrage, planting a foundation of activism aimed at securing equal rights. Over time, this movement expanded beyond voting rights to embrace an array of issues, including access to reproductive healthcare, the pursuit of equal pay, and the fight to end gender-based violence. Munro (2013) stated fourth wave of feminism emerging in the 21st century, it tackles issues like reproductive rights, equitable wages, and addressing sexual violence, while adopting a broader, more global perspective. Technology, especially social media, provides platforms for grassroots organization, rapid communication, and public accountability. Munro emphasizes that this new wave is more inclusive and intersectional, recognizing how race, class, sexuality, and other factors shape women's experiences. Ultimately, the fourth wave's power lies in its adaptability, collective action, and commitment to challenging multiple forms of oppression. Building on this understanding of the fourth wave's inclusive and intersectional framework, feminism as a whole acknowledges that the inequalities women face cannot be fully understood in isolation. Through this lens, identities shaped by factors like race, class, sexuality, and ability further complicate the nature of oppression, underscoring the importance of challenging ingrained assumptions and cultivating meaningful dialogues that strive for true empowerment.

Feminism, at its core, seeks to dismantle deeply oppressive systems and champion the rights and freedoms of all individuals. Abolition Feminism is one recent theoretical framework that aligns with the core feminist goal of dismantling oppressive systems and advancing the rights and freedoms of all. Emerging prominently in recent academic discourse and reinforced by publications from 2022 and 2023, abolition feminism draws on intersectional feminist thought to critique and ultimately seek the eradication of institutions like prisons, policing, surveillance, and other punitive systems that disproportionately harm marginalized communities. A key text that

propelled this theoretical conversation is *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* by Davis, Dent, Meiners, & Richie (2022) to their argument is the recognition that traditional “carceral feminism”—feminism that uncritically embraces policing, imprisonment, and other punitive measures as a response to gender-based violence—ultimately reproduces the very systems of inequality, racism, and state control that oppress women, LGBTQ+ communities, and people of color. By exposing how carceral solutions deepen harm rather than resolving it, the authors advocate for a “feminism without borders,” one that rejects punitive models and embraces transformative justice. Over time, this social and political movement has evolved beyond earlier, more limited frameworks to embrace a broader, more inclusive perspective. Modern feminist thought acknowledges that women’s experiences are not universal, but rather shaped by multiple, intersecting identities. It recognizes that no single narrative can encapsulate the complexities of gender-based inequality. Instead, feminist scholarship pushes us to consider how overlapping factors contribute to marginalized communities’ struggles. Feminism’s ongoing dialogue encourages constant reflection, prompting us to address biases, prejudices, and structural barriers.

By examining how multiple forms of oppression intersect, feminist theory illuminates the complexities of social inequities. This critical approach not only uncovers the hidden layers within systems of dominance but also promotes an active engagement with the experiences of those often silenced. In doing so, it cultivates a heightened awareness that compels scholars, activists, and policymakers to dismantle entrenched patterns of exclusion. Through this rigorous process, feminism continues to evolve, ensuring that its transformative potential remains responsive to the diverse needs of marginalized communities.

#### **b. Judith Butler’s Theoretical Framework**

Judith Butler’s seminal works, particularly *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), revolutionized how we understand gender. In her seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler as quoted in Hough (2010) argues that gender is not something one simply is, but rather something one does—a repeated series of acts, gestures, and behaviours that come to be perceived as natural over time. According to this theory, what we commonly understand as a coherent and stable gender “core” is actually the cumulative effect of these repeated performances, rather than a reflection of any innate, essential identity.

Butler (2011) **posits that gender is not an innate essence or a stable identity but is constructed through repeated performances that consolidate the illusion of a stable gender core.** Building on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, we can thus view cultural artifacts—such as music videos—as not merely reflecting gender norms but actively participating in their production, reinforcement, or transformation. According to Butler (1999), these iterative acts, gestures, and behaviours materialize gender norms and reinforce a binary division of male and female. The notion that gender is performed rather than simply expressed from a pre-existing identity allows us to analyse cultural artifacts—like music videos—as sites where gender norms are produced, maintained, questioned, and reworked. In other words, by applying Butler's conceptualization of gender as performative, we can understand music videos as active cultural sites that do not merely reflect existing gender categories, but continuously (re)produce, negotiate, and challenge the very norms that define and shape gender identities.

Butler's work also draws attention to the regulatory frameworks that police and reinforce heteronormativity. The ubiquitous cultural scripts that dictate how masculinity and femininity should be enacted often limit the range of acceptable expressions. However, because these norms are performed rather than fixed, they are open to contestation. Identifying moments of subversion—where the performance does not neatly align with normative expectations—is crucial in understanding how gender norms can be destabilized.

### **c. Performing Femininity and Masculinity**

Judith Butler's perspective on femininity and masculinity is grounded in her broader theory of gender performativity, which challenges the idea that gender categories are innate, fixed, or naturally derived from biological sex. Male' and 'female' (or occasionally 'male' vs. 'female') as omnipresent, universal linguistic labels appear to be distinct, if not to say significant, enough regarding the way humans see themselves and others in the world. Earlier views and conceptualizations of gender were essentialist in nature, i.e. feminine vs. masculine identities were deemed to have an evolutionary, biological basis which are stable, determined, and not subject to any change (Butler, 2011). Instead, Butler (2011) argues that what we commonly understand as "feminine" or "masculine" are not stable essences or internal truths about a person's identity. Rather, they are sets of culturally and historically contingent norms, stylized behaviours, and repeated acts that collectively produce the appearance of a stable, coherent gender identity.



Building on feminist and queer theorists, Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity proposes that gender is not a stable, inherent characteristic but rather something continuously produced and reproduced through repeated actions, gestures, and cultural codes. According to Butler, we 'perform' gender through socially regulated patterns, inscribed by language, norms, and expectations. This performance creates the illusion of a coherent gender identity, but no authentic or original core underlies these acts. Instead, our repeated expressions, stylizations, and behaviours solidify certain gendered appearances, while other possibilities remain marginalized. Consequently, Butler's theory reveals how gender is a mutable construct shaped by social practice. Butler (Tomaszewski, Zarestky, & Gonzalez, 2020) suggests that the idea of a gender identity is socially made, politically charged and informed by a socio-historical context of a male-dominated society and other social laws. Gender is the cultural embodiment of a sexed body and is shaped and constructed through social mechanisms as well as through internalized discourse and tend to perpetuate it. She further argues that gender identity is an "agentic process of achievement" that we produce because of constraints from society. Repeated gender performativity is what "enables a subject" to be the normative 'male' or 'female. In essence, Butler's theory disrupts the notion of an innate gender identity by exposing how gender is continuously performed, reproduced, and reinforced within a socio-cultural framework. By illuminating the mechanisms through which certain gender identities are legitimized and others marginalized, Butler challenges us to recognize the political, historical, and discursive forces that shape our understanding of gender. In doing so, she encourages us to question the stability of gender categories, revealing them as contingent constructs sustained by the very acts and behaviours that we have been taught to perceive as natural.

### 3. METHODS

This study used qualitative methods to explore gender performativity in the Megan Trainor's 'Dear Future Husband'. Qualitative method is a research approach that focuses on exploring and understanding the subjective experiences, perspectives, and behaviours of individuals and groups (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This method involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data, such as interview transcripts, field notes, and observations, to gain insights into the social and cultural phenomena being studied. Qualitative methods have been particularly useful in gender research because they enable researchers to explore complex and nuanced aspects of gender, including the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals and groups related to gender identity, gender norms, and gender roles (Bamberg,

2012; Green & Thorogood, 2009; Mishler, 1995). Grounded in Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, its primary objective is to thoroughly examine how "Dear Future Husband" (2015) by Megan Trainor constructs, negotiates, and may subvert traditional gender norms. Butler's framework treats gender not as a static identity or biological given, but as ongoing, repeated performances shaped by social conventions. Using this theoretical lens, the song's lyrics, sonic qualities, and corresponding music video are studied as cultural texts that generate, propagate, and potentially challenge distinct, significant discourses surrounding femininity, masculinity, and their complex intersections.

Negotiating femininity and masculinity in the context of Megan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband" provides a compelling framework to investigate how gender identities are performed, contested, and reimagined through popular music. One of the strengths of qualitative methods in gender research is their ability to capture the complexity and diversity of gender experiences and identities. They allow researchers to explore the ways in which gender intersects with other social identities, such as race, class, and sexuality, and to understand the ways in which individuals negotiate and navigate gender norms and expectations in their daily lives. Qualitative research also enables researchers to use a variety of data sources and methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of gender-related issues (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Employing a Judith Butler-inspired lens allows researchers to examine the song's lyrics, imagery, and performative elements as sites where dominant gender norms and expectations are both reproduced and subverted. This approach acknowledges the complexity of gender expression and the interplay between femininity, masculinity, and other intersecting social factors—such as race, class, and sexuality—that shape how individuals understand and enact their gendered selves in everyday life. Utilizing qualitative methods—ranging from lyric analysis and music video observations to interviews and focus groups—can enrich our comprehension of these nuances by capturing the diverse and multifaceted ways individuals interpret and negotiate the messages embedded in cultural texts. This, in turn, generates in-depth insights that can inform discussions on gender, media literacy, and social change.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **1) Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity**

Central to Judith Butler's theoretical approach is the notion that gender is not a fixed biological essence but rather a performative act that is repeatedly constituted through discourse, imitation, and social norms. According to Butler, gender identity

emerges from the repetitive acts, gestures, and behaviours that individuals perform, ultimately producing the illusion of a stable, coherent gender core. This theory challenges the essentialist view that women and men behave in certain ways because of innate characteristics. Instead, Butler suggests that what we understand as femininity and masculinity are the products of cultural expectations and regulatory frameworks. Every public display—from language use and clothing choices to social etiquette and media representation—contributes to the ongoing construction and reinforcement of gender identities.

Butler's idea further implies that these norms are not passively inherited; they are actively negotiated, subverted, and contested by individuals and communities. Gender performativity does not merely reflect a pre-existing self; it actively brings that self into being. For Butler, the process is inherently political because it reveals how power structures and hegemonic ideologies shape the conditions under which particular kinds of gender expressions are recognized as legitimate. By understanding gender as a performance, we open the possibility for transformative acts that challenge and destabilize rigid binaries. Such transformations arise when performances fail, parody gender norms, or engage in forms of drag that underscore the imitative nature of gender itself. Thus, Butler's perspective provides a rich theoretical framework for analysing how media texts—such as music videos—participate in the ongoing negotiation of gender identities and roles.

#### **a. Contextualizing Megan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband"**

Megan Trainor's 2015 single "Dear Future Husband," accompanied by its retro-styled music video, presents a fascinating cultural artifact through which to apply Butler's theory. The track operates within a pop music framework, yet it draws heavily from past aesthetics, particularly the 1950s' domestic ideal. By blending modern production with a throwback visual motif, Trainor's video references a bygone era of strictly delineated gender roles: the dutiful housewife and the breadwinning husband. On the surface, "Dear Future Husband" appears to articulate demands for traditional forms of gentlemanly behavior—opening doors, taking her on dates, and respecting domestic boundaries—while Trainor's playful performance suggests a knowing wink at these conventions. This duality invites a Butlerian reading: Trainor's performance is simultaneously upholding and critiquing normative gender codes.

In analysing "Dear Future Husband," we must consider the cultural moment of its release. By 2015, public conversations around gender had evolved significantly, with increasing recognition of LGBTQ+ identities and a flourishing feminist discourse that questioned rigid conceptions of femininity and masculinity. Trainor's aesthetic choice to adopt a "vintage" persona can be read as an ironic commentary on outdated gender norms. Instead of unequivocally embracing the '50s model of domestic bliss, the video's sugar-sweet colours, choreographed dances, and exaggerated sets highlight the artificiality of these roles. They reveal femininity as a construct that, while historically positioned as "natural," is in fact dependent on stylized repetition and performance. The interplay of lyrics, visuals, and Trainor's own confident posture communicates that gender is not only learned and performed but also up for playful negotiation. Even as the track makes surface-level demands on a future husband—stay loyal, treat her right, and conform to a chivalrous ideal—the undercurrent of humour, irony, and self-awareness suggests that these demands are part of a game of gender signifiers rather than an expression of intrinsic truth. In this sense, "Dear Future Husband" stands as a contemporary instance of how popular culture recycles, remodels, and interrogates the traditional scripts of femininity and masculinity.

**b. Performing a "1950s Housewife" Feminine Ideal**

Within the music video for "Dear Future Husband," Megan Trainor strategically dons brightly colored dresses and takes on domestic tasks—baking pies, cleaning, and waiting expectantly for her prospective suitors—to invoke a nostalgic vision of femininity that was idealized in mid-twentieth-century media. This performance draws attention to the historical scripts that inform contemporary understandings of what it means to be a "proper" woman. The 1950s housewife aesthetic was associated with a tightly controlled feminine persona: a woman dedicated to homemaking, child-rearing, and pleasing her husband. Trainor's presence in this carefully staged environment might initially seem to reinforce that feminine ideal, presenting her body, voice, and behaviour as evidence of how a "good" woman should act.

However, through Butler's lens, it becomes clear that this portrayal reveals the highly performative nature of such ideals. The music video's exaggerated, almost cartoonish sets and Trainor's own playful smirks undermine any notion that these representations are natural or inevitable. Rather than faithfully reproducing the 1950s model, Trainor's performance parodies it. The repetition of these

gestures—arranging pies, standing by the front door, giving knowing side-eyes to the camera—makes visible their contractedness. This call-and-response with historical codes of femininity underscores that such norms are not biological imperatives but learned behaviours subject to adaptation and critique. By occupying this role theatrically, Trainor shows that gendered behaviours are not static; they can be taken up, modified, and relinquished, allowing for new understandings of what it means to be feminine in a contemporary setting.

### **c. Irony, Agency, and Subversion in Trainor's Performance**

What makes Trainor's approach particularly potent is the layer of irony running through her performance. The demands laid out in the song's lyrics—treat her like a lady, show her affection, appreciate her domestic contributions—are performed with a playful confidence that contrasts sharply with the subservience typically associated with the archetype she inhabits. The camera angles, bright pastel colors, and synchronized dancing establish a self-conscious aesthetic that says: "We are performing these roles for your recognition and critique." Her playful winks and measured vocal delivery remind the audience that these gendered acts are being staged, even exaggerated, to reveal their artificiality.

In making these roles visible as performances, Trainor opens up a space for agency and subversion. Instead of concealing the labor that goes into producing "femininity," the video highlights it. The viewer is invited to see these acts as scripted and rehearsed rather than authentic expressions of womanhood. By doing so, Trainor critiques the restrictive binaries that have historically governed women's lives. She asserts that if these roles can be learned, they can be unlearned or replaced with new scripts that better suit contemporary values and individual desires. This gesture aligns with Butler's argument that performances that lay bare their artificiality can disrupt the power of hegemonic gender norms.

Furthermore, the interplay of modern pop music sensibilities with vintage iconography positions Trainor at the intersection of multiple discourses on femininity. Her image is not simply a passive absorption of past norms; it is a conscious reworking that acknowledges the audience's awareness of those norms. In an era where media consumers are more critical and savvy, Trainor's performance becomes a form of feminist camp—employing over-the-top theatricality as a strategy to highlight the absurdity of rigid gender scripts. This method of critique doesn't necessarily reject all aspects of traditional femininity; rather, it suggests that women can pick and choose elements from various historical

scripts, fusing them into personalized expressions that better reflect their autonomy and complexity. In this sense, Trainor's portrayal exemplifies Butler's notion that gender is a site of ongoing negotiation, performance, and political refiguration. It is not fixed in the 1950s nor wholly erased by modernity but is continuously reimagined through performances that both acknowledge and challenge the past.

## **2) Constructing Masculinity in Response to Feminine Demands**

While the focus on femininity is central to the critique, it is equally important to consider how Megan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband" negotiates masculinity. The track's titular address—speaking directly to a hypothetical male partner—positions masculinity as the counterpart to her performed femininity. Within Butler's framework, masculinity is also constructed through repeated performative acts, and these acts are often defined in contradistinction to femininity. If the woman is presented as nurturing, domestic, and emotionally available, the man is frequently expected to be protective, rational, and dependable. This polarity relies on a stabilized set of masculine behaviours that are no less artificial than those assigned to women.

In "Dear Future Husband," masculinity comes into play through the would-be suitors who appear in the video. They often struggle to meet Trainor's demands, comically failing at domestic chores or misreading her cues. Their awkward attempts to conform to her standards highlight that masculine roles, too, are performances subject to the same regulatory pressures and potential failures as feminine ones. If the men appear uncertain or clumsy in meeting Trainor's scripted ideals, it suggests that these ideals—both feminine and masculine—do not arise from innate truths but from cultural scripts that may not align with individual capacities or desires. By showcasing men fumbling through tasks such as cooking or tidying, the video subverts the expectation that men should remain outside domestic spheres. Instead, it places them within the private realm traditionally delegated to women, thereby illustrating that masculinity, like femininity, can be reconfigured and adapted to new contexts.

## **3) Destabilizing Gender Norms and the Path to New Configurations**

Taken as a whole, the negotiation of femininity and masculinity in "Dear Future Husband" reflects Butler's theory that gender norms are neither natural nor inevitable, but rather culturally produced and maintained through performance. By invoking a stylized past and then playfully undermining its expectations, Trainor's music video suggests that the strict boundaries that once defined femininity and masculinity are ripe for contestation. The men and women in the video operate within a space of ironic role-

playing, making it possible to see how easily these norms can be parodied and reshuffled.

This destabilization invites viewers to imagine new configurations of gendered power and relationship dynamics. If Trainor can adopt the aesthetic markers of a 1950s housewife while demanding her suitor respect her agency and individuality, what stops us from mixing and matching other gendered attributes to suit contemporary values? The recognition that these attributes—be they nurturing, authoritative, emotional, or rational—are not biologically hardwired to one gender category encourages a more fluid and equitable understanding of human possibility. It holds open the door for partnerships that are negotiated case-by-case, rather than prescribed by historical precedent or social dictate.

In essence, Butler's theory helps us read Trainor's playful homage to old-fashioned domesticity as a critique that reveals the artificial scaffolding of gender roles. The music video's ironic take on love and marriage acts as a reminder that these institutions, too, are culturally constructed and maintained through performance. With a bright smile and a catchy tune, Trainor delivers a subtle yet powerful lesson: we do not have to accept the rigid patterns of the past. Instead, we can approach them as performances to be studied, critiqued, and rewritten.

By acknowledging that neither femininity nor masculinity is monolithic or unchanging, "Dear Future Husband" invites audiences to participate in a collective reimagining of relationships. Such a reimagining aligns with Butler's broader project of deconstructing normative identities and power structures. It encourages a fluid and iterative process, wherein everyone plays a role in shaping what it means to be a man, a woman, or any other identity on the gender spectrum. In the end, Trainor's work resonates with Butler's insights, demonstrating how cultural texts can expose the performative dimensions of gender and open new pathways to more flexible, authentic, and egalitarian ways of being.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

### **1) Performing Gender: Constructing Femininity and Masculinity in Dear Future Husband**

The research findings suggest that Meghan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband" can be fruitfully examined through a Judith Butler-inspired lens to understand how the song and its accompanying music video articulate, negotiate, and trouble established notions of femininity and masculinity. One of the central tenets of Butler's theory of

gender performativity is that gender does not pre-exist its enactment; rather, it emerges through repeated, stylized performances that come to be read as “natural” over time. In “Dear Future Husband,” both lyrical content and visual representations engage in a playful, tongue-in-cheek negotiation of these roles, where the protagonist’s femininity is simultaneously traditional and subversive. The music video’s sets and costumes—vibrant 1950s-inspired dresses, pastel kitchens, and domestic chores—recall archetypal images of the “ideal housewife,” while the lyrics and Trainor’s self-presentation subtly push back against these expectations. This interplay contributes to a more nuanced understanding of gender as iterative and contested.

From a Butlerian standpoint, the result of the research indicates that Trainor’s staged femininity in the video is not simply a reproduction of past ideals but an ongoing performance that comments on them. By occupying a highly feminine role—baking pies, tidying up a homey space, and waiting for her “future husband”—Trainor’s character is initially placed in a heteronormative setting that might appear regressive. Yet, the subtext and humor embedded in the performance challenge this reading. For example, the protagonist’s demands for equal treatment, respect, and a partner who contributes to the relationship beyond superficial gestures suggest that she is not merely internalizing patriarchal scripts. Instead, she dramatizes these scripts to reveal their constructed and somewhat absurd nature. The resulting tension between the “perfect wife” imagery and the assertive lyrical demands serves as a commentary on how feminine norms can be destabilized even as they are performed.

In addition, the research outcome points to how the male characters in the video are also subject to a certain form of gender performativity. The men vying for Trainor’s affection are depicted as caricatures who must prove their worth by demonstrating domestic aptitude (e.g., cooking skills) and willingness to treat Trainor’s character as an equal. By reversing traditional expectations—having men engage in domestic performances historically coded as feminine and having the female protagonist judge their suitability—“Dear Future Husband” subtly challenges hegemonic masculinity. Though the song never completely breaks from heteronormative frameworks, it reveals that masculinity is also a performance that can be molded, critiqued, and reshaped to serve the interests of equality and mutual respect.

The results further emphasize that the campy aesthetics and performative exaggerations within the video highlight Butler’s notion that there is no “authentic” or “original” gender identity behind the act. Instead, what we see in Trainor’s playful appropriation of 1950s stereotypes is a set of citations—borrowed gestures, retro



outfits, and old-fashioned signifiers—that produce an illusion of stability. By performing these traditionally feminine acts with an ironic wink, Trainor underscores that femininity itself is a stylized repetition of gestures rather than a fixed essence. This approach renders the act visible as an act—i.e., something consciously done rather than naturally occurring. Such visibility destabilizes the gender norms it references.

The interplay of these factors shows that within “Dear Future Husband,” the negotiation of femininity and masculinity becomes an arena of self-conscious performance. Rather than straightforwardly affirming patriarchal gender roles, Trainor’s character negotiates her position, demands reciprocity, and uses humor to expose the constructed nature of the very ideals she seems to enact. In doing so, the song and video contribute to a critical dialogue about how gender norms are sustained and how they might be altered. The Butlerian perspective that emerges from this research allows us to see how media texts can simultaneously draw upon and deconstruct gendered traditions, suggesting that even highly commercial and pop-oriented works have the potential to question and reshape our understanding of what it means to be “feminine” or “masculine.” Such a reading demonstrates that the performance of gender in popular music is dynamic, contested, and ripe for renegotiation.

## **2) Normativity, Resistance, and the Butlerian Framework**

The research indicates that the negotiation of femininity and masculinity in “Dear Future Husband” unfolds against a backdrop of heteronormative structures that Butler’s framework helps to identify. Butler’s work emphasizes how norms—particularly heteronormative gender norms—function through repetition and reinforcement, producing the illusion that certain behaviours, desires, and identities are natural or inevitable. In the context of “Dear Future Husband,” the heterosexual script of a woman seeking a husband and assuming a domestic role might appear to endorse a normative trajectory. However, the results of the analysis highlight that the video’s playful exaggeration of domesticity and the protagonist’s explicit insistence on mutual respect reveal a subtle form of resistance. By making these norms overtly visible and slightly ridiculous, the video helps viewers recognize them as constructed rather than inherent.

This process of making norms visible is crucial to Butler’s notion of subversion. The protagonist in “Dear Future Husband” does not simply accept her role as a future wife; she sets conditions and makes demands. The humorous tone and retro aesthetic work in tandem to show that this future marriage is not a foregone conclusion based on

natural differences between men and women, but rather a negotiation where the partner must meet her standards. Thus, the Butlerian reading suggests that the protagonist resists the idea of a naturally docile femininity that unconditionally cares for the husband-to-be. This form of resistance—albeit performed within mainstream pop culture and reliant on commercial appeal—indicates that even highly mediated performances can serve as spaces where normative structures are recognized and potentially contested. In this sense, the artist's approach can be seen as a feminist intervention that does not entirely discard tradition but repurposes it to highlight possibilities for equitable partnership.

Moreover, the research draws attention to how the male characters' performed masculinity is equally under scrutiny. Traditional masculinity is often underwritten by expectations of prowess, dominance, and emotional restraint. In the music video, this model is inverted: the suitors must impress the protagonist through culinary competence, kindness, and a demonstrated willingness to share domestic burdens. These men, rather than displaying hegemonic toughness or economic dominance, attempt to fulfill the criteria set forth by the female protagonist. By focusing on their domestic failings and successes, the video humorously destabilizes the notion that masculinity is inherently authoritative and unchallenged. From a Butlerian perspective, this moment of destabilization suggests that masculinity, too, is a fluid, performed identity that can be reconfigured within different cultural contexts. If men can be judged by their cooking skills rather than their financial or physical prowess, then their masculinity is similarly unmoored from traditional norms, rendering it less monolithic and more subject to negotiation.

The subversion within "Dear Future Husband" does not necessarily overthrow heteronormative frameworks entirely; it still casts the relationship within a heterosexual matrix and imagines a future husband rather than envisioning alternatives outside heterosexual coupling. Nonetheless, the research underscores that even within this normative frame, there is room to question and reshape the contours of gender relations. The Butlerian lens reveals that the video's emphasis on reciprocity, equal contribution, and respectful treatment invites the audience to imagine a scenario in which gender roles, while still recognizable, are not rigid or predetermined. Instead, they become a set of culturally inherited scripts that can be parodied, revised, and ultimately made more egalitarian.

Another layer uncovered by the research is the complexity of delivering this message within a mainstream pop product. Popular culture does not operate in a vacuum; it must appeal to wide audiences and often relies on familiar tropes for immediate recognition. Yet, by embedding a sly critique of these tropes within a catchy melody and a nostalgic aesthetic, “Dear Future Husband” ensures that the challenge to gender norms is accessible, entertaining, and easily circulating. This popular accessibility may not produce radical social upheaval, but it does raise awareness and prompt questions. For Butler, the potential for subversive repetition—altering a known norm just slightly so it can be recognized as artificial—remains a powerful tool. The research results point to this subtle, perhaps incremental, form of resistance that popular culture can engage in, nudging viewers to reconsider the truths they have long taken for granted.

### **3) Rethinking Gender Roles and Future Directions**

The research outcomes highlight the extent to which “Dear Future Husband” invites audiences to rethink gender roles through the lens of Butler’s theory of performativity. By dramatizing and toying with traditional scripts for femininity and masculinity, Meghan Trainor’s video encourages viewers to see these roles as neither fixed nor natural. Instead, they appear as learned behaviors that must be performed continuously to maintain their illusory coherence. Once recognized as performances, these roles become more flexible, open to reinterpretation, and available for critique. The question then becomes how this recognition might inform future cultural production and reception. If mainstream pop songs and videos can subtly denaturalize gender norms, it suggests a growing capacity for critical engagement in popular discourse, allowing for increasingly complex representations of identity.

The research also opens avenues for considering intersectional complexities that “Dear Future Husband” does not fully address. For instance, Butler’s framework encourages us to examine how race, class, sexuality, and other axes of identity intersect with gender performativity. While Trainor’s video primarily depicts a heteronormative, middle-class, and retro-styled domestic setting, future analyses might explore how different identities negotiate these norms. How would this negotiation differ if the protagonist or suitors represented a more racially diverse cast, non-heteronormative relationships, or non-Western cultural contexts? The results indicate that while “Dear Future Husband” begins a conversation about the contractedness of gender, it does so from a relatively narrow perspective. A Butlerian approach could encourage audiences

and producers to imagine more inclusive scenarios, illustrating how performativity operates across multiple and overlapping social fields.

Additionally, the findings emphasize how humour and self-awareness function as critical tools. The campy, exaggerated aesthetic does more than entertain; it reveals the performative nature of gender roles by calling attention to their artifice. If more cultural texts adopted this strategy, it might lead to greater public understanding that what we often consider “just the way things are” is, in fact, the product of cultural repetition and reinforcement. Such an understanding could empower individuals to question, refuse, or transform the norms that constrain their behaviours and relationships. In a world where media continues to shape our collective consciousness, the ability to recognize and resist the slow sedimentation of gender roles is vital. The research suggests that when these roles are rendered playful and obviously stylized, their hold may begin to loosen, enabling both performers and audiences to negotiate new forms of being.

It is also worth noting that the Butlerian approach itself is subject to critique and evolution. Some critics argue that Butler’s emphasis on performativity neglects material conditions and structural inequalities that shape people’s lives. While “Dear Future Husband” provides a cultural text rich for performative analysis, a fuller understanding of gender’s social reality would also consider economic factors, legal frameworks, and political movements that shape gender possibilities. Future research, building upon the insights presented here, might integrate Butler’s insights with other theoretical lenses—such as Marxist feminism, intersectionality, or queer theory—to produce a more comprehensive reading. The initial takeaway from this research is that pop culture texts can and do engage in subtle acts of resistance and re-signification, but they also operate within complex material conditions that must be accounted for in any holistic analysis.

In sum, the results of the study affirm that applying a Judith Butler-informed perspective to “Dear Future Husband” reveals a nuanced interplay of gender norms, performances, and possible resistances. While the video does not dismantle the heteronormative order entirely, it does exhibit a consciousness of its own contractedness and invites viewers to share in that recognition. This is where the potential for social change lies—not necessarily in dramatic upheaval, but in the quiet recalibration of assumptions. The future husband in the title may still represent a “traditional” role, but the conditions under which he is accepted have shifted. As more cultural products subtly contest or reimagine gender roles, audiences gain insight into

the constructed nature of identity, becoming more equipped to envision new arrangements, negotiations, and collaborations that move beyond the limitations of historically inherited norms. The implications of such a shift are profound, hinting at a popular culture increasingly able to reflect, challenge, and reshape the gendered world we inhabit.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, approaching Megan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband" through a Judith Butler framework reveals a nuanced negotiation of femininity and masculinity that both challenges and reinforces traditional gender norms. While on one level the song appears to celebrate a retro, domestic femininity that positions women as nurturing and men as dominant providers, closer analysis shows that Trainor simultaneously resists these binaries by asserting female agency and the right to set relational terms. Rather than passively accepting conventional gender expectations, the lyrics and performance style emphasize a performative aspect, where femininity is displayed, taken up, and remixed to highlight its constructed nature. By demanding respect, emotional support, and mutuality, Trainor's persona disrupts the notion that women must adhere to passive or submissive roles, even as she draws from a palette of '50s-era tropes. In this tension, the track exemplifies Butler's insight that gender is not a fixed essence but a series of gestures, scripts, and acts that can be appropriated, subverted, or parodied to new ends. Ultimately, this analysis underscores the track's ambivalence: it both indulges and revises heteronormative romance, showing how pop texts can serve as productive sites for rethinking and renegotiating the boundaries of gender identity.

## **LIMITATION**

A major limitation of this research lies in its reliance on a singular cultural product, Megan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband," to represent various broader discourses of negotiated femininity and masculinity. By focusing closely on Butlerian performativity, the analysis may overlook alternative theoretical frameworks or dismiss the complexities of audience reception and socio-political contexts. Moreover, such an interpretation risks overgeneralization, reducing diverse gender expressions to formulaic patterns. The study's emphasis on lyrical content and stylized imagery cannot fully account for shifting cultural narratives or intersectional identities. Finally, the limited scope complicates its applicability to other genres, artists, or similar historical periods.

## REFERENCES

- Armstrong, J. K. (2021). *When Women Invented Television: The Untold Story of the Female Powerhouses Who Pioneered the Way We Watch Today*. New York: Harper.
- Baataar, C., Agana, T. A., & Akapule, S. A. (2023). Wise Saying or “Foolish” Saying: Assessing the Views on the Impact of Some Ghanaian Proverbs and Sayings on Gender Relations in the Frafra Traditional Area of Ghana. *OALib*, 10(02), 1–14. doi:10.4236/oalib.1109770
- Bamberg, M. (2012). Narrative analysis. *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, Vol 2: Research Designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, Neuropsychological, and Biological*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/13620-006
- Banet-Weiser, S., Gill, R., & Rottenberg, C. (2019). Postfeminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in conversation. *Feminist Theory*, 21(1), 3–24. doi:10.1177/1464700119842555
- Benshoff, H. M., & Griffin, S. (2011). *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*. On Wiley Desktop Editions. Wiley. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=8PwiBBLhwGEC>
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identit*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2011). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Carter, C., & Steiner, L. (2004). *Critical Readings: Media and Gender*. On Issues in cultural and media studies. Open University Press. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=7p5hAAAAMAAJ>
- Davis, A. Y., Dent, G., Meiners, E. R., & Richie, B. E. (2022). *Abolition. Feminism. Now*. Haymarket Books.
- Fiss, O. M. (1994). What is Feminism? *Arizona State Law Journal*.
- Green, J. G., & Thorogood, N. (2009). Qualitative methods for health research. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative Methods for Health Research* (Vol. 47, pp. 47-0901-47-0901). California: Sage Publications, Inc. doi:10.5860/choice.47-0901
- Hough, A. M. (2010). *An Exploration of Selected Concepts from Judith Butler : With Application to the Understanding of Gender Identity in Social Work Practice with Marginalized Female Adolescents*. The University of British Columbia.
- Kimmel, M. S. (2000). *The Gendered Society*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=ExjWDtstbQYC>
- Mikkola, M. (2017). Gender Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism. In A. G. K. S. J. K. S. A. Garry (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (1st Edition). New York: Routledge.

- Mishler, E. G. (1995). Models of Narrative Analysis: A Typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5(2), 87–123. doi:10.1075/jnlh.5.2.01mod
- Morgenroth, T., & Ryan, M. K. (2018). Gender Trouble in Social Psychology: How Can Butler's Work Inform Experimental Social Psychologists' Conceptualization of Gender? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9(July), 1–9. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01320
- Retallack, H., Ringrose, J., & Lawrence, E. (2016). "Fuck Your Body Image": Teen Girls' Twitter and Instagram Feminism in and Around School (Vol. 2, pp. 85–103). doi:10.1007/978-981-10-0306-6\_6
- Ryan, M., & Kellner, D. (1988). *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*. On Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film. Indiana University Press. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=S9KZQ3iHeE0C>
- Sutanto, O. (2017). Representasi Feminisme Dalam Film 'Spy'. *Jurnal E-Komunikasi*, 5.
- Swirsky, J. M., & Angelone, D. J. (2016). Equality, empowerment, and choice: what does feminism mean to contemporary women? *Journal of Gender Studies*, 25(4), 445–460. doi:10.1080/09589236.2015.1008429
- Tayson, L. (2006). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide (Second)*. New York: Routledge.
- Tomaszewski, L. E., Zarestky, J., & Gonzalez, E. (2020). Planning Qualitative Research: Design and Decision Making for New Researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1–7. doi:10.1177/1609406920967174