

THE CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN'S NARRATIVES THROUGH WOLLSTONECRAFT'S LIBERAL FEMINISM PERSPECTIVE IN 'KINI MEREKA TAHU' BY BERNADYA

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Abstract

This study analyzed the construction of women's narratives in the song lyrics of 'Kini Mereka Tahu' by Bernadya through the lens of liberal feminism. The research aimed to understand how women navigate interpersonal relationships through narrative, both as creators and victims, within the context of patriarchal structures. A qualitative approach and content analysis method were employed, using the song lyrics as the primary data, supported by literature on liberal feminism. The findings revealed that women in the song utilized narrative to construct an idealized image of their partners for social validation, often at the expense of their own truth and emotional well-being. However, a shift in attitude toward the end of the song indicated efforts by women to reclaim control over their narratives, challenging the patriarchal structures that limited their autonomy. The study highlighted the duality of women's roles in interpersonal relationships and offered new perspectives on how popular media reflects gender dynamics. It also recommended further exploration of women's representation across various media to deepen the understanding of women's empowerment and gender equality efforts.

Keywords: Bernadya, Kini Mereka Tahu, Liberal Feminism, Lyrics, Women

1. Introduction

Art, including music, serves as a medium of expression reflecting social realities and gender dynamics within society (Sergeant & Himonides, 2016). Bernadya's song *Kini Mereka Tahu* is an intriguing example of such representation, particularly in its lyrics, which depict the complex relationship between women and their roles in shaping narratives about their partners, both internally and in social interactions. Through its lyrics, the song opens a discourse on how women manipulate or adapt to societal narratives to maintain their position within interpersonal relationships, aligning with dominant gender expectations. This topic is particularly relevant within the context of liberal feminism, which advocates for gender equality by liberating women from patriarchal structures that limit individual freedom and autonomy (Wollstonecraft, 2014).

Previous studies have examined themes related to women's narratives and gender in media. For instance, Hasby Ash-shidiqy analyzed the representation of women in dangdut lyrics, highlighting how the genre reproduces gender stereotypes that reinforce patriarchal norms (Ash-shidiqy, 2016). Globally, Rodríguez and Lopez-Figueroa investigated the

portrayal of women in digital media, concluding that such narratives often reinforce traditional gender roles, despite resistance through alternative storytelling (Rodríguez & Lopez-Figueroa, 2024). Meanwhile, Alfiandi et al. emphasized that women in song lyrics are often depicted as emotionally bound in interpersonal relationships, reflecting power imbalances in gender relations (Alfiandi et al., 2021).

However, studies specifically linking liberal feminism to song lyrics as an analytical subject remain scarce. As articulated by Wollstonecraft in “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman”, liberal feminism emphasizes the importance of education, equal rights, and women’s freedom to choose their life paths (Wollstonecraft, 2014). This perspective provides a relevant framework for analyzing how women are constructed in media as individuals capable of manipulating, negotiating, or challenging societal gender norms.

The lyrics of *Kini Mereka Tahu* present a narrative complexity that illustrates the duality of women: as victims wounded by relational injustices, but also as active subjects crafting narratives to support their partners' image. This unique analytical space reveals how women are not merely objects in relationships but agents shaping or deconstructing narratives. Consistent with liberal feminism, it can be interpreted as women’s efforts to claim autonomy and control over their life narratives.

The novelty of this study lies in applying liberal feminism to analyze the construction of women’s narratives in popular media, particularly song lyrics. While most feminist media research focuses on structural or macro aspects, this study contributes a micro-level understanding of how women use narratives as tools to negotiate their positions in interpersonal relationships. Thus, this article offers a fresh perspective on reading gender representations in popular media, particularly within the context of Indonesian song lyrics.

This study is also significant for offering a critical approach to understanding how women often simultaneously occupy the roles of subject and object within narratives. As Tong and Botts assert, liberal feminism underscores the importance of viewing women as individuals with the freedom to choose and control their lives (Tong & Botts, 2024). Bernadya’s song exemplifies this complexity, where women are portrayed not only as victims of toxic relationships but also as decision-makers influencing how they are perceived by society.

Ultimately, this study aims to provide deeper insights into how women’s narratives in popular media, such as song lyrics, reflect the challenges and opportunities they face in claiming space and autonomy within a still-patriarchal society. The analysis of *Kini Mereka Tahu* is expected to enrich academic discussions on gender representation in Indonesian popular media and reinforce the relevance of liberal feminist theory in understanding contemporary gender dynamics.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis to examine the construction of female narratives in the lyrics of *Kini Mereka Tahu* by Bernadya. The qualitative approach was chosen to explore the deeper meanings embedded within the song’s lyrics, reflecting social and gender dynamics through the lens of liberal feminism. Content analysis focuses on identifying symbols, themes, and narratives relevant to the

framework of liberal feminism, particularly concerning women's autonomy in negotiating their positions within interpersonal relationships.

The primary data for this study comprises the song lyrics of *Kini Mereka Tahu*, obtained from Genius.com. Supporting data include media analysis and literature related to liberal feminism, particularly Mary Wollstonecraft's seminal work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft, 2014), and previous relevant studies. Secondary sources, such as journal articles, books, and prior research, provide deeper theoretical context and support the primary analysis of the song's lyrics.

Data collection techniques include documentation and literature review. Documentation involved the complete retrieval of the song's lyrics, while the literature review entailed sourcing relevant materials from scholarly journals, books, and research reports to understand liberal feminist perspectives and gender issues related to narratives in popular media.

The data collection instrument used was a liberal feminist content analysis guide. This guide was designed to identify key elements within the lyrics that reflect concepts of freedom of choice, female agency, and resistance to patriarchal norms. The data collection process involved documenting and categorizing narrative elements (freedom of choice, female agency, and resistance to patriarchal norms) found in the lyrics, and comparing these findings with theoretical references such as Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft, 2014) and six journal articles addressing feminism within different contexts (Rasyid, 2024; Astari, 2023; Aulia et al., 2024; Maulid, 2022; Putri et al., 2024; Riskiyani & Nugraha, 2024).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, involving stages of data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and conclusion. Data reduction entailed selecting narrative elements relevant to the theory of liberal feminism. These elements were then grouped into key themes, such as "narratives of women's autonomy" and "social manipulation as a strategy of resistance," based on Wollstonecraft's feminist analysis in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft, 2014). Wollstonecraft highlights women's freedom to make life choices and resist patriarchal norms that constrain individual autonomy. Interpretation involved linking these themes to the theoretical framework, while conclusions aimed to identify how the lyrics of *Kini Mereka Tahu* represent the construction of female narratives in line with Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist perspective.

3. Results and Discussion

This section focuses on the results of the analysis and discussion, highlighting the construction of female narratives embedded in the lyrics of *Kini Mereka Tahu* by Bernadya. The analysis employs Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist framework (Wollstonecraft, 2014) to reveal how the lyrics represent women's autonomy in navigating complex interpersonal relationships. The song lyrics are presented in their entirety as the primary object of the study, with each stanza examined to identify themes such as narrative manipulation, resistance to injustice, and the recognition of women's autonomy (Wollstonecraft, 2014).

3.1 Results

Figure 1
First Half of Verse 1 from *Kini Mereka Tahu*

[Verse 1]
Dari dulu kulebih-lebihkan semua
Padahal yang kau lakukan tak seberapa
Agar seisi dunia tahu
Dan anggap 'ku paling beruntung
Milikimu

In the structure of the lyrics in Verse 1, the narrative constructed by the woman in this song demonstrates a form of social manipulation as an adaptation to dominant gender expectations. Phrases such as "Dari dulu kulebih-lebihkan semua" ("I've always exaggerated everything") and "Padahal yang kau lakukan tak seberapa" ("Even though what you've done isn't much") indicate that the female subject consciously constructs an idealized image of her partner to align with societal expectations. Within the framework of Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism (Wollstonecraft, 2014), this act is viewed as a strategy to maintain control over the narrative of their lives, albeit in a manner that reinforces patriarchal stereotypes. The narrative manipulation reflects how women feel compelled to create an illusion of happiness in interpersonal relationships to gain social acceptance. These actions are not entirely imposed externally but arise from internalized social pressures, leading women to conform to norms that favor their partner's image.

The line "Agar seisi dunia tahu dan anggap 'ku paling beruntung milikimu" ("So the whole world knows and thinks I'm the luckiest to have you") illustrates how women become agents in constructing their partner's social image, albeit at the cost of their personal experiences. This analysis aligns with Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism, emphasizing women's awareness of the social constraints shaping their choices. While women in the lyrics appear to actively participate in shaping the narrative, their actions also reflect the limitations imposed by a patriarchal environment. The lyrics portray the duality of women's roles as both creators of narratives and victims of binding social expectations.

Figure 2
Second Half of Verse 1 from *Kini Mereka Tahu*

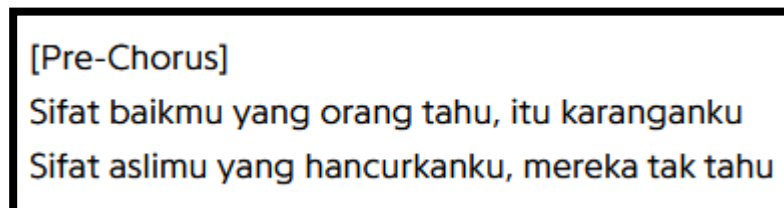
Kukarang cerita yang semula tak ada
Caraku sampaikan seolah semua nyata
Agar semuanya setuju dan yakin pada pilihanku
Memilihmu

In the lyrics "Kukarang cerita yang semula tak ada" ("I created stories that weren't there") and "Caraku sampaikan seolah semua nyata" ("I conveyed them as if they were real"), the woman in the song uses narrative as a tool to construct a socially favorable perception of her partner. This act of fabricating stories reflects an effort to obscure imbalances or deficiencies in their relationship. From a liberal feminist perspective, the

woman, as the primary narrator, demonstrates an awareness of the importance of controlling the narrative presented to the public. However, this control operates within a social context that confines women to the role of maintaining relational harmony, prompting them to craft realities that align with these expectations.

The line "Agar semuanya setuju dan yakin pada pilihanku memilihmu" ("So everyone agrees and believes in my choice of you") emphasizes that the constructed narrative not only serves to protect the partner but also sustains social validation of the woman's decision in choosing her partner. This phenomenon reveals how women must justify their decisions as a form of societal approval. Liberal feminist analysis highlights how women are caught in the need to gain acceptance from a society dominated by patriarchal norms. Simultaneously, this action reflects women's autonomy in utilizing narratives as tools for social negotiation, albeit constrained by external pressures. The lyrics extend the theme of women's dual roles as active agents and subjects limited by social structures.

Figure 3
Pre-Chorus from *Kini Mereka Tahu*



[Pre-Chorus]
Sifat baikmu yang orang tahu, itu karanganku
Sifat aslimu yang hancurkanku, mereka tak tahu

The lyrics "Sifat baikmu yang orang tahu, itu karanganku" ("Your good traits that people know, they're my creation") reinforce the narrative of women as agents shaping their partner's image. Here, women are portrayed not just as individuals adapting to social relationships but as creators of narratives that influence collective perceptions of their partners. This phrase suggests that women play an active role in crafting an idealized image of their partners recognized by society, even if that image contradicts reality. Liberal feminism views this as an effort by women to maintain control over their relationship narratives, executed within a social environment that demands proof of their choices. However, this narrative also exposes the social pressure compelling women to fabricate harmony, even at the expense of their emotional well-being.

Meanwhile, the line "Sifat aslimu yang hancurkanku, mereka tak tahu" ("Your true traits that hurt me, they don't know") highlights the gender imbalance in which women silently bear emotional burdens to protect their partner's image. This reflects the dual role of women: on one hand, they wield the power to shape social narratives; on the other, they remain victims of inequitable relationships. Liberal feminist analysis of these lyrics underscores how women must choose between safeguarding their partner's image or revealing truths that could harm their social standing. This duality illustrates the complexity of women's roles in creating and navigating interpersonal relationships within patriarchal societies.

Figure 4
Chorus from *Kini Mereka Tahu*

[Chorus]
Dan bahkan setelah semua yang kau lakukan padaku
Ku tetap bela kamu di depan teman-temanku
Dan mungkin saja bisa jadi bila kamu datang lagi
Ku 'kan terimamu kembali

In the lyrics "Dan bahkan setelah semua yang kau lakukan padaku, ku tetap bela kamu di depan teman-temanku" ("Even after all you've done to me, I still defend you in front of my friends"), the emotional contradiction experienced by women in maintaining the idealized image of a relationship is evident. Defending the partner, despite personal suffering, reflects the social pressure on women to preserve the appearance of relational harmony. Within the context of liberal feminism, this act illustrates how women are positioned to prioritize their partner and relationship over their emotional well-being. This reveals the power imbalance in relationships, where women disproportionately shoulder emotional and social burdens.

The line "Dan mungkin saja bisa jadi bila kamu datang lagi, ku 'kan terimamu kembali" ("And maybe, if you came back, I'd take you back again") reinforces the narrative of a toxic cycle in which women are trapped in patterns of detrimental relationships. From a liberal feminist viewpoint, this is analyzed as a limitation of women's autonomy stemming from social norms that expect them to forgive and accept their partners under any circumstances. These lyrics also demonstrate how internalized patriarchal norms influence women to prioritize the continuation of the relationship, even at their own expense. Alternatively, this line also reflects women's emotional resilience and capacity for hope, signifying their courage even within less-than-ideal relationships.

Figure 5
Second Verse from *Kini Mereka Tahu*

[Verse 2]
Kudengar kamu sibuk ke sana kemari
Bersihkan namamu di mata orang lain
Kau cerita dari sisimu
Kau bilang tak semua salahmu
Berharap ada yang memihakmu

The lyrics, "Kudengar kamu sibuk ke sana kemari, bersihkan namamu di mata orang lain" ("I heard you're busy running around, clearing your name in front of others"), depict the partner's effort to reconstruct their image in society. In the context of gender relations, this action reflects a dynamic involving the shifting of responsibility for conflicts or relationship breakdowns. From a liberal feminist perspective, this phenomenon represents a form of symbolic domination, where women are disadvantaged as the narratives created by their partners are more readily accepted by society. This dynamic illustrates how

patriarchal social structures allocate greater legitimacy and credibility to male narratives while marginalizing or doubting women's experiences.

The stanza, "Kau cerita dari sisimu, kau bilang tak semua salahmu, berharap ada yang memihakmu" ("You tell your side of the story, you say it's not entirely your fault, hoping someone will side with you"), highlights how the partner uses narratives to influence public opinion and garner social support. In this scenario, women are portrayed as those who must endure the emotional and social consequences of these narratives. Liberal feminist analysis of these lyrics underscores the importance of equal access to voice and representation within interpersonal relationships. This imbalance shows how women are placed in a defensive position, where their experiences are either doubted or erased by dominant narratives. It also illustrates the dual pressure women face, both from their partners and from a society that tends to align with male-centric narratives.

Figure 6
Bridge from *Kini Mereka Tahu*

[Bridge]
Kalau suatu saat kucerita burukmu takkan kutambahkan bumbu apapun
Tak sama seperti saat kuceritakan baikmu

The lyrics, "Kalau suatu saat kucerita burukmu takkan kutambahkan bumbu apapun, tak sama seperti saat kuceritakan baikmu" ("If one day I speak ill of you, I won't embellish it, unlike when I praised you"), acknowledge the intention to present negative narratives about the partner without manipulation or embellishment. This reflects a shift in the woman's attitude in a relationship previously characterized by excessive idealization of the partner. From a liberal feminist perspective, the decision to present the truth as it is can be viewed as a step toward women's empowerment. This signifies an effort to reclaim control over their narratives, which were previously influenced by social pressure or emotional needs to maintain a positive image of the partner.

The acknowledgment that earlier positive narratives were "embellished" underscores how women in relationships often feel compelled to polish reality to meet societal expectations. Liberal feminist analysis of this lyric reveals that such actions are not merely an emotional response but also a compromise with social norms that require women to portray harmonious relationships and support their partners. By rejecting this practice, women assert their autonomy over the narratives they create and challenge patriarchal structures that limit their ability to speak honestly about their experiences.

Figure 7
Outro from *Kini Mereka Tahu*

[Outro]
Yang sebagian besar tak benar begitu

The lyrics, "Yang sebagian besar tak benar begitu" ("Most of it wasn't true anyway"), provide a reflective affirmation of the narratives constructed throughout the relationship. This statement reveals that much of the story created by the woman about her partner does not reflect reality but instead fulfills emotional and social needs. From a liberal feminist perspective, this highlights how women are placed in situations where they feel compelled to craft realities that conform to societal expectations, even at the expense of their truths. This statement, emerging alongside the bridge, emphasizes the resolve to break free from these constructs and move toward greater autonomy over their narratives.

The narrative shift in the outro also reflects the woman's growing awareness of the unequal and manipulative dynamics within the relationship. Liberal feminism encourages women to identify and challenge the structures that limit their freedom, including those in interpersonal relationships. This awareness marks the initial step toward addressing the burdens previously carried due to the pressure to preserve the partner's image. By stating that "most of it wasn't true," the woman begins to deconstruct the idealized narratives created and establishes a new position as an individual entitled to express her truth and reclaim full control over the narrative of her life.

3.2 Discussion

The analysis of the lyrics in *Kini Mereka Tahu* reveals how the narrative crafted by the woman in the song not only reflects societal pressures but also represents an adaptation to dominant gender expectations. In the early verses, the woman is portrayed as an agent actively constructing an idealized image of her partner to gain social acceptance. This phenomenon demonstrates how patriarchal norms compel women to manipulate reality to align with societal standards, often at the expense of their emotional well-being. From a liberal feminist perspective, this action, while seemingly proactive, reflects the constraints imposed by social structures on women's choices.

Furthermore, the woman's use of narrative in the song also highlights a duality in her role as both creator and victim. In the line, "So everyone agrees and believes in my choice of you," the woman not only constructs a narrative to protect her partner but also to validate her decision to society. This underscores the importance of social validation in shaping interpersonal relationships. Liberal feminism views this pressure as a barrier to women's freedom to express their truths, which must often conform to societal norms that uphold male dominance.

The pre-chorus provides deeper insight into the emotional dynamics of the relationship. When the woman in the lyrics reveals that her partner's positive image is a product of her own narrative creation, it underscores the dependency of the relationship on imbalanced social manipulation. Conversely, the concealment of the partner's hurtful traits exposes the emotional burden borne by the woman to maintain relational harmony. Liberal feminist perspectives stress the necessity of balance in relationships, where women should have the right to express reality without feeling burdened by norms that prioritize the partner's image.

The chorus highlights the cyclical nature of toxic relationships that entrap women. Despite recognizing the mistreatment they endure, the women in the lyrics remain loyal to

their partners. This is interpreted as a result of the internalization of patriarchal norms that expect women to continue supporting their partners regardless of circumstances. Liberal feminism identifies this as a limitation of women's autonomy within relationships, posing a challenge for women to assert their right to equitable, mutually respectful partnerships.

A shift in the woman's stance begins to emerge in the bridge, where she commits to narrating the truth about her partner without embellishment. This decision marks an initial step toward empowerment, reclaiming control over her narrative. Liberal feminist theory views this act as a form of resistance against social structures that previously compelled women to uphold their partners' images at the expense of their own truths. It indicates that the woman in the song is beginning to recognize her right to speak honestly about her experiences.

The outro reinforces the woman's resolution to break free from false narratives and establish a new, more autonomous position. The reflective statement, "Most of it wasn't true anyway," reveals her awareness of the manipulation she previously engaged in as a response to social pressures. Liberal feminism interprets this as a pivotal step toward equality, where women begin challenging patriarchal norms that restrict their freedom. This awareness forms the foundation for women to claim their right to authentic and equitable life narratives.

The concept of freedom of choice, as outlined by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, is evident in the lyrics, "I created stories that weren't there." This line illustrates how the woman in the song uses narrative as a means of maintaining an illusion of control in an otherwise less-than-ideal situation. However, this freedom is constrained within a patriarchal social structure that demands women continue supporting their partners' images. Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism critiques this as a challenge to women's freedom to express their truths, as their actions are often shaped by external expectations.

The agency of women is reflected in the line, "So everyone agrees and believes in my choice of you," where the woman actively shapes a narrative to influence social perceptions. Although this action appears to grant her control, it highlights how women must compromise with broader social norms. Wollstonecraft's interpretation of women's agency as the capacity to act independently is, in this context, influenced by the need for social validation, leaving women vulnerable to external pressures.

Conversely, resistance to patriarchal norms becomes evident in the bridge and outro, particularly in the lyrics, "If one day I speak ill of you, I won't embellish it, unlike when I praised you." This acknowledgment reflects the woman's effort to reclaim control over her narrative and reject societal pressure to maintain her partner's image. Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist perspective views this resistance as a crucial step for women to claim their rights to truth and freedom of expression, which had previously been obstructed by restrictive norms.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the construction of narrative in the lyrics of *Kini Mereka Tahu* represents the duality of women's roles as both creators and victims of the social narratives

they construct. The narrative within this song not only portrays the manipulation of a partner's image to meet societal expectations but also reflects the woman's efforts to position herself as a subject within interpersonal relationships. This manipulation involves altering social perceptions of the partner through positive narratives crafted by the woman, even at the cost of their own emotional truth, such as overlooking the partner's negative treatment. Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist perspective reveals that this action reflects the limitations on women's autonomy within a patriarchal structure, where they are forced to prioritize their partner's social image over their personal needs. However, the shift in the narrative towards the end of the song signifies an initial step for women in reclaiming control over their life narrative, while also serving as a reflection on the importance of awareness in fostering more equitable relational dynamics.

Through this analysis, it is recommended that future research delve deeper into how women can construct fully autonomous narratives in popular media, free from the constraints of social norms that impede their freedom. Additionally, it is essential to explore similar representations within other music genres or broader media to gain a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in narrative construction. This study is expected to contribute significantly to efforts in empowering women to overcome patriarchal barriers and achieve greater gender equality.

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