Female Objectification in Billie Eilish's "Male Fantasy"

Adinda Desti Nur Arrizqo[1*], Randi Wira Pramestya[1], Muhammad Rezha Syahputra[2],
Muhammad Varra Ramadhan[3], Ahsin Hamdi Habibi[4]

[1]*Universitas Pamulang, Kota Tangerang, Indonesia*

Randiwira11@gmail.com*

Abstract

This study explores the psychological impact of female objectification as reflected in Billie Eilish's song "Male Fantasy." Despite significant social progress in gender equality, women continue to experience objectification, where their value is assessed primarily based on appearance rather than individuality or competence. Drawing upon Fredrickson and Roberts' Objectification Theory (1997), this research examines how objectifying cultural messages are internalized by women and manifest in self-perception, emotional experiences, and behavior. The study employs a qualitative approach using thematic content analysis of the song's lyrics, focusing on expressions related to self- objectification, body surveillance, body shame, and emotional distress. The analysis reveals that the lyrics vividly illustrate the internalization of societal beauty standards and patriarchal expectations, with the protagonist frequently monitoring her body, expressing dissatisfaction, and experiencing feelings of inadequacy and emotional strain. Findings indicate that music, as a cultural medium, not only reflects the pressures of female objectification but also provides insight into its psychological consequences. The song's melancholic tone and introspective lyrics serve as a powerful representation of how women navigate the tension between societal ideals and authentic emotional experiences. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the underexplored domain of lyrical content in examining female objectification, offering theoretical and practical implications for understanding the pervasive impact of objectifying messages on women's mental health. Future research may extend this approach to additional media forms to further investigate the relationship between cultural representation and psychological well-being in women.

Keywords: female objectification, Objectification Theory, Billie Eilish, Male Fantasy, self-objectification, body surveillance, psychological impact

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, women have experienced notable progress in various areas of public life, including education, professional careers, and leadership positions. These developments reflect an increasing recognition of women's capabilities and contributions to

Ruang Kata: Journal of Language and Literature Studies
Female Objectification in Billie Eilish's "Male Fantasy"
Vol. 6 No. 01 2026
E-ISSN: 2807-1867
Universitas Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama Kebumen

social, economic, and cultural development, as emphasized in discussions of gender equality by UN Women (2020). Women are now more visible as decision-makers, professionals, and cultural producers, challenging traditional assumptions that once confined them to domestic or subordinate roles. Nevertheless, these achievements do not automatically eliminate the structural inequalities that have shaped women's lives for centuries. Beneath narratives of empowerment and progress, long-standing systems of power continue to influence how women are perceived, valued, and regulated in everyday social contexts. One of the most persistent systems sustaining gender inequality is patriarchy, which operates as both a social structure and a cultural ideology. Gill (2016) explains that patriarchy functions through norms, values, and representations that legitimize male dominance while positioning women within restrictive expectations. These expectations often emphasize obedience, emotional restraint, and physical attractiveness, while discouraging traits such as assertiveness, authority, and independence. Such norms are reproduced across generations through family practices, educational institutions, workplaces, and cultural products, making them appear natural and unquestionable. As a result, women's identities are frequently shaped by external standards rather than personal agency, reinforcing hierarchical gender relations that privilege male perspectives and control women's bodies and behaviors. Within patriarchal systems, women's bodies become central sites of regulation and evaluation. Across societies, women are often judged based on how closely they conform to culturally constructed ideals of femininity that prioritize beauty, youthfulness, and passivity. Media plays a crucial role in reinforcing these ideals by repeatedly presenting narrow and idealized images of women that center visual appeal over competence, intelligence, or individuality, as discussed by Tiggemann and Slater (2018). Through continuous exposure to such representations, women are encouraged to internalize the belief that physical appearance is a primary source of social value. This emphasis positions women's bodies as objects of public attention and scrutiny, while other aspects of their identity are rendered less visible or less important.

The pressure to meet idealized standards of appearance becomes increasingly intense in contemporary digital environments. Social media platforms, which prioritize visibility, self-presentation, and comparison, amplify the scrutiny directed at women's bodies. Research by Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) demonstrates that frequent exposure to idealized images contributes to heightened appearance dissatisfaction among women. In these spaces, women are not only consumers of visual content but also active participants in producing and curating images of themselves. This dynamic fosters a culture of constant comparison in which women's bodies are evaluated through likes, comments, and social feedback. Consequently, the body becomes a social arena that requires continuous monitoring and management, reinforcing the belief that women are always subject to external judgment. When the evaluation of women is persistently centered on physical appearance, it develops into the broader phenomenon of female objectification. Female objectification occurs when women are treated primarily as objects to be seen, assessed, and consumed, rather than as whole individuals with thoughts, emotions, and agency. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), as cited in Moradi (2016), explain that objectification fragments women's bodies and prioritizes physical attributes over internal qualities. Through this process, women's value becomes tied to how closely their bodies align with socially constructed beauty standards. Gervais (2018) further argues that objectification reduces women to isolated body parts or aesthetic features, normalizing the visual consumption of female bodies and reinforcing a hierarchy in which appearance outweighs personhood.

Ruang Kata: Journal of Language and Literature Studies
Female Objectification in Billie Eilish's "Male Fantasy"
Vol. 6 No. 01 2026
E-ISSN: 2807-1867
Universitas Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama Kebumen

One of the earliest and most pervasive psychological effects arising from female objectification is self-objectification, a concept emphasized by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) as a core mechanism within Objectification Theory. They argue that when women are continually exposed to evaluations that prioritize their physical appearance—whether through media, social interactions, or cultural expectations—they may begin to internalize this external gaze and apply it to themselves. In this state, women learn to view their own bodies as objects to be judged, adopting an observer's perspective rather than experiencing their bodies from within. This internalized monitoring is not a passive cognitive shift but a persistent psychological stance that shapes daily experiences. Women may feel compelled to regulate posture, clothing, expressions, and overall presentation in anticipation of how others might perceive them (Calogero, 2013). Over time, this can create a habitual pattern of thinking in which bodily appearance becomes a central focus, often overshadowing personal comfort, competence, and emotional well-being. Moreover, self-objectification drains cognitive resources that would otherwise support concentration, creativity, decision-making, and self-confidence. As women devote mental energy to evaluating how they look rather than how they feel or what they can accomplish, their sense of agency can subtly diminish. In this way, self-objectification becomes the psychological doorway through which further consequences—such as body surveillance, body shame, and emotional distress—begin to develop.

Building upon the process of self-objectification, one of its most immediate and observable consequences is body surveillance. This refers to the ongoing monitoring of one's physical appearance driven by the internalized belief that others are continually watching and evaluating the body. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) describe body surveillance as a central outcome of self-objectification, in which women allocate significant cognitive resources to checking, regulating, and managing how their bodies appear in social contexts. This habitual self-monitoring becomes deeply embedded in everyday thinking, compelling women to assess their appearance across various situations. Body surveillance becomes even more pronounced within visually saturated environments, particularly social media, where women are exposed to idealized representations of the female body that reinforce the idea that attractiveness is a core aspect of their value (Harper & Tiggemann, 2016). As a result, many women adjust their posture, clothing, or facial expressions not for comfort or authenticity but to meet perceived beauty expectations. This persistent vigilance generates emotional tension, including heightened self-consciousness and feelings of inadequacy whenever their appearance fails to align with cultural ideals (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). In addition, the cognitive load associated with such continuous surveillance reduces mental capacity for tasks requiring sustained focus, creativity, or emotional engagement. Rather than being fully present in academic, professional, or interpersonal activities, women may experience intrusive concerns about their appearance that disrupt concentration and performance. Through this mechanism, body surveillance illustrates how objectification shapes not only emotional experiences but also everyday cognitive functioning.

Another significant psychological consequence of self-objectification is body shame, which arises when women perceive their bodies as failing to meet culturally constructed beauty standards. According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), body shame emerges when women judge themselves against internalized ideals and consequently experience feelings of deficiency or embarrassment. This emotional response is not merely dissatisfaction with appearance but a deeper sense of personal inadequacy tied to the belief that one's body falls short of what is socially

Ruang Kata: Journal of Language and Literature Studies
Female Objectification in Billie Eilish's "Male Fantasy"
Vol. 6 No. 01 2026
E-ISSN: 2807-1867
Universitas Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama Kebumen

valued. The more rigid and unrealistic the beauty standards, the more intense these feelings tend to become. Contemporary research further demonstrates that exposure to idealized images on social media intensifies body shame by repeatedly reminding women of the gap between their real bodies and the digitally curated standards they encounter (Slater & Tiggemann, 2016; Fardouly et al., 2018). This ongoing comparison process can lead to avoidance behaviors, such as withdrawing from social activities, refusing to be photographed, or engaging in excessive grooming in an attempt to minimize perceived flaws. For some individuals, body shame may also contribute to unhealthy coping strategies, including restrictive eating or compulsive exercise, as efforts to conform to dominant beauty ideals. Beyond behavioral effects, body shame carries broader psychological consequences. Persistent feelings of shame can erode self-esteem, undermine confidence in academic or professional settings, and shape how women navigate their interpersonal relationships. Rather than engaging fully in opportunities or social interactions, women experiencing body shame may become preoccupied with concealing or correcting perceived imperfections. In this way, body shame represents a powerful emotional mechanism through which objectification affects women's well-being and their sense of self.

A further psychological impact that often develops alongside self-objectification and body shame is the emergence of anxiety and depressive symptoms. When women repeatedly evaluate themselves through an external gaze and experience ongoing dissatisfaction with their appearance, they may become trapped in a cycle of worry, hyper-awareness, and emotional distress. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) explain that self-objectification creates a chronic state of self-monitoring that heightens vulnerability to anxiety, particularly in social situations where appearance is likely to be judged. This heightened vigilance can lead to persistent concerns about how one is perceived, resulting in feelings of tension, uneasiness, and fear of negative evaluation. Contemporary studies support this connection, showing that frequent exposure to idealized images—especially on social media—correlates with increased anxiety and depressive symptoms among young women (Tiggemann & Slater, 2017; Diedrichs et al., 2021). These emotional responses stem not only from appearance-related comparisons but also from the internal pressure to meet unattainable beauty expectations. When women feel they consistently fall short of cultural ideals, the resulting disappointment may escalate into hopelessness, reduced self-worth, and emotional fatigue, which are key markers of depression. Moreover, these psychological effects can extend beyond internal feelings and influence broader aspects of daily functioning. Women experiencing sustained anxiety or depressive symptoms may struggle with concentration, motivation, and confidence in academic, occupational, or social contexts. Activities that once felt meaningful or enjoyable can become sources of stress or avoidance, leading to a diminished overall sense of well-being. Thus, anxiety and depression illustrate how the emotional burden of objectification interferes not only with how women feel about their bodies but also with how they engage with the world around them.

Although female objectification has been widely examined in visual media such as advertising, film, and social networking platforms, its representation in non-visual cultural forms remains less thoroughly explored. Music functions not only as entertainment but also as a narrative medium through which emotions, identity, and personal struggles are expressed. Through lyrics and emotional tone, songs provide insight into how women articulate internal experiences shaped by patriarchal norms and objectifying discourses. Unlike visual media, music allows women's psychological responses to objectification to emerge through language and

Ruang Kata: Journal of Language and Literature Studies
Female Objectification in Billie Eilish's "Male Fantasy"
Vol. 6 No. 01 2026
E-ISSN: 2807-1867
Universitas Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama Kebumen

emotional expression, making it a significant medium for understanding the internal dimensions of gendered social pressure. Within this context, Billie Eilish's song Male Fantasy represents a critical cultural text for examining female objectification and its psychological impact. Rather than reproducing idealized images of femininity, the song offers an introspective portrayal of emotional fatigue, discomfort, and self-doubt associated with being viewed through male-centered standards of desire, as reflected in discussions of the song by Eilish (2021). The lyrics foreground women's internal struggles with social scrutiny and unrealistic expectations, emphasizing emotional experience over visual display. As a work created by a female artist, Male Fantasy provides a subjective perspective that centers women's voices and internal realities, making it a particularly relevant site for analyzing the psychological consequences of objectification. Despite extensive scholarship on objectification and its psychological outcomes, much of the existing research prioritizes visual analysis and quantitative measurement. As a result, limited attention has been given to how objectification is emotionally narrated within music from women's perspectives. This gap highlights the need to examine musical texts as spaces where objectifying norms are not only reflected but also critically negotiated and articulated. By focusing on Male Fantasy, this study addresses this gap by exploring how objectification, self-objectification, and related psychological experiences are embedded within lyrical narratives.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine how female objectification is reflected in the song Male Fantasy and to explore its psychological implications for women's self-perception and emotional well-being. The focus is placed on interconnected experiences such as self-objectification, body surveillance, body shame, anxiety, and depressive tendencies as they appear within the song's lyrical content. Through this analysis, the study emphasizes that female objectification is not merely a cultural or aesthetic issue, but a systemic phenomenon with profound psychological consequences that continue to shape women's lived experiences in contemporary society.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, positioning Billie Eilish's "Male Fantasy" as a cultural text that reflects and critiques issues of gender, power, and self-perception. The primary data consist of the official lyrics of the song, which are analyzed as textual material. Secondary data are drawn from academic literature related to objectification theory, gender representation in media, and critical interpretations of popular culture to support and contextualize the analysis. The analytical framework is grounded in Objectification Theory, which provides key concepts such as self-objectification, body surveillance, body shame, and anxiety, allowing the researcher to examine how these psychological experiences are articulated through the song's lyrical content. To analyze the data, this study employs directed content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Directed content analysis is used to systematically code the lyrics based on theoretically informed categories derived from Objectification Theory, while CDA is applied to examine how language in "Male Fantasy" constructs, challenges, or negotiates dominant gender ideologies. The lyrics are segmented into meaningful units such as lines and verses, which are then coded and organized into broader themes reflecting the psychological and social impacts of objectification. Through this combined approach, the study critically explores how the discourse of "male fantasy" represents female subjectivity and power relations, and how it reflects or resists patriarchal assumptions embedded in media narratives.

Ruang Kata: Journal of Language and Literature Studies
Female Objectification in Billie Eilish's "Male Fantasy"
Vol. 6 No. 01 2026
E-ISSN: 2807-1867
Universitas Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama Kebumen

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses how female objectification is reflected in Billie Eilish's Male Fantasy. The analysis is organized according to the psychological effects identified in Objectification Theory, allowing each lyrical excerpt to be examined in relation to specific emotional, cognitive, and behavioral consequences. By interpreting the song through this framework, the study uncovers how internalized beauty standards and the male gaze shape the singer's experiences, revealing the deeper psychological tensions embedded within the lyrics.

Findings

Body Shame: body shame, which arises when women perceive their bodies as failing to meet culturally constructed beauty standards. According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), body shame emerges when women judge themselves against internalized ideals and consequently experience feelings of deficiency or embarrassment. This emotional response is not merely dissatisfaction with appearance but a deeper sense of personal inadequacy tied to the belief that one's body falls short of what is socially valued. The more rigid and unrealistic the beauty standards, the more intense these feelings tend to become. Contemporary research further demonstrates that exposure to idealized images on social media intensifies body shame by repeatedly reminding women of the gap between their real bodies and the digitally curated standards they encounter (Slater & Tiggemann, 2016; Fardouly et al., 2018). This ongoing comparison process can lead to avoidance behaviors, such as withdrawing from social activities, refusing to be photographed, or engaging in excessive grooming in an attempt to minimize perceived flaws. For some individuals, body shame may also contribute to unhealthy coping strategies, including restrictive eating or compulsive exercise, as efforts to conform to dominant beauty ideals. Beyond behavioral effects, body shame carries broader psychological consequences. Persistent feelings of shame can erode self-esteem, undermine confidence in academic or professional settings, and shape how women navigate their interpersonal relationships

Lyrics: "Home alone, trying not to eat"

Anxiety heightened by objectification and appearance-related pressure is reflected through show how constant comparison to idealized images produces emotional strain, making her feel scrutinized and inadequate. This aligns with contemporary research demonstrating that exposure to idealized bodies, especially through media, increases anxiety and depressive symptoms among young women (Tiggemann & Slater, 2017; Diedrichs et al., 2021). The song's portrayal of anxiety thus illustrates how objectification not only shapes body-related worries but also escalates into emotional exhaustion, self-doubt, and ongoing vigilance about how one is

Lyrics: 'I worry this is how I'm always gonna feel,"

Self-objectification, as described by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) in Objectification Theory. The song portrays how exposure to idealized female bodies in pornography triggers self-comparison and internalized body monitoring, captured in lines such as "Distract myself with pornography / I hate the way she looks at me." This reflects the core mechanism of self-objectification, where women begin to view themselves through an external observer's perspective and evaluate their bodies against unrealistic standards. The discomfort and self-

Ruang Kata: Journal of Language and Literature Studies
Female Objectification in Billie Eilish's "Male Fantasy"
Vol. 6 No. 01 2026
E-ISSN: 2807-1867
Universitas Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama Kebumen

criticism expressed in the lyrics illustrate the cognitive and emotional consequences of this process, as the singer struggles with body dissatisfaction, conflict between self-image and media portrayals, and the draining mental loop of comparing herself to unattainable ideals. Thus, the song embodies self-objectification's psychological impact, demonstrating how media-fueled beauty standards infiltrate personal insecurities and emotional experiences.

Lyrics: "Distract myself with pornography / I hate the way she looks at me."

Discucssion

The findings indicate that Male Fantasy illustrates three interconnected psychological effects rooted in objectification. First, the song reflects body shame, which emerges when women perceive their bodies as inadequate in relation to culturally constructed beauty standards. This aligns with Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) concept that body shame develops when individuals judge themselves against internalized ideals, leading to feelings of deficiency and embarrassment. The lyric "Home alone, trying not to eat" captures this response, showing how internalized beauty pressures manifest in avoidance behaviors and restrictive tendencies. Second, the song portrays heightened anxiety resulting from constant comparison to idealized images. The line "I worry this is how I'm always gonna feel" demonstrates the emotional strain produced by appearance-related pressure, consistent with research showing that exposure to idealized bodies increases anxiety and depressive symptoms among young women (Tiggemann & Slater, 2017; Diedrichs et al., 2021). Lastly, the song conveys the mechanism of self-objectification, as described in Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Through lyrics such as "Distract myself with pornography / I hate the way she looks at me," the singer reveals how exposure to idealized female bodies triggers self-comparison, body monitoring, and self-directed criticism. Together, these lyrical expressions illustrate how media-driven beauty standards shape women's emotional experiences, reinforcing body shame, intensifying anxiety, and perpetuating cycles of self-objectification.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how female objectification operates within popular music by analyzing Billie Eilish's "Male Fantasy" as a cultural text situated in broader patriarchal and media-driven structures. Beginning from the recognition that objectification is a systemic and pervasive issue across contemporary media, the research narrowed its focus to a single song in order to critically explore how such structures are internalized and experienced at the psychological level. Through this focused analysis, the study demonstrates that "Male Fantasy" functions as a reflective and critical representation of women's encounters with objectifying gazes rather than merely a personal narrative. Based on the analysis guided by Objectification Theory, the findings reveal that the lyrics clearly articulate the interconnected processes of self-objectification, body surveillance, body shame, anxiety, and emotional fatigue. The song portrays how exposure to male-oriented fantasies—particularly those shaped by pornographic and visual media—produces unrealistic beauty standards that women internalize, leading to continuous self-monitoring and emotional distress. These psychological consequences illustrate that objectification extends beyond cultural representation and becomes embedded in women's self-perception, identity formation, and everyday emotional experiences. Furthermore, the study affirms that "Male Fantasy" exposes the tension between personal subjectivity and patriarchal expectations by illustrating how women navigate between authenticity and externally imposed

Ruang Kata: Journal of Language and Literature Studies
Female Objectification in Billie Eilish's "Male Fantasy"
Vol. 6 No. 01 2026
E-ISSN: 2807-1867
Universitas Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama Kebumen

ideals. Through its discursive construction, the song reveals how objectification operates both externally, through dominant media narratives, and internally, through psychological self-regulation. In line with the research objectives, this study highlights the capacity of music to serve as a critical medium for challenging gendered power relations and articulating the often-invisible emotional impacts of objectifying culture. Future research may expand this analytical framework to other musical works or media forms to further examine how cultural representations shape gendered experiences and psychological well-being.

References

Calogero, R. M. (2013). *Objects don't object: Evidence that self-objectification disrupts women's social activism*. Psychological Science, 24(3), 312–318.

Diedrichs, P. C., Carter, A., Quinn, D. M., & Rudd, N. A. (2021). *The role of media and cultural ideals in shaping body image concerns.* Current Opinion in Psychology, 45, 101–106.

Fardouly, J., & Vartanian, L. R. (2016). *Social media and body image concerns: Current research and future directions.* Current Opinion in Psychology, 9, 1–5.

Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T.-A. (1997). *Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks*. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 21(2), 173–206.

Gervais, S. J. (2019). *The social interaction model of objectification: A process model of goal-based objectifying exchanges between men and women*. British Journal of Social Psychology.

Gill, R. (2016). *Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility*. European Journal of Cultural Studies, 19(4), 325–343.

Helfand, R. (2021). *Billie Eilish shares gloomy "Male Fantasy" video*. The Fader.

Harper, B., & Tiggemann, M. (2008). *The effect of thin ideal media images on women's self-objectification, mood, and body image*. Sex Roles, 58(9–10), 649–657.

Mix100. (2021). *Billie Eilish shares gloomy "Male Fantasy" video.*

Moradi, B. (2016). *Objectification theory and psychology of women: A decade of advances and future directions.* Psychology of Women Quarterly, 40(1), 3–15.

Quinn, D. M., Kallen, R. W., Twenge, J. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2006). *The disruptive effect of self-objectification on performance.* Psychology of Women Quarterly, 30(1), 59–64.

Quinn, D. M., Kallen, R. W., & Cathey, C. (2006). *Body on my mind: The lingering effect of state self-objectification.* Sex Roles, 55(11–12), 869–874.

Schäfer, T., Sedlmeier, P., Städtler, C., & Huron, D. (2013). *The psychological functions of music listening.* Frontiers in Psychology, 4, 511.

United Nations Women. (2020). *Annual report 2019–2020.* https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/annual-report-2019-2020