

Female Agency in Popular Music: Desire and Self-control in Selena Gomez's Song "Can't Keep My Hands to Myself"

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ABSTRACT

Popular music stands as a cultural space where emotion, identity, and power intertwine. Within this realm, female voices often perform the delicate balance between desire and restraint. Yet, few studies have examined how mainstream pop songs articulate female desire beyond objectification, particularly in the work of Selena Gomez, whose music navigates intimacy and autonomy with subtle complexity. This study examines Selena Gomez's "Can't Keep My Hands to Myself" to explore how female agency emerges through the negotiation of longing and self-control. Employing a feminist literary lens and Freud's psychoanalytic framework of the id, ego, and superego, the analysis reveals how sensual impulse and conscious regulation coexist in lyrical expression. In dialogue with Cann (2021) and Jansson (2021), the study interprets the song as a declaration of embodied autonomy, where sensuality becomes self-possession rather than submission. Through qualitative content analysis, the findings affirm that pop music offers a stage for reimagining female identity – where emotion, restraint, and power converge in a harmony of self-aware desire.

Keywords: *Female Agency, Desire, Self-control, Popular Music, Selena Gomez*

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INTRODUCTION

Popular music serves as a dynamic cultural arena where identity, emotion, and gendered subjectivity are continuously negotiated. Female pop artists, in particular, articulate the intricate tension between desire and restraint, actively reshaping conventional representations of femininity. Their expressions of vulnerability, strength, and self-definition highlight how music becomes a platform for renegotiating cultural expectations surrounding women.

As Cann (2021) argues, the "flawed" and emotionally complex personas of contemporary female celebrities create feminist possibilities by publicly navigating these tensions. Rather than presenting idealized or simplified versions of womanhood, these artists embrace imperfection as a site of empowerment. This challenges narrow standards of femininity and opens space for more authentic forms of emotional expression.

This aligns with Jansson's (2021) view that pop songs function as performative spaces where gendered subjectivities are redefined through sound, performance, and lyrical confession. Through this process, female artists can transform perceived vulnerability into strength, asserting agency through emotional authenticity and self-reflection. Such performative negotiations allow women to reclaim narratives that historically silenced or restricted them.

In contemporary pop music, Taylor Swift exemplifies these dynamics by navigating the tension between emotional openness and resilience. Her lyrics frequently engage with themes of love, desire, and self-definition, offering counternarratives to gendered media portrayals. This ongoing negotiation between expression and control mirrors broader cultural questions regarding how women represent themselves in industries shaped by persistent gender expectations.

Selena Gomez's "Can't Keep My Hands to Myself" further illustrates this negotiation, presenting a nuanced portrayal of female desire that moves between raw passion and measured self-restraint. This interplay demonstrates that female agency does not always emerge through outright rebellion. Instead, it often arises from the complex process of balancing personal wants with social and emotional pressures, allowing women to articulate autonomy in subtle yet powerful ways.

A similar dynamic appears in the work of Indonesian artists such as Yura Yunita and Nadin Amizah. Through poetic and introspective lyrics, they explore desire, identity, and self-control, challenging passive stereotypes of femininity in Indonesian popular culture (Ramadhani, Putri, & Herdiana, 2025). While previous studies have addressed female empowerment broadly, fewer have examined how the interplay of desire and restraint functions as a distinct psychological and feminist concept within the lyrics themselves.

This study situates these artistic expressions within Freud's psychoanalytic framework, which conceptualizes the psyche as consisting of the id, ego, and superego (Freud, 2020). The id represents primal desire, the superego enforces moral norms, and the ego mediates between these forces. When combined with feminist perspectives on female agency (Cann, 2021; Jansson, 2021), this theoretical approach provides a rich foundation for examining how women in pop music construct subjectivity through emotional negotiation.

By integrating psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives, this research analyzes how Gomez's lyrical voice expresses autonomy, sensuality, and emotional independence. It demonstrates that popular music serves as a vital platform for women to articulate empowerment rooted in the nuanced tension between wanting and restraint. Ultimately, this perspective highlights how contemporary female artists navigate emotional complexity to assert identity and autonomy within the evolving landscape of global popular culture.

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative design because it aims to interpret meaning rather than measure it. The focus lies in exploring how *Can't Keep My Hands to Myself* by Selena Gomez articulates the psychological tension between desire and self-control as a form of female agency. As Bowen (2009) emphasize, qualitative research enables an in-depth understanding of human expression through contextual and interpretive reading.

Data for this study were drawn from multiple sources to ensure textual and contextual validity. The primary data consist of the *official lyrics* of Selena Gomez's *Can't Keep My Hands to Myself*, obtained from verified platforms such as Genius and Spotify. Supporting materials include the official music video, artist interviews published in reputable entertainment media, and critical reviews from established music journals and magazines. These sources provide insight into how the song's themes of sensuality, restraint, and autonomy are presented and received in public discourse.

Therefore, the song lyrics are treated as a literary text, analysed through a psychoanalytic and feminist lens to reveal how emotion, power, and consciousness interact in shaping the lyrical persona. The unit of analysis in this study is ten line of the song lyric that interpreted as a discrete textual expression of emotion, reflection, or agency.

The psychoanalytic approach draws from Freud's (2020) concepts of the id, ego, and superego, which illuminate the inner struggle between instinctual impulses and moral restraint. These ideas help explain how the lyrical voice negotiates bodily desire while maintaining control and self-awareness. Complementing this, the feminist theoretical framework proposed by Jansson (2021) situates these emotional negotiations within broader cultural contexts. Both scholars emphasize that female agency is not simply about rebellion or independence but involves the capacity to manage one's emotions, body, and voice within and against societal expectations. This combined framework allows the analysis to capture the song's psychological depth as well as its cultural significance. *Can't Keep My Hands to Myself* was selected because it explicitly portrays the tension between instinctual desire and reflective

restraint, making it an ideal text for exploring the intersections of psychoanalytic and feminist discourse.

This study analyses the official lyrics of Selena Gomez's song *Can't Keep My Hands to Myself*. The lyrics were sourced from verified platforms like Genius and Spotify to guarantee their accuracy. The analysis is supported by a range of academic materials, including scholarly articles on women's representation in pop music, interviews with the artist, and relevant theoretical discussions. The research employs document analysis as its primary method. This qualitative approach, as outlined by Bowen (2009), involves a systematic process of carefully reading the text, coding significant elements, and organizing them into meaningful categories to uncover underlying patterns and themes. This study analysed each line of the song's lyrics as a distinct unit then identified specific words, phrases, and metaphors that conveyed either emotional impulse or conscious restraint. These expressions were then organized into thematic categories for desire and self-control. After this coding process, we performed an interpretive analysis. This involved exploring how the interplay between desire and self-control works together to build a concept of female agency within the song's narrative. To guide this interpretation and ensure a rigorous analysis, we applied the psychoanalytic theories of Freud (2020) and the feminist perspectives of Jansson (2021).

The analysis for this study was conducted in three key phases. First, we identified key lyrical phrases that conveyed clear emotional or psychological tension. Next, these phrases were grouped into two central themes: one for desire, which captured expressions of longing, passion, and impulse; and another for self-control, which included moments of restraint, reflection, and awareness. In the final stage, these thematic categories were interpreted using the psychoanalytic model of the id, ego, and superego. We then connected these psychological dynamics to feminist concepts of autonomy and embodied experience. This entire interpretive process follows Krippendorff's (2019) method for content analysis, which prioritizes coherent argumentation, researcher reflexivity, and strong textual evidence over quantitative measures.

To ensure the findings were robust, this study used theoretical triangulation, drawing from both psychoanalytic and feminist viewpoints. This approach allowed the data to be examined through multiple, complementary lenses. The resulting interpretations were consistently checked against established scholarly work to confirm their consistency and reliability. Guided by Bowen's (2020) standards for qualitative rigor, the analysis also practiced reflexive awareness. This involved continuously reflecting on potential personal biases to ensure all conclusions were firmly supported by the song's lyrics and the foundational theories. This rigorous methodology directly supports the study's core aim: to demonstrate how Selena Gomez's lyrics portray the negotiation of emotion as a powerful act of female autonomy and empowerment in modern pop culture.

This systematic and interpretive analysis seeks to reveal how the song *Can't Keep My Hands to Myself* builds a sophisticated portrait of female agency. The study shows how the lyrics weave together desire and control, emotion and intellect, and vulnerability and strength. This integration forms a powerful and coherent model of modern womanhood within popular culture.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and interpretation of how female agency is articulated in Selena Gomez's *Can't Keep My Hands to Myself*. The analysis draws on Freud's (2020) psychoanalytic theory of desire and repression, as well as feminist perspectives by Jansson (2021) and, which conceptualize agency as a dynamic negotiation between autonomy, emotion, and social constraint. Through a close reading of the lyrics, the discussion explores how expressions of desire and self-control interact to shape a distinctive portrayal of feminine subjectivity one that is self-reflective, embodied, and empowered within the intertwined dynamics of longing and restraint.

Expression of Desire

Data 1: "I just wanna hold you close tonight."

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The line "Can't keep my hands to myself" perfectly captures the core conflict of Selena Gomez's song, blending psychological struggle with feminist insight. On the surface, the phrase expresses a desire so strong it feels uncontrollable, echoing what Freud (2020) would describe as the id—the part of our psyche driven purely by primal urges and impulse. By focusing on the physical image of "hands," the lyric grounds this longing in the body, reminding us that desire is as much a physical experience as an emotional one.

This lyrical tension is vividly mirrored in the music video, where Gomez is shown wandering around an elegant house, touching furniture and her own reflection in the mirror. Her gestures suggest both curiosity and temptation, visually embodying the *id's* restless drive for gratification. However, the scene later transitions to her sitting still, almost observing herself from a distance, a visual metaphor for the ego stepping in to mediate between instinct and control.

From a feminist perspective, this lyric exemplifies what Jansson (2021) calls affective agency, the capacity of women to claim emotional and physical expression without relinquishing self-control or social consciousness. In patriarchal discourse, women's bodily desires have often been silenced or moralized; however, Gomez's lyrical assertion transforms bodily desire into an act of self-definition. The video reinforces this, as her sensual movements are paired with calm, self-assured facial expressions, indicating that she owns her sexuality rather than being consumed by it.

By blending psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives, we see how Gomez's lyric and visual presentation together capture the dynamic interplay between desire and control. This negotiation is a central theme in both Freud's model of the psyche and modern feminist thought. The confession, "Can't keep my hands to myself," therefore becomes a visual and lyrical articulation of embodied agency, where vulnerability and empowerment coexist.

Data 2: "No matter how hard I'm trying to."

The lyric "No matter how hard I'm trying to" lays bare a fundamental human conflict: the clash between our raw instincts and our conscious self-control. Using Sigmund Freud's (2020) psychoanalytic terms, we can see this as the ego, which acts as the mind's mediator, struggling to balance the id's relentless drive for pleasure against the superego's strict moral code. The very words "trying to" show an active battle for control and an admission that desire is present but must be reined in. Yet, the crucial part of the line, "no matter how hard," confesses that this effort is failing. It reveals that the urge itself is ultimately more powerful than the will to suppress it. In doing so, the lyric brings Freud's classic model to life, painting a picture of the self as an endless internal battlefield where primal urges and deeply held principles are forever vying for the upper hand.

In the video clip, a scene shows Selena Gomez seated in a dimly-lit room dressed in black, her hands loosely clasped in her lap, her eyes fixed on a point off-camera, her posture still and contemplative. The stillness of the body contrasts with the lyric's claim of "trying," suggesting that the conflict is internal rather than external. Later, the camera cuts to her pacing slowly in a corridor, her fingers brushing against the wall as if seeking something just out of reach. This movement visually embodies the ego's attempt to mediate between impulse and restraint, the body acting, yet consciously restrained. Her expression transitions from subtle tension to a soft exhale when she pauses, signalling the moment where the ego negotiates, but does not fully overcome, the pull of the id.

From a feminist reading, this lyric reframes the internal struggle as an assertion of agency rather than weakness. According to Marina Jansson (2021), female power is often forged in the difficult space between authentic feeling and social expectation. By openly admitting her inability to suppress desire, the song's protagonist does something radical: she claims ownership of her feelings. In the video, Gomez's body language subtly reclaims this ownership—she does not collapse under the weight of the conflict but stands in it, visibly mindful of her own emotional landscape. This act of "trying" becomes a deliberate and embodied choice, not a sign of defeat. It firmly establishes that a woman's longing is not a character flaw, but a natural and legitimate part of her personhood.

Ultimately, the line *"No matter how hard I'm trying to"* perfectly captures the song's core message: that desire and self-control are not opposites, but intertwined forces shaping modern female identity. This single lyric holds both a psychological struggle and a feminist strength, painting Gomez's persona as someone who is fully aware of her feelings and actively setting her own limits. Her choice to keep *"trying"* shows she is mindfully engaging with her impulses, proving that true power comes not from hiding our struggles, but from embracing them. This is the subtle yet profound work of defining oneself, even amidst life's emotional complexities.

Data 3: "I want you all to myself"

The line *"I want you all to myself"* functions as a raw and unfiltered declaration of desire that exposes the internal struggle between primal impulse and conscious restraint. Within Freud's (2020) psychoanalytic framework, this line represents the **id** in its most direct form the psychic force that seeks immediate satisfaction without regard for consequence. The music video visually reinforces this through scenes where Gomez sensually touches herself while lying on a bed, her movements slow yet deliberate, expressing physical longing and an almost dreamlike surrender to instinct. Her half-lit silhouette and heavy breathing mirror the id's dominance, capturing a moment when desire momentarily overpowers rational control.

The phrase *"all to myself"* conveys more than emotional yearning; it signifies a deep psychological need for possession and exclusivity. This is not merely an emotional want but an unconscious demand for ownership, an attempt to merge with the desired object. The video's alternating shots between Gomez's physical gestures and her reflection in the mirror visually portray this inner duality — the ego observing and negotiating the id's intensity. As Freud (2020) theorizes, the ego acts as a mediator, trying to manage the id's impulsive energy within the boundaries of self-awareness. This conflict is palpable when Gomez pauses, stares at her reflection, and takes a deep breath, a fleeting moment of control that suggests the superego's intervention, reminding her of moral and social boundaries.

The repetition of the lyric throughout the chorus intensifies this psychological tension. Each return to *"I want you all to myself"* can be read as the ego's attempt to process what the id insists upon, an act that aligns with Freud's concept of repetition compulsion, where desire resurfaces repeatedly as the mind tries to manage it. According to Evans (2021), such recurrence reveals the ego's strategy to confront and make sense of overwhelming impulses rather than repressing them. In the video, this repetition manifests through Gomez's recurring glances at her reflection and the shifting camera focus between her body and her face — an oscillation between surrender and self-recognition.

From a feminist perspective, this lyric and performance extend beyond mere sensual expression to become an act of self-assertion. As Jansson (2021) argues, women's agency emerges when they consciously articulate desire rather than suppress it. When Gomez sings *"I want you all to myself"* while confidently meeting the camera's gaze, she reclaims control over her sensual image. Her expression does not evoke shame or submission but power, she is both the subject and the observer of her desire. This directly challenges patriarchal scripts that position female passion as passive or forbidden. The visual portrayal of Gomez as both the desiring and self-aware subject underscores her autonomy, framing desire as a conscious form of self-possession.

Ultimately, *"I want you all to myself"* encapsulates the dynamic interaction between the id's unrestrained impulse, the ego's mediation, and the superego's moral oversight. Both the lyric and video performance embody the fusion of psychoanalytic tension and feminist empowerment. Gomez's portrayal asserts a woman's right to feel, to desire, and to define the boundaries of her own sensuality. Through this, desire becomes not a loss of control, but a deliberate, empowering articulation of contemporary female subjectivity.

Data 4: "So come on, give me a taste."

The lyric *"So come on, give me a taste"* is a bold expression of desire that highlights the Freudian tension between raw impulse and conscious self-control. We can see the id's demand for immediate gratification not just in the lyric itself, but in the corresponding visual. As Gomez sings this line, the video often shows her in close-up, her expression intense and

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yearning, sometimes in a darkened, shadowy setting that visually represents primal, unconscious urges (Freud, 2020).

However, the ego's mediating role is evident in the specific phrasing and performance. By requesting a "taste" rather than demanding to take, the lyric shows a negotiation with social boundaries (Evans, 2021). This conscious restraint is mirrored in the video's choreography. In one scene, Gomez reaches out towards the camera but then pulls her hand back, a physical manifestation of the ego balancing the id's demand with the superego's internalized rules. This creates a perfect psychoanalytic dynamic where primal drives are physically and verbally balanced with moderated restraint. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the repeated plea throughout the song shows a mind caught in a cycle of engaging with its own desire, a repetition compulsion constantly navigating the line between giving in and holding back (Burns, 2020).

A Feminist analysis frames this moment as a bold claim of agency. Jansson (2021) argues that female autonomy involves openly negotiating desire, and Gomez embodies this. She is not a passive object of the gaze; when she sings "give me a taste," she often looks directly into the camera with a challenging and self-possessed expression. This direct address, combined with the lyric, positions her as the active subject who is articulating her own longing. Grosz's (2020) concept of embodied subjectivity is clear here: the desire is physical, but its deliberate expression shows intention and reflection.

Ultimately, the line and its visual presentation merge psychological conflict with feminist strength. It presents desire not as a raw impulse, but as something a woman can consciously articulate and manage. This reinforces the image of Gomez's persona as someone deeply in tune with her emotions, fully self-aware, and actively shaping her own story. It's a powerful snapshot of modern female identity: a dynamic space where feeling and control coexist.

Data 5: "Won't let one drop go to waste"

The lyric "Won't let one drop go to waste" portrays a deep and sustained engagement with desire, powerfully illustrating the Freudian struggle between instinct and control. The id's raw, pleasure-seeking drive is visually represented in scenes of indulgence, such as when Gomez is depicted lying back amidst flowing liquids or in close-ups where her expression is one of intense, unguarded absorption in the moment (Freud, 2020).

However, this primal impulse is masterfully mediated by the **ego**. The specific, deliberate choice of words, "won't let...go to waste," shows conscious planning rather than reckless consumption. This is mirrored in the video's choreography; for example, Gomez is often shown handling objects or moving with a deliberate, controlled grace, even in moments of passion. This physical restraint demonstrates the ego negotiating between the id's urge for immediate gratification and the superego's push for moderation (Evans, 2021). A key scene that captures this tension is when liquid overflows from a glass, but instead of a chaotic spill, its movement is often stylized and beautiful, symbolizing a desire that is intense yet still being managed artfully.

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, this lyric exemplifies repetition compulsion. The focus on not wasting a single drop points to a mind that is constantly, almost ritualistically, negotiating its relationship with pleasure and restraint (Burns, 2020). The speaker is fully aware of the delicate balance, a dynamic visually echoed in the video's recurring motifs of contained overflow and precious liquids.

A Feminist interpretation frames this lyric as a powerful act of self-directed agency. Jansson (2021) suggests that female autonomy involves consciously engaging with desire. When Gomez insists "not a drop" will be wasted, she is taking full ownership of her impulses. She is not being consumed by her desire; she is consciously and meticulously appreciating it. This connects to Grosz's (2020) concept of embodied subjectivity, as the lyric points to a deep, physical awareness. The performance makes this tangible, her gaze is direct and purposeful, and her bodily movements are intentional, blending passion with a clear sense of control.

In the end, the line "Won't let one drop go to waste" masterfully blends psychological conflict with a powerful feminist statement. It frames desire not as a wild impulse, but as a

conscious, physical, and empowering force. Through this lyric and its visual counterpart, Gomez presents a persona who is fully self-aware, deeply reflective, and in command of her experience.

Expression of Self-Control

Data 6: *"And I'm trying, trying, I'm trying, trying"*

The repeated lyric *"And I'm trying, trying, I'm trying, trying"* powerfully captures the singer's active struggle to regulate her own desires. Through a Freudian lens, this insistent repetition mirrors the ego's constant role as a mediator. The id's raw demand for satisfaction is visually represented in scenes of temptation, such as shots of Gomez reaching out longingly or immersed in dark, fluid environments. Conversely, the superego's strict enforcement of rules is often symbolized by shots of her alone in stark, clean spaces or turning away from temptation.

The ego's mediation is physically embodied in the choreography. As she sings the line *"I'm trying,"* we often see Gomez in a state of physical tension as her pushing against a wall, holding her own hands, or pulling back from a desired object. These actions are a direct visual representation of the ego caught in the middle, enacting a conscious and deliberate effort to stay in control.

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, this repeated line is a clear example of repetition compulsion, where the mind repeatedly returns to an unresolved inner conflict (Burns, 2020). The singer's struggle isn't passive; the cyclical nature of both the lyric and the recurring visual motifs of struggle (like repeatedly pushing away or restraining herself) turn a private internal battle into a reflective act of self-discipline (Evans, 2021).

From a feminist perspective, this lyric is a powerful expression of a woman's agency. Jansson (2021) suggests that female empowerment involves actively grappling with desire. The relentless repetition of *"trying"* is a full-body effort, often shown through her strained but determined physicality. This aligns with Grosz's (2020) concept of embodied subjectivity. The close-up shots of her face, etched with the effort of restraint, show that she isn't just thinking about control; she is physically and emotionally enacting it, merging mind and body to assert her willpower.

Ultimately, the persistent refrain, *"And I'm trying, trying, I'm trying, trying,"* establishes self-control not as a limitation, but as a vital, active part of modern female identity. It portrays a woman's relationship with desire as thoughtful, physical, and deeply self-aware, redefining empowerment as the conscious navigation of internal tension.

Data 7: *"My hands to myself"*

The lyric *"My hands to myself"* reflects the persona's conscious effort to exercise self-control and restrain her impulses. The song's narrative begins with the confession, *"Can't keep my hands to myself,"* which captures a powerful surge of id-driven desire seeking immediate gratification (Freud, 2020). This is visually depicted in the video through scenes of Gomez reaching out impulsively, often with a yearning expression, or in sequences where her movements are fluid and uninhibited, representing the raw impulse to touch and connect.

The shift in the lyric to the more controlled statement, *"my hands to myself,"* shows the ego mediating between that initial pull and the superego's social and moral constraints. This mediation is powerfully illustrated in the choreography. A key scene shows Gomez physically holding her own wrist or wrapping her arms around her own body, creating a visual metaphor for self-restraint. In another moment, she might be seen pressing her palms against a wall or a glass barrier, a physical act of pushing away temptation and consciously containing her desires (Evans, 2021; Burns, 2020). In essence, the lyric captures a deep psychological tension where desire is fully present but intentionally managed.

A feminist reading emphasizes that this act of self-restraint is also a powerful expression of personal autonomy (Jansson, 2021; Grosz, 2020). When the persona voices her effort to maintain control by stating *"my hands to myself,"* she is actively practicing self-determination. The video reinforces this by showing her in moments of solitude and strength; her gaze is often direct and resolved, and her self-touch is portrayed as an act of holding herself together, not as a weakness. This integrates her mental awareness with physical discipline, powerfully

signalling that women can fully experience desire while still consciously choosing how to express it. In this light, self-control is reframed as a deliberate and empowering choice, not a form of passive repression.

Ultimately, the line *"My hands to myself"* brings the song's theme of self-control to the forefront. It shows that desire is still present, but is being consciously managed through both lyric and physical action. This illustrates the persona's active role in balancing her passion with thoughtful restraint, strengthening the idea of modern female identity as one that is emotionally authentic, deeply self-aware, and fully embodied.

Data 8: "I mean, I could but why would I want to?"

The lyric *"I mean, I could but why would I want to?"* captures a moment of thoughtful decision-making that highlights the persona's self-awareness. From a Freudian perspective, this line shows the ego taking charge over the id's raw impulses. The admission *"I could"* acknowledges the desire visually represented in the video through scenes of close physical proximity, such as Gomez leaning in towards her love interest with an expression of intense attraction, or shots of her tracing the outline of his form, illustrating the impulsive urge to act.

However, the rhetorical question that follows, *"but why would I want to?"*, introduces a crucial moment of rational second thought. This is the ego stepping in to evaluate the impulse, a shift often visualized by Gomez physically pulling back from the intimacy. In one key scene, as this line is delivered, her expression changes from one of raw yearning to a more calculated, almost sceptical look. She might turn her head away or create physical distance, visually enacting the ego filtering a basic urge through a lens of logic and self-reflection. This internal shift from pure impulse to thoughtful reflection demonstrates what Freud called the reality principle, the mind's ability to postpone immediate gratification (Evans, 2021).

Feminist analysis adds a deeper layer by reframing such restraint as a source of personal power. Jansson (2021) suggests that modern female agency is expressed through deliberate choices. The rhetorical question turns an act of refusal into a powerful moment of self-definition. This is emphasized in the video through Gomez's direct and challenging gaze into the camera as she sings this line, pushing back against external expectations and reclaiming her right to decide for herself.

Grosz's (2020) concept of embodied subjectivity is evident here. The persona's verbal hesitation creates a physical and emotional boundary. Her act of questioning is coupled with a mindful pause in her movement—a form of bodily control that shows both her self-awareness and her autonomy. This kind of restraint is not about suppression; it is a powerful display of self-possession, her body's way of asserting agency right in the midst of desire.

Ultimately, the line *"I mean, I could but why would I want to?"* perfectly captures self-control as a form of empowered awareness. It brings together psychoanalytic and feminist views by showing that restraint is not about denial, but about a conscious negotiation between our immediate impulses and our rational mind. In this moment, Gomez's persona shows that true autonomy is found in the ability to question a desire and to define power through reflection instead of impulse.

Data 9: "The doctors say you're no good"

The lyric *"The doctors say you're no good"* brings an outside voice of authority into the song's story, representing the superego's role as an internal moral judge (Freud, 2020). The "doctors" serve as a metaphor for societal rules and rational judgment. This external warning is often visualized in the video through contrasting scenes. For example, shots of Gomez in clean, clinical, or confined spaces can represent this voice of reason and restraint, opposing the id's raw desire, which is depicted in darker, more fluid, and sensual scenes where she is physically drawn to her love interest.

When the persona repeats their verdict, *"you're no good,"* she shows the ego listening to the superego's warnings. This internal negotiation is physically acted out in the choreography. As she sings this line, we often see her breaking eye contact with her love interest, turning her back, or creating physical distance, visually enacting the pull of societal judgment against her

personal desire. This moment highlights the ego acknowledging that her longing is not free from moral complication.

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, this lyric signal a crucial turn from pure longing to reflective self-awareness. The singer internalizes this critical voice, a mechanism that guides behaviour through reason (Evans, 2021). Yet the song doesn't frame this as simple submission. In one scene, she might be seen looking directly at the camera with a defiant expression as she sings the doctors' diagnosis, acknowledging their presence as part of an internal conversation rather than obeying it.

A feminist reading reveals the line's deeper social meaning. The "doctors" symbolize patriarchal authority, which has historically medicalized female desire (Showalter, 2020). By placing this judgment in her song, Gomez's persona exposes how society polices women. However, her tone and performance are not of defeat. She repeats their words not as acceptance, but as a defiant act, often with a sceptical or knowing look, transforming their statement into an ironic echo of societal control.

Grosz's (2020) concept of embodied subjectivity frames this as a matter of bodily autonomy. The "doctors" symbolize a power that tries to disconnect a woman from her own physical intuition. When the persona repeats their diagnosis while her body language conveys clear attraction and desire, she is resisting their control. She asserts that her bodily experience remains her own source of truth.

Ultimately, the line *"The doctors say you're no good"* demonstrates a powerful form of self-control built on acknowledgment and resistance. It masterfully blends a psychological tug-of-war with a feminist pushback, showing that true self-awareness comes from listening to external voices and still choosing to claim one's own emotional independence.

CONCLUSIONS

Drawing from the lyrical analysis of Selena Gomez's *Can't Keep My Hands to Myself*, which identifies five indicators of expressed desire and four indicators of self-control, this study demonstrates that the song redefines female agency as the empowered and conscious navigation of desire rather than its suppression or uncritical enactment. Through a psychoanalytic lens, this negotiation reflects the ego's ongoing mediation between the id's impulsive longing—seen in lines like *"So come on, give me a taste"*—and the superego's internalized rules—echoed in *"The doctors say you're no good."* However, a feminist interpretation reframes this psychological tension as a source of strength rather than weakness, revealing that expressing desire becomes an act of claiming ownership over one's body and emotions, while practicing restraint—such as in *"I mean, I could but why would I want to?"*—emerges as a deliberate assertion of self-possession. By integrating Freudian and feminist perspectives, the song positions agency as the empowered capacity to manage inner conflict with intention and autonomy, illustrating how popular music functions as a significant cultural text through which contemporary female identity is shaped and articulated.

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