

## Interpreting Love Expressions in Keshi's "Understand" Lyrics: An Analysis Based on Paul Ricoeur Hermeneutics

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the expression of love in the lyrics of the song Understand by Keshi through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics. It examines how lyrical narratives convey not only the emotional components of love—intimacy, passion, and commitment—as proposed in Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, but also highlight mutual understanding as a stabilizing force in romantic relationships. Adopting an interpretive paradigm and a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, data were collected through textual analysis, interviews with listeners, and observations of relevant media including podcast content. By applying Ricoeur's dual concepts the dialectic between event and meaning, and the structure of meaning as sense and reference the study provides a layered interpretation of affective meaning in music. The findings demonstrate that song lyrics can function as reflective tools for emotional development and relational awareness. This research contributes to communication studies by offering a methodological model for interpreting emotional meaning in contemporary popular culture and affirms music's role as a medium of emotional and interpersonal discourse.

## INTRODUCTION

Love is one of the most complex and profound human emotions, often expressed not only through direct interaction but also through artistic media, particularly music (Abhi Bavarava et al., 2024). As a universal language, music enables individuals to convey deep emotions, thoughts, and experiences that may be difficult to articulate otherwise. Lyrics, as one of the essential elements in a song, serve as a poetic channel to reveal sentiments such as longing, joy, heartbreak, and especially love (Liang & Lin, 2024). In the context of popular culture, numerous artists have used their works to portray their feelings of affection, forming a unique expression of love through melody and verse.

The phenomenon of love expression in lyrics can be seen in multiple examples from renowned artists. Eric Clapton's "Layla" and Dave Grohl's "Everlong" are just a few among many songs that reflect emotional vulnerability and romantic attachment. Similarly, Casey Luong, better known by his stage name Keshi, composed the song "Understand" as a heartfelt ode to his fiancée, capturing themes of emotional safety, intimacy, and mutual understanding (Yoo, 2023). This demonstrates how love in music transcends entertainment, becoming a medium of emotional reflection and intersubjective meaning (Juslin & Sloboda, 2023).

In communication, love expression is not only a social phenomenon but also an important psychological and emotional factor in building a successful relationship. Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love which consists of intimacy, passion, and commitment explains the dimensions that shape romantic experiences (Firmansyah & Indarti, 2022). Furthermore, the failure to adequately express love has been shown to cause dissatisfaction and distress in romantic relationships, potentially leading to unhealthy relationship (Azkia et al., 2024). Expressing love through meaningful acts, whether verbal or non-verbal, plays a key role in maintaining emotional closeness and mutual respect (Schrage et al., 2020).

Despite the increasing attention paid to music analysis in academic discourse, few studies have delved into the interpretive meaning of love expressions found in contemporary song lyrics through a hermeneutic lens. This study seeks to address that gap by applying Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory to analyze the lyrics of "Understand" by Keshi. Ricoeur's approach focuses on the dialectic between event and meaning, as well as meaning as sense and reference, offering a deeper interpretation beyond the surface-level semantics of a text (Vallée & Davidson, 2016); (Schrage et al., 2020). Through this lens, lyrics are treated not merely as literary expressions, but as autonomous texts capable of generating new meanings depending on the listener's perspective and contextual experiences.

This study is situated in communication studies, specifically focusing on emotional meaning and interpersonal discourse. Data is triangulated through interviews with Keshi's fans and analysis of supporting content from podcast episodes where the artist discusses his relationship and emotional motivation behind the lyrics (Yoo, 2023). By integrating Ricoeur's theory and Sternberg's

love components, the research investigates how expressions of love are conveyed and interpreted within the lyrical structure of the song.

In summary, this paper explores the significance of love expression in the song "Understand" as an emotional and communicative phenomenon. It addresses the need for interpretive depth in understanding how contemporary music reflects and influences real-life relational experiences. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: a review of relevant literature and theoretical framework, a description of the research methodology, a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the findings, followed by conclusions and implications derived from the study.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

This study is situated within the interpretive paradigm, specifically drawing from the phenomenological tradition in communication studies. Phenomenology, as introduced by Edmund Husserl and later developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, emphasizes the significance of subjective human experiences as a foundation for understanding meaning (Rorong, 2020). In line with this, Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics bridges phenomenology and structuralism by focusing on how texts are interpreted through the interaction between the reader and the text (Vallée & Davidson, 2016)

Ricoeur conceptualizes hermeneutics as a dialectical process where meaning emerges from a continuous dialogue between the text and its interpreter. Two principal concepts underpin his framework: (1) the dialectic between event and meaning, which explores how a text refers to real-life experiences and transforms them into meaningful narrative, and (2) meaning as sense and reference, which distinguishes between internal textual coherence and the referential connection to external realities. This hermeneutic lens is used to analyze how the lyrics of "Understand" convey emotional and relational meanings beyond their literal content.

Similar applications of hermeneutic frameworks have also been explored in related studies. For instance, the research titled "Exploring Hermeneutics Through Lyrics of the Song 'Akhir Tak Bahagia': A Case on Critical Discourse Analysis" (Saragih et al., 2023) applies a hermeneutic approach to examine emotional expression in music lyrics. Although the study does not use Paul Ricoeur's specific framework, it reveals that song lyrics can reflect disappointment and heartbreak in a profound and socially resonant way. The research highlights how simple yet emotionally loaded lyrics can represent universal human experiences and serve as tools for expressing deep emotional realities within their sociocultural contexts.

### ***Definition of Expression of Love***

To interpret the meaning of love expressions in the lyrics, the research employs Robert J. Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love. Sternberg defines love as consisting of three interrelated components:

- a. Intimacy, the emotional connection and trust between partners;
- b. Passion, the physical attraction and emotional arousal;

- c. Commitment, the decision to maintain and sustain the relationship over time (Laksono, 2022).

In a healthy relationship, all three elements should coexist harmoniously. These components are not only psychological constructs but also observable in the language people use when expressing love especially through music. The lyrics in “Understand” are interpreted as representing these three dimensions, with particular emphasis on emotional understanding and security.

### ***Music***

Music serves as a universal means of emotional communication, allowing individuals to express complex feelings that may be difficult to articulate through everyday language (Izen et al., 2023). It plays not only an entertaining role, but also functions as a medium of personal and interpersonal expression (Sania & Nawawi, 2024). In particular, when lyric paired with melody, it can intensify emotional responses and enable listeners to connect deeply with the conveyed message. According to Sania and Nawawi (2024), lyrics often reflect personal or fictional stories that help individuals engage in self-reflection and reinterpret emotional experiences from new perspectives.

Moreover, music can evoke powerful emotional responses such as empathy, love, sorrow, or joy. A study by de Leeuw et al. (2022) shows that meaningful songs are those that inspire, touch, and elicit strong affective reactions, including a desire to express love toward others. These affective experiences may even feel transcendent, enabling listeners not only to understand lyrics but to feel them experiencing love as emotion through music itself (de Leeuw et al., 2022).

Tempo and genre also significantly influence emotional perception. Fast-tempo music tends to increase arousal and alertness, while slower tempos often promote calmness and introspection (Patania et al., 2020); (Diaz et al., 2023). In romantic songs, slow rhythms and poetic lyrics like those in *Understand* by Keshi convey emotional depth, vulnerability, and mutual understanding, strengthening the listener’s emotional literacy and reflective capacity. Therefore, music and lyrics can be seen not merely as artistic expressions, but as affective tools that shape the way people experience and communicate feelings in everyday life.

### ***Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics Framework***

Paul Ricoeur’s theory of hermeneutics provides the philosophical foundation for interpreting the lyrics. Two key concepts from Ricoeur guide this research:

- a. Dialectic of Event and Meaning

Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic framework views a text as both an event and meaning. This means that lyrics are not just words but also reflections of real-life experiences. Interpretation happens through the connection between the songwriter’s experience and the meaning understood by the listener.

In this study, Keshi’s “Understand” is analyzed not only for its literal meaning but also as a reflection of emotional and relational experiences. To guide this interpretation, three key principles from Ricoeur are used:

(1) Textual objectivity

Allows the lyrics to stand independently from Keshi's original intent, enabling listeners to construct their own interpretations;

(2) Distanciation

Listeners can step back from their assumptions and approach the lyrics openly, discovering new emotional meanings;

(3) Appropriation,

Enables the audience to internalize the message experiencing the emotions expressed in the song as part of their own relational understanding.

By using this framework, the lyrics of "Understand" are interpreted not only as romantic expressions but as a communicative space where emotional safety, mutual respect, and deep love are conveyed and personally felt by the listener.

b. Sense and Reference

According to hermeneutic theory, the meaning of a text or phrase is not limited to its literal content, but also includes the references shaped by its context and surrounding experiences. Meaning as sense refers to the objective understanding of the words—their definitions or basic concepts. Meanwhile, meaning as reference relates to how those words connect with real-life experiences, making interpretation more subjective and contextual. This idea highlights that language does not merely represent symbols, but also carries the emotional and existential realities of both the writer and the reader.

In the context of this study, the lyrics of "Understand" are not seen merely as romantic expressions, but as a medium through which Keshi communicates his emotional experience of love, trust, and vulnerability. The sense of the lyrics reflects expressions of affection and longing, while the reference points to deeper layers—his personal relationship with his fiancée and the feelings of emotional safety he wishes to share. Through this duality, the song allows listeners to connect with the lyrics based on their own experiences, turning the text into a meaningful space for emotional interpretation and mutual understanding.

Ricoeur also argues that interpretation is a cyclical process where understanding evolves through repeated engagement with the text. This recursive relationship between text and reader creates space for new meaning beyond the author's original intention (Kublikowski, 2023).

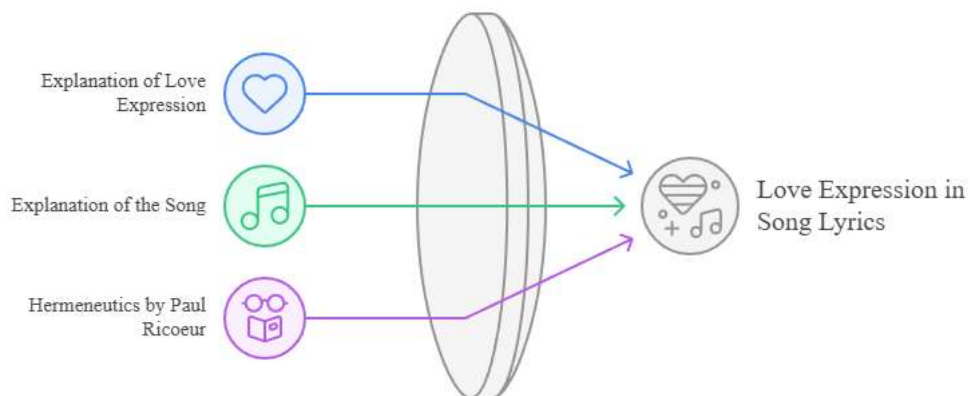


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach within the interpretive paradigm and is rooted in the hermeneutic tradition. The research was conducted over a period of three months and focused on interpreting the expression of love in the lyrics of Keshi's song *Understand*. Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory serves as the primary analytical framework, particularly his concepts of the dialectic between event and meaning, and the structure of sense and reference (Vallée & Davidson, 2016). This theoretical lens enables a philosophical reading of lyrical content as both a symbolic and communicative text.

The method used in this research is hermeneutic-phenomenology, which combines phenomenological attention to lived emotional experiences with a deep interpretive reading of texts. The unit of analysis in this study is the lyric itself, treated as an autonomous narrative open to various layers of meaning. The research focuses on how the theme of love especially in terms of mutual understanding is constructed and interpreted within the text. The data used in this study are categorized as follows:

a. Primary Data:

Textual analysis of the song lyrics is the main source of primary data. The lyrics were segmented into thematic units and analyzed through multiple interpretive cycles using Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework. This process of textual triangulation involved revisiting the lyrics repeatedly to identify patterns and embedded meaning, both at the micro (line/stanza) and macro (whole text) levels.

b. Secondary Data – Interviews:

Interviews were conducted with three informants. These individuals were familiar with the song and had formed personal emotional connections to it. The interviews used open-ended questions to explore the informants' interpretations and emotional reflections, offering insight into audience reception and lived experience related to the song's message. These interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for both guided questions and spontaneous elaboration by the interviewee. The semi-structured nature enabled deeper exploration of emotional expressions and themes relevant to the study.

c. Secondary Data – Media Observation:

To supplement the analysis, observational data were collected from public media sources, particularly podcast episodes and interviews in which Keshi discussed the emotional background and intended meaning of *Understand*. These sources provide contextual understanding of the song's creation and enrich the interpretive process by incorporating the artist's own narrative.

This combination of data sources allows for methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of the study. The integration of Ricoeur's hermeneutics with Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love supports a holistic understanding of how love is expressed in contemporary music—both as personal emotion and cultural discourse.

## RESULTS

This research centers on analyzing the expression of love in the lyrics of the song *"Understand"* by Keshi. Keshi, also known as Casey Luong, is a Vietnamese-American singer-songwriter known for his emotionally vulnerable lyrics and lo-fi R&B production. His debut album *"Gabriel"* (2022) received critical acclaim and wide recognition among Gen Z listeners. Among the standout tracks is the song *"Understand,"* which explores the theme of mutual emotional understanding in a romantic relationship.

The song of *"Understand"* was selected as the object of analysis due to its lyrical depth and emotional resonance. Unlike mainstream love songs that emphasize desire or heartbreak, Keshi's lyrics revolve around being seen, valued, and emotionally mirrored by one's partner. The song exemplifies a relational dynamic where love is portrayed not only as passion or commitment but as deep mutual understanding an emotional state that often serves as the foundation of healthy romantic relationships. To examine how this emotional depth is conveyed linguistically, the lyrics of *"Understand"* by Keshi are presented below as the primary data, interpreted through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic lens

[Verse 1]

Never thought that I'd find  
That the one in my life would be so near  
And now you're here  
I got you, you got me  
When it's us, babe, you make me feel complete  
You're all I need

[Chorus]

Ooh, ooh  
Maybe we can try it if you let me  
Take you by the hand  
You're the only one who understands

[Verse 2]

So I guess that it's time  
I asked you to be mine for all my days  
I hope you'll stay  
I'll admit that I'm scared  
'Cause I've never really cared as much as this  
It's worth the risk

[Chorus & Outro]

Ooh, ooh  
Maybe we can try it if you let me  
Take you by the hand  
You're the only one who understands  
Ooh, ooh, ooh

The lyrics reveal an emotional journey from fear and doubt to the realization that true love lies in being genuinely understood. Rather than portraying love as mere passion or commitment, the song presents it as a relational process rooted in mutual understanding. The repeated line “You’re the only one who understands” functions not just as a poetic device, but as a hermeneutic signal—a marker of deeper meaning. Within Paul Ricoeur’s framework, repetition serves as refiguration, shaping meaning through narrative and symbolic expression. This line affirms that love involves being seen and accepted in both strength and vulnerability, reflecting Ricoeur’s idea that language mediates self-understanding and authentic connection between individuals.

### *Methods for lyrical segmentation and interpretation*

Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory asserts that interpretation involves three stages: naive understanding, distanciation, and appropriation. Texts are viewed not merely as static repositories of meaning but as dynamic entities whose meanings unfold through interaction with readers and their contexts. The dialectic between event and meaning enables the interpreter to understand not only the literal message of the text but also the existential and emotional experiences that it conveys. In addition, Ricoeur distinguishes between sense (semantic meaning) and reference (the experiential reality evoked). Using these concepts, the song’s lyrics were segmented and interpreted to extract expressions of love, especially where such expressions illustrate emotional closeness, trust, vulnerability, and shared understanding.

#### a. Lyrical Segmentation and Interpretation Based on Dialectic Event and Meaning

In Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory, a text is not just a set of words but an event shaped by lived experience and open to interpretation. It functions both as event and meaning, reflecting the author’s reality while remaining accessible to new understandings. Thus, song lyrics—like those in “Understand” by Keshi—should be read not only for their structure but for the emotional and existential truths they express.

This study treats the lyrics as symbolic expressions of love and mutual understanding, using Ricoeur’s principles of textual objectivity, distanciation, and appropriation. Textual objectivity sees meaning within the text itself; distanciation allows critical distance for new insights; and appropriation occurs when the reader internalizes the meaning as part of their own experience. Through this framework, “Understand” is interpreted as more than a song—it becomes a reflection of emotional depth, vulnerability, and the transformative power of being truly understood.

Tabel 1. Lyric Segment 1

Source Text	Objective Text	Distanciation	Appropriation
Never thought that I'd find/that the one in my life would be so near/and now you're here	Expresses surprise and gratitude for unexpected love.	Reflects a shared experience of realizing love is closer than expected.	Reflects emotional maturity and gratitude; love is felt as deep, meaningful fulfillment.

The first stanza of "Understand" presents a nuanced emotional journey that can be analyzed through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic concepts of textual objectivity, distanciation, and appropriation. From the standpoint of **textual objectivity**, the lyrics communicate a sense of surprise and emotional vulnerability, as seen in the line "Never thought that I'd find the one in my life would be so near." This expresses the speaker's realization that a long-awaited connection has arrived unexpectedly, transforming abstract hope into a tangible emotional reality, affirmed by the phrase "and now you're here."

Through **distanciation**, the lyrics transcend the artist's personal context and resonate with broader human emotions. The theme of unexpectedly finding love reflects a common experience marked by disbelief and emotional awakening. The realization that "the one" has always been "so near" invites listeners to reflect on their own relationships and emotional blind spots, suggesting that love or connection often lies closer than perceived.

Finally, **appropriation** enables the listener to internalize this emotional transformation. The initial disbelief becomes a point of emotional honesty, while the acceptance of love's presence symbolizes emotional growth. The closing phrase becomes more than a romantic arrival—it is a metaphor for maturity, gratitude, and the recognition of emotional fulfillment. In this way, the stanza captures a universal journey: longing, realization, and acceptance of love that has always been near.

Tabel 2. Lyric Segment 2

Source Text	Objective Text	Distanciation	Appropriation
I got you, you got me/When it's us, babe, you make me feel complete/You're all I need	The lyrics express mutual love, balance, emotional wholeness, and exclusivity.	These lines reflect mutual support, emotional wholeness, and the role of others in life's meaning.	Love is shown as a complete bond rooted in trust and understanding, reflecting deep emotional and existential connection.

The segment above was taken from the first stanza of *“Understand”*. “I got you, you got me / When it’s us, babe, you make me feel complete / You’re all I need” reflects a balanced and emotionally fulfilling relationship. From the lens of **textual objectivity**, the lyrics illustrate mutual support (“I got you, you got me”), emotional wholeness (“you make me feel complete”), and the exclusivity of love (“You’re all I need”). These expressions suggest a healthy, equal partnership built on presence and understanding.

Viewed through **distanciation**, the lyrics symbolize an ideal human connection, where trust and emotional closeness give life meaning. The sense of completeness reflects a universal desire for relationships that help individuals feel accepted and whole. While “You’re all I need” may appear absolute, it can be read as an intimate affirmation of how meaningful presence can outweigh other needs.

Through **appropriation**, the listener may internalize the emotional maturity portrayed in these lines.

The lyrics allow for personal reflection on love as a safe, reciprocal bond. Altogether, the stanza conveys that one’s emotional and existential sense of completeness can be shaped not only by the self, but through deep connection with another.

Tabel 3. Lyric Segment 3

Source Text	Objective Text	Distanciation	Appropriation
Maybe we can try it if you let me / Take you by the hand	The lyrics express gentle love “take you by the hand” shows commitment, while “you’re the only one who understands” reveals deep emotional exclusivity.	This reflects open, respectful communication and the universal need for understanding and emotional closeness.	The stanza shows healthy love based on choice, mutual understanding, and a shared commitment to grow together.

The next stanza “Maybe we can try it if you let me / Take you by the hand / You’re the only one who understands”, reflects an image of love built on mutual respect, consent, and deep understanding. From a **textual perspective**, the use of “maybe” and “if you let me” conveys a gentle and non-imposing offer of connection, showing that love must involve willingness from both sides. The phrase “take you by the hand” serves as a metaphor for companionship, symbolizing a readiness to walk through life together, not just in joy but also through hardship. “You’re the only one who understands” emphasizes the emotional depth of the relationship, highlighting love as something rooted in empathy and rare mutual comprehension. Viewed through **distanciation**, these expressions can be read universally as the human need for meaningful,

respectful, and emotionally safe connections. Through **appropriation**, listeners may relate this to their own experiences of seeking or finding a relationship where they feel truly seen, understood, and valued.

Overall, this stanza presents love not as mere passion, but as a conscious, shared journey shaped by care, understanding, and emotional presence.

Tabel 4. Lyric Segment 4

Source Text	Objective Text	Distanciation	Appropriation
So I guess that it's time / I asked you to be mine for all my days / I hope you'll stay	The lyrics reflect a thoughtful decision making process in expressing love, "I asked you to be mine for all my days" conveys long-term commitment	Intentional love is shown through commitment ("I asked you to be mine") and non-pressuring hope ("I hope you'll stay").	The lyrics show thoughtful love – "I asked you to be mine" conveys lasting commitment, while "I hope you'll stay" expresses hope without pressure.

The segment taken from Keshi's "Understand" "So I guess that it's time I asked you to be mine for all my days / I hope you'll stay" portrays a mature and thoughtful expression of love, grounded in emotional deliberation and mutual respect. From a **textual objectivity** standpoint, the phrase "I guess that it's time" reveals vulnerability and cautious readiness, while "I asked you to be mine for all my days" expresses a desire for lasting commitment. The closing line, "I hope you'll stay," communicates sincere hope without pressure, reflecting an ethical respect for the other's freedom to choose. Through **distanciation**, the lyrics transcend the artist's personal narrative to express a universal longing for stable, consensual relationships. The balance between emotional desire and autonomy speaks to the broader human experience of building lasting emotional bonds. In terms of **appropriation**, listeners may internalize the message as a reflection of their own emotional readiness and conscious decision to love with maturity and care. Ultimately, this stanza illustrates love as an intentional, evolving connection built on trust, vulnerability, and mutual understanding.

Tabel 5. Lyric Segment 5

Source Text	Objective Text	Distanciation	Appropriation
<b>I'll admit that I'm scared / 'Cause I've never really cared as much as this / It's worth the risk</b>	The lyrics acknowledge fear as part of deep emotional involvement, recognizing that love carries risks but remains worth pursuing.	Fear in love is a universal human experience. The lyrics reflect the courage to move forward despite uncertainty.	This expresses emotional maturity – the willingness to face fear for something meaningful. Love is seen as a conscious, brave act of engaging in deep connection.

In this stanza, love is portrayed as a deeply emotional experience that invites vulnerability, uncertainty, and personal risk. The phrase *“I’ll admit that I’m scared”* reveals an honest acknowledgment of fear, which often arises when emotional investment becomes significant. This fear is not a sign of weakness but rather an indicator of the seriousness and depth of one’s attachment. The following line, *“Cause I’ve never really cared as much as this,”* explains that such fear stems from a level of emotional involvement previously unexperienced, thus emphasizing the uniqueness and intensity of the current relationship. This emotional depth transforms the experience of love from a mere sentiment into a meaningful and risky commitment. The concluding phrase, *“It’s worth the risk,”* affirms that, despite the emotional uncertainty, love is considered valuable enough to be pursued with courage. Interpreted through Ricoeur’s hermeneutic lens, this stanza exemplifies the dialectic of fear and value in love—where emotional maturity is demonstrated not in the absence of fear, but in the willingness to embrace it for the sake of meaningful connection. Love, therefore, is not only a feeling, but a conscious, brave act of existential commitment grounded in trust, openness, and personal transformation.

Tabel 6. Lyric Segment 6

Source Text	Objective Text	Distanciation	Appropriation
<b>Maybe we can try it if you let me/Take you by the hand/You're the only one who Understands</b>	The repetition stanza expresses gentle, consensual love – “Maybe we can try it” shows respectful intent, “Take you by the hand” symbolizes support, and	These lyrics reflect an ideal of open, safe, and mutual communication – transcending romance to express the	The stanza reflects mature love grounded in emotional readiness, respect, and responsibility, where mutual understanding

“You’re the only one who understands” highlights deep mutual connection.	human desire for understanding and shared emotional connection.	fosters intimacy through empathy and shared decisions.
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In the sixth stanza, the lyrics articulate a mature and emotionally respectful form of love through the lens of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic framework. From the **textual level**, expressions such as “*Maybe we can try it if you let me*” and “*Take you by the hand*” reflect a cautious, yet sincere invitation rooted in mutual consent, highlighting the speaker’s awareness that love should never be forced, but instead must be willingly entered by both individuals. The repetition of these phrases from earlier stanzas reinforces their significance, particularly in constructing an emotional bond built on respect and emotional attentiveness. The statement “*You’re the only one who understands*” serves as a key moment that emphasizes the unique and irreplaceable quality of emotional understanding between two people. From a **distanciated reading**, these lyrics extend beyond personal experience and resonate as a universal representation of ideal interpersonal relationships—relationships that value autonomy, empathy, and shared emotional responsibility. The metaphor of *taking someone by the hand* symbolizes the emotional readiness to accompany and support the other person in the journey of life, both in comfort and in challenge. When **appropriated** into the lived experience of the interpreter, this stanza reflects a deeply relational model of love that is conscious, reciprocal, and grounded in emotional maturity. Particularly, the repetition phrase “*You’re the only one who understands*” illustrates how *mutual understanding* functions as the emotional backbone of the relationship; it allows individuals to feel seen, heard, and accepted, creating a secure foundation for intimacy and commitment.

Mutual understanding here is not just an emotional response, but a dialogical process that nurtures trust and provides the space necessary for vulnerability, which ultimately makes the relationship sustainable. Thus, this stanza does not merely express affection, it articulates a vision of love that is dialogic, empathetic, and anchored in shared comprehension and emotional support.

b. Lyrical Meaning Based on Sense and Reference

According to hermeneutic theory, the meaning of a text or phrase is not limited to its literal definition but also includes the references tied to its context and surrounding experiences. Meaning as sense refers to the objective understanding of a word or sentence, what it generally means as a basic concept. In contrast, reference points to the connection between the text and the lived reality or experience it reflects. Reference carries an ontological dimension and it brings lived experience into language, making meaning not just a matter of symbols, but something deeply tied to personal or shared realities.

In this study, the lyrics are not simply a set of words with meaning, but also a medium for expressing emotional and social experiences both from the

perspective of the songwriter and the researcher. The following section presents an analysis of meaning as sense and reference found in the lyrics of Keshi's "Understand" :

Tabel 7. Lyrical Meaning Based on Sense and Reference

<b>Lyric</b>	<b>Sense</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<b>"Never thought that I'd find / That the one in my life would be so near, and now you're here"</b>	This line expresses a sense of amazement and gratitude upon realizing that someone deeply cherished once a childhood friend has become the person long hoped for.	Love is seen as an unexpected yet meaningful connection, often growing from long-standing friendships built on mutual understanding and emotional closeness.
<b>"I got you, you got me / When it's us, babe, you make me feel complete"</b>	The lyric expresses the importance of mutual support and emotional presence in a relationship. It emphasizes how a deep sense of completeness can emerge when both individuals feel understood and cared for equally.	Love is portrayed as a reciprocal bond that fulfills emotional and existential needs, where both partners feel secure and valued through mutual understanding and consistent companionship.
<b>Maybe we can try it if you let me / Take you by the hand, You're the only one who understands</b>	This lyric reflects a sincere invitation to enter a deeper, more meaningful relationship. It expresses a willingness to walk together through future challenges, grounded in emotional honesty and commitment.	Mutual understanding serves as the foundation for a healthy relationship. It fosters emotional security, builds confidence, and enables both partners to support each other in all circumstances.
<b>So I guess that it's time / I asked you to be mine for all my days. I hope you'll stay</b>	This lyric conveys a moment of emotional readiness to commit to a long-term relationship, accompanied by hope for loyalty and willingness to stay together through all seasons of life.	Commitment arises from shared experiences and mutual understanding. When emotional and affectionate needs are met, it naturally leads to a desire for deeper, long-term connection.
<b>I'll admit that I'm</b>	The lyric expresses vulnerability and fear	Serious relationships often involve emotional risk and

<p><b>scared /                  'Cause I've                  never really                  cared as                  much as this                  / It's worth                  the risk</b></p>	<p>that arise from deep emotional attachment. Despite the fear of loss, love becomes a courageous choice when the person feels truly significant and emotionally fulfilling.</p>	<p>uncertainty. When a connection brings safety, comfort, and deep understanding, that fear transforms into bravery driven by trust and the willingness to grow together through mutual openness.</p>
<p><b>Maybe we                  can try it if                  you let me /                  Take you by                  the hand,                  You're the                  only one                  who                  understands</b></p>	<p>This lyric reflects a sincere and respectful invitation to begin a meaningful relationship, grounded in mutual understanding and emotional support. It conveys readiness to walk together through all circumstances.</p>	<p>The lyric highlights how mutual understanding becomes the foundation for emotional intimacy and trust, encouraging the courage to commit and grow together in a healthy, supportive relationship.</p>

**Triangulation Data**

In this study, the researcher further employed data source triangulation to ensure the credibility and validity of the findings. Triangulation was used to verify the truthfulness of information by comparing data from multiple sources. Data were considered credible when consistent responses were obtained across different sources. In this context, the researcher conducted triangulation by referring to various perspectives and interpretive materials such as :

a. Interview Findings

To strengthen the validity of the interpretation, the researcher conducted data triangulation through interviews with three informants. These participants were asked specifically about their understanding of love expressions in the song "Understand" by Keshi, and how they perceive the role of mutual understanding in a romantic relationship. The findings consistently show that all three informants emphasized the centrality of mutual understanding as the emotional core of the song.

*"Behind the words 'you're the only one that understands', I personally think that being understood is something really important for everyone. That's why mutual understanding between two people is such a key element in any relationship. If you want your relationship to be okay and free from major obstacles well, ups and downs will always exist, but understanding each other is something that has to be there. So I think what he's trying to show is that love, at its core, really needs mutual understanding."*- Informant QN

Continue the stated of informant QN. FP similarly remarked,

*"It's like finding someone who truly understands you – so much so that you just feel, 'Yeah, I only want to be with you.' That's how I see it." – Informant FP*

The informants also expressed that the song captures vulnerability, emotional support, and long-term commitment, all of which are made possible through a deep level of understanding between partners. This aligns with the study's hermeneutic findings: that love in *"Understand"* is portrayed as a relational dynamic that grows through empathy, emotional openness, and shared meaning. In this way, the informants' perspectives directly support the core argument of the research that mutual understanding is the foundation of authentic and enduring love.

b. Media Observation

To support the textual and interview findings, this study also utilized data triangulation through media observation, specifically by analyzing Keshi's statements in the Mindset by DIVE Studios podcast. This method enriched the interpretive depth of the lyrics in *"Understand"* by linking them directly to the songwriter's personal reflections.

In Episode 5: Puppy Love, Keshi described his partner Mai as "my rock", which he further describes as someone who provides constant support and emotional safety. These statements directly reinforce lyrical lines such as "I got you, you got me" and "you make me feel complete," confirming the song's core message of mutual emotional reliance.

Another significant segment of the podcast discusses Keshi's decision to propose, aligning with the lyric "I asked you to be mine for all my days." He narrates this as an emotionally deliberate step motivated by deep affection and a desire to bring happiness to his partner. This directly correlates with the commitment component of love described in the study using Sternberg's Triangular Theory.

Moreover, Keshi's reflection on his vulnerability, stating that he was "scared" due to the depth of care he felt connects with the lyric "I'll admit that I'm scared," underscoring the existential risk of love. He attributes this fear, in part, to past bullying and fear of intimacy, as shared in another podcast episode titled Thank You to My Bullies. This context not only validates the lyric's emotional honesty but also echoes Ricoeur's concept of event and meaning where lived experience is transformed into narrative expression.

Finally, Keshi emphasizes that long-term love involves "learning how to love each other" and "forgiving each other," confirming that mutual understanding is not instant but cultivated over time. This directly supports the study's conclusion that mutual understanding is not only a lyrical motif but a lived relational process, aligning with the interpretive insights derived from both textual and interview-based analysis (Utami, 2022).

## DISCUSSION

Based on the hermeneutic analysis of the song *"Understand"* by Keshi using Paul Ricoeur's interpretive framework, this study concludes that love is not merely conveyed through passion or commitment, but is primarily grounded in

mutual understanding. Through textual objectivity, distanciation, and appropriation, the lyrics reveal an evolving emotional journey from fear and vulnerability to emotional security and existential fulfillment. Each lyrical segment reflects not only semantic meaning but also emotional references that resonate with listeners' lived experiences (Izen et al., 2023).

The lyrics of Keshi's song "Understand" were chosen as the research object because the song presents a form of love expression that is not limited to emotional or romantic aspects, but emphasizes the values of mutual understanding and acceptance. Without clear and sincere expressions of love from both individuals in a relationship, the bond can become vulnerable to conflict, emotional distance, and even harmful outcomes for one or both parties. "Understand" attempts to portray a healthy expression of love, one that fosters relational satisfaction and long-term commitment through emotional clarity and shared meaning.

This research is urgent and relevant in the current emotional and social context, where people often rely on music as a reflective medium to express feelings that are difficult to communicate directly. The song reflects how love when rooted in mutual understanding can offer emotional security and clarity, allowing individuals to grow the relationship toward a more serious and committed level. By analyzing the lyrics through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework and Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, this study highlights that all three elements of love (intimacy, passion, and commitment) are conveyed in the song, with mutual understanding as the central foundation. This reveals the importance of love expression as a key factor that shapes relationship satisfaction and the certainty of a lasting romantic bond.

This study aligns with Saragih et al. (2023), who used Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutics to explore emotional meaning in the song "*Akhir Tak Bahagia*," revealing themes of heartbreak and disappointment through dominant phrase classification, rooted in *Erlebnis* or lived experience. While both adopt a qualitative-hermeneutic method, this study differs in theoretical lens and focus. Drawing from Paul Ricoeur, it emphasizes love as a dialogical process grounded in mutual understanding and emotional maturity. Instead of highlighting emotional loss, the lyrics are interpreted as a reflection of relational growth. This contrast contributes a deeper philosophical insight into love expressions in music by framing them through Ricoeur's notions of narrative meaning and emotional development.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that love, as expressed in Keshi's "Understand", is grounded not solely in passion or commitment but in mutual understanding as the emotional and philosophical foundation of a mature relationship. By applying Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework—particularly textual objectivity, distanciation, and appropriation—the research reveals that the lyrics convey a layered emotional journey from uncertainty to emotional clarity, where love is portrayed as recognition, vulnerability, and relational trust. Repeated phrases like "you're the only one who understands" function as hermeneutic markers that emphasize emotional resonance and authentic connection.

The application of Ricoeur's hermeneutics demonstrates that lyrical texts, when interpreted beyond their literal structure, can serve as meaningful vehicles for emotional reflection and relational insight. The implications of this study suggest that popular music—when analyzed through a philosophical lens can reveal profound truths about the human experience of love and connection

This study also affirms that lyrical texts, when approached through interpretive and philosophical analysis, can serve as valuable tools for emotional reflection and relational insight. It highlights the role of music in shaping how individuals experience, process, and express love in their everyday lives.

### **FURTHER STUDY**

In this study, several limitations were identified in the analysis of love expression in the song "Understand" by Keshi using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework. The research was limited to the interpretation of a single song and involved three informant, which makes the results less generalizable to a wider audience or different cultural contexts. The use of secondary data sources such as podcast interviews and media content also presents challenges in fully capturing the artist's intended meaning. Moreover, the interpretation process is influenced by the researcher's own philosophical orientation, which opens the possibility of subjective bias or over-interpretation.

In addition, the study focuses primarily on emotional and relational meaning through lyric analysis, with less attention given to the broader sociocultural or musical elements that may also shape meaning. Although the application of Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory and Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love provides a strong interpretive base, the analysis remains limited to the philosophical and emotional dimensions without empirical validation across larger datasets or listener groups.

Based on these limitations, future research can expand the scope of analysis to include more songs by the same artist or within the same genre to observe thematic consistency and variation. Further studies may also involve a larger and more diverse group of informants across age, cultural background, and listening preferences to enrich audience-based interpretation. Researchers can also consider incorporating a multimodal approach that includes visual and performance elements to deepen the understanding of emotional expression in music. This expansion would allow future studies to contribute more broadly to emotional communication, media interpretation, and music psychology within communication studies.

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