

The Sexual Objectification of Women as Represented in Both Mediums of "Dilarang Menyanyi di Kamar Mandi"

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ABSTRACT

The discussion around women's bodies has been happening for many years and again emerges today as women have claimed their right to bodily autonomy and basic human rights. However, in some parts of the world, for example in Indonesia as depicted in a popular short story by Ajidarma that was adapted into a movie in 2019, somehow women still are viewed as an object and represented as lacking in human qualities such as critical thinking and freedom in several daily aspects. This research article is written in hopes to bring light into the demeaning humor in using women's body and over sexualization of women's activity/body parts are not the progress that equality we, as society, want to achieve. This research applies objectification theory by Nussbaum and Fredrickson & Roberts. The method of the research is textual analysis and the writers also apply comparative study to analyze sexual objectification of women in both the written story and the movie. The finding and discussion of the research conclude how both the author and the scriptwriter normalize sexual objectification towards female characters in the storyline, both in the movie and in the written short story.

Keywords: *Sexual Objectification, Bodily autonomy, Equality, Critical Thinking*

1. INTRODUCTION

The discussion around women's body has been happening for many years and again emerges today as women have claimed their own bodily autonomy following the rise of education and awareness among women. The movement to women's freedom to be recognized as human being and a free individual is being noted into several waves of feminism starting from the first wave into the third wave in the western world. However, in Southeast Asia, the movement itself has its own challenges and difficulties that do not apply the same formula as women's movement in first world countries.

Bong [1] stated it better on her research how women's movement in Southeast Asia is different when we factor in the impact of slavery, racism, and faith into the discussion. Nonetheless, the goal of this movement is to give women their right to basic human right. As clearly stated on the Beijing Declaration [2], the fight on gender equality is not only about women's issues but also about human's rights issues since the earth is populated also by women, not only men.

Sadly, there are still places where women are only being appreciated by her body instead of her humanity, especially in the entertainment industry. Ahmed [3] stated on his study that women in the selected entertainment industry are exploited as stereotypical and mostly portrayed as sex objects or items for male gaze. There is also relation about objectification on the media towards women that will provoke sexual violence.

Indonesia as one of the countries reside in Southeast Asia also become parts of the problem with the difficulty to accept women's movement as a whole since there are still interpretations of faith that oppress women and there are oppressive traditions mixed up into it as well. This often reduces women to an object for male gaze in many instances, one of which is the media people consume.

This analysis will be based on the story written by a male author in Indonesia who wrote several notable literary works. The depiction of women in his story, *Dilarang Menyanyi di Kamar Mandi* (*No Singing in the Bathroom*) or will be shortened as DMKM, are rather sexual and put all the blame on the women instead of the

actual problem, that is the male gaze and sexual objectification.

The story's premise revolves around how the men on the village cannot resist listening to the female character singing while she is in the bathroom and fantasize about her being naked. The solutions offered in the story is to forbid her from singing instead of forbidding the men to gather outside of her bathroom while she is showering. This situation is one of many examples of victim blaming therefore the writers will focus on the sexual objectification shown both in the short stories and its adaptation into a movie with the same title.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory used in this paper is the objectification theory proposed by Martha Nussbaum. Objectification is a notion central to feminist theory. It can be roughly defined as the seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman, as an object [4]. In his article Objectification, Nussbaum identified seven characteristics contained in the concept of treating a person as an object. These characteristics are instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity [4].

According to Holland et al [5] citing from research done by Hollaback! in 2016, large-scale retrospective surveys suggest that sexual objectification is experienced frequently by females from a young age. A cross-cultural study spanning 22 countries and surveying over 16,000 women found that 84% first experience street harassment before age 17. This number is evidently increasing each year caused by the problems and the spike of courage for the victims to speak up.

Focusing on the numbers should wake up the humanity and empathy parts of our society's heart by thinking how women live day to day life with the burden of being reduced to a body with no humanity aspect. This idea is inline with the statement by Fredrickson and Roberts [6] that bodies exist within social and cultural contexts and are also constructed through sociocultural practices and discourses. The idea of human's body between male and female biologically as well as culturally in turn will also perceived differently, this will have an impact to women's mental health to carry the burden of people's perception of herself just based on her looks. The human body should only be perceived as it is, its function for humans to live their lives, instead of attaching other aspects such as purity, value, etc.

Talking about objectification in the media, sexually objectification gaze also occurs in visual media that depict interpersonal and social encounters. Goffman [7] describes this phenomenon in his research that one of the examples is advertisement often depicting a man staring at woman who is doing literally anything, whether she is daydreaming, looking off into the distance, etc.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

In order to identify the sexual objectification in DMKM both from the short story and the movie, research method adapted for this study is descriptive analysis since description plays a critical role in the scientific process in general and education research in particular [8]. In analyzing the text and describing it in critical manner this research is hoping to identifies the issue found in both mediums by applying sexual objectification theory. This literary research will also use comparative study to analyse both storyline in the written short story and the movie DMKM before analysing the findings from both mediums.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Sexual Objectification Found in DMKM

In the story, Gumira leads the reader to get to know the figure of a woman who makes many men in the village have wild imaginations with her bathroom singing. This imagination then leads them to think about erotic things about the owner of the voice. This then brought issues to the wives in the village. Husbands are cold in bed because, as Gumira writes, they have their own expectations of the singer's sensual voice, a girl who lives in Saleha's mother's boarding house. Keeping in mind, Zus, the female character is showering in a closed bathroom that should become her privacy.

Through this story, the author creates a conversation that put Zus to blame for making the men in the village having this 'dirty' thoughts.

When the head of the neighbourhood association who is known as Pak RT opened his eyes, his forehead was already sweating. He was surprised to see that the people around him are drowning in that fantasy and are having an orgasm.

"Aaaaaaahhhh!"

On the way home, the hansip or security guard bombarded him with questions.

"See? Her voice is too sexy"

"Yes."

"So you see, her voice invites our wild imaginations?"

"Yes."

"So you agree that her voice is the problem?"

"That is probably true."

"Lho, sir it is not a probability! Was what happened yesterday not enough?" [9].

In that snippet from the short story, the men are clearly masturbating outside of the bathroom without the consent of Zus, however the *Hansip* or the security of the village trying to convince Pak RT that Zus is in fact the problem, instead of securing and helping Zus to feel safe in her own space.

According to Nussbaum’s theory [4] this situation can fall into denial of autonomy of Zus. With their entitlement as men and looking at the history of patriarchy, it is logical to assume what happened as denial of the woman’s autonomy of her own body. By blaming her for their wrongdoing of trespassing and eavesdropping, they deny Zus of her freedom as individual to take a shower for herself.

Another physical objectification that Gumira brought was the way he described Zus' physique, Gumira wrote: *Accompanied by Mrs. Saleha, who also knew about the problem, Pak RT confronted the woman. A young woman who is not so beautiful is also not considered ugly* [9]. While this is likely to be used as the narrative the story needs, it shows how the author uses his power to determine what is considered beautiful and what is ugly. The use of two very strong words leads to physical judgment.

Gumira also physically described the wives who complained to Pak RT about the presence of women singing in the bathroom. Gumira explained the presence of those who said they only wore a negligee, liked to gossip, and always had curly hair on their heads. Women who always carry children and when they scream it's not as loud. This objectification seems to suggest that the fault lies within these women, because it indirectly invites the reader to participate in judging that these women are not as attractive as the singer in the bathroom.

Then of course in the last part, Gumira indicated that the women who caused their husbands to be uninterested were due to their physically unfit. And also, with a little hint that it is the duty of these women to look attractive so that the husband can be passionate in bed.

In a big meeting the next day he decided that a fitness centre should be established in the village. Pak RT

decided that at the fitness centre, they would be taught Household Happiness Gymnastics, which the wives must follow to make their husbands happy in bed [9].

The best part is, not a single word of Seno Gumira describes or narrates the physical appearance of the men in the village. This gives the impression that the physical appearance of men is not important but they have the right to judge whether a woman is appropriate or not for them. It could lead the readers into the ideology that the only thing that should try to be happy in the life of a husband and wife is the wife with their physical appearance. If they are not attractive, then his married life will be on the verge of danger.

The objectification of women in the current era of globalization and technological progress should have ended. However, with television media, newspapers, and beauty pageants, objectification is rampant but with more attractive packaging. So that this distribution should be shielded with knowledge and awareness to women not to let the phenomenon of objectification affect their self-confidence and self-esteem.

4.2. The Adaptation of DMKM from Short Story into a Movie: Objectification

The movie of DMKM does not have any significant difference other than adding a visual for the story and trying to make it more comic rather than satire, not that the short story itself is a good delivery of satire. The opening story lead with the same way as the written one where the men in the village waiting outside of Zus’s bathroom waiting for her to take a bath. But this time this picture is more exaggerated probably in hope to make it funny.





Figure 1 Movie scene from 01:42 to 03:15 [10]

The pictures above [10] are screenshots from the first few minutes of the movie, and apparently there are no huge difference in the storyline of both mediums. However, the way the story is carried in the movie can be dangerous when misogyny and objectification are treated as a joke. This portrayal is harmful to all of impressionable people on how they perceive women in the society. This is supported by Ahmed [3] who stated that cinematic films prove to be a valuable source to analyse the sexual objectification by the male dominance in the patriarchal society. To this society, it is a woman job to make men not sexualize every part of their body.

In the aspect of the law, the right to privacy is implicitly contained in Article 28G paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (“UUD 1945”) as follows:

Everyone has the right to personal protection, family, honour, and property that is below their dignity and the right to a sense of security and protection from threats to do or not to do something which is a human right.

Therefore, it is much clearer that Zus’s has her right to feel safe in her own space without having to know the way men in her village trying to condemn her for showering and for oversexualizing her voice. She has the right to sing, and the men are forbidden to break her privacy and making her feel unsafe in the eyes of the law.

Other than giving the visual of sexualizing women’s voice in the movie, the critics that the movie put in the movie towards the wives of the men in the village put another blame towards women for the lack of critical thinking of the men, and will bring this unrealistic image of ideal women that to them should be achieved by all women. This will deny women of their individual characteristic and their multifaceted human qualities. According to Fredrickson & Roberts [6] through the sexual objectification by giving an ideal image of women, now the focus of audience is more on physical appearance of women rather than on her mental skills or on what she is as a human being. Therefore, it is an “invisible camera” that portrays every image of women on media; either it is sensually colourful or a picture of a submissive member of society.

5. CONCLUSION

This research findings conclude how the author normalizes the act of sexual objectification towards female characters in the storyline both in the movie and in the written short story. There are several objectifications found in the storyline and one of them is the denial of autonomy of the female character’s body and space. The oversexualisation of women’s voice and permissive act of men’s out of line action are dangerous for the impressionable young people who consume this media daily. Therefore, it is important to increase the willingness of people in our society to keep improving critical thinking regarding human rights especially towards women.

AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

RHS drafted the manuscript and coordinated the findings using sexual objectification theory. VS participated in the comparative analysis between two mediums. RE analysed the movie and designed findings. MIS matched the numbers in findings regarding data to analyse. RTT carried the law aspects of the research. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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