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**THE OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN KELLY SUE
DECONNICK'S GRAPHIC NOVEL BITCH PLANET**

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Abstract

This research investigates a dystopian graphic novel written by Kelly Sue Deconnick. It portrays women as objects and forms of women's objectification in a male-dominated world. It utilizes Simone de Beauvoir's concepts of objectivity and subjectivity to explore the position of women as objects in several areas, including private and social life. The research was qualitative. The data was collected from the literary work itself as well as other scientific articles and literature analyses. The findings showed two forms of objectification done toward women, including isolation and oppression to punish and correct their behavior. This study highlights how these themes mirror real-world gender dynamics, fostering a critical dialogue about systemic patriarchy. The graphic novel serves as a powerful medium to question and challenge societal norms regarding women's roles and identities.

Keywords: Objectification, isolation, oppression, existential feminism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Objectification is known as treating human as an object without considering their dignity. It happens because the culture adopted by society is imbalanced. It forces women to be in lower positions than men including in family, community, and government. Since women seem weaker than men in every aspect of life such as body and mind, it is possible to treat a woman as an object such as instrumentality, rejection of anatomy, passivity, functionality, violence, ownership, and rejection of subjectivity (Widyastana:2018).

Looking at the history of literature, women have always been portrayed as second-class citizens which is less important than first-class citizens, men. The character of the woman is not far away from becoming a slave, the witch, the whore, and the trickster. All of them are objects that give services to other people. None of the characterizations show women as individuals with power. They always receive orders, that is why they are objectified.

According to McKee in Rollero & Tartaglia (2016:3), objectification refers to perceiving a person as an object. It means that there are still potential for other than women are

being objectified because they have less power. One of Kelly Sue DeConnick's masterpieces, a graphic novel entitled "Bitch Planet" brings up the problem of a compliant woman in a world made by men. She portrays how the patriarchal system brings more chances for women to be objectified. It highlights the women at the time who could not do anything freely. Thus, women are trapped in a world where they have to obey the rules made by the patriarchal system.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Gazne (2018) conducted a research about Dystopian Misogyny: Returning to 1970s Feminist Theory through Kelly Sue DeConnick's *Bitch Planet*. She discussed the relation between the story and the second wave of feminism which explore the problems of contemporary American women. This research used the theory of Women Liberation which explained about the consciousness and social action done by feminist. The result of this research explained that the situation of the story has the closest picturization of second wave feminism which embraces the superhero of woman in feminist movemen.

The next research was done by Sweeney in 2020 entitled *Plea deal compounds: Black women's anger in "the system" of Bitch Planet*. This study points out the black woman role as the superhero in the feminist movement. This research used the theory from Rebecca Wanzo in adapting the figure of superhero of white people then take it to the character of Kamau Kogo as black woman. The power hold by the character of Kamau Kogo as a black woman to gather her team and lead them to build more power against the world of men. It changed the perspective that the hero of feminist only come from white people. It disturbed the universality of white men's role in forming the hero figure as America. Along the story, this study explained that the novel "Bitch Planet" opened the gate for the black author to express their story in which has forced to not become the main topic in the trend of graphic novels or comic.

While earlier studies have explored various aspects of *Bitch Planet*, none have utilized Simone de Beauvoir's theory to analyze the novel. This study seeks to fill that gap

by adopting Beauvoir's theoretical perspective as a fresh and innovative approach. By applying her insights on existentialism and feminism, this study will explore deeper into the theme of women's objectification in *Bitch Planet*. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how the novel portrays women's oppression, reducing them to mere objects within a patriarchal society.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative analysis was used since the data was gathered by analyzing the story and interpreting the quoted data. Creswell (2009) stated that qualitative research collects data by examining documents. The researcher makes some interpretation of their understanding of what they hear, understand, and see. Thus, the researcher read and noted the novel to gather data and possessed secondary data—such as books on theory, journals, and research articles to bolster the original data.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Isolation

Objectification of women is a pervasive issue that manifests in various forms across different

cultures and societies. It involves treating women as objects primarily valued for their physical appearance or sexual appeal, rather than as individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and agency. Objectification can lead to a range of negative consequences, including diminished self-worth, mental health issues, and the normalization of gender-based violence.

According to Holt-Lunstad (2015), social isolation refers to the condition where there is less support and interaction feels by the society. In this case, the isolation was experienced by women as the effect of the patriarchy system they live in. It is a functional isolation where women are given less support from the system and do not have the opportunity to ask for it. Women are never been allowed to have the opportunity to have their own freedom because there is always system that controls their action. At the end, when they are out of control and make mistake, there are some consequences in many forms including isolation to rehabilitate their behaviour.

Beauvoir (1949: 470) said that there is no sadder situation compared to a girl that is being isolated to fix

the mistake that her group cannot be forgiven. It shows how women easily targeted as the villain to the mistake they were made. It seems that, the mistake cannot be forgiven easily, so they must go through the isolation to discipline them. This case not only happen to individual but also in a group of people. In this story, it happened between women and the system. Women who are in compliance will be put in an isolated world. This situation can be seen through this quotation:

“The System: Welcome to the Auxiliary Compliance Outpost, intake facility two. Uniforms and Supplies are issued at stalls to your left and right, divided by identification number. Locate the appropriate stalls and proceed down to the concourse. NON-COMPLIANCE IS NOT RECCOMENDED.”

The quotation proves the segregation. The illustration portrayed the situation that women are gathered to prepare themselves to enter a planet that is called “Bitch Planet”. It refers to the world where the people are the women that is marked as the one who make mistake including being in compliance, violating the rule, and every action against the system. “The System: Welcome to the Auxiliary Compliance Outpost,” shows the world where women are isolated.

Based on the illustration shown in the quotation, the civilians that entered the Auxiliary Compliance Outpost are only women. It proves that the only incompliance who is next to be disciplined by the system is only women. This planet is purposed to give disciplinary act towards the women who breaks the rules or being incompliant to their family, rule, or husband. It is to create a good manner of women in the perspective of men. The objectification happened when the women instructed to perform nude and standing in the line before entering the planet. This illustration indicates that women is underpressurized and they do not have any chance to ask for question. The portrayal of only woman in the planet characterized the target of this isolation is only for women that is incompliant that lead to the segregation for only punishing a group, women.

Individual isolation is purposed to solve the individual issue of incompliance. This isolation aims to raise awareness of disobedient people. It becomes the reason why individuals in a system are justified in being isolated so that they regret and realize their actions. Haney (2018) said that solitary confinement is

characterized more by the absence of regular, direct, and meaningful social interactions and positive environmental engagement than by the precise duration of time a prisoner spends in their cell. Even if a prisoner is allowed considerable time outside their cell, they are still regarded as being in solitary confinement if deprived of standard social interactions and positive activities. "Normal" and "direct" contact means interactions that are not obstructed by barriers such as bars, restraints, security glass, or screens. There are some limitations to the activities of the object to make them aware of the consequences if they are not in compliance and confess their mistake. In this case, it happened between Kamau Kogo and the father who represented the system. The isolation experienced by Kamau Kogo is to make her confess her act that accidentally killed other women. This situation can be seen through the quotation below:

“Guards: Kamau Kogo, Room 6. 18 Hours, No Sleep, No Food, No Water. Executing Now.

System: Marian Collins was 42 years old, Kam. She had a life you took from her. She had a son, Kam. Is there anything more tragic than a motherless son? Why did you kill her?”

The quotation proves the solitary confinement targeted to Kamau Kogo. The quotation showed that Kamau Kogo has been isolated for Killing Marian Collins. Even though it was an accident, the system made it as her mistake which made her isolated. She is not allowed to interact with others or eat. Everything is controlled by the system. The system limited the activities of Kamau Kogo. This aims to make him soften and give in so that the system can force her confess the accident to be her mistake. Instead of receiving support from the system, she was blamed for the thing she was done. This is a kind of functional Isolation where she did not receive support from anyone, including the system. If the system was objective, the case would be investigated before blaming her, but it was not.

Additionally, she did not have a chance to defend herself and state what had happened. Looking deeply at the history, it was an event triggered by the guard to take Marian Collins for a punishment, but Kamau Kogo is the one that is blamed. It shows the objectification of women in term of limiting to act and speak. These two behaviors were isolated from Kamau Kogo, so she just can

accept that she is the villain. It portrays the women position in which they are forced to be obedient and are not allowed act out the system that has been made for them.

Women in more severe cases even receive unreasonable treatment. They are made to obey in various ways possible if it can make women return to their obedience. This can be categorized as coercion aimed at women who are considered to have violated the rules made by the system. The most severe stage is when women are punished using tools intended to make them aware of their mistakes. Punishment using tools can be seen as a form of social control, where mechanisms are employed to regulate behavior and maintain societal order. The use of physical instruments underscores the severity and intent of punishment related to its effectiveness and ethical implications. In this story, this situation happened to Marian Collins and the system. Marian Collins, as a woman, must be responsible for the mistake she was made to her husband by accepting punishment in the form of a torture chair called "penance". This situation can be seen through this quotation below:

“The System: Marian Collins, my

angel, please step
forward and confess your sin
Marian: My name is Marian Collins
The System: Come girl!
Marian: My name is Marian Collins,
and I don't belong here
System: People don't end up here by
accident, Marian, search your
conscience!
Marian: I was just tired, he felt
unloved. I was devastated,
I was hurts, I made threats, but I
changed! I took responsibility for my
part and I forgive him. I never would
have hurt anyone. I'm a good girls.
I've always been a good girl. I don't
belong here, you see?
System: I have forgiven you, but you
must forgive yourself, marian.
Penance is a gift to the sinner. Your
pain will be your salvation.
Marian: What is that, what are you
going to do to me?"

The quotation proves the physical isolation that is targeted to women, Marian Collins. She will be isolated by the system using a tool called "Penance." It refers to a punishment where woman is put in a chair with torturer. It refers to the remorse of sin which women is tortured, so the function is to make women aware of their mistake and regret it. In this context, "penance" involves the harsh treatment and repressive measures these women endure in prison, which are supposedly intended to correct their disobedience. In this quotation, the chair itself is a symbol of isolation to

women by forcing them to confess their sin. "System: I have forgiven you, but you must forgive yourself, Marian. Penance is a gift to the sinner. Your pain will be your salvation." This means that women will receive punishment in the form of torture. This tool aims to make them aware of their mistakes and regret it. This is a form of isolation for women where they are forced to accept punishment without being able to provide resistance and rejection. This is the only way they can make the system accept their apologies. In the end, it will make women lose their ability to control themselves because they are objectified in every action they make.

4.2. Opression

Opression encompasses the systematic and unjust exercise of power that perpetuates inequality and discrimination among marginalized groups. It manifests through social, economic, political, and psychological means, leading to significant disadvantages such as limited access to resources, opportunities, and rights based on identity factors like race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Institutional structures, interpersonal

interactions, and internalized beliefs all contribute to reinforcing these disparities, resulting in economic hardship, social marginalization, psychological distress, and health disparities within affected communities. Oppression towards women permeates every aspect of their lives, shaping their social roles, economic opportunities, political agency, health outcomes, and emotional well-being.

Societal expectations rooted in traditional gender norms often restrict women's autonomy and perpetuate stereotypes, leading to marginalization and limited freedoms. Political and legal constraints hinder women's participation and leadership roles, while inadequate protections exacerbate vulnerabilities to gender-based violence and discrimination. These injustices not only inflict physical and psychological harm but also reinforce systemic inequalities, particularly affecting marginalized women who face intersecting forms of oppression based on race, sexuality, or disability.

Objectification of women's bodies involves treating women as objects who are primarily valued for their physical appearance and sexual

attractiveness, rather than as whole human beings with diverse attributes and abilities (Frederic and Robertson:1997). The sexual interests of men are targeted at women to please them when they are in lust. They tend to seek pleasure by finding attraction that can release their lust. Not only in the form of doing it directly but also by harassing them in various ways including making women the model of their imagination. It leads to the situation where men unconsciously objectify women because their body is a pleasure, the shape that can trigger a man's sexuality. It shows that men only see women as the object of sex which is also highlighted by Beauvoir (1949:16) who said that men only see women as sex and no less, the superiority says himself as a subject and women as other. The definition of woman as other conclude how less important her role is even in the sex itself because man only see them as a tool to please them.

Furthermore, as an exchange, women also admit their position to make themselves safe and get freedom. It is the only way they can take since they are in the control of the system itself. In this study, it happened between women and men which is

seen in the representation of guards and the incomppliance women. The women exchange their bodies to get freedom in the isolation system.

“Women: Just because there are no cameras doesn’t mean we’re not being watched.....”

Women: We have an arrangement with Tommy Peepers. He doesn’t report to us. In Exchange, he gets to watch us.

The quotation proofs the sexual oppression that was done towards women. It is to say that women are forced to sacrifice themselves in order to gain leniency. This statement from the women is in the shower room where they used to clean their body without uniform. The quotation *“Just because there are no cameras doesn’t mean we’re not being watched”* indicates that the women are already know they are being watched by someone during bath time. By acknowledging the situation and doing nothing for it means that they cannot do nothing during that time. It is because the situations that are not supporting the women itself so they have to just admit it. There is no guarantee that this is the safest place for them to not be watched by the guards. Moreover, the women who stated

that cameras are not only indicators that the women are being watched. The quotation *“We have an arrangement with Tommy Peepers.”*. From that statement, can be seen that other than cameras, the only thing that can watch them is the guards.

Additionally, it can be found that some women in this graphic novel exchange their body and use it to get concession from the guards to get their freedom. One of the more explicit forms of oppression is through the sexual exploitation of their bodies, where they are coerced or pressured into exchanging sexual Favors for various forms of compensation or survival. This transactional view of women's bodies reduces them to mere objects of sexual gratification and undermines their autonomy and dignity. This indicated that women are objectified sexually.

The freedom mentioned in this graphic novel is because the women are having an affair with another woman and to keep it secret, they let the guard see them while doing sexual activity. This exchange indicates that women do not have freedom included in

relationships. It is a kind of sexual oppression because men, the guard, use the women's bodies to help them to vent their sexual desires. Not only are women oppressed by exchanging their body, but women are also oppressed by men unconsciously. Men try to find a way how they can see women fulfill their sexual desires.

Beyond these overt instances, women also experience a more insidious and pervasive form of oppression that often goes unnoticed or is normalized in society. This unconscious oppression stems from deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes and behaviors that men, sometimes unknowingly, perpetuate. Men, influenced by societal norms and media portrayals, may objectify women, viewing them primarily through a lens of sexual desire rather than as complete individuals with their own aspirations and agency. This objectification can manifest in everyday interactions, where women are judged based on their appearance and sexual attractiveness rather than their capabilities or character. In this context, men might constantly seek

ways to fulfill their sexual desires, whether through subtle advances, or unwelcome attention. These actions, while not always overtly aggressive, contribute to a culture where women are perpetually seen as objects of desire rather than equals. This ongoing, often unconscious behavior reinforces gender hierarchies and perpetuates the systemic oppression of women. In this study, it happened between women and men, the guard. Men use women's body in order to help them to fulfil their sexual desire. This situation can be seen throughout the story.

"Kamau: Gotcha! what's your name? Tommy Pepper? Guard: Fuck you"

This is proof of unconscious sexual oppression done to women. In this scene, Kamau Kogo is being watched by a guard through a small hole in the bathroom. This part of the story indicates that the guards seek for pleasure in the body of Kamau Kogo by seeing her body. He even masturbates when seeing Kamau while taking a shower. It means that Kamau has become the target of sexual harassment by the guards using the appearance of Kamau's nude body to channel his

sexual desires. This quotation “*Kamau: Gotcha! What’s your name? Tommy Pepper?*” is proof when Kamau recognizes the existence of the guards who peeked through the hole. The mentioning name of “Tommy Pepper” is because she knew that this situation was happening to the other girls but not her. It means that this is something usually done to women. This is because men in this study used women as their sexual objects. This situation can be included in the sexual objectification of women by using their bodies for pleasure. Moreover, there is no consent from women to offer their bodies to become the object, but it happened because the man in this story is used to do this action proven by the previous story when other women exchange their body appearance for freedom, so the guards treat Kamau in the same way.

Women categorized as the second sex are considered less powerful than men. It is because of the imbalance of power which leads to the situation where women are objectified. Not only in the system but also in reality where punishment is given to women when they do something other than the rules. This

punishment is not only a warning but in a serious case, it can be violent and cannot be rejected by women. It is to return women to the lines where they must be compliant and stick to the rules. Additionally, it also contributes to the superiority of men. Beauvoir (1949:284) said that in a patriarchal world, men are schooled with violence as it is the way for them to dominate nature by practicing their muscles and using it to achieve their superiority. It indicates that men can use cruelty to show their power and make things as they wish. They try to dominate the system even though it leads to violence. In this study, it happens between the guards and the women. The guards commit violence against women who do not obey his orders. This situation can be seen through the quotation below:

*“Guard: Put your uniform on and proceed down to the concourse.
Pole: Bitch, I know my size! I said...
(Thwuuckk...)
...ahhhhh..!!!”*

The quotation proves that women are experienced body oppression done by the guards. The conversation portrays that protests done by women could result in worse. Women receive physical abuse for giving their opinion

towards what is given to them. The quotation "*Bitch, I know my size! I said... (Thwuuckk...)...ahhhhh...!!!*", shows that women are being the target of violence done by men, the guards. This is the form of rejection towards women to admit that they also think of themselves. But, as illustrated in the graphic novel, a bat was targeted to them. It is to stop their protest towards what was given by the system to them. Even though there is an effort to reject what is given to them, the superiority of the system represented by the guards becomes proof that the effort to make women silent is bigger. This objectification leads to be more radical than the other form of objectification because there is physical abuse practiced to women. This physical abuse indicates the last act to get the women back to compliance. As seen in the illustration, there is a bat that is used to hit the women who are in compliance. This tool is used to give deterrent effect to the one who protest or against the instruction. It highlights that women are never given a space to decide their life including what they wear on their body. It is strictly ruled by the system as the effect of men's

domination.

V. CONCLUSION

Women's objectification manifests in two distinct forms: isolation and oppression, both of which serve to scrutinize and control women's behaviour within the context of societal norms. Non-compliance with these norms often triggers these forms of objectification. Isolation, depicted in the graphic novel, involves segregation, solitary confinement, and physical separation imposed as punitive measures based on women's actions. This isolation serves to exert control and enforce conformity by isolating women from the community. On the other hand, oppression manifests through sexual and bodily objectification. Women in the novel are subjected to sexual harassment by male guards, highlighting a power dynamic where men exert control over women's bodies. In more extreme cases, physical punishment is inflicted as a form of violent discipline for perceived transgressions, reinforcing a system of oppression where women are punished for challenging or deviating from societal expectations. These forms of objectification illustrate broader systemic inequalities

where women's autonomy and agency are restricted, and their bodies and actions are policed and controlled by male- dominated system.

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