

WOMAN DISCRIMINATION IN OSCAR WILDE'S THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes woman discrimination in Oscar Wilde's *the Picture of Dorian Gray* that the role of woman has been marginalized in the eyes of man. Using descriptive and dramatic method through which the researcher takes a look at the action as well as speech of the characters in the novel, the study finds that women are discriminated because of objectification of women, oppression of women's voices, emotional abuse as well as manipulation, and society expectation and standard. Through this study, the researcher is in a considerable hope that it gives contribution to the development of the literary study especially in the area of feminism study.

Key words: discrimination, objectification, oppression, manipulation, social expectation

INTRODUCTION

Pierik (2022) in *Patriarchal power as a conceptual tool for gender history* and Sultana (2011) in *Patriarchy and women's subordination: A theoretical analysis* have respectively come up with the idea of patriarchy. The former, deriving from Greek's term, refers to father with the meaning of supremacy, family connection as well as hierarchy in society. Further, patriarchy refers to male as male is regarded as destiny to be responsible for his family's requirements and safety of their body, emotion as well as spirit. Besides, male's domination goes beyond women in family's matters such as politics, education, economic, social and legal involvement. The latter refers to the father's instruction or the 'patriarch.'

Adam (1995) in *Dandies and desert saints: styles of victorian masculinity* and Wallace (2009) in *Encyclopedia of feminist literary theory* have stated the same idea of women in the eye of men that men's power over women (patriarch) can be historically traced back in any kind of society in their social, legal, political, religious, as well as economic organizations. Though man and woman complete each other, yet, man is put higher than woman due to a system that is patriarchal system viewing woman as inferior in their family life, social life, as well as in working area life.

Thus, because of the patriarchal society, women discrimination is noticeable as being in a subordinate position in men's eyes and being the "other" in men's essential character as well as mental activity. Discrimination, further, refers to the biased behavior of persons or groups based on definite features like race, gender, age, religion, or disability involving different and negative treatment of somebody as well as ignoring their identical chances and privileges due to their affiliation with a specific group. Women discrimination can be seen not only in real life but also in literary works one of which in Oscar Wilde's *the Picture of Dorian Gray*. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* describes debatable message humiliating women's value and encourages a confidence in male dominance referring to objectification of women, oppression of women's voices, emotional abuse and manipulation, society expectation and standard.

Several studies has been conducted to analyze Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as their subject of analysis. Some of the previous to analyze the novel. Aestheticism is closely related to gender theory from a philosophical point of view, however, the researcher will only focus on women humialiton issue using feminism approach in this study. Studies towards this novel that the researcher has been found use the aestheticim or gender theory.

Study conducted by Winata (2018) examines of the immoral behavior which portrays in the main characters of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The researcher used structuralism theory since the researcher only focus on the intrinsic element to comprehend the novel and doesn't find the background story of the author. The

researcher finds the immoral points in the novel leads to consequences of their bad behaviors. Dorian's obsession with youth and beauty led him to commit many unkind deeds, and when Dorian decided to destroy his painting, he stabbed himself. Lord Henry, on the other hand is the only character in the novel who does not accept the consequences of his actions.

Then, Sholichah's study (2020) entitled Hegemonic masculinity in Oscar Wilde's *the picture of dorian gray* analyzes the attitudes of several main characters in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, with an emphasis on the theme of hegemonic masculinity. The researcher finds four main aspects that consist in hegemonic masculinity. There are heterosexuality among Dorian Gray also Lord Henry Wotton; then the power of Dorian Gray to make Sybil Vane fall to her knees with strength that rests on Dorian's beauty and sweet words; the next one is authority, the researcher found the authority that exists in Dorian Gray by killing people and Lord Henry who gives aggression through his 'smart talk' which talks about art. Then the last aspect that the researcher sum up is technical competence, technical competence is a term used when someone is proficient in a skill or knowledge, and an important source of masculine power among men. The researcher found that Lord Henry and Dorian Gray embodied this, as evidenced when Lord Henry shared his deep love for art which Dorian Gray later followed in his footsteps within the novel.

Another study from Safitri Ariyanto (2015) analysis finds the aestheticism forms in the Wilde's *The Picure of Dorian Gray* within the novel, which reveals that the main character, Dorian Gray alongside with his friend, Lord Henry Wotton favor surface beauty of art beyond the morality. The aestheticism movement at that time was supposed to despise the morality of Victorian age and focused more on the subject of art and liberation of its meaning.

The journal from Diponegoro University, conducted by Naratri (2015) with the title psychological conflict of dorian gray in the novel entitled *the picture of dorian gray* by oscar wilde analyzed the novel within using psychological theory, Ed, Ego,

and Superego from Freud. As the researcher goes deeper into the novel, she finds the major theme within the novel is about beauty and everlasting youth. Again, the researcher analyzed the three main characters, such as Dorian Gray, Lord Henry Wotton, and Basil Hallward. In the finding, the Id conflict is around Dorian and Basil, which sparks in the part when Dorian obsessed with the painting created by Basil and makes him obsessed with the eternal beauty which actually did not exist.

Singh (2006) explained that research simply seeks the answer of certain questions which have not been answered so far and the answers depend upon human efforts. Therefore, the researcher is going to break down the analysis of the theme which she chooses, gender discrimination within the novel by Oscar Wilde, *the Picture of Dorian Gray*, and from this case, the researcher adopt it as an article with the title woman discrimination portrayed in Oscar Wilde's *the picture of Dorian Gray*. Thus, the researcher uses the gender theory because woman discrimination is related to the gender theory. Therefore, how the women discrimination is depicted is the researcher's focus of study here.

METHOD

Research Design

The researcher uses descriptive and dramatic method in analyzing woman's discrimination in that describing and discussing as well as reporting the character's speech and action (Little, 1966) are presented by the researcher. Consequently, from the description, discussion and report of the character's speech and action, the researcher does the presentation as well the analysis of the women's discrimination: objectification of woman, oppression of women's voices, emotional abuse and manipulation, and society expectation and standard.in Oscar Wilde's *the Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Data Sources

The data sources of this study are taken in the form of description, speech, and action of the women's discrimination: objectification of woman, oppression of

women's voices, emotional abuse and manipulation, and society expectation and standard from Oscar Wilde's *the Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Data Collection

There is a way of collecting the data: interview, observation, document, and survey the data (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Since this study is a literary study, therefore, observation, document, and survey the data are worth applying here. By observation, the researcher means to read the whole novel first and find the problem and after that the researcher gets the related theory. By document, the researcher means to classify the data which belong women's discrimination: objectification of woman, oppression of women's voices, emotional abuse and manipulation, and society expectation and standard. By survey the data, the researcher means to analyze the classified data

Data Analysis

The data analysis refers to the research question and the explanation of the research question (Miles and Huberman, 1984) that is how women's discrimination: objectification of woman, oppression of women's voices, emotional abuse and manipulation, and society expectation and standard. are described in Oscar Wilde's *the Picture of Dorian Gray*.

FINDING

Objectification of Women.

The analysis revealed that women in the novel are consistently objectified and reduced to their physical appearance. They are often portrayed as decorative objects or sources of visual pleasure for the male characters, reinforcing their subjugation. Examples such as Dorian Gray's and Lord Henry Wotton objectifying remarks and the portrayal of women as object beings exemplify this result.

One of the findings is the objectification of women in conversations, particularly evident in the dialogues involving Lord Henry Wotton. Lord Henry often reduces women to mere objects of desire and amusement, using them as a tool to

satisfy his hedonistic tendency. For instances, in a conversation with Dorian Gray, Lord Henry states, “Women are a decorative sex. They never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly” (Wilde, 2007). This statement highlights the objectification of women and reinforces dehumanization and discrimination they face, such statement reduces them to mere object whose primary purpose is to please and entertain men. This passage strengthened by the theory put forward by McKay (2013) which reads, women are socialized to act and respond to situations in certain ways, defined by gender roles. These roles help shape a woman’s characteristics so she can be accepted as ‘normal’ by the society in which she lives.

Still about Lord Henry Wotton, known for his witty and provocative remarks, frequently objectifies women in his conversations. For instance, he states to Dorian Gray, "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it" (Wilde, 2007) perpetuating the idea of women as seductive temptations that should be indulged in. Lord Henry's objectifying language reduces women to mere sources of pleasure, disregarding their complexity and humanity. Risman and Schwartz (1991) argue how objectification of women leads to their dehumanization and contributes to gender inequality. They stated that reducing women to objects reinforces power imbalances and perpetuates harmful stereotypes.

Dorian Gray's idealization of women further contributes to their objectification. He seeks perfection and immortality in art and beauty, leading him to view women as mere symbols of idealized beauty. Robertson & Frederick (1997) argue in their book, that women physical attractiveness indirectly signals reproductive value, which align very well with the underlying meaning of Dorian’s words that men sees women only with the surface attractiveness. For instance, he regards Sybil Vane as the embodiment of artistic perfection, stating, "She is all the great heroines of the world in one" (Wilde, 2007). This idealization devalues women of their individuality and reduces them to symbols of aesthetic perfection for Dorian's gratification. Also this passage from Dorian Gray, "A woman is a thing to be loved, not understood"

(Wilde, 2007). This quote reflects Dorian's reduction of women to objects of love and desire. By implying that understanding women's feeling is unnecessary, he reinforces the objectification and dehumanization of women, treating them as mere sources of pleasure rather than individuals with complex thoughts and emotions.

Oppression of Women's Voices.

The findings indicate that women's voices and opinions are frequently dismissed or silenced within the novel. Male characters, particularly Lord Henry Wotton, dismissed and disregard women's thoughts, perspectives, and emotions. This pattern of silencing reinforces the power dynamics and contributes to the discrimination and marginalization of women.

First finding about women's oppression is Lord Henry's degrading woman when discussing about women. He often used derogatory terms, reinforcing the patriarchy power to humiliate women. In one conversation, Lord Henry states, "I adore simple pleasures. They are the last refuge of the complex.... But I like women. They are so artistic" (Wilde, 2007). Such remarks implies that women are less intellectual and stereotyping the women to being intellectual inferior than men.

Furthermore, Lord Henry's dismissive attitude towards women's emotions and experiences contributes to their discrimination. He frequently trivializes women's concerns or dismisses their desires, reinforcing a patriarchy power. For example, when Dorian Gray expresses his love for Sibyl Vane, Lord Henry scoffs and responds, "*You really love her?*... Women are never to be entirely trusted, not the best of them" (Wilde, 2007). This dismissive remark underlines the depth of women's emotions and lack of trustworthiness.

Through the researcher's analysis of Lord Henry's conversations, it becomes evident that his dialogues perpetuate the theme of woman discrimination within the novel. Lord Henry's objectification of women, derogatory language, and dismissive attitude all contribute to the degradation and oppressive treatment of women characters. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, there are instances of silencing and

dismissal towards women that contribute to the theme of woman discrimination within the novel. These passages depict the marginalization of women's voices and opinions, reinforcing the power dynamics that lead to their discrimination. Here is an example that highlights this theme:

"Do you think she will consent?" said the lad.

"My dear fellow, I don't know. Women are not always allowed to have a choice, Dorian" (Wilde, 2007).

In this conversation between Dorian Gray and Lord Henry Wotton, Lord Henry dismisses the agency and autonomy of women by implying that they do not always have the freedom to make choices. His statement shows the societal expectations and limitations imposed on women, silencing their voices and reducing them to passive participants in their own lives. He flung himself down on the sofa and turned away his face. "You have killed my love," he muttered (Wilde, 2007).

Dorian Gray's reaction to Sybil Vane's disappointing performance on the stage reflects a clear instance of silencing women. By expressing his disappointment in such a harsh manner, Dorian effectively silences Sybil, belittling her abilities and reducing her to a shallow and stupid person. His words strip her of happiness and invalidate her as an individual. Dorian positions himself as the victim, asserting his own superiority while devaluing Sybil's worth. By framing himself as the victim of her shortcomings, he portrays Sybil as the one at fault, suppressing her voice and dismissed her work talent just because he was not appreciate her acting. This tactic of playing the victim allows Dorian to maintain control and power in the relationship, while simultaneously silencing Sybil's perspective and emotions. Because women were often expected to conform to certain ideals and fulfill the desires of men, his disappointment and shifting the blame onto Sybil, Dorian reinforces societal norms that silence and invalidate women's experiences and talents "Women are a decorative sex. They never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly" (Wilde, 2007).

In this conversation, Lord Henry Wotton perpetuates the silencing and dismissal of women's voices and opinions. By stating that women "never have anything to say" (Wilde, 2007), he belittles their intellectual contributions and suggests that their thoughts and ideas hold no value. This dismissive attitude towards women's voices emphasized the power dynamics that lead to their discrimination and marginalization of women within the narrative. Lord Henry's assertion that women say things '*charmingly*' implies that their only purpose is to please and entertain men, further reinforcing their objectification and diminishing their worth as individuals. By silencing women's voices and devaluing their thoughts and opinions, Lord Henry's statement contributes to the theme of woman discrimination within the novel. It reflects a patriarchal mindset that perpetuates the marginalization and mistreatment of women, denying them their agency and diminishing their importance in intellectual and social discourse. It is important to recognize the harm caused by silencing and dismissing women's voices, as it perpetuates gender inequality and contributes to the emotional and psychological distress experienced by women. According to Connell (2009), hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of masculinity within a society that is reinforced through power structures and social norms. It involves the exertion of power and control by men over women, which often leads to the silencing and dismissal of women's voices and experiences. Connell argues that this dynamic perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces the subordination of women. Connell (2009) states, the controlling feature of hegemonic masculinity is the suppression of femininity, especially in men themselves but also in women. This quote underlines how the silencing and dismissal of women's voices and experiences is integral to maintaining the dominant position of hegemonic masculinity. Women's perspectives are marginalized, devalued, and often rendered invisible, contributing to their discrimination and perpetuating gender inequality.

“Women love us for our defects. If we have enough of them, they will forgive us everything, even our intellects. You will never ask me to dinner again after saying this, I am afraid, Lady Narborough, but it is quite true.” (Wilde, 2007)

When Lord Henry talks to Lady Narborough that he gathers at the small party along with hostess and Dorian Gray, he believes the stereotype that women tend to accept and forgive men's mistakes, even to the point of belittling their intellect. Lord Henry's comments reflect social beliefs that place women in a subordinate position, emphasizing the role seen as their nurturers and guardians, who should be tolerant and forgiving of mistakes of men. His comment suggests that women are more concerned with emotional connection and romance, prioritizing their partner's flawed aspects over their intellectual abilities, and put pressure on women to conform to traditional gender roles, accepting their primary purpose is only to provide emotional support and cater to the needs of men.

Emotional Abuse and Manipulation

The research uncovers emotional abuse and manipulation directed towards women in the novel. Character such as Dorian Gray inflict emotional pain and devastation upon women, utilizing their power and control to demean and humiliate them. This finding show the ways in which emotional abuse perpetuates the subjugation and discrimination of women.

While Dorian Gray's character in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is more passive in his remarks compared to Lord Henry Wotton, there are instances where his interactions and comments highlight the discrimination directed towards women within the novel. These remarks contribute to the objectification, dismissiveness, and mistreatment of women. The first remark by Dorian Gray saying that, "You have killed my love. Why did you spoil the romance of my life? Why have you sent [Sibyl Vane] to the worst death a woman can die?" (Wilde, 2007). This passage shows Dorian's emotional manipulation and blaming Sibyl Vane for his own disappointment. His harsh words and the accusation of ruining the romance of his life contribute to the discrimination of Sibyl, reducing her to the source of his unhappiness and devaluing her worth. The novel highlights the harsh judgment faced by women for their actions

or perceived failures. When Sybil Vane, an aspiring actress, fails to perform well on stage, Dorian reacts with disdain, stating, "You have killed my love." This judgment and rejection reveal the societal expectation for women to meet certain standards, and their failure to do so results in discrimination

Lord Henry Wotton's comments contribute to emotional abuse through his dismissive and unsympathetic attitude towards suffering. Emotional abuse involves tactics that undermine a person's emotional well-being, manipulate their feelings, and devalue their experiences. Lord Henry's statements in this chapter exemplify such abusive behavior. Lord Henry's remark, "I can sympathize with everything, except suffering... It is too ugly, too horrible, too distressing" (Wilde, 2007). demonstrates his lack of empathy towards the pain and struggles of others. By dismissing suffering as unattractive and unworthy of sympathy, he invalidates the emotions and experiences of individuals who may be enduring hardship. This dismissive attitude perpetuates emotional abuse by belittling and downplaying the legitimate emotional needs of others, including women.

Furthermore, Lord Henry's statement in chapter 2 "There is something terribly morbid in the modern sympathy with pain... The less said about life's sores, the better" (Wilde, 2007) reflects its tendency to avoid acknowledging and discussing difficult aspects of life. This attitude denies individuals, especially women, the space to express their pain, seek support, and find healing. Lord Henry's refusal to acknowledge and understand suffering contributes to emotional abuse by disregarding the emotional well-being of others. Emotional abuse often involves mocking or belittled a person's emotions and experiences, which is exactly what Lord Henry's statements in this chapter do. By dismissing suffering as "ugly", "horrible", and "pathetic", He emphasizes the importance and legitimacy of the pain-related emotions. As it minimizes the value and importance of a person's emotional condition, this invalidation and belittling is a characteristic of emotional abuse "Women represent the

triumph of matter over mind, just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals" (Wilde, 2007).

Lord Henry Wotton's statement contributes to emotional abuse through the invalidation and degradation of women's experiences and emotions. By asserting that women represent the triumph of matter over mind, Lord Henry devalues the intellectual and emotional capabilities of women, treating them as objects to be dominated rather than individuals with heart and feeling. Lord Henry's comment displays a demeaning attitude toward women. Because it creates doubt on the value of women's emotions and their entitlement to be taken seriously and understood, this kind of emotional abuse is damaging.

Furthermore, Lord Henry maintains a gender hierarchy that devalues and dismisses women's values by highlighting the "triumph of mind over morals" as an example of masculinity. This passage indicates that women's emotional experiences are less important or valid because they are morally inferior by default. Emotional abuse often involves the invalidation of emotions, gaslighting, and the manipulation of one's feelings. Lord Henry's statement contributes to emotional abuse by invalidating the emotional experiences of women, treating their emotions as unimportant or trivial. This type of abuse can have severe psychological and emotional consequences, as it erodes a person's self-worth, self-esteem, and sense of identity.

Lord Henry Wotton's also commented that can be seen as contributing to another emotional abuse, especially in how he dismisses women's emotional experiences and needs. Emotional abuse involves the manipulation, degradation, and invalidation of a person's emotions and psychological well-being. Lord Henry's statement, "You know I don't believe in romance... I only believe in realities" (Wilde, 2007) reflects a dismissive attitude towards romantic feelings and emotional connection. By expressing his disbelief in romance, he belittles the importance of emotional intimacy and disregards women's emotional needs and desires. This dismissal can be emotionally damaging, as it invalidates the importance of emotional

experiences in relationships. Lord Henry's statement that "Women are never disarmed by compliments. Men always are.." (Wilde, 2007) empowers harmful stereotypes and generalizations about gender. By stating that women are somehow resistant to the positive effects of compliments, he diminishes their ability to feel genuine emotional connection and appreciation. This statement not only perpetuates gender stereotypes but also invalidates women's emotional responses and experiences, which can lead to feelings of indecision, confusion, and emotional distress.

Lord Henry's words contribute to emotional abuse by minimizing women's emotional needs and experiences. Emotional abuse involves exerting power and control over one's emotions, often through manipulation and invalidation. By denying romance and implying that women are unaffected by compliments, Lord Henry undermines women's emotional well-being, perpetuating a dehumanizing and emotionally abusive towards women.

Society Expectations and Standards

The results emphasize the impact of societal expectations and standards on women's discrimination. Women who deviate from prescribed gender roles or fail to meet societal ideals of beauty, virtue, or talent are subjected to criticism, ridicule, and a loss of social status. This finding underscores the damaging effects of societal norms and the role they play in the discrimination of women. This passage strengthened by the theory put forward by McKay (2013) which reads, "women are socialized to act and respond to situations in certain ways, defined by gender roles. These roles help shape a woman's characteristics so she can be accepted as 'normal' by the society in which she lives."

Throughout the novel, women are often described in terms of their physical beauty, emphasizing their external appearance as the primary measure of their worth. For example, when Dorian Gray first meets Sibyl Vane, her beauty is repeatedly highlighted through passages like, "She was wonderfully beautiful, with her fine brow... and her large, blue, tearful eyes." This emphasis on external beauty reinforces

the objectification of women, reducing them to objects of visual pleasure. Another remark by Dorian Gray like below:

"Women are wonderfully practical. Much more practical than we are. In situations of that kind, we often forget to say anything. We get so much absorbed in thinking of our enemies that we forget to hate our friends" (Wilde, 2007).

This remark highlights Dorian's dismissiveness and generalization of women. By implying that women are completely focused on practical matters and lacking in loyalty, he undermines their emotional depth and disregards their individuality.

Another aspect of woman discrimination can be seen in the diminishing of women's emotions and experiences. Both Dorian and Lord Henry often dismiss women's feelings or reduce them to insignificance. For instance, Dorian tells Lord Henry, *"You don't understand what I have suffered... Women have stood like that before, and I have laughed at them."* This dismissal of women's emotions contributes to their discrimination and reinforces a lack of empathy or understanding towards their experiences.

"I hope the girl is good, Harry. I don't want to see Dorian tied to some vile creature, who might degrade his nature and ruin his intellect" (Wilde, 2007).

Lord Henry expresses his hope that Dorian would meet a woman who would not disappoint him. However, his words carry a derogatory towards women he has never even met. This passage reflects the societal expectations and standards that women are subjected to within the novel, choosing wrong woman could lead to a ruined reputation. Lord Henry's concern about Dorian being tied to a woman who might degrade his nature and ruin his intellect highlights the societal pressure for men to seek companionship with women who could uphold their social status and intellectual pursuits. His remark implies that woman has the ability to diminish or degrade the superior qualities of men, thereby positioning men as inherently superior beings. The idea that women are not suitable can lead to the decline of men's nature and intellect

reflects the patriarchal belief that women must submit to men and that their value lies solely in their ability to support and male predominance.

CONCLUSION

The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde does contain content about the abuse and degradation of women, but it is deliberately written by Wilde, the author as a form of satire of social life in the Victorian era. This is simply because Wilde wants to tell and criticize the nature of social life in the Victorian era, which still has a strong patriarchal influence, and the role of women is so weak in addition to the ruler of the time being a woman as well. As is the case with other novelists of the same era, the nineteenth-century novel is one of the most important cultural sites for representing and shaping ideas about women. Thus, the woman discrimination runs as follows: objectification of women, oppression of woman's voices, emotional abuse and manipulation, and society expectations and standards.

Suggestion

Since this study is not flawless, the researcher hope so much the readers of this article gives constructive criticism as well as other researchers may develop this study into further study using any available theories appropriate to the issues in the novel in order that the study of literature comes into development.

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