

Reification of Women in *Othello*: A Feminist Perspective

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Shakespeare's *Othello* is a loaded play from a feminist perspective. The present study indicates how men, in a way, marginalize women, possess them as their property, and sexually assault them by de-humanizing their bodies. Thematically, the play represents a dehumanized role of women who are fragile and submissive in a patriarchal society. This study depicts the image of sexually objectified, commodified, and self-objectified women. The objective of this research is to explore and analyze the objectification of women in *Othello* in such a way as to relate it to the problems in our age. Hence, the research contextualizes gender inequalities at personal, social, political, socio-cultural and organizational level for public awareness. This study will also contribute to the existing body of literature on the adverse effects of objectification and self-objectification, which have been documented such as disorder, depression, and dysfunction in male-female relationships. The methodology used for this research is close textual analysis of the play in the framework of a feminist literary criticism.

Keywords: Objectification, de-personalization, marginalization, patriarchal society, feminism

Women embody a very inferior, marginalized and dehumanized role in Shakespeare's *Othello* (1984), written in the Elizabethan era (1580-1660); which, in a way, represents the patriarchal social order and stereotypical attitudes of men towards women. The patriarchal modes of life represent women as fragile, faithful and submissive to their men. Its ideology further manifests gender hierarchy where women are subordinated to men by virtue of their weaker status in a male-dominated society. Hence, Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca, three women in the play, are the living examples of women's oppression, victimization, de-personalization and marginalization. They are not entitled to equal rights like their male counterparts. Hadfield (2003) quotes Jordan in this regard, who argues, "All three [women] are wrongfully accused of sexual misdemeanor in course of the play; all three, though unequal in their rank-power, are equally vulnerable to a sexual charge brought against them: ...they yield the identical slur, the identical charge of sexual promiscuity – the most readily available form of assault on a woman's reputation."

The above passage represents the weaker image of women in *Othello*. Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca are accused by their husbands being unchaste and whore. Sexual charges have been brought against them by their respective husbands. They have been considered physically, psychologically and morally fragile and treated like animals, irrespective of their feelings and needs. Snow (1980) also observes that in *Othello* one hears the "outraged voice...of the patriarchal social order." In the similar context, MacKinnon (1989) says about male's dominance that "the male standpoint enforces woman's definition, encircles her body, circumlocutes her speech, and describes her life." Therefore, from a patriarchal perspective, the above women are considered the

property of their husbands and fathers, while the three men: Othello, Iago and Cassio, demonstrate the patriarchal order of the Elizabethan society.

Objectification/Reification

Objectification/Reification is an intensive term in the feminist criticism in which the female's body is devalued and sexually objectified by men for the purpose of dehumanizing them. Women are treated as things, objects, and possessions. They are accused ruthlessly for sexuality and prostitution, and are objectified as things interchangeable. Their objectified status cut them off from human existence. Dworkin (2002) says that when objectification takes place, "a person is depersonalized...those who can be used as if they are not fully human, are no longer fully human in social terms; their humanity is hurt by being diminished." Similarly, in the views of Nussbaum (1995), a feminist, there are seven characteristics of objectification, which are given below:

Instrumentality [where] the objectifier treats the object as a tool of his purpose... Denial of Autonomy: [in which] the objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination... Inertness: [where] the objectifier treats the object as lacking in activity,...Fungibility: where the woman is treated as interchangeable, the Violability where women are treated as weak, lacking integrity and to be smashed,... the Ownership: where the women are treated as something to be owned, bought and sold, and [the last one is] the Denial of Subjectivity: where the objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings are not taken into consideration.

Objectification means treating a woman as an object, denying her existence and value, and smashing her integrity and feelings. They are alienated from the society when they are commodified. MacKinnon (1989) also says in this regard, "Reification, similarly, is not merely an illusion to the reified; it is also their social reality. The alienated who can grasp self only as other is no different from the objectified who can grasp self only as thing. To be man's other is to be his thing." Therefore, all the above seven characteristics of reification can be found in *Othello* where Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca are degraded and treated like objects, owned and possessed by men. Their feelings are hurt and their desires are put at the back burner, which have been contextualized in the subsequent paragraphs.

The first characteristic of "instrumentality" is seen in the case of all the above three women in *Othello*. Shakespeare (1984) regards them as "housewives" (1.3.268), an instrument for the fulfillment of men's sexual desires. The other characteristics of objectification are "instrumentality" and the "denial of autonomy," manifested in the expressions of Iago by calling women "wild-cats" (2.1.109). Similarly, Brabantio, Desdemona's father, regards Desdemona as his sole property. Desdemona marries Othello without the consent of her father, which gets her father annoyed about her and he warns Othello to beware of her by saying "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: / She has deceived her father and may thee"(1.3.288-289).

Further, women are also treated as "fungible" and "interchangeable." Othello says about Desdemona that "I had been happy, if the general camp, / pioneers and all, had tasted her sweet body" (3.3.346-347). She has been treated like a thing exchangeable, to be exposed to "violability," and to be smashed after being used. In the same way, they are also regarded as food, to be eaten up by men and then to belch once their stomach is full (3.4.97-99). They are also owned like the property and "ownership" of their dominant male circles. Desdemona is treated as a property of both her father and husband, respectively. Her father, on the one hand, calls Othello a "thief" (1.2.62) for stealing Desdemona from him; and on the other hand, Othello regards Desdemona as his sole ownership while regarding marriage as "a purchase" (2.3.9).

The subordination of women to men is also evident in men's brutal treatment of women in the Venetian society. The male community considers women the prostitutes, irrespective of their respectful status, rights and values. For instance, Othello says about Desdemona, "Damn her, lewd minx! O, damn her (3.3.476)! The expression of "lewd minx" is associated with the whore and a damned prostitute. Hence, the women are cast aside by their dominant male, and they are treated in a very vindictive way.

As mentioned earlier that *Othello* evokes the picture of objectified, commodified and self-objectified women. Therefore, the researcher focuses on the concepts of objectification, commodification, self objectification and sexual objectification of women in *Othello*, keeping in mind their salient features and applications. Firstly, the study delineates with how Desdemona and other females are commodified/dehumanized by the dominant male in their surroundings; secondly, how they start self-objectifying themselves, and finally, how they have been killed by their husbands.

Desdemona is unable to find her place in the Elizabethan patriarchal hierarchy. She marries Othello against the will of her father. She has been considered the property of her father before marriage; and after marriage, her control is given in the hands of Othello, her husband. She has no sense of personal independence, and hence, the idea of patriarchal system evolves that the woman has to live either in the house of her father or husband. The status of Desdemona's obedience and subservient nature reminds us that in a male-dominated society, women are submissive to men. Therefore, the Elizabethan patriarchy gives expressions to disorder and chaos; and conflict takes place in relationships. Levin (1988) quotes Novey who argues that Shakespeare's plays focus on "the conflict between mutuality and patriarchy and the conflict between emotion and control." Hence, the patriarchy/control is associated with men as objectifier while the mutuality/emotions are associated with women being objectified.

Sexual Objectification

This research throws light on different facets of sexually objectified humans. Thematically, Desdemona presents the image of a sexual instrument in the play, and an object for the satisfaction of Othello's sexual desires. He defames her publically, and sexually objectifies her personality. Instantaneously, after her announcement of marriage to Othello, Iago considers it a stain on her father's honor. He considers her as an animal that cannot run away from her master's slavery. Her right of getting married at her own wish is considered a great crime by virtue of gender discrimination in a patriarchal system. Iago asks Rodrigo, Desdemona's lover, to call her father and make him aware of his daughter's bold stance and her desire to fulfill Othello's sexual desires through her body:

Call up her father,
Rouse him: make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets; incense her kinsmen,
And, though he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies: though that his joy be joy,
Yet through such changes of vexation on't (1.1.68-73).

Iago objectifies Desdemona's body as a concrete thing and a very precious gift, which can be stolen if not taken care of. He makes it realized to Brabantio, Desdemona's father, that he has lost his very precious asset, the fair and sweet lady, because of his ignorance of her importance. In the same connection, when Desdemona asks Iago that how he would praise her beauty, he states, "If she be fair and wise, fairness and wit, / The one's for use, the other useth it" (2.1.128-129). In his views, women are men's desirable assets only. They are judged on the basis of their physical appearance, beauty and sexual attraction, not on the basis of their spiritual, intellectual and mental growth. He praises Desdemona as a wise and fair lady who may be used by her husband like a metal/toy, and can be smashed after use.

Though Othello marries Desdemona according to her free-will, Rodrigo depicts Othello as a monster, and accuses him like a thief who has stolen from Brabantio his most valuable gift. He shouts angrily at Brabantio, "Awake! What, ho, Brabantio! Thieves! Thieves! Thieves! / Look to your house, your daughter and your bags! / Thieves, thieves" (1.1.80-82)! Desdemona's marriage to Othello is described as a theft by Iago, and Desdemona as a property by Brabantio. Brabantio asks Othello "O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter" (1.2.62), who has been seduced unlawfully and magically. Her father accuses her for running away with Othello by saying, "She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted" (1.3.60). Both Brabantio and Iago deny Desdemona's subjectivity and treat her as an object of sexual appetite.

It is relevant to quote Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) in this regard who believe that objectification means treating women "as bodies – and in particular, as bodies that exist for the use and pleasure of others." Hence, Othello objectifies Desdemona as a thing/commodity, and says that he wants "to chop her to messes" (4.1.188) when Iago connivingly defames her with Cassio. Othello desires to tear her body to pieces, which has a sexual connotation that he wants to overpower and assault her physically for her infidelity with him. Cohen (1987) believes that it is the sexual connotation of Othello's expressed fear of the power of Desdemona's physical beauty, which propels him to overpower and strangle her sexuality. Cohen (1987) further says that "the contaminated bed and the lying throat being encircled by his [Othello's] strong hands, the surrender of that body to the greater power of his own. Othello's mind is filled with the ultimate inseparability of Desdemona's sexual role from any other she may try to play; her most innocent remark is seen by him to be related to her sexual identity."

Othello wants to control his wife by desiring her to obey him willy-nilly. After getting married, he desires to take advantage of her physical and sexual beauty when he asks her, "Come my dear love, / the purchase made, the fruits are to ensue" (2.3.8-9). Marriage is considered a business dealing for which money is paid, and after payment, a husband is free to use his wife as his commodity/property/possession, and to sexually assault her body in whatever way he wants. In the views of Kant (1963), "The desire which a man has for a woman is not directed towards her because she is a human being, but because she is a woman; that she is a human being is of no concern to the man; only her sex is the object of his desires."

The above passage indicates that sexual objectification is the fulfillment of men's sexual desires on women. Hence, Othello wants to exercise Desdemona's sexuality by disregarding her self-respect and sense of independence in his views of marriage, "O curse of marriage, / That we can call these creatures ours, / And not their appetites" (3.3.270-272). Her sexuality lowers her status to a thing, a toad, and an animal. She is considered less human, and she has been turned into a commodity after marriage. She is de-personalized; and loses her dignity when Othello treats her as a thing belonging to him only.

Othello praises Desdemona's lips as if her lips are like roses and kisses them by saying "Young and rose-lipped cherubin" (4.2.62). He associates the rose with her lips that symbolize sexual objectification. He kisses her before murdering her, and says before committing suicide himself that "I kissed thee ere I killed thee: no way but this, / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss" (5.2. 354-355). Kant (1963) illustrates his viewpoint in the above context that a woman is regarded "as an object of appetite, a person becomes a thing, and can be treated and used as such by everyone...used by all and sundry as an instrument for the satisfaction of sexual inclination...[humanity] is thereby sacrificed to sex." Likewise, Othello uses Desdemona for satisfying his sexual appetite, and he further says:

Yet I'll not shed her blood, / Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow/ And smooth as monumental
alabaster/ Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men. / Put out the light, and then put out the light:
/ If I quench thee, thou flaming minister, / I can again thy former light restore, / Should I repent me;
but once put out thy light (5.2.3-10).

Othello considers it necessary to kill Desdemona by extinguishing the fire of her attractive sexual physicality. He thinks that if she remains alive, she will promote pornography and sexuality, and will betray more men. This symbolizes his fear of female's sexual power over men. Similarly, women are not only used as a commodity but also sexually abused by men just like a thing exchangeable. Iago, the demi-devil, also considers women as men's possessions. He disregards women and wants to interchange Desdemona for Bianca, his wife. Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr (2010) quote Bartky that "SO [sexual objectification] occurs when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire."

Iago considers Desdemona's sexual attraction as his own sexual desire of getting her body for playing with her like a toy. He thinks that Othello has also substituted him for his marriage bed, and seduced his wife, Emilia. Though he is not sure whether Emilia is sexually used by Othello or not, he still desires to satisfy his sexual

desire over Desdemona's attractive/sexual body. He utters these words while obsessed with Desdemona's sexual attraction, "And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets/ He has done my office: I know not if't be true; / But I, for mere suspicion in that kind, / Will do as if for surety" (1.3.369-372).

Talking about "wife for wife", Iago views marriage as a business deal. He says that Othello might have used his wife, Emilia; hence, it is his turn to use Desdemona now. The words expressed in the above lines de-personalize women. Their spiritual beauty is subordinated to their physical beauty. From a feminist approach, the term "sexual objectification" is used to de-personalize a woman to the extent that her own sense of worth is shattered down, as Iago says, "For that I do suspect the lusty Moor/ Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof/ Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards;/ And nothing can or shall content my soul/ Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife" (2.1.276-280).

Iago consoles Rodrigo that Desdemona's body is attractive to Othello for a short span of time, but very soon he will be fed up of his lust and will smash her like a useless thing. Iago says about Othello that, "These Moors are changeable in their wills – fill thy purse with money./ The food that to him now is as luscious as locust/ Shall be to him shortly as acerb as the coloquintida" (1.3.336-338). It indicates the undeniable fact that some men want the physical satisfaction in a relationship only; once it is achieved, then the woman loses all her glory and appreciation. The men forget and throw away women after physical satisfaction just like a commodity or a rubbish thing is thrown away into a dustbin after using it.

Commodification/Concubinage

Another very important term in objectification is commodification/prostitution/ concubinage, which has also been contextualized in the present research. Somehow, it is used as a way of reducing the status of three women from a human existence to a "sexual instrument" and a sexual commodity. Kant (1963) writes in this regard that "a man is not at his own disposal entitled to sell a limb, not even one of his teeth. But to allow one's person for profit to be used for the satisfaction of sexual desire, to make of oneself an object of demand, is to dispose over oneself as over a thing."

Othello introduces Bianca as a prostitute by profession who sells her body to men for money as if her body is a commodity for men to be used for enjoyment. Though she is the beloved of Cassio and she truly loves him, he refuses to marry her. He prefers to use her body only as an object of appetite because he does not consider her a human being, entitled to equal rights like men. He further degrades her in rejecting her proposal by saying "I marry her! What? A customer! Prithee, bear some charity to my wit: do not think it so unwholesome" (4.1.117-118). Iago also degrades her when he tells Othello that she is a creature who advertizes her body like an object to men for getting worldly gain in the form of money, lodging and food:

Now will I question Cassio of Bianca?
A housewife that by selling her desires
Buys herself bread and clothes. It is a creature
That dotes on Cassio; as 'tis the strumpet's plague
To beguile many and be beguiled by one (4.1.91-95).

The term "comodification" is also associated with Emilia who is very sincere to her husband, but still she gets a very low status in the male-dominated society. Iago does not only possess her as a commodity but also describes her as a housewife and a strumpet, and "a villainous whore" (5.2.228). He generalizes women's fragile status as viewed by Bloom (1998) that he is "ready to suspect Emilia with every male in the play, while not particularly caring one way or the other." Cassio even disregards Bianca as a "fitchew" and a "perfumed one" (4.1.141) a lecherous woman or a prostitute who might be used by everyone when money is paid for enjoying her body.

Similarly, Othello also describes Desdemona as unchaste, a whore, "an impudent strumpet," (4.2.79), a "public commoner" (4.2.71-79) and as "false as water" (5.2.134). Her sexual power is considered as an evil and her body is dehumanized by comparing with weed. According to the views of Slights (1997), Othello is described

as an “impartial observer of an objectified Desdemona,” and *Othello* is the story of “an objectified world and an objectified self.” When Othello starts suspecting Desdemona for having illegal relations with Cassio, he starts thinking of Desdemona as unchaste and his only property of ownership.

When Othello is asked to leave for Cyprus, he asks the Duke that he will entrust his wife to the care of Iago by saying, “A man he is of honesty and trust: / to his conveyance I assign my wife” (1.3.280-281). He treats Desdemona like a thing interchangeable that can be given to anyone, and can be bought or sold any time he desires. Immediately, after his declaration of leaving Venetia for Cyprus and handing over his wife to Iago, the first senator assures Othello that he will “use Desdemona well” (1.3.287), which portrays the picture of a verbal objectification using Desdemona like an object.

Iago promises Rodrigo that he will provide Desdemona to him in his bed if he pays money for her body. He assures him that “If thou the next night following enjoy not Desdemona, take me from this world with treachery” (4.2.209-210). This is again an attempt of devaluation of women’s status and their physical use and abuse for the fulfillment of men’s sexual needs. Othello also objectifies Desdemona as a thing interchangeable when he tells her that her body is exchanged by Cassio for a whore, and is being used unlawfully, “Othello: He hath confessed. / Desdemona: What, my lord? / Othello: That he hath used thee” (5.2.67-69).

Animistic and Mechanical Objectification

The other very significant term in feminism is animistic and mechanical objectification where the woman’s body is compared with animals and machines that are senseless, emotionless and feeling-less. Cassio degrades Bianca’s personality by comparing her to a monkey when he is asked by Iago if he desires to marry the prostitute, about which he confesses, “This is the monkey’s own giving out: / She is persuaded I will marry her./ Out of her own love and flattery, not out of my promise” (4.1.124-126). Likewise, Othello also dehumanizes Desdemona’s status by calling her a weed, “O thou weed, / Who art so lovely fair and smell’st so sweet/ That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst ne’er been born” (4.2.66-68)!

Iago, in the same way, also speaks of Desdemona as “a white ewe” (1.1.90). He also talks about his wife, Emilia that she is like a “guinea-hen” (1.3.309), which means a prostitute. He asserts the statement about all the women generally and his wife, particularly. In the same context, Othello particularizes the status of Desdemona as an animal/insect and generalizes the value of all women by calling them “goats and monkeys” (4.1.254). Iago further devalues the status of women, calling them “bells in [their] parlors,” “wild cats in [their] kitchens” and “housewives in [their] beds” (2.1.108-110). He also calls them “as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys, / As salt as wolves in pride,” when their emotions are sexually aroused” (3.3.404-405).

Self-Objectification and Re-Objectification

Recapitulating the above discussion, we come to the point that in a patriarchal system, women are dehumanized, devalued, objectified, and brought down by men. Though they are physically weaker than men, they have to perform their duties assigned to them by the society as a mother, a wife, and a daughter. Hence, sometimes men misuse them; they play with their personality and self-identity. They objectify them to the extent of dehumanizing their bodies like machines, objects, commodities and animals. Whatever men say about women; women in return also start self-objectifying themselves, and at times re-objectifying “themselves as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance,” as viewed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). The women start self-objectifying their personalities on gestural and postural basis, not on the basis of their competency, proficiency and intellectual skills. They accept whatever men desire them to look like and what they project onto them.

The sexual objectification leads to self-objectification of women, which in the views of McKay (2013) changes into “Self-surveillance, causing psychological consequences and mental health risks in victims.” Before going into the details of self-objectification, it is important to describe the term, self-objectification. Self-objectification is defined by Van Diest and Perez (2013), “This regular exposure to objectifying experiences socializes girls and women to engage in self-objectification as a result of internalizing an outsider viewer’s

perspectives of their bodies. Self-objectification is characterized as regarding oneself as an object or collection of body parts.”

Self-objectification occurs in *Othello* when the three women start viewing themselves through the perspectives of the men around them; when the male becomes the observer of the objectified female. This is a fact which is accepted by Emilia and Desdemona before their cruel deaths by the hands of their husbands. Emilia says about men, “They are all but stomachs, and we all but food; / They eat us hungrily and when they are full, / They belch us” (3.4.97-99). Desdemona and Emilia present themselves as eatable things, which are digested by the men hungrily, and when their stomachs are full, they are belched in the form of gas from the stomach through the mouth.

The women start self-objectifying their status and present themselves to the society through men’s views. They start hating their human existence, and devaluing themselves. When Othello and Brabantio objectify Desdemona as an object and a commodity, the later eventually accepts that she is nothing but men’s slave. When she marries Othello, Brabantio loses his temper at her bold stance and starts accusing her. Desdemona gets worried about her role and she utters the following words clarifying the existence of women and their self-objectified status in the patriarchal hierarchy:

My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty:
To you I am bound for life and education;
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;
I am hitherto your daughter: but here’s my husband,
And so much duty as my mother show’d
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord (1.3.178-187).

Desdemona accepts the dehumanized status given to her by the society. She tells Brabantio that she was first the property of him, but now after marriage, she becomes the responsibility of her husband. She further tells him that she has to obey Othello more than him as it the social norm to remain obedient to her husband till the last breath of her life. The objectification of a female is converted into self-objectification where Desdemona calls Othello her lord who can do anything with her. She thinks very little about her place in the Venetian society, and starts creating problems for herself by not thinking negatively about her husband. The dysfunction between male-female relationships starts when one dominates the other. She devalues herself and goes into a state of depression that brings disorder in her life, and eventually causes her death. She remains a very submissive wife, and takes it her duty to remain calm and patient to Othello. Othello scolds her and blames her for indecency and immorality. However, still, she loves him, and thinks that her existence is impossible without her husband.

Desdemona’s voice becomes frozen when she is about to be killed by Othello for keeping illegal relations with Cassio. She accepts her final catastrophic death by the hands of Othello and wants to desire death on her bed by asking Emilia that “Lay on my bed my wedding sheets” (4.2.103). The above lines symbolize sexuality, and sexual objectification which she accepts, showing no resistance when she is being strangled by Othello. She starts worshiping him by giving her body and soul to him. Further, when she sings the Barbary’s songs, her heart is full of Othello, and her love to him; she fears death but remains silent and accepts her fate. It is rightly said by Adamson (1980) that “Desdemona herself, far from threatening to make Othello ‘known,’ continues to obey him to the very end, even when he has told her he has come to kill her.”

Desdemona enters in the world of depression/dysfunction when her husband ignores her, devalues her status, smashes her and accuses her of infidelity. In the state of depression, she goes to the extent of

devaluing her physical and moral strengths. She surrenders her body and soul to her husband by calling herself a vessel, a boat and an object to be used by Othello. She says, "If to preserve this vessel for my lord/ From any hatred foul unlawful touch/ Be not to be a strumpet, I am none" (4.2.82-84.) She accepts that she is a plaything, to be played with and rebuked by men as she says, "I am a child to chiding" (4.2.113), and after the game being played, she is to be smashed/diminished/discarded. She values him like a Saint/God/heavenly being whose orders cannot be denied; and if they are denied, curse will be fallen upon her by divinity.

Hence, the above three women in *Othello* are obedient, and they themselves accept their submissiveness to their husbands. Desdemona says that she is obedient to her husband, and as a result, she remains obedient till her last breath. Emilia also remains submissive to Iago, though she tells Desdemona in privacy that the women are not weak as the men consider them to be, but she is inconsistent and remains weak till the end of her life. She argues that, "Let husbands know, / Their wives have sense like them; they see and smell, / And have their palates both for sweet and sour/ As husbands have" (4.3.89-92).

The above quote shows that women also have similar feelings and desires like men; however, Emilia is unable to express her feelings in front of her husband. Still she gets the courage to disclose the devilish face of her husband, Iago, that it was he who planted the seed of suspicion in Othello's mind that Desdemona is unchaste and she has illegal relations with Cassio. Though she discloses the secret, she cannot resist the Venetian patriarchal social order and is also being killed by Iago, her husband. The same goes for Bianca who remains very obedient to Cassio. When Cassio compels her to "be circumstanced" (3.4.195), she remains subjugated. This is the self-objectified status of women, starts with the sexual objectification and leads to re-objectification. In the views of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), sexual objectification ends in psychological disaster, "unipolar depression, sexual dysfunction and eating disorders," which have been documented in the case of the three women in *Othello* with their disastrous fortunes.

Conclusion

In the Elizabethan era (1580-1660), women had been captured by the patriarchal and religion based male dominated culture. The particular age gave men complete power over women largely due to the religious beliefs of the time. Interestingly, Queen Elizabeth – an all powerful unmarried woman, probably did not want to marry because she would lose her power and independence. Even, until the 20th century, women in the UK would promise to obey their husbands in the words of the marriage ceremony. Hence, in the patriarchal hierarchy, men use religion to condone their treatment of women where no importance is given to their self-reliance. Women have been viewed as physically, spiritually, morally, and intellectually weak.

The above harsh treatment of women can be seen in *Othello* where women are treated like animals. Their bodies are objectified and de-humanized, and in turn, they further destroy themselves by self-objectifying and re-objectifying their existence in a society. Objectification causes many problems for women, such as mental health risks, depression, anxiety, fear, suppression of feelings and desires, body-shame, and sexual dysfunction. Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca have gone through depression, and they devalue their bodies and start thinking about their existence as a divine curse fallen on them. MacKinnon (1989) is of the view that "The least extreme expression of gender inequality, and the prerequisite for all of it, is de-humanization and objectification. The most extreme is violence." Gender inequality is the root cause of all the problems in relationships. If gender equality is promoted, there will be fewer chances of objectification and discrimination. Hence, the three women become the sufferers by virtue of gender inequality.

What we infer from the whole study is how to focus on establishing a gender-free society where every human being has equal rights and obligations. In order to create such a balanced society, the concept of marriage has to be changed in patriarchal societies today just as in the west things have changed a great deal since 500 years ago. Although women are still fighting for complete and utter equality, the legal system now gives them full and equal rights, somehow. Still if marriage is based on equality and reciprocity, then no partner will try to possess the other negatively, and thus sexual assault and verbal cruelty will be diminished. If the relationship is established on the basis of mutual understanding and joint trust, the women will not be then considered sexually or morally unfaithful.

This study may sensitize the readers to the adverse effects of objectification. It focuses on the eradication of gender-inequality from the world. Otherwise, the time is not far off when the patriarchal system will further convert a wife's status in a society to an animal's/insect's status in the world. This study is also an attempt to broaden up the ideas of readers about women's status and their rights. However, the finding of this study recommends gender equity and mutual respect in relationships. Hence, further research from a feminist perspective could examine *Othello* from various other relevant angles such as applying Marxist or radical feminist theories to the play.

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