Male Objectification in Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies*: A Deconstructive Reading

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Abstract

This paper explores the often-overlooked issue of male objectification in literature, using Jokha Alharthi's novel *Celestial Bodies* (2019) to illustrate the concept. While traditional objectification theory focuses primarily on the objectification of women, this study seeks to broaden the conversation by analyzing how male objectification is depicted in the novel. This paper utilizes a deconstructive reading to examine how the novel depicts both men and women fighting against objectification and oppression. In addition, the study examines the evolution of Feminism in traditional Arabic society and sheds light on the role of literature in challenging societal norms and advancing critical thinking. By uncovering the multiple meanings and perspectives within the text, this study contributes to a broader discussion of objectification in literature and society. This paper suggests that Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* is an important contribution to feminist discourse and an essential read for those interested in understanding the intersectionality of gender and objectification in literature.

Keywords: Alharthi, *Celestial Bodies*, Objectification, Transformation, Gender roles, Feminism, Deconstruction

1. Introduction

This study offers a fresh perspective on objectification and gender roles in the Omani context, highlighting the need to consider the impact of objectification on both men and women. Objectification is a key notion central to feminist theory, a lens that seeks to understand and conceptualize gender roles while advocating for women's societal roles, experiences, interests, and work across various fields in life (Byerly, 2018, 21). This study focuses on objectification, how a person can be seen as an object. In addition, the study critically examines objectification from a novel perspective by focusing on male objectification in Jokha Alharthi's award-winning novel, *Celestial Bodies* (2019).

Celestial Bodies tells the story of three families from an Omani village; the novel portrays the lives of women who try to change their destinies and traditional gender roles. The narrative depicts the stories of three generations of people who are caught between two fading worlds, one of poverty, ignorance, slavery, and superstition and one of emerging generations of prosperity, knowledge, and liberation. Alharthi's novel turns the scales upside down on traditional thinking by depicting women who challenge their realities and create new roles for females in society, while men are depicted as more passive. In the novel, Abdullah is an example of the passive male character who is recurringly objectified by both males and females.

The study argues that objectification is not limited to females only, that males can also be objectified under certain circumstances. By using a deconstructive lens, the researchers reverse the traditional gender roles and apply objectification to men, specifically to the male character Abdullah. The study offers a fresh perspective on objectification and gender roles in the Omani context, highlighting the need to consider the impact of objectification on both men and women.

2. Review of Related Literature

The concept of objectification is multifaceted and its interpretation varies among scholars. The current review delves into objectification practiced against males instead of the common female objectification. Similar to female objectification, Male objectification is a complex phenomenon that has profound effects on men's mental health and wellbeing. Male objectification happens when men are reduced to their physical appearance and sexual attributes, rather than being seen as individuals who are capable of having their unique personalities. Male objectification has gained increasing attention recently, especially in the context of media and popular culture.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) point out that male objectification perpetuates harmful stereotypes and gender norms. That is, objectification of men may lead to considerable reinforcement of traditional masculine ideals, such as hardness, dominance, and aggression. Fredrickson and Roberts add that imposing these qualities can have damaging effects on men's mental health, leading to serious mental complications like anxiety and depression. Naturally, the expectations related to men's physical appearance and sexual prowess that result from objectification practices may result in sexual violence, harassment, and other forms of harm.

From a different perspective, some studies have diagnosed signs of positivity in this area. Calogero, Tylka, and Donnelly (2017) have

suggested that men who are objectified may actually be able to resist harmful gender norms and stereotypes by embracing their physical appearance and sexuality. This concept, called self-objectification, can be a positive force in promoting body acceptance and reducing the negative effects of objectification. Self-objectification can be a way for men to take control of their own bodies and redefine what it means to be masculine in a culture that often objectifies them.

On the other hand, objectification has been tackled in master-slave dialectics studies. For example, in "Presence-Absence Dialectics in Athol Fugard's *Blood* Knot, Hamzeh Al-Jarrah dissects the ways in which the other is objectified under the white gaze. In this study, Al-Jarrah presents an existential analysis of the sado-masochistic relationship between two biological brothers but different in color, one is black and the other is white. In addition, in his article "Blackness: The Color of Otherness in *Kennedy's Funnyhouse of a Negro* and Genet's *The Maids*," Al-Jarrah sheds light on self-objectification by developing inferior identity due to "the absorption of the symbol of power" (2022, p. 766). Furthermore, in "*The White Gaze and Third Self in Suzan-Lori Parks' Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*," Al-Jarrah presents a psycho-existential study of objectifying blacks by whites. He argues that "due to internalizing the inferiorizing white gaze," the black characters develop what Al-Jarrah calls a third self (2018, p. 257). The concept of third self as Al-Jarrah argues, refers to:

The idea that between *I* and *myself* there is a *me*. The *I* connotes my subjectivity; as a person of action and agency, the *myself* implies the *I* as an object of my consciousness, whereas the *me* means the *I* as objectified by others. (pp. 258-259)

Critics have produced literature on Alharthi's from multiple perspectives as well, reflecting various beliefs, attitudes, and viewpoints. For instance, Cronin's (2019) "*Celestial Bodies* Review" promotes Alharthi as a distinctive and important voice to world literature and draws on the theory of reality represented by the socio-economic development that Oman has witnessed over the last four decades. Cronin admires how Alharthi successfully portrayed the impacts of the shifts across three generations in Oman in her novel. Similarly, Gaylord (2019) argues for and against Alharthi's novel in his article "*Celestial Bodies*' Reveals Cracks in the Patriarchy." On the one hand, Gaylord supports the novel because it reveals an expansive view of a culture that most people in the West know nothing about; he notes how the narrative charts the experiences of everyone from the poorest servants to the wealthiest merchants. On the other hand, he argues against the novel's structure, describing it as a puzzle with each brief chapter providing a fragment of the picture. Wood's (2019) article "An Omani Novel Exposes Marriage and Its Miseries" reflects on his view against objectification. He discusses how men have reduced women to mere objects that can be applied or utilized at any point in time, and how women have had to fight against this and try to fulfill their conditions for having personal autonomy, gaining authenticity, competence, and independence.

Unlike previous studies, especially that by Wood, this paper offers a fresh perspective on objectification and gender roles in the Omani context, highlighting the need to consider the impact of objectification on both men and women. It adds to the existing knowledge about Feminism and tradition in Oman and the Arabic regions, providing valuable insights for future research in the field.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical debate of this study is rooted in the idea of objectification, a central concept in Feminism. More specifically, the focus is on Nussbaum's philosophical perspective of the concept "objectification" and its seven notions. However, before digging deeper into Nussbaum's conceptualization of objectification, it is necessary to shed light on the history of the foundational term. Originally, objectification was associated with the work of anti-pornography feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon, Andrew Dworkin, and Nussbaum. They were influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who argued against having relationships outside the context of monogamous marriage and warned of the risk of objects of appetite (Papadaki 2021). Likewise, the contemporary feminists Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin argue against men in patriarchal societies who use women as mere tools to achieve their purposes. These philosophers define objectification as treating a person, particularly women, not as a person but as an instrument, a means to an end. Consequences for objectification are socially problematic: inequality, human abuse, injustice. According to Nussbaum (1995), objectification doesn't merely or simply represent the instrumentalization of a person. Rather, objectification involves other notions such as fungibility, denial of autonomy, subjectivity, inertness, violability, and ownership (257). These notions will be used to analyze the objectification of the male character Abdullah in the next section of the study.

In addition to objectification, this study employed the analysis techniques introduced by Deconstruction as critical tools that aim to uncover the hidden meanings and contradictions within a text by breaking it down. This method was developed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the mid-twentieth century and has since been applied to various literary works. Deconstruction challenges the traditional view that a text has a fixed meaning that the author intended (Derrida, 1976). Instead, it suggests that meaning is not fixed, but rather constructed through the interactions between the reader, the text, and the cultural and historical contexts in which they exist (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004). According to Deconstruction theory, a text is always in a state of flux, with multiple possible meanings that are dependent on the reader's interpretation.

To deconstruct a text, as Rivkin and Ryan (2004) argue, the reader must closely examine the language, symbols, and structures used by the author. They must also consider the cultural and historical contexts in which the text was produced and read. Through this process, the reader can uncover the hidden meanings and contradictions within the text that challenge the dominant readings and reveal something beyond the existing meaning of the text (Derrida, 1976). This study reverses the traditional binary of objectifying male/objectified female and establishes a new relationship in which the female gains the power to objectify the male. This new power relation triggers new perspectives and fresh understandings of what *Celestial Bodies* might have to present.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This study reverses the traditional objectification binaries and examines the features of objectification in association with the male gender as stated in the previous section. Consequently, the discussion will be divided into two major dimensions: other characters objectifying Abdullah, and Abdullah objectifying himself (self-Objectification).

4.1 Other characters objectifying Abdullah

This deconstructive analysis of the novel reveals that the male character Abdullah experienced certain types of objectifications by other characters, especially by his family. The novel presents numerous examples that show how Abdullah is objectified by people around him. The discussion of this study follows the seven notions of objectification coined by Nussbaum (1995): instrumentality, fungibility, denial of autonomy, denial of subjectivity, inertness, violability, and ownership.

4.1.1 Instrumentality

Broadly speaking, instrumentality can be understood as the treatment of the human being as a tool for achieving/fulfilling the objectifier's desires and needs. Instrumentality is employed in the novel in different ways and for different purposes. It is practiced by men against other men as well as women against men, that is "Men Instrumentalizing Men" and "Women Instrumentalizing Men", respectively.

Men Instrumentalizing Men

Celestial Bodies provides several cases when men instrumentalize other men. One case is when the teacher 'Mamduh' instrumentalizes Abdullah as a tool to achieve his own needs when he directs Abdullah: "Tomorrow, bring some of these jelly-sweets you folks make here, tomorrow, he said" (Alharthi 17). This behavior shows that the teacher Mamduh uses Abdullah as a tool to get what he wishes or needs including things like the expensive jelly-sweet or the traditional Halwa. Here, Abdullah is instrumentalized because of the status of his father as a rich and powerful figure in the village at that time. The teacher takes advantage of his own authority status and deals with the young Abdullah as an instrument to access desirable goods.

Another example of a male character treating another male as an instrument is portrayed in the relationship between Sanjar, a slave, and his master Sulayman. Sanjar is clear in defining himself as having been objectified:

Merchant Sulayman raised me and, yes, he put me through a little schooling, and he found me a wife, but it was all for his own self-interest, all because he meant me to serve him, and to have my wife as his servant too, and then my children later on. (Alharthi 92).

Sanjar's words highlight the power dynamics at play in Sanjar's relationship with his master. Sanjar acknowledges that while Sulayman provided him with some level of education and helped him find a wife, these actions are ultimately motivated by self-interest rather than a genuine desire to help Sanjar. Further, Sanjar's description of his wife being meant to serve Sulayman highlights the objectification of women that often occurs in patriarchal societies. Sanjar's experience in the novel highlights the ways in which individuals with power and resources can exploit those who are less privileged and use them as instruments to further their own interests. Met'eb Alnwairan (2020) tackles similar cases of objectification from a Hegelian-Marxist perspective. In his article, Alnwairan explores the bitter psychological consequences of objectification on the individual by drawing on examples from Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* (1947). Similar to *Celestial Bodies'* context, Alnwairan's paper shows how individuals are reduced to mere objects in the upper-class eyes, where they serve as tools devoted to maintaining their masters' social and economic dominance (1285).

Women Instrumentalizing Men

The aforementioned excerpts illustrate the manner in which men engage in instrumentalization of other men for their own benefit. Conversely, *Celestial Bodies* presents a distinct form of instrumentalization employed by women in their objectification of men to fulfill their own needs. Upon closer examination, this variation allows new insights into the motivations behind the instrumentalization of men by women. In the novel, such actions are linked to the pursuit of liberty, thus establishing it as a thematic element within this category.

Celestial Bodies presents numerous instances wherein men are regarded as instrumental in fulfilling the aspirations of women within the context of a conservative society, that of Oman in the past. During this time period, women viewed marriage as a means of escaping the constraints imposed by traditional families and societal norms. In the novel, young Shanna is a case in point, as the author describes: **"**Shanna had been delirious with joy. Getting married meant getting out of her collapsing house and away from her family, and that was the most she could hope for. Marrying any man on the face of the earth would do that" (Alharthi 93). Marriage for Shanna is a means of escaping her familial and societal limitations. In this case, Shanna perceives marriage, and, in consequence, men, as an instrument to escape from her collapsing house and her abusive family. Shanna's joy is described as "delirious," emphasizing the extent of her relief and excitement. However, her willingness to marry any man on the face of the earth suggests that her individual preferences and desires may be subordinated to the broader goal of escaping her current situation. This underscores the constraints imposed on women in the novel, where marriage is often viewed as a way to achieve security and stability rather than as a union based on mutual love and respect. Shanna's story highlights the instrumentalization of men as a means of achieving women's aspirations, particularly in the context of marriage, which is perceived as a means of liberation from familial and societal constraints.

A similar case in Alharthi's novel is Asma's marriage as she utilizes her husband as a vehicle to alter her circumstances. Asma reflects:

She'd be one of the women now, and finally she would have the right to come and go, to mix freely with the older women and listen to their talk, to attend weddings, all of them, near and far, and funerals too […] Marriage was her identity document, her passport to a world

wider than home**.** (Alharthi 135)

Shanna and Asma exemplify how women in the novel take advantage of men as instruments to fulfill their dreams and aspirations, which may be unattainable due to gender-based limitations. In this context, men are viewed as material or financial instruments that can aid in achieving women's objectives. This form of instrumentalization, while not necessarily as harmful to men as other types of objectifications, still emphasizes how the relationships between the two sexes can be more complex and less human than it should be.

4.1.2 Fungibility

The character Abdullah in *Celestial Bodies* is subjected to not only financial instrumentalization; he is also treated as an object which could be replaced by any other object. This is called fungibility according to Nussbaum (1995). Throughout the novel, Abdullah is repeatedly referred to by names other than his own, highlighting his lack of a unique, individual identity. For example, when Abdullah seeks Mayya's hand in marriage, her family refers to him only as "the son of Merchant Sulayman," erasing his individuality and reducing him to his father's identity. Even Abdullah's own father fails to recognize his son's name, instead referring to him as "Fattum's boy." Fattum is Abdullah's mother, and using her to reference Abdullah emphasizes the son's subordinate position.

This repeated erasure of Abdullah's name and identity reflects a broader societal objectification of men in traditional contexts. By stripping Abdullah of his individuality, he is reduced to a mere object with no inherent value or unique qualities. This objectification can have damaging effects on individuals, perpetuating harmful power dynamics and reinforcing gender-based inequalities.

4.1.3 Denial of Autonomy

Denial of autonomy is another notion of objectification where the individual is being treated as someone who possesses no self-determination, nor autonomy rights (Nussbaum 1995). In the novel, Abdullah is denied autonomy by more than one character. Abdullah often has no freedom to control his own life, his choices being dictated by others. Abdullah is denied participation in deciding the name of his first child, "London." His wife decides the name of the child without discussing the issue with her husband: "Mayya told him she'd named the baby girl London;" then she spreads the news to relatives: "The baby's name was London, she told his relatives" (Alharthi 9). This treatment of Abdullah shows how others pre-empt and displace his authority, denying his independence.

Moreover, Abdullah is denied autonomy by his father, and this happens many times in the novel. Abdullah wants to continue his undergraduate study abroad, pleading: "Father, please, Father! I want to go to Egypt or Iraq, I want to study at university there" (Alharthi 14). The father refuses, as he sees his son incapable of making any good decision. He tells Abdullah: "I swear you are not leaving Oman;" and his son remarks on the consequences: "So instead, immediately after finishing high school I went to work in his business" (Alharthi 14). In the novel, it is only after the father's death when Abdullah is able to take the step he wanted, saying: "One week after his death I presented my documents to join the distance learning program at one of the universities in Beirut" (Alharthi 55). At a later stage in his life Abdullah summarizes his relationship with his father as "I lived completely cowed by my father's every word" (Alharthi 178). This defines the lack of autonomy for Abdullah.

4.1.4 Inertness

The term inertness refers to the lack of power or activity. Within the scope of Feminism, inertness is used as a feature of objectification to denote a powerless person with a lack of agency (Nussbaum 1995). According to Robin Redhead in her book "Exercising Human Rights," human agency is characterized by individuals having control over their lives including their income, decisions, plans, lifestyle, and the like. In Alharthi's novel, Abdullah loses his agency on many occasions. Abdullah could not even sit the way he liked in public meetings. The character explains: "I tried to sit exactly the way old men sit in the majlis meeting place, my weight on one leg while I folded the other leg beneath me, watchful, knowing I mustn't change my position no matter how numb my legs would go because I had to show the hardness of men" (Alharthi 129). Moreover, Abdullah's father calls him a "boy" just because he does not show the characteristics of the standard man. In his father's view, Abdullah does not deserve to be called a man. This judgment disappoints Abdullah, as he says, "But my father still shouted at me, calling me boy. I was the father of three children; I was no boy" (Alharthi 14). Despite that reaction, Abdullah remains inert, unable to assert himself against his father.

4.1.5 Violability

The concept of violability refers to the act of treating an individual as an object that can be easily broken or smashed, thereby infringing upon their human rights and causing physical or emotional harm (Nussbaum 1995). This practice is often associated with objectification, treating individuals as mere objects, thereby disregarding their feelings and subjecting them to emotional and physical abuse. Consequently, two distinct types emerge from the notion of violability, namely physical violability and emotional violability. In Alharthi's novel, Abdullah is subjected to both types of violability.

Physical Violability

Physical violability refers to intentional bodily harm such as kicking, slapping, punching, or biting; these actions constitute a violation of an individual's human rights and dignity. Although most research on objectification has focused on its effects on women in domestic and public settings, Alharthi's novel, demonstrates that men can also be subjected to this harmful practice. The novel presents several instances where Abdullah is physically violated by his father. For instance, when Abdullah expressed his desire to study abroad, his father responded violently by grabbing him by the neck and barking at him. On several occasions, this practice is repeated. Abullah recalls these

incidents: "He [Abdullah's father] had tied me up in palm fibres and had thrust me down the well to dangle there head-first for what seemed like hours, my head and body colliding against the edges of its stone walls, did not move" (Alharthi 30). Abdullah details similar traumatic experiences from another incident:

My head is under water. This headache lays into me every time I have to fly. I feel confused and unable to focus, and everything in front of me appears to be submerged in water. Then I sense myself being flipped upside down. I'm in a well, head down, and that heavy palm-fibred rope is wound around my body. My skull crashes against the murky black interior wall. I'm terrified that the rope will unravel, will weaken, will break and drop me to the very bottom. (Alharthi 128)

Zarifa, a maid in Merchant Sulayman's house, also subjects Abdullah to physical torture by forcing him to ingest a large quantity of pepper, and she threatens him with further physical harm if he tells anyone about it. These unforgotten experiences lead to Abdullah's isolation in the novel and highlight the destructive consequences of physical violability.

Emotional Violability

Abdullah's distressing experiences of physical violence by his father and Zarifa become indelibly imprinted in his memory. The vividness of his memories is such that he relives the same moments whenever he recalls them. Even when his father was on his deathbed, Abdullah could not let go of the feelings he had harbored for years. He narrates, "I pushed the turban back from the top of my forehead and brought the scars of my deep wound, still so visible, as close as I could to his open eyes. Then I pushed the robe off my shoulder which still carried the harsh marks of knife blades and rough palm-fibre ropes" (Alharthi 33). Abdullah is again objectified, treated as a possession, and dehumanized, as shown when Abdullah's father insults his son and ridicules him. When Abdullah asks his father for something, the latter belittles him and calls him derogatory names like "scruffy lad" to strip him of his dignity (Alharthi 26). During his graduation ceremony, when Abdullah proudly presents his secondary diploma to his father, his father laughs at him, telling his son that the diploma was worthless. Violability as a type of objectification, leads to significant psychological effects on Abdullah's personality in the novel, including anxiety, fear, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence. As a consequence of emotional violence, Abdullah tends to avoid new experiences and relationships, an aspect in his character that limits his personal growth and development.

4.1.6 Ownership

Ownership is a form of objectification that implies that if someone owns an object, it can be bought or sold (Nussbaum 1995). In *Celestial Bodies*, this notion is linked to the concepts of "master" and "slave." The novel portrays ownership as a feature of objectification that is practiced by both men and women, with women owning men and men owning men. Abdullah's father, for example, takes on the role of master when he says, "Sanjar is mine, he doesn't belong to the government" (Alharthi 15).

The novel depicts women's culture blurring the lines between masters and slaves, with slaves being treated as objects or commodities rather than human beings. However, the novel also asks the question of whether men can be objectified by women. Azzan, the strongest man in the novel, is objectified by a woman who wants to own him as a valuable object that is difficult to acquire. Azzan discovers that men can be objectified by women and being a beloved person or a master is no guarantee against being objectified and enslaved. This idea is illustrated in the novel when Qamar declaress, "I want him. I will have him […] This man doesn't seem much use […] But I want him. And he will come to me. When the Moon longs for something, the Moon gets her desire" (Alharthi 39). She objectifies Azzan as a tool that she wants to own. She declares that Azzan will be hers, but she won't be his. She will dictate when he comes and goes, and she will not obey any man. A few weeks later, Azzan discovers that their free relationship is turning into the roughest and most violent form of ownership, driven by need and binding them in irons (Alharthi 79).

4.1.7 Denial of Subjectivity

Men can also be objectified by society when their experiences, feelings, and sentiments are ignored, which is known as the denial of subjectivity (Nussbaum 1995). This phenomenon is evident in *Celestial Bodies* through both male and female characters. Abdullah's father denied his son's subjectivity by referring to him as a boy, despite his age and experience, ignoring his skills. The father repeats this regularly, saying: "Boy! Boy!" (Alharthi 14), "Boy, can't you hear me?", (Alharthi 15), "Boy – have you tied that thieving slave Sanjar to the eastern column yet?" (Alharthi 15), "without getting permission from me? How, boy?" (Alharthi 16). The novel highlights how denial of subjectivity has negative impacts on individuals who are objectified in this manner. Needless to say, this objectification can lead to dehumanization (Haslam 256-258). This practice is harmful to human nature which is characterized by innate features, such as feelings, emotions, interpersonal warmth, and cognitive openness.

In the novel, Abdullah is aware of his father's denial of his humanity, but he is powerless to effect any change. Abdullah's wife does the same thing to her husband, ignoring his feelings, which leads to emotional violability, and, as a consequence, denial of subjectivity. When Abdullah asks her, "Do you love me, Mayya?" she hesitates to answer, breaking his heart. She deals with him as if he does not know how to love or does not even know what love means. This type of objectification makes Abdullah a taciturn man who conforms his behavior to what is expected of him. This is known as silencing. Alharthi states that Abdullah, throughout his life, prefers to contain the scream of desire that echoed inside him (Alharthi 133). *Celestial Bodies* highlights how the denial of subjectivity can lead to objectification, dehumanization, and silencing of individuals. Both men and women can be denied their subjectivity, leading to negative impacts on those who are objectified. This novel shows the importance of recognizing and valuing human subjectivity, emotions, and experiences.

4.2 Abdullah's Self-Objectification

Self-objectification is another term discussed by philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1995, p. 257). It refers to the internalizating of objectifying attitudes and beliefs by individuals about themselves. In other words, it occurs when individuals view themselves through the lens of objectification, treating themselves as objects to be looked at or evaluated based on their physical appearance.

Nussbaum argues that self-objectification is a harmful form of internalized oppression that can limit individuals' opportunities and experiences, and lead to negative psychological outcomes such as low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 267). In the same vein, Calogero (2004) explains that self-objectification is often linked to the cultural pressure on individuals, particularly women, to conform to narrow standards of beauty and to constantly monitor and adjust their appearance to meet those standards.

Researches on objectification have shown that self-objectification is not an isolated activity, but rather a social and cultural phenomenon that is affected by a range of aspects like media representations and societal expectations (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 263). Nussbaum argues that self-objectification is particularly problematic because it can interfere with individuals' ability to exercise their full capabilities and participate fully in society. When individuals are preoccupied with their appearance, they may have less time and energy to devote to other pursuits such as education, work, or social relationships. Furthermore, self-objectification can lead to feelings of shame, embarrassment, or insecurity, further restricting individuals' opportunities and sense of well-being (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 277).

Previous studies have primarily focused on self-objectification in women; however, in her novel *Celestial Bodies*, Alharthi turns the tables on this expectation, demonstrating male self-objectification. This phenomenon is exemplified through Abdullah's struggle with self-objectification as a result of his father's treatment towards him. Abdullah expresses his sense of being overlooked, marginalized, and ignored through his statement: "I would always be the gullible little boy, or the deluded lad who would never know how to manage the family business and would never have his papa's brains" (Alharthi, 2018, p. 132). Furthermore, Abdullah's belief that he does not deserve happiness is another manifestation of his self-objectification. He declares: "I was not worthy of all this joy" (Alharthi, 2018, p. 105). It can be inferred that Abdullah's self-objectification is a result of the criticism and disappointment he has faced from society and the people around him. Abdullah is aware that he is objectified by those around him, including his father, nurse, and wife. This has led to self-objectification as he internalizes the message that he is an object for society. This idea supports the view that self-objectification is not limited to females. In certain circumstances, as the novel shows, males experience self-objectification, which usually leads to lower self-esteem and other psychological disorders.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the deconstructive reading the researchers apply to *Celestial Bodies* questions the practices of objectification of men in the novel and contributes to the broader discourse on objectification. The analysis the paper presents utilizes the notions of objectification as coined by Nussbaum, including instrumentality, fungibility, denial of autonomy, denial of subjectivity, and ownership. The analysis focuses on the character Abdullah and how he is objectified by almost all characters in order to fulfill their desires and needs. In a way, male characters instrumentalize Abdullah for materialistic gains mostly while female characters instrumentalize him to achieve more complex goals like liberty and escaping societal constraints.

Abdullah is portrayed as a victim of objectification in different forms. The practice of fungibility is used to treat him as an object that can be replaced by anyone. Throughout the novel, he is referred to by names other than his own, erasing his unique identity, which reflects the broader societal objectification of men in traditional contexts. Moreover, Abdullah's denial of autonomy is an indicator of his lack of self-determination and independence. The narrative shows how he loses his agency in many situations, becoming inert and being subjected to physical and emotional vulnerability. The novel shows how objectification perpetuates harmful power dynamics while reinforcing gender-based inequalities.

In addition, the novel presents other types of objectifications, especially as Alharthi highlights ownership as a major social issue where individuals treat others as commodities or objects. Furthermore, the author shows how society practices denial of subjectivity as individuals' experiences, feelings, and sentiments are ignored, with negative impact to those objectified. Finally, the novel reflects on self-objectification which occurs when individuals internalize objectifying attitudes and beliefs about themselves, leading to negative psychological outcomes such as low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety.

The novel portrays various aspects of objectification through various male and female characters, emphasizing the harmful effects of objectification on individuals. The study presented provides insight into the objectification of men, contributing to the larger discourse on objectification. Overall, this deconstructive analysis of *Celestial Bodies* challenges traditional objectification binaries by examining objectification in association with the male gender. It also highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing human subjectivity, emotions, and experiences, which can help to mitigate the harmful effects of objectification on individuals and society as a whole.

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