

# The Objectification of Women in Adonis Durado's "Balaki Ko 'Day Samtang Gasakay Ta'g Habalhabal"

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**Abstract:** This research analyzed the intricate themes of objectification of women within the context of Adonis Durado's evocative poem. The study employs a qualitative-thematic approach to dissect the poem's narrative, unraveling the pervasive societal patterns that perpetuate the commodification, erosion of self-autonomy, and vulnerability of women. The analysis unveils that women's objectification is a result of commodities for male sexual gratification. The poem exemplifies how men's focus on women's physical attributes eclipses their individuality, intellect, and emotional depth. The persona's pursuit of sexual pleasure through explicit imagery highlights the demeaning lens through which women are perceived. Further, societal norms can diminish women's authority oneself. The persona's manipulation of the addressee illustrates the power dynamics that hinder women from expressing their desires and choices freely. This portrayal underscores the importance of fostering a culture that empowers women to reclaim their autonomy and assertiveness. Lastly, women's susceptibility to exploitation illustrates the consequences of societal norms that favor male dominance. The persona's assertive sexual commands exemplify the systemic disempowerment of women, leading to their portrayal as passive subjects meant to conform to male desires. This theme highlights the pressing need to challenge such ingrained norms and foster an environment where women are recognized as equals, free from the threat of violation. Collectively, this research accentuates the significance of analyzing literary works to engage in critical conversations about gender inequality and the objectification of women. By unearthing the layers of objectification, self-autonomy erosion, and vulnerability depicted in the poem, this study underscores the role of literature in shaping our understanding of gender dynamics. It underlines the necessity for transformative social change.

**Keywords:** Women, Objectification, Gratification, Self-Autonomy, Viability

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## 1. Introduction

Women are born unique. The value of women is undeniably priceless as they deliver exceptional capabilities that could increase good things for society. However, today's milieu poses numerous societal issues for women. [18] states that despite women's advancement in the areas of politics, economy, and education, some women are still captured in the image of prostitution, battered wives, and economically disadvantaged beings [18]. Consequently, the mentioned scenario leads other people to see women as weak and capable of being objectified as sex material, which notion has been a traditional struggle of women [16].

Objectification is a notion that is central to the idea of a woman being an object. A feature of objectification identified as "instrumentality," which means treating a woman as a tool

for the objectifiers' The concept of objectification, as discussed by [13], is underscored by [6], who identify objectification as the valuation of women based on their physical attributes and sexual parts to gratify the sexual desires of men. Consequently, women are objectified when attention is focused on their appearance [8]. Jutten further elucidates that sexual objectification involves imposing a social meaning on a woman as an instrument for sexual purposes [9].

The pervasive problem of women's objectification in the Philippines manifests in domestic and sexually provocative portrayals in Filipino media aimed at attracting more viewers. When depicted as domestic figures, women are shown as passive and inferior to their male counterparts. As sexual figures, they become exploited representations of vulgarity, catering to the viewers' sexual desires [5], thereby

perpetuating the cultural transmission of objectification.

Fredrickson and Roberts stress that sex objectification has psychological repercussions for women. Women tend to perceive their bodies based on how they are objectified, leading to an obsession with their physical appearance and sexual value [6]. This preoccupation results in negative emotions such as shame and anxiety. Calogero supports this, stating that evaluating women solely on their physical appearance affects their self-worth, potentially leading to mental health issues [3].

Strelan and Gervais assert that women are victimized by men in their objectification episodes [7]. Saez agrees, noting women experience more adverse consequences than men in this regard [17]. Additionally, Tiggemann argues that sexual objectification can negatively impact individuals' sexual satisfaction [21].

The material in the focus of this study, sensually expresses romantic admiration. The poem of Adonis Durado, "Balaki Ko, 'Day, Samtang Gasakay Ta'g Habal-Habal," says the driver's (man) sexual desire for his passenger (woman), which makes the use of erotic symbols to hide the sexual desire of the persona from the physical features of the passenger [14]. The persona is unstoppable in asking for sexual commands from the passenger, who makes the poem concretize the objectification of women figures in the character of the passenger of the poem.

Despite its light tone, the poem embeds a critical issue about women. The poem mirrors a realistic event on how men treat women in our society today. Although women struggle to be on top to preserve their dignity and show their worth over men, there will always be criticism and inequality. The nature of women's physique has been a subject of men's sexual fantasy, and this caused women to be taken advantage of in unexpected circumstances. Thus, this study investigates the objectification of the "habal-habal" passenger (addressee) from its driver (persona), as evident in its sexual commands in the poem. The study's findings will give better awareness, especially of women, on how they must act and show themselves to avoid being taken advantage of by men.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This research is qualitative in design, using new criticism to answer the study's primary objective. Close reading was conducted before examining the textual evidence that supports the objectification of women's characters using the feministic approach to answer the study's primary goal. Thematic analysis was employed to extract the themes in the poem. Each piece depicts the objectification of the addressee by the persona; thus, textual evidence in each line was analyzed. A Feminist Theory of Tyson is used to extrapolate the objectification of the addressee in the poem by its persona. Tyson, in his theory of feminism, explains that in every domain where patriarchy reigns, a woman is other: she is objectified and marginalized, defined only by her difference from male norms and values, determined by what she (allegedly) lacks and that men (allegedly) have. This theory supports the argument that women

in literature are the oppressed characters in which images are underestimated [22]. To address the ethical consideration of the study, the researcher asked permission from the author via email to use the work "Balaki Ko 'Day Samtang Gasakay Ta'g Habalhahal." The result of Adonis Durado's research has sparked the researcher's interest. Aside from its content, it also flourishes using the Cebuano-Visayan language in literature. As a poet, he was honored with several literary awards, including the Lacaba Prize, the Faigao Prize, the Vicente Ranudo Literary Excellence Award, and the Writers' Prize from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. His fourth poetry collection became a finalist in the 2019 International Book Awards.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. A Commodity for Sexual Gratification

Men are easily attracted visually compared to women. When women appear to be visually pleasing to men's sight, and men focus only on their physical appearance and sexual appeal while disregarding the individuality, intellect, and emotions of women, it is already considered objectification. When women are objectified, they are the subject of men's sexual gratification. Men see women as a source of sexual satisfaction, treating women as commodities for pleasure. In the poem of Durado, lines 3-7:

3 Idat-ol og samut  
4 Kanang imong dughan  
5 Nganhi sa akong bukobuko  
6 Aron mas mabatyagan ko ang hinagubtob  
7 Sa imong kasingkasing

It reveals that the persona has a strong sexual attraction to the addressee based on its sexual command, in which the persona is asking the addressee to press the chest on the persona's back so the persona can feel its heartbeat. The sexual power of the persona implies that the persona wanted to feel the warmth of the addressee's breast. By this analysis, the persona is trying to break the innocence of the addressee whose presence aroused the sexual needs of the persona. The result of the sexual command will result in the persona's sexual gratification.

Other lines which support the argument of this research are lines 16-20:

16 Isipon tang kaugalingong mga dila.  
17 Dayon samtang nagakatulin  
18 Kining atong dagan,  
19 Mamiyong tag maghangad  
20 Ngadto sa kawanangan

These lines depict that the persona wanted sexual gratification by asking the addressee to imagine themselves kissing hard against each other. While doing such a sexual act, the persona wanted to be gratified by feeling the orgasm from the front of kissing the addressee. In the poem, the persona's objectification of the addressee can lead to viewing oneself as a commodity, existing solely for the gratification of others.

This mindset can result in treating women as possessions,

leading to abusive and exploitative behaviors. Women's bodies are frequently hypersexualized in all forms of media, including literature- perpetuating the objectification of women. The portrayal of women as sexual objects for consumption can contribute to harmful beauty standards and unrealistic body ideals, impacting women's self-esteem and body image.

In this literary piece, the presence of the woman addressee is captured as innocent and easily deceived. In reality, these types of women are the ones being commodified in society, and men want to take advantage of this opportunity. Unfortunately, some men may perceive women's physical aspects primarily through an objectifying lens, reducing them to their physical appearance and disregarding their other qualities and abilities. This issue of women in society may somehow be perpetuated through poems contributing to the problematic "sexualization" of women.

Sexual objectification occurs when a woman's body and her sexual body parts, along with their functions, are viewed separately from her as an entire person [6]. When women are objectified, they are treated as mere bodies, instruments for the use and pleasure of others [13].

Nussbaum identifies instrumentalization, or treating people as mere tools for one's purposes, as "the most morally exigent notion" involved in objectifying others. She argues that instrumentalizing others denies "what is fundamental to them as human beings, namely the status of beings ends in themselves." Instrumentalization is, therefore, the root of objectification.

MacKinnon, too, describes objectification in similar terms. She writes: "... A sex object is defined based on its looks, in terms of its usability for sexual pleasure, such that both the looking—the quality of gaze, including its points of view—and the definition according to use become eroticized as part of the sex itself. This is what the feminist concept of 'sex object' means" [12].

Furthermore, men's active sexual stimulation shows how driven they are to be sexually gratified. According to Peplau, compared with women, men think about sex more often [15]. Across the life span, men rate the strength of their sex drive higher than do their female age-mates. Men are more interested in visual sexual stimuli and more likely to spend money on sexual products and activities such as x-rated videos and visits to prostitutes. It is usually the man who wants to have sex more often than women do.

Also, the poem "Inday" suggests a young woman. Accordingly, younger women tend to be objectified more often due to sex goal activation associated with greater fertility. If women are objectified due to perceptions of fertility, we would expect to see women who are both attractive and young objectified most by men. From a sociocultural perspective, a woman's youth may suggest a lack of social power. Influential individuals perceive subordinates as less human, power increases expectations of sexual interest from a subordinate, and individuals are primed to feel more powerful, objectified, sexualized women more than low-power individuals. For these reasons, younger women may be more likely to be objectified than older women [10].

### 3.2. *Lacks Self Autonomy*

In a period characterized by advancements, the discussion of women's challenges remains pertinent, with one such concern being the issue of self-autonomy. This multi-faceted issue strikes at the core of women's agency, perpetuating harmful societal norms that undermine their individuality, self-worth, and freedom.

Self-autonomy is rooted in the ability of individuals to make independent choices guided by their desires, preferences, and beliefs. However, for many women across various cultures and contexts, attaining self-autonomy remains elusive due to the persistent objectification they encounter. In the poem, lines 1 and 2 reveal that the persona aims to coax the addressee with affection, using "day" as a term of endearment relevant to their local context.

1 Balaki ko day

2 Samtang gasakay ta'g habalhabal.

Moreover, the line "gasakay ta'g habalhabal" typically, "habalhabal" refers to a mode of transportation when riding with a "habalhabal" driver, compliance with the driver's requests becomes imperative, leaving the passenger with little choice other than to adhere to the driver's wishes. In the poem's context, the persona's tone implies an ulterior motive who wanted to take advantage of the situation. The addressee then is expected to respond positively to the persona's overtures, lest there be negative repercussions for not following the driver's command.

The addressee's unease connected to reacting in a way that doesn't align with one's authentic identity highlights a predicament concerning a woman's self-governing independence. As the addressee journeys, her fate is placed in the hands of the persona, who wields absolute control over the expedition. Seizing this opportunity, the persona skillfully influences the addressee's sexual arousal as she travels as a passenger in the rear. Objectification, in this context, refers to the reduction of women to mere objects of visual pleasure, disregarding their intellectual, emotional, and personal dimensions [20]. This reduction strips women of their agency, positioning them as passive subjects meant to conform to societal expectations and fulfill the desires of others.

In lines 14-15, there is an implication of a sexual encounter between the persona and the addressee. The word "balili" symbolizes the hair in the private parts, indicating the realization of the persona's fantasy towards the addressee.

14 Ang mga balili unya

15 Nga naghalok sa 'tong batiis

The persona's persistent allure leads the addressee to assume a submissive role, enabling the persona to influence their sensations skillfully. This dynamic continues until the addressee succumbs to the intense feelings of desire.

The paragraph underscores the issue of objectification, particularly concerning women and their lack of self-autonomy. The portrayal of the addressee in a submissive role due to the persona's constant temptations reflects a troubling dynamic where the woman's agency is undermined. This situation exemplifies how objectification can strip

women of their ability to make independent choices and decisions, reducing them to objects to be manipulated. The lack of control over their desires and actions perpetuates the narrative that their worth is solely tied to fulfilling the desires of others, perpetuating the troubling cycle of objectification.

Based on the "Features of Objectification," according to Nussbaum, denial of autonomy exists in objectification, where the objectifier treats the object as lacking in freedom and self-determination [13]. Relevant research shows a representation of women and minorities as mere sidekicks, as non-autonomous characters [2].

In the poem, the woman seems submissive to the request of the persona, depicting a denial of her autonomy. It is consistent with objectification theory [6], whose extensions demonstrate how the sexual objectification of women leads them to adopt a submissive role. This conveniently mirrors men's ideals and ideologies that agents deny others' autonomy by presuming that others' goals are the same as the agents' goals [11].

The findings from Baldissarri and colleagues indicate that individuals who feel objectified tend to be less likely to resist relationships due to a diminished belief in their own free will. Consequently, this experience may influence women's hesitancy to decline advances in ambiguous situations and discourage them from actively rebelling. This perspective aligns with the notion that sexual objectification results in the dehumanization of women, stripping them of essential "human rights of wellbeing and freedom," as suggested by the study's outcomes [1].

### 3.3. Portrayed with Violability

In a societal structure dominated by patriarchy, men wield a disproportionate share of power in comparison to women. This power dynamic permeates various aspects of life, including the expression of sexual desires. Men, being inherently driven by their sexual nature, often display an elevated level of assertiveness in matters of sexuality. Consequently, this assertiveness frequently translates into the imposition of their desires upon women. Conversely, the theme of vulnerability emerges prominently, encompassing the idea of being subjected to violations. In this context, women find themselves situated as a vulnerable group within society, susceptible to various forms of exploitation and harassment, particularly concerning sexuality.

In the poem, lines 21-22 contain symbols that can be interpreted as representing the ultimate goal of the persona's intentions directed at the addressee. These symbols imply the culmination of the persona's actions, releasing their fluid onto the intimate area of the addressee.

21 Aron sugaton ang taligsik

22 Sa uwan, dahon, ug bulak.

These lines explicitly suggest that the recipient is depicted with an air of innocence, making them susceptible to unwelcome advances. The persona, consistently assuming a dominant role throughout the poem, effectively illustrates that men hold a commanding position in terms of physical strength and authority. When men display heightened sexual

assertiveness, women often find themselves unable to resist due to the intensity of these advances, leading to their vulnerability within society [19].

Moreover, the incorporation of various sexual commands in the poem viewed as the persona's sensual expressions directed at the addressee, can be identified as instances of objectification. Phrases such as "balaki," "Idal-ot," "gaksa," "Gitika," "mamiyong," and "sugaton" represent embodiments of the persona's erotic desires involving the addressee. This implies that despite the private and intimate nature of these actions, women who are the recipients are portrayed as a group subjected to sexual submission within society.

Drawing on Nussbaum's perspective on violability, the objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary integrity, making it permissible to break up, smash, and invade [13]. Sexual aggression, such as physical penetration, serves as a clear illustration of violability [11].

Elder et al. revealed a high prevalence of sexual objectification perpetration in their qualitative study, with male participants frequently reporting actions like "looking at," "watching," "viewing," and "checking out" female bodies [4]. Significantly, sexual objectification perpetration has been linked to sexual violence [7] and can be considered a behavioral precursor to extreme manifestations of sexual violence.

In the realm of intimate relationships, one of the most hostile outcomes of sexual objectification could be the sexually aggressive treatment of women. Treating women as objects involves using them as tools to satisfy male sexual desires, potentially leading to the sexual coercion of women. Consequently, men who habitually sexually objectify women have a higher likelihood of coercing their partners sexually, making sexual objectification a potential risk factor for sexual coercion offenders [17].

## 4. Conclusion

Adonis Durado's "Balaki Ko 'Day Samtang Gasakay Ta'g Habalhabal" reveals the objectification of women. Specifically, it discloses three general themes. Theme 1 reveals an aspect where women are objectified and treated as objects solely for male sexual pleasure. The poem vividly illustrates how men's fixation on women's physical appearance overshadows their unique qualities, intelligence, and emotional depth. Theme 2 delves into the impact of societal norms on women's autonomy. The persona's manipulation of the addressee serves as an illustration of power dynamics that restrict women from freely expressing their desires and making choices. Theme 3 unveils women's vulnerability to exploitation, demonstrating the consequences of societal norms favoring male dominance. The persona's assertive sexual commands exemplify the systemic disempowerment of women, depicting them as passive individuals meant to conform to male desires. Overall, this research underscores the significance of analyzing literary works to engage in critical discussions about gender inequality and the objectification of women. This study

highlights the influential role of literature in shaping our understanding of gender dynamics and emphasizes the imperative need for transformative social change.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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