

**WOMEN'S OPPRESSIONS AS REFLECTED IN
JORDAN BELFORT'S THE WOLF OF WALL STREET**

Submitted by:

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses women's oppression in Jordan Belfort's memoir entitled *The Wolf of Wall Street*. The purposes of this thesis are to explain the forms of women's oppression and the causes of women's oppression in the memoir. In order to achieve the desired result, the writer uses library research to collect data and sociological approach by emphasizing feminism theory and oppression theory to analyze the data. The analysis shows the oppressed women, the forms of oppression, and the causes of oppression. Through the analysis, the writer concludes that there are three forms of oppression suffered by women and the cause of the oppression is financial dependency.

Keywords: Oppression, women, feminism

I. INTRODUCTION

As part of society, women often become the target of oppression. It happens because women are seen as inferior beings compared to men. The reason why men think that women are inferior is because most women are physically weaker than men. That prejudice becomes the source of women's oppression, especially in patriarchal society.

Social injustices done to women are changing from time to time. Women are prohibited to join men to work as they are seen incapable to do so. Rather than working as equal partner with men, women are directed to take care of the house, the children, and their husbands. As time passes, women gradually start working outside their house. They take part in earning money both for themselves and their family. Since women begin to work in career world, the oppression done to women is changing. When they work, they get paid less than men. Job vacancies for women are also still limited. Furthermore, they also become a target of harassment in the offices as women are powerless against men's domination.

Based on that explanation it can be assumed that in patriarchal society where men are dominant, women are hindered to discover their potential. They are directed to serve men and submit to men's domination.

Based on those backgrounds, the writer will analyze a memoir, a kind of literary work in the form of recollection of actual events, entitled *The Wolf of Wall Street*, written by Jordan Belfort. The writer of this paper chooses the book because from his memoir it can be seen how women are oppressed by men in the career world, how they are oppressed, and why they are treated that way.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Intrinsic Aspects

Character is one of the important elements in fiction; it is the element which gives life and movement to the story. According to Holman, character is defined as the representation of moral quality and human personality. "The idea of the presence of the moral constitution of the human personality, the presence of the moral uprightness and the simpler notion of the presence of creatures in art that seems to be human beings of one sort on another" (1986:81). Furthermore, character is also divided into two kinds, flat character and round character. In *Aspects of the Novel*, flat character is described as a character which has single quality or trait (Forster, 1927:48). Flat character is consistent and does not develop any other trait in the story. Usually minor character is flat character.

On the other hand, round character is a character that has more than one quality and trait (Forster, 1927:48). As the story progress round character will show different quality and trait, they are developing, the opposite of flat character. Usually round character is major character.

The setting of place is where the actions occur in a literary work. "...includes the physical environment of the story: a house, a street, a city, a landscape and a region" (Kennedy and Gioia, 2010: 80). It tells us the name of certain location based on reality or fantasy, and even an abstract place such as in the mind, the middle of darkness, etc. The setting of time explains about the time where the actions take place. According to Kennedy and Gioia (2010), It can be the current time or even historical times. Setting of time gives us information when something happens or how long it had happened. The setting of social environment describes the social condition that happens in the story. It gives us the information of how the society works and the behavior of individual or groups. Robert and Jacob defined setting as "A work's natural, manufactured, political, cultural, and temporal environment, including everything that characters know and own" (1988:253).

According to Holman, conflict is an element which brings interest and thrill in the story as two opposing forces struggle for their cause in a plot (1972: 118). Conflict creates tension since it changes the flow of the story and gives opportunity for characters to develop. In addition, Holman states "The conflict implies not only the struggle of two opponent forces a person against someone or something, but also the existence of some motivation for the conflict by him" (Holman, 1986: 105). It means that there has to be some motivation behind character's action that causes conflict.

Extrinsic Aspects

Intellectual and political movement concerning the condition of women in which they are treated unjustly by the system of male domination is generally described as feminism. Booker says "Modern feminist seeks to challenge the traditions and conventions of 'patriarchal' society that is biased on premise of masculine authority" (1998: 89).

Although every feminist goal is to remove women's oppression and gain equality, not every feminist has the same way of thinking, "The labels also help mark the range of different approaches, perspectives, and frameworks a variety of feminists have used to shape both their explanations for women's oppression and their proposed solutions for its elimination" (Tong, 2009: 1).

Following her statement, Tong categorizes feminism into several focuses like liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, psychoanalytical feminism, etc. In this paper the

writer uses Marxist feminism since according to Tong, it concerns on the liberation of women in class-based society and wealth centered society (2009: 4).

Women are oppressed by men because they are economically dependent to their husbands. Even if women begin to work, they will not get equal position or wage as men can get because in male-dominated society, women's effort is seen as something trivial and it can be done by men too. Men see that women are worth only to sexually please men. This idea leads women to exploit their own body and even sell it for living. Tong states "After all, if one has little else of value to sell besides one's body, one's leverage in the marketplace is quite limited" (2009: 99). It means that if women are desperate to fulfill their daily needs, the most valuable possession they have to sell is their body.

Oppression, as defined by Young in her article entitled *Five Faces of Oppression*, is a situation where people are inhibited to develop their abilities and express their feeling or thoughts (2004: 40). Young divides oppression into five kinds and explains the difference to understand the injustice suffered by oppressed people; the five forms of oppression defined by Young are exploitation marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. In this thesis, the writer will explain several forms of oppressions relevant to the study which are exploitation, powerlessness, and violence

Young mentions about women exploitation where women are exploited as their energies and effort to physically and emotionally comfort men, usually by doing house chores, taking care of children, and providing sexual needs are often undercompensated (2004: 51). Men see those efforts as responsibilities that have to be done by women. Even career women are exploited in the form of being paid less than men for same job.

In addition to women's exploitation, there is a kind of oppression that mostly happens to women, that is sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is another form of oppression that occurs as the result of unequal transfer of power which favoring men. In patriarchal society, men maintain their power and domination over women through sexual coercion, and sexual coercion itself is done not based on lust on desire to exert control (Malamuth, 1996; Brownmiller, 1975). It means that men show their power and domination by sexually abusing women as they think women are weaker than men.

This is a form of oppression where people is treated disrespectfully or unjustly because they lack of authority in decision making situation, express themselves awkwardly, and have no right or power to give order (Young, 2004: 56). They also have no chance to develop their

potentials and capabilities because oppressed people think that they are powerless and protest is futile.

According to Young, violence is categorized as social injustice because it is systemic, that it targets member of a group. “Violence is systemic because it is directed towards member of a group simply because they are member of that group” (Young, 2004: 62).

III. RESEARCH METHODS

In analyzing *The Wolf of Wall Street*, the writer uses library research to support the analysis of the book. Mary W. George states that library research “involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/ expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point” (2008). Books and articles from internet sources are used by the writer in gathering the necessary data materials. This paper analyzes how characters, settings and conflicts are presented for the intrinsic elements. In the extrinsic elements, the writer focuses on the oppressions of women. The writer uses Feminism approach as it is explained by Booker below:

“Feminism literary criticism focuses on the relationship between literature and patriarchal biases in society and on the potential role that literature can play in overcoming such biases. Many feminist critics have persuasively argued that literature plays a central role in the development of social attitudes toward women and of women’s attitudes toward themselves” (1998: 89).

The writer is also emphasizing the theory of Marxist feminism as a branch of sociological approach. Marxist feminism is used since it concerns on women’s issues in wealth centered society.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Intrinsic Aspects

Jordan Belfort is the main character of the story. He is nicknamed Wolf of Wall Street because he is a smart and slick man who builds Stratton Oakmont, one of the biggest Stock Broker Companies in Wall Street. Aside from his speaking ability, Jordan is also known as a drug

and sex addict. Throughout the story we will be shown how his life falls apart because of his severe addiction to both drug and sex.

This woman was too much! But I had to love her! My confessor! “All right, Patricia, all right! The answer to your question is: no! I’m a fucking liar and a cheater and I sleep with prostitutes the way most people put on socks—especially when I’m fucked up on drugs, which is about half the time. But even when I’m not high on drugs, I’m still a cheat. So there! Now you know. Are you happy?” (Belfort, 2007: 173).

Nadine Caridiis the second wife of Jordan Belfort. She is a young and beautiful model. Before Nadine marries Jordan, she was his mistress. Their affair begins when they meet at one of pool parties that Jordan holds. Her beauty and sexy appearance make Jordan fall for her. She is the reason behind Jordan’s divorce. “I had never meant to hurt Denise. In fact, it was the furthest thing from my mind. But Nadine swept me off my feet, and I swept her off hers” (Belfort, 2007: 34).

The events in *The Wolf of Wall Street* occur between years 1993 through 1997. Since it is a memoir, a recollection of real events, Jordan provides the story with some events having specific time and date. With specific information about the time and event we can see what happens in that time. “It was May 4, 1987, my first day on Wall Street” (Belfort, 2007: 6). There we can see that Jordan gives us specific time when he starts his career on Wall Street.

In 1987, Wall Street is known as a famous place where many investors circulate their money to buy stocks. Many companies focus on selling stock and rely on that business only. As a place where money is circulated, many people see Wall Street as a promising place to build their career. They come in hope to seek job with high payment, including Jordan.

The story of *The Wolf of Wall Street* generally takes place in Wall Street, a central place of global stock trading market in New York. There gather many people to earn a living in stock trading business companies. We can see from previous quotation (Belfort, 2007: 6) that Jordan, the main character of the story, works in Wall Street.

Jordan as the focus of the story with his lifestyles of constantly consuming drugs shows us that most of his inner conflicts are related to his drugs addiction. In one of his conversations with Patricia, he confesses that he knows the negativity caused by his drugs addiction, such as how he becomes wilder when on drugs, but at the same time he is ready to spend his fortune just to get his favorite drug (Belfort, 2007: 173). Jordan is not only struggling against his own desires: he is also struggling in many conflicts against other people. At home, he is often conflicting against his wife. It always happen when Nadine catches him cheating or abusing drugs.

“*SPLASH!*” “I woke up to the angry yet gorgeous face of my second wife, Nadine” (Belfort, 2007: 23). We can see that Jordan and Nadine have already quarreled first time in the morning. The reason is none other than Nadine catches Jordan cheating as he mentions other woman’s name in his sleep.

Extrinsic Aspects

The idea of women not as capable as men brings social injustice in women’s career. With the population of men outnumbering women, job vacancy becomes scarce for women. Employers who think that men are superior prioritize men to be hired. Even if women get a job, they are paid less than men. In this situation, women are forced to find a better way to get a job. In search for a better way to get hired, women find out that in male-dominated society, beautiful-looking woman get a job easier than ordinary-looking woman. Women’s exploitation occurs since patriarchal society judges women based on their appearance. Men are interested in women’s beauty and sexiness and they feel more comfortable working with beautiful woman rather than with ordinary woman. Thus, many women beautify themselves because employers hire women for their beauty rather than their capability.

You may have seen Nadine on TV; she was that sexy blond who tried to sell you Miller Lite beer during Monday Night Football, the one walking through the park with the Frisbee and the dog. She didn’t say much in the commercial, but no one seemed to care. It was her legs that got her the job; that and her ass, which was rounder than a Puerto Rican’s and firm enough to bounce a quarter on. Whatever the case, I would be feeling her righteous wrath soon enough (Belfort, 2007: 16).

The quotation above supports the idea that employers hire women for their beauty and sexiness. Beer which is a kind of beverage that is mostly drunk by men is not represented by manly male model; instead it is represented by sexy female model. We can see that Nadine, who shows on TV advertisement, does not do much but she gets famous and successful. As Jordan says in the quotation, it is her sexy appearance that gets her the job. Even the watchers of the advertisement, which mostly are men, do not care so much about what she does there because they are attracted to her body. This proves that society judges women based on their appearance.

Furthermore, in *The Wolf of Wall Street* we can see that Jordan builds his company with mostly men. As the head of the company he uses his influence to exploit his female workers to wear body-exposing outfit that shows their sexiness in spite of their professionalism. He does it even though such outfit violates the written rules.

Powerlessness. This form of oppression occurs to most of women who lives in patriarchal society since men are the power holder. In *The Wolf of Wall Street*, this oppression can be seen in Jordan's office. There, it can be seen that female workers are wearing sexy outfit because their boss, Jordan wants them to, as subordinate these female workers have to obey that (Belfort, 2007: 52). Another example of powerlessness is shown indirectly in the following quotation:

Danny shrugged. "You were grabbing her tits and trying to stick your tongue down her throat. Nothing so terrible if we were in a different situation, but up here in the air...well, there's different rules than back at the office (Belfort, 2007: 123).

Powerlessness often happens because men who have higher position have tendency to do things they like to the lower position workers, especially women. Jordan as man who is accustomed to being the boss unconsciously harassed a stewardess. It can be seen in the quotation that Danny, Jordan's partner, tells Jordan that what Jordan has done is terrible because it is not in their office. What Danny said means that in their office sexual harassment is not a bad thing, especially because they have authority in the office. They know that with their position in the company, their workers can be easily manipulated. This means that female workers in Jordan's office are powerless in front of Jordan even when they are sexually harassed.

Men tend to resort to this form of oppression to maintain their superiority and dominance over women. Even in wealth centered society such as Wall Street, where everything is dealt with money, violence still happens. Jordan shows us that even though most of the time he uses his wealth, he eventually resorts to violence when Nadine tries to take away his daughter.

"Stop!" she screamed. "Please, stop! It's your daughter! Put her down!" And she kept wriggling her way up my leg, trying to get a grip on my torso. I looked at the Duchess, and at that very instant I wanted her dead. In all the years we'd been married I had never raised a hand to her—until now. I placed the sole of my sneaker firmly on her stomach, and with one mighty thrust I kicked out—and just like that I watched my wife go flying down the stairs and land on her right side with tremendous force (Belfort, 2007: 437).

It can be seen that the violence he does to Nadine is severe enough that it could endanger her life. Women are physically smaller and weaker compared to men, thus making women vulnerable to physical abuses. This condition also gives men superior feeling toward women, because men think women are weaker than men.

When women are oppressed, some of them may be powerless to resist or even protest, but some of them also tried to regain their right by resisting or protesting. The form of the resistance can be physical or verbal. In *The Wolf of Wall Street*, few oppressed female characters show resistance when they are oppressed. Nadine is one the female character shown to give resistance and protest when she catches or suspects Jordan cheating behind her

“Oh, I’m really fucking scared,” interrupted the blond firecracker. She shook her head in disgust, and her little pink nipples popped out of her next-to-nothing outfit. I tried not to stare, but it was difficult. “Maybe I should go run and hide,” she quipped. “Or maybe I’ll just stay here and *kick your fucking ass!*” The last few words she screamed (Belfort, 2007: 23).

It can be seen that Nadine gives Jordan sarcasm and scream as her resistance toward Jordan’s cheating behavior. She is often seen to verbally protest Jordan to show that she knows what Jordan does behind her, and that she has the right to be angry to him.

“*SPLASH!*” “I woke up to the angry yet gorgeous face of my second wife, Nadine”(Belfort, 2007: 23). It can be seen that Nadine, after hearing Jordan mention other woman’s name, throws a glass of water to the still sleeping Jordan. She does that to show that she is not afraid of him, that she has the right to punish Jordan.

Another example of physical resistance is shown when Nadine tries to take away her daughter from Jordan because he is thought to be harmful.

Chandler started wailing and crying hysterically, and I screamed at the Duchess, “Go fuck yourself, Nadine!” I hit the stairs running. The Duchess took a flying leap and grabbed me around the thighs, desperately trying to keep me from going up the stairs (Belfort, 2007: 437).

It can be seen that in order to prevent Jordan take away her daughter, Nadine physically trying to stop him.

Aside from physical and verbal reaction, some women in *The Wolf of Wall Street* show their resistance toward oppression using legal way. One of the examples of legal protest can be seen from the following quotation, “What the fuck do you do, besides getting us tangled up in a sexual-harassment lawsuit with that big-titted sales assistant—whatever the fuck her name was” (Belfort, 2007: 82). The quotation shows that there is resistance against that oppression. Jordan’s female worker files a lawsuit for sexual harassment that she gets when working in Jordan’s company.

The Wolf of Wall Street, where the setting is in Wall Street, focuses on career world. In the memoir, women are oppressed because the men in charge judge women based on looks. Based on that idea, women start to beautify themselves. They put make up and wear sexy clothes to please men. Jordan and friends' habit of classifying women also gives us a picture of women's stereotype in society. A stereotype that beautiful woman is related to wealth while ordinary woman is related to poorness. It is the consequence of women classification based on appearance where beautiful woman needs more money.

“But before you actually depart this room full of winners, I want you to take a good look at the person sitting next to you, because one day in the not-so-distant future, you'll be sitting at a red light in your beat-up old Pinto, and the person sitting next to you is gonna pull up in his brand-new Porsche, with his gorgeous young wife sitting next to him. And who'll be sitting next to you? Some ugly beast, no doubt, with three days of razor stubble—wearing a sleeveless muumuu or a housedress—and you'll probably be on your way home from the Price Club with a hatchback full of discount groceries!” (Belfort, 2007: 97).

In quotation above, Jordan gives speech that encourages his workers to work with him. By working with him they will be rich and the rewards waiting for the rich are beautiful wife, the good prize, while poor worker who quits the job Jordan offers will live their life with ugly wife as the bad prize.

Because of the idea that money can buy women, men who have money start to abuse their power. In Stratton Oakmont, Jordan who has not only the highest position but also the most fortune runs his office as he pleases; he even tries to have sex with as many sales assistants working under him.

“What did that say about me? Did it make me weak? Or was it only natural to want to bang them all? After all, what was the point of having the power if you didn't use it to get laid?” (Belfort, 2007: 275). Jordan in his farewell speech questions himself on how he should have sex with more of his female workers before he retires. He even states that it is his right as power holder to use it to subdue his female workers to satisfy him. It shows that when men have power, they mostly abuse it to control women. Whenever women refuse to do what men want, men will use the power they have to force their will.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the intrinsic and extrinsic analyses on previous chapter concerning on oppression done to women, the writer concludes that in *The Wolf of Wall Street* women, either career women, prostitutes, or housewives, suffer from three forms of oppression because they are financially dependent. The forms of the women's oppression are sexual abuse, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism.

The first form of oppression that is suffered by women is exploitation. In the story we can see this oppression is done by Jordan Belfort. He is a sex addict who always wants to have sex with women around him. In his office, he takes advantage of his position to have sex with his female workers. He even allows other male workers to have sex with female workers in the office. Furthermore, Jordan also uses prostitutes to satisfy his desire. Whenever he is not with his wife Nadine, he has sex with other women.

The second form of oppression suffered by women is powerlessness. It can be seen clearly in the story that many women are powerless against the domination of men. Jordan as the head of Stratton Oakmont Company uses his position to do whatever he wants, including sex with his female workers. His female workers also let him do what he wants because they do not have the power to fight back. They need the job and afraid of losing it if they resist Jordan's will. In Stratton Oakmont female workers are also encouraged to wear sexy outfit instead of professional outfit.

The third form of women's oppression in *The Wolf of Wall Street* is violence. It can be seen that even though most of the time Jordan deal with his problem using his money, when he unable to maintain dominance over Nadine, he resorts to violence. This oppression does not only occurs in household, prostitutes are also vulnerable to violence since they are paid and thus expected to obey all of the customer's desire, when not fulfilled they might resort to physical abuse.

All of those oppressions happen because women are financially dependent. We can see in the story how career women are sexually abused in the office but can do nothing because they need the job to earn money. Prostitutes also have to give sex service and obey what customer wants in exchange of money. Housewives is the most financially dependent because they do not have income other than from their husbands, thus they have to obey their husbands. Stereotype of women is also the reason why women's oppression occurs. Based on women's stereotyping, men sees women as something that is valuable when they are beautiful or sexy, and they can be used when they are paid enough.

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