

The Resistance to The Objectification of Body in Emily Ratajkowski's Memoir My Body

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to contribute to the analysis of feminism and patriarchal culture related to the objectification of women's bodies and their resistance in the memoir My Body released in 2021 and written by Emily Ratajkowski. The memoir My Body (2021) illustrates that patriarchal culture grows and develops in people's lives as shown by the dominance of men over women in various aspects of life which causes women's bodies to be objectified so that they experience limited access in various fields of life. The analysis in this study includes the depiction of patriarchal culture and objectification of women's bodies in the memoir My Body (2021) and the resistance to patriarchal culture carried out by female characters in the memoir My Body (2021). In conducting the analysis, the researcher used the literary criticism method by using the theory of feminism from Helene Cixous' thoughts to analyse feminism related to the culture of objectification of women's bodies and their resistance. The results of this study found 4 data in the form of narratives. This research describes body objectification as a culture that limits women that makes women disadvantaged, the culture depicts women as figures who depend on male superiority, and as objects of male lust. In their resistance, women reject norms by writing. Women also resist the culture of objectification by being independent from male roles, independent in defending themselves, and independent in making life decisions. Women are also portrayed as rebelling against male control. This research makes an answer to Helene Cixous' theory of "why women should write" because they have to "fight" the norms and culture that limit and harm women themselves and only fellow women understand how to be in that position.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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KEYWORDS

Feminism; Patriarchal Culture; Objectification Body; My Body.

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1. Introduction

As time progresses, literature becomes a form of cultural expression that plays an important role in human life, especially in conveying values, forms of emotion, and views that exist in society. Through its implementation in literary works, an author can portray the social, psychological, and cultural realities of the society of his or her time. According to Teeuw (1984) literature is an artistic and imaginative expression that is individual in nature, born from human thoughts, feelings and emotions. This view shows how literature is not only seen as entertainment, but also a reflective medium capable of expressing fundamental aspects of human life (Rahman, 2018; Suma et al., 2023; Sugiyartati et al., 2020; Junaid et al., 2025).

Of the various forms of literary works, memoir carries a special place as a genre of non-fiction writing that focuses on recording events in an individual's life, with an emphasis on memorable moments that shaped and changed the author's life (Barrington, 2000). Memoirs place personal experience at the centre of the narrative, presenting the unique perspective of the author in describing an emotional, social, or even spiritual journey.

In this modern era, memoirs have developed quite rapidly with themes that raise issues that are increasingly varied and relevant to social, cultural and psychological changes. One of the main issues that often appears in memoirs is feminism, a movement that fights for emancipation and gender equality for women. Essentially, feminism highlights the various forms of oppression and discrimination experienced by women and explores ways in which patriarchal structures in society can be challenged. Feminism is the struggle to end sexism, exploitation, and gender-based oppression (Hooks, 2014). The issue of feminism has always been related to patriarchal culture and has been deeply rooted in human life.

According to Tuttle (1986) Etymologically, feminism comes from the word 'feminism' taken from the Latin *femina*, which means 'woman' in English. Literally, the term refers to "having female characteristics and traits". Feminism has evolved into various schools that cover complex issues relating to women's rights, gender-based violence, equality in education and employment, and the representation of women in the media and politics. de Beauvoir (1949) states, One is not born, but becomes, a woman. This emphasizes that women's identities are shaped by social and cultural factors, not solely by biological aspects. Feminism seeks to change society's perception of women and challenge norms that inhibit their potential (Abbas et al., 2024; Rahman, 2024; Junaid et al., 2024). Feminism does not only focus on the struggles of women, but also invites all individuals to contribute to creating a more just and equal society (Muslimat et al., 2023; Jumriati et al., 2021).

Among the various aspects of feminism explored in memoirs, the *objectification of women's bodies* is one of the issues that is often raised as a theme. The objectification of women's bodies is one of the manifestations of the patriarchal culture rooted in society. This phenomenon refers to the act of treating women's bodies as objects to be enjoyed, valued, or consumed, often ignoring the human aspects and personality of the women themselves (Roberts, 1997). Women's bodies in literature are often influenced by patriarchal beauty standards and gender norms, which construct women's bodies as objects that must fulfil certain social expectations. Cixous et al. (1976) argues that women need to "*write from their bodies*" as a form of empowerment and resistance to the patriarchal culture that exploits women's bodies. In many feminist books, the female body is not only depicted as a physical symbol, but also as an arena for struggle and determination of self-identity amidst cultural pressures in society.

The objectification of women's bodies is a central issue in feminist discussions, where women are often judged by their physical appearance, which leads to the reduction of women's identities to mere visual objects. (Bordo, 1993). In many cultures, the objectification of women's bodies in media and literature is often distorted by patriarchal views that prioritize aesthetic values over human values. This leads to women losing autonomy over their own bodies, as well as experiencing pressure to meet unrealistic standards of beauty. This objectification not only impacts the way society views women, but also the way women themselves view themselves.

One example of feminism issues depicted in a book is *My Body*, a memoir written by Emily Ratajkowski. She is known for her career as a model, actress, and writer who often shows her views on women's bodies, sexuality, and identity. The researcher will analyse the narrative in *My Body* and focus on feminist issues related to the author's resistance to her body as depicted in the novel. Upon its initial release, the book received widespread attention from both readers and critics for its unique perspective and honesty in exploring issues of the body, sexuality, and self-control. The book received appreciation for the author's courage in tackling themes that are often considered taboo or difficult to talk about, especially from someone in the fashion and entertainment industry who focuses heavily on physical appearance. *My Body* was the topic of discussion across major media platforms, including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanity Fair*, which is a significant achievement for Ratajkowski's debut work as a writer. This shows that the memoir attracted the interest of many readers who were interested in her perspective on gender, sexuality, and objectification in a broader context. *My Body* also sparked widespread discussion on social media, with many readers expressing a sense of connection and empathy towards Ratajkowski's experiences. The book also received a favourable rating of 4.2/5 from 74,687 readers and received many positive reviews on *goodreads*.

Previous studies have discussed the representation of women in media and literature, such as studies on the objectification of women's bodies in the entertainment industry and the representation of women in other memoirs. However, a specific study of Emily Ratajkowski's *My Body*, which uses the perspective of H el ene Cixous' feminism theory, has yet to be found. This research makes a new contribution by analysing how Ratajkowski represents the female body through a narrative that contains personal experiences with criticism of patriarchal culture. This contribution is important because this memoir not only speaks about the author's individual experience, but also raises issues that are widely relevant in the discourse of feminism. Through this approach, the research provides a new perspective on how women can use writing to reclaim control over their bodies and identities.

This research uses several previous studies as references. The first research is a journal entitled *Perlawanan Objektivikasi Perempuan dalam Karya-Karya Utuy Tatang Sontani* (Feysa Razan & Erowati, 2021). This research focuses on the resistance to the objectification of women in Utuy Tatang Sontani's works, which reflects the reality of patriarchal culture where women are often placed in a subordinate position and lose rights over their own bodies. This creates inequality of treatment experienced by women in society. The research method used is descriptive qualitative, with an analysis of three of Utuy's works, namely "Doger," "Awal and Mira," and "Bunga Rumah Makan." This research empirically analyses the elements in literary works, including dialogue between characters, character descriptions, and aspects of the

flow of story events to reveal forms of resistance to objectification experienced by women. As a result, the research shows that there are forms of objectification of women represented in Utuy's works, and through his characters, Utuy tries to fight against this objectivity. This reflects an attempt to reveal and oppose the social construction that places women in a subordinate position. Although this research has a similar framework, namely the depiction of the body as a tool of exploitation and empowerment, there is one thing that distinguishes the researcher from Razan & Erowati's (2021) research. The researcher focuses on autobiographical media (memoirs), which offers a direct perspective from the author on her own body, while the research focuses on fictional works, namely novels.

The second research is a journal entitled *Representasi Citra Perempuan dalam Novel Memoar Seorang Dokter Perempuan Karya Nawal El Saadawi* (Prima Anggradinata & Korespondensi, 2022). This research discusses the discourse on the importance of women in Arabic literature. Many literary works written by men represent the repression of women, reflecting the subordination and hegemony they experience in Patriarchal societies. However, women's perspectives on their experiences and resistance are often overlooked, especially in the context of culture and traditional values. Anggradinata used a qualitative method with Simone de Beauvoir's femininity discourse approach and Stuart Hall's representation theory. As a result, this research shows that the novel fights against traditional values that shackle Arab women. Despite having the same research object, which is a memoir, Anggradinata's research raises the issue of eastern culture, especially the Arab country in the mid-20th century. Meanwhile, My Body's research raises issues that exist in modern culture, especially in America.

This research is expected to provide benefits both theoretically and practically, especially for readers who are interested in feminism studies regarding how women's bodies are objectified in the book. Theoretically, this research can enrich the study of feminism by highlighting how the objectification of women's bodies is represented in memoirs and how resistance against it is carried out. Meanwhile, practically, this research aims to open new insights into feminist studies, patriarchal culture, and the objectification of women's bodies, both in the past and present. In addition, this research also reveals how the author is directly involved as a female character in the memoir, thus providing a deeper perspective on women's experiences in dealing with their objectified bodies.

2. Methodology

Based on the data to be collected, this research uses literary criticism as a framework to examine the problems in this research. Literary criticism is a discipline that interprets, analyses, and evaluates literary works (Fard, 2016). There are four approaches in literary criticism, namely mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective. In this study, the approach used is the mimetic approach. Fard (2016) explains that mimetic literary criticism involves the study of imitation and reflection in literature, often looking at how literary works reflect or respond to social and cultural structures. This approach allows the research to understand how the memoir *My Body* reflects social realities about women's bodies, especially in the context of beauty standards and the exploitation of bodies constructed by popular culture and capitalism.

Data sources are the original sources from which data is collected and obtained in a study. The main data source in this research is the E-Book version of memoir *My Body* written by Emily Ratajkowski which was published by Metropolitans Book on October 19, 2021. This e-book was acquired in PDF format for easy reading, annotation, and efficient data extraction for analysis. This text serves as the main corpus for researching Ratajkowski's resistance to body objectification, using textual evidence such as key phrases, chapters, and narrative elements that highlight her arguments and perspectives.

There are several steps in the data collection technique carried out in this study, the first step is to identify the type of data to be used. In this case, the data collected is qualitative data, namely books, articles, documents, and so on. In this study, the data used is a digital book, namely a memoir entitled *My Body* (2021). Before identifying further data, researchers first read the object of research, namely the digital book *My Body*, which was released in 2021 and written by Emily Ratajkowski. The total chapters of this book are 12 chapters; "*Beauty Lesson*", "*Blurred Lines*", "*My Son, Sun*", "*Toxic*", "*Bc Hello Halle Berry*", "*K-Spa*", "*The Woozies*", "*Transactions*", "*Buying My Self Back*", "*Pamela*", "*Men Like You*", "*Releases*". After that, identify the theories to be used that relate to the topic of the problem in the data to be discussed by organizing and collecting data according to the theories that have been identified. The data is in the form of narrative quotes from books related to the topic of the problem.

The data analysis technique in this research is carried out through several stages. The first step was to identify the main data taken from the text of Emily Ratajkowski's memoir *My Body*. Passages relevant to the objectification of women's bodies, such as descriptions of personal experiences, the author's reflections on her body, as well as how the body is represented in social, cultural, and economic contexts, were selected as important data to analyse. Furthermore, the data

were classified based on Helene Cixous' theory of feminism, which highlights women's resistance to patriarchal culture, especially in the context of objectification of women's bodies. The data were then grouped according to the research problem and analyzed in two main aspects, namely social expectations of women in society and forms of resistance to patriarchal culture. After the data is classified, the next step is to interpret and describe the data to answer the research questions. This interpretation process focuses on how the narratives in *My Body* represent women's bodies as active subjects and resist patriarchal domination. The analysis is conducted to understand how Ratajkowski uses her body as a form of resistance, reclaims the body's agency, and creates an authentic narrative of the female experience. The results of this interpretation are then systematically described to provide a deeper understanding for the researcher, other researchers, and readers.

3. Result and Discussion

Through the analysis of Emily Ratajkowski's memoir *My Body* (2021), 4 data were obtained, including the depiction of patriarchal culture, namely the objectification of women's bodies and the resistance of the female main character when her body is objectified in the memoir.

3.1 Depiction of Womens Body Objectification in Memoar *My Body* (2021)

Data 1

In 2014 My manager at the time, Evan, informed me that the billionaire financier behind Wolf of Wall Street was offering to pay me \$25,000 to go to the Super Bowl with him. He explained that this person, Jho Low, "just liked to have famous men and women around" and there would be other celebrities going, too. "Everybody who is anybody is doing these kinds of deals with him," he assured me. "He's just one of those insanely rich guys from Asia." (p.91)

In chapter 9, Evan, Emily's manager, offers her the opportunity to be widely recognized among the upper class. The upper-class person is Jho Low, a wealthy Asian man who often pays famous celebrities just to accompany him to watch shows or just party. The depiction of patriarchal culture is reflected in the behavior of Jho Low who is depicted as having full power over everything and easily paying for everything to fulfill his personal interests, including Emily who was then a controversial model in his music video clip. The number of beautiful women and celebrities paid by him further emphasizes the patriarchal element where men only make women as objects of personal beauty. This is in line with Cixous' view in Tong (2009) who criticizes the gender dichotomy in a patriarchal society. According to him, men are often associated with everything that is active, cultural, light, high, or generally positive, while women are generally associated with everything that is passive, natural, dark, and low. In many cultures, men are often associated with attributes that are considered active and dominant, such as power, strength, and leadership.

The culture of objectifying women not only creates gender inequality, but also shapes the way society views the roles and values of each gender. Evan, Emily's manager, considers it normal in the fashion industry that if models are attractive but unpopular, then they should strive to gain popularity from the big men who have authority over the industry. While men enjoy power and authority, women are often positioned as objects. Like Emily, who is considered an object by Evan only for his personal needs. If Emily can be widely recognized, then Evan as a manager gets a lot of benefits. This makes women perceived as symbols of beauty and sexual attractiveness, which leads to their objectification.

Data 2

I WAS FOURTEEN the first time Owen forced himself on me. We were lying on the crusty carpet of his mother's condominium. It was early morning, and I was so exhausted that I could barely keep my eyes open. I wanted water, but there was none. I remember the way his skinny jeans tightened over his erection, and I remember the dirty shoelace he used as a belt. I'd told my parents I was sleeping over at a friend's house so I could stay out all night and go to house parties. Owen, who was sixteen, had said that's what I should do. (p.36)

Owen's statement, "that's what you should do," in the context of Emily lying to her parents in order to stay with him, reflects the patriarchal attitude that men's desires should come first. This attitude demonstrates Owen's dominance in the relationship, where he influences Emily to ignore her values and boundaries in order to fulfill his desires. As such, Emily loses authority and control over decisions regarding her body and actions, leading to her portrayal as an object of sexuality in Owen's view.

Cixous in Tong (2009) argues that in Society, man is the self; woman is the other. As such, women exist in a man's world on his terms. In the patriarchal view, men are often perceived as the primary subjects, who have a clear and recognized identity. They are the "self" who has power, voice and authority. Similarly, Owen has full access to Emily's body, and with full awareness he insists on having sex with her. In contrast, women are often seen as objects or "others" whose existence is determined by men and the norms they set. This creates inequality in terms of identity and recognition.

Data 3

"What's your ethnicity, girl?" This conversation is one I'm used to having on set; it almost always goes exactly like this, and I want to shut it down as quickly as possible. I don't like the way white women use the question as an opportunity to list their ethnicities in an attempt to sound quote unquote exotic: I'm thirteen percent this and seven percent that. Instead I tell him simply: "I'm a white girl." My hairdresser laughs. (p.13)

Patriarchal culture categorizes women based on body shape and skin color. This creates different views on beauty standards. Emily and the hairdresser's conversation illustrates how women are often objects in power relations and social discourse, including in everyday conversations about their identity. The question posed by the hairdresser reflects how society has certain expectations of women based on their race and ethnicity. Emily highlights how the hairdresser as a white woman mentions their lineage in detail to sound more "exotic", which reflects exotification as a form of objectification of women. In a patriarchal culture, women are not only faced with the demands of beauty standards but also social constructions that place their identity as something attractive if it meets certain expectations. This is in line with Cixous' thoughts in Tong (2009), which states that We find ourselves the objects of multiple power relations and social discourses about sanity, sexuality, and violence, for example, and we experience ourselves as being controlled by these relations and discourses, as having to be obedient to them.

Emily's response by saying that she is only a white girl shows a form of resistance to the social discourse that tries to control how women's identities should be perceived. Instead of following a common pattern of extenuation, Emily chose not to give an answer that could prolong the conversation. However, the hairdresser's laughing response shows that social expectations of how women talk about their identity are still very strong and taken for granted. This confirms that patriarchal culture not only controls women's bodies but also narratives about their identities, including how they are expected to define themselves in everyday conversations.

3.2 A Female Characters Resistance to the Objectification of Her Body in Memoir My Body (2021)

Data 4

"Wear whatever you want, Ems," my mother would always tell me. "Don't worry about other people." She wanted me to be free of shame, to be able to embrace the way I looked and whatever opportunities it presented. (p.15)

In patriarchal cultures, there is a clear separation between gender roles where men are often perceived to have greater physical strength than women. This creates a stereotype that men are better able to protect themselves and others, while women are considered weaker and vulnerable to physical harm. As a result, women are often perceived as having limited power when it comes to protecting themselves. Patriarchal culture often reinforces the idea that women should cover their bodies to protect them. This can be reflected in social norms that emphasize the need for women to protect their bodies by wearing covered clothing, creating a sense of unfreedom for women to wear what they want to wear. Some people also think that women who wear clothes that are too revealing can cause crime.

Women must be able to fight against all social norms that undermine them. As written from Cixous by Batular (2019) that women engaging in feminine writing will create a real image of women themselves if women are able to rebel, society must now see women as powerful. Emily is faced with a situation where she is free to dress as she pleases or follow her fears of other people's views on her body and her overly sexy clothes. Emily's mother is portrayed as someone who fights patriarchal culture about objectification of women's bodies and their freedom of dress, it is shown by her words that support her daughter's decision to dress as she likes without thinking about others. When women are able to overcome fear with their strength or abilities, it can break gender stereotypes that view women as weak and powerless. This illustrates that women can also have the strength, resilience and ability to protect themselves from others. This gives the message that women have the ability to protect themselves, maintain their safety and well-being, and fight for justice, without having to rely on male protection or intervention.

Data 5

I've never been good about taking care of myself. Cleaning my body is not a habit I take pleasure in but a concession to social expectations; I know that being dirty is embarrassing and not feminine. I'm always distracted and annoyed in the shower, forgetting to shave the backs of my calves or to rinse my hair for an adequate amount of time. For me, the ritual of cleansing has always been an inconvenient necessity, something I have to do for other people. (p.69)

In this chapter Emily talks about KOREATOWN or familiarly referred to as K-Town, which is an area containing beauty shops, spas and beauty clinics. The visitors of K-Town themselves reflect beautiful women from various cultures who have slim, smooth bodies and not the slightest hair on their bodies. In her narrative, Emily explains that she rarely cleanses her back, thighs and calves of body hair as k-town women do, she considers the act of cleaning her body such as shaving her back, thighs and calves to be a concession to social expectations rather than a source of pleasure or personal empowerment. Instead of celebrating her body as a place to demonstrate personal identity, she experiences it as a burden, a necessary obligation to fulfill societal expectations. Patriarchal culture views women's clean bodies as being used to beautify themselves in front of men, placing women as objects to men. Emily feels comfortable if she can be herself and not fall into beauty standards that can objectify her body in society. The narrative is most likely the concept of Medusa by Cixous, from Batular (2019) Cixous states that Medusa is a symbol of revolution to change the past through her feminine desires, Medusa is still beautiful and she laughs at the men who try to attack her.

Data 6

For most of my life, I thought of myself as savvy, a hustler. I understood that I had a commodifiable asset, something the world valued, and I was proud to have built a life and career off my body. All women are objectified and sexualized to some degree, I figured, so I might as well do it on my own terms. I thought that there was power in my ability to choose to do so. (p.10)

In the introduction to her book, Ratajkowski describes how she faced various challenges in life, including men's views and perceptions of her body, which significantly affected the way she viewed and understood her own body. The narrative highlights Emily's experience as a model in an industry that often objectifies women and sexualizes them to a certain extent. Through her observation of this dynamic, Emily realized how the patriarchal system in the industry reduced women's value to their physical appearance. This realization motivated Emily to use her writing skills as a tool of resistance. By writing her memoir, she created a space to reflect on her personal experiences and opened up a broader discussion about objectification, sexuality, and control over women's bodies.

Based on Nurrachman (2023), The concept of Medusa is used to restore symbols of femininity, that if women are cursed in the patriarchal system, then women must be able to rebel. This concept is in line with Emily's resistance to the patriarchal system she faced in her line of work, especially in the modeling industry, which often reduced women to sexual objects. Emily chose to write her memoirs as a form of resistance to these injustices. Through the memoir, she not only recounts her personal experiences but also exposes the systemic practice of objectification, while reclaiming the narrative of her body and identity as a woman. Her memoir becomes a medium that is not only a reflection of her personal experience but also a symbol of women's struggle to reclaim their bodily autonomy.

4. Conclusion

In her memoir *My Body*, Emily Ratajkowski challenges the patriarchal culture of body objectification by incorporating Helene Cixous' feminist principles, which seek to dismantle male-dominated narratives and structures. As both the author and main character, Ratajkowski reflects on her personal experiences in the public eye, revealing the complex ways in which women's bodies are commodified and scrutinized. She critiques the media's portrayal of women, highlighting how society reduces them to mere objects, often stripping away their autonomy and agency.

Through her narrative, Ratajkowski not only critiques these oppressive systems but also celebrates authentic feminine strength and beauty. By rejecting the patriarchal lens that often defines women, she presents a more empowered perspective, one that embraces the multifaceted nature of womanhood. Her memoir becomes an act of reclaiming control over her own narrative and body, offering an alternative to the prevailing norms that have historically shaped the representation of women.

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