
The Stepford Wives Opinion on Women and Feminism

Women and feminism has been a topical issue from the late 20th Century and more prominent in the latter part of the 21st Century. The dominance of women by the “superior being” of men has been listed in the literature since the realization of the atrocities on women and their silent absorption and subsequently protests for remedial measure through the advocacy of the sociological and legal stances. Here in this empirical assessment of the “Stepford Wives” by Ira Levin , a satirical thriller novel which was later made into two movies, namely by the same name in 1974 and 2004 by Edgar J Scherick, the discussion pertains to the

(a) the autonomous submission of women and subjectivity; (b) the dominance of men over women as a conjugate; and (c) the redressal in the modern and post modern era and the seeking of equality in gender bias through the acceptable notion of feminism in altruistic form.

In the book, Levin states that the women at Stepford (Connecticut, USA) were often the victimised subjects of “zombie-like” submission to men and often had to bear the brunt of such dominance. Yet, silently, there was an uprising in the underground that the redressal has to be sought out.

Tricia Pummill (San Diego State University) *Western Tributaries* vol. 2 (2015) writes:

“The Stepford Wives presents a disturbing vision of America as a country where men destroy women and replace them with robots in order to simulate a non-existent past lifestyle. Joanna Eberhart’s realization that she is marked for extinction evokes terror among women as a class. Levin adheres to the tradition of warning of a danger and portrays Joanna’s dark humour as a means of resistance to oppression.”

The ground breaking novel in the context of freedom for and of women conjugated with feminism and gender equality is thus an issue of the present as it was of the past. The dictionary definition of the word Stepford refers to derogatory especially in the context of women subjected to atrocities and made subservient to men. The dictionary also states that feminism is “the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes.”

"Today the combat takes a different shape; instead of wishing to put man in a prison, woman endeavors to escape from one; she no longer seeks to drag him into the realms of immanence but to emerge, herself, into the light of transcendence. Now the attitude of the males creates a new conflict: it is with a bad grace that the man lets her go."

Simone de Beauvoir -*The Second Sex* (Levin) raised feminist consciousness by stressing that liberation for women was liberation for men too. (Burkett) Contemporary feminist theory began with Simone De Beauvoir’s argument that because men view women as fundamentally different from them, women were reduced to the status of the second sex and hence subordinate. Kate Millet’s theory of subordination argued that women are a dependent sex class under patriarchal domination. (Sultana)

In 1963, the post-World War II belief was that women’s destiny is to marry and bear children.

“Women’s movement” peaked in the 1960s and '70s and touched on every area of women's experience—including family, sexuality, and work. (Burkett) It began to raise the consciousness of many women who agreed that homemaking in the suburbs sapped them of their individualism and left them unsatisfied. (Khan) The Stepford Wives expressed the sexual politics of the early 1970s, the moment when “Women’s Liberation” was becoming “second-wave feminism.”

This excerpt speaks that the monosexual God (man) who demands that idols be broken is himself an idol: a primary ideational and linguistic projection whose masculine character obstructs the political and existential becoming of women. Liberal feminists such as Judith Plaskow, therefore insisted that real feminism must begin with a counter-idolatrous reform of the orthodox or archaic concepts that underpin the relationship between women, their identity and gender roles. (Raphael)

With this backdrop, the following questions-issues are discussed in brief:

a) The autonomous submission of women and subjectivity: the first issue here is whether the fairer gender is or was considered as the weaker of the two sexes and whether sexism had or has a role to play. One might consider that the gender equality was cognitively in the mindset in the covert format yet the overtness was subjectively suppressed by the so called dominant gender (men). The definition of Stepford is a term used to refer to someone that is so obedient and perfect that he or she seems almost like a robot. A woman who is extremely subservient to her husband and who meets his every need in an overly-perfect manner is an example of a Stepford wife. The issue begs the question was the women then forced to submission or was it voluntary. Societal norms of the identity-less women enforced the dictums of dominance to be “Stepfords”. The issue also begs the question whether women had option for redressal of the dominance. Here, the notion of sexism then dictated that the women were the “weaker of the sexes” and were meant to obey, and bear children at the beck and call of the men, the caretaker of the hearth. That’s all. But over the passage of time, as women realized that the burden of the atrocities was too much to bear, the dictums of tradition had to be challenged through the educative process in conjunction with legal connotations. Those strong women like Levin who had the courage to bring to fore the issues of Stepford, related well with the general dynamics of society especially women who were direct victims. So in the study of the literature it is evident that the women then were victims of subjugation and not voluntary participants. The argument would not have arisen if there were the voluntary notion of women.

b) The dominance of men over women as a conjugate: Were all men dominant over women and did this notion abide well with the societal norms then, is the question of importance. Although there might have been the anthropological notion of the bread-winner wins the hearth of the homestead, it does not give the legitimacy of the proclamation of the Stepford. Societal evolution is grossly engrained in the anthropological context without much of a say to prove it, yet the anthropological stance did define the roles of the sexes and its interplay in the construct of life. Lily Climenhaga, mentions that the tradition of dominance is ill-founded, and that women were made to be subservient to complexities of societal norm:

“Women within Western historiography prior to the 1960s generally played a minor role within history...Women played a marginal role within most histories written until recently with the emergence of feminism. Intellectual history was essentially a great man’s history, which typically served to marginalize and exclude women. Women were effectively defined as the “Other” within the intellectual history.” (Climenhaga)

c) The redressal in the modern and post modern era and the seeking of equality in gender bias through the acceptable notion of feminism in altruistic form: Lily Climenhaga further writes that "During the Enlightenment period both men and women wrote about the role of men and women and their natural place within society. Women's status as inferior to men during this period became institutionalized through the work of many intellectuals who labeled women as lacking the intellectual capacities men held." The question here is: are women intellectually same, superior or inferior to the opposite gender of Homo sapiens? One wonders why this issue should come up at all. First, the two genders of the Homo sapiens are designed anthropologically to serve different purpose, the genetic composition of the two are almost 70% similar with variation in the reproductive issues and a similar differentiation in the mindset of perspectives of viewing the societal dynamics of construction of the homestead, work functions and patterns and overall evolutionary development. The common labeling of the women being the weaker sex is of course, presently the dilemma of the modern and post modern era. With the legitimacy of the education of women (who were deprived of it in the past) rapid developments have been evidenced in the growth of role of women in the professional, domestic and societal arenas. The society has thus moved from gender biased format to pluralistic evolutionary construct. Women no longer are subjecting themselves "voluntarily or involuntarily" to become the Stepfords of society but are striving to be in the forefront. Whilst, modern and post modern women embrace the feminism with equal force, there are of course, some doubts about the equatorial blending of the two genders in the context of supremacy, functional beings of socio-economic development and the transition to unitary construct of society. The literature today, when scanned, reveals that the evolutionary movement from extended family to unitary-singularities. This evolution is a direct outcome of the enforced Stepford practices of the past.

Society has strangely distinguished rulers of both private and public worlds, women and men respectively. (Winterson) Women were termed as the producing class while the husbands were the expropriating class. The women's gruesome monotonous housework was considered no work at all and women were seen as dependent on men. (Sultana)

But and those of the future are well on their freedom from Stepfords to become respectable as was seen in earlier times, males were considered active, females passive. For the society female was "mutilated male", someone who does not have a soul. In this view, the biological inferiority of woman made her inferior also in her capacities, her ability to reason and, therefore, her ability to make decisions. Because man were superior and woman inferior, he was by default considered born to rule and she to be ruled. As the great Aristotle has put in, "the courage of man is shown in commanding of a woman in obeying" (Sultana)

It is important to remember that humans are not passive objects or unquestioning recipients of gender programming', as some sociologists have suggested. People are active agents who create and modify roles for themselves. (Giddens) In conclusion, it can be stated that the women of today and those of the future are well on their freedom from Stepfords to become respectable balanced members in the socio-dynamics of Homo sapiens evolution. Power is scarce and hence the competition among men and women. Women are wrapped up in the thick fiber of expectations of society. Hence, it should be encouraged to

"Teach ones daughters to worry less about fitting into glass slippers and more about shattering glass ceilings"- Unknown (Fuller)