

Memories that make  
us who we are:  
comparing 'the  
stepford wives' and  
'get out'



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In today's society, where people now desire to be unique and different from others, the concept of personal identity has become very important. One acquires their personal identity through the experiences they have and how they learn and respond to them. The novel, "The Stepford Wives" by Ira Levin and the movie, "Get Out", by Jordan Peele, address the problems that arise when someone is stripped of their memories, and are left without a personal identity, or acquire a new one. Both Joanna Eberhart, from the "Stepford Wives", and Chris Washington, from "Get Out", face antagonists who do not regard their victim's lives as equal in value to their own, whether it be because of the stereotype of women's place being in the home, or racism towards black people. Both pieces of work utilize an investigative lead character to illuminate how despite one's perverted fantasies of recreating themselves and others to create the "ideal being", they fail to preserve the essence of what made their victim human: their memories.

When recreating their wives to fit their idea of the perfect housewife, the husbands of the Stepford wives favor a pretty face and an obedient attitude, over making their wives have their own personalities. As Joanna is assimilating into the town of Stepford, she begins to notice differences in the wives of the men who are in the Men's Association compared to those she has met outside of Stepford. None of the women lead lives of their own, instead their main objective in life is to keep their house clean and their husbands happy, while looking perfectly presentable doing so. It becomes clear to Joanna, and the readers, that this occurrence is more than a coincidence, when her friend Bobbie Markowe, who used to criticize the Stepford wives for settling into their role as a housewife, suddenly begins to

accept and encourage the very same idea. When Joanna visits Bobbie to confirm her suspicions that she had in fact changed, she notices how, “Bobbie had seemed different; she hadn’t said the sorts of things she usually did, and she moved more slowly too,” (Stepford, 81). This dramatic change in Bobbie, leads Joanna to investigate further, and she quickly discovers the reason all of the Stepford wives seem so alike, and why Bobbie changed too: their husbands turned them into robots. Joanna was able to make this discovery, because when making their wives into robots, the husbands from the Men’s Association focused more on making their wives look human rather than having all of the qualities that make someone human, most importantly, their memories

Without one’s memories, it is impossible for them to have their own identities. This explains why all of the Stepford wives lacked depth and originality, because life experiences and how a person learns from them are what shape their personality. And why Joanna was able to detect a change in Bobbie; Bobbie was who she was, because of her experiences, and they led her to defining herself as an independent woman with a life of her own. Once she lost her memories and became a robot, Bobbie lost her passion for having her own life, thus losing her sense of identity. Instead of maintaining their personalities, Bobbie—and the other wives—were programmed to believe, “It’s no disgrace to be a good homemaker...and to be more careful about my[one’s] appearance,” (Stepford, 82). This shows how their husbands only valued their wives for their bodies, instead of their minds and don’t consider them as having as much value as a man has. Instead, they believe

that a woman should be content in their outdated roles as homemakers, and if they don't fit that role, they need to be replaced.

Chris's captors also ignore the effects of stripping someone of their memory, and instead view his body only as a vessel: an object that can be altered to fit their selfish needs. While attending his girlfriend, Rose Armitage's, family get together, Chris notices that there is only one other black man at the party. Chris immediately notices the man's style of clothes, for he is wearing a tan suit that would typically be worn by someone who is white, and older, which doesn't suit this man who appears to be younger. Upon meeting this man, who claims his name is Logan, Chris notices how Logan's word choice and style of talking does not align with the style of speech that he associates with black people. This being because how someone talks, is usually a reflection of how the people around them spoke as they were growing up, and Logan not using Black English Vernacular, suggest that he would have had to have been raised around primarily white people. The "whiteness" in Logan, becomes especially evident to Chris when he asks Logan what his view is on what it is like to grow up black and how he is treated by society. Logan's inability to answer this question, raises Chris's suspicions even more. Even though Chris is not yet aware of the operation where Logan's brain was put into this man's body, the Coagula process, he is aware of the differences between the man in front of him and what he considers a normal black person. The reason he can detect these differences, is because the experiences a black person has is entirely different from those of someone who is white, due to racism and discrimination among many other things. Without those memories, it is hard to mask the fact that Logan is a white

man in a black man's body. Chris soon finds out that his suspicions were justified, and that Logan went through the Coagula process. The antagonists chose black people specifically, because they believe that being black would make them stronger, cooler, and more attractive; although from this description it seems like they idolize black people, it is actually only their body that they regard as valuable. They believe that with their "superior" white brains, they will be able to utilize a black person's body, better than they can. The captors' choice of women and black people specifically, sheds light on how these groups were, and still are, stereotyped and dehumanized.

The "Stepford Wives", takes place during the second wave of feminism, when women were demanding social and economic equality. Joanna and Bobbie are examples of women who supported this movement and desired to be seen as equals to men. Their husbands turning them into robot homemakers, could be seen as a metaphor for how some men reject this movement and try to maintain the inequality at any expense. By making their wives into robots, they silence their cries for a better life and prove that they only value them for their bodies. Similarly, Rose's family disregards the right to life that all humans are entitled to, and believe that black people do not share this right. They desire only a black person's body, not their mind, because their racist views have led them to believe that the reason black people are at a disadvantage, is because of their "inferior" brains, which don't allow them to reach their full potential. Both pieces of work utilize white antagonists—white male antagonists for the "Stepford Wives"—to portray the advantages and sense of entitlement they have, which the protagonists lack due to being taught that they are not equal. This inequality

allows for the antagonists to feel superior and believe that they are more capable of running their victims' lives. But, seeing as how the antagonists are mere mortals, when they attempt to play the role of God and recreate human life, they are unable to entirely capture the essence of what made those people human. Without one's memories, the facade of these recreated beings being purely human, begins to crumble.

In both the "Stepford Wives", and "Get Out", the lead characters are able to detect the contrasts between the people who are presented to them as human and actual humans, before they learn of the transformation these people were subjected to. Although they walk and talk like a regular person, they lack the depth and individuality that is necessary for being human. These differences are due to not having their memories, or in the case of "Get Out", having someone else's memories. The similarities between how the robot wives act and those who have undergone the Coagula process, emphasizes the fact that the distinction between having a personal identity and not having one, resides in whether or not that being has their memories. Because even though Logan had blood running through his veins and a beating heart, without having those memories, Chris was able to notice the irregularities in how he spoke and presented himself, just as easily as Joanna did with the robots.