

Gender and feminism in 'why i want a wife' research paper examples

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



The duality between genders has been an ongoing phenomenon since the beginning of mankind - man has always been different from woman, and vice versa. Many conflicts have arisen because of an arguably patriarchal society - it is generally considered that men oppress, and women are subjugated. Feminist theory, on the whole, is a type of conflict theory. According to feminist theory, gender is closely related to power; in this case, mankind has invariably held the power over women in relationships and society as a whole. There has been a systematic oppression of women by men, which thereby prevents them from taking the resources, authority, jobs, and money of men. This is known as a 'patriarchy'; a society dominated by men at the expense of women's rights (Weber, 2006). Given the works of Judy Brady and others, it is clear there is an economic and racial subjugation that is also occurring, one which affects both genders; 'Why I Want a Wife' is just one expression of this subjugation, which is often expressed and explored through sociological theories.

A group in power will often oppress another, lesser group. In Judy Brady's "I Want a Wife," the resentment towards men by many women is made apparent; she claims that she wants a wife, and proceeds to list all the things a wife would allow her to have. With a wife, Brady says, she could be free to do whatever she wants, like "go back to school so that [she] can become economically dependent" and support herself and her dependents (p. 1). Sanders, conversely, believes that women should not envy men the difficult tasks of war and hard labor, and he wishes he had the ability to avoid those that women receive, in "The Men We Carry in Our Minds." In all of these instances, one group holds all the cards, and it is up to the agency of the

lesser group to make the necessary changes in society to make it better. Brady's text, in particular, is an interesting play on the expectations men have on women. Brady says, " I want a wife who will work and send me to school"; here, she notes the important roles women have in taking care of a household, allowing her (or the theoretical male in this situation) to take it easy while the woman does all the work (Brady, p. 288). Because of the husband's natural expectation to not have to do work, and for allowing the wife to be the economically independent one, Brady shows how women have a lot of strange pressures put on them - they have to both perform many duties around the house, and also make the husband's life as easy as possible. Brady also says, " I want a wife who is a good nurturant attendant to the children who arranges to be around when the children need special care, because, of course, I cannot miss classes at school. My wife must arrange to lose time at work, but not lose the job" (p. 289). This is yet another expectation men have on women; the husband wants women to earn the bread and take care of the house, relieving as much responsibility as possible from the wife. Because the husband does not have as much to do, his life is easier, but the wife's feelings and desires are not considered; her job is to facilitate his easy life.

Brady views marital relationships in her work as a stereotype; this is a very cartoonish and broad view of real relationships, but they echo real expectations that are depicted in media and the main pop culture present today. Dealing with the new questions of supplemental income and two-income households, Brady notes that women are still expected to do more work than men, all the while likely receiving lesser pay. Brady's twist on the

male chauvinistic perspective makes clear the expectations men have of women - they are objects meant to cater to their every desire, with no thoughts or feelings of their own. Brady even coldly notes how replaceable and quickly forgotten women are as soon as they become inconvenient for men: " If by some chance, I find another person more suitable as a wife I want the liberty to replace my current wife I will expect a fresh, new life; my wife will take the children and be solely responsible for them so that I am left free" (Brady, p. 290).

The presence of gender inequality is a much more nebulous phenomenon than might be thought. Sanders, in his text, studies himself and his experience with both genders, and comes to the conclusion that his own anxieties about being a man make him wish he were a woman, at least in terms of social responsibility. " It's much easier being the victim. All the victim has to do is break free. The persecutor has to live with his past" (p. 69). As a boy, Sanders looked at women's grievances with a jaundiced eye, feeling as though they had a freer life, not having to deal with the horrors of war or bodies broken by decades of manual labor. West emphasizes the importance of fathers in the raising of a child, supported by Brady's insistence that wives (wrongfully) are forced to do all the work when raising a child; " I want a wife who will have arranged that the children are fed and ready for bed before my guests arrive so that the children do not bother us" (p. 2). With Brady's essay, the idea of family almost becomes a burden for men; they do not actually want a family, but take down roots in order to please women who will only take on the sexual and material expectations of men if they are promised security through marriage and family-building.

Feminist theory is a type of conflict theory. According to feminist theory, gender is closely related to power; in this case, mankind has invariably held the power over women in relationships and society as a whole. There has been a systematic oppression of women by men, which thereby prevents them from taking the resources, authority, jobs, and money of men. This is known as a 'patriarchy'; a society dominated by men at the expense of women's rights (Weber, 2006). One powerful example of feminist conflict theory is Rae Lesser Blumberg's Gender Stratification Theory - in this, the position of women compared to men's power in all different kinds of societies are shown to be less influential and respected than men (Turner, p. 183). This creates a power imbalance, favoring men and their ability to enact change on a social and political scale. Women are, historically, unable to participate in economic production, distribution, and labor at the same level as men. Primarily, the key to social power for women is economic power, according to Blumberg's theory; as men possess the wealth, they possess the power (Turner, 2003).

According to gender role conflict, "socialized gender roles have negative consequences on the person or others" (Amato, 2006). Therefore, not only does the pattern of male-centric violence partially stem from their status as the power-holders in society, violent men themselves become a social problem. Understanding the societal factors that lead men to violence has led to notions regarding their use and abuse of power granted to them by society over women. Given the intolerable epidemic of disproportionately male violence occurring in society, ideas regarding a change in power dynamic to favor women have been heavily considered.

The true enemy of society being the unchecked power of the rich is made clear in these texts. Sanders, eventually realizes that the true enemy of both genders is the rich - both women and disenfranchised men looked to the power that rich men held, and coveted it. " The difference between me and these daughters was that they saw me, because of my sex, as destined from birth to become like their fathers, and therefore as an enemy to their desires" (p. 72). This helps to illustrate just how righteous resentment of the rich can be masked in gender-based resentment; women resent men in general, when it is typically the rich men who stand in the way of the equality they desire.

The kinds of solutions that are present involve dramatic regulation and changes in gender attitudes. Sanders discusses the presence of disenfranchised men like him as an ally for women's rights; if they were to work together, they would be able to come to a solution that benefits both sexes, only at the expense of the haves for the sake of the have-nots.

Brady's satirical take on what a wife should 'willingly' do is a call for change in what is expected of a wife in general; by making the gender lines in a marriage more equitable, there would be no cause for resentment as the husband would get away with less.

In conclusion, Judy Brady's " Why I Want a Wife" points out a greater societal problem with the way men and women relate to each other. In traditional relationships, men are allowed to have as few responsibilities as possible, as so much of the weight of the household duties is placed on the wife. Society already forces women to do a great deal to keep up a household, and with the added pressure of having to work as well, women are really oppressed in

a patriarchal society. Feminist theory addresses this problem, as it views society as being very man-centric, something that needs to be pointed out, addressed, and fixed as best as possible. Essays and poems like Brady's work (and Sanders') are one step in that direction, as they allow for perspectives that let us look critically at our world and find ways to make it better.

Works Cited

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