

Women as a Commodity/Object/Prop

Sonia Mehta

Department of Philosophy Daulat Ram College, University of Delhi
E-mail: soniamehta@outlook.in, mehtasonia@hotmail.com

Abstract—Putting light on certain apothegm's, "One, who builds others, knows what it is like to be torn down, one who showcases utmost care and support towards her family, one who passes the torch to a new generation, "She is a Woman". But characterising a 'Female' as same as a 'Woman' is a mistaken notion upon which "Lynda Birke" sheds light by saying that 'a Female (sex) is an organism that produces eggs whereas the meaning of Woman (gender) is created by the society and is dynamic'. The question is what impact does this distinction leave on the society? Whether the society that sets the standards of defining a Woman sees her as a 'Woman per se' or as a 'female'? Furthermore, degrading someone on the basis of their looks is "Objectification". But is it justifiable to treat a Woman as a 'Commodity/object' because of their body structure?

The answers to the above questions depends upon the in depth survey of both 'Woman' and 'Man' regarding their perceptions about "The Anatomical Objectification of Women". This paper involves a survey of 50 men and 50 women within the age group of 21-30 and 19-42 respectively. The survey aims to grasp whether people knows about the bifurcation between Sex and Gender? What is their understanding of the term 'Woman'? Is objectifying women and using her as a commodity acceptable? Can reproduction be the stand to judge, women as inferior or superior? Does woman's identity depends upon the stereotypical notions of her being emotional, having perfect body and fair skin etc.? Why are women only seen as a man's women? Do you think woman's nature of being warm, approachable and empathetic had provided a setback for her? Do you think, the culture of domination is to preserve the 'identity of men'? Is cultural dominance framing a vital part of women's personality? What are the reasons behind considering women ancillary? Do men believe in giving equal status to women and will they encourage it? Do women actually have equal status in the society? Is equal status with men sufficient? What can be done in order to curb this objectification? This paper attempts to highlight, what is the actual status of woman in this male chauvinistic society?

Keywords: Women, Sex, Gender, Objectification and Status.

1. INTRODUCTION

Differences amongst 'Men' and 'Women' have always been the criterion to distinguish between the two, whether it is societal or biological. Similarly, there exists a varied amount of disparity within the 'concept of Female (Sex) and the 'concept of Woman' (Gender). Lynda Birke, elaborates that there is a stark distinction between 'Sex' and 'Gender'. Where the former is concerned with the biological aspect i.e., an organism that produces eggs, the latter ascribes to the norms

and values set out by the society. Interestingly, the bifurcation of these two notions isn't something new, a survey conducted on 50 Men and 50 Women shows that more than 80% of people know about it. But the dilemma is when asked 'what they meant by the term Women?' 61% of male population agreed that it's both 'an organism that produces eggs' and 'an individual created by the society'.

Albeit, the notions of Sex and Gender are distinct from each other yet they coincide in framing the "Identity" of women. The crucial difference between the sexuality of a male from that of a female is that a 'Female has the potential to reproduce' and bring forth the next generation whereas the male doesn't.

Other physiological differences such as women undergoing 'Menstruation' and being 'Emotionally Sensitive' are a part of the above difference. However, the problem is that these differences are taken not only as the standard to define 'Women' (Gender) by this male chauvinistic society but also to differentiate their born and brought up. For example: The stereotypical idea of associating colours with both Girls (pink) and Boys (blue); Girls to have an inclination towards household work whereas Boys to learn and earn the livelihood for the family etc. But, even though 91% men within the age group of 21-30 years agree that women's nature to proliferate isn't something to regard her as inferior, ironically it is not portrayed in the society.

Thereby, the Sexuality that leads to Women being treated as a "Commodity" or a "Prop" to be used in order to support and care for the family, to maintain the household etc. results in "The Objectification of Women".

2. OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN

The scenario of Women's objectification isn't a peculiar thing rather an everyday occurrence for people engaged in glamour industry, movies, media etc. This paper doesn't focus on who all are engrossed in this objectification but "What has lead to this Objectification?". Considering the Hindu pantheistic society where at a time Women had the status of a "Deity" in contrast with the present day where she is treated as a "Commodity". Thereby, guiding us to the initial question about "What is the actual Status of Women in Society?" What has lead to this decline?

3. HINDU SCRIPTURES

Hindu scriptures bifurcate into *Sruti* (that which is heard) and *Smriti* (that which is remembered), so is the 'Status of Women'. Where *Sruti* (Vedas, Upanishads etc.) provides a firm view regarding the eminent role played by women in society, *Smriti's* (Dharmas, Itihasas etc.) view is quite contradictory. According to *Sruti*, the Status of women was equivalent to men. Women were given profound respect, honour and were considered as the embodiment of qualities and powers. Hence, giving them the stature of 'Goddess' such as Durga, Kali etc.

Further, 'Manusmriti' asserts that "Where women are worshipped, their Gods dwell; where women are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards." It means the society where women are treasured and idolized, there will be health, fortune and comfort; if women aren't honoured then the society will face adversities. Where Manusmriti talks so highly about the Status of women, the incidents of Objectification such as Draupadi being undressed publicly by the Kauravas in the epic of "Mahabharata", Ravana's forceful abduction of Sita and Lord Ram's request for Sita's trial by fire to evaluate her pure and serene character in "Ramayana" doesn't indicate the worshipped or honoured status of women. Hereby, leading to a contradiction between the two views.

In Vedic period men were instilled with the values to Treat, Respect and Care for women as his own daughter (except his wife). But with the growth in Civilization and Modernization, the roots of these Vedic traditions and knowledge got weak over the time. It resulted in Women being 'Objectified' and 'Discriminated' based on their Rights and Status.

4. TODAY'S SCENARIO

Although, the present day society is a reflection of past but this reflection is tainted when it comes to 'Women'. Where at a time, Woman's nature of being warm, approachable, empathetic, protective and strong led her to the stature of a 'Goddess', today it is looked as a setback. In a survey of 50 women within the age group of 19 – 42, 45% of women agree that these qualities are viewed as problematic whereas 38% doesn't agree and the rest 17% are clueless.

It is interesting to note that Women had been flourishing in all spheres still, her role is narrowed to her Family (as a daughter), marital life (as a Wife) and not to mention as Motherhood (as a mother). Of the three prescribed roles, Woman's role as a 'Mother' is the most admired one as it links both her feminine aspect as well as her being a woman. A mother gives birth to a child by carrying him/her for 9

months but her duties go way beyond that by transforming that infant into a good/moral/ethical human.

Further, 96% men agree that Objectification of women is wrong yet the men-centred society asserts that the Identity of a woman is dependent on a man. As a result, women are often labelled as "Man's Woman". It means that a Woman as a 'Girl' (Unmarried) should be in the custody of her 'Father', as a 'Wife' (Married) in the custody of her 'Husband' and as a 'Widow' in the custody of her 'Son'. Even if a Woman is courageous enough to stand independently without the shadow of Men, 83% women in the survey agree that they had to perform beyond their limits to validate her existence.

The difficulty is that men and women together lay the foundation of a society. But in this society where men's status is quite stable from the beginning, women's stature has been through a major downfall i.e., from the pedestal of a 'Goddess' in Vedic period to being 'Objectified' in *smriti's* and till now. According to 38% Men, 'Biological Difference', 'Emotions', 'Money', 'Leadership' are the causes behind this downfall, whereas 71% women knows that 'Biological differences', 'Gender inequality' and 'lack of initiative' has caused it.

Though, majority of Men believe in Equal Status of Women and will encourage it; but 78% women beliefs that having Equal Status is not enough. Equality amongst society is necessary, not in parts but as a whole. The drawback is that the patriarchal system that is adamant on oppressing women is hampering a vital part of women's personality.

5. CONCLUSION

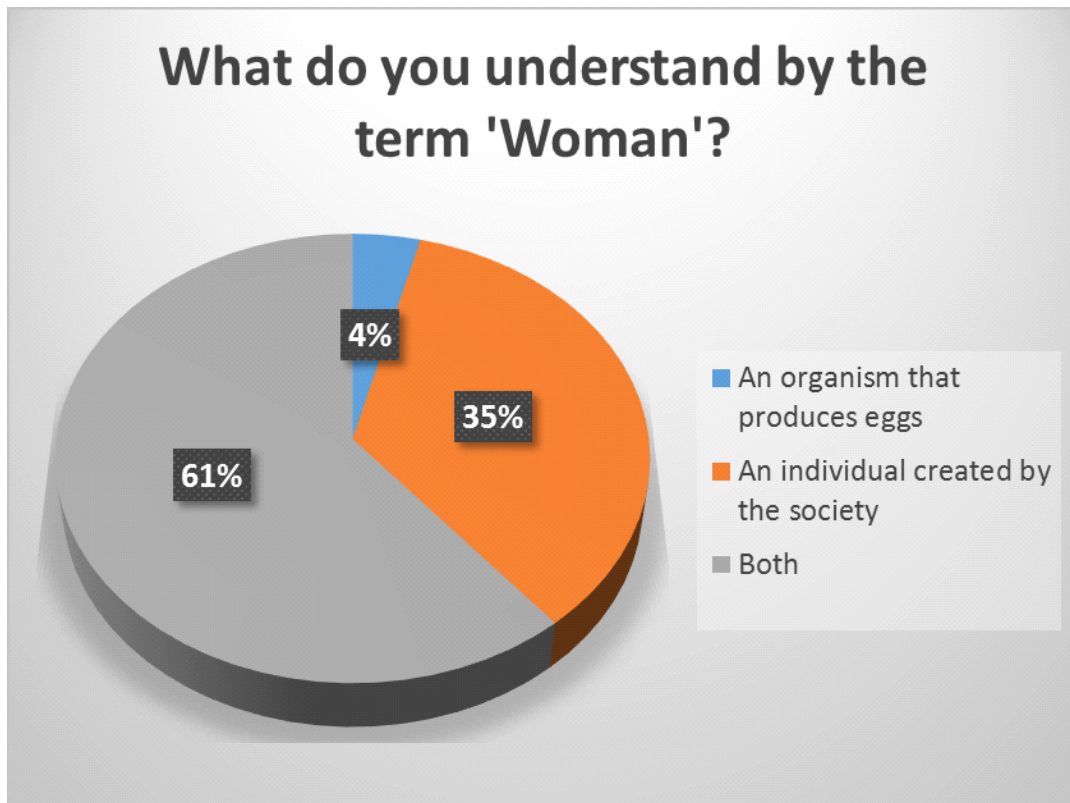
"When Men are oppressed, it is a Tragedy. But when Women are oppressed it is a Tradition."

— (Letty Cottin Pogrebin).

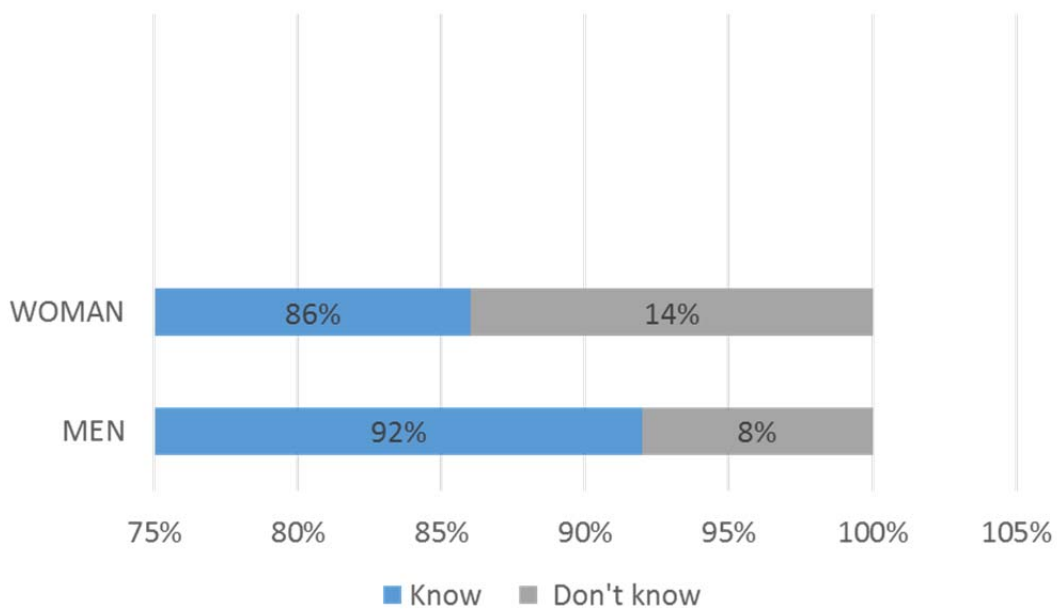
The issue of "Objectification of Women" has been raised by many. However, its impact on the society is neutral because here, the victims are Woman's and the ones idealizing her roles as a Daughter, Wife and a Mother are the makers of society. Further the fight to be "At Par" with men, with Equal Rights and values is also ambiguous. Women will be said to be "At Par" with men 'when the roles of both men and women are reversed and is acceptable to all.

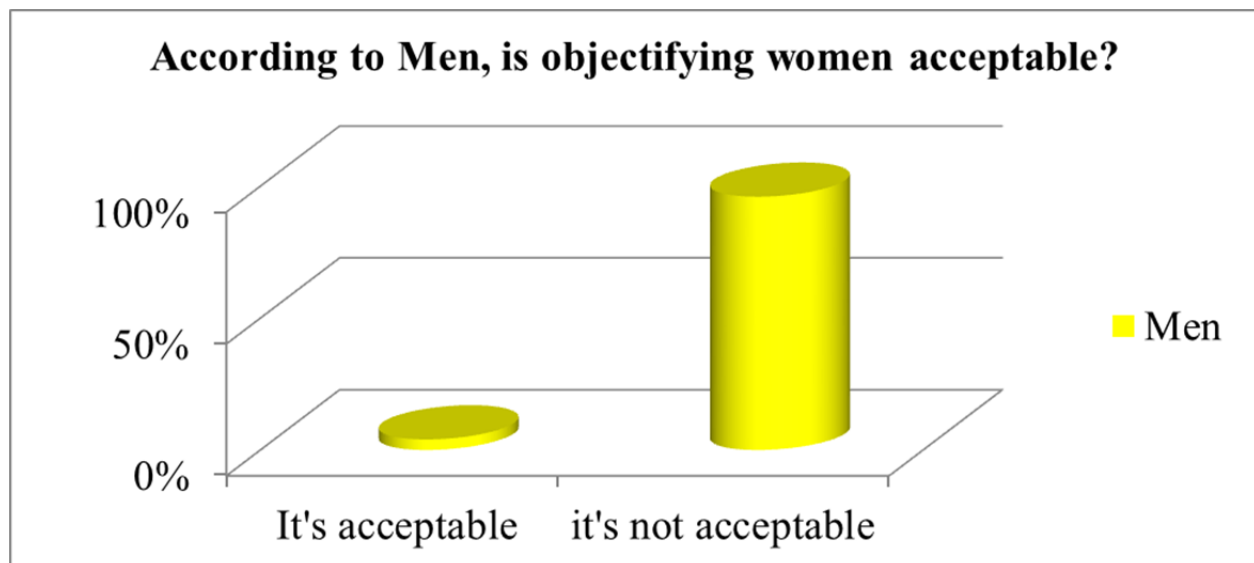
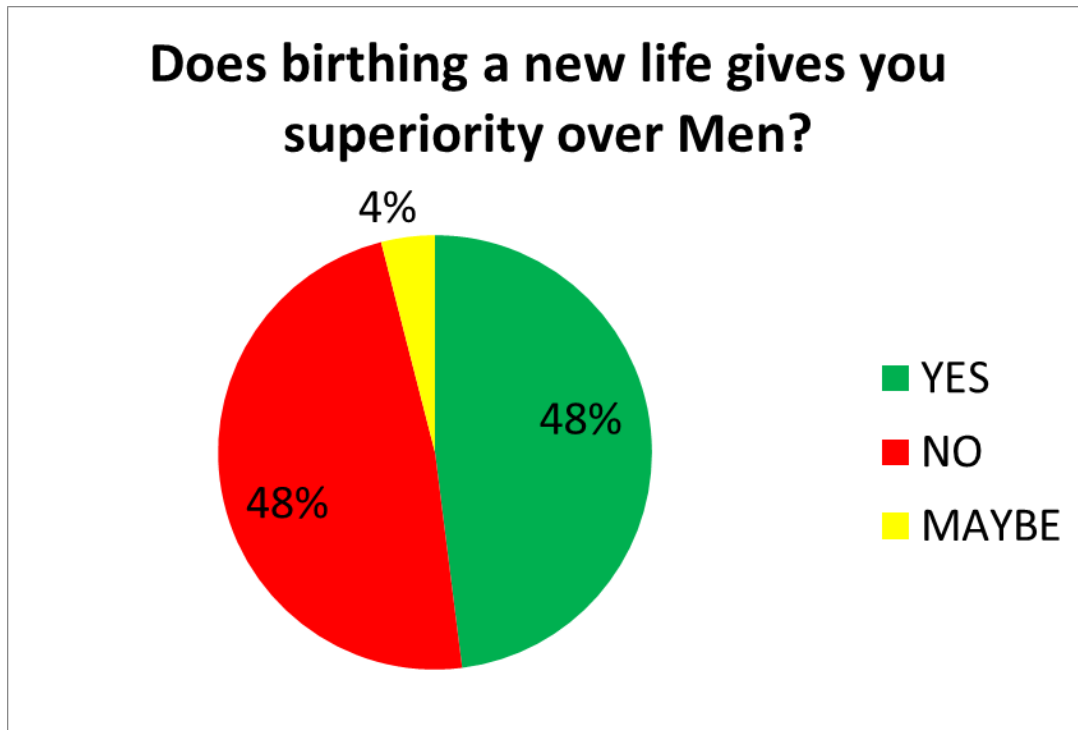
It's true that to bring back the eminent role of Women shown in Vedic period will require some time but it is also worth realizing that no matter how much one abides by the values and traditions, at some time changes do become the priority.

6. DATA ANALYSIS



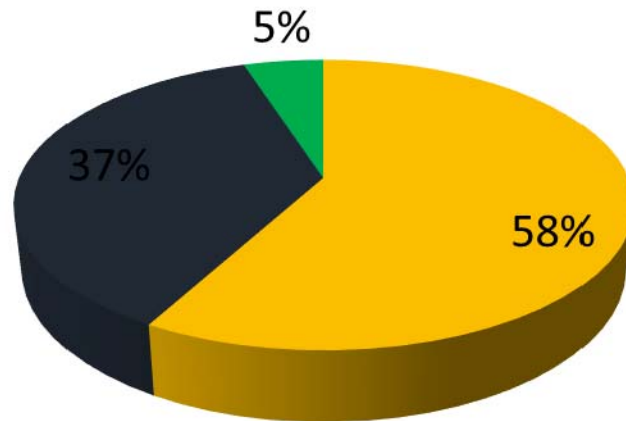
Do you know the bifurcation between Sex and Gender?



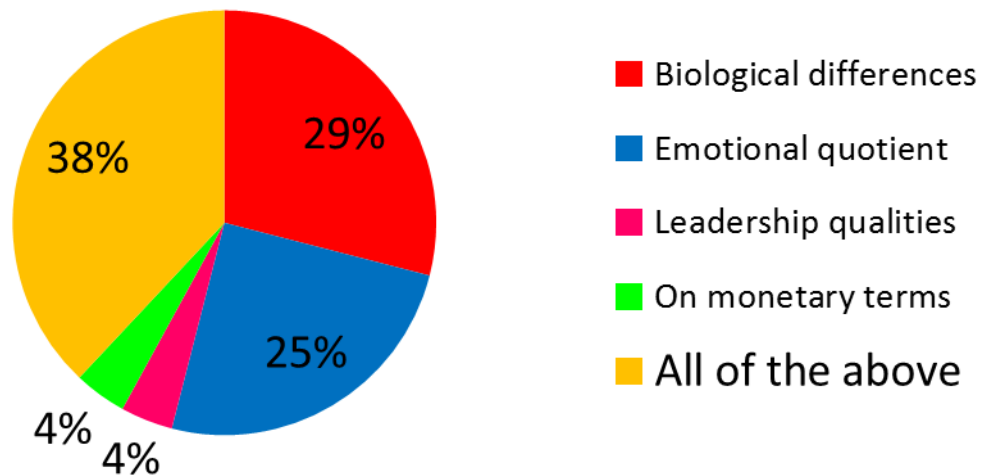


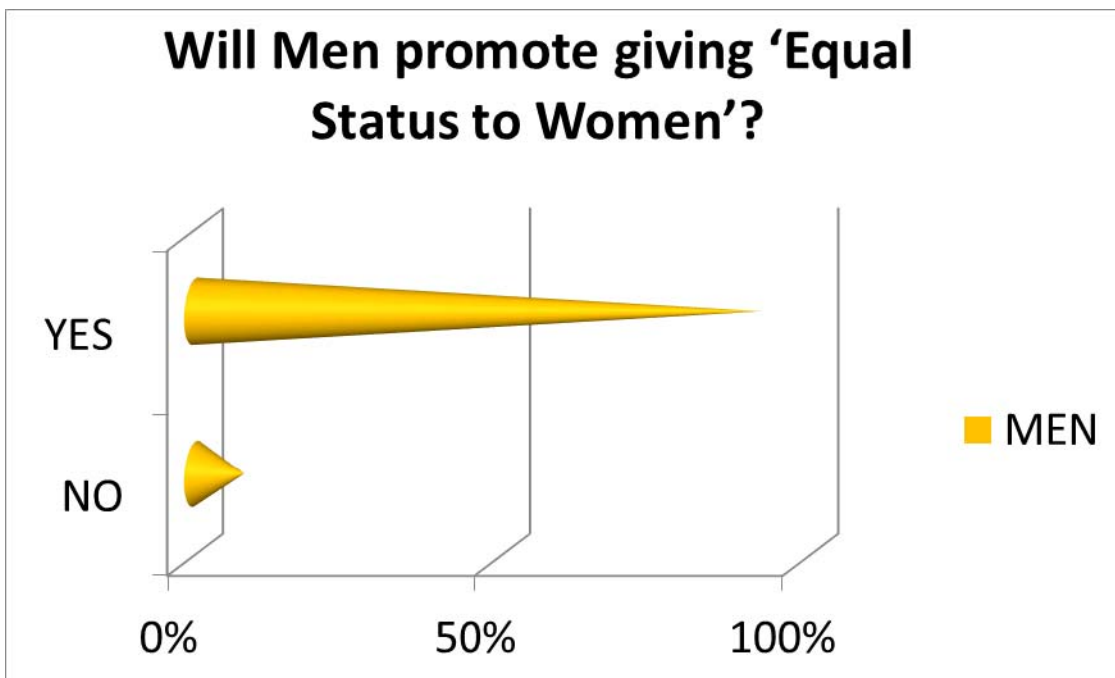
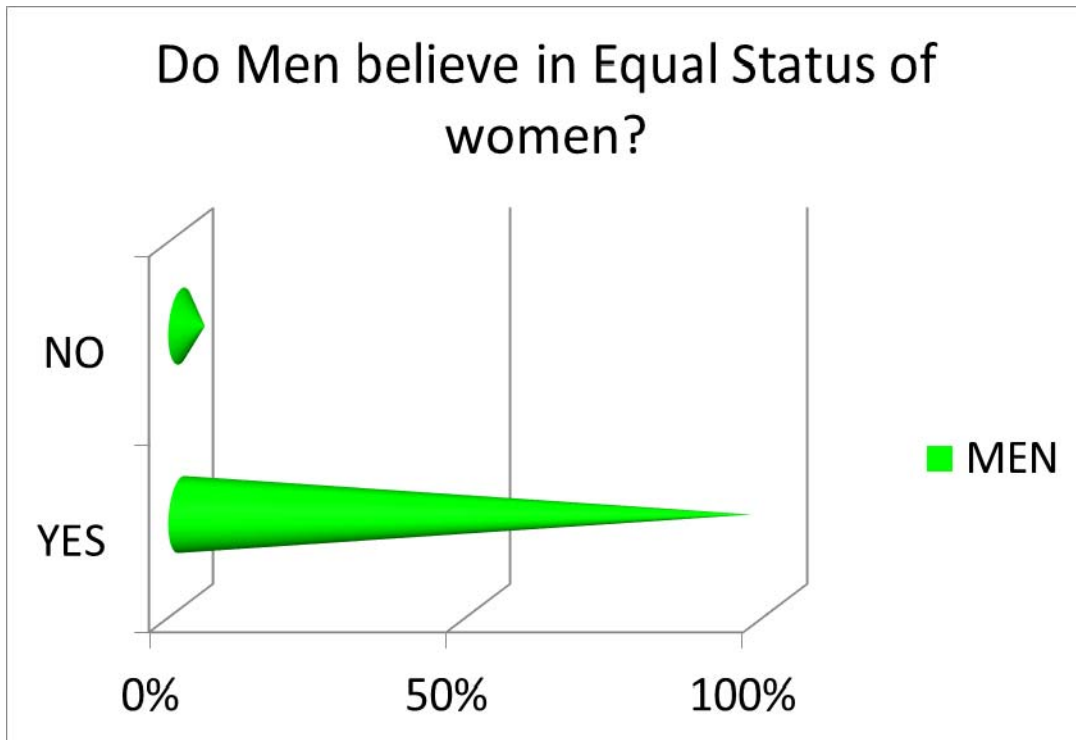
Do you believe, that Women are often seen as "MAN'S WOMAN" ?

■ YES ■ NO ■ MAYBE



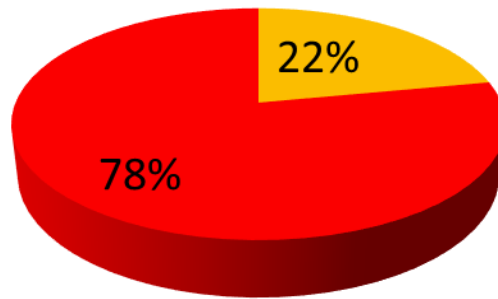
What according to Men are the reasons to consider her as ancillary?





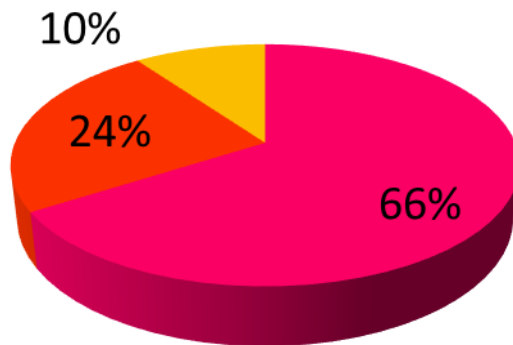
Is Equal status with Men enough for Women?

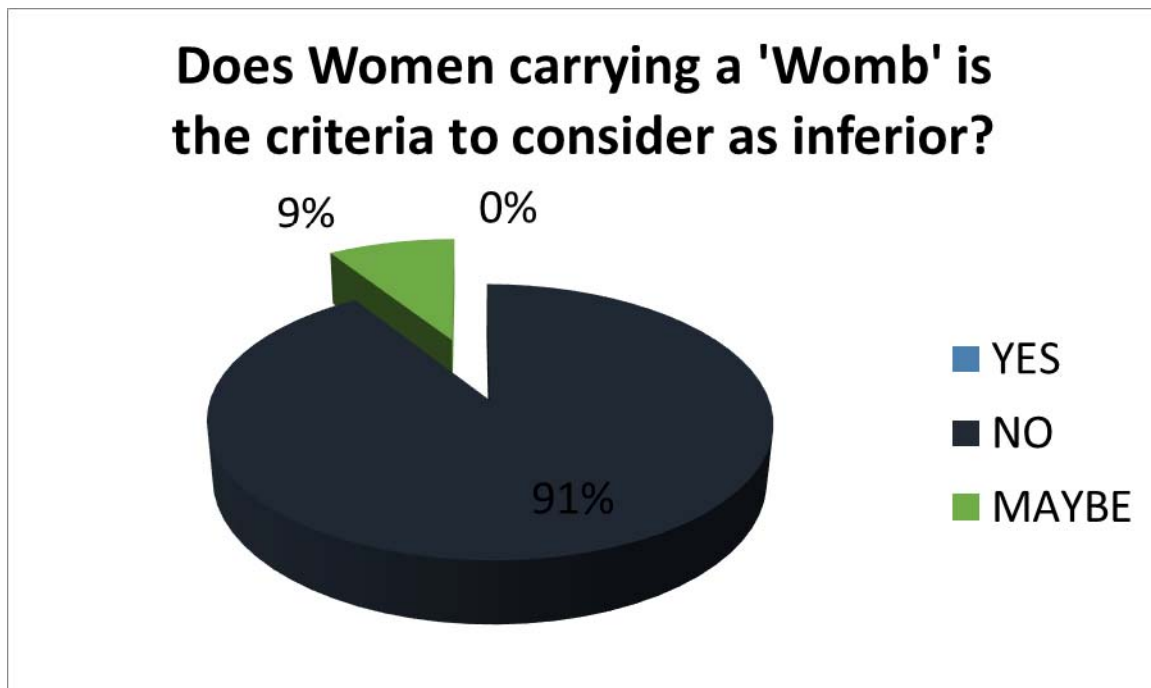
■ YES ■ NO



Do you agree that cultural Dominance is framing a vital part of your personality?

■ YES
■ NO
■ MAYBE





BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex*, Translated and edited by H.M. Parshley, London, Published by Jonathan Cape, 195
- [2] Cahill, Ann, *Overcoming Objectification: A carnal ethics*, New York, Published by Routledge, 2011
- [3] Kilbourne, J. (2002). *Beauty and the Beast of Advertising*. Retrieved March 12, 2005 from
- [4] http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article40.html.
- [5] Lehtinen, Virpi, *Luce Irigaray's Phenomenology of Feminine Being*, Published by state University of New York Press, 2014
- [6] Lloyd, Geneieve, *The Man of Reason 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, London, Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1984
- [7] Menon, Nivedita, *Seeing Like A Feminist*, New Delhi, Published by Penguin Group, 2012
- [8] Mill, John Stuart, *The Subjection of Women*, New Delhi, Published by Vani Prakash, 2015
- [9] Padadaki, Evangelia (Lina), "Feminists perspective on Objectification", *The Stanford encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL= <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/feminism-objectification/>>