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## Paper 1-Style Analysis: “*I Want A Wife*”

“I Want A Wife” is an article written by Judy Syfers for a feminist magazine called “Ms” in 1971 and was previously delivered as a speech at a women’s rights rally in San Francisco. In the essay, Syfers displays how useful and convenient it would be to have a wife of her own. Through linguistic devices such as repetition, a job-description-like tone and a perspective that exposes the sheer absurdity of a role we assume utterly normal in our everyday lives, Syfers manages to redefine the word ‘wife’ to represent what is essentially an assistant and/or secretary to make her husband’s life effortless.

It is very clear to see why such a piece would fit in the context of the 1970s; the so-called ‘second-wave feminist movement’ gained a lot of popularity from events the rise of many women in head of state positions, like the election of Margaret Thatcher as British Prime Minister 1979, as well as increased an increased public voice and numerous social movements. Accordingly, Judy Syfers aims to depict the extent of patriarchy in marriages and relationships in the latter 20th century, and thus displaying the single-sided convenience (only for the husband, not the wife) and obsolescence of the concept itself with this essay.

Syfers uses repetition and language to create a rather demanding image, one that reflects the unrealistic roles that wives were expected to uphold in society at the time. This effect is most notably created by the extensive repetition of the phrase “*I want a wife*” at the beginning of paragraphs and throughout the essay. This works as an indicator of the level of

entitlement that Syfers claims men possess. The wide variety of tasks, ranging from cooking to taking care of children to keeping track of doctor appointments build up an assistant-esque role. Through “*will remain sexually faithful . . . jealousies*” and “*my sexual needs may entail more than strict adherence to monogamy*”, Syfers conveys the complete lack of reciprocity between husband and wife when it comes to faithfulness.

This egocentricity is considerably strengthened by the fact that the whole essay is written in the first person. This significantly affects the tone of the text and adds a powerful level of satire towards society. Syfers puts herself in the position of the opposition (namely, husbands and men in general) and does not explicitly express her own viewpoints about the issue in the essay. Instead, she manages to make the issues very obvious to the reader by connecting the title of ‘wife’ to all these countless and absurd obligations and responsibilities. The perspective that Syfers uses in this essay is vastly different from the perspective of the target audience (feminists), which creates a very strong contrast in principles that is impossible to overlook.

There is a certain structure that Syfers employs in the essay; we can observe that each paragraph concerns itself with a different aspect relating to the roles that wives uphold. She iterates through all the different components of everyday life (children in paragraph three, the house in paragraph four, social life in paragraph five, marriage itself in paragraph seven) and details all the requirements that a wife has to uphold in the said field. This technique turns the essay into nothing more than a list of job requirements (‘I want this . . . , I want that . . . , Must have this . . . ’). Through this, Syfers conveys very effectively how going through marriage and suddenly holding the title of ‘wife’, women are automatically loaded with tasks extraneous to their own lives but ‘vital’, as it turns out, for their husband and the rest of the family.

Another intriguing aspect of this essay is the lack of any real sentimental value.

Syfers uses a very particular register to create this effect; one that is quite academic and reason-based instead of emotion based. The language is intellectually sound (no contractions, concise language without any ‘bells and whistles’) and concepts such as cheating and divorce are described as “*strict adherence to monogamy*” and “*liberty to replace my present wife with another one*”, which injects a legal/terms-and-conditions feel to the essay. Another contributing factor to the lack of sentiment effect is having the tendency to treat absurd things as if they are automatically implied. In other words, Syfers writes about certain wife responsibilities as if they should be taken for granted. This is achieved by phrases such as “*Needless to say*”, “*Of course*” and “*Naturally,*” and effectively conveys the level of inconsiderateness that Syfers believes men possess.

In conclusion, although Judy Syfers’ essay contains numerous exaggerations, she nevertheless accomplishes to very satirically convey her point about the convenience that arises from having a wife but the inconvenience that arises from being a wife. Through many rhetorical devices, Syfers manages to effectively convey the rigor involved in upholding the elusive role thus illustrates just how absurd it is that such a concept is so accepted in our society as the ‘norm’.