

NO MORE MR. MOM

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[Assignment: Responding to essays we have read and issues we have discussed in class, write a short essay making a point about families. You may write about your own experience in order to support or oppose something, or you may analyze the ideas of the writers.]

(1) After reading the essay "Why I Want A Wife," I would agree with Judy Syfers that a wife is a person who is expected to do, and does, everything for her husband and family. I have had the experience of living with a self-professed male chauvinist pig for the past eighteen years. That man is my father and his expectations for his wife correspond closely to Syfers' list of a wife's duties.

(2) First of all, he feels that the wife should do all of the household chores that Syfers lists, such as cooking, cleaning, mending, ironing, washing, etc. This could be due to the fact that he is, in my mother's words, "an ineffective fool" when it comes to anything mechanical. He does not know how to use a washer or dryer and once when he tried to use the dishwasher, the house almost floated away. He views these machines as "feminine machines," meant only for use by women since they do "women's jobs." However, he does know how to use the remote control, refrigerator and the microwave, even though they are "women's machines," because they are, somehow, "masculine machines." All men use the remote control so they can watch one football game on NBC (or, in my father's case, a hockey game) and switch to CBS for another game during commercials. Then they go to the refrigerator during halftime and make a huge sandwich and get a soda or possibly reheat some roast beef in the microwave and make a sub, while their wives are slaving away cooking and vacuuming.

(3) Syfers writes "I want a wife who takes care of the children when they are sick. . . . I want a wife who will care for me when I am sick and sympathize with my pain. . . ." (41). My father expects the same. When my mother gets sick, such as her yearly bout with the flu, sheer pandemonium breaks loose because no one knows what to do. However, when dad gets sick, the house runs smoothly, even though he complains every two minutes about his runny nose or headache. In fact, when he was in the hospital for four months a few years ago, the house was a model of efficiency because, in his words, "he wasn't around to mess things up." Also, the fact that my mother is a nurse makes her even more valuable to our family since she can often diagnose what is wrong and save us a trip to the doctor.

(4) Not only can my mother do "women's work" but she can do "men's work" as well. My mother is an interior decorator, carpenter, and architect in addition to being

a nurse, mother, wife, and housekeeper. She designed our deck, did most of the building, and determined where her plants and the grill and table would be located on it. She also redecorated our entire house by wallpapering, re-carpeting and reorganizing all the furniture on her time off from work. And when my parents decided to put cedar shakes on the exterior of our house to replace the old, light green paint, it was my mother thirty feet up in the air on the ladder, hammering away, while my father leaned against the house and smoked his Marlboro Lights.. His excuse always was "The doctor told me twenty-five years ago that I should never climb a ladder because of my bad back." Yet, he could chase criminals or pick up heavy barricades at his job as a police sergeant.

(5) And yes, it is true that there are men who "want a wife who will type my papers for me when I have written them" (41). When my father decided to go back to college to get his degree in public safety, my mother did everything but write his papers for him. In fact, on his graduation day, she was expecting her own diploma along with his. She deserved one after nursing him through mononucleosis and his "terminal case of the stomach flu" while working part-time and taking care of two children, those wifely duties.

(6) However, I must disagree with Syfers' claim that men want their wives to do everything around the house. My father, for example, has actually attempted to cook real food. He even remembered to turn the oven on, which is an accomplishment for him. However, on those rare occasions when he has ventured into the kitchen, he has ended up cooking enough to feed the entire Third World for ten years, instead of a family of four. He has made such creations as seven-pound meatloaves and my mother's favorite, two-pound meatballs in five gallons of spaghetti sauce.

(7) Syfers' essay argues that most men seem to want a wife who takes care of everything for them. My father seems to fit this model when you first look at him. But deep down within him, I think he really does try to help and do things. I really do not believe that he wants my mother to have to do everything around the house. Yet, despite his intentions and those of other men like him, I do think that what Judy Syfers wrote back in 1972 is still true today in 1988, and it will still have some truth to it ten years from now.