

Why i want a wife



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Weddings are often a time of celebration, especially for my family. This past summer, as we prepared for my sister Gini's wedding, the festivities extended to good-natured teasing of the bride- and groom-to-be. For example, WITH knowing smiles, my parents--self-proclaimed experts on marriage courtesy of their own wedding almost thirty years ago--dispensed advice about everything, including how to improve her cooking skills beyond instant rice and grilled cheese. Gini's typical responses included " That was a long time ago," " Things are different now; times have changed," and " Jason can do a lot of things for himself. " It was with particular delight that my family took to rubbing in one of Jason's smoother moves. He waited until a few short weeks before the wedding to inform Gini that his Mom had always done his ironing for him, and now he expected Gini to take over that task--- after all, he couldn't wear wrinkled clothes to his new job, could he? Poking fun at the responsibilities involved in marriage is similar to the attitude presented in Judy Brady's 1971 essay, " Why I Want a Wife. " In " Why I Want a Wife," Brady offers hypothetical criteria for an ideal wife in a satirical commentary on how the work of wives is often taken for granted.

The humor of the essay lies in its structure: on the surface it seems to accept the criteria it puts forth, while the meaning actually operates in the recognition that the narrator is being sarcastic. Using writing as one of her tools for activism, Judy (Syfers) Brady has established herself as a supporter of the women's movement since she began more than thirty years ago. In " Why I Want a Wife," she narrates a setting that mocks the situations and obligations wives find themselves immersed in. The narrator draws on her

own experiences to present examples of how “ good” wives are expected to behave.

The satirical critique emerges as the narrator thinks through her reasons for wanting a wife. The language used has a satirical edge evident in both the author’s emphasis on certain modifiers (indicated by italics) and in the surface structure of the sentences, which belies the underlying criticisms. The audience should recognize the sarcasm from the language and attitude of the narrator. Now let's consider all the elements supporting her satirical point, beginning with the author's long history with this style of writing.

Judy (Syfers) Brady has established herself as a supporter of the women’s movement, and critics point to this essay as typical of her career. " Throughout the article, [Brady] lists characteristics that she would like in a wife...She never comes out and says that the way that women are treated in family situations is wrong. She implies it by sarcastically creating her ideal wife. This technique works because it forces readers to realize it for themselves" writes Diego Vasquez on a webpage titled " A Rhetorical Critique of ‘ Why I Want a Wife. " 2 Vasquez’s analysis includes the supposition that the essay first appeared in pamphlet form, and suggests that Brady was a "...radical feminist writing for other radical feminists. " Vasquez also notes that Brady is reported to have said, " I am married, am a housewife, and have two female children; all three of those factors keep my anger alive," and that "[Brady] tried to persuade other housewives to take a step back and look at how they were being exploited. " Judy Syfers Brady, who was born in 1931 and later studied at the University of Iowa, now lives in San Francisco. In 1972, " Why I Want a Wife" appeared in the first issue of <https://assignbuster.com/why-i-want-a-wife/>

" Ms. " 3 Although at that time, few critics expected the magazine to last 4, almost twenty years later it (re-) featured " Why I Want a Wife. " 5 Another decade later, almost thirty years after the essay first appeared in Ms. , Ms. Brady is still active in women's movements. Her more recent work can be found in " Greenpeace Magazine" 6 and in the " Women's Review of Books. " 7 Through all these works and critical commentary on it, we can see her personal focus on making a strong case for the feminist cause.

Much as her personal life informs her recent article in the " Women's Review of Books," Judy Brady appears to have drawn on her own experiences when she wrote " Why I Want a Wife. " In the essay, the author/narrator drives home the amount and type of work expected of wives both by situating herself as involved in some of it and by listing qualifications. In my reading, the setting of the over-worked housewife will take the form of the narrator both being such a wife and of describing such as wife through mimicry.

To indicate this setting, I will use actions to reinforce the narrator's words. For example, at the beginning, in the clause " while I was ironing," the narrator slips in that she thought through her argument while engaged in domestic labor. When I read that line, I will direct a look at the audience that conveys just how thrilled I am to be pressing clothes. Which is to say, my look will suggest that yet again, while I was doing one of my many thankless jobs, I was thinking about that " poor" guy.

A second way I intend to suggest the setting is to give the audience a withering look while I use my right hand to pick up and put away imaginary things as I read the lines " I want a wife who will keep my house clean. A wife

who will pick up after my children, a wife who will pick up after me. I want a wife who will keep my clothes clean, ironed, mended, replaced when need be, and who will see to it that my personal things are kept in their proper place so that I can find what I need the minute I need it. Later, to show the perfect wife being the perfect hostess, I will offer up imaginary hors d'oeuvres with a graceful sweep of my hand when read the clause " I want a wife who takes care of the needs of my guests so that they feel comfortable, who makes sure that they have an ashtray, that they are passed the hors d'oeuvres, that they are offered a second helping of the food, that their wine glasses are replenished when necessary, that their coffee is served to them as they like it. The gracefulness of the movement will hopefully reinforce the wife-seekers conception of feminine social skills in addition to suggesting and mimicking an actual setting where hors d'oeuvres are being offered. Also, to follow up that line and to show that the coffee is just right, I will bring up my right hand, holding my fingers folded down, except for my thumb and index finger, which will be touching at the imaginary point of perfection. This movement will signify the (anal) expectations about a wife's responsibilities.

In all these ways the author's relationship to the setting supports the point of the essay through a performance of the character's satirical tone. As a character, the narrator has chosen to view these (anal) expectations in a humorous, satirical light. To show this mark of a sharp mind and wit, I will read every line in light mockery. This sweet little wifey has a biting way of deftly masking her meaning in false agreement. The criticisms of the narrator aren't malicious, but they are satirical, and I hope to project that satire in my reading.

I imagine the narrator as someone with self-confidence and poise, dignified even in undignified circumstances, and I plan to portray that by standing upright, neither puffed with arrogance nor slumped with despair. That is how I will stand, too, when I read the brief paragraph on replacing the hypothetical wife (" If, by chance, I find another person more suitable as a wife than the wife I already have, I want the liberty to replace my present wife with another one.

Naturally, 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. ") For that paragraph, I will assume the tone of a martyr, as if the wife-seeker is sacrificing him(/her)self for the well-being of the universe. Also, to show the narrator as parodying the self-centered concerns of a wife-seeker, I will gesture toward myself, occasionally laying my hand below the base of my throat, throughout my reading.

This movement will direct attention to the self who is self-centered and will be a trifle melodramatic, as can be expected of someone who is over-acting to make fun of another person's selfishness. And, to further express the overall satire of the essay, I will try to keep the hint of a smirk (a dubious, critical smirk-not a self-satisfied one) on my face. This smirk should put a sarcastic edge on my reading as the character considers all the benefits of having a wife which she would like to enjoy.

Thinking about and sarcastically expounding on the thankless duties expected of " good" wives is how I envision the development of this piece's " action. " I plan to show this action of " Thinking" in several ways. One way is

to pretend as though I, the narrator, think some of my ideas are super, such as " I want a wife who is a good nurturant attendant to my children, who arranges for their schooling, makes sure that they have an adequate social life with their peers, takes them to the park, the zoo, etc. ").

I will try to keep a fake, bland smile on my face to suggest how nice, easy, and convenient it must be to be able to rely on someone else for such tasks. Another way I will demonstrate the narrator's thought processes will be to act as though some of my ideas have just occurred to me, including the somewhat random " I want a wife who will type my papers for me when I have written them. " I will pause before that line and try to look thoughtful before coming to the revelation that that would be quite handy.

An additional way to indicate the narrator's thinking will be to vocally (not verbally) suggest that some of my ideas are onerous duties I have long since grown tired of doing, such as " When I meet people at school that I like and want to entertain, I want a wife who will have the house clean, will prepare a special meal, serve it to me and my friends, and not interrupt when I talk about things that interest me and my friends. " I will adopt a haughty, superior tone to deliberately imitate how I have been told, in effect, to lower myself.

Showing this process of reflecting on the expectations for wives will help to foster the sense of mockery the narrator employs throughout her satirical litany. This satire and sarcasm is evident in the language used even at the beginning of the piece, and I plan to play it up. For example, when I read the second line (" I am A Wife. "), I will say " I amm"--holding the " M" slightly

longer than necessary for emphasis-before I punctuating " A Wife" with a demure smile to indicate the sublime pleasure I derive from the this, the most fulfilling of feminine roles.

Also on " A Wife," I will lower my voice to further emphasize the depth and fullness of my appreciation for my position. I plan this obviously exaggerated infusion of wife-dom with positive connotations to set up the satirical attitude toward " wife" in the rest of the piece. . Some other ways I plan to use the language of the essay to drive home the narrator's voice is to take advantage of the author's locations of emphasis. In two places, the author has italicized " my" when she writes " my physical needs" and " my sexual needs. In those two places I will particularly stress " my" to reflect the intensity of the selfishness being described, and I will gesture toward myself. The author has also italicized the " good" in " I want a wife who cooks the meals, a wife who is a good cook. " I will vocally stress the " good" and I will make an " Mmmm" face (quick raising of my eyebrows while smiling with my lips closed) to reflect the author's intentional emphasis. These actions should help to make the satirical intention of the speaker clear to the audience.

Making the sarcasm/satire of the narrator clear to the audience will be an essential part of my performance. To introduce the sarcasm in the opening, I will look over the audience's heads, almost at an imaginary star that represents how dreamy my life as a wife is and how happy I am at my good fortune of being married when I read the lines " I belong to that classification of people known as wives. I am A Wife. And, not altogether incidentally, I am a mother. Of course, this dreamy look will be an act on behalf of the narrator, who is making fun of anyone who actually believes that that is the

sum of how she feels. In the next paragraph, I will look at the audience as I brace them for my diatribe. I will be giving them a semi-serious look, with my eyebrows raised in a quizzical way, that matches the narrator's dry tone. From this look, the audience should infer that the narrator actually judges her friend, or people like the friend, much harsher than the words being used would imply.

Further into the essay, there is the paragraph about sexual needs (" I want a wife who is sensitive to my sexual needs, a wife who makes love passionately and eagerly when I feel like it, a wife who makes sure that I am satisfied. And, of course, I want a wife who will not demand sexual attention when I am not in the mood for it. I want a wife who assumes the complete responsibility for birth control, because I do not want more children. I want a wife who will remain sexually faithful to me so that I do not have to clutter up my intellectual life with jealousies.

And I want a wife who understands that my sexual needs may entail more than strict adherence to monogamy. I must, after all, be able to relate to people as fully as possible. ") When I begin that paragraph, I will give the audience a saucy, playful look. Then, I will look eager (chin and eyebrows raised, expectant smile) when I speak of making love eagerly, and I will look stubborn (eyebrows lowered, negative shake of my head) for when I am " not in the mood. " Although I will have maintained appropriate eye-contact throughout the reading, at the end, with the final sentence (" My God, who wouldn't want a wife?), I will pin the audience with a piercing look, looking them straight in the eye, as if to say, " Well, duh! ," when the narrator's true voice finally speaks. These actions should connect the audience directly to

the progression of thought and satire as the speaker leads up to and makes her strong concluding statement. Judy Brady has strong opinions about what shouldn't be automatically presumed as a wife's obligations. Her opinion influenced her essay " Why I Want a Wife", wherein she introduces the reader to an overworked housewife's reasons for wanting a wife of her own.

This housewife/narrator cleverly uses language to comment on the condition of wives by verbally condoning what she actually despises. Because the audience will be able to pick up on her sarcasm, they will understand her unsaid message. Although it might be possible to construe Brady's essay as a bitter diatribe against the injustice of the way some wives are subordinated, I prefer to read this piece as the humorous product of a sharp wit, almost like Jonathan Swift's " A Modest Proposal. Usually, when I read over this essay, a smirk finds its way to my face-the same kind of smirk I feel starting when I think back to the proud phone call my family received after my newlywed sister Gini succeeded in making meatloaf all by herself. Maybe Gini was right in those days before her wedding when she anticipated that things would be different for her and Jason, and that the two of them would share household responsibilities. They seem to be equally experiencing the hazards of cooking. Recently, Gini told us about a kitchen disaster that involved them both.

Ace-chef that she is, Gini failed to notice that some fresh-from-the-freezer sauerkraut was burning one of her (wedding gift) pans. Jason came to the rescue, though, convinced that he could save the day with his superior knowledge that only inorganic chemicals can clean up burned organic materials. And so, he set about " desperately" trying the salvage the pan

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using Gini's nail polish remover. It does my heart good to know that the two of them work so well together in the kitchen. Although now I am torn about what to get them for Christmas: new cookware? Who knows, maybe I'll get them a restaurant gift certificate.