

DESIGN AND MEANING

1. In your desk dictionary, look up each of the words Bierce defines. What is the basic difference between Bierce's definitions and those in the dictionary? In what situations would Bierce's definitions be more useful?
2. Analyze why each Bierce definition is humorous.

WRITING IDEA

Write three *Devil's Dictionary*-style definitions. Some possible choices are "freedom," "intelligence," "perverted," "nice," "foolish," "potential," "overemotional," "fanatic," "honest"—words that have strong subjective meanings. Compare your definitions with the ones in the dictionary.

JUDY SYFERS

Why I Want a Wife

Syfers, a free-lance writer, says that her own experience, plus discouraging advice received from male teachers, inspired her to compose the following essay, which first appeared as the "Backpage" feature in Ms. magazine in December of 1971 and has since been widely reprinted.

VOCABULARY

<i>adherence</i>	undeviating attachment; sticking to
<i>entail</i>	to make necessary
<i>nurturant</i>	nourishing; encouraging growth; taking care of
<i>peer</i>	an equal
<i>replenish</i>	to fill again

I belong to that classification of people known as wives. I am A Wife. And, not altogether incidentally, I am a mother. [1]
Not too long ago a male friend of mine appeared on the scene fresh from a recent divorce. He had one child, who is, of course, with his ex-wife. He is looking for another wife. As I thought about him while I was ironing one evening, it suddenly occurred to me that I, too, would like to have a wife. Why do I want a wife? [2]
I would like to go back to school so that I can become economically independent, support myself, and, if need be, support those dependent upon me. I want a wife who will work and send me to school. And while I am going to school I want a wife to take care of my children. I want a wife to keep track of the children's doctor and dentist appointments. And to keep track of mine, too. I want a wife to make sure my children eat properly and are kept clean. I want a wife who will wash the children's clothes and keep them mended. I want a wife who is a good nurturant attendant to my children, who arranges for their schooling, [3]

makes sure that they have an adequate social life with their peers, takes them to the park, the zoo, etc. I want a wife who takes care of the children when they are sick, a wife 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 and not lose the job. It may mean a small cut in my wife's income from time to time, but I guess I can tolerate that. Needless to say, my wife will arrange and pay for the care of the children while my wife is working.

I want a wife who will take care of my physical needs. 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. I want a wife who cooks the meals, a wife who is a *good* cook. I want a wife who will plan the menus, do the necessary grocery shopping, prepare the meals, serve them pleasantly, and then do the cleaning up while I do my studying. I want a wife who will care for me when I am sick and sympathize with my pain and loss of time from school. I want a wife to go along when our family takes a vacation so that someone can continue to care for me and my children when I need a rest and change of scene.

I want a wife who will not bother me with rambling complaints about a wife's duties. But I want a wife who will listen to me when I feel the need to explain a rather difficult point I have come across in my course of studies. And I want a wife who will type my papers for me when I have written them.

I want a wife who will take care of the details of my social life. When my wife and I are invited out by my friends, I want a wife who will take care of the babysitting arrangements. 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 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. 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. And I want a wife who knows that sometimes I need a night out by myself.

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.

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.

When I am through with school and have a job, I want my wife to quit working and remain at home so that my wife can more fully and completely take care of a wife's duties.

My God, who *wouldn't* want a wife?

DESIGN AND MEANING

1. According to what principles does Syfers organize the details of her definition into paragraphs?
2. Think of at least two reasons for the frequent repetition of the words "I want a wife."
3. What kind of person is the "I" in this essay? What kind of person is the wife?
4. What is the purpose of Syfers's definition?
5. Many people would agree that this definition is exaggerated. Assuming that the writer was aware of this exaggeration, why do you think she did it?

SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE

Compare the main points of "I Want a Wife" and "The Story of an Hour" in Chapter 4.

SHORT WRITING IDEA

Write a paragraph defining a human role: friend, confidant, mistress, critic, teacher, mentor, enemy.

LONGER WRITING IDEA

Go to your local bookstore and review the text of greeting cards designed for wives, husbands, or mothers. Putting together the ideas you find, write an essay defining a wife, a husband, or a mother as viewed by the greeting card industry.