

Tracy Johnson

WR 122

Author's Note: I am 41 years old and married to a wonderful husband. As a mother of three and grandmother of four with only my husband and myself at home, I am now continuing my education. I am learning so much and having fun in the process. I am attending MHCC for my prerequisites and then going into the Nursing program, graduating with a bachelor's degree. Writing has been one of my hardest subjects in school, yet to my amazement and due to some hard work, I am succeeding! This assignment was the hardest to do so far.... Editorial/Analysis. The article I chose to analyze was one that I could relate to with my own family: blending of the new age with the stereotyping of gender roles when it comes to parenting.

In Praise of a Single Dad

“When there is smoke in the kitchen, Mom is cooking,” is the saying in my house. My kids always wanted their dad to do the cooking because he was better than I was and it was always such a treat. I say a treat because when they were little he hardly ever cooked because it was “Mom’s job” while Dad went to work and supported the family. As they grew older, Dad started doing more and more till now he does most of the cooking. Times were changing and still are. Now as adults, my boys share so much more of the responsibility of parenting their own children. Their parenting seems to be defined more by how much they love their family and want to spend time with them than by just a gender role. In his opinion essay, “It Takes a Real Man to Be a Good Mother,” Robert Wilder takes parenting one step further as he uses logical, emotion, and ethical appeal to show his audience that a man can express his love for his children by being both a mother and a father as he wants and needs to be.

In his well-organized piece, using logical appeal, Wilder starts off with a good opening. He gets our attention by telling us how he appreciates his father when he calls him on Father’s Day as well as on Mother’s Day, for taking on the roles of being both “the hand that rocks the cradle and the one that held the hammer” (Wilder 24). Wilder’s father, Ben, was involved with his children more than most fathers were in his day and age. He writes that his father did more tasks at home than most other men (before his mom died) and cooking is the example he gives, stating, “My father had always shouldered a lot of the responsibility around our house” (24). Then, when his wife died, Ben was forced to take on the role of being a mother as well as a father to Wilder and his three brothers. As he continues he moves into describing the motherly

role that his dad took after his mother's death. He talks of how his father made the effort to do even the little things that a mother would do. Ben took the time to get to know the boys' friends and even went as far as making "the 'Dear Abby' refuge that my mom would have provided" (24). He got involved with the boys' everyday school life that a mother would usually do, such as being "Cast Mom" for his son's play (24). If necessary, he "would have happily donned an apron and oversize oven mitts" (24). He even paid attention to the little details, for example remembering his daughter-in-laws by sending cards and money on special occasions (birthdays, Mother's Day and Valentine's Day, and condolences on their wedding anniversaries), all of which are typical things for a mother to do... not a father. Then Wilder wraps up his essay with what is happening now in his life with his own children, stating that he also wants to be like his father.

Single dads will be the most interested audience as Wilder appeals to their love for their children, letting them know that they can do a good job of raising their children alone. That saying, "If others can do it, so can I," will mean a lot to the readers as they see that a man was successful in nurturing his children and it was a job well done. Now that Wilder has given them a positive example, it will be up to them to follow in their father's footsteps as they raise their own children. Wilder wants to encourage the readers, letting them know that they can still be manly men even if they take an active part in their children's lives. He also wants the audience to know that their role as a parent should be defined by their love for their children and not what the norm says it should be, regulated by gender roles. Wilder's audience of mothers who have to work and let the fathers stay home with their children can be encouraged knowing that their husbands are more than capable of taking on the role of nurturing as needed. The audience of the older generation, male or female, may not be as readily able to take on the new concept of men being able to do the job well, or accept that they are still 'men' even if they allow themselves to cross the line of what they have always known their gender role to be. More and more of the generations, young and old, are becoming more involved with their own children, such as changing diapers, nightly bottle feeding, and more. I feel that readers of all ages, whether they have children or not, will be encouraged after reading this essay in the fact that men can be more involved with the raising of our children.

Wilder draws the reader in with strong emotional appeals as he starts off with a sentiment of appreciation to his own father: "Like any son worth his salt, I have a note on my calendar in June to call my dad on Father's Day, but unlike other men, I also have that same reminder scrawled on Mother's Day the month before" (24). This tugs at the heart of all fathers and mothers wishing that their children would appreciate them as much as he does his father. He moves right into mentioning the fact that his mother died of cancer, and everyone who loves a sad story will surely continue reading. He talks of the love that his father had for his children and how, "He was always happy to play any role we needed to make our lives seem less damaged" (24). Wilder did a good job of keeping the 'positive' attitude of his father throughout the whole story although you know that some of the times had to have been tough. As Wilder writes, you can sense that he worships his father, something that all men want from their kids -- to be their hero. Wilder admires his father and it shows in the way he portrays him.

Wilder has a good ethical appeal as he himself is a father. He is also the son of a man who set a good example for other men on how to fill the role of both a father and a mother. We perceive the writer as being well brought up even though he did not have a mother. He is following in his father's footsteps and hopes that one day he will be immortalized in the same way his father was, as a good mom.

All in all, Wilder does a good job of giving us an example of a man who expressed his love for his children by filling roles of both a mother and father. He showed that rigid gender stereotypes are not necessarily what you have to follow, but what you yourself define as good parenting in order to raise your children in a loving and nurturing way. The new age has come, and with it, new parenting styles and gender roles that don't have a definite line. Men are still fighting the stereo-typing of mothering, but are prevailing. I see this in my own family as my youngest son, Michael, and his wife, Shannon, raise their new daughter, Payten. Michael shares nightly feedings and changes diapers. He even bathes Payten in a most precious way showing the tenderness of his own heart; he keeps his little girl covered with a warm, wet towel, so she won't get cold as she lies in the baby tub. Just like Wilder is carrying on the example set by his father, so is Michael. They are not the tip of the iceberg, but the melting of it; blending of the new age with the stereo-typing of gender roles.

Work Cited

Wilder, Robert. "It Takes a Real Man To Be a Good Mother." Newsweek 15 May 2006: 24.

Instructor's Note: The first major writing assignment Tracy Johnson faced in WR 122 was one students may find difficult and dry. She needed to analyze an opinion piece, determining how effectively the writer persuaded his audience by using logical, emotional and ethical appeals. Tracy selected a piece that appealed to her and brought her own voice and experience into the introduction and conclusion, providing a charming frame for the more serious analysis.

--*Beth Sammons*