

Student name

Professor name

English 110

Date

Please note: All paragraphs directly prove the thesis (underlined). How? Each paragraph uses the PIE paragraph approach: each starts with the **Point**, an arguable topic sentence—in **bold**—that directly proves the thesis and states the one point that will be addressed in that paragraph; then **Information** from the text is used in the form of paraphrases and smoothly integrated quotes; then this is followed with **Explanation** telling “so what?” is the importance/significance?

Women, Are You Living for Yourself or for a Man?

A woman in her 40s who never marries or has children is often met with concern, suspicion or pity and there is even a pejorative word for her, “spinster.” In contrast, a man in his 40s who never marries or has children is often viewed positively as a bachelor or a playboy or simply as a free man. This double standard forces many women to live for others first and themselves second, something a man is never asked to do. This was especially true in the early 1900s when women were discouraged from having careers outside of the home and were encouraged to have their primary focus in life be caring for their husband, children and home. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman the author of the short story “A New England Nun,” presented women from this era with a story of a woman who rebels against the usual adherence to duty, submission, and self-sacrifice. Through the story of her main character Louisa, Freeman offers an alternative to the role American society had expected women to play. Freeman proves there are advantages to be had for women who break the bonds of socially created gender roles by declining to get married and have children, and instead create a life entirely their own, one in which they are not tied down by the needs of others and advantageously avoid the negative influence brought on by the judgements and expectations of a man.

Although Louisa’s engagement promised security and stability, it is immediately clear that the return of Louisa’s long-awaited fiancé threatens to destabilize the ordered and serene life she had created for herself. Because her fiancé Joe Dagget had to work overseas for 14 years, Louisa had a taste of something not many women of her time experienced, socially approved independence. During this time, Louisa became quite content with her solitary life. Louisa developed a passion for caring for her

home and did chores because it pleased her, which is a far cry from the feelings most women in that era experienced in caring for a house, husband and children. Upon her fiancé's return, the presence of masculinity upsets the ideal environment Louisa had established in her life and Freeman illustrates this when the couple's first reunion ends in chaos. As Joe is leaving Louisa's house, he stumbles over a rug which knocks over her basket of sewing supplies, and as the yarn spools helplessly unravel across the floor Louisa says stiffly to Joe, "Never mind, I'll pick them up after you're gone" (65). As her yarn unravels, Louisa gets a preview of what Joe's presence will do to her life. Louisa's meticulous care for her home and her appreciation for cleanliness and order shows that having a place of her own and maintaining her preferred surroundings gave her a sense of pride and placed power and control over her life in her own hands.

Another way marriage threatens Louisa is that it would make her dependent. A stipulation for marriage during the early 20th century that would have had a devastating impact on Louisa's life was that all her treasured possessions would legally become her husband's property. Louisa discovered many of her passions whilst living independently. Among those were her china set that she used daily, her photo albums, her books, her sewing supplies that she grew to call good friends, her dog Caesar, and most of all her home. In addition to the transfer of possessions following matrimony, women also no longer had control over what they did with their time. In Louisa's case, she would be forced to become a servant of both her new husband, his mother, and their future children. Her time would no longer be her own as she would become the cook, laundress, seamstress, and caretaker for others. The independence that Louisa cherished would be replaced with servitude, duty, and dependence on a man she barely knew.

The predominate message for women, yet not for men, is that their lives will be incomplete, empty, and without purpose if they do not marry and have children, trapping some women in miserable lives. Without socially accepted alternatives, some women get married and have children who would be better off doing neither. Shouldn't a person want to take on the challenging task of caring for others rather than producing more unhappy marriages and checked out parents who feel distanced from and

resentful of their children? The pressures, however, on women to marry and have children back then persist today, and this needs to change. The ending that Freeman created in her story proposes that some women should choose to live for themselves. After Louisa breaks off her engagement, she sees the endless possibilities for her future, “She gazed ahead, through a long reach of future days strung together like pearls on a rosary, every one like the others, and all smooth and flawless and innocent, and her heart went up in thankfulness” (72). At this point, Louisa is no longer marrying Joe, but she does not perceive life without love or intimacy as any terrible loss. Instead, she sees a life full of freedom and potential.

We mustn't continue to limit the potential of women by making them conform to limited gender roles. An article written by the UN Women's Secretary General for International Women's Day 2017 claims that, “Around the world, tradition, cultural values and religion are being misused to curtail women's rights, to entrench sexism and defend misogynistic practices.” Even though women in the 21st century have deviated from being dependent on the financial stability provided by a man, conventional views continue to limit their growth by assigning them to feminine type jobs and denying them leadership positions. In addition to inequality in the workplace, women are often juggling both work-life and domestic-life. Louisa's story stresses the importance of being a strong woman in a restrictive society and emphasizes the precious rewards that are yours to possess when you alter your path based on your own decisions. The worth of a woman should not be judged by marriage and children because the worth of man certainly is not.

Works Cited

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