Patricia Simon writes *Women in Frames* with a distinct feminist point of view. Simon’s central argument is the portraits painted of women in the renaissance directly reflect the culture of Florence during this period of time. In particular, the role and expectations of a women. Simon uses aspects of portraits to expose the cultural and social norms that women took part in.

Most importantly, Simon examines the meaning of the profile portrait in conjunction with the role of women in society during the renaissance. Simon makes it clear that women were to be the object of male gaze. Yet, are always portrayed as chaste and virtuous wearing the finest clothes and jewels. These two ideas can be seen as contrasting in comparison with today’s society. The profile viewpoint isolates the woman from the viewer, her eyes are always averted, and as a result, the viewer cannot interact with the portrait or vice versa. Simon states that is as a result of the idea of chaste, virginal women, only “loose” women looked at men directly.

Simon also notes the lavish clothing and jewelry that were commonly on display in portraits. This is a representation of another aspect of renaissance culture: the dowry. A father has a portrait painted of his daughter depicted as virginal, obedient, and chaste while wearing jewels and elaborate dresses. This then is passed from one man’s domain to another when she is married. The father is simply reinforcing the virtues and honorable qualities, a kind of advertisement. Simon points out that women were seen more as an object than a person, in renaissance life and portraits. In portraits, the personification is removed from the woman. She is depicted as an ideal woman.
The author has a distinct point of view. Simon writes with a feminist tone. Simon’s argument makes sense, as well as her point of view in dealing with the specific topic of women in portraiture. However, the ideas presented in this article are shocking coming from a modern point of view. Simon has the right idea, but was the social and cultural norms were as extreme as she presents them to the reader? Simon only examines portraits of wealthy women coming from nobility. Nobility are held to specific standards because of being in eye of public. Simon does not acknowledge any working class women. Perhaps this was because families of a lower class than nobility did not make portraiture a priority. What does this say about the role of women and cultural expectations in the working classes?

Word Count: 422