

## READING COMPREHENSION

Read the text below and answer the questions that follow.

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### Women's Low Status and Power

1 Worldwide, females are generally lower in status and power, relative to males. This may be called gender stratification, although it is sometimes referred to as gender inequality, sexism, patriarchy, and female disadvantage (Chafetz, 1990).

2 Many feminists view men's greater economic power and, correspondingly, women's economic dependence on men, to be at the heart of women's lower status and power. Once societies based on money evolved, men's labor appeared to have greater value because it was done for money or the exchange of goods. The important economic contributions that women make collecting fuel, taking care of animals, growing vegetables, doing laundry, preparing food, taking care of children, and so on are frequently forgotten or devalued as "natural". Research, both in the United States and elsewhere, consistently finds that women's power is related to their ability to make money. However, women's ability to make money has been constrained by their household responsibilities and by the designation of higher paying jobs as for men.

3 Worldwide, men control economies and resources, own more property, and occupy more positions of power in business and banking. This is true in virtually every country, including industrialized nations such as the United States. Men make more money than women, and even when they work the same jobs as women, **this** tends to be true. Women's labor is also undervalued relative to men's. On average, women have less leisure time than men do and they do more of the world's work than men. But because their labor is more likely to be unpaid or underpaid, women typically have less economic power. For example, employed women's earnings range between 50 and 95 percent of what men earn; on average they earn two-thirds of what men earn (International Labour Organization, 2003; United Nations, 1999).

4 Women's lack of economic power is related to their strong presence among the ranks of the poor. Poverty is said to have a "woman's face" because the majority of the 1.5 billion people living on one dollar a day or less are women (United Nations, 2000). The gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has widened in the past decade, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the feminization of poverty.

5 Politics is another arena in which women's low power and status are apparent. In the twentieth century, activists worked to gain women the rights to vote (called women's suffrage). In most countries, voting rights have only been awarded to women in the last thirty years. Even in the United States, it was not until 1920 that women were granted the right to vote. By the year 2003, all countries that allow males to vote have granted women that same right, except for Kuwait.

6 Women's presence in formal politics is important because male lawmakers are less likely to make laws that serve women and children's interests. Without the activism of women, most male lawmakers are not inclined to think about rape, domestic violence, women's health issues, and childcare. A current focus of activism is increasing women's political power by increasing the number of female lawmakers. For example, in 2003, in separate demonstrations, women's activists in India, Indonesia, and Jordan protested the failure of political parties to support woman candidates. They demanded that their governments require that 30 percent of representatives be female, a figure set by the United Nations as a goal for all countries by the year 2005.

7 Not only is women's work typically unpaid or underpaid, it is undervalued relative to men's work. Part of being the underclass is that your group is less valued than the upper class, despite your group's contribution to the economy or culture. Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist and one of the first scholars to pay serious attention to the activities of women, noted, "Whatever the arrangements in regard to descent or ownership of property, and even if these formal outward arrangements are reflected in the temperamental relations between the sexes, the prestige values always attach to the activities of men" (1935, p. 305). Likewise, anthropologist Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo (1974) points out that what is striking is that male activities, as opposed to female activities, are always

recognized as predominantly important, and cultures bestow authority and value on the activities of men. She notes, for example, that in parts of New Guinea where women grow sweet potatoes and men grow yams, yams are the prestige food distributed at feasts.

8 Job prestige is one example of women's lower status. According to the UN, women worldwide are almost always in less prestigious and lower-paid jobs than men. As the level, prestige, and pay of a job increase, **so does** the number of men in those job categories (Burn, 1996). This is true even in the United States, the majority of prestigious and professional jobs are held by men: 71 percent of computer scientists, 74 percent of doctors, 64 percent of college and university professors, 77 percent of architects, and 90 percent of engineers (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000).

9 Not only are male activities valued over female ones, but in most countries, females value male children over female children, in what is known as son preference. All over the world, people greet the birth of boys and girls differently (Mosse, 1993). For example, among the Turkana people of northern Kenya, great feasting accompanies the birth of a boy, but there is no feasting if the baby is a girl. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2003), the areas most affected by son preference are South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan), the Middle East (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey) and parts of Africa (Cameroon, Liberia, Madagascar, Senegal). Although son preference is not as obvious in the West, great value is still placed upon producing a male heir to carry on the family name. Girls are expected to grow up, marry, take their husband's name, and have babies. In many families, their only achievement is expected to be to have children, who, because they have their husband's name, are not credited as achievements to her family but rather to his. Conversely, a son's achievements – financial success, property ownership, education, and so on – are credited to his family of origin. In the United States, most Americans express the wish that their first child be a boy and that if they have more than two children, that there be more boys than girls (Atwood, 2001).

10 In some countries, son preference means that girls are disadvantaged from birth, receiving less care and fewer resources than sons do. Every year, about 250,000 girls die because they experience disadvantage relative to boys (United Nations, 1998). Female children aged 1 to 4 are more likely to die than male children in all countries in south central Asia (India, Bangladesh, and Nepal) and in nearly three-quarters of the countries in northern Africa and western Asia even though males are genetically more susceptible to most causes of infant death (UN, 1998). In Latin America, there is evidence of abnormal sex ratios in infant mortality figures in Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay. Discrimination in the feeding and care of female infants and/or higher rates of morbidity and malnutrition have been reported in most of the countries already listed and also in Bolivia, Columbia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Saudi Arabia (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2003). The UN attributes these differences to the better nutrition, health care, and support that male children receive in some countries. Femicide (female infanticide) is also a contributing factor in some cases. In extreme cases, son preference may even lead to discrimination prior to birth in the form of sex-selective abortion. In mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, and India, some parents use amniocentesis and sonography (ultrasound) to determine fetal sex so that female fetuses can be aborted.

11 Femicide has significantly affected the sex ratio of the population in some parts of the world. According to the United Nations Population Fund (2003), worldwide it is estimated that more than 100 million girls are "missing" as the result of sex-selective abortion, infanticide, and neglect. India now has one of the most distorted sex ratios in the world; there are 927 females for every 1000 males when globally the average is 1060 females for every 1000 males. In two Indian states, northern Haryana and Punjab, it is even lower – 793 girls for every 1000 boys. The Women's Centre, a leading Bombay feminist group, was instrumental in passing legislation to ban tests for the use of sex determination in 1988 in the Indian state of Maharashtra and the federal government requested that doctors not perform sex-selective procedures. The Women's Centre documented the growth of bargain clinics offering the service for low prices to the middle class and the poor. These clinics played on the fear of dowry, property or money brought by a bride to her husband on their marriage, with such slogans as "Better 500 rupees now than 500,000 later" (Bumiller, 1990). Despite legislation and government directives, son preference continues in India and women's activists continue their work to stop it.

12 According to the UN, the practice of son preference emerged with the shift from subsistence agriculture, which was primarily controlled by women, to settled agriculture, which is primarily controlled by men (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2003). In the patrilineal landowning communities prevalent in the Asian region, the economic obligations of sons towards parents are greater. Sons are the source of family income and have to provide for parents in their old age. Sons bring prestige to the family. They are the interpreters of religious teachings and the performers of rituals, especially following the death of their parents. They are the holders of political power positions and high status jobs. They are the soldiers that protect the community. In contrast, daughters are expected to marry, leave the family, and have children. Consequently, they do not have the potential to enhance the family's economic or social position the way that sons do. Daughters in some cultures are viewed as wasted investments. For instance, an Indian proverb says, "Raising a daughter is like watering a shady tree in someone else's courtyard." Similarly, the title used to describe the female Muslim child translated to "another's wealth". This refers to the fact that any investment made in a girl is enjoyed only by her husband's family when she moves in with them upon marriage. Because she is in a sense a wasted investment, she will receive less attention and fewer resources than her brother (Goodwin, 1994).

13 In India, and other countries where it is expected that parents of daughters will pay a dowry, son preference is aggravated. Dowry inflation is a problem in many countries, particularly Greece, India, and Pakistan. It costs more and more to marry off one's daughter as globalization increases consumerism of cultures and families with sons look at dowries as a way to increase family wealth and acquire material things. **This** makes daughters expensive, especially for those who are poor. In contrast, when a son marries, the family accrues wealth of the new daughter-in-law's dowry.

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Taken from:

Burn, S. M. (2005). *Women across cultures: A global perspective*. New York: McGraw Hill.

**A. Answer the following comprehension questions.**

1. How did women's status start to worsen in the history?

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2. Why is poverty "female"?

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3. What is the blind spot of man who are in lawmaking?

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4. What does the slogan of the clinics in India mean by "Better 500 rupees now than 500,000 later" in paragraph 11?

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5. "In sociology and psychology, **internalized oppression** is the manner in which an oppressed group comes to use the methods of the oppressor against itself. For example, sometimes members of downgraded or minority groups hold an oppressive view toward their own group, or start to believe in negative labels of themselves."

Which idea in the text exemplifies the above definition of internalized oppression?

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**B. Guessing Vocabulary**

1- Find a word or an expression in paragraph 7 which means "*attracting attention or notice through unusual or noticeable qualities*":

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2- Find a word or an expression in paragraph 10 which means "*vulnerable and inclined*":

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3- Find a word or an expression in paragraph 12 which means "*common/generally or widely accepted*":

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**C. Reference Words**

1- (Par. 3) "this" refers to:

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2. (Par. 8) "so does" refers to:

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3. (Par. 13) "this" refers to:

## ANSWER KEY

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### A. Answer the following comprehension questions.

1. **Once societies based on money evolved, men's labor appeared to have greater value because it was done for money or exchange of goods.** The important economic contributions that **women** make collecting fuel, taking care of animals, growing vegetables, doing laundry, preparing food, taking care of children, and so on are frequently **forgotten or devalued as "natural"**.
2. Because the majority of the 1.5 billion people living on one dollar a day or less are women/ Because the gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has widened in the past decade, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the feminization of poverty.
3. (Not making laws that serve) **women and children's interests/** (Most male lawmakers are not inclined to think about) **rape, domestic violence, women's health issues, and childcare.**
4. It means that if the parents do not abort the baby girl by paying 500 rupees, they will have to pay much more money as dowry in the future when the girl gets married.
5. Females value male children over female children, in what is known as son preference.

### B. Guessing Vocabulary

1. Find a word or an expression in paragraph 7 which means "attracting attention or notice through unusual or noticeable qualities": **Striking**
2. Find a word or an expression in paragraph 10 which means "*vulnerable and inclined*":  
**Susceptible**
3. Find a word or an expression in paragraph 12 which means "*common/generally or widely accepted*":  
**Prevalent**

### C. Reference Words

1- (Par. 3) "this" refers to:

**That men make more money than women**

2- (Par. 8) "so does" refers to:

**Increase**

3- (Par. 13) "this" refers to:

**(The fact) that globalization increases consumerism of cultures and families with sons look at dowries as a way to increase family wealth and acquire material things**