

■ Skill Development: Concentration

When you have finished the assignment, evaluate your reading and study time.

How long did you take to read the selection? _____ minutes

How long did you take to answer the questions? _____ minutes

Did you work steadily or were you interrupted? _____

Did setting a time goal help you keep your mind on your work? _____

If you had been given the concentration pop quiz while reading this selection, would your score have been high _____, medium _____, or low _____?

Selection 2

SOCIOLOGY



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Skill Development: Concentration

Directions: Before reading the second selection, take a few moments to analyze your potential for concentration, preview the selection, and answer the following questions.

1. *Where are you? _____ What time is it? _____*

Is this study time and place written on your weekly time schedule? What, if any, are your external distractions?

2. *Is anything special on your mind at the moment? Are you ready to "attack" the material? What, if any, are your internal distractions?*

3. *Do you have any interest in reading the next selection? It is called "The American Man" and comes from a sociology textbook. Do you think the role of the American man is changing? Looking over the pages, you might notice words and phrases like masculine mystique, locker-room culture, costs and benefits of the male role, competitive syndrome, and machismo. Do these phrases give you ideas you may want to explore? What ideas in particular are of interest to you?*

4. *Set approximate time goals for yourself.
How long do you think you will take to read this section?
_____ minutes*

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How long do you think you will take to answer the questions?

_____ minutes

Learning Strategy

Be able to describe the traditional male role and its demands in American society. How and why is that role changing? What is your own opinion of the changes?

Word Knowledge

Review the ten vocabulary items that follow the selection. Look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary.

THE TRADITIONAL MALE ROLE

Donald Light and Suzanne Keller, from *Sociology*

The Legacy of the Traditional Male Role

In American society, economic rewards, social status, and power have traditionally been greater for the male than for the female role. Institutional arrangements have given social life a decidedly male cast. Male interests and needs have been served, often to the detriment of women. And male values and assumptions have provided the guiding principles that have governed the relationships between the sexes.

Components of the Traditional Male Role The traditional male role has been as deeply tied to the family as has the female role, although the connections are not always so obvious. First and foremost, a man has been expected to be a good provider for his wife and children. Financial independence has been a prerequisite for manhood in our society; respect has gone to men who were reliable and hard-working. Americans did not think it odd for a man to sacrifice his leisure hours and even his health to a career. His accomplishments and property have been indications of his worth. Initiative, ambition, and strength have been all part of the "masculine mystique." We have seen a man as mature if he accepts obligations for dependents, takes the necessary risks, makes decisions, and provides security and protection for those in his care.

It is no wonder, then, that so many American fathers and mothers encouraged their sons to excel in sports (sometimes ignoring the fact that a boy was not interested in or built for athletics). Sports were not an end in themselves: very few boys went on to become professional athletes, and few fathers expected them to. But team sports teach a boy to be assertive and competitive—which were thought to be essential masculine qualities. These qualities are also, as it turns out, necessary for corporate success at

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the managerial level. Football, baseball, and basketball were believed to help boys develop personal skills important to a later career: how to compete to win, how to cooperate with those you would not choose as friends to get a job done, how to win and how to lose, how to take risks, how to take criticism, and how to bend the rules (Hennig and Jardim, 1977). These sports taught boys to appreciate the need for teamwork, goals, plans, and leaders. They provided the framework and ground rules for corporate life. And they are rules and skills that women, who tend to participate (if they do at all) in one-on-one or individual sports such as tennis, swimming, or skating, have had less opportunity to learn.

Weakness, doubt, and compromise have been signs of failure for men, who were taught from childhood to conceal or deny such feelings. The taboo on expressing emotions and self-doubt explains the American stereotype of the strong, silent type that historically has been popularized in Western movies. The 100 percent American he-man was happiest when he was with his buddies or alone with his horse. Although courteous to women, he remained detached from them. Impervious to pain as well as to feelings, he was rugged and resourceful and enjoyed going up against overwhelming odds.

Heterosexual prowess has also been essential to American manhood. Stereotypes depict men as possessing a nearly unlimited appetite for sexual adventure and enjoying sex for its own sake (unlike women, who were thought to require at least some romantic feelings). Far more stigma has been attached to effeminate behavior in boys than to masculine behavior in girls, who are permitted to play the role of tomboy. A woman who shows little interest in heterosexual relationships might be labeled prissy or cold; a man has been assumed to be homosexual.

Finally, American men have been accustomed to being in control. When placed in a position subordinate to a female they have often felt uncomfortable. Sharon Mayes (1979) observed the behavior of males in female-led groups at a series of conferences in a university setting. She reported that the males regularly expressed a fear of losing control. Some described women as "plotting against them." They felt threatened when women were no longer subordinate.

Benefits of the Traditional Male Role Like the female role, the male role has had mixed effects. American men have had access to the pinnacles of institutional power; men (white middle-class men, that is) have controlled the nation's government, churches, corporations, professions, universities—even theaters and art galleries. Men have been free to exercise legal and social powers denied to women and children. With the notable exceptions of the draft registration law and some alimony statutes, neither law nor custom has discriminated against or restricted men solely on the basis of their sex. Men have had more opportunities than women to develop their talents and to acquire special skills and knowledge useful for coping with the world. (If a family has only enough income to send one

child to college, in all likelihood it will send the son.) Many more men than women have entered the most prestigious professions.

In general, men earn more than women performing similar kinds of work and are more likely to be promoted to powerful and lucrative executive positions (where they enjoy the ministrations of secretaries, who are nearly always women). The fact that social values have encouraged men to display initiative and independence from an early age must also be counted among the benefits of the male role. Finally, the pervasive myth of male supremacy has buoyed the male ego.

However, even though these potentialities are built into the male role, they have not been equally available to all men. Opportunities for training, economic self-support, and power are clearly more accessible to men at the top of the social pyramid than to those at the bottom. To generalize from the circumstances of the privileged few distorts the actual situation of most men, who are less in control of their lives and fates.

Costs of the Traditional Male Role The responsibilities attached to the male role in America can be a source of great stress and anxiety as well as a source of satisfaction and pride. Being in a position to make decisions is fine for people who are confident of what they are doing, but it seems less of a privilege to those who are uncertain of themselves. Complicating matters is the fact that men are supposed to maintain the impression of strength and courage at all times. Fear of inadequacy and failure is the dark side of the pressure on men to achieve. What is more, the emphasis men place on strength, toughness, initiative, and superiority can have unintended consequences, including the requirement to test and prove these attributes by engaging in violent exchanges with other men.

Equally costly is the competitive syndrome that asks men to consider all other men as either inferiors or rivals and requires substantial mobilization of psychic aggression. Although men have enshrined the idea of male solidarity, male friendships are not necessarily easy relationships:

When stripped of male sex role "props," such as baseball scores, automobiles, and masculine sex boasting and fantasy, many men find great difficulty in relating to other men. A man in a group said, "You know, I have a pretty good idea of what I can get in a relationship with a woman; but I just don't know what I could get from a man. I just don't know." (J. Pleck, 1972:8-9)

By defining the expression of warmth, tenderness, and sensitivity as weakness, men limit their relationships with their own children and with women. Further, the separation between work and domestic roles denies many fathers the satisfactions associated with rearing children. Not surprisingly, far too many men find themselves emotionally isolated and alienated from their sons and daughters. And when men define women as sex objects, they simultaneously represent themselves as sex machines, an outlook that can impair sexual functioning and contribute to impotence.

In very concrete terms, men suffer more heart attacks, and their life expectancy is eight years less than that of women. Men also have more

psychosomatic diseases, such as ulcers, spastic colon, asthma, and migraine. More males than females suffer from personality disorders marked by aggressive and antisocial behavior (Rosenfield, 1980). The male suicide rate is triple the female rate, and men are fourteen times as likely to become
 120 alcoholics. Moreover, men commit 95 percent of all violent crimes and eight times as many murders as women do.

Role Conflicts Finally, as with the female role, a number of conflicts are built into the male role. Men are supposed to be single-minded in the pursuit of success but not neglectful of their families; they should be
 125 simultaneously interested and disinterested in women; and they must be strong, self-reliant, and unemotional, yet require the sympathetic care of a nurturant wife.

As a result, many men find that masculinity is a rather vulnerable and precarious status. The male role is demanding and difficult, and the
 130 "failure" rate is high. In American society, as in other industrial societies, few men can hope to achieve the wealth, power, and positions of leadership that social ideals prescribe. *Machismo* may be a last resort for men who accept the traditional masculine role but cannot fill it. Overtly, machismo consists of a show of strength and sexual prowess as well as the
 135 denigration, exploitation, and often brutalization of women. Covertly, this display masks fears and doubts about self-worth. In an effort to convince other men, women, and above all himself that he is truly all-male, a man uses machismo as a front for insecurity, self-doubt, and worldly failure (Aramoni, 1972).

140 Given the contradictions inherent in the traditional male role, many men welcome the changes in the female role as a liberation from the burdens of traditional masculinity. These men seek a new male ideal, less geared toward competition and dominance. Men will be better off, they argue, if they can learn to acknowledge their human vulnerability and limitations
 145 and escape the posturing and pretense of the male role. Others see change as a dethronement from a previously privileged status. The more they feel they have to lose, the more likely men—and women—are to resist change. Consequently, anger, conflict, and misunderstandings have often accompanied the social change that has involved traditional sex roles.

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