**Gender Equality – GP Comprehension Discussion**

**[Notions of Gender]**

**Passage 1:** Keith Long challenges the notion of gender that we have come to accept.

We are surrounded by gender lore from the time we were very young. It is ever-present in conversation, humour, and conflict, and it is used to explain everything from driving styles to food preferences. Gender is embedded so extensively in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, and that it appears to us to be completely natural. The world swarms with ideas about gender; these ideas are so commonplace that we take it for granted that that they are true, accepting common adage as scientific fact. Rarely do we – but we should – look beyond what appears to be common sense to find not simply what truth might be behind it, but how it came to be common sense.

It is frequently argued that biological differences between males and females determine gender by causing enduring differences in capabilities and dispositions. Higher levels of testosterone, for example, are said to lead men to be more aggressive than women; and left-brain dominance is said to lead men to be more rational while their relative lack of brain lateralisation should lead women to be more emotional. As an example, consider the obvious biological fact that women bear and nurse children and men do not. Couple this with the unremarkable view that women are also more gentle and nurturing than men, and, hey presto, we end up with a “biological recipe” for women to be the primary caretakers of children.

Many people accept that this means women are therefore much better suited than men to take care of children once they are born, and that the family might be harmed if mothers work outside the home or if fathers are the primary caretakers. As long as this belief exists, women may not want to work outside the home or, if they choose to do so, they face opposition from employers, family and friends. Conversely, men may not even think about wanting to stay at home and may themselves face misgivings from colleagues, relatives and peers if they want to do so. A belief in a strong biological basis for differences between women and men implies, then, that there is little we can or should do to change these differences. It implies that “anatomy is destiny,” and destiny is, of course, by definition inevitable.

Be that as it may, in the famous words of Simone de Beauvoir, “Women are not born, they are made.” The same is true of men. From infancy, male and female children are interpreted differently, and interacted with differently. Experimental evidence suggests that adults’ perceptions of babies are affected by their beliefs about the babies’ sex. It was found that adults watching a film of a crying infant were more likely to hear the cry as expressing frustration if they believed the infant was a boy, and as plaintive or expressing insecurity if they believed the infant was a girl. In a similar experiment, adults judged a 24-hour-old baby as bigger if they believed it to be a boy, and finer-featured if they believed it to be a girl. Such perceptions then enter into the way people interact with infants and small children. People handle infants more gently when they believe them to be female, more playfully when they believe them to be male.

Educational institutions also reproduce the gender norms in myriad ways. As prime sites for socialisation, schools are key institutions for the construction of gender. Elementary schools not long ago were known for keeping girls and boys separate – lining them up separately to move about the school, pitting them against each other in competitions, separating them for physical education. Looking at how schools tackle the more formal aspects of education it is clear that here too sexism is prevalent. One academic research shows that the majority of schools fail to encourage subject choices in a gender neutral way. Boys are less likely to take stereotypically girls’ subjects such as Psychology or English, whereas girls are opting not to take Physics or Economics, stereotypically identified as “for boys”.

All this has great consequences for the roles adopted by the different genders when children become adults. Women are generally expected to be in charge for caring for people’s everyday needs – clothing, feeding, cleaning, caring for them. Until recently, this expectation has kept many women out of the public workplace, and while nowadays most women in the west do work outside of the home, many of their occupations are extensions of their domestic roles. Traditional women’s jobs are in the service sector, and often involve nurturing, service, and support roles: teachers of small children, nurses, secretaries, flight attendants.

A woman’s time is traditionally controlled by the continual needs of other people. The tasks that men traditionally do in the middle-class domestic sphere, on the other hand, are cyclical. Taking out the trash, tending the yard, doing repairs – these are things that can be scheduled in advance, to fit around the rest of one’s activities. But not only do these dichotomies go unnoticed, they are imbibed as the way things should be. They are seen as instinctive rather than learned, effortless, commonplace, and therefore, based on common sense. But this sense of things has to be periodically challenged.

**Passage 2:** Stephanie Low examines the implications of changing gender norms.

Unlike the generations before them, a majority of millennials surveyed argued that gender should not define people the way it has historically, and society and individuals should not feel pressured to conform to traditional gender roles or behaviours. One reason for this change in norms is financial necessity. Traditionally, all women were expected to stay at home and look after the children and the house. She would have been given a housekeeping allowance by her husband to pay for food and clothes, and perhaps a little extra for herself. But with the increasingly high cost of living, such as an arrangement no longer sufficed. Over time, and since women started joining the workforce, they have climbed the ladder of success, studying and training in well-paid roles, such as doctors and lawyers, with high responsibilities. In turn, this has led to greater visibility of women at the workplace. Thus, from the abyss that sprang the primeval notion of gender differentiation emerges the manifesto of equal opportunities and expectations.

This displacement in gender norms and the changes in societal expectations have brought about long-overdue tackling of issues of inequality and unfair treatment, especially for women. Powerful men are being held accountable in cases of sexual harassment and assault. Most of them are swiftly losing their social standing and jobs, and facing harsh public backlash. Corporations and media entities are issuing strong statements and demonstrating zero tolerance for sexual misconduct, and politicians accused of abuse are also being pushed to resign. More importantly, men are becoming a part of this cultural revolution. Many men are freshly reflecting on their own and their colleagues’ behaviour, and starting conservations about the abuse of power and privilege, the socialisation of men and boys, the objectification of women and a culture of toxic masculinity. Because of these changes, the erstwhile esteemed notion of the gentlemen has never been so ungently nudged away.

But, ungentle or not, the disruption of the status quo cannot be without distress. While women may be seen as building a better world for themselves, men are seen to have been left behind in a way that will have negative repercussions for everyone. With the gender pay gap still yawning wide and men showing no sign of relinquishing the top spots in salary scales around the world, it is easy to scoff at the very idea of them being – woefully – at a disadvantage. But the fact remains that, in some crucial areas, they are. Take, for example, the well-corroborated research finding that a boy born today is less likely to attend university than high sister if the present trends in education continue. It is a terrifying prediction which will have widespread ramifications, not just for men in the workplace, but for relationships between men and women as well.

To be a male adult today is to be ambivalent: on the one hand, they are encouraged to look like pumped-up superheroes, because for girls today, nothing less than a Dwayne Johnson lookalike will do. On the other, they must be kind and sensitive. They must also be brilliant fathers – and put in as much work as women when it comes to parenting – but when it comes to break-ups, it is mothers who often have the upper hand. The perceived silencing of and unfairness meted out to men, particularly when it comes to parental access and financial support after divorce, has led to an increasingly vociferous alliance of men who blame a conspiracy of vengeful women, bias in the courts and feminist-dominated social services for ruining their lives and their relationships with their children after separation.

How then do we get out of this predicament? Do we ask more complex questions and brace ourselves for the answers that we cannot handle? While we no longer accept anatomical differences as the justification for gender inequality, the path to social progress is one we should tread carefully.

**Questions**

**From Passage 1**

Q1) Why, according to the author, does gender appear to us “to be completely natural” (line 4)? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

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Q2) Explain what the author means by “unremarkable view” in line 15. **Use your own words as far as possible.** [1]

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Q3) In what ways are women’s occupations extensions of their “domestic roles” (line 54)? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

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Q4) Explain the difference between the demands on women and men in lines 57-60. **Use your own words as far as possible**. [3]

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Q5) Using material from Passage 1, paragraphs 3-5 (lines 18-48), summarise what the author has to say about the beliefs regarding the differences between men and women, and how these beliefs are formed.

Write your summary in **no more than 120 words**, not counting the opening words which are printed below**. Use your own words as far as possible.** [18]

*People believe that* ……………………………………………………………………………

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**From Passage 2**

Q6) How did “financial necessity” (line 4) lead to the change in gender norms? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

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Q7) Explain what is meant by “primeval notion of gender differentiation” (line 12). **Use your own words as far as possible.** [1]

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Q8) In paragraphs 2-3, what does the author see as concerns for men given the changes to gender norms and the status quo? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [3]

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Q9) Explain why “to be a male adult today is to be ambivalent” (line 36). **Use your own words as far as possible.** [1]

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Q10) In the concluding paragraph, what does the author suggest we do to handle the issue of gender? [2]

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**From both passages**

Q11) While Keith Long makes the point that we should question our common notion of gender, Stephanie Low is of the view that we should be mindful of the implications of changing gender norms.

How far would you agree or disagree with the concerns expressed in these two passages? Support your answer with examples drawn from your experience and that of your society. [10]

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**Suggested Answers**

**From Passage 1**

**Q1) Why, according to the author, does gender appear to us “to be completely natural” (line 4)? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]**

From the passage

Gender is embedded so extensively in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural.

Paraphrased answer

The idea of gender is entrenched/deeply rooted in all aspects of our lives.

**Q2) Explain what the author means by “unremarkable view” in line 15. Use your own words as far as possible. [1]**

From the passage

Couple this with the unremarkable view that women are also more gentle and nurturing than men…

Paraphrased answer

The author means that the idea/notion that women are more gentle and nurturing than men is widely/commonly accepted.

**Q3) In what ways are women’s occupations extensions of their “domestic roles” (line 54)? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]**

From the passage

…many of their occupations are extensions of their domestic role.

Traditional women’s jobs are in the service sector, and often involve nurturing, service, and support roles: teachers of small children, nurses, secretaries, flight attendants.

Paraphrased answer

In both their occupations and their roles at home, women have to take care of children/and the sick/those with needs and provide assistance to others.

**Q4) Explain the difference between the demands on women and men in lines 57-60. Use your own words as far as possible. [3]**

From the passage

A woman’s time is traditionally controlled by the continual needs of other people.

The tasks that men traditionally do in the middle-class domestic sphere, on the other hand, are cyclical. Taking out the trash, tending the yard, doing repairs – these are things that can be scheduled in advance, to fit around the rest of one’s activities.

Paraphrased answer

While the demand on women’s time is determined/dictated by others, men have greater control/autonomy over their tasks as their tasks are predictable/routine, and they can plan for/determine them ahead of time.

**Summary Writing**

**Q5) Using material from Passage 1, paragraphs 3-5 (lines 18-48), summarise what the author has to say about the beliefs regarding the differences between men and women, and how these beliefs are formed.**

**Write your summary in no more than 120 words, not counting the opening words which are printed below. Use your own words as far as possible. [18]**

People believe that…

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| **Point** | **From the passage** | **Paraphrased answer** |
| 1 | Many people accept that this means women are therefore much **better suited** than men to take care of children once they are born, | …it is **more fitting** for women rather than men to look after the interests of the family |
| 2 | and that the family might be **harmed** if mothers work outside the home or if fathers are the primary caretakers. | …Otherwise, they think that the family’s interests would be **hurt**  OR  …Otherwise, it would be **detrimental** to the family |
| 3 | To the extent this belief exists, women may not want to workoutside the home or, | As a result, women **chose** to stay at home |
| 4 | if they choose to do so, they **face** **adversities** from employers, family, and friends. | …to avoid **objections** from/ **difficulties** posed by those around them |
| 5 | Conversely, men may not even think about wanting to stay at home | …while men **feared** staying at home |
| 6 | and may themselves **face misgivings** from colleagues, relatives and peers if they want to do so. | …for the same reasons  (given that others would **question** them) |
| 7 | A belief in a strong biological basis for differences between women and men implies, then, that there is **little** we can or should do to **change** these differences. | Some people also **accept** that |
| 8 | It implies that “anatomy is destiny,” and destiny is, of course, by definition **inevitable**. | …the physical differences between men and women are immutable/ a given/ **fixed**. |

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| **Point** | **From the passage** | **Paraphrased answer** |
| 9 | Be that as it may, in the famous words of Simone de Beauvoir, “Women are not **born**, they are **made**.” The same is true of men. | In contrast, others believe that these differences are **nurtured** |
| 10 | From infancy, male and female children are interpreted differently, and **interacted** with differently. | [interpretation/perceptions]  How adults **view** male and female children… |
| 11 | Experimental evidence suggests that adults’ **perceptions** of babies are **affected** by their beliefs about the babies’ sex | [response/interacted/affected]  …shaped the way they **treat**/ **mingle** with/ **respond** to / communicate with / play with them |
| 12 | It was found that adults watching a film of a crying infant were more likely to hear the cry as expressing **frustration** if they believed the infant was a boy, | For the same behaviour / When they see babies crying, adults see **anger**/ aggression in boys  …and **fear**/ helplessness in girls. |
| 13 | and as **plaintive** or expressing **insecurity** if they believed the infant was a girl. |
| 14 | In a similar experiment, adults judged a 24-hour-old baby as **bigger** if they believed it to be a boy, and **finer-featured** if they believed it to be a girl. | Similarly, their view/ judgement of the **physical appearance** of the babies are affected by their knowledge of their gender. |
| 15 | People handle infants more **gently** when they believe them to be female,  more **playfully** when they believe them to be male. | They treat female infants with **care**,  but are **rough** (or idea of mischief/teasing) with the male ones. |
| 16 | Educational institutions also reproduce the gender order in **myriad** ways.  As **prime** sites for socialization, schools are **key** institutions for the construction of gender. | Such social beliefs are **instilled**/ **reinforced** (either degree or scope) in schools |
| 17 | Elementary schools not long ago were known for keeping girls and boys **separate** — lining them up separately to move about the school, pitting them against each other in competitions, separating them for physical education. | …where girls and boys are often **segregated** |
| 18 | Looking at how schools tackle the more formal aspects of education it is clear that here too **sexism** is **prevalent** (G17) | …based on **chauvinist** notions/ **prejudice**… |
| 19 | One academic research shows that the majority of schools fail to encourage subject choices in a gender **neutral** way (G19). | …which affect even the subjects the students study. |

People believe that it is more fitting for women rather than men to look after and safeguard the interests of the family. As a result, women choose to stay at home to avoid objections posed by those around them, while men fear staying at home for the same reasons. Some people also accept that the physical differences between men and women are fixed. In contrast, others believe that these differences are nurtured. How adults view male and female children shaped the way they mingle with them. For the same behaviour, adults see anger in boys and fear in girls. Similarly, their judgement of the physical appearance of the babies are affected by their knowledge of their gender. They treat female infants with care, but are rough with the male ones. Such social beliefs are reinforced in schools where girls and boys are often segregated based on chauvinist notions which affect even what subjects the students study.

**From Passage 2**

**Q6) How did “financial necessity” (line 4) lead to the change in gender norms? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]**

From the passage

But with the increasingly high cost of living, such an arrangement no longer sufficed.

Over time, and since women started joining the workforce, they have climbed the ladder of success, studying and training in well-paid roles with high responsibilities, such as doctors and lawyers.

In turn, this led to greater visibility of women at the workplace.

Paraphrased answer

When families could no longer cope with household expenses, women had to find employment/started working. At workplace, they became accomplished/made significant achievements and it became normal to see women at work.

**Q7) Explain what is meant by “primeval notion of gender differentiation” (line 12). Use your own words as far as possible. [1]**

From the passage

Thus, from the abyss that sprang the primeval notion of gender differentiation emerges the manifesto of equal opportunities and expectations.

Paraphrased answer

It means a basic/instinctive/primitive idea of gender discrimination/segregation/ distinction.

**Q8) In paragraphs 2-3, what does the author see as concerns for men given the changes to gender norms and the status quo? Use your own words as far as possible. [3]**

From the passage

Paragraph 2

Invariably, through these changes, the erstwhile esteemed notion of the gentlemen has never been so ungently nudged away.

Paragraph 3

…men are seen to have been left behind (b) in a way that will have negative repercussions for everyone. (c)

…it is easy to scoff at the very idea of them being — woefully — at a disadvantage. (b repeated) But the fact remains that, in some crucial areas, they are.

…will have widespread ramifications, not just for men in the workplace, but for relationships between men and women as well.

Paraphrased answer

The author is concerned that men would lose the respect/status they enjoyed. She is also worried that the disruption will leave men stagnating/worse off than women, and this will have a severe impact on society.

**Q9) Explain why “to be a male adult today is to be ambivalent” (line 36). Use your own words as far as possible. [1]**

From the passage

To be a male adult is to be ambivalent: on the one hand, they are encouraged to look like pumped-up superheroes, because for girls today, nothing less than a Dwayne Johnson lookalike will do. On the other, they must be kind and sensitive.

Paraphrased answer

This is because he has to appear manly/macho, and yet show a caring side.

**Q10) In the concluding paragraph, what does the author suggest we do to handle the issue of gender? [2]**

From the passage

How then do we get out of this predicament: Do we ask more complex questions and brace ourselves for the answers that we cannot handle? While we no longer accept anatomical differences as the justification for gender inequality, the path to social progress is one we should tread carefully.

Answer

The author suggests that we should not ask more difficult questions which lead to answers we cannot deal with/accept. Instead, we should proceed cautiously on this matter.

**Application Question**

**From both passages**

**Q11) While Keith Long makes the point that we should question our common notion of gender, Stephanie Low is of the view that we should be mindful of the implications of changing gender norms.**

**How far would you agree or disagree with the concerns expressed in these two passages? Support your answer with examples drawn from your experience and**