

GRE Reading Comprehension

According to usage and conventions which are at last being questioned but have by no means been overcome, the social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man. A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies. If the promise is large and credible his presence is striking. If it is small or incredible, he is found to have little presence.

The promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual—but its object is always exterior to the man. A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. His presence may be fabricated, in the sense that he pretends to be capable of what he is not. But the pretense is always toward a power which he exercises on others.

By contrast, a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her. Her presence is manifest in her gestures, voices, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, taste—indeed there is nothing she can do which does not contribute to her presence. Presence for a woman is so intrinsic to her person that men tend to think of it as an almost physical emanation, a kind of heat or smell or aura.

To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.

And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman.

She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. Men survey women before treating them. Consequently how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated. To acquire some control over this process, women must contain it and internalize it. That part of a woman's self which is the surveyor treats the part which is the surveyed so as to demonstrate to others how her whole self would like to be treated. And this exemplary treatment of herself by herself constitutes her presence. Every woman's presence regulates what is and is not "permissible" within her presence. Every one of her actions—whatever its direct purpose or motivation—is also read as an indication of how she would like to be treated. If a woman throws a glass on the floor, this is an example of how she treats her own emotion of anger and so of how she would wish to be treated by others. If a man does the same, his action is only read as an expression of his anger. If a woman makes a good joke this is an example of how she treats the joker in herself and accordingly of how she as joker-woman would like to be treated by others. Only a man can make a good joke for its own sake.

1. According to “usage and conventions,” appearance is NECESSARILY a part of reality for
 - (A) men
 - (B) women
 - (C) both men and women
 - (D) neither men nor women
 - (E) men always and women occasionally
2. In analyzing a woman’s customary “social presence,” the author hopes to
 - (A) justify and reinforce it.
 - (B) understand and explain it.
 - (C) expose and discredit it.
 - (D) demonstrate and criticize it.
 - (E) sanction and promote it.
3. It can be inferred from the passage that a woman with a Ph.D. in psychology who gives a lecture to a group of students is probably MOST concerned with
 - (A) whether her students learn the material.
 - (B) what the males in the audience think of her.
 - (C) how she comes off as a speaker in psychology.
 - (D) finding a husband.
 - (E) whether a man challenges her.
4. The passage portrays women as
 - (A) victims
 - (B) liars
 - (C) actresses
 - (D) politicians
 - (E) ignorant
5. Consider each choice, and select all that apply.
Which of the following is implied by the passage?
 - (A) A man is defined by what he does, whereas a woman is defined by how she appears.
 - (B) Men are not image-conscious.
 - (C) Good looks are more important to women than to men.
6. The primary purpose of the passage is to
 - (A) compare and contrast woman’s presence and place in society with that of man’s.
 - (B) discuss a woman’s presence and place in society and to contrast it with a man’s presence and place.
 - (C) illustrate how a woman is oppressed by society.
 - (D) explain why men are better than women at telling jokes.
 - (E) illustrate how both men and women are hurt by sexism.