

## ECON 460: Women, Work, and the World Economy

### Reading Guide: *The Woman That Never Evolved*

Professor Sarah Hrdy's book provides an overview of gender relations among non-human primates, and discusses the implications of these patterns for the evolution of gender norms among humans.

This reading guide serves two purposes. I offer suggestions about *how* to read Professor Hrdy's book, and I also provide a list of questions that you should be able to answer based on your reading. Your responses to the discussion questions will help you complete the Reading Response exercise in gradescope after you finish the book.

1. Begin by skimming the preface and then reading Chapter 1 ("Some Women That Never Evolved") carefully. You should either take notes or highlight important passages in your reading packet. After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
  - (a) How does Professor Hrdy describe the conventional wisdom about sex selection and the evolution of human gender roles (at the time that she wrote the book)?
  - (b) What does Professor Hrdy mean when she refers to **dominance** among humans? How does this differ from her definition of primate dominance?
  - (c) Is male dominance common among non-human primates? How does the pattern of dominance among primates inform our understanding of the evolutionary causes of male dominance among humans?
  - (d) How do humans differ from all other primates, according to Professor Hrdy?
2. Now skim Chapter 2 ("An Initial Inequality").
  - (a) What is **sexual dimorphism** and how does it usually manifest among primates?
  - (b) What is **anisogamy**, what is **sexual selection**, and how might one have led to the other?
  - (c) How would you describe the *r*-selected and *K*-selected reproductive strategies, and which better describes primate reproduction?
3. Next skim Chapter 3 ("Monogamous Primates: A Special Case") and Chapter 4 ("A Climate for Dominant Females").
  - (a) What do monogamous primates have in common? Are monogamous primate species closely related? Do they live in similar ecological niches?
  - (b) What do primate species with dominant females have in common? Are they closely related? What types of ecological niches do they live in?

4. Now read Chapter 5 (“The Pros and Cons of Males”) carefully, and then answer the following questions:
  - (a) How do primate fathers differ from other male mammals?
  - (b) What happened to the gray langur monkey called Scratch?
  - (c) What is **infanticide**, how common is it among primates, and what evolutionary function might it serve?
  
5. Now read Chapter 6 (“Competition and Bonding among Females”).
  - (a) What are **allomothers** and what evolutionary function might they serve?
  - (b) What is life like for female hamadryas baboons and female geladas?
  - (c) How does inherited rank contribute to the evolutionary fitness of primates?
  - (d) Do female primates compete with one another? How does competition among primate females differ from competition among primate males?
  
6. Now read Chapter 7 (“The Primate Origins of Female Sexuality”), and then answer the following questions:
  - (a) What are the two misconceptions about the potential evolutionary functions of female sexuality in primates?
  - (b) What is the most common explanation for the **continuous receptivity** of human females?
  - (c) Does evidence from non-human primates support the hypothesis that continuous receptivity is necessary for successful pair-bonding?
  - (d) Why might **concealed ovulation** have evolved in humans?
  - (e) Why might **nonreproductive sexuality** be adaptive for female primates?
  
7. Now read Chapter 8 (“A Disputed Legacy”). You can skim pages 160–172, and then read the second half of the chapter more carefully. After reading the chapter, answer the following questions:
  - (a) How might female promiscuity have been adaptive in humans or their recent evolutionary ancestors?
  - (b) Is sexual dimorphism more or less pronounced in humans than among other higher primates? Does the evidence suggest that sexual dimorphism has become more or less pronounced over the course of human evolution?
  - (c) If female promiscuity serves an evolutionary purpose, why might so many human cultural practices emphasize female chastity?
  - (d) Is the experience of being female better or worse for humans than for other primates? Why?