Revision

Practice exam-style questions

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This issue contains some guidance on answering the exam-related high-mark questions in the article on young women and feminism. Note that this is guidance only — you may have taken a different approach, but should make quite sure that you have answered the question.

Young women and feminism

Question

Using material from the article and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that feminism has little to offer the young women of today.

A couple of important things to note before you start planning the essay:

• First, you have been instructed to use material from the article and your own knowledge — make quite sure that you do this. You will almost inevitably use information that you already know, so the important thing to remember is to make sure that you use relevant material from the article. Note the important word ‘relevant’ — choose your material carefully. (In an exam, you would be using an Item rather than an article, as here, but the point remains the same.)

• Second, you have been asked to ‘evaluate’ a view. While this may seem self-evident, some students present two or more points of view when answering this type of question, but then fail to look carefully at their relative strengths and weaknesses, so fail to evaluate. Sometimes you may be able to reach a firm conclusion that one particular view/theory/method is indeed better than the other(s) in this particular context, though remember to summarise briefly in your conclusion why you have arrived at this decision.

Sometimes, however, your conclusion will not be as clear-cut, and you may write that in some cases, or for some people, or under certain conditions (remember to explain these) one is better than the other, but that is not always the case. The important thing is not that you have to arrive at a definitive judgement, but that you have shown that you have looked at the view/theory/method or whatever and considered some alternatives and tried to evaluate them. This may sound a bit complicated, but if you get used to using this technique in your homework essays, it will come easily to you in an exam.

Bearing these points in mind, now let’s look at the question. I suggest that there are two important elements. One, of course, is ‘feminism’, and the other is that the question specifically refers to ‘young women’ rather than ‘women’ in general.

• Taking ‘feminism’ first (though you may wish to follow a different structure), you obviously need to explain what ‘feminism’ is. You do not need (and will certainly not have time for) a blow-by-blow account of feminism or feminists from the suffragettes onwards, but you DO need to show that you understand feminism as a branch of sociological theory. Think carefully
about how you would do this. What important concepts would you use? Patriarchy would be an obvious one, but you may wish to include others.

Given the thrust of the question about ‘young women’ it would also be useful to give some brief details of what ‘feminism’ has achieved in women’s struggle for gender equality in different spheres of life. Again, avoid going into great detail — always keep an eye on the clock.

- This should bring you neatly into material from the article. You could address questions such as what were the young women’s views on feminism? Why did some of them reject it, and why? Did they think that gender equality had been achieved, and if not, why did they not see feminism as a way of achieving this? Again, remember to use appropriate concepts, such as ‘stereotypes’. Another very important concept in this context would be ‘intersectionality’ — how would you use this?

Throughout your discussion, remember to bring in relevant material from elsewhere than the article — particular writers or studies, and different types of feminism.

- Finally, you need to address the main point of the question — does ‘feminism’ have little to offer the young women of today? If this is so, what evidence is there? If it is not so, what can or could feminism offer these young women?

This should then enable you to form a brief but relevant conclusion in which, on the basis of what you have offered in your essay, you can answer the question. Remember the earlier point — you may conclude that feminism has something to offer all young women, or only some, or some more than others. Whatever your conclusion, it should follow logically from what you have written earlier.

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