4.2 Liberal and Radical Feminism: Tensions Within the Tradition

Total Marks

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 45 minutes · Write-in edition

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be answered in bullet points or short sentences. For levels-marked questions, write a structured response with developed explanation and, where required, a judgement. The final 30-mark essay should show balanced evaluation, precise terminology and relevant examples. Allocate your time so the 30-mark essay receives at least 35 minutes.

1 State one central aim of liberal feminism in relation to gender equality within existing political and legal institutions.

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 State how socialist or Marxist feminists link patriarchy and capitalism in their analysis of gender inequality, and give one short example of the mechanism they identify.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 Explain briefly why radical feminists emphasise personal and family life as a site of political struggle, naming one implication for feminist strategy.

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

4 Explain two ways in which socialist feminism's linking of patriarchy to capitalism changes the diagnosis of women's oppression compared with liberal feminism. Give a short example for each way, explain how these differences lead to different policy priorities, and add one further concise example or implication for strategy that distinguishes socialist from liberal responses.

(Total for Question 4 is 6 marks)

5 Evaluate the extent to which feminists disagree over how equality should be achieved. In your answer, compare liberal, radical and socialist approaches and reach a reasoned judgement.

(Total for Question 5 is 24 marks)

6 Distinguish between liberal and radical feminist views of how change should be achieved in society and politics. This is a 10-mark short-answer question assessed by a point-band scheme.

(Total for Question 6 is 10 marks)

Mark scheme · 4.2 Liberal and Radical Feminism: Tensions Within the Tradition

Question 1

one accurate stated aim, for example securing equal legal and political rights and opportunities for women within existing institutions	**B1**

Answer: To secure equal legal and political rights and opportunities for women within existing political and legal institutions.

Question 2

identifies the general link that capitalism exploits women through unpaid or low-paid labour and reinforces gender divisions	**B1**
gives a brief example of the mechanism, for example unpaid domestic labour reproduces labour power for the market	**B1**

Answer: Socialist feminists argue that capitalism exploits women's unpaid domestic and caring labour and that patriarchal gender divisions are reproduced by capitalist economic relations; for example, unpaid childcare and housework reproduce labour power that benefits employers and reduces the cost of labour reproduction for capital.

Question 3

identifies that radical feminists view patriarchy as rooted in personal, domestic and sexual relations rather than only in public institutions	**B1**
explains why this matters, for example because everyday family practices reproduce gender hierarchies and male authority	**B1**
gives an implication for strategy, for example advocacy of consciousness-raising, separatism or transformation of intimate relations rather than only legal reform	**B1**

Answer: Radical feminists view patriarchy as embedded in personal, domestic and sexual relations, so everyday family practices reproduce gender hierarchies and male authority. This leads to strategies that target private life, such as consciousness-raising, women-only spaces and attempts to transform intimate relations, rather than relying solely on legal reform of public institutions.

Question 4

identifies one way, for example that socialist feminists see economic structures as foundational to gender inequality rather than only legal exclusion	**B1**
develops this with an example, for example unpaid domestic labour enabling capitalist profit by reproducing labour power	**B1**
identifies a second way, for example that socialist feminism emphasises class and economic exploitation interacting with gendered labour markets	**B1**
develops this with an example, for example concentration of women in low-paid caring and service jobs as beneficial to capital	**B1**
provides further development linking diagnosis to different policy priorities, for example redistribution, socialisation of care or workplace reform	**B1**
additional concise example or implication for strategy distinguishing socialist from liberal responses	**B1**

Answer: One way is that socialist feminists treat economic structures as foundational, arguing that unpaid domestic labour reproduces labour power for employers, so addressing domestic labour and social care is necessary rather than only legal equality. A second way is the emphasis on how class and capitalist labour markets shape gendered outcomes, for example how women are overrepresented in low-paid caring and service sectors which capital relies on; this diagnosis leads to policy priorities like redistribution, workplace reform and socialising care, beyond the liberal focus on anti-discrimination and equal opportunity.

Question 5

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Basic or fragmentary knowledge of feminist strands with little or no analysis or evaluation. Claims are general and unsupported by examples.	**1-6**
Level 2 Clear, accurate knowledge of at least two strands and some developed analysis of their differing prescriptions for achieving equality, with limited evaluation or unbalanced judgement. Use of examples may be limited.	**7-12**
Level 3 Detailed and accurate knowledge of liberal, radical and socialist approaches used to construct a sustained analysis of their disagreements. Evaluation weighs strengths and weaknesses of each approach and begins to reach a supported judgement, using appropriate examples.	**13-18**
Level 4 Sophisticated, wide-ranging and accurate knowledge applied to a tightly argued evaluation that compares the strands on how equality should be achieved. Analysis and evaluation are well integrated, examples are precisely chosen and the response reaches a clear, well-substantiated and balanced judgement about the extent of disagreement.	**19-24**

Indicative content:

- Liberal feminism: diagnosis focuses on legal, political and institutional barriers; prescriptions include anti-discrimination laws, equal pay measures, gender mainstreaming, quotas and expansion of opportunity. Strengths include achievable, incremental change and use of established institutions; weaknesses include limited effect on private life and persistent cultural norms.
- Radical feminism: diagnosis focuses on patriarchy rooted in private and sexual relations and cultural norms; prescriptions include consciousness-raising, transformation of personal relationships, challenging sexual politics and in some currents separatism or revolutionary change. Strengths include attention to lived experience, domestic violence and cultural change; weaknesses include potential impracticality of separatism and difficulty of implementing sweeping cultural transformation.
- Socialist feminism: diagnosis links patriarchy to capitalist economic structures; prescriptions include socialising care, redistributive policies, workplace transformation and addressing unpaid labour. Strengths include attention to economic structures and material conditions; weaknesses include potential underestimation of cultural and sexual dimensions and challenges of coordinating class and gender movements.
- Areas of substantial disagreement: strategy and priority, for example whether legal reform is sufficient, whether private life must be centrally targeted, and whether economic transformation is necessary. These lead to different policy mixes and different allies in politics.
- Areas of common ground: all strands reject gender oppression, support improved material conditions and safety for women, and often overlap in concrete campaigns (for example against violence, for reproductive rights and for workplace protections). This common ground permits tactical alliances despite deeper theoretical disagreement.
- Evaluation might consider empirical evidence: legal reforms have improved formal rights but not erased pay gaps or domestic inequality, suggesting limits to liberal strategies; radical insights have broadened political attention to private violence and culture but have struggled to secure institutional change alone; socialist proposals highlight structural economic levers that could reduce material inequalities but face political difficulty in implementation.
- A strong conclusion weighs these points and reaches a judgement on the extent of disagreement, for example arguing feminists disagree substantially on diagnosis and priorities, and therefore on the means to achieve equality, but share enough practical aims to collaborate on specific reforms, so the disagreement is deep in theory but often narrower in practical politics.

Question 6

Level 1 Basic or partial distinction that names one or two features of either liberal or radical feminism, with limited development or accuracy. **1-3**

Level 2 Clear distinction with accurate points about both liberal and radical approaches, but less precise development or limited range of examples. **4-6**

Level 3 Detailed, accurate and well-developed distinction that explains how liberal feminists favour reform through law and institutions while radical feminists stress transforming private life, consciousness-raising and, where applicable, separatism, with relevant examples or brief evaluation of the differences. **7-10**

Indicative content:

- Liberal feminism advocates change through legal reform, equal opportunities policies, access to education and employment, and working within existing political institutions to secure formal equality.
- Radical feminism argues patriarchy is rooted in personal and family life and cannot be solved by legal reform alone, so it emphasises consciousness-raising, changing personal relationships, cultural practices and in some cases separatist strategies or revolutionary transformation of gendered social relations.
- Examples that might be used: liberal feminist campaigns for equal pay legislation or anti-discrimination law; radical feminist use of consciousness-raising groups in the 1970s and campaigns against domestic and sexual violence.
- A strong answer may note that the difference is partly strategic and partly diagnostic: liberals see the problem as legal and political exclusion, radicals see the problem as social and cultural reproduction of male power.