4.5 Feminist Perspectives on Religion and Patriarchy: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Where a question asks for a short answer write in full sentences for clarity. Use sociological terms and name studies where asked.

1 Item B: Short extract summarising Woodhead's threefold distinction. Woodhead suggests some religions are 'patriarchal spaces' where institutions and doctrines maintain male dominance; others function as 'personal empowerment' spaces where individual women use belief to gain confidence and resources; a third type are 'gender-critical' spaces where religious ideas are contested and contested interpretations compete. This extract is an invented summary for classroom use only.

(a) Analyse one reason using Item B and your knowledge. **(5)**

(b) Analyse a second reason using Item B and your knowledge. **(5)**

(Total for Question 1 is 10 marks)

2 Item B: Use the short Woodhead extract given in Q1. Applying Item B and your wider sociological knowledge of feminist analyses such as El Saadawi and Holm, evaluate feminist views of the relationship between religion and patriarchy in contemporary societies.

Apply Item B and your knowledge to evaluate the extent to which feminist views successfully explain the relationship between religion and patriarchy.

(Total for Question 2 is 12 marks)

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3 Define briefly what sociologists mean by 'patriarchy' when discussing religion in contemporary societies.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

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Mark scheme · 4.5 Feminist Perspectives on Religion and Patriarchy: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

(a) identifies a reason, e.g. institutional structures and doctrines can embed male authority and restrict women	**B1**
(a) develops using Item B, e.g. Woodhead's 'patriarchal spaces' show how institutions maintain male dominance	**B1**
(a) further development with evidence, e.g. examples such as male-only priesthoods or ritual exclusions	**B1**
(a) links analysis to the idea that institutional power shapes women's roles rather than individual choice alone	**B1**
(a) AO1 credit for naming a relevant study or author, e.g. El Saadawi or Holm used to support the point	**B1**

(a) Answer: Reason example: institutional structures and doctrines can embed male authority, as Woodhead's 'patriarchal spaces' suggest; this is supported by El Saadawi and Holm who describe male-only leadership and ritual exclusions which limit women's institutional roles.

(b) identifies a reason, e.g. religion can provide personal resources, identity and networks that empower women	**B1**
(b) develops using Item B, e.g. Woodhead's 'personal empowerment' spaces where women gain confidence and social capital	**B1**
(b) further development with evidence, e.g. women-led religious groups, community leadership, or social services run by women	**B1**
(b) links to how this counters simplistic views of religion purely as oppression	**B1**
(b) AO1 credit for naming a supporting example or study, e.g. research showing women as active organisers in local faith groups	**B1**

(b) Answer: Reason example: religion can grant women personal resources, identity and networks that empower them, as Woodhead's 'personal empowerment' spaces suggest; evidence includes women-led groups and community roles where women gain status and social capital.

Question 2

Level 1 Limited evaluation with brief or undeveloped use of Item B and few relevant sociological ideas, mainly assertion with little evidence.	**1-3**
Level 2 Some evaluation using Item B and one or two sociological ideas. Arguments are partially developed, with limited evidence or examples, and an emerging judgement.	**4-6**
Level 3 Clear evaluation using Item B and several sociological ideas. Arguments include relevant examples and studies, with balanced discussion of strengths and weaknesses and a reasoned conclusion.	**7-9**
Level 4 Sustained, well-evidenced evaluation applying Item B and wider knowledge. Arguments show detailed use of studies such as El Saadawi and Holm, Woodhead's distinctions, counter-evidence of women's agency and religious feminism, and reach a supported, balanced judgement.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- AO1 material: Feminist claims that religion can be patriarchal, with El Saadawi and Holm arguing that texts, rituals and institutional roles often subordinate women; examples include male-only priesthoods, exclusion from ritual or purity taboos.
- Use Item B: Woodhead's distinctions provide analytic nuance, showing religions may operate as patriarchal spaces, personal-empowerment spaces, or gender-critical spaces. Apply this to avoid overgeneralisation.
- Strengths of feminist views: explain how doctrine and institutional structures can reproduce male dominance, supported by historical and ethnographic evidence; show how symbolic practices and leadership exclusions maintain gendered power.
- Limitations and counter-evidence: feminist accounts can overgeneralise across different faiths and contexts, ignoring variation; evidence that women use religion for empowerment, leadership at local levels, and form women-centred movements undermines a simple oppressive model.
- Evaluation should balance structure and agency, noting that patriarchy may be embedded institutionally while women still negotiate, resist and use religious resources for status and community.
- Methodological points: differences between macro institutional analysis and micro studies of lived religion; value of mixed methods. Consider cross-cultural variation and the danger of imposing a single feminist template on diverse practices.
- Conclusion: reach a balanced judgement on the extent feminist views explain the relationship, for example that feminist perspectives are powerful for revealing structural inequalities but must be combined with nuanced, contextual analysis such as Woodhead's to fully explain contemporary patterns.

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Question 3

identifies patriarchy as a social system where men hold primary power in public and private institutions (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. in religion this can mean male control of leadership, interpretation and ritual roles **B1**

Answer: Patriarchy is a social system where men hold primary power in public and private institutions; in religion this can mean male control of leadership, interpretation and ritual roles.

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