

Ashoka University
Office of Admissions

On-the-spot Essay:

The on-the-spot essay evaluates the following parameters: engagement with the prompt, critical thinking, clarity of thought, and creativity. The candidate will be given two topics to choose from at the time of writing the essay. The candidate cannot use any external resources to help them write the essay. The essay has no word limit; however, the candidate is given 30 minutes to complete the exercise. The essay can be attempted with minimal preparation.

Please find attached some sample prompts and essays. These essays were written by candidates in the last Admissions Cycle on prompts given to them during their Interview Round.

Women are trolled ‘differently’ on social media. Do you agree or disagree? Write a reasoned response.

How different is the virtual sphere from the physical world one that we live in? As the two merge, we find ourselves entrenched in problems that we have never encountered before, as the anonymity offered by the internet gives some people the perverse confidence of harassing others through various means, from messages and unwanted sexual advances, all the way to death threats. Online harassment, or 'trolling,' is something that nearly everyone faces. But, as in the real world, women are more affected by this problem, and in vastly different ways, than are men, as their sexuality, opinions, and bodies are inextricably tied to the way that they experience the internet.

Perhaps as a result of the way in which modern media portrays women's bodies, by unashamedly using their sexuality to advertise anything from deodorant to cars, women are forced to be intensely aware of the pictures that they upload online. This can be a double-edged sword, because when women are modestly dressed, they are called "prudish," but when they are dressed in a traditionally feminine way, they are met with all manner of questions regarding their moral character. This kind of moral policing is something that men do not face online.

Women are also silenced extensively. Popular news reporters and journalists, such as Barkha Dutt, are regularly referred to as "presstitutes," in order to make their opinions seem less credible. This method of silencing women's voices is used so that the power balance remains the way it is, with men talking about every issue, and women unable to share their views on anything, leading to an imbalanced portrayal of news and current events. Furthermore, women who declare themselves as feminists face double the backlash, as popular authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have experienced, when her readership in her home country of Nigeria decreased after she gave a TED talk called 'We Should All Be Feminists'. As men have not been facing centuries of oppression, they would be unable to comprehend this kind of silencing.

Some might argue that men are threatened in more extreme ways, such as death threats and arrests, as in the case of the teenager who was arrested some time back, for sharing an edited photo on the popular messaging application Whatsapp that showed the Prime Minister in an unfavourable light. However, men do not face the kind of trolling that women do, simply because they are respected more in society, and while they may be judged for their religious or political outlooks, they are not judged for their appearance and sexuality. For the same reason, there are much fewer male victims of revenge porn, than there are female ones, and the consequences of such horrific violations of trust and privacy are also greater for women.

While most men are still unable to comprehend the problems that women face online, and how different they are from those faced by men, it is important that this be exposed, because a society can never advance if over half of the world's population are systematically oppressed, solely because they happened to be born in a body that is less physically strong. Perhaps, taking a leaf out of the physical world, it is time that social media companies tightened their security forces to mimic that of the police force, in order to curb the trolling faced by women as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community, so that the world becomes a safer and more authentic place for everyone.

Social media promotes armchair activism. Do you agree/disagree? Give reasons to support your position.

The view that social media promotes armchair activism, is one which must be examined multifariously - not solely in the context of whether or not it truly manifests in armchair activism, but more broadly, in the goals and efficacy of activism itself. The following essay will therefore seek to briefly examine the given statement, in order to come to a conclusion on the given statement.

Armchair activism at once conjures images of the quintessentially unmotivated, ceremoniously brandishing their weapons of choice - Twitter, Facebook, perhaps Instagram for the otherwise inclined.

However, it is first significant to define what the term "armchair activism" refers to. Most superficially, it may refer to a particular brand of activism which takes place within the safe and comfortable confines of the home. At other levels, it is entrenched with connotations of a superfluous type of activism, the sole purpose of which may be reduced to gaining the moral upper hand in a technological landscape increasingly dominated by popularity rather than substance. Within this definition however, it conspicuously emerges that any judgment of social media promoting armchair activism (as given by the latter definition) relies upon a definition which implicitly determines this type of activism to be one devoid of true culpability and engagement.

While it is true that this form of activism on social media, requires far less of the physically taxing protests, marches and vigils associated with activism in the 21st century, it is more so, reductive to classify this form of activism as devoid of the same spirit of protest and dissent which manifested themselves in revolutions in far flung corners of the world.

Simultaneously, it is important to consider the relative efficacy of activism in its most tangible, physical forms. Marches, rallies and events aimed at the promotion of an ideological end, often risk no impact whatsoever, on the basis that the individuals they attract, the news sources covering them, and nearly every organization involved in its portrayal, confirm and reinforce their own ideology so vehemently, that it isolates the individuals whose minds truly need to be exposed to differing perspectives. Instead, it can often risk acting as an ideological echo chamber - a cause for alarm, given its associations with tyrannous rule.

In contrasting activism on social media with this, it is important to concede that this too, may occur within the social media, wherein demographic trends within applications can restrict the types of individuals this activism reaches in posts, op-eds or articles. It remains that social media creates, perhaps inherently, the necessity for affirmation through virtue-signalling posts. However, in an increasingly bi-partisan world of heterogeneity, the left and the right coexist far more frequently in this sphere, than within the real world. Moreover, regardless of the often disingenuous intent of individuals engaging in this form of activism, social media represents the power of numbers - with enough individuals, a message is far more effectively transmitted to the masses, of ideologically differing individuals.

While at the most basic level, social media may be considered to promote armchair activism, therefore, when considered along with the potential nuances of the definition of 'armchair activism', it is far better portrayed as an alternative form of activism, the true worth of which, remains to be seen.

Real men don't cry. Critically analyse this statement.

“Real men don't cry”, a mere four words which epitomize the toxic masculinity prevalent in today's patriarchal society. The number of assumptions made with these four words are thought-provoking to say the least, because one cannot help but wonder how the expression of a basic human emotion got assigned fixed gender roles.

For infants, crying is a mode of communication, before the structures of language take hold. Even as language eventually comes into their grasp, crying remains an effective means of expressing any strong emotions, as though its primal nature serves as a far more cathartic outlet than mere words. What we observe till this stage is that there is no gender disparity when it comes to the reasons and frequency a child cries.

However, as children grow older, relatively older, because they still may be just as young as three or four, the social forces start to take hold. Adults who are revered start influencing them with this one poisonous idea: “real men don't cry”. Little boys automatically start associating crying as something inherently feminine, this at a time when they are first coming to terms with the concept of males, females, and biological sex.

This idea having taken root firmly, children begin to grow up, and notice all the other differences between the two sexes, ones which at first glance seem innocuous, but subconsciously keeps reiterating the fact that men are stronger, and hence superior, and women are weaker, hence inferior. With “boys don't cry” already having been indoctrinated, any form of emotionality begins to be associate with weakness. This is obviously the firm basis on which the entire notion of sexism rests, assuming a female's inferior capacity simply for having been born a female, and being allowed to cry.

Yet, while many often realise that this system is created to subjugate females, the fact that males are equally inconvenienced and repressed by it is often overlooked. As discussed earlier, crying is a primal form of catharsis, which comes instinctively to all humans. However, in order to maintain the platform that the patriarchy rests on, men must suppress this urge, leaving them no outlet for feelings that naturally occur. Repression can only continue for so long, and this eventually manifests in one of several different ways: directed inwards, directed outwards, or numbed with the help of external substances.

This extreme reaction mostly only occurs in those men who have been more heavily influenced by the patriarchal ideal, and the external expression often turns out to be violent. The reason for this could either be pent-up resentment, or a need to physically reinforce their dominance, as the possibility of becoming emotional is too big a threat.

Thus, “boys don't cry” often, instead of turning men into the ever-composed individuals they are meant to be, instead makes them the opposite: people being ruled solely by their repressed emotions.