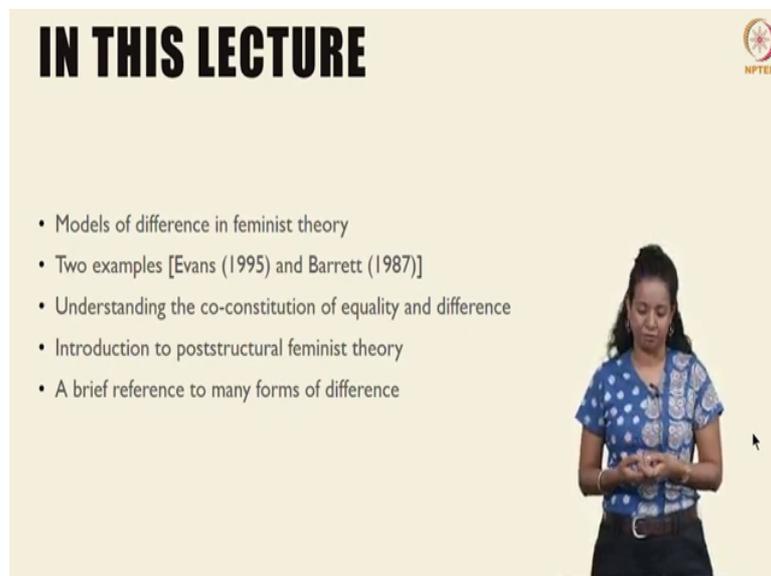


**Feminism: Concepts and Theories**  
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**Key Concepts: Difference**

Welcome back to Feminism: Concepts and Theories. Today we are going to go over another concept as promised. So, I will give you a caveat here. For the next few weeks, this week the next and the week after, we are going to go at this pace. But, I would suggest you pay careful attention to each concept because right after that we will speed forward in figuring out how all of these concepts work together, conflict with each other, and so on and so forth.

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**IN THIS LECTURE**

- Models of difference in feminist theory
- Two examples [Evans (1995) and Barrett (1987)]
- Understanding the co-constitution of equality and difference
- Introduction to poststructural feminist theory
- A brief reference to many forms of difference

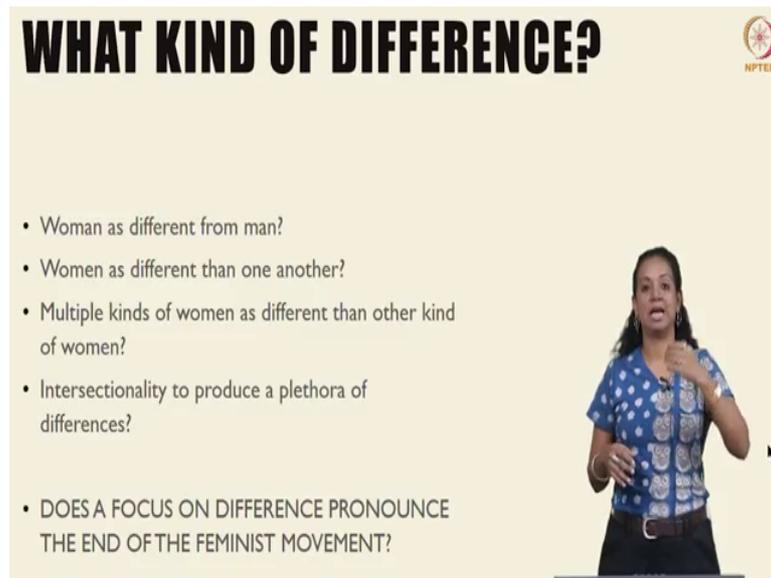
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Dr. Mathangi Krishnamurthy

So, in today's lecture we are going to take up the concept of Difference, and as ever like we did with equality we are going to look at models of difference in feminist theory. We are going to take two models as examples in order to understand how the landscape is configured; we are looking at Evans in 1995, and Barrett in 1987. Our goal in this series of conceptual understandings is to look at the co-constitution of equality and difference and this will be an ongoing theme as we move forward in this course. Which is how is it that each concept dovetails into the other, and how we are building upon each as we build up a basket of concepts. There will also be a brief introduction to post-structural feminist theory and do not let the gigantic word bother you. I will try and explain this in as precise manner as possible but remember as we move along in the course, you are going to have to keep adding to your vocabulary. I would strongly suggest looking it up, seeing various sources, also keeping a dictionary on hand should any of these seem intimidating or daunting.

But, I promise you, as much as you might feel like a lot has been thrown at you in the first few weeks, it is also necessary for us to continue to remember that feminist theory is a vast field and therefore, what I am trying to equip you with is a basic understanding of how to read feminist theory. And lastly we are going to give a brief reference to many forms of difference because as ever, a lecture is not enough to encompass the whole universe of difference.

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**WHAT KIND OF DIFFERENCE?**

- Woman as different from man?
- Women as different than one another?
- Multiple kinds of women as different than other kind of women?
- Intersectionality to produce a plethora of differences?
- DOES A FOCUS ON DIFFERENCE PRONOUNCE THE END OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT?

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So, without further ado, what do we understand as difference in feminist theory? What kind of difference? Let us dive right in. Woman as different from man? Some would say obviously, and some would say not really. Women as different than one another? Of course, but we are also looking at what kinds of difference between women: physical, emotional, spiritual, identity based, so on and so forth.

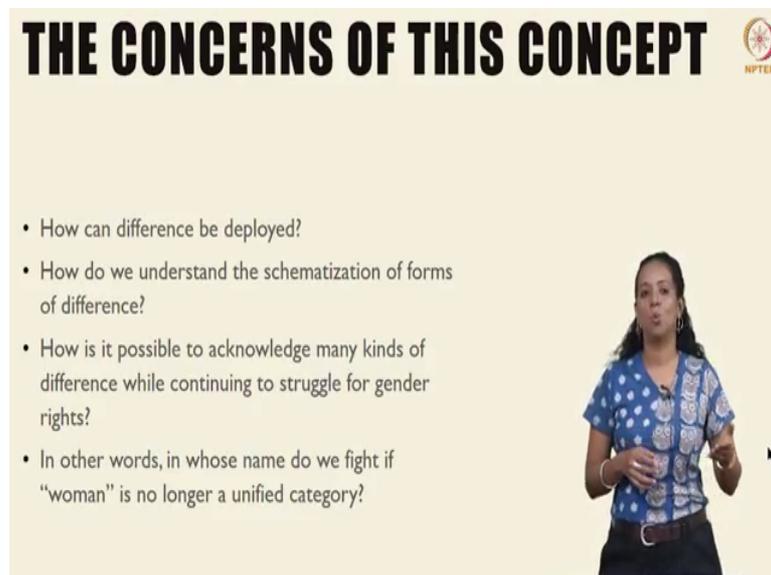
Multiple kinds of women as different than other kind of women, and here we are speaking about categorisation; about how is it that we can then think about baskets of difference in order to compare and contrast; and lastly, very important, intersectionality to produce a spectrum or a plethora of differences. I may have said this before so let me repeat, what do we mean by intersectionality?

Intersectionality merely refers to the fact that gender is one axis of difference; it is intersected by race, caste, class and therefore the particular kind of difference that is the lot of any individual depends upon where that individual falls at the intersection of these differences. And this has very much to do with our understanding of identity as a major player in the social sciences, which is why it never becomes unfashionable.

So, gender is an important category of identity. It is never very clear as to how gender will dictate differences just based on the fact of gender. In other words, if I ask you as to whether in a given context, is a woman more at disadvantage than a man, it will also depend on the comparative race, caste, class of each of these individuals being compared. So that again complicates our discussion of difference within feminist theory, which is what kinds of difference are more important than others.

And very-very important, and this is why a lot of people may have a little discomfort in speaking about difference in relation to any form of theory that also seeks to produce change in the world, which is, the moment you start arguing for endless difference, you are also arguing for the instability of a position and let us pause, what do I mean by that? What is the instability of a position? Here I am referring to identity as a stable position. But, if we are constantly speaking about gender as inundated with differences, with different kinds of genders, then who is the person that we are fighting for or the feminist movement is fighting for? If nothing is sure about gender then how is it that we make a plea in the name of gender for equality?

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**THE CONCERNS OF THIS CONCEPT** 

- How can difference be deployed?
- How do we understand the schematization of forms of difference?
- How is it possible to acknowledge many kinds of difference while continuing to struggle for gender rights?
- In other words, in whose name do we fight if "woman" is no longer a unified category?



And therefore, the concerns of this concept have very much to do with asking, how can difference be deployed? And deployment is a term you will come across very often over the course of these lectures. It means that we are not making any kind of artificial separation between theory and practice. It means that in many ways theory exists to play, and I do not mean play in a light-hearted or frivolous fashion.

It means that conceptually you can deploy something imaginatively. How is it that a concept like difference can continue to make a plea for equal rights and equality is an imaginative

question? You have to fill it with content depending on the context you are employing it in. So, then a second question, how do we understand the schematization of forms of difference?

Now, why is a schema important? They are merely organisational tools for things to make sense to you. Meaning, you draw a scheme of various forms of difference and see how they are connected to one another so that you can continue to think about difference as a complex concept, while at the same time not being worried that you cannot deploy it at all in a situation of asking for rights.

How is it possible? Therefore, to acknowledge many kinds of difference while continuing to struggle for gender rights. Now, this is a question that feminist theory and the feminist movement are fairly clear about, which is that you cannot refuse difference, you cannot collapse all manner of woman into one category just because it is convenient. You have to hold together difference while also allowing them to speak together as a whole and this is a difficult concern. But both feminist theory and the feminist movement are adamant upon saying that this is something that has to be brought about at the risk of homogenising differences into one kind of subject position.

In other words, whose name do we fight if woman is no longer a unified category? And this is something I was referring to a couple of seconds ago, which is that, what is this category of movement, how is that we outline it and detail its contours? So, these are the concerns within which today I am going to discuss difference.

So, I say this again and again, which is, that difference is one of the most important concepts that you will learn in feminist theory. I would encourage you to struggle with it for a bit and not to sit back and say “this is not for me” if some part of it is difficult or discomforting or disconcerting.

Part of the mandate of theory is also to tell you that the world is a complex entity and theory in its singular form cannot really allow you to grapple with it. It gives you a set of tools but the work will have to be done by you.

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## EVANS' SCHEMA OF DIFFERENCE (1995)



- Valuing woman's difference from man (the 'weak' and the 'strong' versions of cultural feminism)
- Differences between groups of women (identity politics)
- The difference within (postmodernism and poststructuralism).



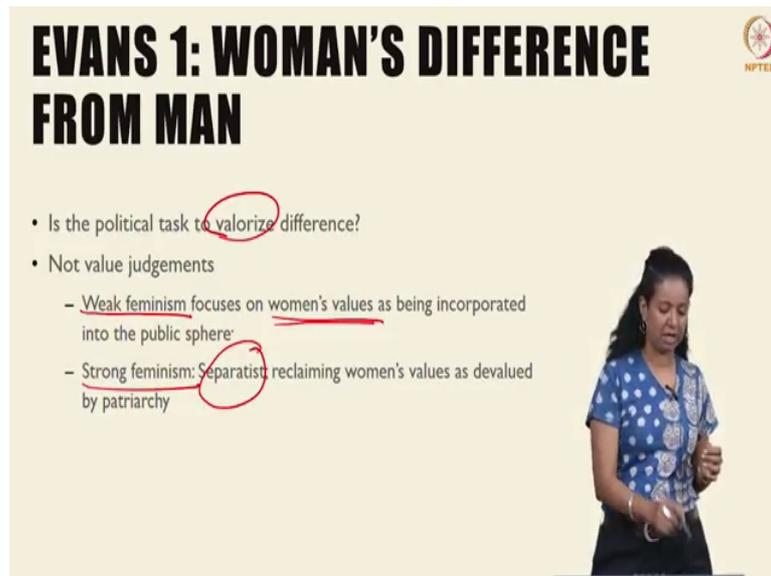
Let us start therefore as promised with Evans' schema of difference which was written in 1995. Here, Evans details the kinds of difference, starting with valuing woman's difference from man, and here this is a fairly commonsensical position to take. Women are considered different than men.

But, in what way? And the answer could come in multiple ways; so the ones that Evans is detailing for us are the weak and the strong versions of cultural feminism. I will come to each of these in just a little bit. A is woman's difference from man; weak and strong version. B is differences between groups of women.

This is not pursuing the idea of a singular woman versus a single man, and they are different; instead, Evans is talking about how one group of women has very-very different sets of identity politics than the other, and thereby a different set of needs and a different set of demands.

Lastly, we are speaking about the difference within and here we are squarely in the realm of the language in meaning, and this is where we will also be introduced to postmodernism and poststructuralism. Now, just a brief definition: with postmodernism and poststructuralism, it might be essential to have a working knowledge of modernism and structuralism. But, for the purpose of this lecture this is really not necessary, so I will offer a brief explanation in a next few slides.

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**EVANS 1: WOMAN'S DIFFERENCE FROM MAN**

- Is the political task to valorize difference?
- Not value judgements
  - Weak feminism focuses on women's values as being incorporated into the public sphere
  - Strong feminism: Separatist reclaiming women's values as devalued by patriarchy

The slide features a presenter on the right side, a woman wearing a blue patterned top. The text on the slide includes a title, a main question, and two categories of feminism with their respective descriptions. Red circles and lines are drawn around the words 'valorize', 'Separatist', and 'women's values' in the original image.

Let us start with the first kind of difference where we are speaking about woman's difference from man. Therefore, we ask, is the political task to valorize difference? And the word valorize is an interesting one. Because here you are not only taking difference as something that is a given, you are seeking to make it heroic, you are seeking to add value to this question of woman's difference from man. By saying that for centuries, all you have said is that women are different than man, therefore their needs and rights are different. But, such differences have led to marginalisation of woman so how about we do the opposite? We take it for granted that women are different than men but additionally, we also say that such difference ought to be honoured, it ought to be valorised, it ought to be made heroic.

We have to pay specific attention to the details of woman's lives in order to understand what kind of difference can bear on it, and here we are speaking about two kinds: weak feminism, strong feminism. Please remember, weak and strong over here are not value judgements, they are descriptors. They are descriptions of what kinds of difference are being made heroic in this process.

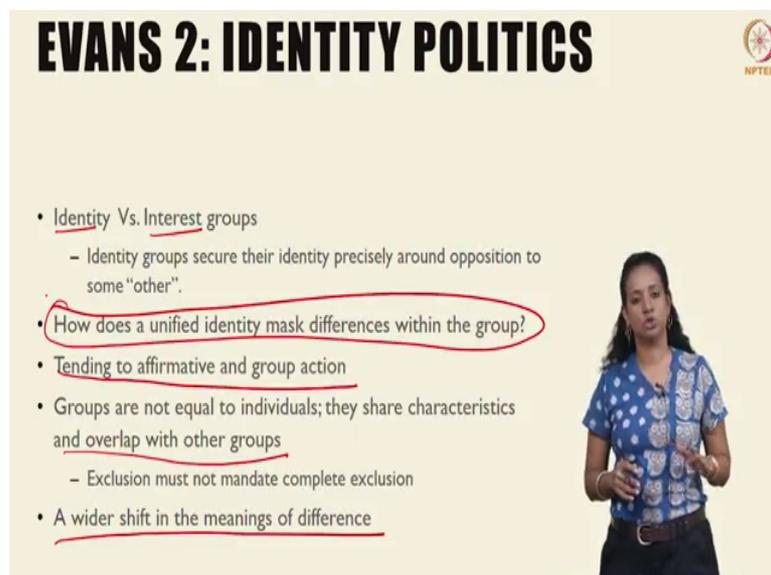
Weak feminism's focus is on woman's values as being incorporated into the public sphere. Let me give you an example: these days managerial traits are supposed to also accommodate understanding, caring, nurturing being available to your team members in order to understand their plight and life and this is what would come under the category of weak feminism where you say women's values, traditionally what are considered to be only the purview of women's characteristics, the capacity to love, the capacity to nurture, the capacity to listen. These should be part of public sphere as desirable and necessary for the good of humankind.

And therefore, weak feminism or in another words you might even call it soft feminism which is, yes, women are exactly who give you always thought them to be but let us bring those ideas about women into the public sphere and make them necessary to us. Strong feminism is, as the word suggests; strong, assertive, some might argue aggressive. Primarily, separatist in impulse and here I know you are having imaginations of Amazonian woman taking over the world but that is not quite what it means.

You reclaim woman's values as devalued by patriarchy. You say that the things that have been dear to women have always been struck down by patriarchy. Think for example, of the narrative of emotional women, women who are irrational, women who are capable of day dreaming at the cost of the work that needs to be done. If you go back to a previous lecture where we spoke about the kinds of binaries along which concepts are organised, here woman's values are consider to be unnecessary.

Strong feminism not only reclaims these values but separates them saying you have actively devalued them and we want those rights back. It is arguing almost militantly for a return of those things to public imagination and wanting to separate from men's values as defined by patriarchy.

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**EVANS 2: IDENTITY POLITICS**

- Identity Vs. Interest groups
  - Identity groups secure their identity precisely around opposition to some "other".
- How does a unified identity mask differences within the group?
- Tending to affirmative and group action
- Groups are not equal to individuals; they share characteristics and overlap with other groups
  - Exclusion must not mandate complete exclusion
- A wider shift in the meanings of difference

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In our second form of difference that Evans speaks about, we are concerned with identity politics where woman, man band together based upon some common aspects of identity that they consider to be inherent to their sense of self. Here, let me separate between identity versus interest groups which is that identity groups are also secured around identity which is often defined in opposition to someone else, it is not merely enough on its own.

Interest groups merely come together for the sake of some common interest that they share. Philately, fishing, reading, writing so on and so forth, and these are often interests that they share rather than things that they consider germane to their capacity to being in the world.

Here we ask, how does a unified identity mask differences within the group?

Now you can see the kind of dialectic between the second form of difference and the first form of difference. The first was about differences between men and women and saying all women are the same. Here, you are separating women into particular identity groups and then asking, well, all right. Suddenly it is no longer woman as a single category.

But, if we have say three categories of women based on different identity characteristics, what about the differences within that group itself and how is that those differences are not taken into account in this form of difference? In spite of this issue, identity politics does signify a wider shift in the meanings of difference.

You are breaking down a single category of woman into a couple more identity groups and often the goal is for affirmative and group action, pleading for rights for the group instead of for a single movement as an individual deserving rights in the world.

Groups are not equal to individuals therefore, they share characteristics and overlap with other groups. So, one of the arguments made is that exclusion within identity politics, saying so on and so are a group of women, must not mandate complete exclusion for other kinds of women as well. There must be room for inclusion, allegiance, affiliation and so on, and we still continue to ask the question, how does a unified identity mask differences within the group? But we bracket it. We leave it alone saying identity politics do achieve some functions and this is a caveat that we must continue to pay attention to.

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## EVANS 3: THE CASE OF POSTMODERNISM



- The omniscience of a suspect metanarrative
- A challenge to the politics of emancipation
- A critical lens
  - Postmodernism: A position
  - Poststructuralism: A methodology to evaluate truth claims and understand the exclusionary operations that help establish said truths. The subject in this account is a process.



## EVANS 2: IDENTITY POLITICS



- Identity Vs. Interest groups
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- How does a unified identity mask differences within the group?
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Lastly we come to the question of the case of postmodernism or the difference within. Which is really if you can see, it is a bit of a funnel: we start with woman as a large category, woman and man as different. Then we break it down and say, women and women, there are differences but alright we will deal with it by putting them into different identity groups.

Third, the case of postmodernism addresses the previous question which is, how does a unified identity mask differences within the group? Well in order to consider that, what is offered is the case of postmodernism. Where you suspect all narratives, where you say there is no such thing as woman; really, these are words we play with.

These are categories that are provided conveniently for the purpose of easy living in the world and therefore it offers a challenge to even something like identity politics, calling everything

suspicious and a bit of a lie. It is a critical lens and often the differences between postmodernism and poststructuralism are collapsed into one.

So, I will speak about the difference a little bit but I hope postmodernism is clear because postmodernism is very much a certain kind of public cynicism, and also a public amusement theoretically, with the idea that anything can even have stable or clear meaning.

One can think about postmodernism as a position. Now, something that follows from this is poststructuralism which it would be useful to understand as a methodology to evaluate truth claims and understand the exclusionary operations that help establish said truths. The subject in this account is a process. Now, hark back to an earlier lecture where we spoke about this kind of construction of discourse; that is it is only through discourse—things said again and again and repeatedly from multiple quarters— that any category begins to take on the location of truth.

Poststructuralism is a method to unravel such truth value. It asks us to evaluate truth claims. Like for example, think about people saying a woman's place is in the kitchen. So, we are not saying that it is obviously false, that there is problem in that, it is patriarchy. Instead we ask, who are the people that believe that a woman's place is in the kitchen?

Then you ask further questions, then you say how is it that you believe that, who told you, what are the kinds of scientific knowledge, cultural narratives, religious narratives that have allowed you to believe that a woman's place is in the kitchen?

So, poststructuralism really offers a constructive method for us to be able to understand, how something takes on the nature of reality and this is why poststructuralism is in many ways not the same as postmodernism, and this is something to remember as we go forward to investigate the question of difference.

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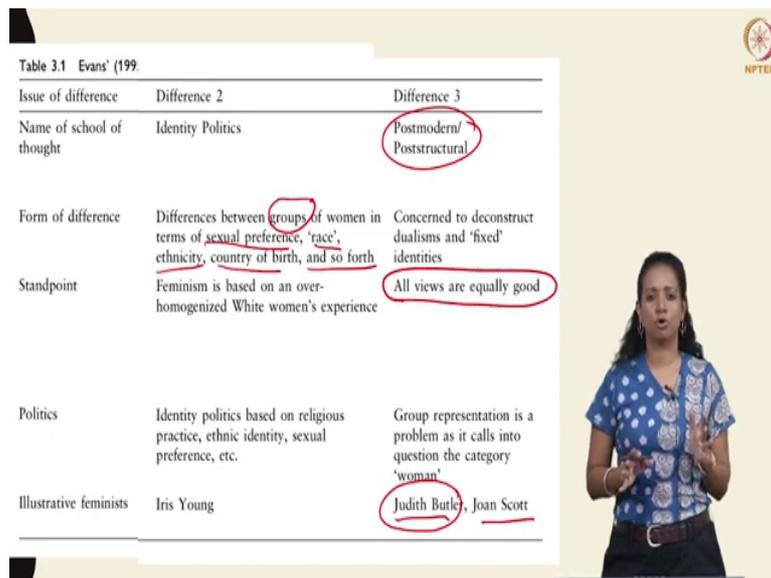


Issue of difference	Difference 1
Name of school of thought	Woman-centred school/ Cultural feminism/ Gynocentricism/ gynandry
Form of difference	Differences between women and men
Standpoint	Revalues women's difference from men but <u>two main schools</u> : (a) <u>different but equal</u> —women have complementary virtues to those of men (b) <u>rebut, refuse, attack all that is man-made</u> . Woman's difference is superior.
Politics	Belief in some kind of universality or commonality of womanhood
Illustrative feminists	Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich, Carol Gilligan

So, let us do a quick recap and here I am only going to go over Evans' schema of difference, let us start with difference one. What is the school of thought? It is a woman-centered school or cultural feminism. If you remember which is, in which we are talking about how we have weak and strong versions of cultural feminism, gynocentrism or gynandry.

The form of difference that it advocates looks at a differences between men and women. What are its standpoints? Where does it look at this problem from the point of view of? Two main schools: Different but equal—women have complementary virtues to those of men and that is why they ought to be recognised and pulled into public imagination. (Or) Rebut, refuse, attack all that is manmade. Woman's difference is superior. Remember the materialist stances that we spoke about, this comes added from a similar school of thought. What are these politics? Belief in some kind of universality or commonality of womanhood. That there is something essential to being a woman that is shared by all women across the universe. Some illustrative feminists to read should you be interested: Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich, Carol Gilligan.

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Issue of difference	Difference 2	Difference 3
Name of school of thought	Identity Politics	Postmodern/ Poststructural
Form of difference	Differences between groups of women in terms of sexual preference, 'race', ethnicity, country of birth, and so forth	Concerned to deconstruct dualisms and 'fixed' identities
Standpoint	Feminism is based on an over-homogenized White women's experience	All views are equally good
Politics	Identity politics based on religious practice, ethnic identity, sexual preference, etc.	Group representation is a problem as it calls into question the category 'woman'
Illustrative feminists	Iris Young	Judith Butler, Joan Scott

Difference two, what is the name of the school of thought? This is fairly obvious: identity politics. What is the form of difference that this school embraces? Differences between groups of women in terms of identity categories such as sexual preference, race, ethnicity, country of birth, so forth. Again I will emphasize that identity groups are different than interest groups.

Standpoint is that feminism is based on over-homogenized white women's experiences which means that they are critiquing a form of feminism that takes on a universality and universality in this case is not the universal male object, it is the universal white woman as the neutral subject upon whose experiences all of feminism's activities should be based.

By introducing identity politics, this is also speaking about intersectionality and saying, there are different kinds of women in the world and their interests are completely different than those of white women and should be heeded to accordingly. What are the politics of this form of difference? They are based on religious practice, ethnic identity, sexual preference etc. In other words, the politics that one associates with identity, namely identity politics. Illustrative feminists are people like Iris Young as given in this schema. There are other feminists who also practice very-very interesting vibrant forms of identity politics in relation to women's issues and we will visit some of them in a week, where are speak about the three waves of the feminism.

In the third kind of difference, postmodern slash poststructural, we are concerned to deconstruct dualisms and fixed identities. In other words, we are deconstructing the very category of woman, thereby also bringing us to risky propositions that feminist politics cannot be practiced in the name of any kind of identity, and here while the table says that all views are equally

good, the right way to phrase this would be that in postmodernism, all views are equally suspect and poststructuralism is interested in asking how is it that something that is a good view point began to be seen as good or true or right?

Group representation is a problem as it calls into question the category woman. Here, illustrative feminists are Judith Butler, Joan Scott. Now, we will speak about Judith Butler a little bit in this lecture itself, and then again in the weeks on Queer theory and poststructuralism. So, if poststructuralism does not make enough sense to you right now, just hold on for a few weeks, by the end of the course it will.

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**BARRETT'S SCHEMA OF DIFFERENCE (1987)**

- 1. Difference as experiential diversity (unitary human subject)
- 2. Difference as positional meaning (discourse; textual and local; difference as created through oppositions)
- 3. Sexual difference (Sexuality or sexual difference as central to women's oppression; gendered subjectivity, a reclaiming of the unconscious – e.g. Chodorow)

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Let us move on now to Barrett's schema of difference. This was propounded in 1987, so many years before Evans but there is a reason we are taking it afterwards. It also because the categories in this collapse and expand upon Evans' schema of difference. Here, Barrett is concerned with difference as experiential diversity; again we are coming back to the category of the human. And we are saying that difference can only be based upon life experiences and therefore, the author is interested in experiential diversity of unitary human subjects where gender is part of that difference but it is not the only one.

Difference as positional meaning: discourse; textual, local differences created through oppositions. Here in the second form of difference we're squarely in the realm of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Barrett's first category of difference collapses one and two in Evans. Barrett's second category of difference equals Evans' third category of difference.

And to this Barrett adds one more, which is the question of sexual difference which has then gone on to gain interesting directions within feminist psychoanalytic theory. Where sexuality or sexual difference is central to women's oppression, and gender subjectivity means that you reclaim the unconscious from that kind of training of your sexuality. I will not go much into it in this lecture mainly because it is a bit of a dense and difficult topic at this stage. But we will revisit it again in Queer theory.

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Issue of Difference	Difference 1	Difference 2	Difference 3
Name of school of thought	Difference as experiential diversity	Difference as positional meaning	Sexual difference
Form of difference	Differences between women and men. Differences between groups of women in terms of sexual preferences, class, 'race' and so forth	Linguistic difference, difference produced through discourse	The creation of gendered subjectivities accounts of sexual difference
Standpoint	Rests on a view of the unitary human subject who is an active and effective agent. Confidence in empirical methods and an ontological reality	Deconstruction of the unified subject of humanism. Rejection of grand narratives. Challenge to transcendental meaning. Dismantling of supposed certainty	The centrality of sexual difference to women's oppression
Politics	Recognition of diversity of social experience both between women and men and within groups of women	Textual and local	A reclaiming of the unconscious
Illustrative feminists	Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich, Andrea Dworkin, Dale Spender	Angela McRobbie	Juliet Mitchell, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Melanie Klein, Nancy Chodorow

So, to recap a couple of questions with Barrett's schema of difference. School of thought: difference as experiential diversity, where differences are both differences between women and men, and differences between groups of women because all of it can come under the category of experience. It rest on the view of the unitary human subject who is an active and effective agent.

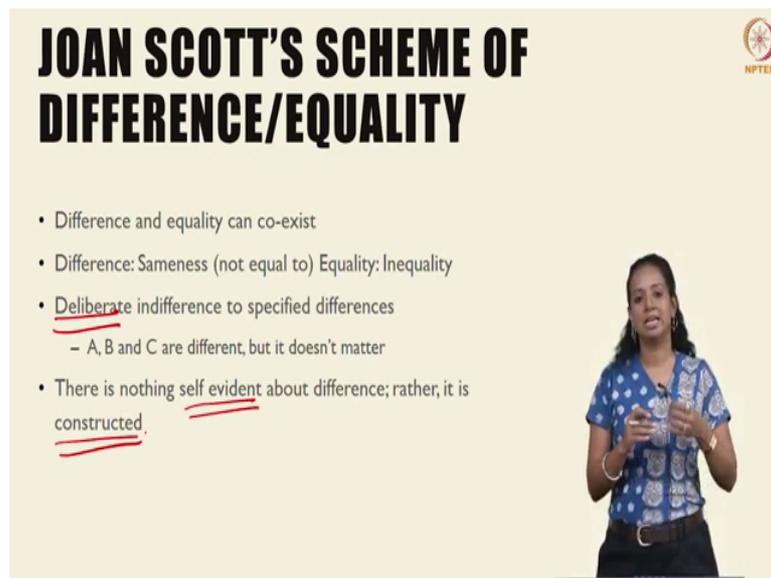
Does this remind you a little bit of liberal feminism as we discussed the idea that, every human is an agent and acts within various sets of constraints? And thereby these actions are to be taken into account to understand the need for feminist intervention, and there is a confidence in empirical methods and an ontological reality. By ontological we mean lived every day, day-to-day, acting reality. It's politics are about the recognition of diversity of social experience. Now, remember when we say ontological, we are talking about people's experiences in society. Both between women and men and within groups of women. Now, this is a fairly sort of all-encompassing generous category of difference because it does not exclude anybody. Instead it insist on difference as absolute and of difference as an ongoing process. To that extent it might share some kinds of similarity with the idea that the subject is very much of process. But, what

it does not share is a clear analysis of the categories of discourse that bear upon the subject as they live daily life.

Illustrative feminists are Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich, Andrea Dworkin, Dale Spender. In Barrett's second category of difference we are interested in difference as positional meaning very specifically within linguistic difference, language and discourse. Here the standpoint is the deconstruction of the unified subject of humanism.

You have to reject all grand narratives and there is a challenge to transcendental meaning. It is a dismantling of reality so you can consider this to be a combination of both the postmodern and the poststructural point of view and its politics are very much textual and local. Meaning, its intervention is located in dismantling any kinds of assumptions in writing and reading, and the ways in which meaning is constructed in the world. Illustrative feminist could be Angela McRobbie, and lastly sexual difference is interested in the creation of gendered subjectivities through accounts of sexual difference. It's looking at the centrality of sexual difference to women's oppression. Now, this is very much also rooted in questioning schools of biological determinism that say well here is the bodily empirical evidence that women are different than men because sexually they are just oriented differently. Each is oriented towards the other if you are looking at standard heterosexual constructions. Here, theorists interested in reclaiming the unconscious also look at liberating that kind of sexual imagination from these constraints and you are looking to Juliet Mitchell, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Melanie Klein, Nancy Chodorow.

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**JOAN SCOTT'S SCHEME OF DIFFERENCE/EQUALITY**

- Difference and equality can co-exist
- Difference: Sameness (not equal to) Equality: Inequality
- Deliberate indifference to specified differences
  - A, B and C are different, but it doesn't matter
- There is nothing self evident about difference; rather, it is constructed.

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I also want to introduce you briefly over here to Joan Scott's scheme of difference/equality. Where she importantly argues that difference and equality can co-exist and we are bringing together a previous lecture on equality along with this on difference. When we say that difference in relation to sameness is not the same as equality and inequality.

You can have differences and sameness within one particular set of thoughts in relation to equality. Just because you are perpetuating differences does not mean that you will automatically perpetuate inequality and this can be brought up about she argues by a deliberate indifference to specified differences. In other words A, B, C are different but it does not matter.

You do not assigned a hierarchical value to differences. You do not say so and so is short, so and so is tall, and therefore tall is greater than short, you just say it does not matter. It just means in different circumstances these can take on different valences and the task of society is to ensure that whether short or tall, the opportunity, conditions and outcomes available to each are not different or superior or inferior. And at the same time Scott argues that there is nothing self-evident about difference. She goes one step further, she says not only can difference and sameness be accommodated within the same understanding of equality, in fact, let us question difference itself, how is it that difference comes into the world? She argues that the kind of hierarchical difference upon which inequality rests is constructed. Let me add a note over you to say that every time you see constructed does not mean it is false, we are not questioning things like real or false.

We think that even constructed things have force in the world, they have consequences and therefore when we say it is constructed does not mean it is not enduring or it is not strong. It means that it has to be dismantled or deconstructed.

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**CENTRAL PROBLEMATIC**

- "...a rather obvious point to make about the way in which feminist thought has been classified is that there is no real consensus as to which categories are the most meaningful, how many there are and which writers are to be located within each."
- *Heuristic rather than an empirical device*
- Postmodernism and Poststructuralism are often considered to be at the root of these concerns

Now, that we have come to the end of these two schemes of difference, it would be useful to outline our central problematic, which is that the ways in which feminist thought have been classified, you can begin to understand that there is no real consensus as to which categories are the most meaningful, how many there are, which writers speak to which, often, these are overlapping and it might lead to some confusion.

It might be useful to remember that these are heuristic rather than empirical devices. Which means they organise the world in particular sets of ways for your thinking convenience; they are not absolute truths in the world and just because there are so many categories does not mean that they negate one another or one is most superior to the other. It just means that they tackle difference sets of things and we all have to get used to thinking about all of them together rather than in silos.

And some of these problems arise because postmodernism and poststructuralism are considered to be at the root of these concerns. How does one understand anything, if the postmodernists think that nothing matters and if the poststructuralists think that everything needs to be deconstructed? Certainly you think about yourself as forever drawn into these concerns and obsessed with them which has given rise to a lot of memes about both postmodernist and poststructuralists.

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Just to give you a couple of examples, you recognise the scene from “Fight club”. Which says the first rule of postmodernism is you do not define it. Often people joke that it means anything goes, and this is kind of funny. But, you have to remember that postmodernism comes in the wake of modernity which is all about surety and rationality and definitiveness.

And postmodernism was essential for the breakdown of these kinds of inaccurate sureties in the world. Where the world seem to be uncertain, and breaking down and the postmodernists came about and said, well actually the things that you think are certain are really not and we need to rethink our capacity to be in the world. It performed an important imaginative and political function.

Similarly, look at this meme about poststructuralism where somebody is calling a help-centre to say “Is someone you care about getting involved with poststructuralism?” and the woman says, “My son has recently been using the term knowledge in the plural, should I be worried?” And the person says, “Unfortunately this may be a symptom of reading of Foucault; refer to human nature in a conversation and observe your son’s reaction”. This is hilarious. But, remember this: poststructuralism is powerful, yes it does teach you that most kinds of things in the world are unsure. That often we use them in a way that includes certain assumptions that ought to be overturned. But, also imagine the liberty of a world where things are not sure which means you can keep constructing them over and over again with a new set of assumptions that will hopefully lead us towards egalitarianism and equality.

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# POSTMODERNISM AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM

- Issues of universality, subjectivity, and power overlap
- Postmodernism – position
- Poststructuralism – offers a set of tools
  - Methodology to examine how women's lives are constructed in the form they take
  - Response to critiques of Marxist certainty
  - Offers the possibility of creating new gender discourses



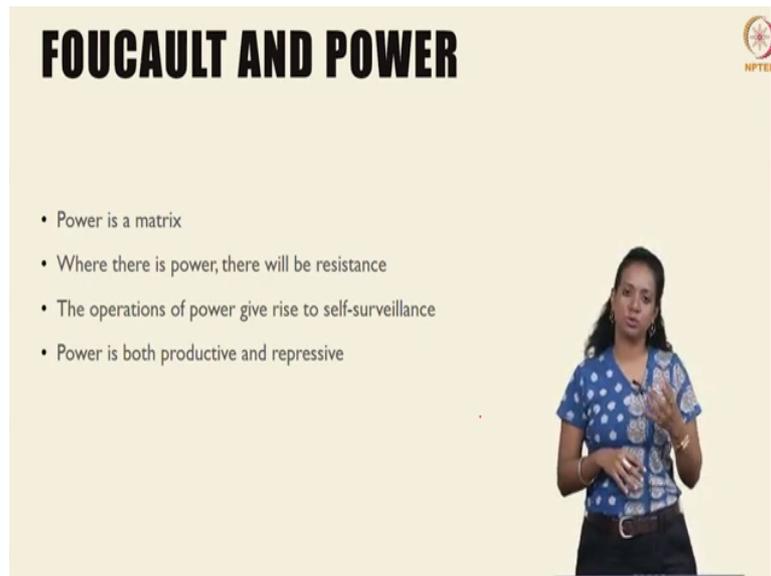
So, what should be know about these two terms is that issues of universality, subjectivity, power overlap. Universality is suspect, subjectivity is considered to be formed by different sets of forces in the world that change over time. Which is why the subject self is constantly in process and both postmodernism and poststructuralism are interested in power and power is not a bad word.

It is just something that needs to be analysed and looked at to understand how it acts upon subjects in the world. Postmodernism is a position as we discussed earlier, poststructuralism offers a set of tools. For, feminist theory it is particularly important because we are asking, how women's lives are constructed in the ways that you see them to be constructed.

It can also be considered as a response to critiques of Marxist certainty, where you say that once the class structures breakdown, women will be as equal as men and that has not happened, either with class or with women, and offers us the important possibility of creating a completely new set of gender discourses and can you imagine how exciting that is?

I know it is scary to a lot of people in the world the idea that, genders are not certain, that of course there are men and women and what will you know if you think that this truth has broken down? Well I am not sure; poststructuralism also means that one has to give up one's attachment to constantly knowing all the time.

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The slide features a title 'FOUCAULT AND POWER' in bold black letters at the top left. Below the title is a bulleted list of four points. On the right side of the slide, there is a photograph of a woman in a blue patterned shirt and dark pants, who appears to be presenting. In the top right corner, there is a small circular logo with the text 'NPTEL' below it.

- Power is a matrix
- Where there is power, there will be resistance
- The operations of power give rise to self-surveillance
- Power is both productive and repressive

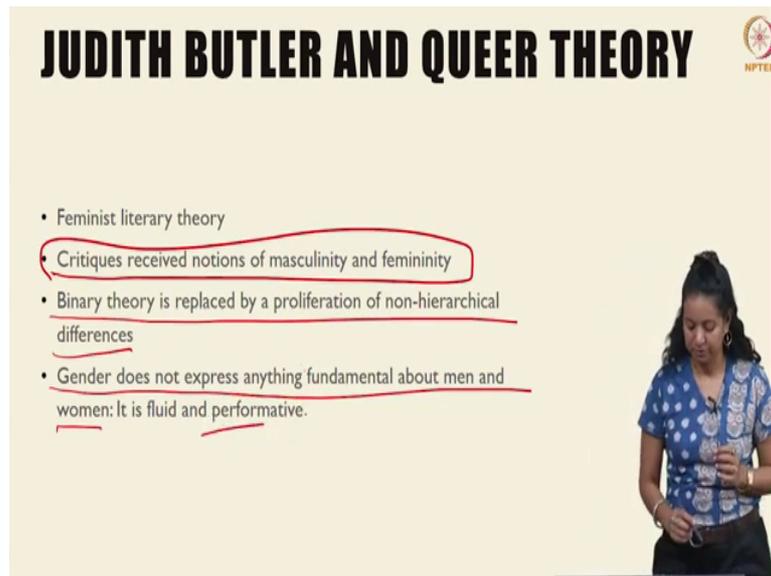
Here, it is also useful to do a little bit of a side note on Foucault. Michele Foucault; philosopher thinker, influential figure, who wrote and spoke about power. And to Foucault, power as I discussed earlier is a matrix. It is not a singular force, it comprises a set of forces that together act up on individuals and create subjects in the world.

Foucault also argues that where there is power, there will be resistance; so all is not lost when we say power, we are not talking about something that cannot be fought against; instead poststructuralism also offers us the capacity to deconstruct in order to understand differently and thereby resist power. The operations of power give rise to self-surveillance this is an important-important point for feminist theory because then we ask the question, how is it that women themselves are not interested in liberating themselves?

And the simple answer is well in many ways women are also part of the same system as the rest of the world and therefore, you surveill yourselves to try and be good subjects in the world based on the discourses that you are subject to. Lastly, as I mentioned earlier power is both productive and repressive.

It represses things but it produces new things and therefore it is an important force in the world to pay attention to. Reading Foucault is also really important to understanding poststructural theory and here I want to give a brief introduction to another figure that we will read soon enough.

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**JUDITH BUTLER AND QUEER THEORY**

- Feminist literary theory
- Critiques received notions of masculinity and femininity
- Binary theory is replaced by a proliferation of non-hierarchical differences
- Gender does not express anything fundamental about men and women: It is fluid and performative.

The slide features a yellow background with a green vertical bar on the right. A presenter, a woman in a blue patterned shirt, is visible on the right side of the slide. The text on the slide is black, with some words underlined in red.

Judith Butler an important figure and important writer in post-structural feminist and Queer theory. I will not talk about what Queer theory is at this point of time; this is merely introduction to a Butler who made her primary contributions in feminist literary theory and critiques receives notions of both masculinity and femininity.

So, now we are in the realm of the third kind of difference which is critiquing both masculinity and femininity in relation to Evans and the second category of difference in relation to Barrett where she says that binary theory should be replaced by a proliferation of non-hierarchical differences.

Remember Scott where we spoke about how difference can be deliberately ignored and as if it does not matter? Butler is speaking about the same thing in relation to gender saying it is not just man and woman; it is different kinds of men, different kinds of women and depending on how is it that they are located along a longer spectrum, we can create multiple categories of gender that need not be hierarchically related to one another. Most importantly and we will revisit this soon enough but I want you to remember this at this point of time as an important way to understand difference by deconstructing gender. Butler argues that gender does not express anything fundamental about men and women. There is nothing intrinsic to us called gender, gender is fluid and gender is performative. Now, what do we mean by performative?

Does it mean that we are all tricksters in the world that we know some other truth and then we emerged and then says, okay, let us play man-woman, let us play woman-man. Let us play act and perform these things and fool the world. Pay attention: the word is performative not performance.

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**JUDITH BUTLER: QUEER THEORY**

- Kafka's "Before the Law"
- The anticipation conjures its object
  - An expectation that produced the very phenomenon it anticipates
- Performativity works by anticipating a gendered essence and is repeated over time to solidify into identity
- A so-called internal feature is produced through bodily acts
- Caveats: Not voluntary and does not take away from questions of agency

The slide features a small video inset on the right side showing a woman in a blue patterned shirt speaking. The text on the slide is annotated with red circles and lines highlighting specific phrases: 'An expectation that produced the very phenomenon it anticipates', 'Performativity works by anticipating a gendered essence and is repeated over time to solidify into identity', 'A so-called internal feature is produced through bodily acts', and 'agency'.

Therefore what Butler is arguing in relation to gender being performative, is that subjectivity in the world is formed through performance; discourses around us tell us, what men and women ought to be like and we are informed that we are man or woman based on biological characteristics at birth.

And then we repeat what we think to be the ideal performance of masculinity or femininity. Again and again and again until it begins to seem natural and part of us. In other words, there is no intrinsic understanding of gender that one should have allegiance to, one should get used to thinking about gender as performative and maybe we can perform differently or perhaps maybe even stop performing and therefore she reads texts like Kafka's Before the Law and says that the anticipation conjures its object.

We anticipate that somebody is going to expect us to be gendered in particular fashion and even before that person expects us we perform it. We walk in a certain fashion, we speak in a certain fashion, we fashion ourselves as appropriate gendered subjects. In other words, in Butler's terminology, an expectation produces the very phenomenon it anticipates which is sort of a little bit mind blowing if you ask me.

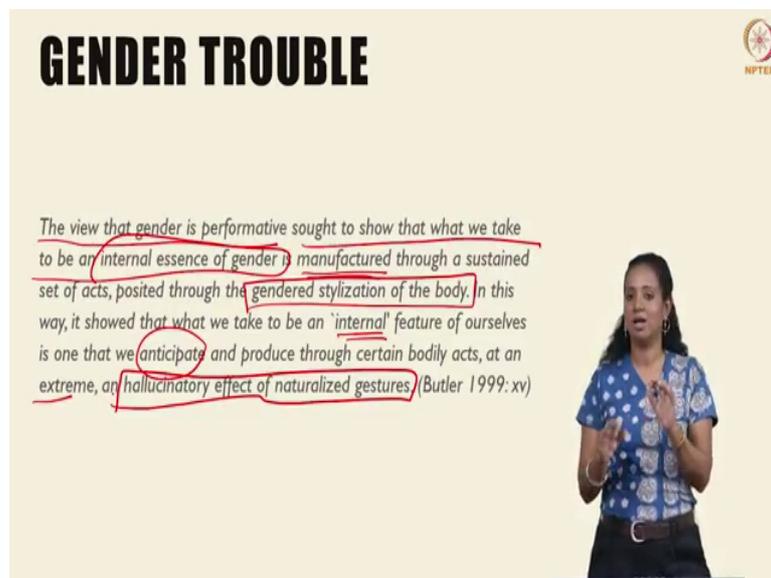
Because she says that performativity works by anticipating a gendered essence; it is repeated over time to solidify into identity. A so-called internal feature and I will have you pay attention to "so-called" is produced through bodily acts. The body itself performing in the world; everyday existence produces something that you think is intrinsic to you.

However, this is neither voluntary nor does it take away from questions of agency and this might be difficult to understand because if somebody is performing does not it mean that they have something to say in the process that you can choose? This is why poststructuralism or poststructural feminist theory conflicts with liberal feminism. We do not have choices, we are formed through structures of power and gendered in structures of power.

At the same time it is not that we do not have an agency or a capacity to act in the world; it is just that it is limited. I know that in many ways this is a lot, so please remember that this is merely an introduction to Butler and we will revisit this in the week on poststructural theory. I just thought that it might be interesting to introduce at this point to tell you what is coming ahead. So, this is a little bit up of teaser campaign.

At the same time, I find poststructural feminist theory to be some of the most exciting theory in this field and therefore it is something that all of us should necessarily engage with whenever we can.

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**GENDER TROUBLE**

*The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it showed that what we take to be an 'internal' feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, as a hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures (Butler 1999: xv)*

The slide features a woman in a blue patterned shirt speaking in a video inset on the right side. The text on the left is a quote from Butler (1999: xv) with several words and phrases underlined in red.

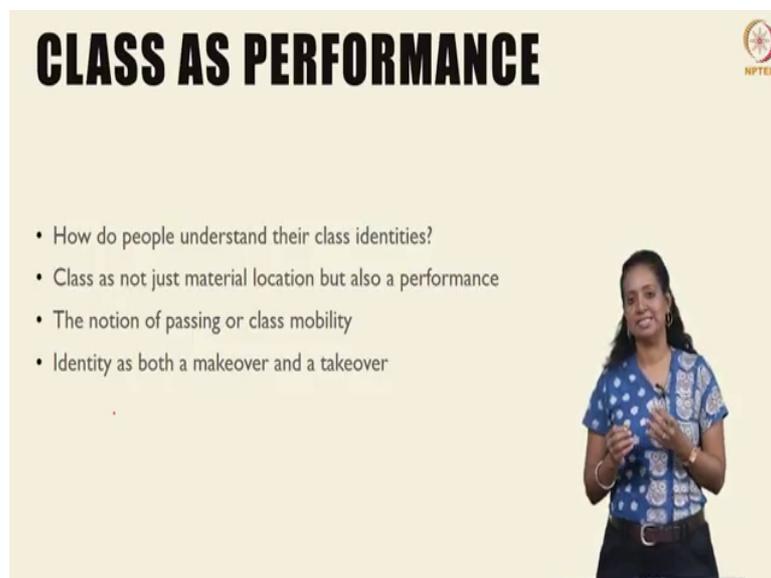
Just to give you a little bit more of a taste of what Butler says and writes, and if this is something that you find difficult hang on to that thought. We will be reading a large portion of “Gender Trouble”, the book I am quoting from, a few weeks into the course.

Here, speaking about gender she says, the view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. Here, is another an important thing to remember: the body is very important to Butler's theorization.

It is not located just in language, it takes into account bodily presence in the world as a gender. In this way it shows that, what we take to be an internal feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce. Remember anticipation? Kafka? And produce through certain bodily acts at an extreme a hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures.

I find this to be a quite lovely turn of phrase: hallucinatory effect as if in many ways gender is something that we are hallucinating through in the world. Hang on to that thought again: because these are imaginative theoretical gestures there for you to play with, to be able to really think about gender as not natural.

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**CLASS AS PERFORMANCE**

- How do people understand their class identities?
- Class as not just material location but also a performance
- The notion of passing or class mobility
- Identity as both a makeover and a takeover

The slide features a presenter, a woman with dark hair wearing a blue patterned top, standing on the right side. In the top right corner, there is a small circular logo with the text 'NPTEL' below it.

And just to give you a little taste of how such theorization may be extended into other forms of difference, the text also asks you to see class as performance. Here by text I mean Christina Hughes' chapter on difference and not Butler. How do people understand their class identity? Sociology, anthropology, the social sciences will have told you that class is about socio-economic capacity which is not false.

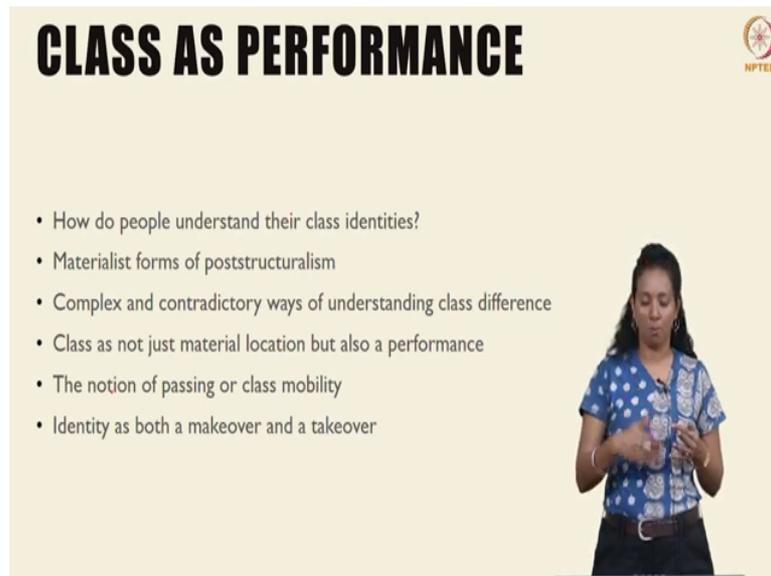
However, in relation to feminist theories of difference, we are looking at class as not just material location but also as performance in a similar fashion as Butler and gender. In other ways, can you identify people's class if they do not tell you how much they earn or how they been educated or what levels of education they have?

Aren't there certain facets of performance that also seem to come hand in hand with material benefits? And therefore you also have the notion of passing or the notion of class mobility where people modify their speech, their clothes, their comportment, their manner of bodily

being in the world to seem to be of certain classes or to gain upward mobility, and in this instance, class as an important facet of identity is both a makeover and a takeover.

You make yourself over in the image of something that you anticipate people are going to expect if they want to see you as a particular class subject and your identity is also taken over by these expectations.

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**CLASS AS PERFORMANCE**

- How do people understand their class identities?
- Materialist forms of poststructuralism
- Complex and contradictory ways of understanding class difference
- Class as not just material location but also a performance
- The notion of passing or class mobility
- Identity as both a makeover and a takeover

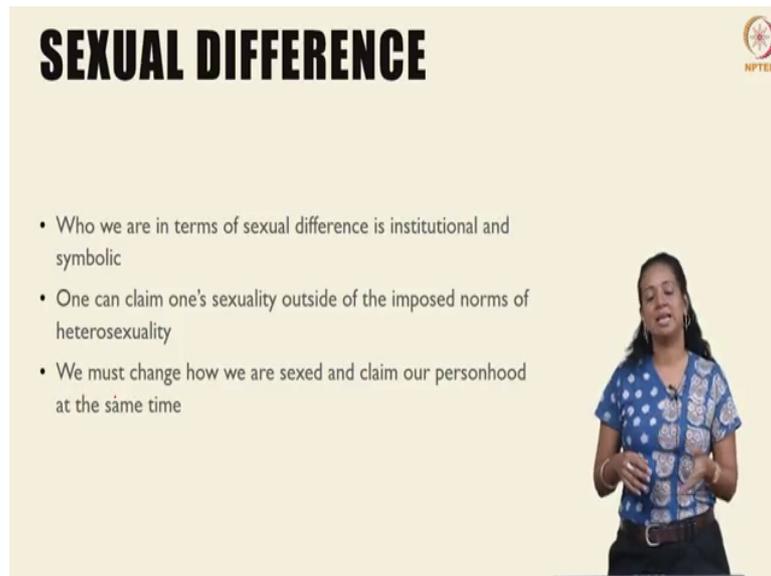
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Therefore, in relation to class performance or the difference as part of class identities in feminist theory, we ask as to how the people understand their class identities. Here, we are looking at materialist forms of poststructuralism and complex and contradictory ways of understanding class difference not merely based in material wealth.

I already mentioned the notion of passing or class mobility but in relation to the materialist form of poststructuralism that we are speaking about. It is important to remember that such passing or such mobility has material consequences. It is not merely about identity as a fashionable thing, it means that certain kinds of wealth will come to you if you are seen as a particular kind of class subject. Think for example, about ways in which people have to appear in job interviews. What kind of class background? What kind of educational background?

It will not matter if your certificates say certain things, it will matter that you are evaluated to be of a certain class by the person sitting opposite to you interviewing you, and like we said identity as both a makeover and a takeover is particularly important because here, we are talking about forms of injustice perpetuated depending upon how you are perceived in the world.

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**SEXUAL DIFFERENCE**

- Who we are in terms of sexual difference is institutional and symbolic
- One can claim one's sexuality outside of the imposed norms of heterosexuality
- We must change how we are sexed and claim our personhood at the same time

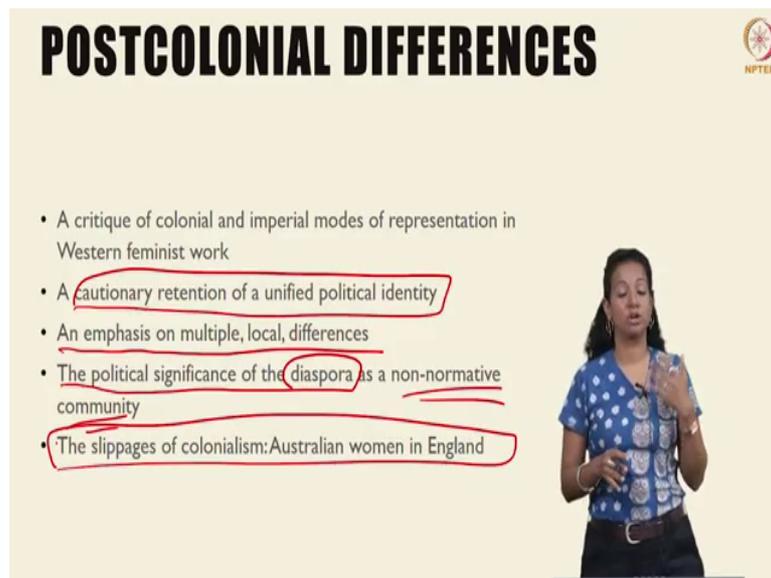
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A brief sort of looking through sexual difference: here again if we start thinking about through Butler's theory we are saying that, sexual difference is institutional and symbolic. Now, I would not have you worry about these terms too much. By institutional we mean that, they mean something to particular kind of institutions such as family, state so on and so forth.

And here is a controversial claim: that one can claim one's sexuality outside of the imposed norms of heterosexuality. Now, this is a difficult one for a lot of people to wrap their heads around because again heterosexuality is considered to be the norm in society through which we reproduce ourselves and many theorists and writers are arguing very strongly for the fact for sexuality itself to be an identity based claim that can be dismantled.

And this is what they are suggesting: that we must change how we are sexed and claim our personhood at the same time. That is possible to be sexed differently than heterosexual society demands of us and we can still be full persons in society.

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**POSTCOLONIAL DIFFERENCES**

- A critique of colonial and imperial modes of representation in Western feminist work
- A cautionary retention of a unified political identity
- An emphasis on multiple, local, differences
- The political significance of the diaspora as a non-normative community
- The slippages of colonialism: Australian women in England

The slide features a presenter on the right side, a woman wearing a blue patterned top and dark pants, gesturing as if speaking. The background is a light yellow color. The title 'POSTCOLONIAL DIFFERENCES' is at the top left in bold black letters. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner. The bullet points are on the left, and the presenter is on the right. Some text in the bullet points is circled in red.

The last form of difference I want to deal with today is under the category of the postcolonial which is involved with critiquing colonial and imperial modes of representation in western feminist work. This is particular to feminist theory because a lot of people writing in this vein have argued that political identity in a lot of feminist writing is focussed on the global north and does not take into account the ways in which gender has been inflected by the postcolonial experience.

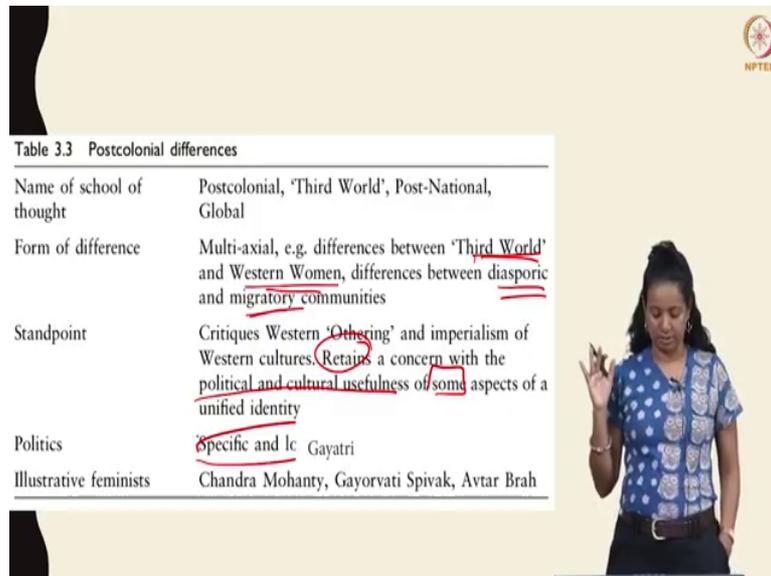
By this I mean countries that were formerly under colonial rule and the ways in which their gendered subjectivities were influenced by such forms of imperial rule. In postcolonial difference, we look at a cautionary retention of a unified political identity: say women in India, women in South Asia, women in Sri Lanka, women in Bangladesh so on and so forth. Even as there is an emphasis on multiple local differences. In other words, women in these countries are claiming that women of the global north do not speak for us and writing from the global north does not take into account differences of postcoloniality. Such writing also argues for the political significance of the diaspora as a non-normative community.

Now, you will see this very often with theory; theory is interested in things that do not quite fit into normal categories. Diaspora is such a non-normative community carrying culture from one place, being able to speak about life experiences in another, and having markers of all of these on their subjectivities also leads to different accounts of gender, which theory claims is very important in trying to understand how is it that feminism should move forward.

One of the example the text gives in relation to the slippages of colonialism is related to Australian women in England who one might ostensibly think would enjoy the same benefits

as a British women. But, this is often not so because of the kind of class and cultural differences seen to be borne by Australian women even as they look the same as British women and this is an important case study to illustrate such an account of postcoloniality, even though Australia is not within the general pantheon of the postcolonial.

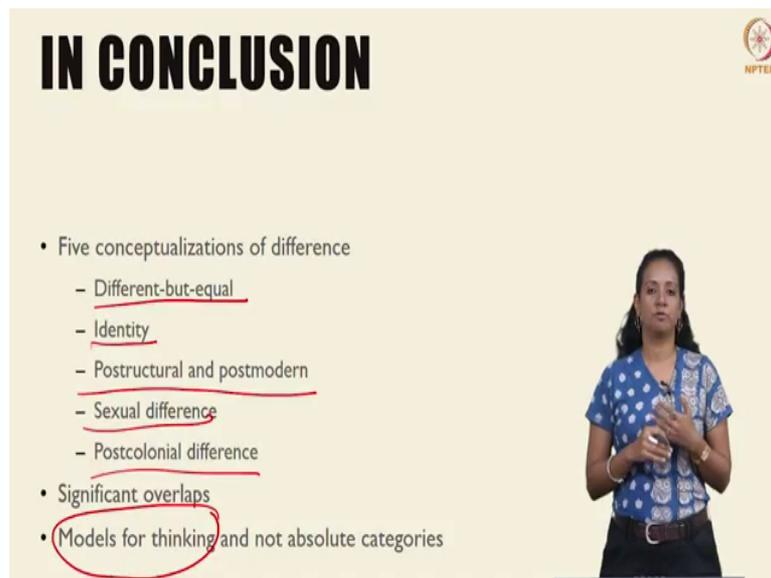
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Name of school of thought	Postcolonial, 'Third World', Post-National, Global
Form of difference	Multi-axial, e.g. differences between 'Third World' and Western Women, differences between diasporic and migratory communities
Standpoint	Critiques Western 'Othering' and imperialism of Western cultures. Retains a concern with the political and cultural usefulness of some aspects of a unified identity
Politics	Specific and local Gayatri
Illustrative feminists	Chandra Mohanty, Gayorvati Spivak, Avtar Brah

Quick recap again: postcolonial, Third World post-national, global are the multiple names of this school of thought. The forms of difference that they speak about are the differences between Third World and western women, differences between diasporic and migratory communities. Such a school critiques western othering and imperialism as found in western cultures, even as it retains a concern with the political and cultural usefulness of some aspects of a unified identity. Provisionally, strategically in some contexts as oppose to others, its politics specific to the local, and some illustrative writers are Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak and Avtar Brah.

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**IN CONCLUSION**

- Five conceptualizations of difference
  - Different-but-equal
  - Identity
  - Poststructural and postmodern
  - Sexual difference
  - Postcolonial difference
- Significant overlaps
- Models for thinking and not absolute categories

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In conclusion, at the end of today's long lecture which I imagine has been quite a lot we looked at five conceptualizations of difference: different but equal, identity based differences, poststructural and postmodern difference, sexual difference, postcolonial difference.

Let me emphasise again that there are significant overlaps between all these forms of difference. They are heuristic tools, they are not meant to constantly speak about erasing the other. It is not that you cannot use all of these together, if you choose and these are modes for thinking and not absolute categories. With this we come to the end of lectures for week two where we went over conceptual clarity, equality and difference. Next week two different sets of concepts as we move further along; until then.

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