

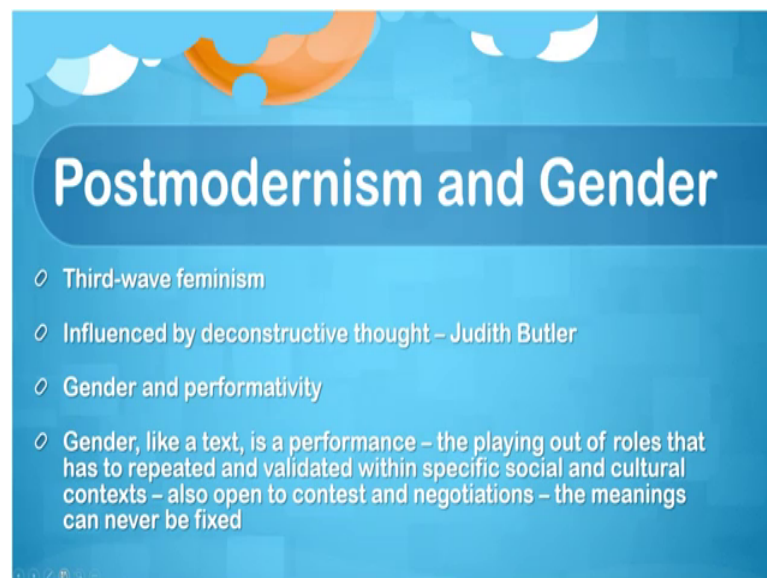
Postmodernism in Literature
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Lecture – 10
Postmodern Feminism: Gender and Performativity

Hello and good morning. Welcome today's session. Title post modern feminism, general and performativity in the final segment that we shall be taking a look at this week, we are focusing on how post modernism, and particularly post structuralism influence of various theorizing aspects of feminism, and how those things could be located in the particular aspects of gender, and the theory of performativity propounded by Judith Butler.

So, this discussion also needs to be situated in continuation with the many post structuralist theories, we have been taking a look at. And, also we have already highlighted the fact that the post structuralism theories; they do give a foundational aspect. They do provide a certain foundational framework to engage with the idea of the post modern; and to engage with post modernism in different texts and contexts.

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So, how do we locate post modernism and the play of post modernism? In the sight of gender and, if we examine this historically, it needs to be located as a part of a third wave of feminism. You might also be familiar with the first and second wave of feminism as those aspects are not a part of this discussion; we shall not be engaging with those in

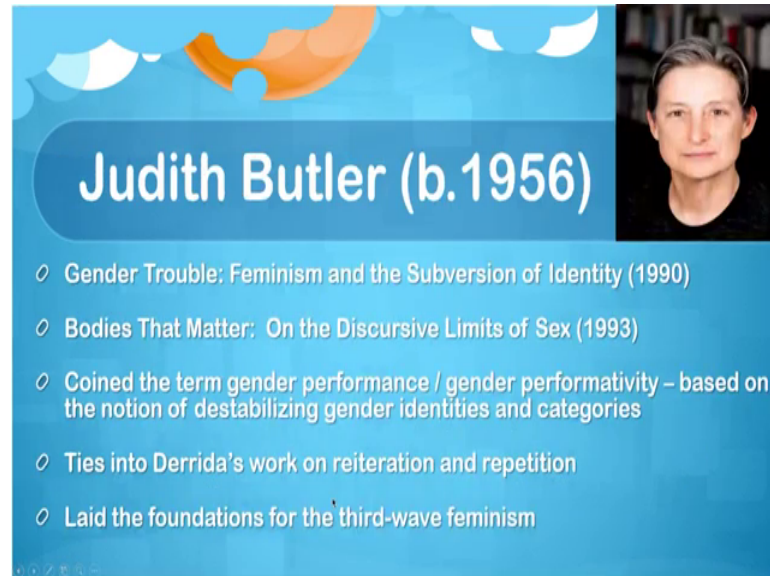
detail. Ah, contrary to the first and second notions, the third wave feminism which also are challenged many of the concepts introduced in the first and second wave. They deconstructed the role of; deconstructed the notion of gender and also began to see gender as a socially constructed or phenomenon.

So, in that sense; one of the most influential theorists in their third wave feminism who could also be associated with post modernism is Judith Butler; who was also tremendously influenced by deconstructive thought by Derrida; which we have already taken a look at in one of the previous sessions.

Ah, Judith Butler particularly focused on the idea of gender and performativity. And the objective of this lecture is to highlight how gender and performativity operates in the postmodern scenario. And also to showcase the various forms in which it has been theorized and how later we could, perhaps apply it as part of literary criticism. And ah, in this text, in this lecture we shall be focusing on how Butler looks at gender; like a text and analyzes it like a performance, and also how she talks about the various ways in which gender could be, how gender could be identified at different roles being cleared out, and repeated and validated within especially within specific social and cultural contexts; just like language, and this is something that also, it has also been departure from the structuralist.

So, saussurean notions about language and, this performance is also open to contest and negotiations; because the meaning can never be fixed. And the unfinalizability of meaning, the rejection of any kind of fixed meaning any idea fixity was also quite characteristic of the first module ideas.

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Judith Butler (b.1956)

- Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990)
- Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex (1993)
- Coined the term gender performance / gender performativity – based on the notion of destabilizing gender identities and categories
- Ties into Derrida's work on reiteration and repetition
- Laid the foundations for the third-wave feminism

It is also important to take a quick look at the contributions of Judith Butler. She was born in 1956. Butler is an American philosopher and gender theorist. And her contributions could be seen as a very similar and even foundationalist to the, I idea of third wave feminism. So, the idea of performativity which we shall be focusing in today's lecture is drawn from two of her seminal works. The first one title gender trouble feminism and the subversion of identity, which was published in 1990, and a secondly, bodies that matter on the discursive limits of sex published in 1993.

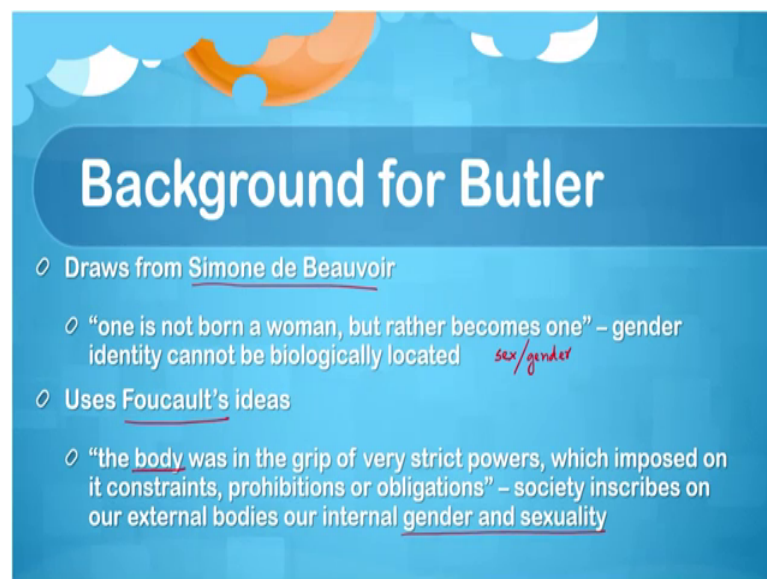
Gender trouble could be considered as a hugely popular text by Judith Butler. It was also one of the most influential books produced in the 20th century. And what makes this work significant was the commercial success that it enjoyed along with the theoretical foundations that it late. It is said to have sold over 100,000 copies. In this work notably, she critically discusses the works of Freuds, Montagu Wa, Alikum, losing (Refer Time: 04:12) Derrida and even Foucault. And we can also see that her idea of performativity; her critique of gender, her critique of gender is a social construct has also a derivation of all of these theorists all of the post structuralist ideas put forward by these many theorists that she talks about.

And ah, she coined the term gender performance or gender performativity. And since a 1990's this is an important term to talk about gender, particularly in the post colonial and the postmodern phases. And this idea is based on the notion of destabilizing gender

identities and categories. And ah, this is also in a typical way a move away from the structuralist notions where there are fixed meanings for the signs and the signifiers, and here Butler highlights the need to destabilize the gender categories and the fix fixed ideas associated with gender in order to understand the changing nature of the performances which have been attributed to particular gender rules.

She also draws upon Derridas work, and this in the ways in which she talks about performativity that we find that feminism also ties into Derridas work on reiteration and repetition, which she used extensively in the context of his discussions about anti construction and also how he also rejected and moved away from the structuralist motions in the structuralist ideas about language and the idea of sign, this signifier and the signified.

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Background for Butler

- Draws from Simone de Beauvoir
- “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” – gender identity cannot be biologically located *sex/gender*
- Uses Foucault's ideas
- “the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations” – society inscribes on our external bodies our internal gender and sexuality

When we talk about the intellectual tradition that laid a significant background for Butlers work; two names have to be further highlighted Simone de Beauvoir and Foucault. Needless to say, both these theories and the contributions and the works that they have foregrounded were seminal to understanding of a post modernism, post structuralism and even the literary and cultural productions of the contemporary. Simone de Beauvoir noted in her work that one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.

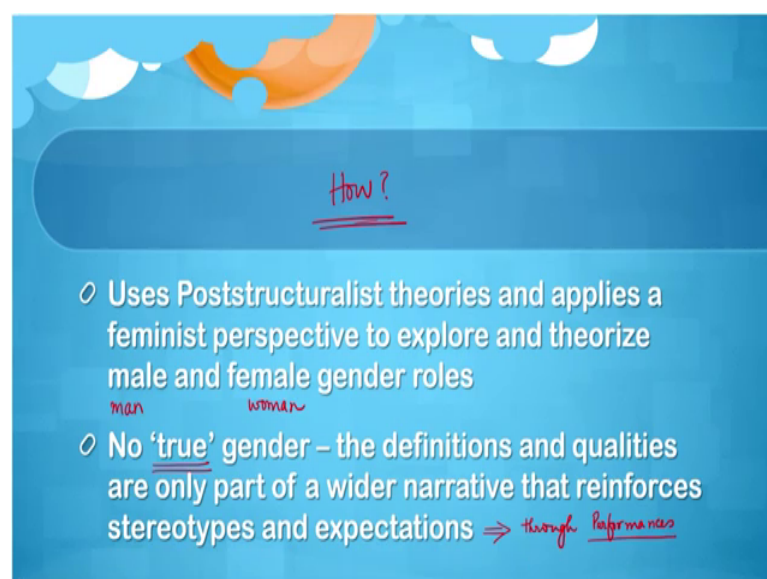
We find in Judith Butler playing with this notion and also reinventing the idea of gender, reinventing the various categories which are also implied in the context of gender, and

she argues that gender identity cannot be biologically located. Here she also foregrounds a difference that she later highlights in most of her works and also becomes a rather foundational to the understanding of third wave feminism with distinction between sex and gender.

One could be born a male or a female, but gender identity, as a man or a woman is ascribed by many construction, many constructs of the society. She also uses Foucault's ideas extensively. Foucault particularly in his work discipline and punish; he wrote the body was in the grip of a very strict powers which imposed on it the constraints prohibitions or obligations. And in discipline and furnish, Foucault also discusses extensively on the ways in which body has been used to perform particular rules by the society or the norms which are dictated by the, the external the outside a factors.

So, a Butler draws upon these ideas and she argues that the society in scribes honor external bodies are internal gender, internal gender and sexuality. So, here butter also differentiates between what is apparent outside and also what constitutes the inside. She also breaks away from the conventions of the society ascribing certain internal values such as gender or sexuality as a reinforcement, as a stereotypical reiteration, or even any kind of a cultural construct. And ah, these two aspects also form the basis of Butler's work; and also our understanding of a performativity and gender in the context of post modernism.

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How?

- Uses Poststructuralist theories and applies a feminist perspective to explore and theorize male and female gender roles
man woman
- No 'true' gender – the definitions and qualities are only part of a wider narrative that reinforces stereotypes and expectations ⇒ *through performatives*

So, at this point it is also important to ask; how this becomes important for us? Why do we need to discuss this in order to engage with post modernism? Because this course is primarily about post modernism and literature, and it is very imperative for us to understand how these varied discussions in the context of post structuralism, in the context of feminism, and where genuine performativity will contribute to our understanding of post modernism. In our Butler is used for performativity, we find that she is using the post structuralist theories, and applying a feminist perspective to explore and theorize male and female gender roles. And ah, here, this is a very typically postmodern perspective, because the image the biological distinction is between male and female roles.

But by ascribing gender roles such as man and woman, there is also a kind of a delimiting experience which is being forced upon these particular biological entities. In the Butler in a very postmodern way is rejecting these emotions and moving away from these categories to encourage us to think in, many different ways. In that context of sequin leashes also arguing that there is no true gender.

The definitions and qualities which are being are now made available as part of definitions of being a woman or being a man are only part of a wider narrative that reinforces stereotypes and expectations. And how is this being done? This is being done through particular kinds of performances. Because those are not always already given identities, those distinctions are not always already, ah, they are as natural. They are being provided by the society, they are being reinforced by through various kinds of cultural institutions, and this reinforcement is being done through performances.

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How is this performance constituted?

- 'men' and 'women' are social categories defined in relation to each other
male ← → female
- Bodies behaving in particular ways - Clothing, mannerisms, speech, language - belonging or characteristic of being men/women
- What is meant by the signifier (woman) in relation to the Poststructuralist position of examining signs and signifiers
- Language and clothing - signs of being men and women - uses particular things to declare one's gender
 - Eg: cross dressing causes confusion, moral outrage

Maintains and legitimizes a seemingly natural gender binary

So, how is this performance a constituted? Butler and many other proponents of the third wave feminism our challenge in the idea and the conventional constitution of men and women, and arguing that the, there is only social categories defined in relation to each other. So, how do they become a social categories? As we have illustrated, the biological category is that of male and female. So, by situating them in binary opposition to one another, they are being constructed as social categories and their definition is also in relation to each other; in binary opposition, one should be either male or female. One should perform either a male gender role or a female gender role. And this identity of being male or female is also dependent on the kind of performance, and the kind of performativity that is applied to an object; that is being applied to a subject.

So, this could be this is could be constituted in many different ways. Ah, it could be about bodies behaving in particular ways. So, yeah, here is also a very significant focus, a very significant underscoring of the role of the body. And the identity is also being read used to their level of the body. And, here we notice that our clothing, mannerism, speech, language; all of those are become determinants in this performance. And, it is also about having particular kinds of clothing to ascribe different gender roles, different kinds of clothes, different kinds of mannerisms which are being traditionally attributed to either men or women. So, according to these kinds of behavior, according to the particular kinds of behavioral patterns and the performance is that they highlight. They are also

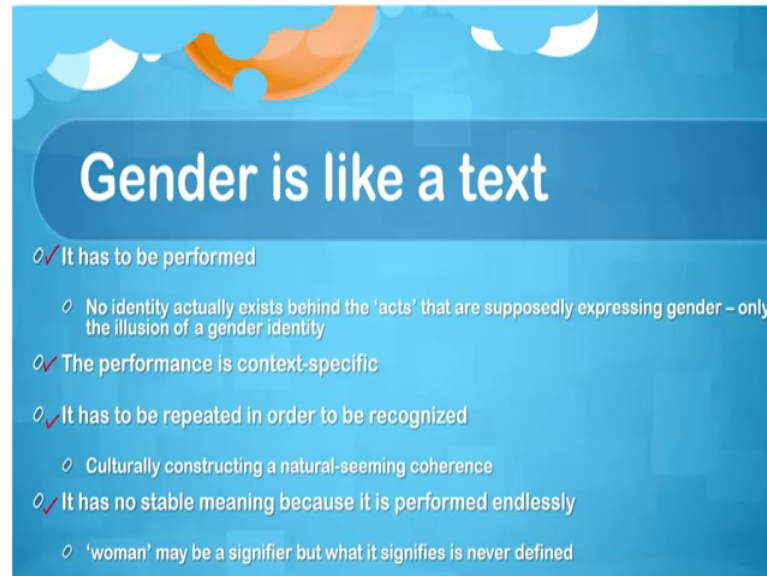
being characterized; they are also being classified according to the characteristics that they display as men and women.

So, there is also this question which gets highlighted; what is meant by the signify of women in relation to the post structuralist position of examining signs and signifiers? Here, we find Butler being a very post structuralist, and also being tremendously influenced by Derrida, and she agrees that she acknowledges that of woman is a signifier. But the contention is about the fixity of meaning, which is also being attributed to the signifier woman.

And, she also here draws upon Derrida to talk about the multiple meanings which are available to the signifier, and that there is no final meaning which could be attached to the signify of woman, and there is no way in which one could say that this is the only meaning; this is the essential meaning which the term woman wears. And, there is also a social function that all of these things perform, because if we talk about language and a clothing which are also signs of being men and women, and these different kinds of, different kinds of languages and clothing up are being used to declare ones gender as the a man or a woman.

And for example, if you talk about cross dressing; we also realize that it causes a lot of confusion as well as moral outrage, because this kind; this performance according to the gender rules; it also has a larger role to play. It maintains and legitimizes our seemingly natural gender by running, a seemingly natural gender binary. And, this term seemingly natural is ah, very important because gender binaries otherwise has been constructed as a very natural phenomenon, such as a male and a female, but on the other hand, I reiterate. Butler highlight solution that, unlike the biological binary of male female which is natural, the gender binary; the difference between man and woman is a socially constructed notion and it is also then need of the society to maintain and legitimize such kinds of binaries.

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Gender is like a text

- ✓ It has to be performed
 - No identity actually exists behind the 'acts' that are supposedly expressing gender – only the illusion of a gender identity
- ✓ The performance is context-specific
- ✓ It has to be repeated in order to be recognized
 - Culturally constructing a natural-seeming coherence
- ✓ It has no stable meaning because it is performed endlessly
 - 'woman' may be a signifier but what it signifies is never defined

What does Butler mean when she identifies gender like a text? There are four points which could be highlighted in this context. This also needs to be read in connection with the many discussions that we have been having in the context of post modernism by problematizing the idea of text, and how the text has been seen in the inner deconstructive fashion this also, so, in a sense ah, this discussion also demands of recall of the previous lectures where we had been talking extensively about the idea of the text and how a text could be deconstructed in the postmodern scenario. So, when we talk about gender like a text, first of all it has to be performed. Secondly, the performance is a context specific. Thirdly, it has to be repeated in order to be recognized. Here we can also find a lot of similarities with that of language. Fourthly, it has no stable meaning because it is performed endlessly.

So, what do we mean when we say that gender is like a text and it has to be performed? And this, this implies that there is no identity behind the acts that are supposedly expressing gender. There is only an illusion of a gender identity, because it is a social construct. It is not a reality, but it is a social construct which is being made to pass off like a, seemingly natural entity or seemingly natural binary or like a very natural identity. And, it is also context specific because it is the gender role performed in different places would also be very different. In many theories give this example of a tribal woman versus a woman who is working in the corporate our field, in order to show that


these different contexts demand, different kinds of gender performances or performativity, and one is certainly very different from the other .

So, just like language, just like a text, the meaning which is being derived over here is also very context, specific. The performance that is demanded of different contexts is also very different. So, just like language, just like the relation between science the fire and the signified, gender is also a performance which has to be repeated in order to be recognized. And, ah, it is this repetition, and this legitimization, and this reinforcement of a seemingly natural coherence is very important in order to complement the meaning making process.

And gender begins to make sense, the natural coherence the seemingly natural coherence make sense only through there is repeated repetitions, and, this recognition and acknowledgement which is being given to it by any kind of external force; it is the society or any kind of cultural in situation. And like a text, it has no stable meaning, because it is performed endlessly.

As a Butler would put it; the term woman may be a signifier, but what it signifies is never defined. And, in these are four elements by in which we also equate gender with a text, with aspects of language; we also find that it is very very postmodern in the engagement with particular kinds of identities and particularly and particular kinds of socially constructed notions.

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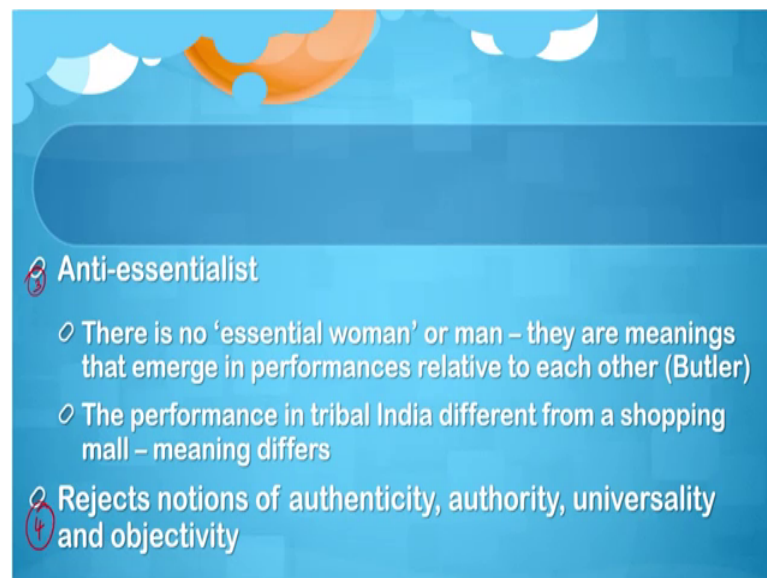


This view is Postmodern and Poststructuralist

- 1) Because it refuses a fixity of categories
 - Sees gender as provisional, shifting, contingent and performed
- 2) Reject essentialisms and stable identities or meanings
 - Sees gender as an unstable category that has to be repeatedly reinvented.

And this view of looking and gendered as a performance, by linking gender and performativity, and identifying gender like a text is a very postmodern in post structuralist view. And, the this is for obvious reasons. Firstly, because it refuses a fixity of categories gender is seen as a provisional shifting contingent and a perform to category. There is no fixed meaning or a fixed category which could be attributed to it and it also. Secondly, rejects essential isms and stable identities or a meanings, and gender is seen as an unstable category that has to be repeatedly reinvented. This is also quite similar to many other positions from the point of view of post modernism and post structuralism.

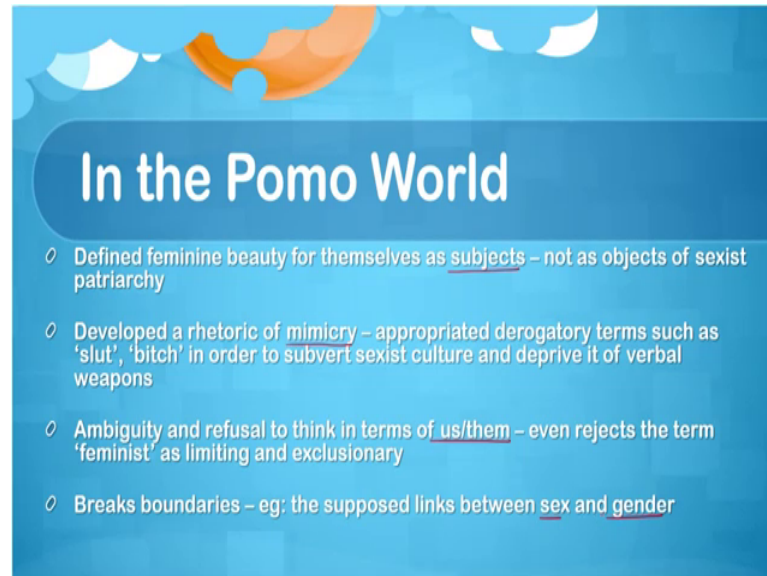
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It is also an anti essentialist. And when I say anti essentialist, I mean that there is no anti of essential man or an essential woman, they are only meanings that emerge in performance is relative to each other as Butler would put it. And the performance which is identified with this meaning is also quite different in different contexts, as we have noted the performance in tribal India is certainly different from a shopping mall.

So, the meaning differs according to the context, and in that since there is no idea of an essential woman. Therefore, this approach could also be seen as very anti essentialist. And, it also rejects the notions of further authenticity, authority, universality and objectivity, which is also a postmodern a phenomenon of looking at many things in the contemporary.

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So, when we talk about the changing our notions of a feminist and the changing notions of the idea of gender and the postmodern world, it is important to note that the third wave feminists also began to define feminine beauty for themselves as subjects. We also spoke briefly about how the subject position has been changing in the postmodern world, how are certain are shifting in the idea of the subject as being a coherent, unified subject has moved away, has been challenged and has moved away from the structuralist a liberal humanist point of view.

So, in the definition of the feminine beauty in the third wave of feminism in the postmodern world, the beauty is not seen as an object of sexist a patriarchy and on the contrary a kind of an articulation of particular kinds of feminist subject positions. And, also another example would be a development of a rhetoric of mimicry. And this is done through particular strategies of a through appropriating derogatory terms such as a slut or a bitch in order to subvert sexist culture and to deprive it of verbal weapons.

There is also a rejection of the binary ambiguities and refusal to think in terms of us and then. There are even certain thinkers and certain writers who would reject the use of feminists as being limiting and exclusionary, because they also want to break a boundary as it is they are supposed to links between sex and gender; one is a biological category, a biological identity and the other one is a social construct.

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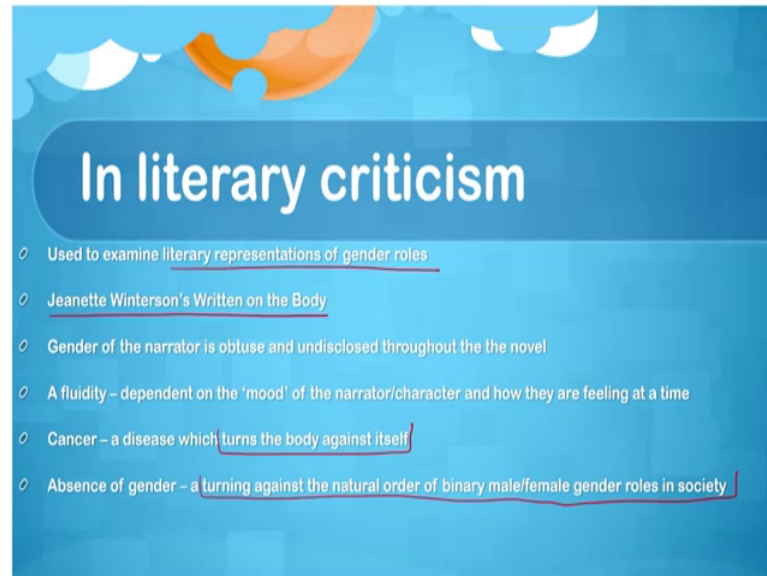


Here we also find in the script of gender performance in the postmodern world, is also a rejection of all kinds of our totalizing explanations which also makes it very post structuralism post mortem. And to sum up, it is also important to highlight their gender and its meaning independent locations and contexts, and it cannot be universal because meanings are made at the, at the local level.

There are no universal meanings, there are no totalizing are fixed a stable meanings, It is all local, and it is continuously image in the state of flux. And this meaning, this the explanations or the meanings cannot be fixed and demands and depends on repeated performances in relation to other performances like gender or text or even language. And also, one interesting thing is that one cannot step outside the performance to be objective.

In order to develop an objective point of view for example, one cannot step outside one particular gender performance; that is, in order to develop an objective idea of what it means to be a male or a female, one does not have the choice to move out of one performance and adopt another one. And these multiple challenges which are being given on the totalizing explanations make gender performativity; the discussions and gender perform performativity our central aspect or to discuss a feminism in the postmodern scenario.

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And, how do we make use of these ideas? How do we make use of these theories in the field of literary criticism? We can use the idea of gender performativity to comment on and to examine literary representations on of gender roles. And, here we particularly talk about one text which we shall be looking at in detail at a later stage. Ah, Jeanette Winterson's written on the body, and in this particular work, the gender of the narrator is obtuse and undisclosed throughout the novel.

And, the gender of the narrator of the character is also in a fluid a state contrary to the popular are structureless assumptions, and is also dependent on; the narrators gender is also a very interestingly dependent on the mood of the narrator or the character or how they are feeling how he or she is a feeling it or one particular point of time. And, I, in this novel; as the plot develops, we also see that in cancer, the disease cancer is also a central character, this engagement with cancer is also very significant in this discussion where we gender of the narrator is undisclosed because cancer is seen as a disease which turns the body against itself. And, connecting this with the idea of a performativity, the absence of gender is also turning against the natural order of binary male female gender roles in society.

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Materialist views:

Criticisms of Pomo feminisms

- ◊ Pomo view of feminism – emphasize discourses rather than material conditions
- ◊ Privileging the representational over the lived
- ◊ Materialist feminism – turns away from the Pomo flexible, shifting discursive view of gender
- ◊ Focuses on the social conditions, the economy and the politics

Class as an analytical category

So, these are the multiple ways in which we can make use of the idea of performativity, the theory of performativity to understand particular kinds of gender roles being portrayed in literature, and also in other cultural sites. There are also been a number of criticisms against a postmodern feminisms including the role of performativity in ascribing gender roles. And, this is also because the postmodern feminism, the post structuralist idea of feminism and the theory of a performativity; they emphasize discourse rather than material conditions. So, then we briefly talked about the materialist views which could be seen as a critique of postmodern feminism where they began to argue that the postmodern feminist very guilty of privilege in the representational over the lived.

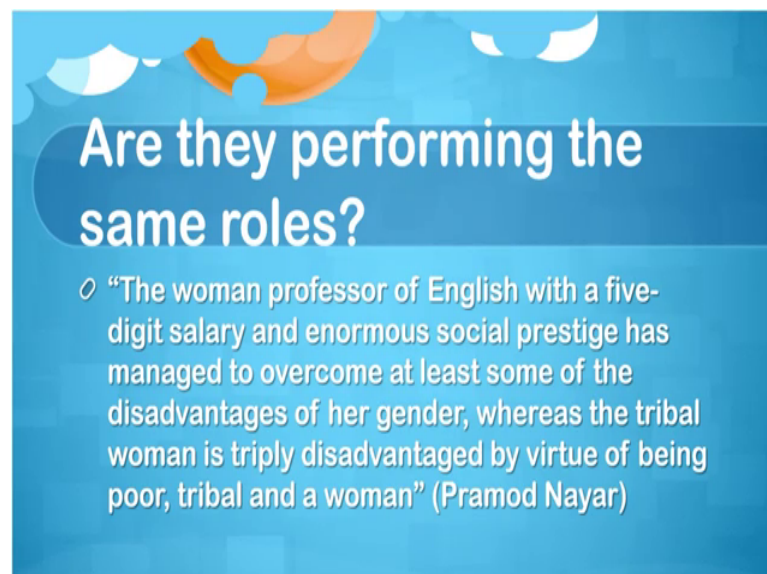
So, they also the material feminists, the materialist view also called for an inclusion of the medieval conditions in order to understand the category of gender. And it also says turned away from the post modern flexible shifting discursive view of gender, and also encouraged the critics to focus on the social conditions, the economy and the politics to understand gender as a category in the contemporary. So, what makes a materialist view different from that of the, our postmodern views on feminism is that, they also include class as a analytical category.

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And, this is particularly important because the materialist are feminists, the materialist view on feminism also believed that, women's oppression stems also from a combination of patriarchy because it is based on unequal gender relations; and also on capitalism, which is based on unequal class and economic power. So, unless you approach the idea of women's oppression or the limiting categories of gender, from both these aspects are put together; it is impossible to arrive at a liberated unbiased critical.

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And also coming back to this question about whether, whether all women are performing the same kind of role; it is important to highlight the example that Pramod Nayar uses in his commentary.

The woman professor of English with a five-digit salary and enormous social prestige has managed to overcome at least some of the disadvantages of a gender, where the tribal woman is is triply disadvantaged by virtue of being poor, tribal and a woman. So, such kinds of many critiques are available against the idea of, against a theory of performativity of gender which is also part of third wave feminism, which also makes use of the post structuralist theoretical positions.

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Nevertheless, performativity remains a key link in the theoretical feminist a frameworks within the discourse of feminism, a post modernism and your theory. It is also a one of the most used theoretical frameworks to engage with gender, within the discourses of literature and also other artifacts of culture, And, as we begin to wind up this lecture, it is important to highlight that the, idea of performativity the theory of performativity also gives us certain frameworks to talk about the destabilization of the categories of sex and gender, and how they are anti essentialist in nature.

It also gives us, particular ways to deconstruct the binary oppositions. Here, we can also link the theory of performativity with the idea of deconstruction. And, it also makes available to us a critique of regulatory regimes and normalizing discourse in society,

which also attempts to fix gender and sexuality. And, it there are also these are many different multiple points of view being made available through a critique of the performances which are being done in order to ascribe particular gender roles or to declare one's gender and once, in one form or the other. And finally, this encourages a discussion on the reed deregulation and multiplication of sexuality. So, the idea is not a privileged one position over the other The idea is not to celebrate a queer form of sexuality in opposition to the heterosexual identities, but the idea of performativity in that sense to encourage a discussion on the deregulation and multiplication of sexualities.

And, it is at this level that the theory of performativity also becomes a very, useful postmodern a framework to talk about gender, to talk about sexuality, and to talk about the various manifestations of each gender relations within particular kinds of literature, particular are cultural settings, and also in the other larger disciplinary framework. So, with this, we also begin to wind up todays lecture.

Thank you for listening, I look forward to seeing you in the next session.