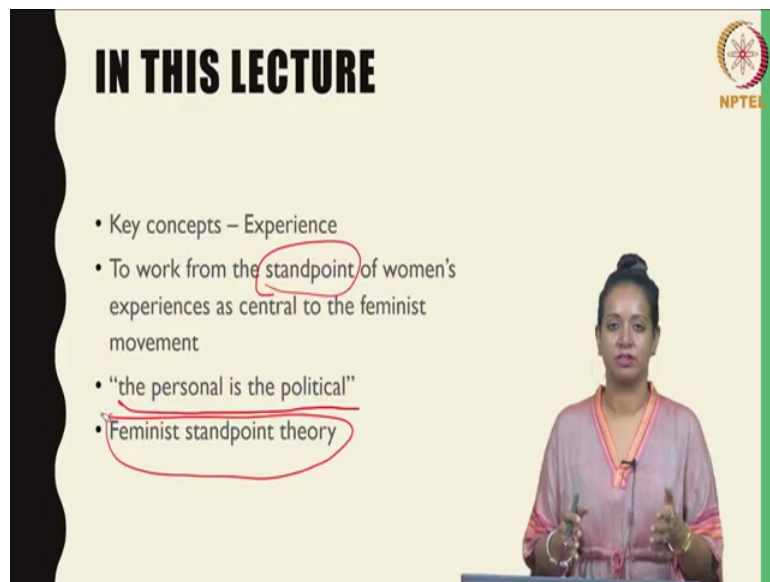


Feminism: Concepts and Theories
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Key Concepts: Experience

Welcome back to feminism concepts and theories. We are now in lecture 12, the penultimate concept for this week and for the course in general. So, you can congratulate yourselves for being in the final stretch.

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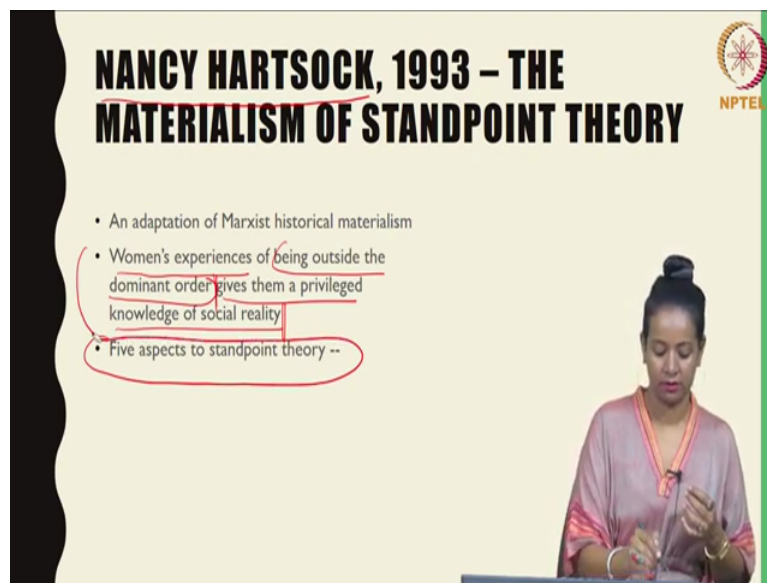


Without further ado, today, our key concept is rather fun because it is something which I think everybody can relate to, so think about this as being towards the end, because one has to have gone through Equality, Difference, Choice, Care, Time, in order to bring them together within the concept we know as Experience. Now, remember Experience is very-very important because feminist theory, feminism is a movement, is predicated upon building on people's experiences in the world.

There are ways in which we pull back and forth, we say that Experience is where we should start from and at the same time, we say that Experience is mediated through society. Remember our structure-agency debate? So think about Experience as mediating between the two. Structures are responsible for the kind of experiences we are going to have, but we are the agents who have those experiences. And therefore, it is very important within our conceptual repertoire, to be able to comprehend Experience.

Today, and in this lecture, we are going to cover, standpoint theory, or the understanding that the standpoint of women's experiences is central to the feminist movement, and without taking those into account, the movement has no teeth. We also discuss a fairly common understanding of this kind of sloganeering of “the personal is the political” and what do we mean by that? Lastly, we bring them together in a deepened understanding of standpoint theory, yes, but also engaged with its critiques, and try and understand what it means for the contemporary moment. This is our agenda for this lecture, and therefore, let us get started.

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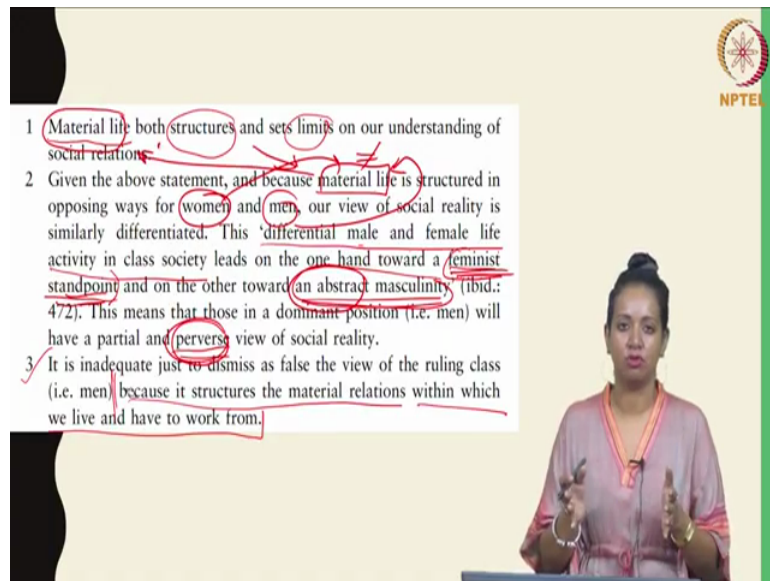


Standpoint theory is considered to have been popular since Nancy Hartsock proposed it in 1993. And here, this is something that we should understand as an adaptation of Marxist historical materialism, in the way that we understand materialism to be the sum total of people's experiences. Hartsock proposed that women's experiences of being outside the dominant order gives them up privileged knowledge of social reality. Now, please focus on a couple of words over here.

We already know about women's experiences and we have come to understand over the past few weeks, that women are often outside the dominant order, meaning the dominant order structures their lives, it fits women into particular kinds of blocks, it conditions their experiences, at the same time preventing them from shaping such a dominant order. So, women's experiences of being outside the dominant order gives them a privileged knowledge of social reality.

Please bear in mind, this is a proposition. This is a thesis, and we are going to try and understand whether this is borne out, but for a moment, let us assume this is the case. Let us assume that women's experiences given that they are outside the dominant order, allow for them to see reality not only differently but in a more informed critical fashion. Let us explore this through 5 aspects.

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1 Material life both structures and sets limits on our understanding of social relations.

2 Given the above statement, and because material life is structured in opposing ways for women and men, our view of social reality is similarly differentiated. This 'differential male and female life activity in class society leads on the one hand toward a feminist standpoint and on the other toward an abstract masculinity' (ibid.: 4/2). This means that those in a dominant position (i.e. men) will have a partial and perverse view of social reality.

3 It is inadequate just to dismiss as false the view of the ruling class (i.e. men) because it structures the material relations within which we live and have to work from.

“Material life, both structures and sets limits on our understanding of social relations.” We think about material life as something that is almost ordinary, the clothes that we wear, the ways in which we lead our lives. What is it that we eat? What is it that we have to do day-to-day in order to survive?

In order to understand standpoint theory, we should understand that material life structures and sets limits on our understanding of social relations. What is it that we understand to be good or bad, honest, dishonest, desirable, undesirable all of our notions of social relations in the world, how we relate to other people are very much conditioned by material life, meaning, the actual details of the things and possibilities that are available to us in our day-to-day living.

“Given the above statement, and because material life is structured in opposing ways for women and men, material life, as we have explored over the past few weeks, offers men and women drastically different opportunities and possibilities.” Therefore, since material life governs social relations, and since women and men have different understandings of material life, our view of social reality is similarly differentiated. Meaning, men and women don't live

in the same world. People might have noticed this in relation to the recent hashtag Me Too movements, which is a lot of men said in response to a lot of the things that women shared about molestation, daily heckling, daily experiences of feeling attacked or threatened, that they just did not know.

And instead of taking this as a declaration of bad faith, instead of saying, how dare men not know, instead, let's step back and say that the material relations within which men's lives are configured allows for them not to see, it is not something that is part of their experience of the world and because they are part of the dominant social order, it's very difficult to interrupt it, yes?

"This differential male and female life activity in class society, leads on the one hand toward a feminist standpoint and on the other toward an abstract masculinity. This differential male and female life activity in class society leads on the one hand, toward a feminist standpoint and on the other toward an abstract masculinity." Pay attention to the point at which we are proposing a feminist standpoint, as opposed to an abstract masculinity.

"This means that those in a dominant position, that is men, will have a partial and perverse view of social reality." Let me take you back to the previous statement for just a second. Differential male and female life, we have established this, leads on the one hand toward a feminist standpoint and the privileges that they enjoy, along with also having to experience a non-privileged life.

From the margins, it is easier to see the centre and also easier to see that which you have been denied, hence, a feminist standpoint, and on the other toward an abstract masculinity. In other words, the dominant order does not encourage, or inspire reflexivity or critique. If you are part of a dominant order, in this case masculinity, you have no reason or incentive to be able to analyse it and it remains both a norm and an abstraction invisible to its own inhabitants.

Those in a dominant position will have a partial, we only understand society partially, and this word is interesting, and "perverse" view of social reality. Here, remember the usage of perverse is to indicate something distorted, something that has become an image not quite true to reality, but at the same time, it goes further, it presents itself as if it were true through a distorted lens. And this is what we understand as perverse. So can you imagine a lot of men saying, "Surely it is not that bad for women, look at the number of advances that we have

made in modern society.” This is what we understand as a perverse, non-feminist standpoint view of society itself.

Three, “[i]t is inadequate just to dismiss as false the view of the ruling class, because it structures the material relations within which we live and have to work from.” So here we are asking the question of, what do we do with such a perverse understanding of society? Do we just call it false? Do we just call it false and dismiss it? Or do we take it seriously because it has such close relations with how is it that our lives, all of our lives are structured through modes of power, and we are suggesting that we must take it seriously because it wields considerable influence. Therefore, such a perverse view of social reality, which men or masculinity inhabits is also something that is central to maintaining the gender status quo.

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4 Because of the dominance of masculine views, the truth of social relations and change must be struggled for through the use of social analysis and education. Thus, 'The ability to go beneath the surface of appearances to reveal the real but concealed social relations requires both theoretical and political activity' (ibid.: 478). Necessary theoretical developments would include a systematic critique of Marxism. Political activity would be focused on ending gendered divisions of labour.

5 The adoption of a standpoint exposes 'reality' as inhuman and is therefore potentially liberatory.

Feminist theory
Feminism

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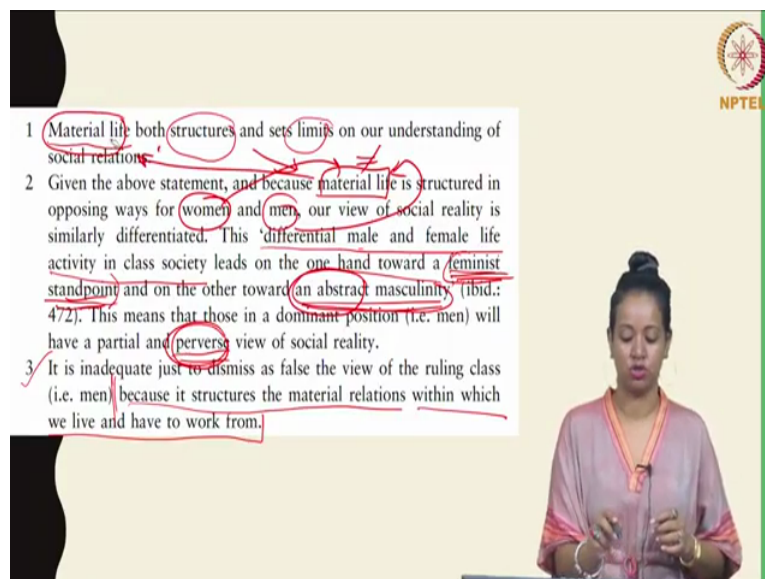
Four, “[b]ecause of the dominance of masculine views, the truth of social relations and change must be struggled for through the use of social analysis and education.” Precisely what you are doing in this moment! “Thus, ‘The ability to go beneath the surface of appearances to reveal the real but concealed social relations requires both theoretical and political activity.’” Here, we are looking at the relationship between “feminist theory” and “feminism as a movement.”

“Necessary theoretical developments would include a systematic critique of Marxism” itself, which suggest that the moment women start working society will be corrected. “Political activity would be focused on ending gendered divisions of labour; this is in relation to a critique of Marxism.” Pay attention to the first line, because of the dominance of masculine

views, the truth of social relations and change must be struggled for. And the key word here is “struggled” through the use of social analysis and education. Use this to reflect upon what we began with that in many ways feminism or feminist theory is soundly derided across genders. It is seen as unnecessary analysis, it is seen as an instantiation of the common understanding that you think too much. Instead, feminist standpoint theory is arguing that such a form of analysis is absolutely essential to be able to break through the dominance of masculine views and truth or true understanding of the multifaceted ways in which gender organizes society will only come through this.

The adoption of a standpoint exposes reality as inhuman. It allows for us to see reality as structured by inegalitarianism, inequality, and misery that is the lot of one set of the population. And therefore, it is “potentially” liberatory, potentially, because if you act upon it, if you are able to pursue such an understanding in a political fashion, then we might have liberation from such a dominant order. These are the 5 things you need to remember to understand why standpoint theory takes the stance that it does.

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1 Material life both structures and sets limits on our understanding of social relations.

2 Given the above statement, and because material life is structured in opposing ways for women and men, our view of social reality is similarly differentiated. This 'differential male and female life activity in class society leads on the one hand toward a feminist standpoint and on the other toward an abstract masculinity' (ibid.: 472). This means that those in a dominant position (i.e. men) will have a partial and perverse view of social reality.

3 It is inadequate just to dismiss as false the view of the ruling class (i.e. men) because it structures the material relations within which we live and have to work from.

To quickly recap, material life structures and sets limits on our understanding of social relations, because material life is structured in opposing ways for women and men, our view of social reality is differentiated leading towards a feminist standpoint for women and an abstract masculinity for men. It is inadequate to dismiss as false the view of the ruling class because it structures material relations.

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4 Because of the dominance of masculine views, the truth of social relations and change must be struggled for through the use of social analysis and education. Thus, 'The ability to go beneath the surface of appearances to reveal the real but concealed social relations requires both theoretical and political activity' (ibid.: 478). Necessary theoretical developments would include a systematic critique of Marxism. Political activity would be focused on ending gendered divisions of labour.

5 The adoption of a standpoint exposes 'reality' as inhuman and is therefore potentially liberatory.

Feminist theory
Feminism

Because of the dominance of masculine views, the truth of social relations must be struggled for both theoretically and politically. The adoption of a standpoint exposes reality as inhuman, and is therefore potentially liberatory. This is also part of other forms of social theory, which argued that truth or reality is only available from the point of view of those who are the most marginalized in a system, because they understand both, what it is that they suffer, as also that which would allow them -- the position of the rich, the fortunate, others in society -- if only they were part of that kind of set, they would not have to suffer misery. As opposed to, as opposed to those who are in the dominant order, who only understand their lives as something that they deserve, or are entitled to and it takes a stretch to be able to understand the lives of those that are not as fortunate as them, and then, to be able to analyse it as a result of an unequal social structure, and not destiny, or fate, or luck, or what have you or any other explanation that allows them to sit comfortably in the positions that they have inherited.

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IMPLICATIONS

Generalizing the activity of women to the social system as a whole would raise, for the first time in human history, the possibility of a fully human community, a community structured by connection rather than separation and opposition. One can conclude then that women's life activity does form the basis of a specifically feminist materialism, a materialism that can provide a point from which both to critique and to work against phallocratic ideology and institutions. (ibid.: 478)

The slide features a woman in a pink shirt speaking in the background. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner.


What are the implications if we begin to follow through with standpoint theory? “Generalizing the activity of women to the social system as a whole would raise for the first time in human history, the possibility of a fully human community, a community structured by connection rather than separate and opposition.” And what do we mean by “connection?” We mean that we understand the world in a structural fashion, the misery of some allows for the fortune of others. It is not that they are clearly separated by accident or contingency or providence. Instead, it is only because a large set of the population is kept poor or marginal, or what have you, that the dominant order is able to establish dominance among the few.

“One can conclude then that women's life activity does form the basis of specifically feminist materialism, a materialism that can provide a point from which both to critique and to work against phallocentric ideology and institutions.” Phallocentric just means focused on men or the phallus as a symbolic understanding of masculinity. Here, we are propounding something very interesting, which is a feminist materialism.



And what is materialism? The idea that only material life can allow us the clues to develop social theory, or a theory of society as a whole. In feminist standpoint theory, we then suggesting that what happens when we bring women's life experiences into the fold, wouldn't that form the basis of a feminist materialism that would allow us to focus on connection rather than separation, and therefore provide for us the possibility of a liberatory fully human community.

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CRITIQUES OF STANDPOINT THEORY




- Do we deny knowledge or voice to those who have not had experiences?
- Is experience enough to ensure political consciousness?
- The above misread standpoint which in all cases, involves critical consciousness, reflexivity and struggle

4 Because of the dominance of masculine views, the truth of social relations and change must be struggled for through the use of social analysis and education. Thus, 'The ability to go beneath the surface of appearances to reveal the real but concealed social relations requires both theoretical and political activity' (ibid.: 478). Necessary theoretical developments would include a systematic critique of Marxism. Political activity would be focused on ending gendered divisions of labour.

5 The adoption of a standpoint exposes 'reality' as inhuman and is therefore potentially liberatory.

Feminist theory!
Feminism



Now remember, standpoint, theory is a theory, it is a set of propositions. So there also exist a bunch of critiques, primary among them, if we are working from Experience -- and remember, this is the lecture on Experience -- do we deny knowledge or voice to those who have not had experiences, are we excluding them solely because they do not have this unique feminist standpoint and this can be true across women.

Because as we have discussed earlier, woman is not a homogenous unit, all women are not the same, they differ by various kinds of race, caste, class positions, and therefore, there are many who may not have had experiences of marginality as they understand it, do we deny them this kind of access to specific truthful knowledge.

Second, is a more of an additive question. Agreed, say women have experiences and we are accommodating them, we are voicing them we are talking about it, is such experience or the

talking of it enough to ensure political consciousness. And go back a slide before this, which is that it needs struggle, -- needs both theoretical and political activity. Critiques of standpoint theory therefore ask, is experienced enough to ensure that women will act upon the knowledge secured by such experiences to come to political consciousness.

Separate between political consciousness is consciousness and political activity as those who go out to protest, who are loud in opposition, while writing, talking, yelling about things, which is also necessary activity, but it is not the same as political consciousness, which is the understanding of self as a being in the world and political circumstances or structures as determining that beings life experiences, chances, and possibilities.

Those who read standpoint theory argue, however, that the above critiques misreads standpoint, which in all cases is not just about experiences. We do not all get together in a magic circle. It is not just a consciousness-raising session, it also means coming to action. Hence, critical consciousness, and it is not just consciousness, it is “critical consciousness;” not just saying, “my experiences have been terrible so far, it’s because I am a woman,” it is also going on to ask you to deconstruct, why is it that womanhood comes along with such problematic experiences? Reflexivity? How are we located in those experiences, what our capacities for agency, and lastly, Struggle? Nothing is secured just by coming to consciousness; it just means that that standpoint allows us to see differently.

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FEMINIST EMPIRICISM VERSUS FEMINIST STANDPOINT

- Merely adding women in does not address masculine hegemony
- Knowledge emerges through the struggles the oppressed wage against their oppressors

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Here, there is also a case we are making, where we differentiate feminist empiricism from feminist standpoint. Feminist empiricism is the idea that one needs to count the women; think about ways in which we spoke about new historicism, recovering women's voices and their importance to history. Similarly, feminist empiricism means that you have to provide for apprehensibility, legibility and visibility of women across situations and contexts. But just adding women in does not address masculine hegemony. There are questions we always get as to why is it that women also participate in the project of patriarchy? And this is the answer to that: Just because there are women in any situation does not mean that there is an automatic challenge to the masculine order.

Knowledge emerges in this instance through the struggles the oppressed wage against their oppressors, which means all of these have to be identified. Who do we understand is oppressed? Why is it that we understand them as oppressed? Who are their oppressors and what is the mode of struggle that we want to adopt in our coming to consciousness, in our claim that we are fighting for liberation?

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FEMINIST EMPIRICISM VERSUS FEMINIST STANDPOINT

In this Harding (1991) argued for 'strong objectivity' as a hallmark of feminist research. To take up the position of 'strong objectivity', one does value the other's perspective but one does not 'go native' or merge oneself with the researched. Rather, one seeks to consider the particularity of cultural location from a critical distance. Or as Haraway also comments:

A standpoint is not an empiricist appeal to or by 'the oppressed' but a cognitive, psychological, and political tool for more adequate knowledge judged by the nonessentialist, historically contingent, situated standards of strong objectivity. Such a standpoint is the always fraught but necessary fruit of the *practice* of oppositional and differential consciousness. (1997b: 198-9, emphasis in original)



And let me read you something from the text to illustrate this further. “In this, Harding argued for ‘strong objectivity’ as a hallmark of feminist research. To take up the position of ‘strong objectivity,’ one does value the others perspective but one does not go native or merge oneself with the researched. Rather, one seeks to consider the particularity of cultural location from a critical distance.

Or as Haraway also comments, “[a] standpoint is not an empiricist appeal to or by ‘the oppressed’, but a cognitive, psychological and political tool for more adequate knowledge, judged by the nonessentialist, historically contingent, situated standards of strong objectivity. Such standpoint is the always fraught but necessary fruit of the practice of oppositional and differential consciousness.” This might seem rather difficult, but I promise you by the end of the course you will be reading it like your morning newspaper.

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FEMINIST EMPIRICISM VERSUS FEMINIST STANDPOINT

In this Harding (1991) argued for 'strong objectivity' as a hallmark of feminist research. To take up the position of 'strong objectivity', one does value the other's perspective but one does not 'go native' or merge oneself with the researched. Rather, one seeks to consider the particularity of cultural location from a critical distance. Or as Haraway also comments:

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CRITIQUES OF STANDPOINT THEORY

- Do we deny knowledge or voice to those who have not had experiences?
- Is experience enough to ensure political consciousness?
- The above misread standpoint which in all cases, involves critical consciousness, reflexivity and struggle

Let us start at the beginning. 'Strong objectivity' as a hallmark of feminist research... here, the question that we are asking is that if standpoint theory is not just about experience, is it possible then for others to recover these women's voices as well? We are arguing for strong objectivity as a hallmark of feminist research. In this we are again following from the earlier point, do we deny knowledge or voice to those who have not had experiences?

Let me tack on a further question, what about doing research itself with women or with feminist issues of feminism itself. And here, Harding is arguing that this position of strong objectivity, is one where we not just value the others perspective, but we also place ourselves as researchers at a critical distance. We acknowledge we are outsiders, at the same time we try and understand these voices in a located fashion.

A standpoint, therefore, is not an empiricist appeal. It is not merely a recording of women's experiences or the experiences of the oppressed, but a cognitive, psychological and political tool. So, cognitive you have to understand it fully in its context, in its time and space. It is psychological, you have to try and comprehend what those materialistic experiences and their trajectories have had as an effect on people's psyches. And it is a political tool, you use it to argue for a better kind of organization of humanity through political means. For more adequate knowledge, not perverse views of reality, judged by the non-essentialist, historically contingent, situated standards of strong objectivity. So in Haraway's understanding these are the parameters of strong objectivity. Our standards for understanding oppression or lack thereof, always must be situated, they must be located in the context that we investigate.

They are historically contingent -- it means that they arose at a particular time and place, it does not mean there were always the case or that that will always be the case, they are often brought into being at the meeting point of a variety of factors.

And non-essentialist -- such conditions or such understanding must not be reproduced as the property of the milieu that you are investigating. There cannot be an inextricable relationship between the two. You can't suggest that this is the identity of the oppressed, and it will always remain the case. In other words, strong objectivity understands feminist research as part of a longer process, where you are empiricist in the service of a more precise analysis.

Such a standpoint is the always fraught -- it is always tension filled, you are never quite sure what you are doing -- but necessary fruit of the practice of oppositional and differential consciousness. A 'practice' is a really interesting word here, because you are saying that in all cases, one has to ask the question, as to what is the dominant order and what are the ways in which one can practice an oppositional and differential consciousness? I am not asking for people to rebel without a cause, to be contrarian for the sake of, but to constantly ask what the world would look like from a non-powerful point of view, and hence, oppositional and differential consciousness.

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FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

- The nature of women's experiences as individuals and as social beings has been excluded and/ or misrepresented
- Including women's contributions will result in a shift in perspective
- Attempts to reclaim the value of women's experiences on their own terms

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This therefore leads us to the next kind of broad heading of feminist epistemology. For those who are puzzled over the nature of this word, epistemology, merely means that we are questioning the ways in which we know what we know. So, the simple, or the easy understanding is epistemology equals, how you know what you know. What are the ways through with something has been established in your understanding as knowledge?

So, a feminist epistemology as a result of feminist standpoint, feminist empiricism, feminist representation, recovery of feminist voices will consist of the following understandings: the nature of women's experiences as individuals and as social beings has been excluded and or misrepresented including women's experiences; is not merely an additive project; it will result in a shift in perspective, suddenly the world will look different. Attempts must be made to reclaim the value of women's experiences on their own terms, in their own understanding. Why are certain things valuable for women must be asked and responded to in women's own words and language. And this broadly is what is encompassed within feminist standpoint.

I want to also present to you a different set of understandings or theorization of experience, and our experience can be part of theorization itself, through Donna Haraway's understanding, which is often known popularly as Cyborg theory.

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The slide features the title "CYBORG STANDPOINTS" in bold black letters, with "CYBORG" circled in red. Below the title is a list of four bullet points, each preceded by a red checkmark. The third bullet point, "Feminist standpoint as a fiction necessary to the political context within which it is created", has the word "fiction" circled in red. In the top right corner is the NPTEL logo. A video inset in the bottom right shows a woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing a pink and orange striped shirt, speaking and gesturing with her right hand.

- The post-modern subject
- The multiply located subject of the global order
- Our experience is constructed through the concepts available to us
- Feminist standpoint as a fiction necessary to the political context within which it is created

Cyborg standpoints are slightly different than feminists standpoints as suggested by Nancy Hutsul. Cyborg standpoints, the postmodern subject, one that is structured by multiple things, gender being only one of them with no clear understanding of what all of these combinations will produce as a figure. In other words, remember when we said that postmodern theory or post-structural theory, renders the entire figure of woman itself a little suspicious, what we are doing here is pushing that understand and saying, okay, woman is not part of our landscape anymore, gender is still part of it, how about we mix it all up in unexpected combinations, including developments in technology, science, in the ways in which our bodies are produced in society? And we end up with the figure of the cyborg, part human, part machine, part anything.

And here, Haraway is working on the understanding that our experience is constructed only through the concepts available to us. Meaning in any society, while we think that we are having experiences, it depends on the basket of concepts in our daily milieu that allow us to interpret those experiences. I am in a classroom, I am teaching you, this is a situation where I am speaking and you are hearing things and all of this is happening in real time.

However, I or you are only able to comprehend it through a larger understanding of the words available to us: education, knowledge, schools, certificates, etc. etc. And Haraway suggest that feminist standpoint is a fiction or was a fiction necessary to the political context within which it was created. In other words, feminist standpoint might have been useful at one time when women's voices were so hidden. They were so not available that even an imagination of them was necessary in order to be able to create that world where women are equally

represented. Haraway now suggesting that the world is much more complex. We are now in a time where our understanding of identity is very complicated and gender has to be considered along with a plethora of other concepts. In other words, we need a different set of fictions as possibilities of hope.

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THE CYBORG

- A new politically motivated imaginative device
- An alternative story about women's experiences
- A narrative or story that points us to a post-gender world
- Fractured identities and pluralities of multiple feminisms

In such a standpoint, the cyborg functions as a politically motivated, imaginative device. What is an imaginative device? Stay with me and think carefully about what Haraway is suggesting? She is saying well, in an earlier version of standpoint theory, you put forward the understanding that the moment we start speaking from the point of view of women or women's voices we'll have a privileged understanding of reality.

Now, we have come to the point where that is not enough, we need a different outside point. At one point of time, women was so on the outside, that that was a great standpoint. Now, we need to push our imagination and the boundaries of our imagination, we need a completely different fiction, to be able to have a clear view of reality. And she is suggesting the cyborg as providing an alternative story about women's experiences.

In this fictional world, there is a narrative or story that points us to a post gender world. What will the world look like if we achieve the final goal of feminist theory, which is the disappearance of gender itself, the gender can be something that comes and goes, or is benign, but does not order hierarchy or hierarchical knowledge of the world. Therefore, the word post, remember whenever you see post gender it does not mean the gender has disappeared; it means that gender is no longer important.

And in such a world we are dealing with fractured identities and pluralities of multiple feminisms and therefore we need a cyborg, since feminist standpoint does not provide a unitary, united understanding of this kind of truthful world and we are dealing with many fractured identities and pluralities of feminisms, our outside has to be completely different and hence the cyborg.

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The slide features the title "CYBORG" in large, bold, black letters. Below it, a bulleted list contains two items: "• Unafraid to recognize kinship with animals, machines, others" and "• Multiplicity and contradiction". A quote from Haraway is displayed in a white box: "is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful (infidel) heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new Right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, spaces, stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. (ibid.)". The video background shows a woman in a pink top speaking, with red circles highlighting the words "others", "infidel", and "goddess" in the text on the slide.

CYBORG

- Unafraid to recognize kinship with animals, machines, others
- Multiplicity and contradiction

is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful (infidel) heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new Right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, spaces, stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. (ibid.)

And the cyborg seems to be a great figure to also try and destabilize the position of humans in the world. The Cyborg is unafraid to recognize kinship with animals, machines, others, suddenly the cyborg brings into play possibilities of being human in completely different ways, and it thrives on multiplicity and contradiction. The very figures that we understand to be men, women, machine, animals are all mixed up, and parts do not match each other. And it sounds strangely familiar, it feels like all of our rich inner lives, where we are never sure what we are going to be the next day, we try very hard, but often we struggle and such is the figure that Haraway suggests will capture the nature of identities in the current moment.

Now, cyborg in her words, is a dream, not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. Here, infidel just means that we are not sure what to believe anymore. The nature of all truth has been exposed to be partial, contingent and ephemeral. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of this super savers of the new right. Just follow the language here and enjoy it.

It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationship, spaces, stories, though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess;

this is a very interesting choice of binaries. As a woman, would you be a cyborg? Or would you rather be a goddess?

One seems to be attached to very particular ideas of powerful femininity, whereas the other disavows all ideas of identity. Now, questions of Cyborg as the proper figure for feminist's standpoint may well be critiqued, but I want to illustrate one of the aspects of what this speaks about the idea of multiplicity and contradiction in relation to experience by going through a case study from the text.

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Case Study 16: Theorizing Young Asian Women's Experiences


Shain (2000: 159) argues that an analysis of young Asian women's experiences means that 'race, gender, class and age divisions cannot be mechanically added or reduced to one or other of the divisions'. For this reason, Shain's research focuses on 'the complex reality of the lived experiences of young Asian women with reference to the intersections of that experience with educational institutions and frameworks'. Shain's research is based on semi-structured interviews that were conducted with 44 British-born Asian girls of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian descent. Her theoretical framework would be described as broadly postcolonial and specifically it draws on Gramscian concepts of historical specificity, articulation and hegemony.

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Case Study 16: Theorizing Young Asian Women's Experiences. "Shain 2000 argues that an analysis of young Asian women's experiences means that 'race, gender, class and age divisions cannot be mechanically added or reduced to one or other of the divisions.'" In other words, you cannot form an additive theory which is it is all women, let us add categories of age, let us add categories of class, age, etc.



"For this reason, Shain's research focuses on the complex reality of, ..." aha! Our magic word today, "'lived experiences' of young Asian women with reference to the intersections of that experience with educational institutions and frameworks." Here comes our structure question. "Shain's research is based on semi structured interviews that were conducted with 44 British born Asian girls of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian descent. Her theoretical framework would be described as broadly postcolonial, and specifically in draws on Gramscian concepts of historical specificity, articulation and hegemony." Not that it is particular to this course; broadly, it would be useful to look up Gramscian concepts of hegemony.

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Shain notes:


Since the experiences of young women are shaped by a multiplicity of factors . . . their responses to the situations in which they find themselves will also vary. These depend upon particular relationships between the various structural factors that shape their experiences, and also upon the subjective experience of these situations. Young women of similar religious backgrounds located in the same region within Britain, whose parents originate from the same region in Pakistan, may define their experiences of school in very different ways. This may relate to the class position of their respective families in Britain, or to the gender patterns within their households. (ibid: 161)



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Shain




Shain notes: “Since, the experiences of young women are shaped by a multiplicity of factors..., their responses to the situations in which they find themselves will also vary.” This is directly correlated to what we understand as race, gender, class and age divisions, as not being able to be added or reduced. In other words, just because we know all these details, does not mean we will know exactly how people exert agency in any situation.

“These depend upon particular relationships between the various structural factors that shape their experiences” in time and space “and also upon the subjective experience of these situations. Young women of similar religious backgrounds located in the same region within Britain, whose parents originate from the same region in Pakistan may define their experiences of school in very different ways. This may relate to the class position of their

respective families in Britain, or to the gender patterns within their households.” So see how Shain is complicating the narrative, she gives us all of these young women who are located in the same region whose parents originate from the same region in Pakistan.

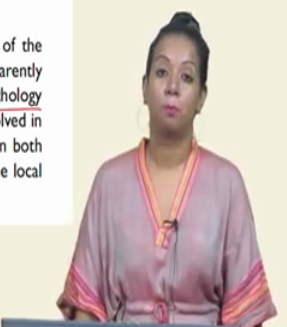
So they have come from one place and located in another place, but there are so many other factors that are responsible for how people live their lives, that it complicates the very process of analysis itself. Here, we are arguing for multiplicity and contradiction in the ways in which people live their lives and therefore suggesting that experience is central to our analytical integrity.

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For example, Shain illustrates how young women's responses to racism at school varied in terms of whether these would be perceived as mediated by a desire for survival or resistance. Nevertheless, Shain also notes that primarily their responses remained at the level of the individual rather than collective struggle. However, Shain argues:

Although their responses were not revolutionary, the strategies of the young women cannot be viewed simply as reproductions of the apparently static cultures that are handed down to them (as in cultural pathology frameworks). Instead they reveal that young Asian women are involved in creating and shaping new identities for themselves which draw on both the various residual cultures of their parents' traditions and on the local and regional cultures that they currently inhabit. (ibid.: 171)



“For example, Shain illustrates how young women's responses to racism at school varied in terms of whether these would be perceived as mediated by a desire for survival or resistance.” What is it that they feel like doing that day? Are they feeling particularly survivalist, one has to get by? Or are they feeling particularly pugilistic like somebody is itching for a fight and want to signify that they are powerful, or they are tired of giving in any given set of factors would structure their responses.

“Nevertheless, Shain also notes that primarily their responses remained at the level of the individual rather than collective struggle.” This is the one thing that seems to unite them, which is each of these girls seem to treat their experiences as something that they were individually responsible for, and not necessarily to be fought for together.

“However, Shain argues: Although their responses were not revolutionary, the strategies of the young women cannot be viewed simply as reproductions of the apparently static cultures

that are handed down to them, as in cultural pathology frameworks.” Here, we are also talking about particular forms of racialization that assume that cultures of the global south such as those in Pakistan, are frozen in time, no matter where they travel.

“Instead, they reveal that young Asian women are involved in creating and shaping new identities for themselves, which draw on both the various residual cultures of their parent’s traditions and on the local and regional cultures that they currently inhabit.” This young women are very, very creatively amalgamating all of their varied influences, their geographic location, their cultural location, but also the cultural memory and tradition handed down to them by their parents and there is no clear understanding of what such a mixture would look like.

Here, think about possibly relating this to the figure of the cyborg to the kind of outside that might be signified by the diasporic subject when no factor is available in quite the same fashion; where the limitations of tradition are exposed as other limitations of global modernity or the global north and they all come together in the daily experiences of these women. And hence, this could well approximate our desire for the cyborg itself.

Let me now move on to another example of Cyborg feminism, where we actually investigate what happens to the real cyborgs.

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And the example I suggest here is the film *her*. I am not going to tell you the exact plot but this is a narrative about a young man, young white man, maybe not so young. But Joaquin Phoenix plays a computer programmer who is in a kind of relationship with a cyborgian woman with a voice and a program meant to approximate female presence. And we see a lot of these kinds of investigations within -- what can I say? -- we see a lot of these investigations within feminist science fiction that are pushing the boundaries of where is it that we find femininity? Reinvestigated, reinvented, and represented for popular consumption. So, just a few lines from this. Theodore, the protagonist says, “you know, sometimes I think I have felt everything I am ever going to feel and from here on out, I am not going to feel something new, just lesser versions of what I have already felt, just lesser versions of what I already felt.”

And this is by the director spike Jones. Think here of the ways in which a feminine program or computer figure is meant to create these feelings that modernity has taken away from poor Theodore. The figure here is called Samantha and she says, “You have a lot of contacts,” Theodore says, “I am very popular,” he is making a joke. And Samantha says, “Really? Does this mean that you actually have friends?”

Look here at the slippage between contacts and friends and she is speaking directly to the loneliness of the modern figure, of the modern man, that must then be alleviated by this kind of feminine Cyborgian figure even if she is not necessarily, “real.” What would something like this mean, for Cyborg standpoint theory is an open question.

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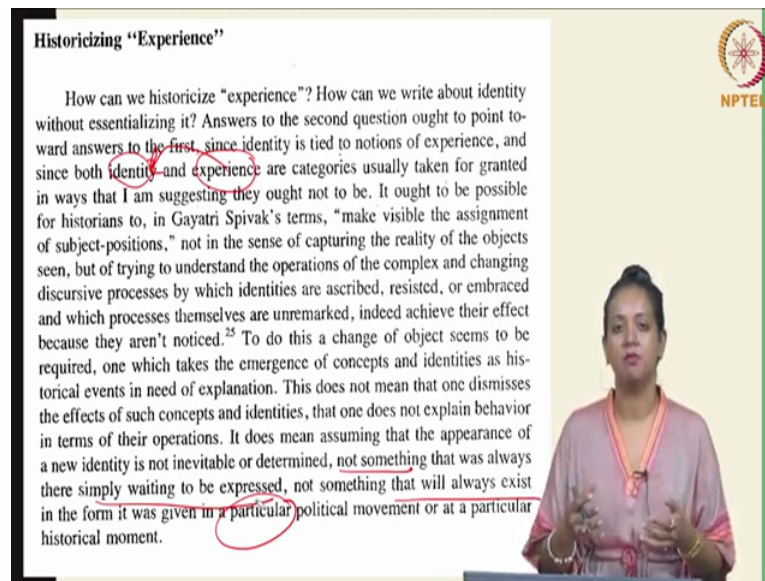
HISTORICIZING EXPERIENCE

- "Experience" (Joan Scott in 'Feminists theorize the political')
- How can we adopt a critical understanding of experience without essentializing it?

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The last examination of experience that I want to convey to you in this lecture is from Joan Scott's essay called the evidence of experience, in a volume titled *Feminist Theorize the Political*. And here Scott is asking the question – How can we adopt a critical understanding of experience also, without essentializing it? And we know this to be true in common anecdotal exchange, you say something and somebody else will say, well no, actually, I know the truth of it, because I have experienced it, because I have grown up here I know everything about this city, because I live in India, I can speak about Indian culture. There is the danger of always essentializing through an authentic point of view, as if living something is enough to know it and this is a danger with conceptualizations of experience, the romanticization of it.

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Historicizing "Experience"

How can we historicize "experience"? How can we write about identity without essentializing it? Answers to the second question ought to point toward answers to the first, since identity is tied to notions of experience, and since both identity and experience are categories usually taken for granted in ways that I am suggesting they ought not to be. It ought to be possible for historians to, in Gayatri Spivak's terms, "make visible the assignment of subject-positions," not in the sense of capturing the reality of the objects seen, but of trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced and which processes themselves are unremarked, indeed achieve their effect because they aren't noticed.²⁵ To do this a change of object seems to be required, one which takes the emergence of concepts and identities as historical events in need of explanation. This does not mean that one dismisses the effects of such concepts and identities, that one does not explain behavior in terms of their operations. It does mean assuming that the appearance of a new identity is not inevitable or determined, not something that was always there simply waiting to be expressed, not something that will always exist in the form it was given in a particular political movement or at a particular historical moment.

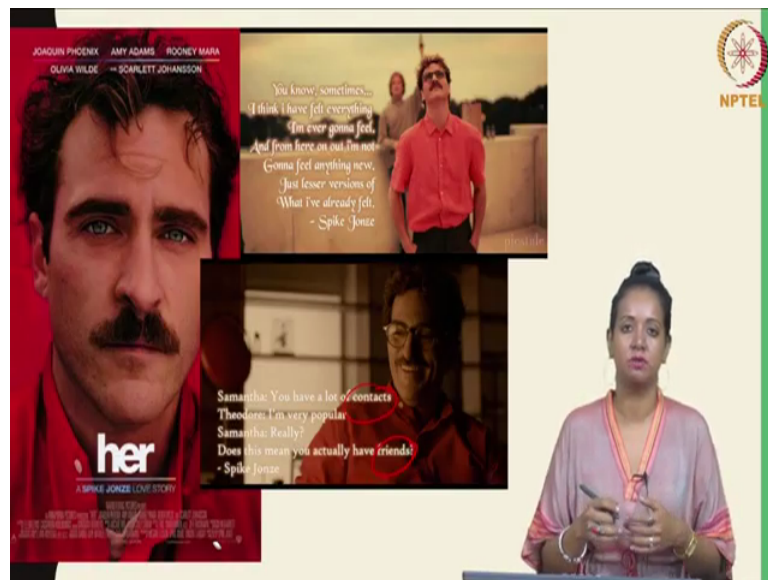
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So, let me read to you something from that text. "How can we historicize experience? How can we write about identity without essentializing it? Answers to the second question ought to point toward answers to the first since identity is tied to notions of experience, and since both identity and experience are categories, usually taken for granted in ways that I am suggesting they ought not to be." Here, Scott is deconstructing both identity and experience which are usually considered as one feeding into the other. "It ought to be possible for historians to, in Gayatri Spivak's terms "make visible the assignment of subject-positions..." How is it that something gets to have particular identities? "...not in the sense of capturing the reality of the objects seen, but of trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted or embraced? And which processes themselves are unremarked indeed achieved their effect because they aren't noticed." Here there is a very-very important link that Scott is making between experience and discourse. Think about it very much in terms that we discussed in the lecture on conceptual clarity, how do we get to be who we are, because discourse assigns positions to us.

"To do this a change of objects seems to be required, one which takes the emergence of concepts and identities as historical events in need of explanation." That is what cyborg standpoint is doing with feminist standpoint. It says that feminist standpoint arose at a particular moment in history, which is no longer applicable, so let us try a new concept, let us experiment with Cyborg. It does... "This does not mean that one dismisses the effects of such concepts and identities that one does not explain behaviour in terms of their operations, the

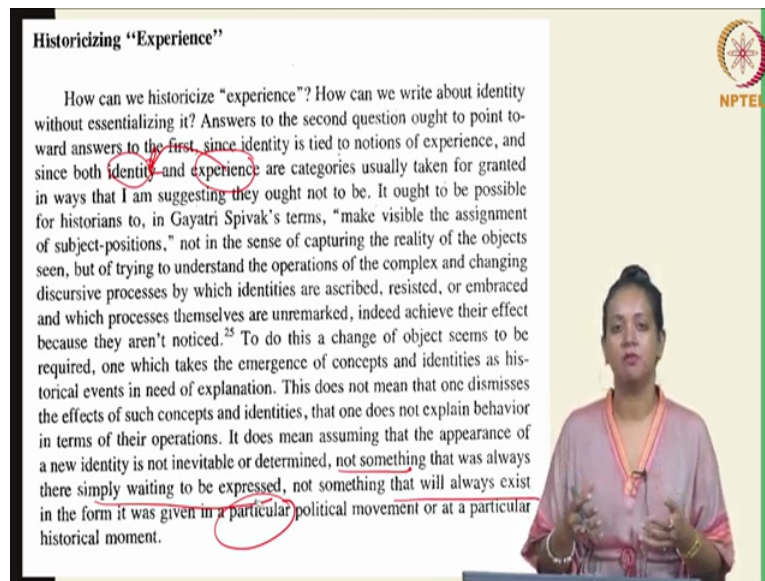
concepts are still in play. It does mean assuming that the appearance of a new identity is not inevitable or determined, it requires imaginative political activity to see what is it that we can be, and what are the ways in which discourses structure us as if those identities will always be the same, not something that was always there simply waiting to be expressed, not something that will always exist in the form it was given in a particular political movement or at a particular historical moment.”

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Think here about how something like this, where you do not even see the woman conforms to a historical understanding of woman have we not moved to something that might not have been imaginable, especially because one could not predict the ways in which technology would structure our life and this is what Scott is gesturing towards by saying.

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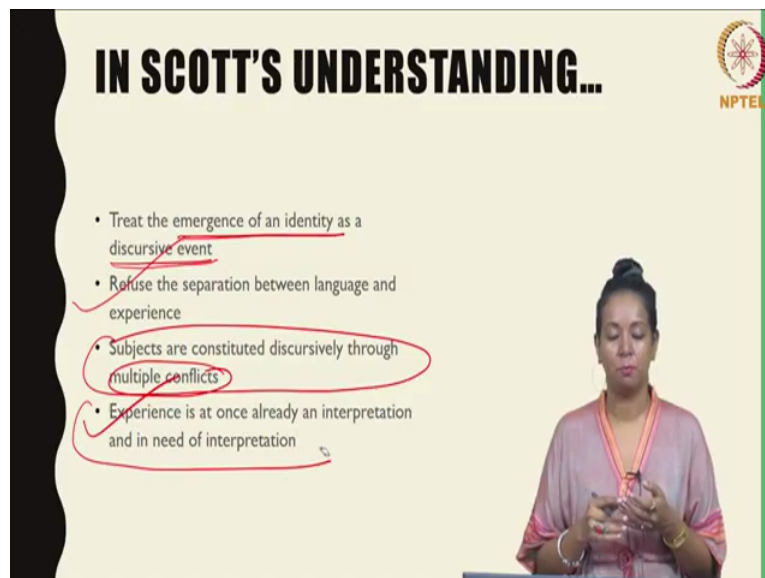
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The slide features a speaker on the right and a red circle around the phrase "not something that will always exist in the form it was given in a particular political movement or at a particular historical moment."

"[N]ot something that was simply waiting to be expressed," it is an accidental happenstance filled moment that we now speak about female robots. "Not something that will always exist in the form it was given in a particular political movement or at a particular historical movement." In other words, woman as a category itself is continually under question.

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IN SCOTT'S UNDERSTANDING...

- Treat the emergence of an identity as a discursive event
- Refuse the separation between language and experience
- Subjects are constituted discursively through multiple conflicts
- Experience is at once already an interpretation and in need of interpretation

The slide features a speaker on the right and red circles around the phrases "Subjects are constituted discursively through multiple conflicts" and "Experience is at once already an interpretation and in need of interpretation".

Therefore, in Scott's understanding, identity emerges as a discursive event, and one should not refuse the separation. In other words, in Scott's understanding, the emergence of an identity is a discursive event, and therefore, one should refuse the separation between language and experience. I would add one more to this which is the separation between discourses and experience, they are closely related.

Subjects are constituted through multiple conflicts discursively; experience is at once already an interpretation and in need of interpretation. Now, this is quite poetic and I think it captures the heart of our discussion today. I will stop there and I will encourage you to go back to this presentation and go over it again. Because experience does allow for us to consider all the other concepts that we have discussed so far, but also push its boundaries.

In the last lecture for this week, coming up soon, we will discuss briefly another important concept, Space, and with that, we will come to an end.