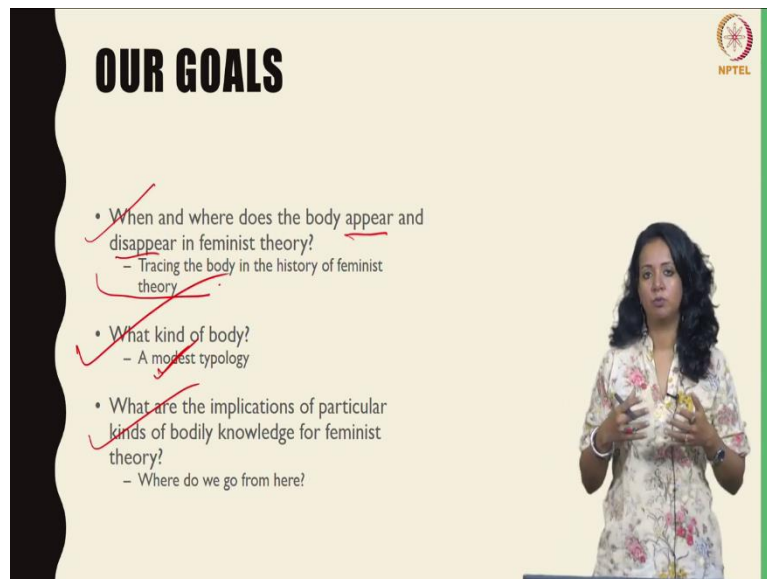


Feminism: Concepts and Theories
Dr. Mathangi Krishnamurthy
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The Feminist Body – Part II

Welcome back, I hope you have had a bit of a break. Let us continue in today's discussions to our next topic of interest.

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OUR GOALS

- When and where does the body appear and disappear in feminist theory?
– Tracing the body in the history of feminist theory
- What kind of body?
– A modest typology
- What are the implications of particular kinds of bodily knowledge for feminist theory?
– Where do we go from here?

The slide features a video inset on the right side showing a woman with dark hair, wearing a floral patterned dress, speaking and gesturing with her hands. The NPTEL logo is visible in the top right corner of the slide.


And this is related to what kind of body? And let us begin with the kind of body that is most familiar to a number of us when we think about women and women's issues in the contemporary world: the beautiful body.

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WHAT KIND OF BODY?

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- The beautiful body
 - In our culture not one part of a woman's body is left untouched, unaltered... From head to toe, every feature of a woman's face, every section of her body, is subject to modification. (1974: 113–114)



“In our culture, not one part of a woman's body is left untouched, unaltered. From head to toe, every feature of a woman's face, every section of her body is subject to modification.” Clearly familiar, clearly more familiar than we would like. Let us take a look at beauty and the body in feminist theory. And in relation to this, what I want to do is read to you from a very important text in relation to beauty, Naomi Wolf's, *The Beauty Myth*. So work with me here. Let us see what are the multiple ways in which we can understand theory as working through concepts of beauty?


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THE BEAUTY MYTH – NAOMI WOLF

NPTEL

At last, after a long silence, women took to the streets. In the two decades of radical action that followed the rebirth of feminism in the early 1970s, Western women gained legal and reproductive rights, pursued higher education, entered the trades and the professions, and overturned ancient and revered beliefs about their social role. A generation on, do women feel free?

The affluent, educated, liberated women of the First World, who can enjoy freedoms unavailable to any women ever before, do not feel as free as they want to. And they can no longer restrict to the subconscious their sense that this lack of freedom has something to do with—with apparently frivolous issues, things that really should not matter. Many are ashamed to admit that such trivial concerns—to do with physical appearance, bodies, faces, hair, clothes—matter so much. But in spite of shame, guilt, and denial, more and more women are wondering if it isn't that they are entirely neurotic and alone but rather that something important is indeed at stake that has to do with the relationship between female liberation and female beauty.



Wolf writes – “At last, after a long silence, women took to the streets. In the two decades of radical action that followed the rebirth of feminism in the early 1970s,..” and you will recognize Wolf is talking about second-wave feminism here, “Western women gained legal

and reproductive rights, pursued higher education, entered the trades and the professions, and overturned ancient and revered beliefs about their social role. A generation on, do women feel free?" Here is an important question, because Wolf is asking this in relation to the third-wave of feminist movements. She is asking, after all of these forms of progress, now that we have all forms of rights, do women feel free?

"The affluent, educated, liberated women of the First World, who can enjoy freedoms unavailable to any women ever before, do not feel as free as they want to." Do you hear strains of Betty Friedan and the feminine mystique? "And they can no longer restrict to the subconscious their sense that this lack of freedom has something to do with --- with apparently frivolous issues, things that really should not matter. Many are ashamed to admit that such trivial concerns --- to do with physical appearance, bodies, faces, hair, clothes --- matter so much. But in spite of shame, guilt, and denial, more and more women are wondering if it isn't that they are entirely neurotic and alone but rather that something important is indeed at stake that has to do with the relationship between female liberation and female beauty."

Now remember, Wolf is writing at a point when it is important that these considerations come to the fore. We are still not at that point that we referenced in third-wave feminism where women were embracing girliness as an antidote to the kind of second feminist disavowal of everything that was, quote unquote, "feminine." Here she is asking an important question. She is saying, is there a relationship between female liberation and female beauty without really telling us whether it is a positive or a negative association.

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THE BEAUTY MYTH - NAOMI WOLF

The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called "beauty" objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women's beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless.

None of this is true. "Beauty" is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves.

NPTEL

She calls this, as the title of the book says, *The Beauty Myth*. The beauty myth tells a story. The quality called beauty objectively and universally exists. So see where the object of this book lies. It is moving from this question of women feeling oppressed by certain kinds of questions such as physical appearance, bodies, faces, hair, clothes, and moving it to the question of what this universal standard a female beauty may be.

“The beauty myth tells a story. The quality called “beauty” objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it.” Even as I am saying it, I despair because I wonder how will we ever get rid of this standard. Women must want to embody it, women universally must want to embody beauty of the universal kind and men must want to possess women who embody it. And this comes up again and again and again where celebrity men are asked about the women they are married to, “how does it feel to be married to the most beautiful woman in the world?” The question itself is such a leading endorsement of this beauty standard.

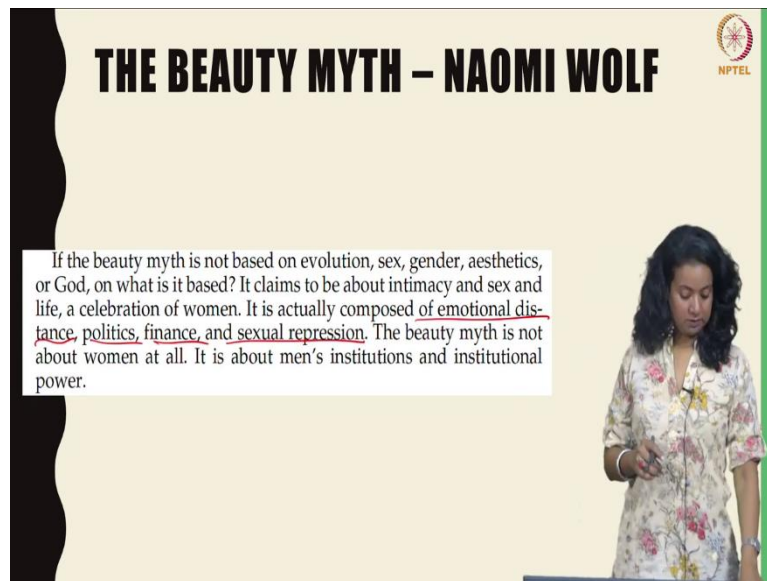
“This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary. Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful,” as if this is a natural given in society. Are you able to make the connection between Simone de Beauvoir’s text and Naomi Wolf’s contention of this kind of beauty myth? Because she is talking about the building blocks of myth-making. It is biological, it is sexual, it is evolutionary. Of course, it is a given, beautiful women give birth to better looking children who have better chances in the world or some such myth. “Strong men battle for beautiful women, beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women’s beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, like in some kind of mythical animal kingdom, it is inevitable, and changeless.”

Wolf goes on to say, “None of this is true. Beauty is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact.” There is her argument. She argues that the kind of myth-making around beauty is merely a kind of weapon meant to keep male dominance intact and it is justified through these kinds of arguments about nature. “In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for

resources that men have appropriated for themselves.” Here is a completely different story of beauty that Wolf is constructing for us.

In this world, where men have appropriated resources for themselves, how is it that women are allowed to compete? They are allowed to compete for these resources by competing for the men through attributes that they have no control over, such as the beauty myth. The beauty myth in Wolf’s understanding is a culturally imposed physical standard. And the moment you define beauty like this, you take away from its seeming inevitability, its seeming universality, so on and so forth.

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THE BEAUTY MYTH – NAOMI WOLF

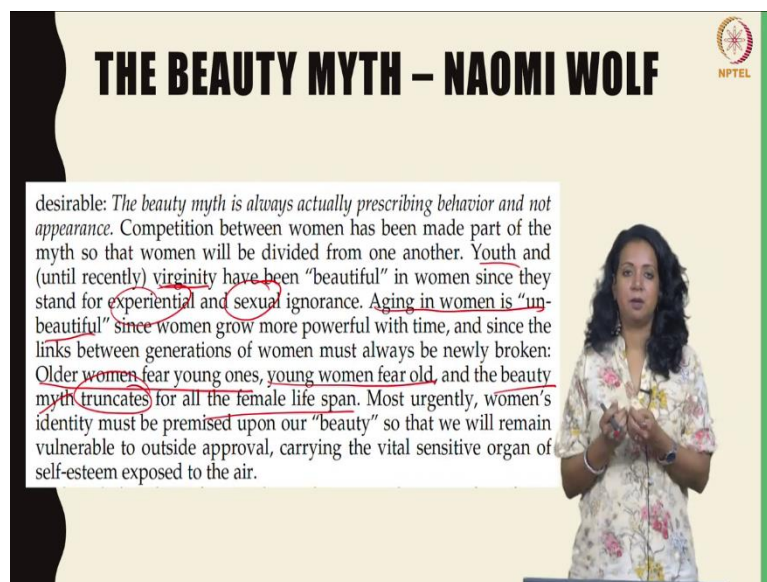
If the beauty myth is not based on evolution, sex, gender, aesthetics, or God, on what is it based? It claims to be about intimacy and sex and life, a celebration of women. It is actually composed of emotional distance, politics, finance, and sexual repression. The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men's institutions and institutional power.

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Naomi Wolf is shown in a video frame on the right side of the slide, wearing a floral dress.

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THE BEAUTY MYTH – NAOMI WOLF

desirable: *The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance.* Competition between women has been made part of the myth so that women will be divided from one another. Youth and (until recently) virginity have been “beautiful” in women since they stand for experiential and sexual ignorance. Aging in women is “unbeautiful” since women grow more powerful with time, and since the links between generations of women must always be newly broken: Older women fear young ones, young women fear old, and the beauty myth truncates for all the female life span. Most urgently, women's identity must be premised upon our “beauty” so that we will remain vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ of self-esteem exposed to the air.

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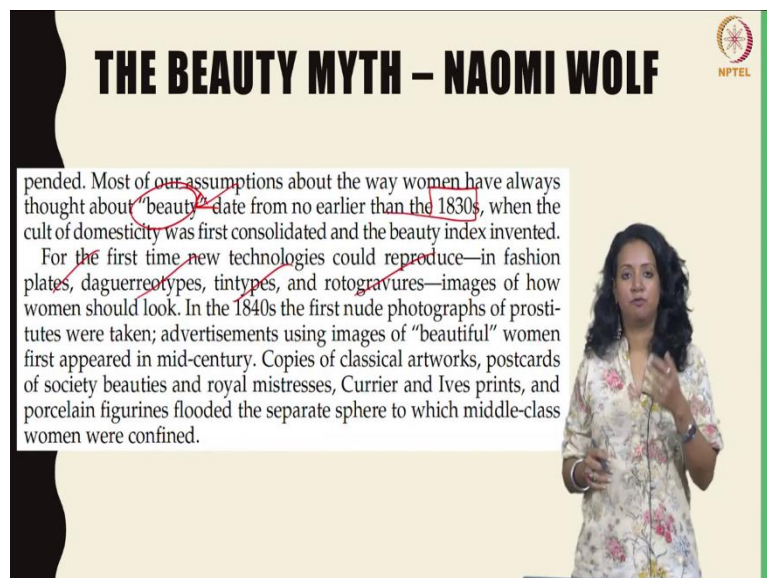
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more powerful with time, and since the links between generations of women must always be newly broken. Older women fear young ones, young women fear old, and the beauty myth truncates for all the female life span. Most urgently, women's identity must be premised upon our beauty so that we will remain vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ of self-esteem exposed to the air.” Look how damning this argument is. Does any of this make common sensical meaning to you? Look what she is saying, aging in women is unbeautiful. The aging woman is not a beautiful entity in society. She has lost the one currency that makes her desirable to men, and since men are the ones that have power, she no longer has access to power. At the same time, you want to be able to divide up women into different communities. So beauty becomes the currency through which they compete with one another. Older women fear young ones, young women fear old, the beauty myth truncates for all the female life span. It truncates possibilities of being anything besides a contender in this beauty contest.

Most urgently, women's identity must be premised upon our beauty, beautiful or not, good looking or not, so that we will remain vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ of self-esteem, exposed to the air. Our identities will always be dependent upon being identified by somebody else as worthy of the beauty market.

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THE BEAUTY MYTH – NAOMI WOLF

pendent. Most of our assumptions about the way women have always thought about “beauty” date from no earlier than the 1830s, when the cult of domesticity was first consolidated and the beauty index invented. For the first time new technologies could reproduce—in fashion plates, daguerreotypes, tintypes, and rotogravures—images of how women should look. In the 1840s the first nude photographs of prostitutes were taken; advertisements using images of “beautiful” women first appeared in mid-century. Copies of classical artworks, postcards of society beauties and royal mistresses, Currier and Ives prints, and porcelain figurines flooded the separate sphere to which middle-class women were confined.

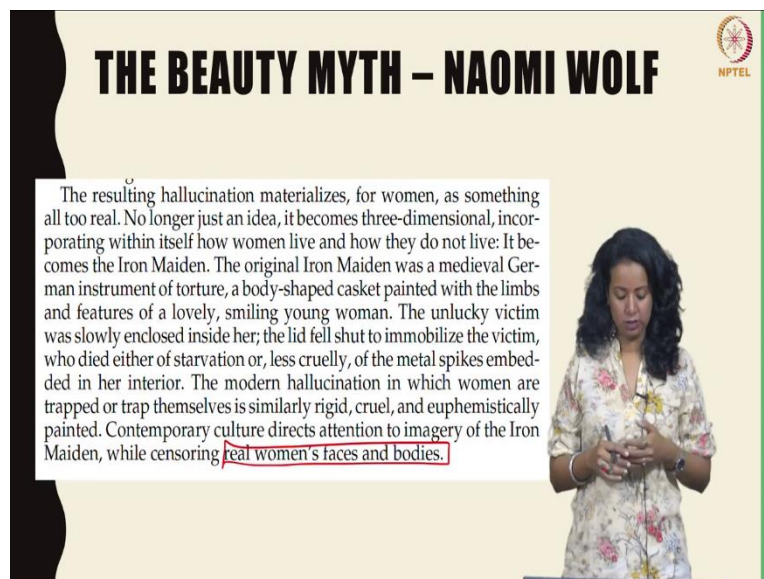
NPTEL

Another interesting point that Wolf then goes on to make is to say that “(m)ost of our assumptions about the way women have always thought about beauty date from no earlier than the 1830s, when the cult of domesticity was first consolidated and the beauty index invented.” Now this might seem strange to people. Surely even before that time, there were

ideas of beautiful women but that is precisely what Wolf is trying to say. The universal standard of beauty in any time and place is not universal. It changed over time, it was meant to do different things. Beauty as such in any time and age, might have operated in exactly the same fashion, but our assumptions about beauty are very modern. And this is why you see different standards of beauty even in the current moment across the world. However, they all seem to conform to particular kinds of stereotypes about physical appearance and the female body.

“For the first time, new technologies could reproduce in fashion plates, daguerreotypes, tintypes, rotogravures; images of how women should look. In the 1840s the first nude photographs of prostitutes were taken; advertisements using images of beautiful women first appeared in mid-century. Copies of classical artworks, postcards of society beauties and royal mistresses, Currier and Ives prints, and porcelain figurines flooded the separate sphere to which middle-class women were confined.” These were clues, these were suggestions for middle-class women confined to homes in the new cult of domesticity, that this is what you have to strive to become; these work prescriptions for beauty practices.

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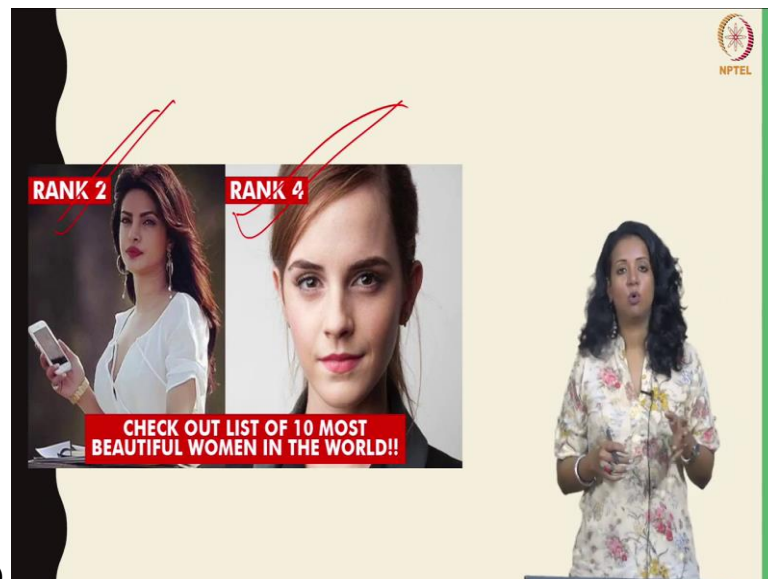


The slide features a title "THE BEAUTY MYTH – NAOMI WOLF" in bold black letters at the top left. To the right of the title is the NPTEL logo. Below the title is a text box with a white background and black text. The text reads: "The resulting hallucination materializes, for women, as something all too real. No longer just an idea, it becomes three-dimensional, incorporating within itself how women live and how they do not live: It becomes the Iron Maiden. The original Iron Maiden was a medieval German instrument of torture, a body-shaped casket painted with the limbs and features of a lovely, smiling young woman. The unlucky victim was slowly enclosed inside her; the lid fell shut to immobilize the victim, who died either of starvation or, less cruelly, of the metal spikes embedded in her interior. The modern hallucination in which women are trapped or trap themselves is similarly rigid, cruel, and euphemistically painted. Contemporary culture directs attention to imagery of the Iron Maiden, while censoring real women's faces and bodies." To the right of the text box is a photograph of Naomi Wolf, a woman with dark hair, wearing a floral patterned shirt, looking down at her hands.

“The resulting hallucination materializes, for women, as something all too real. No longer just an idea, it becomes three-dimensional, incorporating within itself how women live and how they do not live. It becomes the Iron Maiden. The original Iron Maiden was a medieval German instrument of torture, a body-shaped casket painted with the limbs and features of a lovely, smiling, young woman.

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And this is all too familiar to us right now. In fact, also familiar, our advertising campaigns which claim to show real women, even they seem to have suspiciously unattainable standards of beauty that are still meant to be, standards to be achieved, that are still meant to be something out of the reach of everyday women in the world. Let me show you a few examples, even though I know you are surrounded by these pretty much everywhere.

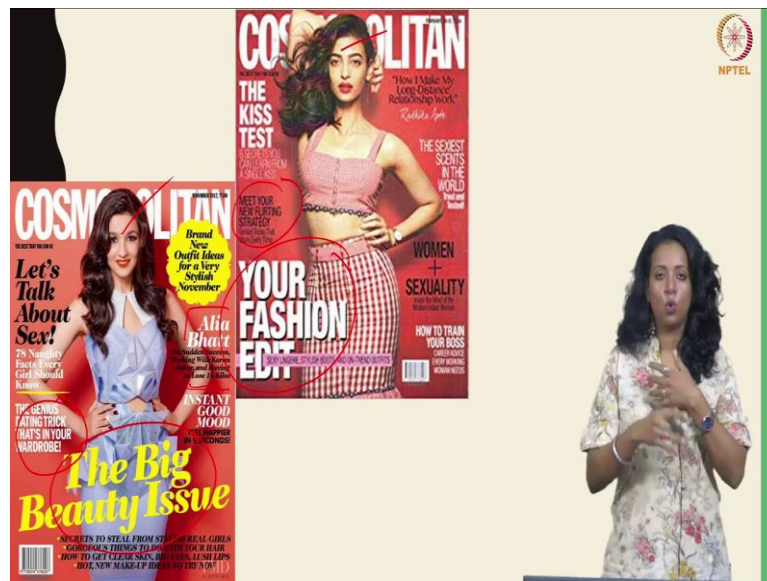


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Think, for example, of a very, very standard Google search. List of the 10 most beautiful women in the world, rank and rank. Think already of how this kind of competition is now blatantly out in the world where we are surrounded by images of beauty, we are given rankings, we are given competitive enticement to say who is it that is most beautiful?

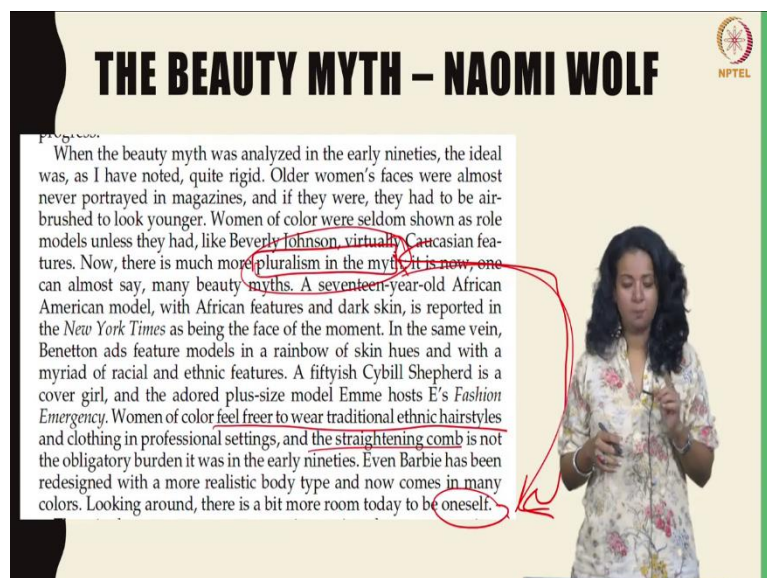
People are even jubilant, oh, an Indian woman has made the list as opposed to a British woman. There are all sorts of strange discourses floating around that only seemed to emphasize exactly what Wolf is arguing. Think also of covers of fashion magazines, which are some of my most favourite places to apply analysis.

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Cosmopolitan, Alia Bhatt, Radhika Apte; two completely different kinds of actors who are now on the covers of magazines speaking about the big beauty issue, your fashion edit, new flirting strategy, genius dating trick that is in your wardrobe. Also check this out, Alia Bhatt on sudden success, working with Karan Johar, and having to lose 16 kilos. I will not say much about what these beauty standards are about, but clearly the idea of thinness, the idea of light skin, the idea of fashion, all of these are part of this complex that we seem to intuitively understand as beauty.

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Wolf continues, when the beauty myth was analysed in the early nineties, and this is from a new introduction to a new edition. She says, “The ideal was, as I have noted, quite rigid.

Older women's faces will almost never portrayed in magazines, and if they were, they had to be airbrushed to look younger. Women of colour were seldom shown as role models unless they had, like Beverly Johnson, virtually Caucasian features. Now, there is much more pluralism in the myth;" And this is a nice turn of phrase, 'more pluralism in the myth'. "It is now, one can almost say, many beauty myths. A seventeen-year-old African American model, with African features and dark skin, is reported in the New York Times as being the face of the moment. In the same vein, Benetton ads feature models in a rainbow of skin hues and with a myriad of racial and ethnic features. A fiftyish Cybill Shepherd is a cover girl, and adored plus-size model Emme hosts E's Fashion Emergency. Women of colour feel freer to wear traditional ethnic hairstyles and clothing in professional settings, and the straightening comb is not the obligatory burden it was in the early nineties. Even Barbie has been redesigned with a more realistic body type and now comes in many colours. Looking around, there is a bit more room today to be oneself."

And yet these two are at odds with one another, there is pluralism in the myth, one can be oneself. I want you to pay attention to the ways in which the body moves through these discourses. In one set of arguments as Wolf argues, there seems to be no escape, that there can be only one universal standard of beauty that is floating around as a myth that we need to all aspire to. At the other end, Wolf is now claiming that with this pluralism, we can now be oneself.

However, I still urge you to ask the question, what are the ways in which body and beauty are still entangled in some kind of irrevocable hole that exerts pressure on the female body? And what would feminist theory have to say about it? I also want to speak a little bit about the ways in which what Wolf is speaking about: feeling freer to wear traditional ethnic hairstyles, not needing the straightening comb. In other words, owning heritage, owning tradition, having multiplicity of race and other kinds of features, are part of this plurality in beauty. Let me take you through an important case study.

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BEAUTY AND RACE

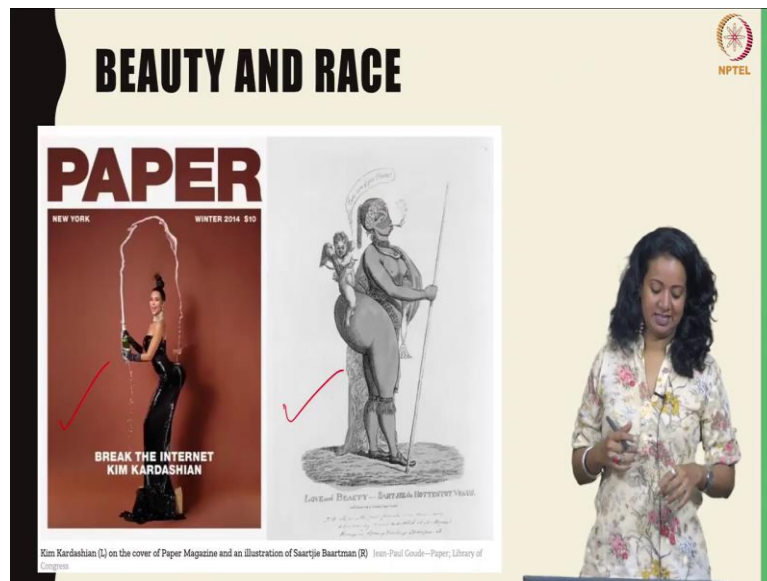
Kim Kardashian (L) on the cover of Paper Magazine and an illustration of Saartjie Baartman (R) Jean-Paul Goude—Paper; Library of Congress

This, as people might well know, is Kim Kardashian. Kim Kardashian's iconic image on the cover of Paper, reminded many of the iconic drawing of Saartjie Baartman. Saartjie Baartman's story is very, very familiar to readers of feminist theory.

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MIMICKING RACIALIZATION?

- Kim Kardashian's Nude Photos and Saartjie's Choice: History's Problem with Fascinating Bodies – Jordyn Blaise, Time Magazine; Nov 14, 2014
- <https://time.com/3586176/kim-kardashian-saartjie-baartman/>



And let me read to you an excerpt from an article on Saartjie Baartman and Kim Kardashian titled “Kim Kardashian’s Nude Photos and Saartjie’s Choice: History’s problem with Fascinating Bodies” by Jordyn Blaise in Time Magazine, November 14th, 2014. So the link is available for those who want to go read the entire article. But the article speaks about how Saartjie Baartman was a colonized body or the body of a woman who was paraded throughout Europe as the Hottentot Venus, as a freak body. Unnatural, freakish African body who was paraded through Europe as a freak show, and how she signified the greatest sort of most egregious, immoral excesses of European colonialism inflicted on racialized female bodies. What does it say then? That Kim Kardashian body mimics it for purposes of capitalist consumption. I am not going to offer you an analysis, I just thought it was something important to show you in order for you to see how complicated this idea of plurality in beauty can also be.

The other kind of body that I want to move on to, to sort of segue from this understanding of Kim Kardashian is something that I think will be well introduced through the idea of cosmetic surgery, which is such a raging feminist issue. Should women have the right to modify their bodies given the availability of technology in order to conform to beauty myths? Does it give them more power and more currency in a system that is any way rigged against them?

Or does it signify to us the capitulation, the increasing capitulation of certain kinds of privileged women to these beauty myths, thereby producing for the public standards that others will never be able to meet? In other words, are they rigging the system further? But

cosmetic surgeries also then are on the fine line between the beautiful body and the medicalized body.

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THE MEDICALIZED BODY

- Since the second half of the nineteenth century
- A focus on demographics and hence reproduction
- Motherhood, contraception and eugenics
- Reproductive processes, sexuality, and the endocrine system


What do we mean by the medicalized body? Since the second half of the nineteenth century, there has been a focus on women's bodies as problems. We already gestured to this a little bit in relation to the Contagious Diseases Act, but the focus on demographics, as we mentioned early, and hence reproduction also brought about a renewed focus on motherhood, contraception, eugenics, reproductive processes, sexuality, and the endocrine system.

In other words, all the ways in which the female body was considered to be radically different than the male body. Remember the dyad that Simone de Beauvoir suggests, think about the medicalized body as precisely occupying that dyad, where there is a fetishized attention that is given to reproduction, sexuality, and the endocrine system, which are so different than men's bodies, that they must be controlled, or they must be medicalized or treated as diseases.

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- "According to the Western medical model, premenstrual syndrome is a disease, menstruation is a disease, pregnancy is a disease, childbirth is a disease, and menopause is a disease. From this model, I have reached the conclusion that being a woman is a disease."
- -- The Medicalization of Women; Sybil Shainwald; Women's Health Advocate
- <https://www.womenshealthadvocate.org/articles/the-medicalization-of-women/>




I want to read to you from a document online titled, "The Medicalization of Women" by Sybil Shainwald, who is a Women's Health Advocate. Now the reason why I wanted to pick from a non-academic source is to also speak to you about the ways in which others are concerned about this state of women's health and the medicalization of women's bodies. Shainwald says, "According to the Western medical model, premenstrual syndrome is a disease, menstruation is a disease, pregnancy is a disease, childbirth is a disease, and menopause is a disease. From this model, I have reached the conclusion that being a woman is a disease."


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- "Another phenomenon of modern medicine is the medicalization of mood variations in the menstrual cycle. There is no doubt that fluctuations in hormone levels can influence mood and behavior. However, it would appear that men's peaks and valleys of mood and impulsivity are similar to those of women; but they are simply not cyclical. At some more or less arbitrary point, a function, mood, or behavior becomes a disease. Since hormones do affect mood and behavior, there are probably some individuals whom they affect more intensely than others."

Hormone
↓
Women





- "According to the Western medical model, pre-menstrual syndrome is a disease, menstruation is a disease, pregnancy is a disease, childbirth is a disease, and menopause is a disease. From this model, I have reached the conclusion that being a woman is a disease."
- -- The Medicalization of Women; Sybil Shainwald; Women's Health Advocate
- <https://www.womenshealthadvocate.org/articles/the-medicalization-of-women/>



I have just put down for you some excerpts from this address, and here is the link in case you want to go and read it in its entirety. "Another phenomenon of modern medicine is the medicalization of mood variations in the menstrual cycle. There is no doubt that fluctuations in hormone levels can influence mood and behaviour. However, it would appear that men's peaks and valleys of mood and impulsivity are similar to those of women; but they are simply not cyclical. At some more or less arbitrary point, a function, mood, or behaviour becomes a disease. Since hormones do affect mood and behaviour, there are probably some individuals whom they affect more intensely than others." Here Shainwald is disaggregating hormones as merely the property of women and locating them in bodies' writ large. And she's saying, "Given how there seems to be broad cultural agreement about women's moodiness before menstruation," how is it that we try and understand this in relation to women's bodies?

And by emphasizing that hormones affect some more intensely than others, she is removing it as the exclusive property of women. She is also arguing additionally, that of course men also have moods, just not cyclically, men's bodies are not affected in the same fashion, but moodiness is clearly a problem of the human population, except because it is not identified in relation to bodily properties, it is considered to be a personality quirk and never marked. So lo and behold, again, you have unmarked behaviour in men, as opposed to clearly marked behaviour in women that is treated as a disease.

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Male hormones Female
Testosterone Hormone PMS.

The effects of “male” hormones – most or all hormones are found in both sexes, though in different quantities and proportions – are much less studied and attended to. There is probably a causal link between surges in testosterone in adolescent boys and their tendency to have motor vehicle collisions, but attempts to modulate testosterone would be experienced as castrating, and the very idea rouses terror and indignation. The treatment of premenstrual syndrome, or premenstrual dysphoric disorder, in contrast, is a growth industry.

“The effects of “male” hormones. Most or all hormones are found in both sexes, though in different quantities and proportions -- are much less studied and attended to. There is probably a causal link between surges in testosterone in adolescent boys and their tendency to have motor vehicle collisions, but attempts to modulate testosterone would be experienced as castrating, and the very idea rouses terror and indignation. The treatment of premenstrual syndrome or premenstrual dysphoric disorder, in contrast, is a growth industry.” So interesting!

So you have the idea of male and female hormones, except in one it is PMS, whereas in the other, via testosterone, it is merely maleness. And this is what the author is trying to emphasize for us. Additionally adding that the treatment of this disorder is a growth industry. There are increasing calls for medication to regulate women's moods premenstrual onset. However, she is asking why is there no medication to regulate testosterone, normally in everyday lives in the ways in which it can be studied to establish a link between motor vehicle collisions in adolescent boys and testosterone levels. And she is suggesting that should this be the case, it would be experienced as castrating, because it would hit at the heart of maleness.

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Reason vs Emotion

Premenstrual syndrome is perhaps the only psychological "disorder" that boasts more claimants than sufferers. When women self-referred for premenstrual symptoms are required to keep prospective daily ratings of the symptoms, and then compare them with their menstrual cycles, most prove to have symptoms completely unrelated to hormonal status.

It is unacceptable and, for some women, dangerous, to express justifiable feelings of irritation or anger in our society, they feel "not themselves" when such feelings do manifest. Sometimes it is easier, and more acceptable to their male partners and employers, to blame these episodes on their hormones.

NPTEL

“Premenstrual syndrome,” she continues, “is perhaps the only psychological disorder that boasts more claimants than sufferers. When women self-referred for premenstrual symptoms are required to keep prospective daily ratings of the symptoms, and then compare them with the menstrual cycles, most prove to have symptoms completely unrelated to hormonal status.” In other words, she is saying that premenstrual symptom or premenstrual syndrome has become such a culturally accepted understanding of women's bodies by women themselves, that often, even with lack of evidence at having any kind of relationality to hormonal levels, you still feel it. She is extending for us our understanding of Simone de Beauvoir's assertion, that one is not born, but becomes a woman.

“It is unacceptable, and, for some women, dangerous, to express justifiable feelings of irritation or anger in our society, they feel “not themselves” when such feelings do manifest. Sometimes it is easier; and more acceptable to their male partners and employers, to blame these episodes on their hormones.”

There is another binary that is also being re-established in the process, which is the one of reason versus emotion. Emotional women are premenstrual, it is a condition, it is not something that is natural. This is another level of binary formation between rational man and irrational premenstrual woman. From this analysis of PMS or premenstrual syndrome in reproductive bodies, Shainwald then goes on to offer an analysis of the aging body or its direct opposite, which is the menopausal body.

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THE AGING MEDICALIZED FEMALE BODY

Menopause is described in medical literature as “the death of the woman in the woman.” How does it happen that the natural occurrence in life drives us to the doctor’s office in such numbers?

The slide features a speaker on the right side, a woman with dark hair wearing a floral patterned shirt, standing behind a podium. The background is a light beige color with a dark wavy border on the left and a green vertical bar on the right. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner.

She says, “Menopause is described in medical literature as “the death of the woman in the woman.” How does it happen that the natural occurrence in life drives us to the doctor’s office in such numbers?”

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THE AGING MEDICALIZED FEMALE BODY

- Not all nineteenth-century physicians, however, shared their peers’ negative views of menopause. One trend-breaker dared to refer to menopause as “a period of increased vigor, optimism, and even of physical beauty.” Another physician publicly criticized his medical colleagues for subjecting women to unnecessary oophorectomies, stating in a medical journal that he had “yet to see a woman made better in health by the removal of her ovaries.”
- By the middle of the twentieth century, the medical profession switched from looking upon menopause as the cause of disease and began to think of it as a disease itself – a deficiency disease, like diabetes. This gave doctors the exclusive right to diagnose menopause and to treat its symptoms with estrogen, the hormone women were said to be lacking.

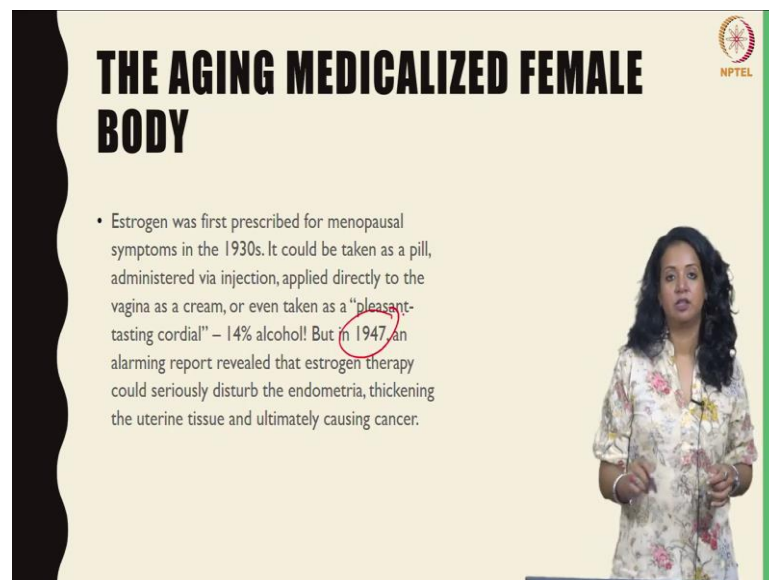
The slide features a speaker on the right side, a woman with dark hair wearing a floral patterned shirt, standing behind a podium. The background is a light beige color with a dark wavy border on the left and a green vertical bar on the right. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner.

And tracing the history of menopause, she speaks about how “[n]ot all nineteenth-century physicians shared their peers’ negative views of menopause. One trend-breaker dared to refer to menopause as “a period of increased vigor, optimism and even of physical beauty.” “Another physician publicly criticized his medical colleagues,…” and he said he had “yet to see a woman was made better in health by the removal of her ovaries.”

In other words, doctors arguing for the prolonging of women's sexual and reproductive health, or rather the prolonging of the existence of organs that signalled that this body is still a reproductive sexual, healthy female body.

“By the middle of the twentieth century, the medical profession switched from looking upon menopause as the cause of disease and began to think of it as a disease itself, a deficiency disease. This gave doctors the exclusive right to diagnose menopause and to treat its symptoms with estrogen, the hormone women was said to be lacking.” Again, estrogen then becomes the bodily quality that signifies woman in very, very specific material terms. So the location of body then moves from beauty, or the outward body, to the endocrine system.

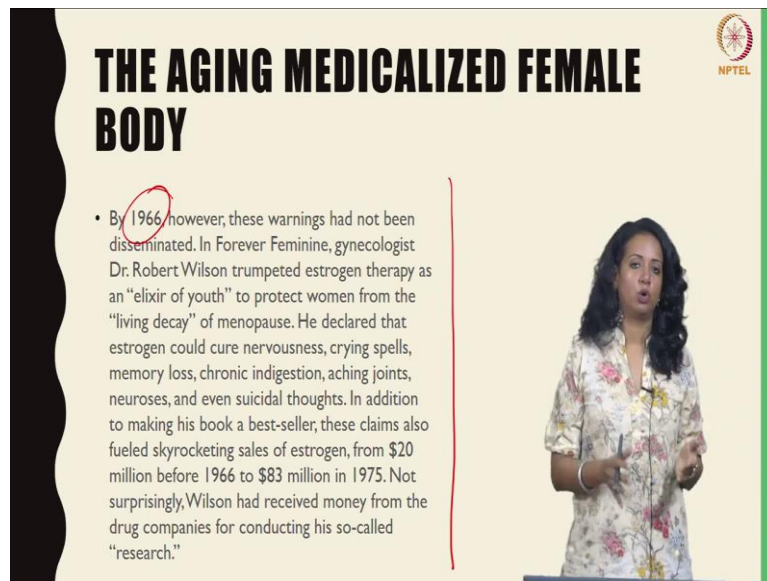
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The slide features a title "THE AGING MEDICALIZED FEMALE BODY" in bold black letters on a light yellow background. To the right of the title is the NPTEL logo. Below the title is a bulleted text: "• Estrogen was first prescribed for menopausal symptoms in the 1930s. It could be taken as a pill, administered via injection, applied directly to the vagina as a cream, or even taken as a "pleasant-tasting cordial" – 14% alcohol! But in 1947, an alarming report revealed that estrogen therapy could seriously disturb the endometria, thickening the uterine tissue and ultimately causing cancer." The year "1947" is circled in red. On the right side of the slide, a woman with dark hair, wearing a floral patterned shirt, is standing and presenting. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner.

“Estrogen was first prescribed for menopausal symptoms in the 1930s. It could be taken as a pill, administered via injection, applied directly to the vagina as a cream, or even taken as a “pleasant-tasting cordial,” - 14% alcohol. But in 1947, an alarming report revealed that estrogen therapy could seriously disturb the endometria, thickening the uterine tissue and ultimately causing cancer.” Pay attention, the year is 1947 that this report comes out.

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The slide features a title "THE AGING MEDICALIZED FEMALE BODY" in bold black letters at the top left. To the right of the title is the NPTEL logo. Below the title is a bulleted text block. The first word of the bullet point, "By", is circled in red. To the right of the text is a photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white floral patterned shirt, standing and speaking. The slide has a black wavy border on the left and a green vertical bar on the right.

THE AGING MEDICALIZED FEMALE BODY

- By 1966, however, these warnings had not been disseminated. In *Forever Feminine*, gynecologist Dr. Robert Wilson trumpeted estrogen therapy as an “elixir of youth” to protect women from the “living decay” of menopause. He declared that estrogen could cure nervousness, crying spells, memory loss, chronic indigestion, aching joints, neuroses, and even suicidal thoughts. In addition to making his book a best-seller, these claims also fuelled skyrocketing sales of estrogen, from \$20 million before 1966 to \$83 million in 1975. Not surprisingly, Wilson had received money from the drug companies for conducting his so-called “research.”

“By 1966, however, these warnings had not been disseminated. In *Forever Feminine*, gynecologist, Dr. Robert Wilson trumpeted estrogen therapy as an elixir of youth to protect women from the “living decay” of menopause. He declared that estrogen could cure nervousness, crying spells, memory loss, chronic indigestion, aching joints, neuroses, and even suicidal thoughts. In addition to making his book a best-seller, these claims also fuelled skyrocketing sales of estrogen, from dollar 20 million before 1966 to dollar 83 million in 1975. Not surprisingly, Wilson had received money from the drug companies for conducting his so-called “research.”

What does this tell you? And at some point of time, this was banned, at some point of time these results were made public, but not until they had already, they had already done reasonable amounts of harm in relation to women's bodies. But what does this tell you? It tells you that the beauty myth, this plurality of the beauty myth also operates at different levels of what constitutes a suitable female body.

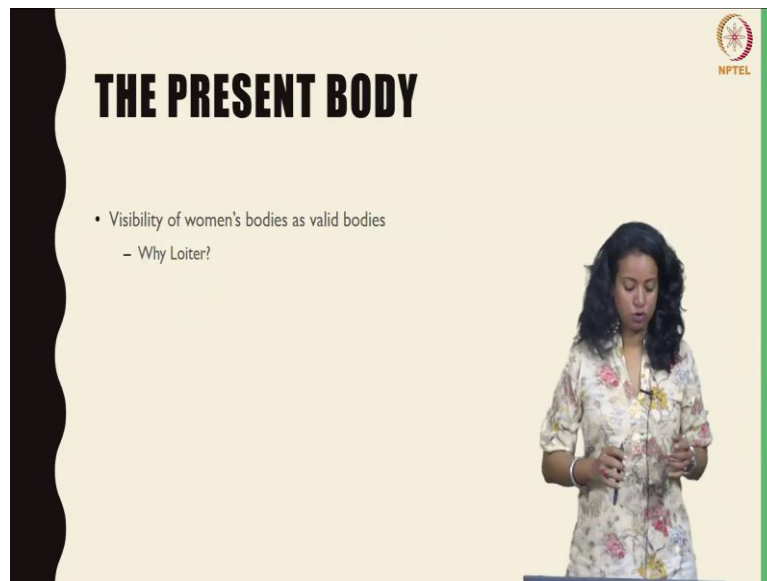
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The slide features a title 'THE MEDICALIZED BODY' in bold black text at the top left. Below the title is a red horizontal line. The main content consists of two bullet points: '• Women's bodies are consistently manipulated, fragmented, employed, and raided in ways altogether different from men's bodies' and '• Reproduction, the foetus, medically valued by-products, surrogacy'. A red scribble is drawn over the text, specifically circling the phrase 'altogether different from men's bodies' and the second bullet point. A sub-bullet point '- Cosmetic surgeries' is also present. In the top right corner, there is a small circular logo with the text 'NPTEL' below it. On the right side of the slide, a woman with dark hair, wearing a floral patterned top, is shown from the waist up, gesturing with her hands as if presenting.

“Women's bodies, in other words, are constantly manipulated, fragmented, employed, and raided in ways altogether different from men's bodies.” Cosmetic surgeries are only the tip of the iceberg and they continue in relation to reproduction, IVF, surrogacy, eggs for surrogate exchange, so on and so forth. Medical Science is replete with these examples of, on the one hand, wanting to prolong women's youth and beauty, and on the other hand, completely ignoring symptoms such as period pain, endometriosis, ways in which women's pain is constantly devalued as not being something that they are adequately able to handle, as opposed to investigating women's bodies in their particularities. This is why the medicalized body is an important aspect of study for feminist theory.

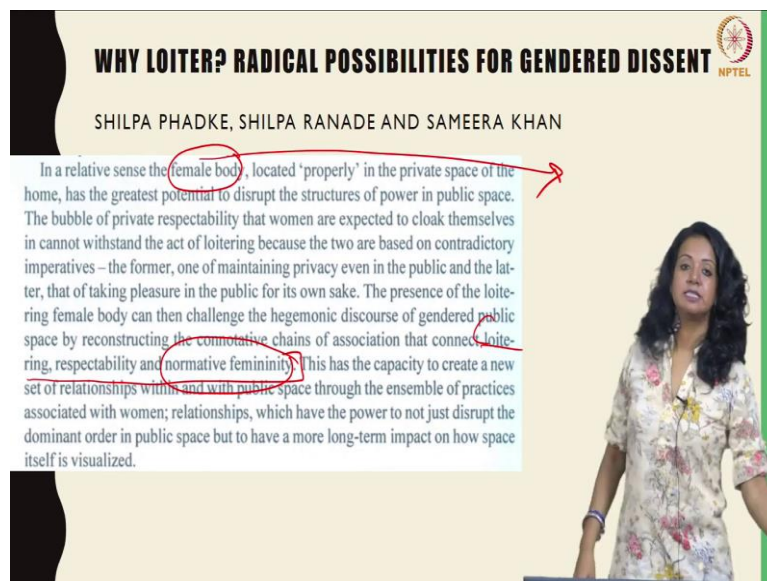
Now, between the body possessing beauty and the medicalized body, we are moving between two kinds of analysis. One kind of analysis is about deconstructing or breaking down what is it that counts as a female body and then going on to understand what are the ways in which it is both visible and not visible in our day to day understanding of life as we know it.

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To this extent, I want to pay brief attention to this question of women's bodies as valid bodies in public space.

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And this text we had brought up before in relation to our discussion of space called why loiter, which is by Shilpa Phadke, Shilpa Ranade, and Sameera Khan. And I want to read you a brief excerpt of the argument the authors are making as to why loitering is important. “In a relative sense the female body, located properly in the private space of the home, has the greatest potential to disrupt the structures of power in public space.” Here, the authors are making a case for body quo body, as body is being identified as female to be visible in public space.

“The bubble of private respectability that women are expected to cloak themselves in cannot withstand the act of loitering because the two are based on contradictory imperatives. The former, one of maintaining privacy even in the public and the latter, that of taking pleasure in the public for its own sake. The presence of the loitering female body can then challenge the hegemonic discourse of gendered public space by reconstructing the connotative chains of association that connect loitering, respectability and normative femininity. This has the capacity to create a new set of relationships within and with public space through the ensemble of practices associated with women; relationships, which have the power to not just disrupt the dominant order in public space but to have a more long-term impact on how space itself is visualized.” Now the thrust of the author's attentions are to gendered public space, but I think here, we are looking at a different kind of body, which is also one that is material and present, and legible, and visible, which by its very being there changes the dynamics of public space. At the same time, this body also interrupts the norms of normative femininity by loitering, by just being out in public space, doing nothing, not being the busy female body that is always rushing from one space of safety to another, but merely being a female body in public space. And from this kind of resolute transgression, let me move to the last kind of body I would like to discuss today, which is the living, legible body on another register.

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THE LIVING, LEGIBLE BODY

NPTEL

Eye-opening
CORDELIA FINE

HELL YES
CAITLIN MORIN

THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER

INVISIBLE WOMEN

EXPOSING DATA BIAS IN A WORLD DESIGNED FOR MEN

CAROLINE CRIADO PEREZ

Hugely readable
ROBERT WEBB

A game-changer
THE TIMES

- The dangers caused by virtue of the male body as the universal standard

Here, I want to read to you a little bit from a pretty interesting book called, *Invisible Women: Exposing data bias in a world designed for men*. Here, the author Caroline Criado Perez speaks about the dangers caused by virtue of the male body being the universal standard. So an actual material invisibilizing of women and women's data.

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INVISIBLE WOMEN REVIEW
- ELAINE GLASER (FEB 28, 2019)

[HTTPS://WWW.THEGUARDIAN.COM/BOOKS/2019/FEB/28/INVISIBLE-WOMEN-BY-CAROLINE-CRIADO-PEREZ-REVIEW](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/feb/28/invisible-women-by-caroline-criado-perez-review)

It's a smart strategy, therefore, to invite readers to view this timeworn topic through the revealing lens of data, bringing to light the hidden places where inequality still resides. Criado Perez has assembled a cornucopia of statistics - from how blind auditions have increased the proportion of female players hired by orchestras to nearly 50%, to the good reasons why women take up to 2.3 times as long as men to use the toilet. This is a man's world, we learn, because those who built it didn't take gender differences into account. Most offices, we learn, are five degrees too cold for women, because the formula to determine their temperature was developed in the 1960s based on the metabolic resting rate of a 40-year-old, 70kg man; women's metabolisms are slower. Women in Britain are 50% more likely to be misdiagnosed following a heart attack: heart failure trials generally use male participants. Cars are designed around the body of "Reference Man", so although men are more likely to crash, women involved in collisions are nearly 50% more likely to be seriously hurt.

The slide also features a video of Elaine Glaser, a woman with dark hair wearing a floral patterned top, speaking and gesturing with her hands. The NPTEL logo is visible in the top right corner of the slide.

I am reading to you from a review of the book, which I would encourage you to pick up and read for your own understanding and your own analysis. Elaine Glaser who reviewed the book says, “It is a smart strategy, therefore, to invite readers to view this timeworn topic through the revealing lens of data, bringing to light the hidden places where inequality still resides. Criado Perez has assembled a cornucopia of statistics from how blind auditions have increased the proportion of female players hired by orchestras to nearly 50 percent. Why women take up to 2.3 times as long as men to use the toilet, most offices, we learn, are five degrees too cold for women because the formula to determine their temperature was developed in the 1960s based on the metabolic resting rate of a 40-year-old, 70 kg man. This is a man's world, we learn, because those who built it did not take gender differences into account. Women's metabolisms are slower and therefore, they are always feeling too cold. Women in Britain are 50 percent more likely to be misdiagnosed following a heart attack. Heart failure trials generally use male participants. Cars are designed around the body of Reference Man, so although men are more likely to crash, women involved in collisions are nearly 50 percent more likely to be seriously hurt.”

Look at the kind of body that appears and disappears in these sets of observations. Blind auditions increase the proportion of female players, meaning people evaluate female players differently once they know that they are male or female, so you need the female body to disappear. Offices are five degrees too cold for women, meaning that when you are testing, forming a universal standard, you need women's bodies to be present, and included, and valid. And all of these will outline to you the very real consequences of life and death, as far

as women's lives in the world are concerned. This brings us to the end of a broad set of discussions around bodies in feminist theory, I will add that I have not covered everything; this is only a smattering of things in feminist theory to give you an idea of why the body matters and what are the ways in which it can be analysed.

I would encourage you to take it further and perform other kinds of analysis in relation to the things that interest you, to see how, a) women are included or excluded from certain understandings of the world, and b) to denaturalize your assumptions of what a woman's body should be like or indeed, what gendered bodies look like in common understanding.

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IN SUMMARY

- The Body in Feminist Theory
 - The Second Sex ✓
- Forms of Bodies
 - The Beautiful Body ✓
 - The Medicalized Body ✓
 - The Living, Legible Body ✓
- Where to from here?
 - Case-Study and Interview ✓

Handwritten notes: Race (with arrows pointing to 'The Beautiful Body' and 'The Living, Legible Body'), and a circle around 'Where to from here?'.

NPTEL logo in the top right corner.

In summary, today, we looked at the body in feminist theory and read from *The Second Sex*, in order to try and understand feminist theory's assertion that a woman is not born, but made. We looked at particular forms of bodies, the beautiful body but also the workings of race in relation to beauty; the medicalized body; and the living, legible body, both in terms of visibility and legibility in public space, and in relation to the data sciences.

In relation to where to from here, let us explore that closer to the end of the course where we bring it all together through learnings and conclusions. So, until next week, please go through all of these case studies and ideas and see how is it that you can deepen your own understanding of the feminist body in feminist theory. Until then...