

**Feminism Concepts and Theories**  
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**Vocabulary**

Hello and welcome to the second lecture for Feminism Concepts and Theories. If you remember the last time I had promised that this lecture would merely be a set of words. Now while this might seem not formidable I will assure you that the words we are taking into account today formed the very foundation of everything else that we are going to do in this course, so I suggest that you pay careful attention.

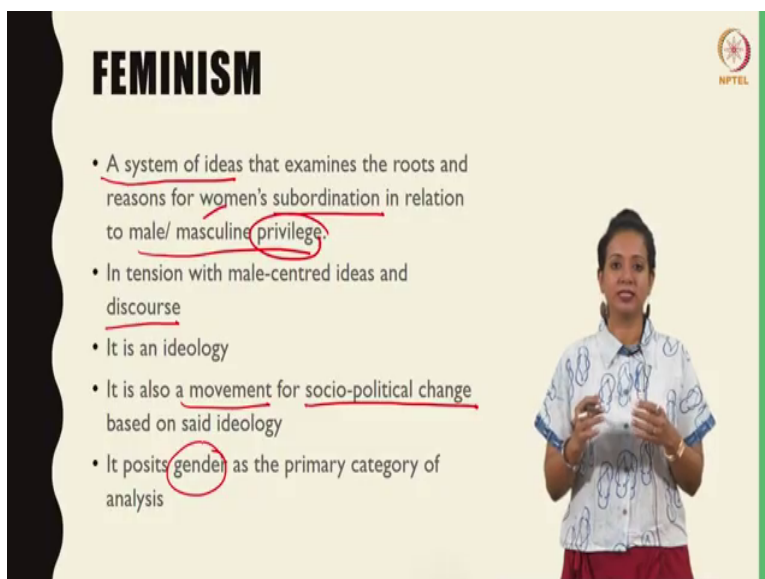
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In the lecture, in a vocabulary these are the words we going to look at, one feminism, now if you noticed the word that you see on the slide is feminism parenthesis s parenthesis closed. Why feminisms is one of the things that we are going to explore over the course of this lecture. Two, feminist, now one might intuitively lead to the other, but I do want to spend some time on trying to understand why the word feminist has received such a bad reputation and what are its possible pitfalls and dangers if we confine it to a particular set of definitions.

Very important, you got a little bit of a teaser preview of this in the last lecture, but what exactly is a sex slash gender system and why is it important to our understanding of feminist theory. And lastly, this is a big one this is a particular sort of systematic understanding of the universe within which feminism matters and therefore I do want to spend some time on it.

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## FEMINISM

- A system of ideas that examines the roots and reasons for women's subordination in relation to male/ masculine privilege.
- In tension with male-centred ideas and discourse
- It is an ideology
- It is also a movement for socio-political change based on said ideology
- It posits gender as the primary category of analysis

So without further ado, let us get started. Feminism, first of all let us be very clear that feminism is not one particular idea, it is a system of ideas that examines the roots and reasons for women subordination in relation to male slash masculine privilege. Now as we go along in the course we will also open out the meaning from women subordination to feminine subordination to questions of femininity as opposed to masculinity but soon enough.

So one thing that is important to remember in this instance is that it is a system of ideas, it looks at questions of subordination of women in relation to male masculine privilege, yes. Two, it is intention with males centred ideas and discourse. Now remember the idea of tension means that there is constant friction, there are things to be fought over, there are things that males centred ideas and discourse do not agree on with respect to women's position in the world.

So another important word to remember is discourse and I will expand, explain this later on the course but discourse means a set of ideas circulating in culture, in our everyday life that is perpetuated in the ways in which we live and think that things are good and true in the world. Three, it is in ideology, now what do you mean by ideology?

Now ideology has very-very different meanings across the social sciences, so one thing to remember here is that I merely mean a point of view or a set of points of view in relation to how the world should be organised, it is not necessarily related to Marxist ideology in a

particular fashion, although that can happen with all ideologies and there I mean the understanding that ideology masks the structures of power that govern what we considered to be truth in the world, just a side note.

And feminism lastly, this is the most popular understanding of it as a movement, it is a movement for socio-political change based on said ideology and ideology of course is that men and women are equal in the world, everybody is equal in the world and all of our thinking processes should be oriented towards bringing such equality into play. So, remember it is a movement, also remember movement for socio-political change, merely changing certain institutional processes will not be enough, we also have to change the ways in which society thinks vis-à-vis women and femininity.

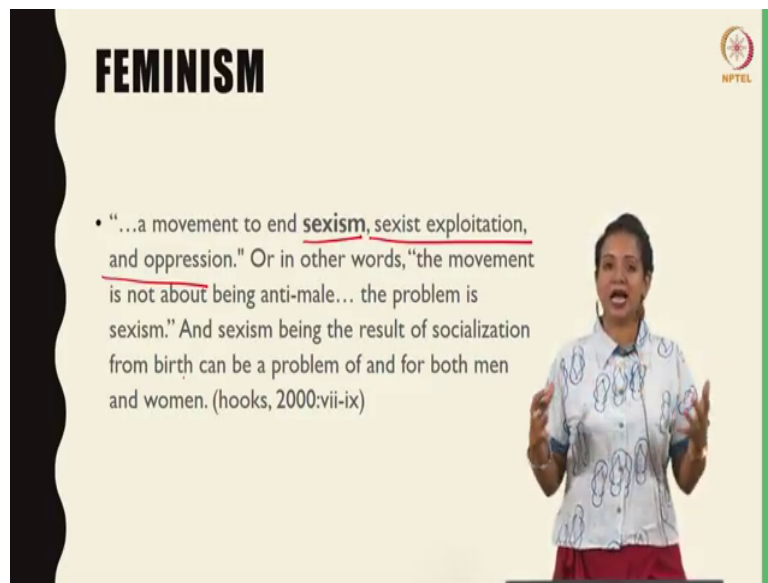
So, I hope these are clear. Lastly and this we begin the course with so I cannot emphasize it enough, it posits gender as the primary category of analysis, again, this is not to say that other categories such as race, caste, class are not important but feminism specialises in showing you how gender matters and why is it the gender operates as an axis of difference. Remember this word axis of difference, because in many ways it is saying the gender does not determine in a very particular fashion how things happen, things are located along a spectrum.

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Now these are from a book called, feminism is for everybody passionate politics by a thinker, philosopher, public culture figure based in the U.S called bell hooks. We will be returning to this text again and again, so please keep it in mind as we go through these definitions.

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And in bell hooks words, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression, and this is important because usually the word feminist or feminism sets off hackles in relation to being anti-male, anti-men, man-hating, so remember in bell Hooks words, the movement is not about being anti-male, the problem is sexism. And what is sexism?

Sexism is a result of socialization from birth that can be a problem of and for both men and women and I will have you ponder that for just a tiny bit because often sexism is considered to be something that feminists merely point out in everything in society. Whereas, in hooks understanding sexism is a question of socialization of men and women and a problem for both men and women, which takes it out of the realm of feminism being a woman's problem.

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**FEMINIST**

- One who subscribes to feminism(s)
- Karen Offen. 1988. Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach. Signs, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 119-157.
  - They exhibit consciousness of, discomfort at, or even anger over institutionalized injustice (or inequity) toward women as a group by men as a group in a given society

So then, we come to the next important question, if this is how we understand feminism as a movement to end sexist exploitation, should not we all be feminists? And yet there are so many people that are very-very scared of calling themselves feminist, often on account of having their behaviour examined against the term, especially for men, so for example, can you imagine a man and saying, I am a feminist and then being asked, if you are feminist then how come you act like this, so I want to open out the realm of feminism, feminist itself.

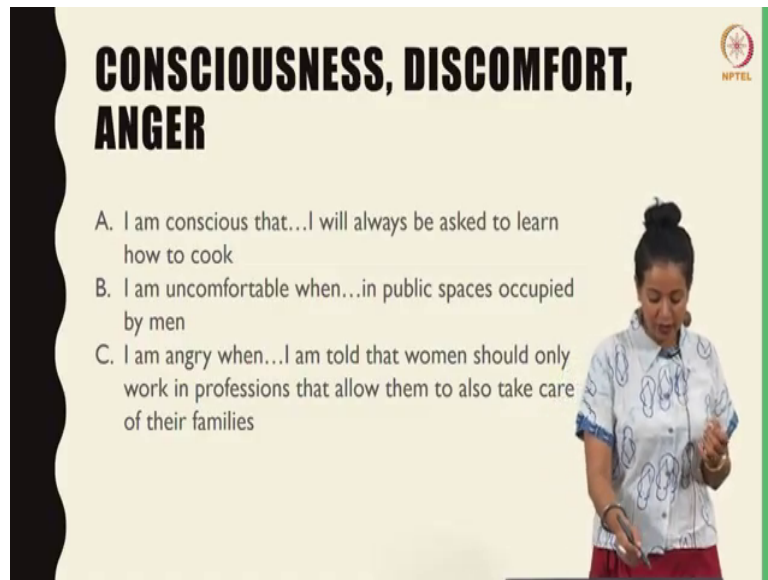
Even for popular public culture figures, you here this very often in public space where somebody says, “I am not a feminist, but I believe in equal rights for women,” and the fear there of course is of having every action of yours evaluated in public space against your declaration that you are a feminist. Let us work with couple of these and see what we come up with in relation to that problem. Very very simple, who is a feminist? One who subscribes to feminisms, which means there are many kinds of feminisms that are underlined by some common principles, some of which we have outlined in the previous slides.

And here I borrow from Karen Offen defining feminism, a comparative historical approach that really put its weight behind the understanding that feminism has always changed over time and we need to keep these in account as we define feminism. Who are feminists? Feminist exhibit consciousness of, discomfort at, or even anger over institutionalized injustice or equity towards women as a group by men as a group in a given society.

Here remember, it is not merely about individual hurt, blame, trauma or wounding, it is about women as a group by men as a group. So, if you may recall, many people will say not all

women, not all men or all women all men. Here we are really concerned in relation to feminism in talking about institutional forms of injustice or institutional change or societal change. So, it is really important that we do talk about all women and all men even though individual men or individual women may not necessarily say that they are part of everything that the group subscribes to.

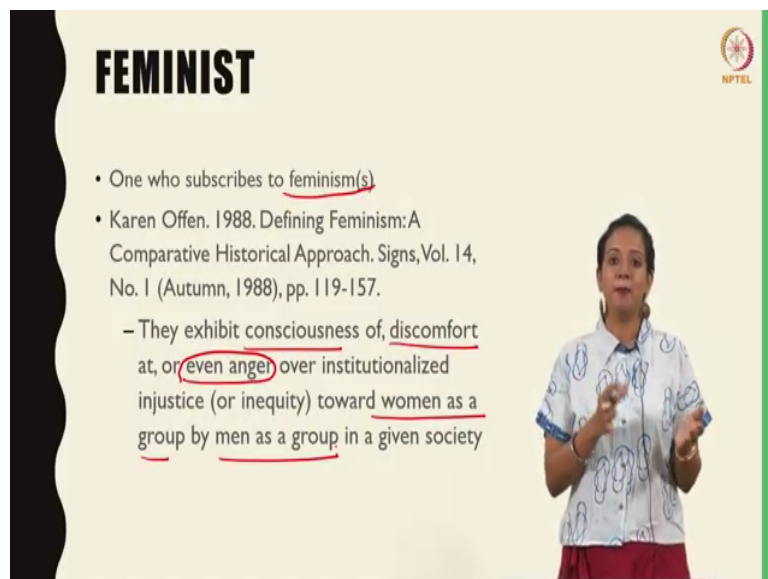
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**CONSCIOUSNESS, DISCOMFORT, ANGER**

- A. I am conscious that...I will always be asked to learn how to cook
- B. I am uncomfortable when...in public spaces occupied by men
- C. I am angry when...I am told that women should only work in professions that allow them to also take care of their families

The slide features a presenter on the right side, a woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a light blue patterned short-sleeved shirt and a red skirt. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner.



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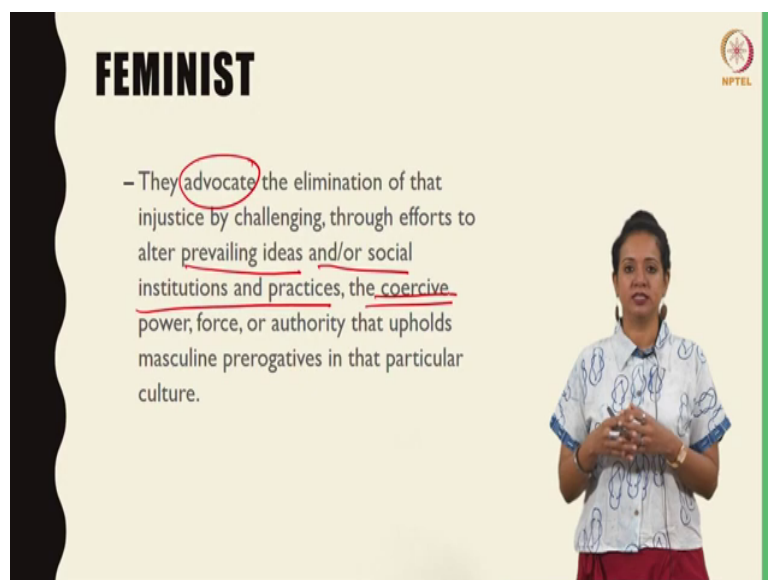
Let go over these, consciousness, discomfort, anger. Recall the previous slide; consciousness of, discomfort at, or even anger. So maybe take a minute to think about what are the ways in which you individually experience consciousness, discomfort, angry over the ways in which women as a group are treated by men as a group and this of course exhibits itself through individual events in life, even though it is not the intent of the person doing the act to hurt

somebody or make somebody feel bad or make somebody feel unequal and yet these acts persist.

So, I spend a few minutes thinking about what are the things that I feel consciousness about discomfort at, anger about and came up with this list. Unconscious, that I will always be asked to learn how to cook, how is it that you eat? How many times do you cook? What do you do for your food? Which is more often asked me than a lot of my male colleagues. I am uncomfortable when in public spaces occupied by men and this is something a lot of women will share, which is the idea that of course they do not mean harm, it is not necessary that in public space at particular times of day people mean harm to you and yet you feel uncomfortable because in many ways it is about historical understanding of how men as a group behave towards women as a group.

And lastly, I am angry I am when I am told that women should only work in professions that allow them to also take care of their families and this follows on historical spectrum of a women being asked, well who is at home to take care of the children, or how do you take care of the home or how is it that you both a professional and a homemaker, yes. So recall some of these when making your own list and then go back to the definition to understand whether you are a feminist or not.

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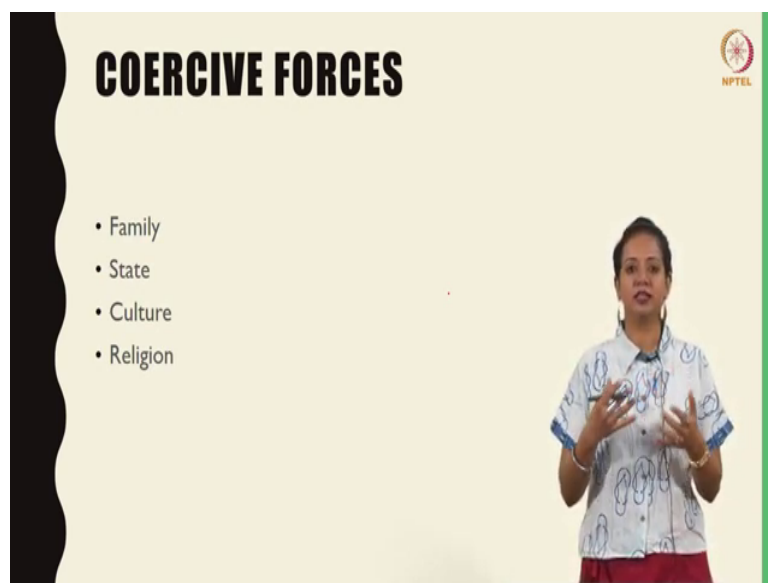
The slide features a light green background with a black wavy border on the left and a green vertical bar on the right. The word 'FEMINIST' is written in bold black letters at the top left. In the top right corner, there is a small circular logo with the text 'NPTEL' below it. The main text on the slide is a definition of feminism: '- They advocate the elimination of that injustice by challenging, through efforts to alter prevailing ideas and/or social institutions and practices, the coercive power, force, or authority that upholds masculine prerogatives in that particular culture.' The word 'advocate' is circled in red, and 'prevailing ideas and/or social institutions and practices, the coercive' is underlined in red. A woman with dark hair, wearing a white patterned short-sleeved shirt and a red skirt, stands in the bottom right corner of the slide, gesturing with her hands as if presenting.

Feminist advocate the elimination of that injustice by challenging through efforts to alter prevailing ideas and or social institutions and practices, the coercive power, force or authority that upholds masculine prerogatives in that particular culture. Now this is really really

detailed and important explanation of who a feminist is, because in many ways clearly being a feminist means that you must be involved in some kind of action and it means it could be advocacy, it could be active advocacy, it could be being at the forefront of change or otherwise the choices are very much yours.

But it means that you put your weight behind the elimination of that injustice. It means that you challenge through efforts to alter prevailing ideas, social institutions and practices and this an important word, coercive power, because coercive power is not very very obvious, it means that the power operates constantly in a chronic fashion and you feel the effects without necessarily understanding the force of it.

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So, what might be coercive forces? Things very much around us in the everyday and through the span of our lives, family, state, culture, religion all of these have various kinds of what Louis Althusser would call ideological state apparatuses, which means that in many ways they are part of interpolating us into a culture where men behave in particular ways and women behave in particular ways and these are responsible for creating these kinds of hegemonies where masculine prerogatives are far more important than feminine or female ones.



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**FEMINIST**

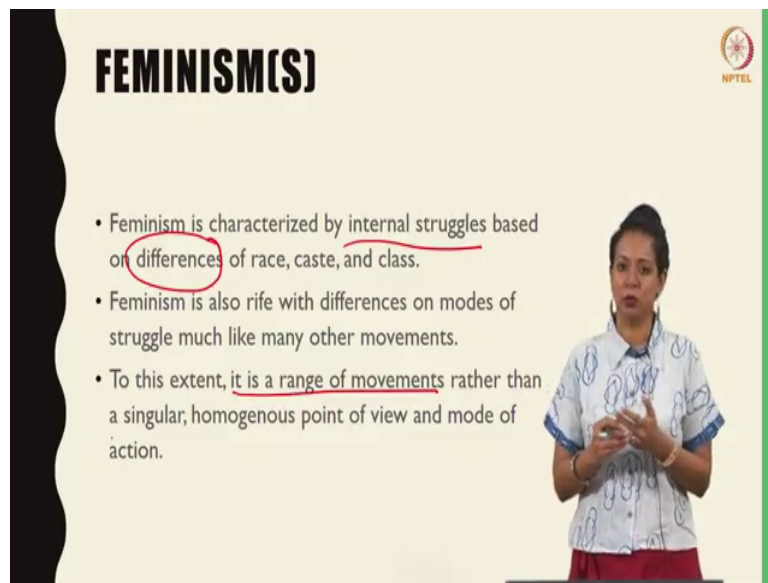
- They recognize the validity of women's own interpretations of their lived experience and needs and acknowledge the values women claim publicly as their own (as distinct from an aesthetic ideal of womanhood invented by men) in assessing their status in society relative to men.

NPTEL

Who else is a feminist? Feminist recognise the validity of women's own interpretations of their lived experience and needs and this is really really important because following this, there has also been a call for women to represent their own experiences instead of being written about, talked about, produced, discourse about, meaning there is validity to your own frames in represent your experiences, in having a sense that life cannot merely be spoken about in one particular fashion, seemingly neutral but often masculine. And acknowledge the values women claim publicly as their own.

There is in many ways a point of you that emerges from women as a group as distinct from an aesthetic ideal of womanhood invented by men in assessing their status in society relative to men. Think for example, of the kinds of ways in which there is a common discourse that, as long as men know what they have to do and women know what they have to do, everything is alright the world is a difficult place because women no longer subscribe to the ways in which their functions are naturally given and perform them, they are confused and this is an assessment provided by an aesthetic ideal of womanhood that the ideal women should be like this, and not a lived person who have the capacity for their own experiences and own representations.

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## FEMINISM(S)

- Feminism is characterized by internal struggles based on differences of race, caste, and class.
- Feminism is also rife with differences on modes of struggle much like many other movements.
- To this extent, it is a range of movements rather than a singular, homogenous point of view and mode of action.

Let us then move on from feminism and feminist to feminisms. As you might have been able to tell by now the definitions I am providing are not necessarily uncontested and in many ways they are contested by both men and women, they are contested by women of different races, caste and classes as being very particular to only one kind of woman and therefore, within feminism there have been various kinds of contest that has strengthened its ideals, that have allowed these kinds of critics to produce a more interesting version of feminism depending on who is speaking and from where, and these are important to the growth of the field of both feminism as a concept and as a practice because it is really important that we think of changes applying to everybody, and not merely to a particular set of women and men in the world.

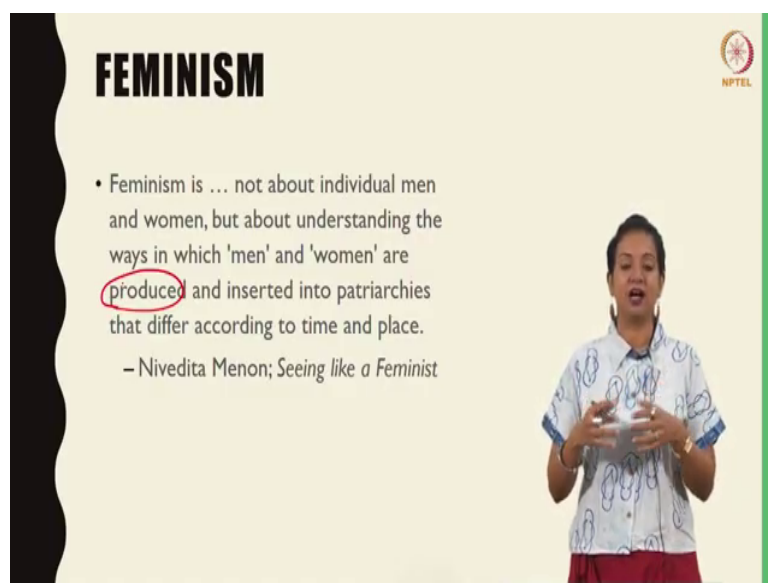
Therefore, please remember that feminism is characterized by internal struggles, and often in the history of a movement, internal struggles are spoken about as being problematic as weakening the movement, whereas feminism, feminist theory does maintain the critic is important to the growth of something, it is only through responding to critic in a dialectical fashion that we can produce something that has actual effects in the world.

Feminism is also a rife with differences on modes of struggle much like any other movement. So, even the mould of how to bring about this change is spoken about differently depending on which part of the world and which set of women we are working with. So, this is a again important to preserve because there is no one particular way in which to bring about change and this also then ties in with the first point, which is that there is an internal struggle of

difference, different women speak differently and it is important that they all feel like they are part of a feminist movement and there is no one particular kind of feminism that one must advocate.

To this extent, it is a range of movements rather than a singular, homogeneous point of view and mode of action. Now, this of course makes it possible that a large set of people may be able to call themselves feminist without fear. However, this also brings in the attendant danger that feminism will become like a consumption choice. It is a thing that you choose and discard at will, rather than something that is an ethical point of view in the world. So as we go along in the course, remember feminism is not a, it is my choice movement, it is very much about being able to deepen one's own ethical stance vis-a-vis women's position in the world.

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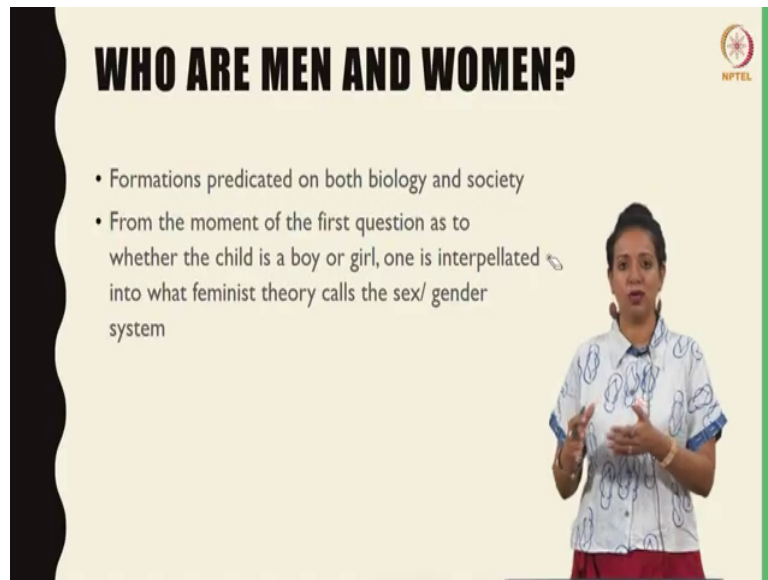


And here, let us move on a little bit from feminisms to Nivedita Menon's question of what feminism is in her book, "Seeing like a Feminist," and she says, "Feminism is not about individual men and women," and remember we also said this with bell hooks, which is that it is about a group of men and a group of women, "but about understanding the ways in which men and women are produced and inserted into patriarchies that differ according to time and place."

Here pause, because what do we mean when we say men and women are produced and this is a bit of a confusing one for a lot of people. What you mean production? We are people in the world men, women, children, these are things that you can identify, these are objects of

seeming reality and yet one of the most important interventions of both feminism and we will come to this later, feminist postdoctoral theory is the understanding that men, women are cultural categories. These are socio-cultural categories that are spoken about in particular ways depending on when and where they are produced and we will come to that in a little bit.

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Because then we have to answer the question who are men and women, does it not matter as to the fact that physically somebody is identified is being a boy or girl. Feminist theory suggest that men and women are formations predicated on both biology and society. It is not that biology does not play a role, but naming something as a particular kind of category is a product of both biology and society where you not only name it, but then you expect that category to behave in very very particular ways that are important to our clear understanding of the world.

From the moment of the first question as to whether the child is a boy or a girl one is interpolated into what feminist theory calls, the sex-gender system. I will have you pause on the word interpolated, interpolated is from Louis Althusser where he speaks about how people in society are interpolated into certain categories and his famous examples is of course, of a policeman on the road calling out to a person and saying, "Hey!" and no matter what you hear the voice and you turn, does not matter whether you being held or not, you are pulled into the system and that is what he understands as interpolation.

And here, I am using it specifically to say that when a child is born in the world, the first question is, is it a boy or a girl and from the moment of the answering of the first question

everything else then follows a certain kind of predetermined path that has different elements but everybody knows the end point.

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**SEX/ GENDER**

- The beginnings of feminist theory
  - Sex is biological and gender is cultural
  - In other words, while you might have been identified on account of biological characteristics as being one of two on the sex binary— man or woman, girl or boy— codes for how each of these should live are prescribed by and inscribed in specific, located cultures.

Therefore, the beginnings of feminist theory are predicated upon the understanding that sex is biological and gender is cultural and this is important to remember, so for our current understanding, let us just say, sex-biology, gender- culture, we will of course disrupt this later on but that is for another lecture. In other words, while you might have been identified on account of biological characteristics as being one of two on the sex binary.

Now remember even the sex binary is no longer a given, even biologically people have been identified as being on a sexual spectrum and the sex binary is merely an experience one and easy one that we have always function with. Let me go back to it, while you may have been identified on account of biological characteristics as being one of two on the sex binary, man or woman, girl or boy – codes for how each of these should live are prescribed by and inscribed in specific located cultures.

Important work here are codes, prescribed, inscribed and let us spend a few moments on talking about each of these words. The word ‘codes’ indicates that there are a set of rules that these are tacit, they are not necessarily always spelt out aloud. Prescribed, these are prescribed as necessary for what one would call normal life and normal is a very loaded word, it means that if you act accordingly, society will think of you as capable of inclusion and ‘inscribed’, which means that one will be surrounded by this codes in very very quiet ways, these are not necessarily things that will be given as a sheet of codes or rules to follow.

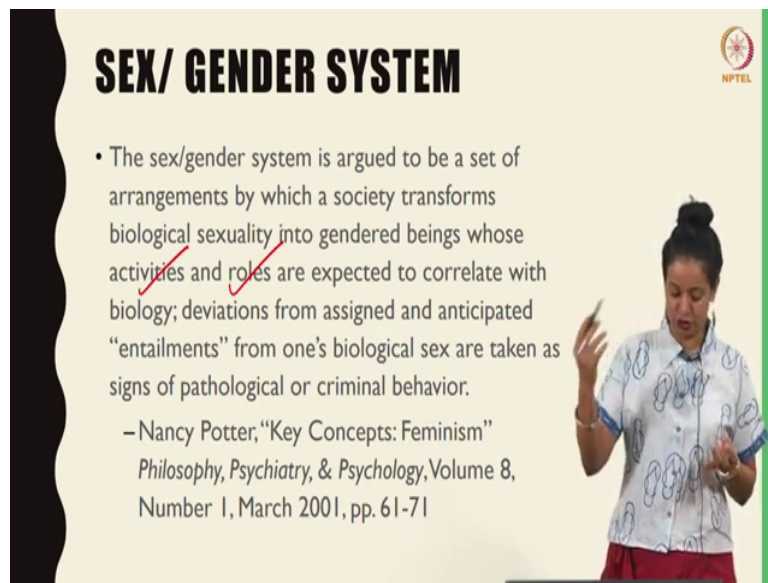
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Think for example of the set of pictures that I have given you on this slide, surely you can take a look at it and know immediately as to what accounts for which category on the gender binary girl, boy, girl, boy I suspect you will have no trouble and while there may be some kind of movement every now and then depending on how things are moving in specific cultures.

For example, girls wear pants, yes girls might play with meccano sets, yes very very rare that boys will play with dolls and this will have particular kinds of consequences should the boy do so. So perhaps, now I am giving you little hint into the understanding that feminism is also concerned with these questions of how is it that society locates both men and women and not just women.

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**SEX/ GENDER SYSTEM**

- The sex/gender system is argued to be a set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into gendered beings whose activities and roles are expected to correlate with biology; deviations from assigned and anticipated "entailments" from one's biological sex are taken as signs of pathological or criminal behavior.

– Nancy Potter, "Key Concepts: Feminism"  
*Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, Volume 8,  
Number 1, March 2001, pp. 61-71

The sex gender system and here let us return to the kind of dangerous long definition I gave you in lecture 1 and suggested that we might be, we might have to take a little effort before we understand it in its entirety, so let us try again. Sex/gender system, the sex /gender system is argued to be a set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into gender beings. Let us just focus on these parts, gendered beings, right? What are gendered beings? Beings that have gender, beings that perform in a gendered fashion.

A set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into gendered beings. So, feminist theory is really concerned with the process of transformation that biologicals sexuality does not naturally mean that people will behave in particular gendered fashion, culture has to produce those gendered beings whose activities and roles are expected to correlate with biology, girls are as girls do, boys are as boys do.

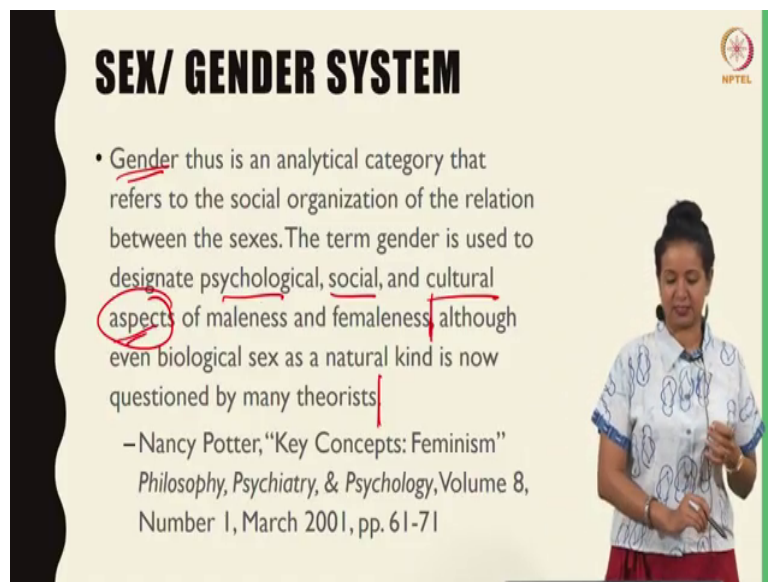
And here is the clincher, deviations from assigned and anticipated entailments from once biological sex are taken as signs of pathological or criminal behaviour, in other words, abnormal, unnatural, not belonging in society. In many ways while these cause may seem benign, naturalized as if what are the way of living could there be, it is only in the deviations that one begins to understand that how dangerous it is to not behave in this fashion.

So, then let us go over it one more time, the sex/gender system is argued to be a set of arrangements, remember codes, rules, ways in which society organises men and women by which a society transforms biological sexuality, is it a boy or a girl at birth into gendered

beings girl, boys, men, women whose activities and roles are expected to correlate with biology.

Remember the really really common term, boys do not cry, deviations from assigned and anticipated entailments from one's biological sex, if you are born a girl of course you should behave in this fashion and if your deviating from that something is wrong with you and this needs to be corrected for being able to live in society, are taken as signs of pathological or criminal behaviour. And this is just to remind you from Nancy Potter's Key Concepts and Feminism, in the journal Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology from 2001.

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**SEX/ GENDER SYSTEM**

- Gender thus is an analytical category that refers to the social organization of the relation between the sexes. The term gender is used to designate psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness, although even biological sex as a natural kind is now questioned by many theorists

– Nancy Potter, "Key Concepts: Feminism"  
*Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, Volume 8, Number 1, March 2001, pp. 61-71

To continue, gender and this remember is one of the primary things we are concerned with in the course, thus is an analytical category that refers to the social organisation of the relation between the sexes, here we are taking gender away from its natural connotation that says that we understand who is a man, who is a woman depending on gender, gender tells you how is it that a man becomes a man and woman becomes a woman. The term gender is used to designate psychological, social and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness, although even biological sex is a natural kind is now question by many theories.

I want you to bracket of this part of the definition for now because will come to it later on the course, but remember the first part, it is an analytical category we analysed through the concept of gender to understand what is a gendered being? It refers to the social organisation of the relation between the sexes and this is a thing you ought to remember that gender in social it is about what happens in society which means that it can be changed around if you



try with great difficulty all be it and change has to come as a group but it can be changed it is not given or natural. The term gender is used to designate psychological, social, and cultural aspects, which means that these are not things that you gone from some natural existence in society, they have to be created and built.

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**SEX/ GENDER SYSTEM**

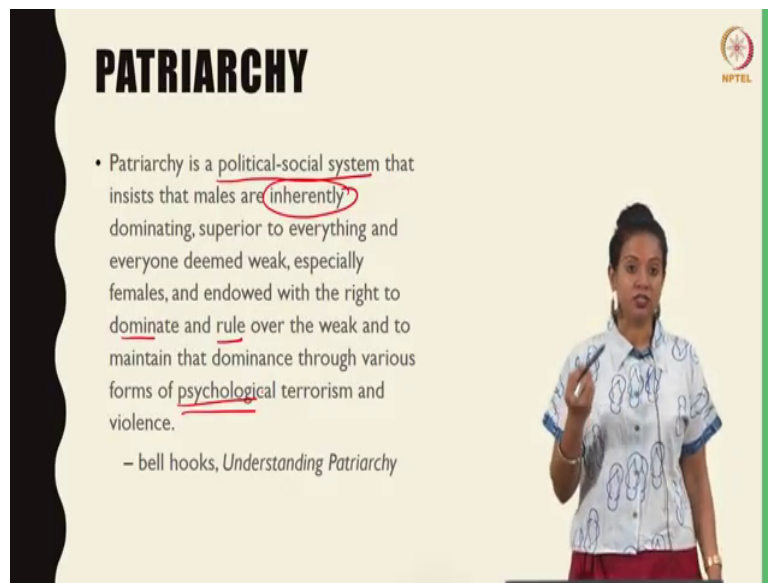
- Within this (dichotomized) sex/gender system, then, biological sex is taken as given, and gender is assumed to “naturally” follow—as is the appropriate object-choice of desire. → *Heterosexuality*

—Nancy Potter, “Key Concepts: Feminism”  
*Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, Volume 8, Number 1, March 2001, pp. 61-71

The slide features a speaker on the right side, a woman in a light blue patterned shirt and red skirt, gesturing with her hands. The slide has a black wavy border on the left and a green vertical bar on the right. An NPTEL logo is in the top right corner.

And lastly, within this dichotomized sex gender system, biological sex has taken as given genders assume to naturally follow, as is the appropriate object choice of desire. Now, I am just going to introduce you to a term over here and we will talk about it later, a term called heterosexuality, which means that if you are born a man and behave like a man, if you appropriately gendered, the object choice of desire has to be a woman, likewise if you are born a woman behave like a woman then you are appropriate object choice of desire has to be a man and along this spectrum and the idea of sex, gender and sexuality is built an entire society. Therefore, in the sex gender system what also follows is that sexuality is naturalized as much as sex and gender.

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**PATRIARCHY**

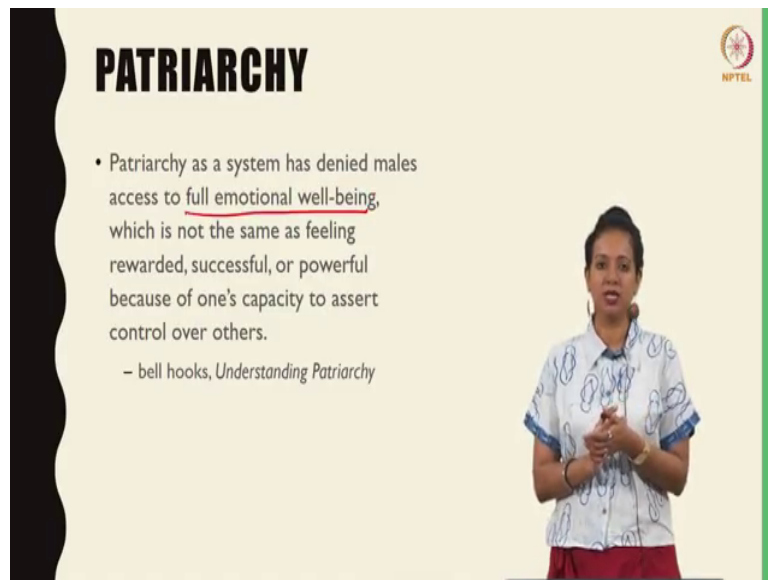
- Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.

– bell hooks, *Understanding Patriarchy*

And therefore, we then come to the word that we encountered first in Nivedita Menon's definition where we speak about how is it that this entire gamut of gendered beings behave in society and why does society care and we land upon a word call patriarchy. Please pay attention to this this, this is from bell hook's *Understanding Patriarchy*, and she says, "Patriarchy is a political-social system, which means that there are stakes in patriarchy that insist that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females," which means that it is not just females is everybody in society that is weaker than the male species.

"And endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence." Now, the word psychological is important over here because this understanding of maleness is superior or male as superior or masculine values as superior, these are embedded in society around us and it is not just meant that subscribe to it, but everybody that we know in very-very subtle ways, these are the ways in which we understand society as a natural entity within which certain rules are not even obvious to be questioned. Keep this in mind, we will return to this in a bit, but less you think that this definition of patriarchy is only about the hurting of everybody that's inferior to man and masculine entitlement.

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**PATRIARCHY**

- Patriarchy as a system has denied males access to full emotional well-being, which is not the same as feeling rewarded, successful, or powerful because of one's capacity to assert control over others.

– bell hooks, *Understanding Patriarchy*

The slide features a speaker on the right side, a woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a light blue patterned short-sleeved shirt and a red skirt. 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.

One of the things that hooks does talk about, is the idea that patriarchy as a system has denied males access to full emotional well-being which is not the same as feeling rewarded, successful, or powerful because of one's capacity to assert control over others, and this is rapidly gaining currency in our understanding of theory, to say that wielding of power also hurts the person wielding the power and not merely the victim.

In many ways it erodes one capacity to be human and denies access to full emotional well-being, which means that within patriarchy because all men have to behave like powerful men, there is no capacity to be any different even if one wants to be or feels differently. Therefore, we will end the lecture with this understanding of patriarchy before we go on to a few other words and a more expanded understanding of how bell hooks thinks that feminism is for everybody.

So for today's lecture, I want you to be able to rehearse these terms feminist, feminism, feminisms, sex/gender system and patriarchy, until next lecture.