

Feminism: Concepts and Theories
Dr. Mathangi Krishnamurthy
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Feminisms: Fourth Wave, Popular Culture and Social Media Part 1
Session 1

Feminism Concepts and Theories, lecture 22, week 10, I hope you are impressed with yourselves for having made it thus far, because I certainly am, and today's lecture I have had so much fun curating its contents, putting it together, that I hope you feel the same way about it as I do.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:45)



In continuity with our lectures from week 9, where we discussed film, theatre, and a little bit of advertising we are now going to move unsurprisingly into the realm of social media. So, today we are covering popular culture, social media and feminism and it will be as fun as it sounds, hopefully.

In the midst of which, ofcourse, I have to have a teaching moment so we are going to speak a little bit about something that I promised at the end of our discussions on the

third wave of feminism, namely is there a fourth wave, how do we locate it, how do we understand it?

In relation to this fourth wave, I am particularly interested in discussing new interdisciplinary forms of thinking across media. By this, I mean, that we are moving squarely into the realm of the contemporary, which means theoretically, we are on slightly shaky ground and this is a well-known fact about social theory. It is very difficult to theorize in the moment; usually, we are much better at theorizing in hindsight and finding explanatory frameworks in hindsight. So, in many ways this week might be your litmus test, because if you have absorbed the many lessons of the past few weeks, you should be able to theorize on your own. You should be able to critique some of the theoretical suggestions I am putting forth and figure out for yourselves as to what are the ways in which the contours of feminism are being redrawn in the contemporary world. So in many ways today's lecture is all about praxis, theory and practice in tandem.

We are discussing various examples of social media, art and digital production and dissemination in relation to the themes for this week. So, it feels like you will pay careful attention and I do look forward to your comments and thoughts.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:49)

CONTEMPORARY FEMINISTS

- People still don't like feminism or feminist theory
- Feminists continue to disagree with each other
- Feminism seems to have become more akin to bell hooks' critique of "Lifestyle Feminism".
- At the same time, it is a good time in the world to speak about feminism

The slide features a woman in a purple patterned dress speaking in the background. A logo is visible in the top right corner.

Let us start with what is going on in the realm of feminism and this might take us back to some of our early discussions when we began this course: that feminism is not necessarily a word that is liked universally even now, it is considered something that is a realm of a small number of women, of esoteric thought, of people who can afford to think in these terms, it is a luxury.

So nothing has changed; even in the contemporary era a number of people do not seem to like feminism or feminist theory, and I have been party to a number of discussions, where the person opposite me, usually a male begins their discussions with, you are alright, but I do not like feminists as a whole, until I pause to ask, what exactly do you understand as feminists?

And often the knowledge of this so-called feminist is drawn from popular culture, popular understanding, and is often a shorthand, for what we have been studying to be the conflicts of feminists theory. So, even as feminists continue to disagree with each other and form different ideas of what the mandate of feminism should be, the public at large seems to have decided what feminists are, and whether to like or dislike them.

Popular culture in many ways is very much party to these discussions and increasingly in the contemporary world, 'feminist' is worn as a brand, or a badge of honor, or a cause or

a principle, or an identity, multiple possibilities; and in such a scenario, feminism seems to have become more akin to what bell hooks critiqued as lifestyle feminism, if you remember the text we studied in our first week.

However, and there is always a however, there is always a pro and a con, it is a good time in the world to speak about feminism because it finally seems to have popular purchase, much like during the heyday of the first, second, or third wave. And therefore it is a good time to ask the question, is there a fourth wave of feminism? And, what are the things that it seems to be commonly characterized by, as opposed to the first, second, and third wave of feminism.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:22)

CONTEMPORARY FEMINISTS

- The gains of the first, second, and third wave have led to a consistent and continuous set of discussions, some radical, some reformist, some problematic, some erudite, some thoughtful, on feminism.
- Feminism is also, now a global discussion, no longer restricted to Women's Studies departments

So, for our discussion, let us start with the understanding that the gains of the first, second, and third wave have led to a consistent and continuous set of discussions, not agreements, not disagreements, not fallouts, all of the above, but discussions, some radical, some reformists, some problematic, some erudite, some thoughtful, on feminism itself.

Now, it is something that a number of people seem to be invested in and therefore “wave.” Feminism is now a global discussion, no longer restricted to women studies

departments; and part of the reason, why it as a global discussion is also because of the radical kind of breakthrough in communication technologies and in social media.

Now there are platforms for people to discuss back and forth transnationally, globally as to the need for feminism and what its mandate should be.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:26)



The slide features a title 'FOURTH-WAVE FEMINISM' in bold black letters at the top left. Below the title is a list of five bullet points: '• Queer Feminism', '• Sex-positive', '• Body-positive', '• Digitally driven', and '• Pragmatism, inclusion and humour'. The first bullet point has a red checkmark to its left. The second and third bullet points have red lines underlining the words 'gender' and 'sex' respectively. The fourth and fifth bullet points are circled in red. To the right of the text is a photograph of a woman in a purple patterned dress speaking. In the top right corner, there is a small circular logo with the letters 'NPTEL' below it.

- Queer Feminism
 - Queering of gender and sex based binaries
 - Trans-inclusive
- Sex-positive
- Body-positive
- Digitally driven
- Pragmatism, inclusion and humour

Therefore, let me gather together some commonly identified traits of fourth wave feminism, if you agree with me, that there may be such a thing. One, it is queer and I am running a little ahead of myself, so let me also add the caveat that we will speak about queer theory and queering, in the week following this, but for now, let us just bracket this and try and understand that queer feminism means a queering of gender and sex-based binaries.

We have already discussed some of this in our previous weeks that even in the sex-gender binary while gender was considered to be a cultural modification of biological sex in a way that it solidifies into the male-female binary sex itself which used to be considered a given has now been discussed by multiple feminist theories as something that is also a product of culture – just the matter of biological sex material is not enough to be able to qualify bodies into a clear male or a clear female.

We will discuss much more of this in the next week as I mentioned, and queer feminism is also trans-inclusive, it includes trans-gendered bodies, transsexual bodies, bodies on the spectrum of gender fluidity that identify in myriad ways with non-male, non-female sometimes neither, sometimes both, sometimes a bit of one and more of the other and many such combinations of gender identities.

Fourth-wave feminism identifies as sex positive, sees a value to owning, celebrating, and enjoying sexuality in differently sexed bodies, the ways that they choose to do so; it is body positive – it rails against the standards of beauty. The ways we discussed in Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, where particular kinds of raised, sexed, and sized bodies, ageist parameters against bodies, it rails against all of these and advocates body positivity that people have positive feelings about the bodies that they inhabit, that they are able to identify with those bodies as opposed to clamoring for the perfect kind of body that is promoted by public culture, mainly by capitalist public culture.

Very important for us, it is digitally driven, as I mentioned a few seconds ago, fourth-wave feminism is driven by proliferation of social media communication and therefore its projects also benefit greatly from such a digitally driven world, and this one - jury's out - but perhaps one of the things, to think about is that, fourth wave feminism can be very pragmatic. It is interested in goals, it is interested in the here and now, like many movements, and focuses on inclusion across conflicts, across debates, across fights, across discussions and differences, it advocates inclusion, so intersectionality is almost given, and very-very often, also because it is driven by a number of young people, those who do not necessarily take seriousness seriously, it is also driven by a lot of humor in the process of waging some very serious battles.

These traits of fourth-wave feminism are not written in stone; they are not meant to be absolutes, they are just a couple of things here that I have gathered, that others have gathered in thinking about what might possibly unite the various projects of fourth-wave feminism.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:30)

FOURTH-WAVE FEMINISM

- Intersectional Feminists
- Men and Women of all ages
- "Maybe the fourth wave is online," said feminist Jessica Valenti in 2009.
- The Digital Divide? → *Qualified*

The slide features a speaker on the right side, a black wavy border on the left, and a green vertical bar on the right. A small logo is visible in the top right corner.

As I mentioned above, intersectionality is very much a given for fourth-wave feminism and we are forced to reckon with the multiple identities that fourth-wave feminists occupy, however, there is a question, as to whether such intersectionality has any kind of consonance with earlier understandings of intersectionality, which were very much to do with the multiple oppressions that people face, along different axes of difference. Has it become something that is part of a new identity politics, where people don various identities as badges of honor and thereby the discussion becomes very much about one form of identity against another in a hierarchy, as opposed to an inclusion mandate; and I am throwing the question out there just to complicate this idea of fourth wave feminism and not to suggest that such identities are disingenuous.

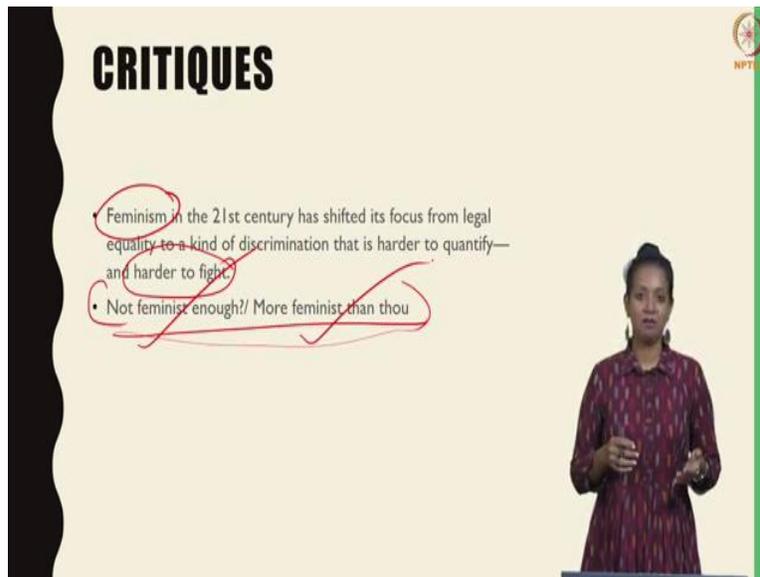
Another thing to remember is that fourth-wave feminism is occupied by men and women of all ages, men as well, and of all ages. The feminist Jessica Valenti suggested in 2009 that “maybe the fourth wave is online,” which begs a couple of questions, there is the standard traditional question which I think can be easily answered right now, which is if it is online, is it real?

Does it connect to the struggles of real people? The question about whether the old goals of feminism that were about systemic oppression, about development through systemic change, do they count anymore? Or have we all reverted to lifestyle / choice feminism? And what of questions like the digital divide, which is about the fact that a lot of the

world does not have access to online communication, to the linguistic hegemony that is English? And what are the ways in which the digital divide that persists affects the proponents of fourth-wave feminism? These are things to think about; these are not absolute critiques, and as we will go on to study in our examples for today, this digital divide is being addressed by those who are translating into local languages; by the fact that technological change is widespread; by the very...very materiality of smartphones that everybody seems to own; and to this extent, perhaps the digital divide itself needs to be qualified in particular ways to try and understand who are the creators of content for fourth wave feminism and perhaps work to critique that as opposed to saying that content itself is always already divided because it is digital.

So, just a couple of thoughts before we venture into the various kinds of projects that qualify fourth-wave feminism. But before we do that, let me just go over the critiques one time, before we head into a description of these projects.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:37)



Feminism in the 21st century seems to have shifted its focus from legal equality to a kind of discrimination that is harder to quantify and harder to fight and this has so much resonance with the ways in which we understand resistance and power itself in the 21st century as bearing no enemy, no clear “man” to rail against, no clear source of power and how resistance itself has become fragmented.

And post-structuralism, post-modern theorization will tell you that this maybe the defining problem of the 21st century so no reason why it would be different for feminism, therefore, what is the battle that feminism has to wage becomes dissipated, fragmented, so on and so forth, which has led to multiple kinds of conflicts between feminists as to what should be the appropriate object of ire, resistance and struggle?

You hear some struggles qualified under this idea of not feminist enough, which is that the kind of feminism that some people practice is qualified as a fake feminism, that its something that is given up on the hallowed ideals of the feminist movement, and there is ofcourse the more feminist then thou, which is it becomes a competitive arena as to who is able to speak about, live up to, define the ideals of feminism better. So feminism, itself as ever is also qualified by the kinds of power struggles that are familiar to the 21st century.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:30)

CRITIQUES

- “For the black second-wave feminist thinker known as bell hooks (as a political statement, she prefers not to use capital letters in her name) this is “*faux feminism*.” Her powerful critique of *Lean In* notes that Sandberg relies on the tropes of traditional femininity to package her message, and says her white, corporate “feminism” fails to imagine a different kind of world or to build on collective action. Getting more women in the boardroom does little to help the single mother employed to clean the office at night. It is important to remember that the career advantages now enjoyed by more educated women have been made possible by the outsourcing of domestic labour to poorer, often immigrant women. Feminism, for too long, has been dominated by an elite class of women, meaning it has accounted for a relatively narrow range of experiences.
- Everything you wanted to know about fourth wave feminism—but were afraid to ask; Jessica Abrahams, 2017 (<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/everything-wanted-know-fourth-wave-feminism>)

I want to read to you a little bit from an article titled, “Everything you wanted to know about fourth wave feminism – but were afraid to ask” by Jessica Abrahams in 2017. The link as ever is below, if you want to read the entire thing, but here I am interested in ways in which the author outlines the struggle between second wave feminists and fourth wave feminists, and the critiques that second wavers levy at fourth wavers.

“For the black second-wave feminist thinker known as bell hooks,” and remember bell hooks is someone that we have already read, “(as a political statement she prefers not to use capital letters in her name)” and this is because this is an article for popular consumption, people may not be aware of who bell hooks is, unless you are in a class on feminist theory, so bell hooks considers this to be “*faux feminism*,” false feminism. Her powerful critique of the very popular book by Sheryl Sandberg called *Lean In*, where Sandberg argues that the problems that women face in the corporate arena have to do with the fact of them not having the confidence enough or not participating enough.

And I am simplifying the argument but to a large extent Sandberg makes it a problem of agency and choice, bell hooks “powerful critique of *Lean In* notes that Sandberg relies on the tropes of traditional femininity to package her message and says that her white corporate “feminism” fails to imagine a different kind of world or to build on collective action.” Individual choice versus collective action!

“Getting more women in the boardroom does little to help the single mother employed to clean the office at night,” it is not inclusive enough, it is about corporate women and it attempts to provide a one-size-fits-all solution. “It is important to remember that the career advantages now enjoyed by more educated women have been made possible by the outsourcing of domestic labor to poorer often immigrant women. “

And here bell hooks is addressing the amnesia of the 21st century where a number of people believe that the feminist struggles of today are only of this time; that now that they have the capacity to work that was not built on the backs of labor by other feminists of the second wave; instead, they think about the problem in the here and now and say that well, if there is a glass ceiling or if there is a wage / pay gap is because women have to work harder, they have to make their presence felt.

“Feminism for too long has been dominated by an elite class of women meaning it has accounted for a relatively narrow range of experiences.” Sound familiar? We have been repeating this problem since the second wave, so in many ways not only has it not gone away, it has been reinvented in a new set of tropes, and this is a powerful, important critic.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:52)

The slide features a title 'CRITIQUES' in bold black letters at the top left. Below it is a bulleted quote from Jessica Abrahams (2017) discussing radical voices in the fourth wave of feminism. The quote is partially circled in red. To the right of the text is a photograph of a woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a patterned purple dress, looking down. In the top right corner, there is a small circular logo with the letters 'NPTA' below it. The slide has a light beige background with a black wavy border on the left and a green vertical bar on the right.

CRITIQUES

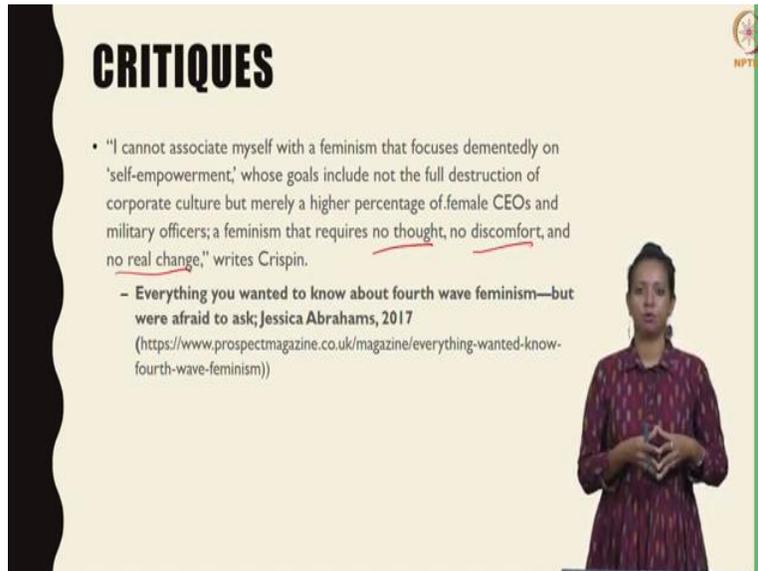
- “More radical voices within the fourth wave—such as Laurie Penny, the author of *Bitch Doctrine: Essays for Dissenting Adults*, and Jessa Crispin, author of *Why I am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto*, both published this year—would agree. For them, though it might help to boost its popularity, feminism should not be comfortable, and it certainly shouldn't be pretty. These feminists want something closer to a revolution that upends a value system that valorises aggressive male individualism.”
 - Everything you wanted to know about fourth wave feminism—but were afraid to ask; Jessica Abrahams, 2017 (<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/everything-wanted-know-fourth-wave-feminism>)

Abrahams continues, “More radical voices within the fourth wave,” like I said, the fourth wave is not homogeneous, there are other kinds of voices “such as Laurie Penney, the author of *Bitch Doctrine: Essays for Dissenting Adults* and Jessica Crispin author of *Why I am Not a Feminist, A Feminist Manifesto* both published this year 2017 would agree. For them though it may help to boost its popularity, feminism should not be comfortable and it certainly should not be too pretty. These feminists want something closer to a revolution that up ends a value system that valorizes aggressive male individualism.

Again, we go back to our hallowed concepts in equality, which is, what kind of equality? Do you want to be equal to men? Or do you want completely new standards for what counts as equality? And here both Penny and Crispin are of the opinion that current feminism even though greatly palatable, even though it has been branded so beautifully to the extent that it has become popular; they think that it certainly should not be pretty; it should not be comfortable; it should not be something that anybody can easily adopt; if it were that easy we would have had a revolution long ago. They also want a revolution that up ends a value system that radically changes a value system, that valorizes aggressive male individualism.

Why are we back in the same place viz-a-viz Corporate Feminism where a woman has to be able to earn her right to be taken seriously? Why is it that feminism is peddling the same old tired goals, is what Penny and Crispin and other fourth wavers want to know.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:51)



CRITIQUES

- "I cannot associate myself with a feminism that focuses dementedly on 'self-empowerment,' whose goals include not the full destruction of corporate culture but merely a higher percentage of female CEOs and military officers; a feminism that requires no thought, no discomfort, and no real change," writes Crispin.
- Everything you wanted to know about fourth wave feminism—but were afraid to ask; Jessica Abrahams, 2017
(<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/everything-wanted-know-fourth-wave-feminism>)



CRITIQUES

- "More radical voices within the fourth wave—such as Laurie Penny, the author of *Bitch Doctrine: Essays for Dissenting Adults*, and Jessa Crispin, author of *Why I am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto*, both published this year—would agree. For them, though it might help to boost its popularity, feminism should not be comfortable, and it certainly shouldn't be pretty. These feminists want something closer to a revolution that upends a value system that valorises aggressive male individualism.
- Everything you wanted to know about fourth wave feminism—but were afraid to ask; Jessica Abrahams, 2017
(<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/everything-wanted-know-fourth-wave-feminism>)

And Crispin writes, "I cannot associate myself with a feminism that focuses dementedly on 'self-empowerment,' whose goals include, not the full destruction of corporate culture, but merely a higher percentage of female CEOs and military officers: a feminism, that requires no thought, no discomfort, no real change," writes Crispin.

Again, so familiar we are looking at a culture of what Foucault used to call “technologies of the self,” wherein the self is the only project that is worth working on. You do not consider the self in relation to other selves in the world, you only want to be able to utilize all the tools made available to you by the hegemonic system, in this case corporate capitalism, to improve your prospects in the world, without really changing the terms within which such improvement is possible. And this to Crispin, to Penny is a giant problem and does not conform to feminism as they understand it, therefore the title of Crispin's book, *Why I am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto*.

From this set of critiques then, let me move on to a set of projects that I want to detail and outline for you in order to give you a sense of how is it, that fourth wavers are carrying out their projects and what are their thoughts about the multiple projects of feminist theory and feminism as a force in the world.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:35)



Here is a quick listing, we are going to study a project called *Everyday Sexism* by Laura Bates in 2012, then the *#HappytoBleed* movement that Kalpana briefly referred to in her lecture, we are going to speak about a resource called *Menstrupedia* founded by Aditi Gupta, we are of course going to discuss *#MeToo*.

And I want to end with the fantastic work of the folks at *Agents of Ishq* by Parodevi Pictures, so hang in there, while we go through these, one-by-one and these are just a set of random examples that I have picked from. I am sure if you look around you, there may be multiple kinds of platforms of choice that you find yourselves drawn to, so think about looking at all of those in conjunction with today's lecture.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:28)

EVERYDAY SEXISM

the everyday sexism project

project about contact support digital security

The Everyday Sexism Project exists to catalog instances of sexism experienced on a day to day basis. They might be serious or minor, outrageously offensive or so niggling and normalised that you don't even feel able to protest. Say as much or as little as you like, use your real name or a pseudonym - it's up to you. By sharing your story you're showing the world that sexism does exist, it is faced by women everyday and it is a valid problem to discuss.

If you prefer to e-mail me at laura@everydaysexism.com I can upload your story for you instead. Follow us on Twitter (and submit entries by tweet) at @EverydaySexism.

EVERYDAY SEXISM

Divya

17th March 2010

I'm not sure if this counts as casual sexism. A norm Tuesday morning at work. I was waking through pantry to washroom, where a group of colleagues were hanging out. I was casually ("just for fun") asked, by one of them, to make tea for all of them!

Just 16 but fed up

17th March 2010

Anyone else experienced the kind of harassment you feel you can't object to? The kind you're expected to take as a compliment?

I frequently have men of varying ages (all adults though) come up to me and tell me I'm pretty, gorgeous, dressed up like I'm going somewhere and the person I'm seeing must be lucky etc. I feel like I can't object because the words coming out of their mouths seem nice, but the situation can feel threatening despite that. Also, I'm hoping they don't realise this because I'm tall, but I'm only 16 so they really shouldn't be talking to me, and this started when I was 11. Even if I were a grown woman I don't think it should be ok. Random men shouldn't have the right to comment on my appearance whenever they feel like it. It shouldn't always be on me to gauge the potential danger of these situations.

Let us start with the *Everyday Sexism* project founded by Laura Bates in 2012, and this is what the website has to say about the project, “the everyday sexism project exists, to

catalogue instances of sexism experienced on a day-to-day basis. They might be serious or minor, outrageously offensive or so niggling and normalized, that you don't even feel able to protest. Say as much or as little as you like, use your real name or a pseudonym, it is up to you, by sharing your story you are showing the world that sexism does exist, it is faced by women every day, and it is a valid problem to discuss.

If you prefer to email me at laura@everydaysexism.com, I can upload your story for you instead. Follow us on Twitter at [everyday sexism](https://twitter.com/everydaysexism).” So think about the fact that multiple platforms are being used in the service of this project, Twitter and the website itself.

Shall we spend a few minutes unpacking this then? Let us look at what its mandate is. one, it wants to catalogue instances of sexism and the assumption here is that, sexism is a term that encompasses a wide gamut of experiences and therefore, the website says there may be serious or minor and it is left to the person sharing as to how they characterize it, meaning the website does not care even if the person thinks it is just a small thing; they want to be able to witness it, they want to be able to exist, to say that I hear you, I understand that you have experienced it as sexism and I am here to listen. “So, niggling and normalized, that you do not even feel able to protest,” and this is very important because it brings back ideas of consciousness raising, the idea that sexism has been normalized in society, we are all told to put up with it, to think about it as common sensical everyday experience. And that as women, if we complain about every single thing that happens to us, how will we live in the world, as if, feeling that something is sexist, is at odds with being able to live; as if, complaining is the wrong thing to do, in order to be able to live every day; and therefore, the website says that “you do not even feel able to protest and that is the problem and we are here to help you.”

“Say as much or as little as you like, use your real name or a pseudonym,” thereby addressing another important concern, which in the days of social media can help you overcome your fear of sharing. Use your real name or a pseudonym it is up to you, just for the experience of being able to say it out loud. There is no expectation or guarantee of legal, or criminal, or societal action, it is merely a fact of being able to acknowledge, that this happened to you. By sharing your story, you are showing the world that sexism does

exist. You are making it harder for the world to dismiss your experience, as merely small, as merely perfunctory, as just something that happened to you and does not happen to people on an everyday basis, that it is an exception. You accumulate the stories in order to witness collectively that sexism is a phenomenon in the world that happens disproportionately with women.

Here are a couple of experiences that women have shared that are up on the website, so women called Divya on 17th March 2020 says, “I am not sure if this counts as casual sexism, a norm Tuesday morning at work, I was walking through pantry to washroom where a group of colleagues were hanging out. I was casually, just for fun, asked by one of them, to make tea for all of them.” It is up to you all to make up your mind whether this is small or niggling or not worth mentioning after all, were not they just asking for fun, but this is the kind of testimony that someone in real life or among their friends would hesitate to discuss, lest they be slammed for being too sensitive.

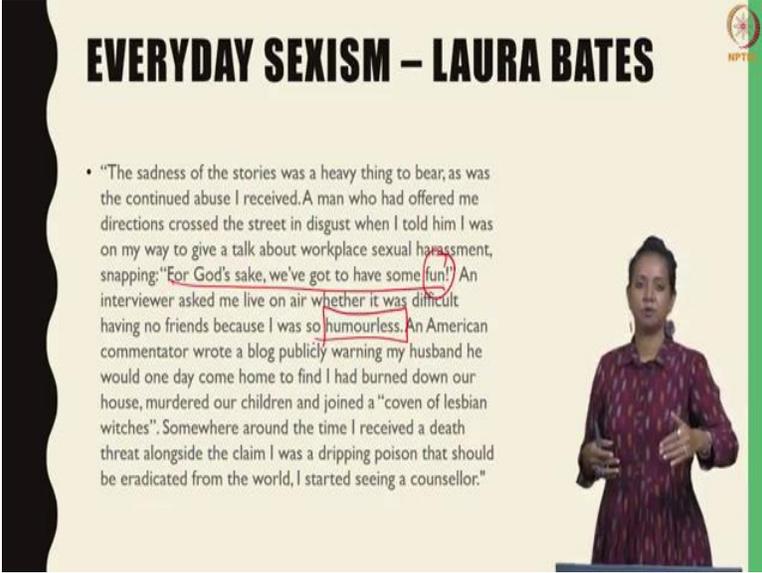
“Just 16 but fed-up,” here someone has said, “Anyone else experienced the kind of harassment you feel you cannot object to, the kind you are expected to take as a compliment?”

I frequently have men of varying ages, all adults though, come up to me and tell me I am pretty, gorgeous, dressed up like I am going somewhere and the person I am seeing must be lucky etcetera. I feel like, I cannot object, because the words coming out of their mouth seem nice, but the situation can feel threatening, despite that. Also, I am hoping they do not realize this because I am tall but I am only 16, so there really should not be talking to me and they started when I was 11. Even if I were a grown woman, I do not think it should be okay. Random men should not have the right to comment on my appearance whenever they feel like it. It should not always be on me, to gauge the potential danger of these situations.”

To a lot of us, currently looking at this lecture, this might sound familiar and the terms within which it is set are very familiar. Compliments are a way of people to be nice to each other. However, there is a power-ridden situation within which these compliments arise. Men of varying ages, all adults, seem to be coming up to a 16-year-old, all the time

and telling her that she is beautiful, she is gorgeous, and that the man she is going to see must be lucky, etcetera., suggesting therefore that in many ways there is an underlying sexualization of this person, that there is a way in which she is having to gauge the potential danger of these situations; whereas there is, to ask, if there is any possibility that the person giving these compliments may mean the person any harm. And this is a fraught, stressful situation and within this account the person is identifying the problem where she says, “random men should not have the right to comment on my appearance.” Men should not be given the right to say what they please to women, even though it might seem like a compliment, because it is about a woman’s appearance and this should not be okay in a society rife with sexism.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:51)



EVERYDAY SEXISM – LAURA BATES

- “The sadness of the stories was a heavy thing to bear, as was the continued abuse I received. A man who had offered me directions crossed the street in disgust when I told him I was on my way to give a talk about workplace sexual harassment, snapping: “For God’s sake, we’ve got to have some fun!” An interviewer asked me live on air whether it was difficult having no friends because I was so humourless. An American commentator wrote a blog publicly warning my husband he would one day come home to find I had burned down our house, murdered our children and joined a “coven of lesbian witches”. Somewhere around the time I received a death threat alongside the claim I was a dripping poison that should be eradicated from the world, I started seeing a counsellor.”

(Note: In the original image, the words 'whether it was difficult' and 'so humourless' are circled in red.)

(Note: A small logo with the letters 'NPTA' is visible in the top right corner of the slide.)

Bates writes that in many ways being the medium or the conduit for these stories was a difficult proposition. She says, “The sadness of the stories was a heavy thing to bear, as was the continuous abuse I received.” And this is something very familiar, to anyone who is experienced trolling online, that you say something that is not palatable to the public at large and you will receive multiple kinds of hate often in very-very troubling sexist fashion. “A man who had offered me directions crossed the street in disgust, when I told him, I was on my way to give a talk about workplace sexual harassment, snapping, “For God’s sake we have got to have some fun.” And fun is a nice little shorthand for saying, allow the world to continue being sexist, the way it has always been. “An interviewer asked me live on air, whether it was difficult having no friends because I was so humorless.” Here is another charge at feminism at large, which is all feminists are humorless, they have no sense of humor, they take everything too seriously, they winge about everything.

“An American commentator wrote a blog publicly warning my husband, he would one day come home, to find I had burned down our house, murdered our children and joined a ‘coven of lesbian witches.’ Somewhere around the time I received a death threat alongside the claim, I was dripping poison that should be eradicated from the world. I started seeing a counsellor.”

Imagine how traumatizing it already is to read these stories of women everyday, over and above which, Bates received all these forms of online hate.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:46)



The slide has a light beige background with a black wavy border on the left and a green vertical bar on the right. At the top right is a small circular logo with the letters 'NPTA'. The title 'EVERYDAY SEXISM – LAURA BATES' is in bold black text. Below the title is a quote from Laura Bates, with several phrases underlined in red. To the right of the text is a video inset showing Laura Bates, a woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a maroon patterned dress, speaking with her hands.

EVERYDAY SEXISM – LAURA BATES

- “But there were pleasant surprises, too. I hadn’t anticipated the practical and emotional help offered by other women – solidarity from those of my own age and staunch support from older feminists who had seen it all before. And nothing could outweigh the privilege of being entrusted with so many people’s stories, often never told before. I felt a great sense of responsibility to make sure women’s voices were heard. I began to work with schools, universities, businesses, politicians and police forces, to try and ensure that the stories of one generation could alter things positively for the next. It helped hugely to feel that concrete change could come directly from the project.”

She also says though, “But there were pleasant surprises too. I had not anticipated the practical and emotional help offered by other women. Solidarity from those of my own age and staunch support from older feminists who had seen it all before. And nothing could outweigh the privilege of being entrusted with so many peoples’ stories, often never told before. I felt a great sense of responsibility to make sure women’s voices were heard, I began to work with schools, universities, businesses, politicians and police forces to try and ensure that the stories of one generation could alter things positively for the next. It helped hugely to feel that concrete change could come directly from the project.”

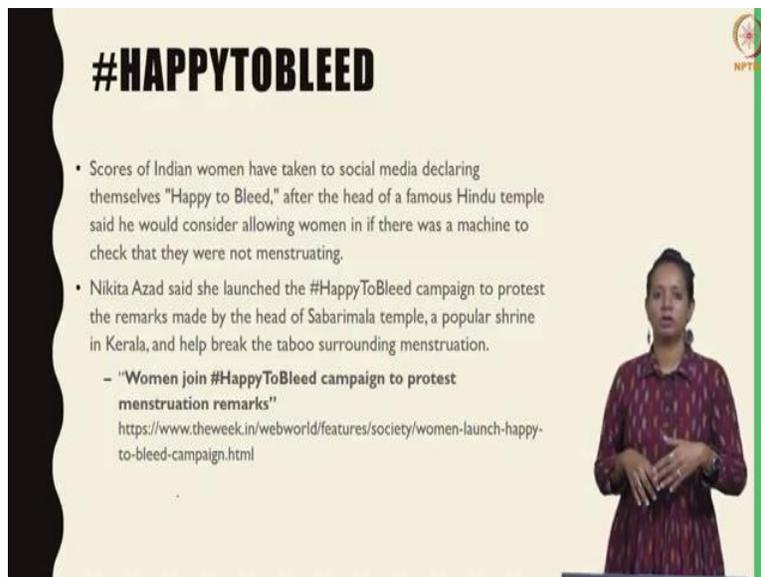
This also testifies to the fact, that we are still doing consciousness-raising for everyone, men and women alike, and in the process there seems to be an online building up of sisterhood of a particular kind where in, sharing these experiences, women come to realize that they are not alone.

Hence practical and emotional help offered by other women and from older feminists who had seen it all before and this is remarkably important, in many ways much as there might be frustration that we are having to do this over and over again, it helps to

remember that the forms of struggle are not new. Others have waged them before and we can continue to wage them in the here and now. At the same time, you also seen Bates efforts, a larger attempt to change the discourse, to change the narrative, to influence larger varieties of people that may not conform to the kind of binary of feminist or misogynist.

Therefore the project was very much invested in change in the world as we know it; it was not merely a form of storytelling, much a storytelling is never a small thing, so I do not mean to suggest, so I do not mean to suggest that telling stories is immaterial in itself, but stories were being told by a wider number of audiences in order to bring about societal change and this was helped by the fact of its online dissemination and dialogue.

(Refer Slide Time: 35:26)



#HAPPYTOBLEED

- Scores of Indian women have taken to social media declaring themselves "Happy to Bleed," after the head of a famous Hindu temple said he would consider allowing women in if there was a machine to check that they were not menstruating.
- Nikita Azad said she launched the #HappyToBleed campaign to protest the remarks made by the head of Sabarimala temple, a popular shrine in Kerala, and help break the taboo surrounding menstruation.
 - "Women join #HappyToBleed campaign to protest menstruation remarks"
<https://www.theweek.in/webworld/features/society/women-launch-happy-to-bleed-campaign.html>

NPTI

(A photograph of Nikita Azad, a woman in a purple patterned dress, is shown on the right side of the slide.)

Let us talk next about the campaign #HappytoBleed where scores of Indian women took to social media declaring themselves, happy to bleed, which is quite revolutionary in the Indian scenario, after the head of a famous Hindu temple said he would consider allowing women in, if there was a machine to check that they were not menstruating.

This is a familiar kind of taboo in Indian Hindu temples which is the idea that it does not allow in women who are menstruating to worship in its premises. Nikita Azad said she launched their happy to bleed campaign to protest the remarks made by the head of the

Sabarimala temple, a shrine in Kerala, and help break the taboo surrounding menstruation.

And all of this is chronicled in an article in “The Week” titled women join happy to bleed campaign to protest menstruation remarks. The link is available for you to read through the article but pause for a second and look at the kinds of ways in which contemporary feminism is challenging something that a lot of people consider sacred. We are looking at the kind of clash between quote-unquote modernity and sacrality religious tradition much like in the Shah Bano and the Roop Kawar case. We are looking at the playing out of these debates in the here and now, but on a different site.

(Refer Slide Time: 37:03)

The slide features a light beige background with a black wavy border on the left and a green vertical bar on the right. At the top left, the hashtag '#HAPPYTOBLEED' is written in large, bold, black letters. Below it, there are two bullet points. The first bullet point reads: "This is a basic issue about discriminatory beliefs that say menstruation is unclean," said Azad, a student. "Menstruation is a natural activity which doesn't need curtains to hide behind." The second bullet point reads: "Since Azad started the campaign earlier this week, women, along with some male supporters, have posted photographs on Facebook and Twitter holding an array of signs with the words 'Happy to Bleed.'" Below the second bullet point, there is a sub-bullet point: "- 'Women join #HappyToBleed campaign to protest menstruation remarks'" followed by a URL: <https://www.theweek.in/webworld/features/society/women-launch-happy-to-bleed-campaign.html>. On the right side of the slide, there is a photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a purple patterned dress, standing and speaking. In the top right corner, there is a small circular logo with the letters 'NPTI' below it.

This is a basic issue about discriminatory beliefs that say menstruation is unclean, said Azad, a student. Menstruation is a natural activity which does not need curtains to hide behind. Since Azad started the campaign earlier this week, women along with some male supporters have posted photographs on Facebook and Twitter, holding an array of signs with the words HappytoBleed.

A menstruation is an important subject for feminist theory to tackle. We are looking at ways in which across cultures women who menstruate are deified but also kept apart

from society as if considered to be in a liminal state where they are dangerous and hazardous to normal functioning at large.

Multiple anthropological texts will offer you different sets of explanations, many of them about gender, many of them about ritual, and many-many of them to speak about the ways in which such rituals uphold the status quo in society.

We are looking at a campaign like this addressing precisely this taboo and arguing that women have full rights to citizenship and admission to public places and should not be discriminated against, just because they are bleeding, they happen to-do so, a couple of times every month, and through the year, this is part of their daily existence, this should not be treated as an exceptional polluted state.

(Refer Slide Time: 38:44)



MENSTRUPEDIA

- "Menstrupedia is a friendly guide to periods which helps girls and women to stay healthy and active during their periods. With a team of dynamic and passionate people with complementary skills, Menstrupedia aims at delivering informative and entertaining content through different media. Menstrupedia is a small but definitive step to shatter the myths and misunderstandings surrounding menstruation for ages."

The slide features a black wavy border on the left and a green vertical bar on the right. A small logo is visible in the top right corner. A video inset on the right side shows a woman in a purple patterned dress speaking.

Along with this campaign, I want to also then discuss another resource called Menstrupedia that helps address a number of gaps in information among young girls in India and across the world, who reach menstruating age. Since menstruation is such a taboo topic and often spoken about in hushed tones, across classes, castes, and races, a resource like this helps to address questions that young children may have in a manner that is friendly, non-intimidating and non-threatening; in a way that girls can then make

peace with their own bodies and begin to accept themselves as inhabiting particularly gendered bodies without feeling consternation about them.

The menstrupedia page says, “Menstrupedia is a friendly guide to periods which helps girls and women to stay healthy and active during their periods. With the team of dynamic and passionate people with complementary skills. Menstrupedia aims at delivering informative and entertaining content through different media. Menstrupedia is a small but definitive step to shatter the myths and misunderstandings surrounding menstruation for ages.”

Again, between these two sources, HappytoBleed campaign and menstrupedia, you see an effort at education, you see an effort at awareness, and you see the ways in which both these resources include both men and women even as they are addressed to society at large and to girls in the case of menstrupedia.