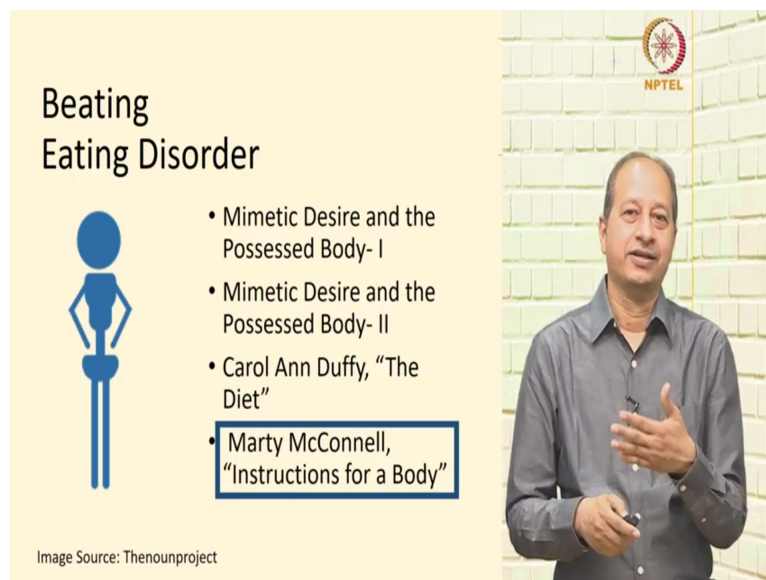


**Literature and Coping Skills**  
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**Indian Institute of Technology (BHU) Varanasi**  
**Lecture No. 40**  
**Marty McConnell, “Instructions for a Body”**

Hello everybody, I am Ajit K Mishra, your course instructor for Literature and Coping Skills. I am here again with the last lecture of this material Mimetic Desire and Eating Disorders. So, in the last three lectures of this module, I talked about a variety of issues related to body image, body image disorders, body dissatisfaction, negative body image and eating disorders. In this lecture I am going to talk about some more crucial aspects related to this particular menace that we call eating disorders; so let us start.

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As you know in this lecture, I am going to walk you through Marty McConnell’s slam poetry or standpoint instructions for a body; which are almost popular poems in social media. And it has been liked by millions of people worldwide; because it talks about a very different kind of body image, which we generally tend to ignore. So, what exactly does it talk about and what are the other aspects related to this particular issue? Are some of the things that I am going to talk about today. So, let us take a quick look at each of these things.

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It all begins with the idea of the perfect body obsession; until now you must have realized that it is all about an obsession. Why do some people behave in an unnatural, unexplainable manner when it comes to their bodies? It is all about how we perceive our body, how we feel about our body, how we understand our body; and how we behave in order to make this body appreciable, recognizable. So, these are the things that in fact lead us gradually towards various problems one after the other. So, to name those problems can be negative body image, image dissatisfaction, body image distortion, body dysmorphic disorder, and a lot of things.

The list is long, because something or the other gets added to this list on your way to the attainment of that unattainable body shape or image. So, this ultimately leads to something that we call an obsession, and this is a perfect body obsession; the perfect body is not there, even if it is there. It is there because of a variety of things that we probably do not know; maybe due to the intervention of technology, surgery, drugs, excessive exercise, and eating alterations and a variety of other things. Most often we do not realize this, and we fall into the traps of that perfect body ideal.


And when we do not do that and when we are overwhelmed by the perfect body ideal; it leads to the perfect body obsession. There are many elements of this society that we live in, which promote the idea that having the perfect body is a passport to command others admiration and

approval. And that is one big reason why most of us tend to chase the perfect body image or perfect body ideal; so that we can command admiration and approval. It can be individual, it can be social, it can be harmful; so it is all about the admiration and approval that we can come out.

And that is the enticement that is the catch that is a prize; because of which we continue to do things that we are not supposed to or expected to do. So, when we look at how society portrays this perfect body, it does so by projecting it as the key to attracting a romantic partner. Landing a dream job and then having good health, popularity and self-confidence. So, society continues to say that the perfect body is your key to a good life; and that is one big reason why we promptly surrender to this enticement.

And what does this perfect body look like for women? The ideal is either thin wave look, which is an impossible voluptuous figure. For men, it is all about muscularity. And whenever we find ourselves out of these two ideals, we tend to do things that gradually develop into an obsession. Because we are obsessed with a certain type of thing that is the perfect body, and will do anything to achieve that particular state; so that is all about the game, which we need to be aware of; we need to wake up to the realities of this scheme; so that we can protect ourselves and people around us. So, the perfect body obsession is not a contemporary issue; it has been there for a long long time.


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## Perfect Body Obsession

- Society says that the perfect body is your passport to the good life
- The hour glass and the inverted pyramid
- The 'perfect body' trap
- What meets the eyes may not be true (photo-shopped ideal body images)
- Body editing apps (e.g. Photable)
- The 'body police' and size oppression

Image Source: cnn.com



And society tells us that your body is your passport to good life; that is one reason. And then there are two types of perfect body ideals. The hour glass body type for the females and the inverted pyramid body type for the males. So, these two have been invoked for a long long time, and we try to chase these models. And then there is a perfect body trap, we fall into that; this trap is laid by source societies we live in, by the media that we consume; and a variety of other things. The peers that we interact with, the family that we grow up in there are several things, several sources that influence; or that create this trap and we fall into that trap, if we are not aware of its adverse consequences.

And then most often we either tend to ignore or we do not know, that what meets the eyes, may not be true. So, in our times this particular phrase has been a catch phrase photoshopping, everything is photoshopped; everything is morphed in a way so that it appears to be absolutely different. So, photoshopped ideal body images actually fly everywhere. So, when we want to catch any one of those ideal images, we are actually catching an artificially enhanced one, a photoshopped ideal body image. That is not a real one, but we catch that and develop some kind of obsession for it; so that leads to the perfect body obsession, because we treat them as the real ones. And then you will be surprised to know how many body editing apps are available, for the gadgets and the devices that we use including our smartphones. For example, Photable is one such body editing app that will help you edit your body, before you can post it for social media consumption. You can edit your body in such a manner that it looks perfect; it matches the perfect body ideal. And that is one big reason why table is such a popular body editing app. There are hundreds of such body editing apps, why are they there? What are they doing there?

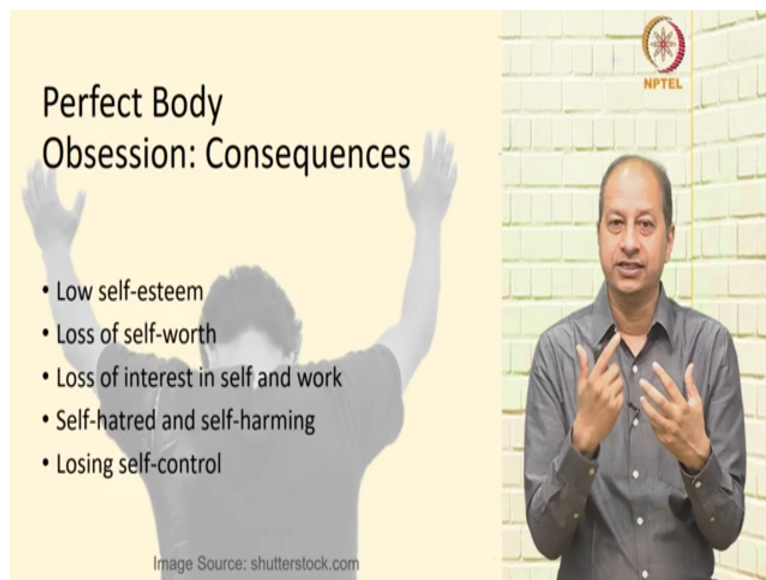
Simply because of the perfect body obsession, we want to do something to this body; because we do not like how this body looks, so we can go to any extent to do this. And then we come to a certain type of behaviour that we generally do not think about, but this happens. It is very much there that is called body police and size oppression. So, body police is a menace most often we do not realize its impact on our psychological and physiological well-being. So, body police as I told you is a menace; I may be likely to have acted as a body police.



At some time, I do not know, if I have told somebody something about his or her body; then I might have acted as valuables. I did not realize that then, but it happens. So, body police is generally done by people like us; I may be a body police, you may be a body police, your friends maybe your body police, your family members maybe a body police; so, we all act as body police. So, what does the body police do? The body police reinforces the society's messages about body standards, body shape, body sense- so, that is exactly how we make people conform to the message; the society's message of the perfect body ideal.

So, body police ultimately leads to size oppression, which occurs when a person is harassed or discriminated against simply for being or not being a certain sense. So, it is a body police that reinforces the size norm, when this does not happen that leads to size oppression. If I think I do not have that perfect size, I will feel oppressed; or I will be oppressed. By these oppressive mechanisms including the body police; so it is very important that we understand, we realize this particular menace.

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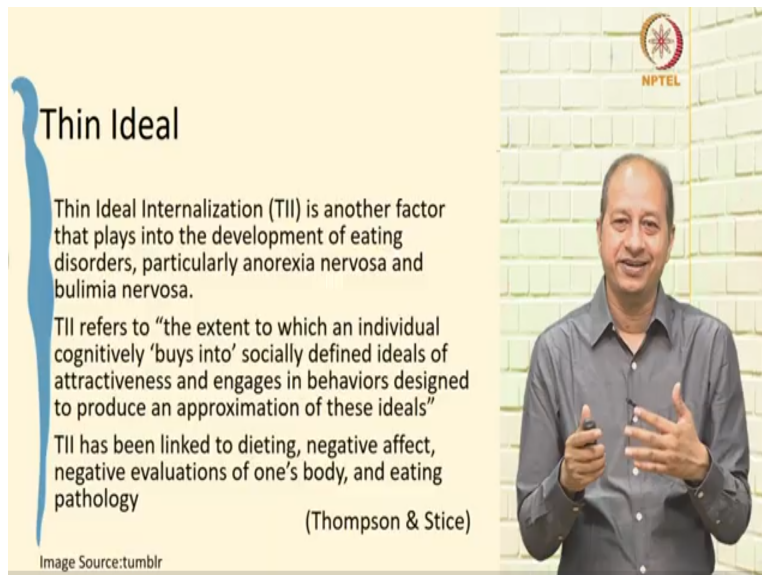
Again when our perfect body obsessions are not fulfilled are not met with; they will obviously lead to serious consequences. You will have your back against the wall, and several things will be written on your back starting with low self-esteem. You will lose your esteem, you will think that I am good for nothing tough. I do not deserve to live, because I do not have the body that

will command respect, approval and recognition; so, you will lose your self-esteem. You will also lose your self-worth; you create yourself as an invalid, who does not fit into the social norms.

And then, it will also lead to the loss of interest in self-involvement, when you lose your esteem, your worth; you will not be interested in yourself at all. And when you are interested in yourself, you also lose interest in the work that you are doing. So, then it will promptly turn into self-hatred and self-harming; behaviours will also follow. Once you develop self-hatred, you will begin to treat your body as your enemy; and then what exactly do we do with our enemies? We harm our enemies; and you will begin to engage in body harming activities. So, it can lead to cutting, it can lead to slapping oneself, banging your head against the wall or any hard surface, a variety of things.

So, and then that will also lead to the loss of self-control; you will completely lose self-control. When that happens, you will not know what to do next; because you have lost your control. So, these are the consequences of perfect body obsession, which are very very serious; you do not take care of this particular obsession, right at the beginning. I mean if we do not prevent this particular attitude from developing into an obsession, the perfect body obsession.

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**Thin Ideal**

Thin Ideal Internalization (TII) is another factor that plays into the development of eating disorders, particularly anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

TII refers to “the extent to which an individual cognitively ‘buys into’ socially defined ideals of attractiveness and engages in behaviors designed to produce an approximation of these ideals”

TII has been linked to dieting, negative affect, negative evaluations of one’s body, and eating pathology

(Thompson & Stice)

Image Source: tumblr

The slide features a video inset on the right side showing a man in a grey shirt speaking and gesturing with his hands. In the top right corner of the slide, there is a logo for NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) consisting of a circular emblem with a book and a lamp, with the text 'NPTEL' below it.

So, that brings us to the idea of the thin ideal internalization. We all internalize the thin ideal, because we treat it as the only ideal for us. So, this thin ideal internalization is of course an important factor that feeds eating disorders. This may sound a little paradoxical, but that in fact feeds eating disorders; especially anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. So, it is the extent to which an individual cognitively buys into the socially defined ideals of attractiveness, and engages in behaviours designed to produce an approximation of these ideals.

First you buy into those ideals, the socially designed or defined ideals; and then you go for an approximation of these ideals; that is the thin ideal. So, TII or thin ideal internalization has also been linked to dieting. We know that negative effects are body hatred, negative evaluation suffers body, negative body image; and then eating pathology like eating disorders.

So, we need to be very very careful that thin ideal internalization that leads to the thin ideal internalization, in fact leads to a very different kind of obsession that we call body shaping. Because we all want our bodies to be a certain shape; if that does not happen, our bodies will be out of that normative shape, so that happens through a variety of channels, the idea of body shaping. So, we all need to feed the ideal body shaping; so that we can feel special, we can feel important.

We all know that it is very very unrealistic and unfair to expect everyone to look like the so-called perfect women models. It is impossible and it is unrealistic and unfair; but the power of these images remains hard to resist. And it becomes extremely difficult for us to give up that pursuit, the pursuit of the mythical body size. Even though this particular procedure may end up being detrimental to our emotional and physical health; we continue to waste that pursuit. The mythical pursuit of the perfect body size; so that is that is a big problem.

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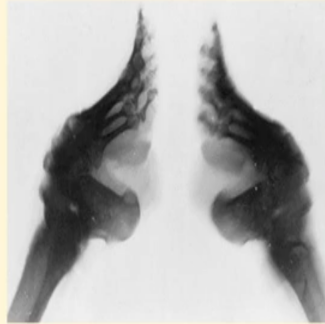


I will cite a few examples to show you how body shaping activities have been a social, a physical and a psychological menace for a long long time. Although these body shaping activities are not prevalent in our times anymore; but then they have been prevalent. And we know certain other body shaping practices prevalent during our times. So, let us take a look at this example. It is a Chinese foot binding culture; there was a time when foot binding culture was extremely popular in Chinese societies. In which teen girls were asked and sometimes pressured to wear the lotus shoes. You can see the lotus shoes right on the screen. So, they were so small, so that they would bind the feet in a certain manner; and the feet would be reframed in a certain way. This particular practice is extremely popular in Chinese societies, because they preferred impossibly small feet. And it was approved, it was appreciated and recognized in these Chinese societies.

So, it was a very very popular practice. The foot binding, or the lotus shoe wearing practice; so that the feet of these teenagers would develop or turn out to be extremely beautiful. But, then did they actually turn out to be beautiful. What happened to those feet when they were bound, they were made to be picked into these lotus shoes; impossibly small sized shoes, so this was the result.

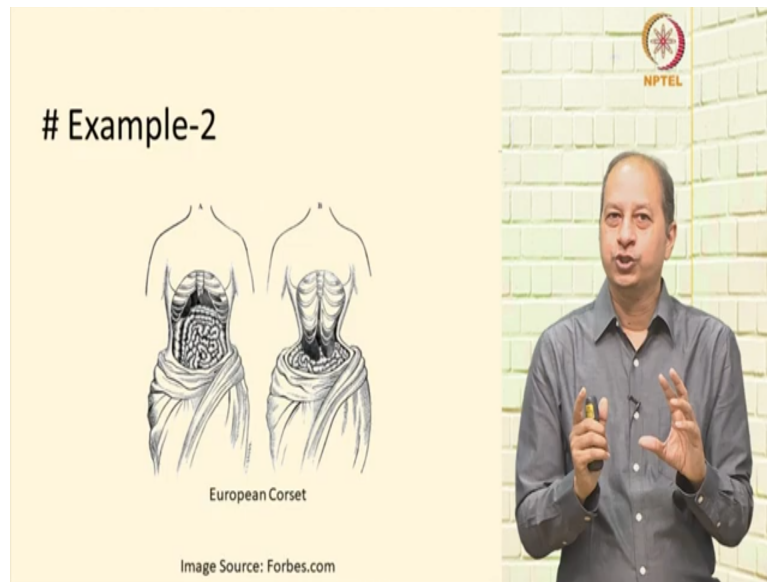
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### # Example-1



So, there is an x-ray of the bound feet; as a result of wearing the lotus shoes this happened. So, it severely deformed the ankles and the feet as well; so that is the impact of body shaping. But, many societies practiced that.

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Then, there is another example that is taken from the European corset practice or corset culture. So, on your screen you can see two body images: one on the left and the other one right. You can see the image on the right is the result of this corset culture; so how severely it has been formed or restructured the entire body including the skeleton, including the rib cage, and the intestines. Now, look at the position of the intestines as well, the European corset so, that is again amines; that is again a huge huge problem.

So, we need to be aware of the body shaping culture, and if you can quickly recall the kind of things that people do to their bodies in our times. Today in contemporary times they give a certain desired shape to their bodies in an unnatural manner.

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So, we will quickly get to imagine these things; these are the things that people do in order to give a certain shape to their bodies starting with injections. Face lifting, then hardware cosmetology or cosmetology in general, trichology and then body shaping through certain mechanical devices or gadgets, so, that is the impact of body shaping. But, we all want our body to be shaped to be sculpted in a certain manner; so that it commands social approval and recognition- so, that is how we approach our bodies and that is exactly what we do to our bodies; so that is the impact of body shaping in our times. Body shaping is very closely associated with another concept that is fat oppression. So, fat oppression was popularized by Judith Stein, one of the pioneers of the fat liberation movement. She very strongly suggests that fat oppression does not just affect people who are fat, I mean men and women who are fat. It really works to keep everyone in line. In line that means you do not cross that fat line; so it is a whole system of social control that keeps thin women. Absolutely terrified of being fat or thinking they are fat; and a whole lot of energy goes into dealing with fat.

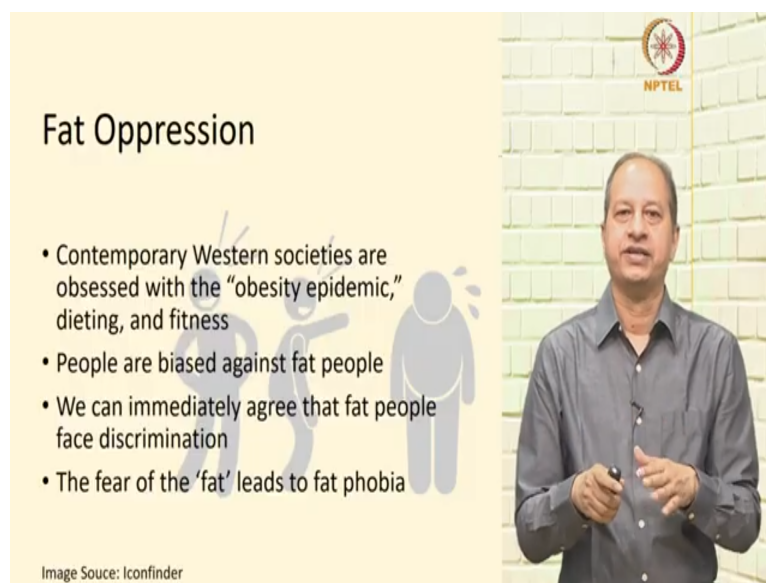
So, if you look at how our society is struggling with fat; you will be able to understand this particular phenomenon. So, it also keeps women who are medium sized, absolutely panic stricken; because they are right on the border. So, if somebody is thin, they are also terrified; thinking they might add some more fat to their already thin body. Those who are medium sized



are panic stricken; because they are right on the borderline. Those who are already fat added some fat to themselves; they bear the brunt of the social taunting, social ostracization.

So, fat oppression is everywhere; it is pervasive because we all deal with fat. Therefore, the moment you switch on your television, you pick any magazine; you open your social media platforms. You are bombarded with these anti-fat ideas; everywhere anti-fatty images and anti-fat ideas. So, we all are struggling with the demon called fat; so that is therefore it is a very very important concept.

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The slide is titled "Fat Oppression" in a bold, black font. Below the title, there is a bulleted list of four points. To the right of the text, there is a faint illustration of three stylized human figures of different sizes. In the background, a man in a blue shirt is speaking, and the NPTEL logo is visible in the top right corner.

- Contemporary Western societies are obsessed with the "obesity epidemic," dieting, and fitness
- People are biased against fat people
- We can immediately agree that fat people face discrimination
- The fear of the 'fat' leads to fat phobia


Image Source: Iconfinder

So, fat oppression is extremely pervasive in western societies, but it has traveled to the eastern societies as well. So, there is something that is called the obesity epidemic that the western societies are struggling with. The eastern societies have also started struggling with the obesity epidemic; that is why we have so many body shaping gyms, body shaping supplements in the market. Body shaping images flooding our media escapes. So, the eastern societies are not far away from this obesity epidemic as well.

So, now most people are generally biased against the fat people; therefore the fat people are subjected to social ridicule. And then we cannot disagree that fat people are not discriminated against; they are discriminated; because they become the butt of laughter. They are ridiculed, they figure in humorous activities or comic activities. So, therefore the fear of the fat leads to a


kind of phobia that is called phobia; we call experience the fat phobia. Some of us can be absolutely unmindful and not mind having a little fat or adding fat to ourselves. But, most of us experience this fat phobia.

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### Body Shame and Guilt

- Body shaming occurs among both men and women of all different shapes and body sizes
- Criticizing your own appearance, through a judgment of or comparison to another person
- It often leads to comparison and shame, and perpetuates the idea that people should be judged mainly for their physical features
- Body shaming has included both criticisms of being “too fat” or “too skinny”



So, that in fact results in body shame and guilt; that is a serious problem body shame and guilt. Because body shaming occurs among both men and women of different shapes and body sizes. So, if you have a certain body shape or size, since most of us cannot achieve that perfect body ideal; it generally falls short of it or way behind it, and we experience body shame and guilt. So, then we begin to criticize our appearance through judgment or comparison. We become our worst enemies and then this particular type of comparison and judgment, often leads to shame.

And then perpetuates the idea that people should be judged mainly for their physical features; and that is how your goodness, your inner strength, your inner goodness is not recognized. It becomes invisible to people, because the physical features and the physical appearance becomes the most important object. So, body shaming occurs on either side of the body image axis; it can occur with people who are too fat or even with people who are too skinny. So, it can happen to anybody.

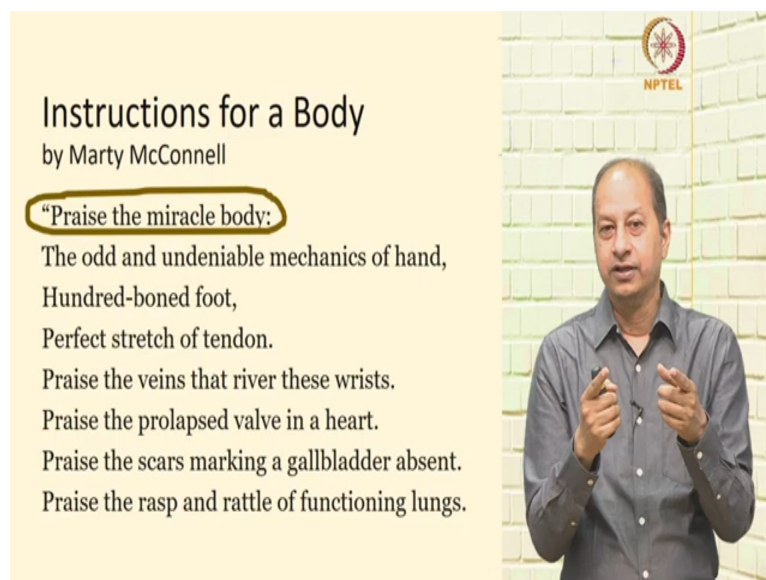
So, when body shame and guilt happens that leads to serious problems. And if we do not wake up to that particular thing, then we might end up becoming our worst enemies; and treating our

body as our biggest enemy. So, with that in mind, I will now walk you through Marty McConnell's instructions for the body. But, before that I must tell you that there are a few questions that we need to answer before we go there; we go to instructions for the body.

What happens when the body shame and guilt take a worse turn? We tend to ignore this body, reject this body; we dissociate ourselves from this body. We say this body does not belong to me; I cannot have such an ugly body. So, we reject this body and then does such behaviour create a vicious cycle of body hatred? Yes, once you engage in body hatred, body rejection; it will create a vicious cycle that will continue until and unless you decide to put an end to it.

Now on the flip side, if I learn to register my gratitude for the body that I have. Instead of hating this body, rejecting this body, dissociating oneself from this body, if I develop a sense of gratitude for the body that I have, then what? So, with these ideas in mind, I will now take you to Marty McConnell, "Instructions for the Body" to show you how this particular quality composition acts as a set of coping skills. That is a reason why I find this particular poem extremely interesting; because this is not about coping skills; this is a coping skills point; so that makes it very very interesting.

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**Instructions for a Body**  
by Marty McConnell

**"Praise the miracle body:**  
The odd and undeniable mechanics of hand,  
Hundred-boned foot,  
Perfect stretch of tendon.  
Praise the veins that river these wrists.  
Praise the prolapsed valve in a heart.  
Praise the scars marking a gallbladder absent.  
Praise the rasp and rattle of functioning lungs.

So, we start with a very important approach; it is all about how we approach the whole issue. If I treat my body as my enemy, I will approach it as an enemy. If I treat my body as my friend, I will

approach it as my friend; and how do we approach our friends? We generally greet our friends. We generally praise and appreciate the things that our friends do for ourselves; so we need to start with this praise. So, praise the miracle body: this is not only a body; this is a piece of miracle.

When you gradually enter your body and develop some kind of affinity with each and every part of it; then you gradually discover that this is not only a piece of socially determined, culturally determined object artifact. This is a miracle, so that is exactly how Marty McConnell begins by; so, praise the miracle body. There are so many things that we have, even if we miss something; even if we have to give up some problems.

For example, praise the scars, marking a gallbladder absent. If your gallbladder has been taken away due to a surgery problem; you can praise these scars that show you that you had a gallbladder once, so this is a miracle party. Now, the veins river your wrists, rattle of functioning lungs; we can praise everything. The perfect stretch of the tendon, we can praise everything.

There are so many things about this body that we can praise; but do we do that? We treat this body as an object, as an artifact which can be praised only when it becomes a certain size or shape; that is a misconception which McConnell is trying to break. So, it is all about praising; so praising is an act of gratitude. We need to praise the things that we have instead of blaming the things that we do not have. So, it is all about engaging in a very positive approach or activity.

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Praise the pre-arthritis ache of elbows and ankles.  
Praise the life line sectioning a palm.  
Praise the photographic pads of fingertips.  
Praise the vulnerable dip at the base of a throat.  
Praise the muscles surfacing on an abdomen.  
Praise these arms that carry babies and anthologies.  
Praise the leg hairs that sprout and are shaved.  
Praise the ass that refuses to shrink or be hidden.  
Praise the cunt that bleeds and accepts,  
Bleeds and accepts.  
Praise the prominent ridge of nose.  
Praise the strange convexity of rib cage.



And then we pass through several lines all of them starting with that one magical word praise; so, we can praise so many things. So, when you go through these lines, you gradually discover that this body is a miracle. It is a mechanism that is miraculous; it acts in a very very miraculous strange manner, which we do not try to understand. All that we try to engage with is the outward appearance of this body. So, this body has so many things, so many things that we can look up to and praise.

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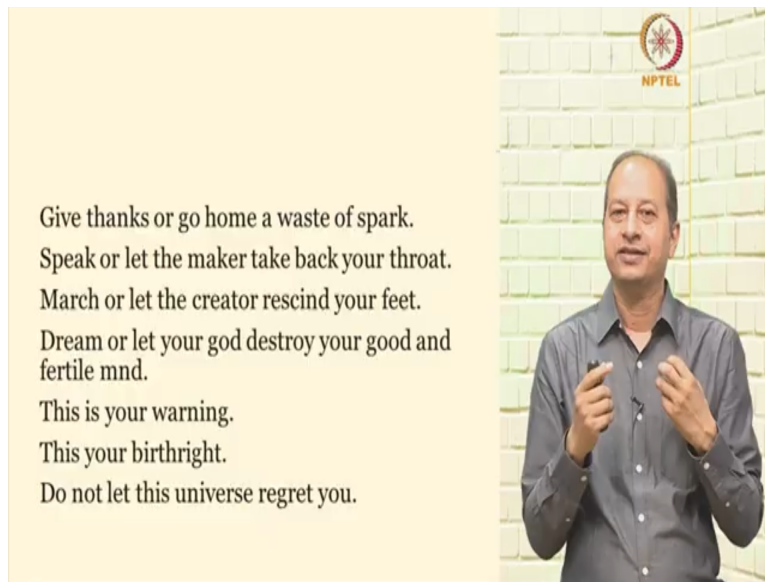
#### Give thanks

For chaos theory, ecology, common sense  
That says we are web,  
A planet in balance or out,  
That butterfly in Tokyo setting off  
thunderstorms in Iowa.  
Tell me you don't matter to a universe that  
conspired  
To give you such a tongue,  
Such rhythm or rhythmless hips,  
Such opposable thumbs.



So, then there is a shift; we now come to a very different type of approach from praise. It is now giving thanks or thanksgiving; so, this becomes a very very important thing here. Do we ever thank our body or do we only treat our body as our enemy? We need to thank, we need to develop a certain thankfulness in us; because we have this body that is again a very important coping skill. Praising and that is acknowledging, appreciating, recognizing or proofing; and now we come to the other side of it. That is giving thanks being thankful to something that we have. However imperfect, it maybe but we have it; and we need to be thankful for it, so she does that.

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And then we come to the last segment, where she emphasizes that this is your warning. We need to treat it as a warning; this is your birthright. This body is your birthright, you need to be thankful; you need to praise it that is your birthright. Your birthright does not tell you that you should have your body; should treat it as your enemy; so do not let this universe regret; you have a life, you have your existence, you have a body, which means a lot to you. You need to be thankful, you need to praise this body; and you need to be thankful for this body. Otherwise the universe will regret that you have this now.

So, you do things that will not make this universally great you; so that way we come to the very idea, the core idea of this composition. So, when you look at the entire upward decomposition, you will find that it projects a magnificent body with certain deformities, with certain defects. But, overall it is magnificent power, which comes to us as a gift; and we need to accept it in the shape and the size that it arrives. So, we need not bother about the things that we do not have; but we need to focus on the things that we already have.

So, what we can do is to express our gratitude and celebrate this body, embrace this body, empower this body with our positive approaches towards it. So, when you look at how each body part is carefully brought out. Pictured, painted in this entire poetic composition, you will understand that this body is in fact very very important. This body is not only about the outward

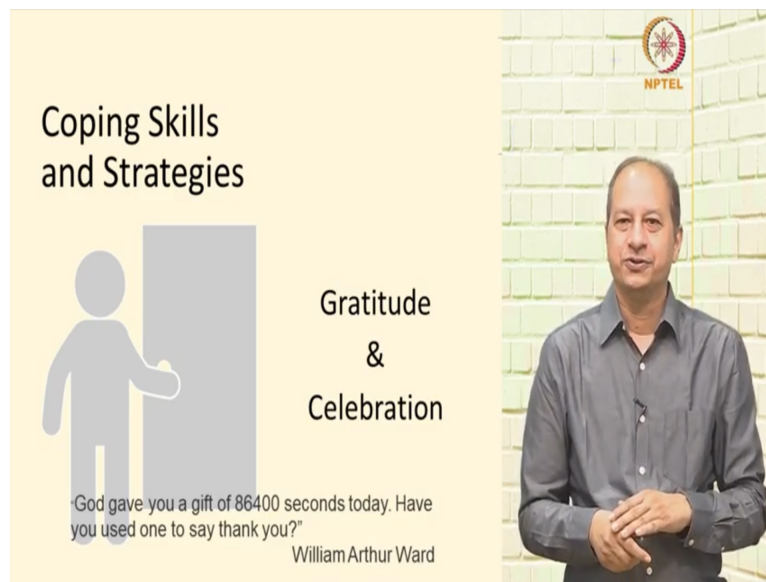


appearance; it is much more than just that; so that is how we come to it. So, when you look at the title of this composition, you will find instructions for the body.

So, McConnell is not trying to issue a set of instructions for your body; she is issuing a set of conditions that will make you wake up to the beauty of your body. And the instructions that we generally give to our bodies can be overcome, when we wake up to the beauty of this body. So, she is trying to be critical of the instructions, the prescriptions, the directives that are generally given to the body.

For example: following a strict diet regime, going for excessive exercising, and doing a variety of things to keep this body in shape and size; so that we can match the perfect body ideal. She is not issuing any instructions; those are the instructions that are given to our bodies, by either us or through those pressure sources. She is not giving any instructions to your body to anybody; so these are the ideals that are given to our bodies.

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So, when it comes to coping skills and strategies, we can start with this interesting quote by William Ward. God gave you a gift of 86400 seconds today; everyday we get that. Have you used one to say thank you? So, that is not the idea. The idea is how often we express our

gratitude to God for giving us this model; everything that we have that we own comes to us from some source from somebody, from people around us.

How often do we show our gratitude to those people? So, it is a gift that we have; and we do not recognize its value; so, it is all about gratitude and celebration. And through gratitude and celebration, we can embrace and empower our bodies with their defects, with their deformities, with their lacks; we can always celebrate this. So, McConnell is talking about these two very important skills, gratitude and celebration.

So, when that happens, with gratitude and celebration we can chat about the gift; the idea of the gift that is your body, which is given to you; which comes to you from some source. Imagine when we get a gift we feel elated, happy and that leads to the secretion of dopamine in our brain. And that makes us feel extremely good, because that also leads to the secretion of serotonin. So, every time you receive a gift, you feel extremely good and special; so also when you give a gift to others, both of you feel extremely good and special. That is the power of gifting.

So, when you have a gift, when you treat something as a gift; you will feel special and that will release dopamine in your brain. And you will feel extremely rewarded and happy; so that is the power of gift. So, the moment we begin to treat this body as a gift that comes to us from somebody; it may be the almighty or maybe our parents. Then we will experience that happiness that contentment; so that is the power of gift. And then if I can quote psychologists Shai Devidai and Thomas Gilovich; in one of the papers they have talked about these issues. They say that we tend to focus more on the obstacles and difficulties of life.

For example, I do not have the perfect body; that is an obstacle or difficulty for me. Because such feelings demand some action; therefore we focus on them. And we have to fight to overcome them to get back to the normal flow of life; and that is the reason why most often we think about the difficulties and obstacles. And we emphasize the difficulties and obstacles in lives; but, that is not the case on the flip side. We generally forget to attend to the better things in life, because most often we become so action oriented. And these difficulties demand some action and we recognize them.

And we tend to forget the good things that we are the better things that we have in life; because they are already there. And we do not have to do anything to make them stay with us, and that is exactly where the problem lies. So, practicing gratitude according to Gilovich is the best way to remind ourselves of the things that give us the courage to move on in life. Therefore, we need to shift the perspective from focusing too much on the obstacles, the problems, the difficulties that we have in life to the things, the better things that we have in life. So, in this case McConnell is trying to do that; we have such a miraculous thing such a beautiful wonderful thing.

And we need to focus on that and we need to be thankful for it; we need to praise the thing that we have; so that is the power of gratitude and once we show gratitude, we can develop resilience and that will lead to the celebration of life- so that is exactly what McConnell's instructions for the body talks about.

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So, that brings us to the end of this lecture and coincidentally this is the last lecture of this course; not only of this module but of this course. And I hope you have liked the things, you have found the things that I talked about in this lecture useful, informative. And with this you can now work on these ideas starting with the first coping skills idea to this one; so that you can gather a set of coping skills with the help of which, you can help yourselves overcome various

challenges in life. You can also help others around you overcome those challenges. So, thank you very much for joining me.