

The background of the slide features a textured, light beige paper-like surface. In the upper half, there are faint, dark silhouettes of mountains. On the right side, there are dark, thin branches of a willow tree with small, dark buds.

Risky Business :

The ways mother blaming
in the media derails
FASD discourse

The background of the slide features a soft, textured illustration. In the upper half, there are faint, rolling mountain peaks in shades of light brown and beige. On the right side, a willow tree with long, thin, drooping branches is depicted, each branch adorned with numerous small, dark, circular buds or leaves. The overall aesthetic is calm and naturalistic.

When Personal Becomes Political

Exploring Pregnancy, Mothering &
Substance Use in the Context of
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Prevention is complicated...

- ❖ Since the mid 70's prenatal alcohol exposure has received significant publicity in North America
- ❖ The inevitable response to this costly and tragic outcome of maternal drinking is sadness/outrage- often directed at birth mothers...

Prevention con't...

- ❖ Yet the life context of mothers is rarely part of this discourse, the role of her partner even less so...
- ❖ We have forgotten our shared responsibility to care for mother so she can care for her child...Doula principle

Liberal understandings of good citizenship

- ❖ Liberalism assumes individuals have full capacity to control their actions and move through social systems (or society in general) at will
- ❖ Citizenship is based on this standard
- ❖ We value persons that contribute as “good citizens” in society

Society values citizens able to contribute to the common good...

And families- grandparents, mothers, fathers etc. - have a passionate interest in healthy babies.

Society requires and appreciates the benefits of citizens that can participate actively in keeping the business of communal living moving along.

Societal Viewpoints on Motherhood...

Issues like pregnancy and substance use frequently reflect patriarchal and/or “religious right” viewpoints regarding women

Society often has a strikingly simplistic response to substance use/recovery and most understanding relates to male usage.

Literature review

Armstrong, Elizabeth. (1998). Diagnosing moral disorder: the discovery and evolution of foetal alcohol syndrome.

Armstrong follows public awareness of addictions from being seen as an exclusively male problem (to be disapproved of by women in the prohibition era) to being viewed as an illness within the medical model and finally to recognizing that women also have addictions.

Armstrong cont'd

Once FAS was identified as the possible outcome of female substance use, the ensuing outrage focused on addicted females as 'bad' and immoral, rather than humans in need of support.

Armstrong cont'd

Eventual awareness within the medical community that health providers have two patients to address: the mother and the affected individual.

Courtwright article

Courtwright, David. (2004). How real is fetal alcohol syndrome?

Identifies gaps in research regarding the complete aetiology of FAS & apparent contradictions in findings regarding the number of ETOH exposed babies that actually are born with no evidence of harm.

Courtwright article cont'd

Contends FAS is a social/moral rather than medical construct and that FAS only 'began to occur' when it was diagnosed, thus implying that prior to 1972 no such cases existed.

Courtwright article cont'd

Suggests that alcohol is only one (minor) factor in producing foetal harm and should be carefully evaluated before being identified as the main contributor.

While this stance may ameliorate the blaming and shaming that pregnant substance using mothers (especially women in minority groups and /or those living in poverty and under duress) experience, it does not address the risk of alcohol use during pregnancy.

DeVille & Kopelman

DeVille, K.A, Kopelman, L.M. (1998). Substance abuse in pregnancy: moral and social issues regarding pregnant women who use and abuse drugs.

Medical framework has created sanctions for optimal 'pregnant' behaviours & increasingly holds women accountable for pregnancy outcomes.

DeVille & Kopelman cont'd

Point out that society often fails to acknowledge any aspect of the role of the male partner, as well as the social and physical milieu, in pregnancy outcomes.

DeVille & Kopelman cont'd

Societal views regarding pregnancy outcomes on our future citizens; usually results in pitting rights of the foetus against the rights of the mother; ending with limiting of liberty for the mother.

DeVille & Kopelman cont'd

Identify the challenge of balancing two values that society holds dear:

moral duty to protect the unborn and/or other vulnerable citizens versus individual liberty

Janet Golden

Golden, Janet. (2000). A tempest in a cocktail glass:
mothers, alcohol and television 1977-1996.

Follows (American) evening
television news depictions over
a 20 year period linking alcohol,
pregnancy, and foetal harm...

Janet Golden cont'd

evolved from generalized concern over the drinking patterns of middle class women towards blaming marginalized women for consuming substances 'without concern for the outcomes this use has upon their children'

Janet Golden cont'd

& traces move from addictions as a public health concern (related to males) to 'danger to society' viewpoints and moral failing (for women) punishable by law, even though this collides with individual rights.

“wayward wombs” ...
scorn that society reserves for
mothers who ‘prefer ‘drugs to
nutrients and partying to nurturing,
while refusing to consider the
emotional states of those who find
themselves in the predicament of
poverty, violence and substance use
while pregnant. (Golden)

Janet Golden cont'd

‘mother /foetus divide’ a consequence

1. desire for increasingly invasive interventions during pregnancy subsequent to medical advances with premature babies
2. increasing publicity & concern over crack use during pregnancy
3. legalized abortion debate

Pederson et al

Greaves, L., Pederson, A., Varcoe, C., Poole, N., Morrow, M., Irwin, L. (2004) Mothering under duress: women caught in a web of discourse.

Mothering can be fraught with complications and pressures and occurs in various circumstances and contexts...

Pederson et al cont'd

...expectations for all mothers are the same, i.e. they must lay aside their own needs for their children (born and unborn)

...yet there exists no level playing field from which to actualize this expectation.

Whenever parents, especially mothers, are singled out as the ones responsible for societal well-being compliments of their role as child bearers/rearers, the blaming and shaming of those who 'fail' in this god-like task is a logical outcome.

Pederson et al cont'd

With child protection legislation and the growing awareness that children require/deserve state-protected safety and adequate care, came promotion of child centred interventions juxtaposed against parent centred intervention

Pederson et al cont'd

This has resulted in pitting the rights of parents against those of children and subsequent splitting of the family wellness model into competing parts.

Status of Women Canada

- ❖ A Motherhood Issue: Discourses on Mothering Under Duress (Poole et al)
- ❖ Examined how mothers who experience mental health/addiction problems are portrayed in media, policy, the public and among themselves
- ❖ Women are “responsible at best and monsters at worst”

Who's responsible?

- ❖ When mental health problems are present, the challenges she faces such as finding adequate treatment, or housing deemed out of a woman's control
- ❖ The system is considered to be partially to blame

Who's responsible?

- ❖ When a woman is being abused, the situation is seen as partly in her control
- ❖ Poor outcomes seen as only partially a failure of the system
- ❖ Emphasis on caring for children over caring for the mother

Who's responsible?

- ❖ Women using substances are deemed to be deliberately making poor choices; “life style problem”
- ❖ System is not to blame when services fail her
- ❖ Children portrayed in the media as victims, need for services is child focused

Ladd-Taylor

Ladd-Taylor, Molly. (2004). Mother-worship/mother blame: politics and welfare in an uncertain age.

Contends that our current preoccupation with blame has nowhere been more damaging than when it has been directed at mothers.

Yes, it is a relief that mothers no longer have to conform to the Madonna/saint model, however, painting them as societal enemies and monsters when they do not appear to prioritize the needs of their offspring is hardly an improvement.

Disadvantaged mothers,
deserve neither the entire
blame for a generation of
troubled youth, nor the charge
of murder when they are
found to have caused either
inadvertent or 'deliberate'
foetal harm.

McCormack, Thelma

McCormack, Thelma. (1999) Foetal syndrome and the charter: the Winnipeg glue-sniffing case

Review of the case of the young Manitoba woman who was court-ordered to remain in treatment while she was pregnant and substance using.

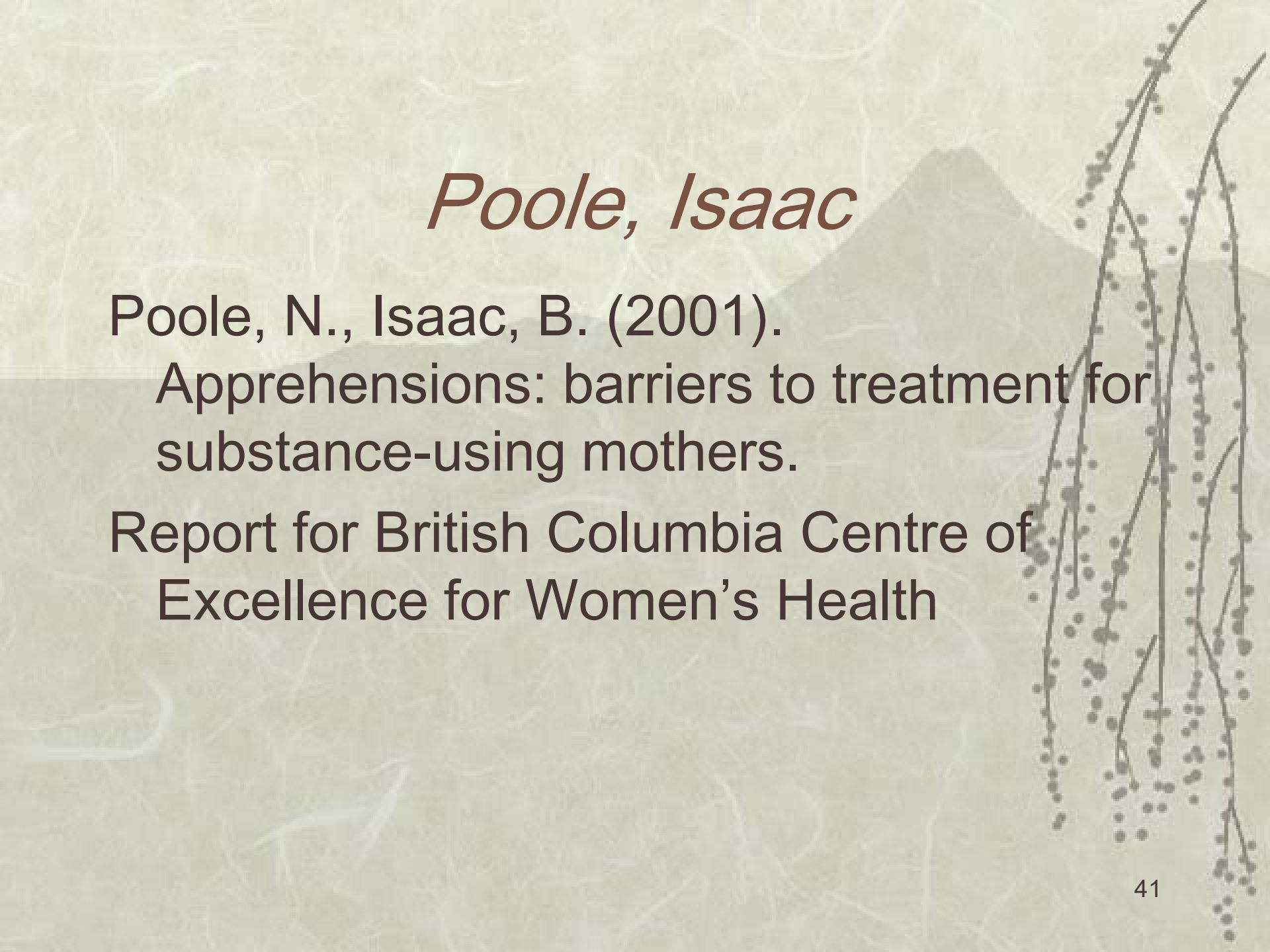
Challenges the dichotomy produced by scientific discourse when it intersects with the legal system and societal scrutiny... McCormack contends that we have failed to reconcile constitutional law with women's rights during gestation, reflected by shortcomings of existing treatment interventions for addicted mothers.

Autonomy, beneficence, and application of the 'harm principle' result in pitting the rights and obligations of mothers and their health providers against that of the foetus, while denying the possibility of a unique entity that is 'mother/foetus during gestation.

Canadian policy is largely ***women-centred*** because of the Charter and dismisses the rights and needs of the foetus; ***foetus centred*** focus (often the stance of pro-life groups) also does not do full justice to the issue...

...because these (patriarchal)
opposing stances view mother
and foetus as distinct
individuals

A much richer perspective is
provided by the notion of
'pregnant embodiment', as
framed by Greaves and
colleagues (2002)

The background of the slide features a faint, artistic illustration. On the right side, there is a weeping willow tree with long, thin branches and small, dark, round leaves. In the background, behind the tree and text, is a silhouette of a mountain range under a light, textured sky.

Poole, Isaac

Poole, N., Isaac, B. (2001).

Apprehensions: barriers to treatment for substance-using mothers.

Report for British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health

One of several Canadian versions of the California 'barriers to treatment for substance using women during gestation' study completed by Klien, D., CZahnd, E. (1997).

This report proposes that interventions for an addicted woman be framed/addressed almost exclusively in the context of her entire set of relationships in order to prevent post treatment drift and/or alienation from her support group.

Corse, McHugh, Gordon

Corse, Sara J., McHugh, M.K., Gordon, S.M. (1995).
Enhancing provider effectiveness in treating pregnant
women with addictions

American study; articulates the
need for alternative approaches to
addictions treatment for substance
-using pregnant women...

Corse, McHugh, Gordon cont'd

...innovative program where the focus is on incorporating addictions interventions into the nurse-midwife role through the provision of comprehensive services: medical clinic setting.

Corse, McHugh, Gordon cont'd

- ❖ Medical setting due to lack of woman-centred addictions treatment facilities and programs available to pregnant women
- ❖ Canada & USA rarely offer childcare and comprehensive services to substance using women.

Jos, Perlmutter & Marshall

Jos, P.H., Perlmutter, M., Marshall, M.F. (2003).
Substance abuse during pregnancy: clinical and
public health approaches

Explores the relationship that
professionals in general and
medical professionals in
particular, have with their
patients/clients/consumers.

Original intent of this relationship was rooted in the principles of confidentiality, client best interest, and ability of the professional to grant authoritative input into client decision making while recognizing and balancing the inherent right of the client to refuse the advice.

In this relationship confidentiality may be compromised only in cases where the possibility exists of third party harm.

As mandatory reporting becomes more common this relationship is being undermined.

In the case of mother/foetus, professionals are caught in the dilemma between patient confidentiality, public policy regarding healthy birth outcomes, and the risk of alienating patients/clients, who may never return for care.

A clinical model of intervention remains centred around personal responsibility for optimum health. A public health care focus shifts programs and policies to the *milieu*, recognizing individual health as a consequence of personal choices & the *collectively created social environment*.

Therefore, there are distinct limits of clinical (medical) treatment as intervention for pregnant substance use...and high need for macro (societal) solutions to address substance use for pregnant women.

Klien, Crim & Zahnd

Klien, D., Crim, D., Zahnd, E. (1997). Perspectives of pregnant substance-using women: findings from the California needs assessment

Explores the self-stated reasons that women give for not entering into treatment programs for drug/ETOH misuse, particularly during gestation.

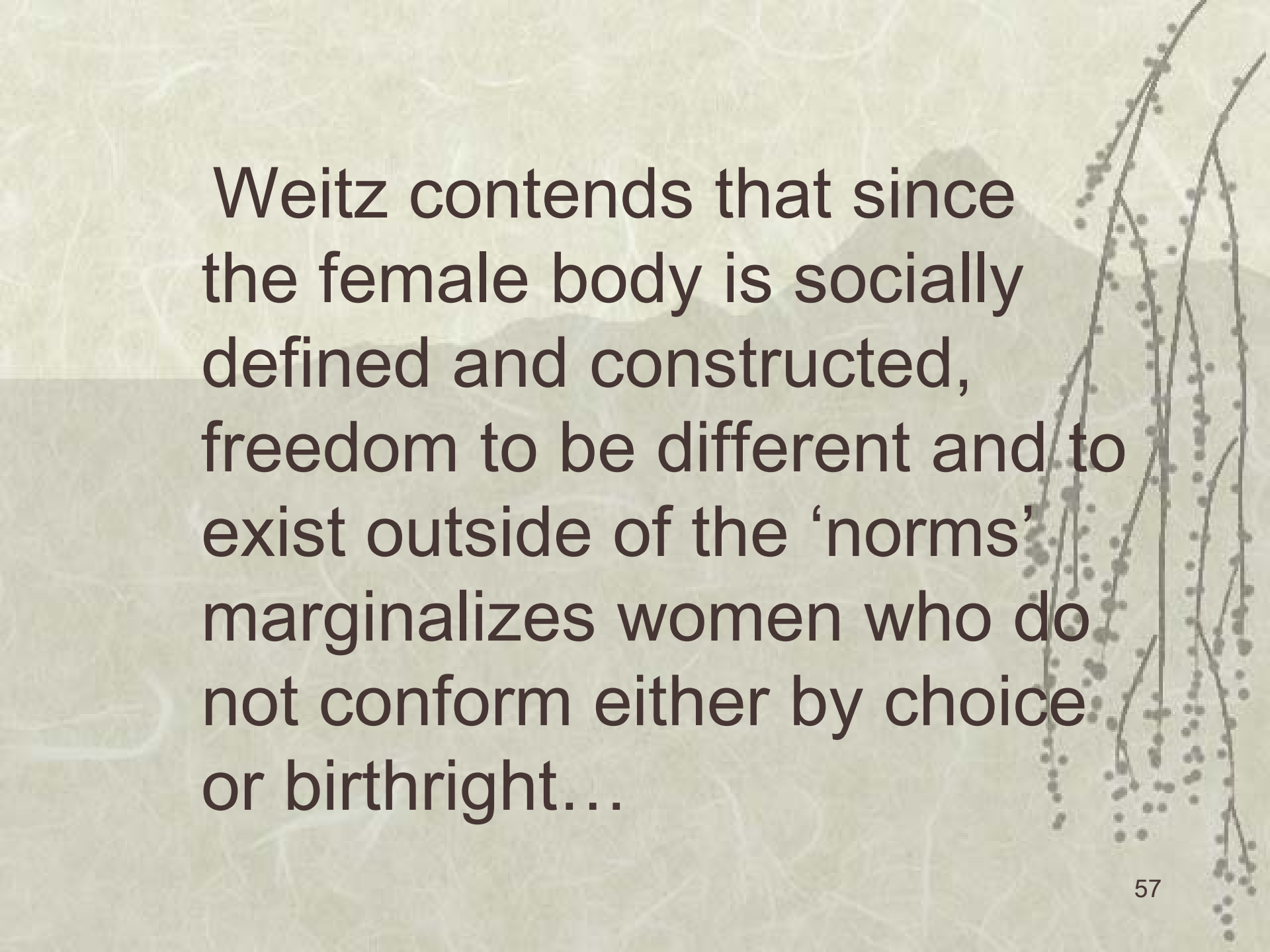
Most often the reasons given centre on the demands of childcare and lack of appropriate services for women; as well most (American) addiction programs refuse pregnant females the chance to enter treatment based on the fear of reprisal in the form of a lawsuit should there be later evidence of foetal harm.

Women frequently self-reported that they were able to reduce their substance use during pregnancy on their own, that their fears of child protection intervention kept them from seeking help, that their social situations were severely complicated, and ***that they had significant emotional challenges.***

Weitz, Rose

Weitz, Rose (Editor). (1998). The politics of women's bodies: sexuality appearance and behaviour.

Collection of essays that explore the construct of the female form as an adjunct to male definitions of the female role in society.

The background of the slide features a soft-focus image of a mountain range under a hazy sky. In the foreground on the right side, there are several thin, dark, drooping branches of a willow tree, adorned with small, dark, round buds or leaves. The overall color palette is muted, consisting of earthy greens, greys, and browns.

Weitz contends that since the female body is socially defined and constructed, freedom to be different and to exist outside of the 'norms' marginalizes women who do not conform either by choice or birthright...

And provides background to the discussions regarding societal views on mothering, on becoming sexually active, and on male-female relationships as the only choice that is sanctioned by society.

Weitz: While these discourses are limiting, far more damaging are the political tools and policy norms generated by a patriarchal mindset that continue to oppress women.