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Deconstructing 'Gender and Development' for 'Identities of Women'

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Abstract

In this article, the *gender and development* paradigm is critically reviewed and an alternative framework of research – *identities of women* – is proposed. This article contends that the *gender and development* paradigm is primarily guided by the tenets of Western feminisms and economic development. The article also highlights the other limitations of the paradigm, including its preoccupation with male-female inequalities, macro generalisations and symbolic representation of women, and absence of local contexts. The *identities of women* framework proposes to address the limitations of the *gender and development* paradigm by studying women's conception of their environment and women's understanding of their relationship with these environments The *identities of women* framework is informed by poststructuralist critique of feminism, cultural anthropology and a socio-psychological approach to identity.

The recognition of women and their needs in the developing world as unique was primarily due to efforts by Western feminist researchers to create awareness about the powerless situation of women in developing societies (Connelly, Murray-Li, MacDonald & Parpart, 2002; Moghadam, 1998). Currently, both planners of economic development and feminists understand the situation and needs of women in developing societies through the framework provided by the *gender and development* paradigm. This article addresses the problems with applying the *gender and development* paradigm in research and practice with women in developing societies and proposes an alternative framework called the '*identities of women*'.

Statement of the problem

Research informed by the *gender and development* paradigm primarily uses a *person in environment* approach to frame research questions and practice initiatives, for example by researching women as part of 'the family' or 'the household'. This is because the transition from a developing into a developed society is visible in changing social systems such as production systems and systems of family relations. Furthermore, theories of Western feminism and agenda of economic development guide the understanding of these environments, although the *gender and development* paradigm has recently evolved to include aspects of local culture and indigenous feminisms. Lastly, the goal of research and interventions developed within the framework of the *gender and development* paradigm is to help women make the transition into a modern society. Thus, the process of transition into modern society is presented as a solution to women's problems in formerly traditional societies.

This article reviews the social system-based approach of the *gender and development* paradigm to women in developing countries and identifies the following themes in its applications: (a) primacy of development-focused goals, such as exploring links between the

status of women and fertility outcomes; (b) inadequate representation of local culture, values and realities in favour of the ideals of Western feminism; (c) broad generalisations about developing societies and the women in them, such as male-female inequalities across social systems and processes; and (d) piecemeal and symbolic representation of women that characterises women's opinion as an outcome of social oppression.

This article presents an alternative framework for research and practice with women in developing societies – *identities of women*. Women's self-conception, the multiple social environments that are relevant to individual women and women's relationship with those environments – as perceived by individual women, are the three main principles that inform the *identities of women* framework. The i*dentities of women* framework prevents the redefinition of women, based on external assessments of their reality and the externally driven need for change, present in the *gender and development* framework. Instead, it proposes the realisation of individual women's aspiration through the acknowledgement and acceptance of their present identities.

This article is organised into three main parts. The first part is a critical review of the conceptual framework of the *gender and development* paradigm. The second part of the article introduces the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the *identities of women* framework. The final part of the article is a summary comparison of the *gender and development* paradigm and the *identities of women* framework.

Gender and development paradigm

The *gender and development* paradigm (Moser, 1989) emerged in the early 1970s as a response to the perceived marginalisation of women from the economic development process. Early development planners considered women a symbol of the traditional culture of their societies and thus as an economic and developmental liability (Young, 1993). Boserup's

(1970) study marks the beginning of research on how women's roles changed during economic and social development (Haider, 1995; Momsen, 2004). Such gender-focused studies, along with feminist arguments about the social construction of gender and gender hierarchies, highlight both women's potential as economic assets and the social forces that often resist women's contributions (Bhavnani, Foran & Kurian, 2003a; Chow & Lyter, 2002; Haider, 1995; Momsen, 2004; Young, 1993).

From WID to WCD: contexts, theories and concepts

The *gender and development* paradigm has acquired a central place in many studies on the impact of development and modernisation on women in developing societies. However, the dynamic nature of these societies, the complexity of the change process and conflicting outcomes of development have led to the evolution of four phases within the paradigm: w*omen in development* (WID), w*omen and development* (WAD), g*ender and development* (GAD) and w*omen, culture, and development* (Rathgeber, 1990). While all four phases share some basic tenets, each proposes a unique understanding of women, development, indigenous culture, and their relationship to one another. Each of the four phases informs current development practice and research with women. A comparison of the different phases of the paradigm (including the evolution, primary concepts, analytical framework, contributions and common criticisms of each phase) is presented in Table 1[1].

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[1] Table 1 is a synthesis and analysis of the primary published works that study and apply the *gender and development* paradigm (Bhavnani et al., 2003a; Chow & Lyter, 2002; Connelly et al., 2002; Evans & Stephens, 1988; Gordon, 1996; Haider, 1995; Jahan, 1995; Kabeer, 1999; Moghadam, 1998; Momsen, 2004; Parpart, 1993; Parpart, Connelly et al., 2002; Rathgeber, 1990; Sen, 1999; Sen & Grown, 1997; Sethi, 1999; Worseley, 1984).

Table 1. Gender and development paradigm: from WID to WCD[a].

	W I D	**WAD**	**GAD**	**WCD**
	BACKGROUND			
Time period[b]	1960s and early 1970s	Mid-1970s to mid-1980s	Mid-1980s to present	Late 1990s and 2000
Historical context	- In response to Welfarism[c]	- Part of the adverse reaction to Capitalism	- Western academics criticisms of World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies for structural change in third world economies[e]	-Third World feminists' aversion to grand theories
	- End of 1st development phase; coincided with the rise of the Western feminist movement in 1968	- Influenced by *Marxism*	- Growing realisation of ineffectiveness of Structural Adjustment Programs	- Reaction to perceived Western cultural hegemony
	Boserup (1970) challenged the 'trickle down' effect of economic theory[d]	- NGO's work with women.	- Crash of South-East Asian economies	- Growing influence of Third World academics
Origin	A Non-profit group	United Nations (1976-1985)	Third world feminists' and social activists'[f] reactions to con-current develop-ment agenda	Worsely (1984) discussed culture as a 'missing concept' in development[g]
Influential feminisms [hi]	Western Liberal Feminism	Marxist feminism	Radical and Socialist feminisms	Postmodernist feminism
Related theories	Neo-classical economic theory [j]	Dependency theory[k]	Patriarchy and gender stratification	Culture studies, Third-World studies
	CONCEPTS			
Attitude toward development	Pro-efficiency and anti-poverty	Self-sufficiency and Self-organisation	Symbolic of power inequality in social relations between men and women	Right balance between global and local; environment and science and technology; values, identity and institutions and production

	W I D	**WAD**	**GAD**	**WCD**
Approach to development and women	Integration of development and women's agenda	Rejection of both incorporated women and development into the goal for a new economic structure	Incorporated social construction of gender into development)	Inclusive (women and development and culture)
Development and the traditional / indigenous culture	Local, traditional culture – a barrier to growth	Endorses a unifying homogenous culture that promotes economic equality	Oppressive and maintained through patriarchy	Redeeming, intricate, contextual, and essential to maintain local system of values, beliefs and actions
Patriarchy	Criticizes it and the dependence it propagates; sees economic role for women as a solution.	Negates its importance; class-based discrimination is given more importance	Single most important construct and the overarching assumption for most traditional societies	One of the many realities in women's lives
Symbolism of women	Potential as economically productive units	- As members of the have-not group of? the unindustrialised nations - Symbol of macro-level inequalities, such as class	- Gender as a social construction, true across societies - Monolithic third world woman	- Reduced symbolism, - Wholesome entity; - Incorporating the three earlier phases

ANALYSIS

	W I D	**WAD**	**GAD**	**WCD**
Study of women's Context	Within modernisation	Part of other domains of stratification	Systems of gender stratification	Deconstructed and reconstituted cultures
Role of women (production vs. reproduction)	Equity with men as productive agents	Emphasis on productive	Varies	Inseparable productive and reproductive roles
Primary Focus (Structure/Agency)	Structure (social systems)	Collective Agency (not specifically women)	Structure (social systems)	Agency & structure Women and their social systems
Research Focus	Single dimension: Economics	Multidimensional, but class is primary	Single dimension: gender	Multidimensional, but culture is primary
Interventionist approach	Yes – through training and resource allocation	Yes – through self-help organisations and traditional income generation	No – more focused on policy change: Socialist state welfare that encourages state subsidy of education and health	No – draws from an anthropological understanding.
Major contributions	Made women central to development process	Highlighted the need for accurate measurements to assess the position of women	Integrated women's existence within the household with the labour market	Made the category 'women in third world' more flexible and highlighted variations in local contexts of women
Criticisms	Ethnocentric; does not challenge any aspect of capital-ism, modernisation, or its usefulness for	Does not see a difference between men and women's problems; focuses on women's productive role and ignores reproductive	Gynocentric, reductionist understanding of gender	Might lead to local culture hegemony as the one associated with global modernity

	W I D	**WAD**	**GAD**	**WCD**
Deconstruction of agenda	women in non-industrialised societies Conservative, capitalist, economic, and productivity bias	Reactionary third world perspective of perceived neo-colonization	Revolutionary Western feminist ideology with *made to fit* categorisation of development and women	Pacifistic Third-World feminist take on Western feminism in support of capitalist economy

[a]WID is women in Development (WID); WAD is Women and Development (WAD); GAD is Gender and Development (GAD); WCD is Women and Culture and Development (WCD). [b]Length of time when the particular phase of the paradigm was of primary importance. [c]Stereotyping women and their traditional role (Agarwal, Humphries & Robyens, 2003). [d](Boserup, 1970). [e](SAP) structural adjustment programs based on liberal development (Young, 1993). [f]DAWN, the organisation Development Alternatives for a New Era, was the primary spokesperson (Sen & Grown, 1997). [g]Culture has been considered important for a long time now. In fact more than one contender exists for the origin of WCD (Bhavnani et al., 2003a). [h]Primary source: Connelly et al., 2002. [i]For definitions and descriptions of the different types of feminisms see Boles & Hoeveler, 2004. [j]Key words in neo-classical economic Theory are 'maximisation of market potential', and individual utility (Ghosh, 2001). [k]Dependency theory separates development from capitalism and argues for more self-reliance for third world countries rather than reliance on foreign aid.

Each phase of the paradigm builds on the previous phase by addressing the changing social realities of developing societies. Further, each phase was based on concurrent social ideologies. All four phases use feminist and development thought to explain the situation of women in developing countries and to format the future agenda for their well-being. While all share a similar foundation, these phases represent differing perspectives within feminist and development thought. For instance, WID and GAD both emphasise the role of society and its institutions in determining women's participation in development, but differ in their definition of well-being for women. WID's argument is based on the economic utility of women and the benefits women gain from economic change. GAD bases its argument on patriarchy and the resulting unequal social relations between men and women. On the other hand, WAD and WCD are invested in the agency (Kabeer, 1999) of women rather than the influence of institutions. WAD focuses primarily on the economic agency of women, while WCD perceives women's agency to be present across social and economic domains. In WID, women's agency represents collective action, while WCD defines women's agency as a

primarily individual undertaking that differs across groups and cultures (Chua, Bhavnani, &

Foran, 2000).

Evolution of the *gender and development* paradigm parallels the evolution of feminist

thinking (Bhavnani et al., 2003a; Chua et al., 2000; Connelly et al., 2002; Enders- Dragaesser,

1988; Parpart, Connelly & Barritreau, 2002; Rathgeber, 1990). Liberal feminism informed the

WID focus on integrating women into the economy, while Marxist feminism moved the

gender and development paradigm toward WAD's class-based understanding of

discrimination and marginalisation of women (Rathgeber, 1990). Radical and socialist

feminisms, which focused on the imbalance of power in social relationships between men and

women and on the holistic development of women, were the basis of GAD (Connelly et al.,

2002). Postmodernist thinking in feminism questioned the false uniformities created by

categories like *gender,* giving rise to WCD (Connelly et al., 2002; Miller, 2000).

The influence of feminist thought is also reflected in the characterization of patriarchy

represented in each phase of the *gender and development* paradigm. WID was conceived as a

response to patriarchy within the family, while WAD associated patriarchy with

discrimination practiced by the *haves* against the *have-nots*. In the development of GAD,

patriarchy was the raison d'être, as GAD emphasises women's vulnerable position in society

in comparison with men. In WCD, patriarchy is not a homogenous construct, but is a product

of local cultures. Further, WCD accords equal importance to the agency of women as it does

to social systems, such as culture (Duncan, 1994; Gottfried, 1998).

Deconstructing each phase's specific agenda clarifies the rationale of the different

phases. WID presents a conservative agenda that is built around ideals of economic growth.

By adopting liberal feminists' belief in equality of opportunity for women, WID shares the

goals of growth and productivity espoused in classical theories of economics and

modernisation. WID also challenges traditional cultural values regarding women's social and

economic roles. Grounded in Marxism, WAD reflected growing dissatisfaction with capitalism's outcomes and highlighted the increasing dependence of formally socialist nations on capitalist countries. WAD's analysis of development represents women as one exploited class among many. WAD celebrates culture as a unifying element against capitalism and emphasises women's potential role as self-sufficient production agents.

GAD revolutionised the concept of gender relations by focusing primarily on the cultural context, as defined by patriarchy and social inequality instead of the economy and production relations. This phase advocates economic reliance as one way for women to step out of these relations. WCD rejects GAD's negative characterisation of culture's influence on women's lives. WCD is grounded in postmodernism and draws from cultural theories and third-world studies to create micro-frameworks for research and practice with women that reflect their local culture and values.

Paradigm lost: critique of the gender and development paradigm

This article reviews the main themes in the critique of the *gender and development* paradigm's approach. First, the paradigm measures development primarily in terms of economic outcomes (Jahan, 1995). Second, the first three phases of the *gender and development* paradigm construct uniform realities to depict women throughout the Third World (Bhavnani, Foran, & Kurian, 2003b; Gordon, 1996). The paradigm also sets unrealistic goals for women that fail to recognise the realities of their lives. Lastly, the *gender and development* paradigm does not seriously consider the opinions and world views of women themselves (Parpart, 1993; Raju, 2002).

Too often, the *gender and development* paradigm defines development in ways that highlight economic growth, at the expense of social and cultural concerns. Gordon (1996) suggests that the liberal feminists who developed WID supported a capitalist and modernist

development agenda because it validated their own positions and privileges within the world system. Such preconceived agendas lead to a disregard for the agency of women in developing societies, as visible in both GAD and WID. These agendas reflect a structural understanding of society. A case in point is the goal of reducing fertility and perpetuating family planning in developing societies. The economic perspective in WID suggests that overpopulation leads to a lack of growth and overburdening of the economy. Similarly, some proponents of the feminist perspective in GAD supports lowered fertility as a means for women to achieve social and economic independence from the control of family (Young, 1993). Although the rationales behind the two objectives are different, the desired, if somewhat crude, outcome is similar – moving women in developing societies into an increasingly socially (economically) *productive* but *non-reproductive* role.

The construction of uniform realities and their application to all women in the Third World is a popular theme in the *gender and development* paradigm critique (Bhavnani, Foran & Kurian, 2003b; Gordon, 1996; Mohanty, 1988). Jahan (1995) contends that the use of macro indicators of development in WID, such as the fertility rate and sex ratio, blurs the picture of women's reality and creates an apparent uniformity. On the other hand, the WCD contention that culture can fill the gap between representation and reality in constructing women's lives in Third World countries can also be critiqued as the propagation of a replacement hypothesis that substitutes one social system, such as development or gender, with that of culture (Tucker, 1997). The uniqueness of women's lives is lost in macro constructions and analyses that create universally applicable categories such as gender.

A primary goal of Western feminism is equality between men and women. In developing countries, however, these goals become unrealistic as most of these women are dependent upon family for survival and live in a culture that is built upon principles of inequality between males and females. The family and the household continue to be the most

reliable source of social, economic, and emotional support for women. Women are able to group around feminism only in rare circumstances (e.g. when the privileges of higher education and class allow them to do so). For many women, adopting the goals of Western feminism would mean losing their families, the primary source of support for the fulfilment of their social, psychological and economic needs.

The *gender and development* paradigm does not give serious consideration to the world views of the women it studies (Parpart, 1993; Raju, 2002; Spivak, 1988). Throughout each phase of the paradigm, women's lack of social awareness is associated with their inherent or learned inability to think or understand their own situation. The task of deciding women's strategic interests is largely taken over by researchers and planners. This implicit disregard for women's opinions is illustrated in the use of macro social ideologies, such as those of Western feminism, throughout the *gender and development* paradigm. These feminisms have less to do with women's realities and more to do with researchers' world view (Miller, 2000). The debates of Marxist vs. Radical vs. Postmodernist viewpoints is influential in determining state and international policy, but have little relevance to the day-to-day life of women.

Alternative framework for understanding women: identities of women

Even though criticisms of the *gender and development* paradigm's approach to conducting research with women in developing societies abound, there are very few alternatives to it. This article proposes the *identities of women* framework as an alternative research and practice method to understand the relevant yet unquantifiable worlds of individual women in developing societies. Within this framework, women are the primary source of information on their position and are recognised as agents who assess and evaluate their own situation (Francis, 2002; Frye, 1996; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998).

Identity and gender identity

Identity is a widely researched concept that has varied interpretations and applications. Weinreich (2003) proposes a five dimensional classification of the study of *identity*: psychodynamic, cognition and affect, symbolic interactionist, social identity and social anthropological. Weinreich's typology of the study of identity is drawn from the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology and political science (Brewer, 2001; Dube, 2001; Huddy, 2001; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The two main fields of psychology that study identity are developmental and social psychology. Identity studies in developmental psychology focus on the formation of self-concept in individuals and groups (Josselson, 1982). Social psychology-based studies of identity focus on identity's impact on role construction of individuals and groups (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). In the field of sociology, social identity is concerned with the social representation of groups. In anthropology, identity is the representation of groups through local culture and social practices (Dube, 2001). In political science, identity is integrated into the construct of identity politics[2] (Brewer, 2001). The construct of identity is therefore subject to interpretation based on the field of study (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

The study of identity in gender studies is limited in scope, focusing primarily on the construction of gender identity in women. Gender identity has evolved from biology-based explanations to using psychology and sociology to explain differences between men and women (Deaux & Stewart, 2001). The social dimensions in the construction of gender identity are studied under three approaches – gender as unchangeable, gender as self in context of a group, and preferred identity based on a given identity's level of social

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[2] Identity politics is a means to understand affiliations formed by individuals and groups based on perceived similarity with each other and with the objective of sustaining or aspiring for outcomes that benefit the group (Brewer, 2001).

acceptance (Frable, 1997; Josselson, 1982). Feminist researchers focus on how women's sense of self is drawn from the social construction of women's roles and from the values that guide socially acceptable behaviour for women (Roberts, 1981); Volman & Dam, 1998). This understanding of gender explores the construction of gender as a system trait and is useful in exploring power imbalances between women and men across systems. Feminist viewpoint on women's identity has been criticised because it ignores the differences between women's behaviour (Kimball, 2001).

The *identities of women* framework has a broader scope than the one outlined by feminist studies as it focuses on the uniqueness of individual women, not on the 'essentialising' uniqueness of the social category of gender. Past research on the gender identity of women in developing societies has been embedded in comparisons between women from developed and undeveloped societies or in comparisons between men and women. In contrast, the *identities of women* does not focus upon comparisons, but builds its framework around women's agency within their individual contexts.

Interdisciplinary approach to understanding identities of women

The *identities of women* framework is an interdisciplinary approach. It combines a poststructuralist[3] critique of feminism (Francis, 2002; Hughes, 2002; Parpart, 1993), a cultural anthropology-based understanding of social contexts (Holland et al., 1998; Williams, Labonte, & O'Brien, 2003), and a socio-psychological understanding of the relationship between context and individual performance (Frable, 1997; Unger, 2001). This interdisciplinary approach to the study of *identities of women* is based on three premises: (a) rejection of the generalisation of women's identity; (b) acceptance of women's unique place within a framework of specific and time-bound socio-cultural contexts; and (c)

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[3] Poststructuralism is based on Foucault's (Foucalt, 1980) discourse analysis. It challenges (along with postmodernism), the *truths* of research and instead focuses on the relativism of truths (Francis, 2002).

acknowledgement of an individual woman's ability to have multiple identities and to negotiate new ones. Together, these three approaches construct a powerful method of learning more about the women's experiences through the women themselves in the *identities of women* framework.

Poststructuralist critique of feminism

Poststructuralism is a method that deconstructs social phenomena by first separating the social phenomenon from its observer, and then focusing on the observer's subjectivities in observing, recounting and interpreting the social phenomenon (Hughes, 2002). The poststructuralist critique of feminism questions the established and accepted tenets of feminism, such as social research's characterisation of a powerless and subordinate female identity. Poststructuralist feminism proposes that a woman's identity is a temporal duality of positions, meaning that women carry within them the positions of powerful and powerless at the same time, rather than the either/or position suggested by most discourses (Francis, 2002; Huddy, 2001; Hughes, 2002).

A poststructuralist method is appropriate for the study of female identity in cross-cultural settings, as it does not presume a stationary and simplistic definition of women. Poststructuralist feminists propose that women's identities reflect the relationship between 'language, power, and subjectivity' in social discourse, rather than mirroring a true reality (Hughes, 2002: 14). Poststructuralism provides a way to question existing characterisations of female identity in transitional societies. An illustration of poststructuralist deconstruction can be found in Rao's (1999) deconstruction of discourses on women in the work of Gandhi and Nehru, the two national leaders of India's independence movement. Rao explores the relativity of truth within these discourses and reviews its applicability to women's issues. Nehru and Gandhi used their personal beliefs in the sanctity of science and religion,

respectively, to construct women as symbols. The women in their constructions had no space for individual expression, in private or in public. According to Rao, Nehru never addressed women's issues directly. Instead, he made them a part of his discourse on science and technology and the outcome of progressiveness. As a result, Nehru's vision of an independent India was one in which women were active agents of change but for a preordained purpose. Gandhi used female figures from Hindu mythology to create a space for women that facilitated their participation in the ongoing freedom struggle while restricting their lives to the household (Rao, 1999). Rao's analysis reveals the postructuralist purpose of the 'subjective' position (of women) that would otherwise remain hidden within the discourses (of these two powerful men).

Cultural anthropology

Cultural anthropology studies relevant and specific contexts, both social and cultural (Dilley, 2002). This approach can be used to locate female identity within specific, defined and described contexts of culture without proposing a macro, encompassing, representative reality associated with that cultural context (Holland et al., 1998). The presentation of Docha Ringmo, a woman and a roadside vendor of beer, who sat on the sidewalks in a Ladakh (a Northern mountain region of India) marketplace, would be an example of this approach (Aggarwal, 2002). Aggarwal (2002) presents a brief biography of Docha Ringmo's character, researched with the help of the people who formed her immediate cultural context in the town, in the marketplace, in the monastery and in other local contexts. Docha Ringmo was a twice-married, childless, beer drinking, sometimes abusive, brave and always well-dressed woman, who wore a coveted *perag*, a headgear with symbolic and material value attached to it. Docha Ringmo ensured an aristocratic funeral from the local monastery in exchange for her valuable emerald embedded *perag*. Aggarwal's description of Docha Ringmo is situated

within a socio-cultural ethnology of the marketplace, the traditional functions and importance

of the marketplace, the wider geographic context of the people of Ladakh, local trade

practices, local demographics and variations within them such as the differences in freedom

of Ladhakhi women as compared to Hindu and Kashmiri women. Aggarwal also reviews the

colonisation history of Ladakh, current politics and social structures such as the monastery,

and external structures such as a Norway-funded NGO (Aggarwal, 2002). This approach

provides unconventional references to understand culture and context of individual women

that bring forth the differences in individual context rather than their homogeneity.

Socio-psychological approach

The psychosocial perspective of identity highlights the complexity, multiplicity, and

negotiability of identity (Hughes, 2002; Unger, 2001). For instance, Aggarwal's (2002)

Docha Ringmo, in a socio-psychological perspective, would be understood through the

assorted realities of her life and their significance to her: her relationships, such as those with

her two husbands and her niece, her role as a beer vendor in the market, and her alcoholism;

her motivations, such as her desire to always dress well and to have an aristocratic funeral;

and significant stages of her life, such as the acquisition and relinquishing of her *perag*, her

marriage and divorce. Identity in the socio-psychological approach studies formation of

identity over the life cycle and in reference to a single domain in life (Deaux & Stewart,

2001). Thus, Docha Ringmo could be studied through the course of her life, considering all

the variables and contexts listed above, or her identity formation could be captured in a

snapshot version by examining one particular domain. The multitudinous references for

Docha Ringmo's life illustrate the environment in person approach wherein a myriad social

systems and their relevance is understood from the perspective of the individual woman.

Narratives as an illustration of the identities of women

Personal narratives[4] of women can be used as an example of women's expressed identities. Life stories, autobiographies, and letters are examples of personal narrative and can be read as expressions of the narrator's identity. They are situated within structural contexts (i.e. the state, the economy and the society) and processional or agentic contexts (i.e. institutional and interpersonal relationships), at the same time. Such narratives highlight the differences in experience and expression among women living in the same social contexts, as each narrative revolves around a different set of factors that each narrator considers salient to her identity. These factors are drawn from personal socialisation histories and social contexts of poverty and religion; interpersonal relationships including those with family, extended kin, husband, children, and community; local histories such as cultural revolutions and social movements; and state structures and policy (Raheja, 2003). Personal narratives are the actual voice of the women themselves and are able to reflect even the subtle differences between individual women.

Identities of women and participatory development

It is important to address briefly the similarities and differences between the *identities of women* framework and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), developed primarily by Robert Chamber, is a practice-oriented method of development that 'aims at enabling local people and communities to take control over their own development' (Kapoor, 2002: 101). PRA uses local knowledge and participation to give local people a role in planning and a chance to contribute to their own learning process. PRA

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[4] Narratives or narration of life stories represent events in an individual's life from the distant or immediate past. These events are linked together through the narrator's reflections constructed in framework bound by time, relevance, and context of the events (Cortazzi, 1993). Narrative analysis is the study and interpretation of this narrative content as well as its organisation (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Tamr, 1998).

relies on innovative communication and community development practices to achieve these objectives. The underlying premise is that participation by all members of the community will improve developmental efforts.

The *identities of women* framework and PRA share a number of similarities, such as emphasis on 'client' participation, and free-form implementation. Despite these similarities, PRA and the *identities of women* framework have markedly different objectives. PRA uses social action and 'client' participation to facilitate development. In contrast, the *identities of women* framework advocates social action and participation as means to achieve agency for the individual woman, but neither supports nor opposes development (Kapoor, 2002; Parfitt, 2004). Also, the PRA 'free form' of research is aimed at achieving agreement within groups, whereas the use of narratives in the *identities of women* is not constrained by preordained outcomes, but a simple means of expression.

Kapoor's (2002) primary criticism of Chamber's work is on grounds of its inadequate theorisation and discounting of local politics, i.e. it ignores the fact that hegemony of group interests in a community implies the interests of the powerful in the society. Neither of these criticisms is applicable to the *identities of women* framework. The *identities of women* framework is based in three theoretical orientations. Further, the *identities of women* framework is a response to the local politics of societies in which women live and does not ignore differences even within women as a group.

Summary comparison between identities of women and gender and development

A summary of the two frameworks—the *identities of women* framework and the *gender and development* paradigm – is presented in Table 2. The two frameworks are compared in terms of approach, theory, concepts, interventions, contributions and limitations.

Table 2. Comparison.

	Identities of Women	Gender and Development
Approach	Environment-in-person: The individual is the primary source of information	Person-in-environment – the different social systems across cultures and societies are used as explanatory variables
	Questions the relevance of any 'one' (environment) structure to all individuals. Positions environment as incidental and not primary to a woman's frame of reference	Accepts the relevance of at least one environment in the population of study, uses environment to construct a context for women's situation
	Descriptive: Uses comparison only if it is part of a woman's identity expression.	Comparative: Studies women in reference to men and to women in developed countries.
	Does not presume primacy of any group association	Accords primacy to particular groups, based on researcher orientation
Primary theories	Poststructural feminism; identity theories, primarily anthropological and psycho-social	Theories of feminism; developmental economics, including socialist and capitalist; culture studies
Primary concepts	Woman, Identity and Agency (as individual-level constructs)	Gender, Development and Culture (as macro and systemic constructs)
	Women as individuals	Women as members of groups, based on gender, class, and culture and other social variables
Interventions	Women identify needs and set goals	Social researchers and planning experts identify needs that are compatible with organisational and policy goals
	Flexible in choice of goals; not agenda-driven	Fixed agenda developed by organisations and researchers; goals are informed by those agendas
	No fixed macro agenda; focuses on the needs of individuals and their community	Multitude of macro agendas: raising status, empowerment, autonomy, transforming production relations, establishing cultural codes
	Complete sharing of decision-making power within organisations; provides leadership roles for clients within and beyond the scope of interventions	Sharing of decision making power only at the lower levels of organisation and within the intervention; leadership roles for clients are driven by the success of interventions
	Primarily activist	Primarily integrationist
Contributions	Recognition of enterprise and initiative taken by women in developing societies	Relevant in the initial stages of bringing women into planning and policy focus
	Agency-driven: Focuses on women's efforts to deal with the duality of transition and lack of change in the systems around them	Handicap driven: Focuses on the difficulties women face, first in traditional societies and now in developing societies

	Identities of Women	Gender and Development
Limitations	Not immediately comparative; will lead to eventual comparison based on differences and commonalities identified by individuals	Comparative and contradictory: critiques gender-based stratification, but accepts development-based ones
	Not cost-effective in immediate application Argues for uniqueness in framing problems and searching for solutions, which is time-, effort- and resource-consuming	Planned in a cost-benefit framework. Problem and solutions are constructed to represent generalised realities – overtly simplified and practical approach in order to legitimise addressing a large section of world population
	Shuns symbolism in favour of micro realism	Symbolic: uses analogies of women to support some aspect of the researcher's world view of macro realities
	Places absolute credence on women's ability to express their understanding of their environment. The environment is considered of limited importance on its own	The state of the system presented as true representation of women's status. Differences in findings are often explained away as the inability of women to grasp their own reality or the questions of research

Conclusion

The *gender and development* paradigm has contributed immensely to recognition of women living in societies that are in transition. However, the *gender and development* paradigm has created a restricted frame for research and practice with women in developing countries. It is based in macro and homogenous constructions of women; use of women as symbols to explain some aspect of *backwardness* in traditional societies; presumptions of women's limited existing agency; and control over the direction of their future.

The inconsistent findings from research using the *gender and development* paradigm are explained by the social and individual context and system characteristics. Within the *gender and development* paradigm, there is limited scope to establish the relevance of the hypothesised contexts in women's lives. In addition, the macro grouping of women presumes the necessity of a modern, economically productive, and educated context for women as precursors to women's agency.

On the other hand, the *identities of women* framework explicitly acknowledges the existing agency in women, regardless of context. Within this framework, it is clear that

women already have the ability to determine the pathways for their own well-being. From a poststructuralist perspective on discourse as an expression of power, *identities of women* advocates for every woman the most fundamental power that an individual possesses – the power to be heard, not piecemeal, but holistically; not as a mouthpiece of someone else's cause, but in furtherance of her own. The power to define problems and to design solutions has been vested in planning and research experts at each step of the development process. The *identities of women* framework advocates surrender of that power to those to whom it rightfully belongs – women; and in this way (as researchers and practitioners) we can accept differences between women even if we cannot explain them.

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