

Symposium Proposal

Section- Social Issues and Development

Reading (I)identity in context – understanding through meaning making

Identity has turned out to be an issue of concern in contemporary society and thus has taken many different connotations, personal-cultural-political. In academic discourses it attracted attention of all the social science disciplines. Identity refers to the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles that define who one is. Identities can be focused on the past, the present or the future involving a meaning-making process. Persons form their identity by integrating their life stories - narrativize their life-experiences that provide them with a sense of unity and purpose of life. Given that the human *subjects* have access to their internal world mediated by language, gets involved in an active interpretation of their experiences. Thus emerges the hermeneutical phenomenological human *subject*, essentially through narrative. Narrative may be understood here as our way of experiencing time, integrating perception of future potentialities based on the sense of the past, employing a narrative logic involving attributions of causality and purpose. Narrative identity is expected to provide a more inclusive and exhaustive first person perspective, and it can also meaningfully incorporate existing narratives into its emplotment and interpretation.

The symposium will comprise of four papers all focusing on the narrative identity of four different groups of participants.

Sl No.	Presenter	Affiliation	Title of the paper
1	Sonali De	Professor of Department of Psychology, University of Calcutta Email:sonalide2002@yahoo.com	Beyond binary – with (not) FAQs – a few <i>trans</i> stories
2	Amitava Sengupta	Guest Lecturer, Department of Psychology, West Bengal State University Email: amtv sengupta@gmail.com	Conflict lens overshadow gender lens? - Communal conflict and gendered violence
3	Rituparna Chakraborty	Assistant Professor, Psychology, AIMS-Institutes of Higher Education, Bangalore. Email: crituparna02@yahoo.in	Journey of ‘Being’ - contemporary identities of women in Bengal
4	Mahua Chatterjee	Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Calcutta. Email: mailme.mahua@gmail.com	Vision in blindness: A study on personal identity of blind people

The Abstracts of the four presentations are given below:

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Beyond binary – with (not) FAQs – a few *trans* stories

Sonali De

Abstract

Gender turns out to be a defining system of power relations embedded in other power relations. Physical differences in human bodies are assumed to construct two mutually exclusive gender categories with their dichotomised social roles. Masculinity and femininity are symbolically embodied, performed, and communicated through our grooming and life style.

The term transgender refers to an inclusive category that refers to people whose gender identity and expression differs from their assigned sex at birth and diverge from the normative beliefs existing in the society and expectations linked with their biological sex. It includes trans men and trans women (MTF & FTM persons) as also gender-queer (e.g. bi-gender, pan-gender, gender-fluid, third gender), cross-dressers, gender nonconforming, and ambiguously gendered persons. While their experienced gender identity remains a main focus to themselves as well as others in their social world, their life-long struggle for a personal identity often remain unseen.

The present paper attempts to explore personal identity of transgendered persons through narrative inquiry (both discrete stories as well as extended accounts of their lives that develop over the course of interviews), with the belief that personal narrative can unfold a view that otherwise stay hidden. The interview included. From analysis of the narratives many interesting aspects surfaced. Their gender identity goes through an uncertainty when the internal gender experience gets into conflict with gender expectation; this accompanies a “sense of loss, of incorrectness, of anger, and depression, of longing for a more authentic mode of being”. Both personal and gender identity gets shaped in the intersubjective space which is often marred by sexual violations and violence.

Key words: Transgender, Gender experience, Identity, Narrative

Conflict lens overshadow gender lens? - Communal conflict and gendered violence

Amitava Sengupta

Abstract

India in search of its Nation-state identity had imagined nationhood characterized by secularism, but instead witnessed many riots with immense bloodshed.

Across a long span of time from *Noakhali danga* (riot) to riots during partition of Bengal before independence to Gujarat riots in contemporary past, scholarship has seen little visibility of women in political discourses despite a constant need to sort gendered basis of such violence, perpetrated in communal conflicts. From girl trafficking to using gang rape as a weapon all are scripted to modify our multicultural country to a monolithic desert.

Social scientists throughout in their discourses on communal violence articulating the women's presence (or absence), framed the "women as (un)gendered part of their community. Although women are made central to the religious violence(!), they are viewed as passive persons without rights" (Segal and Demos 2013). So the 'passive frame' of women is representation of an 'endangered women frame'.

Is this only a religious hatred or is it another face of the power imbalance and structural relationship of inequality, which makes communal tension a *gendered riot* in essence.

In response to the recent incidents of communal tension in different parts of West Bengal, like Chandannagar, Kaliachak, Dhulagarh, Hajinagar or Basirhat, AAMRA - a research group attempted to delve the *truth* behind such incidents of tension. As a part of this we tried to understand from local narratives how women experience these situations of mutual distrust, skepticism and collective paranoia. When the male members of the two communities attacked each other with swords, how it left women with utter scare, distress, anxiety and panic, not just for their man or other possessions, for their self and body too. However, this is not the only picture; there are incidents when instead of remaining passive victims they participate in arson, lynching and looting shops. The implication of this in terms of identity of women is discussed.

Key words: Representation, Communal conflict, Gender violence, Women's perspective

Journey of ‘Being’ - contemporary identities of women in Bengal

Rituparna Chakraborty

Abstract

Contemporary circumstances of aggravated exploitation and maltreatment of women in various parts of India has put a question on the perpetuation of authoritative constructs of society over the years. Even after much advancement in academic and financial spheres, condition of women in India has not attained much development; at the core of which is how women view themselves. Analyzing recent incidents in Bengal, we felt the necessity to delve into the construction, perpetuation and change of identity among women in Bengal, who are expected to have the capacity for resistance to unreasonable authoritative influence. We conducted a qualitative study, using open-ended in-depth semi-structured interview method with 50 married women participants in parts of Bengal. The recruited participants aged between 18-40 yrs., with minimum secondary-level education and free from chronic physical and psychological illness. Sampling technique was purposive for our study, where maximum variation was aimed, with few limitations. We analyzed the transcribed data using qualitative analytical methods considering the cultural-relational-social context. We followed method of pluralism in qualitative analysis to get a deeper understanding of the data with help of multi-layer interpretation and multiple-perspectives brought in through different analytical approaches; where three data analysis methods were used - Grounded theory, Interpretative Phenomenological Approach and Narrative analysis. Through analysis, conflict between *macro* and *micro* identity surfaced up as a major theme. Four major typologies of identity spectrum could be seen, where somewhere women are caught in the quandary of choosing between the *wish to live as a woman* vs the *way to live peacefully*, some consider *allowance as independence*; whereas some are seen attempting to be equal to *standards* through defying norms and few are there who are seen striding towards *macro-identity* through an individual construction and pragmatic alteration of life-space. We also came across an interesting theme of gradual construction of modern educated *ideal* woman's identity as '*superwoman*'.

Key words: Women, Identity, Life-space, Pluralism in qualitative analysis

Vision in blindness: A study on personal identity of blind people

Mahua Chatterjee

Abstract

“Personal identity is the result of presenting each of the events in one’s life as parts of a meaningful whole and, in consequence, of presenting oneself to others as the protagonist of a unique story” (Widdwershoven, 1994, cf. Perinat, 1998). The importance of having a positive, well-adjusted self-concept is quite apparent, and we must accept that a visual impairment may, in itself, have important effect on the formation of a person’s self and identity. Warren (1994) highlights the major roles that body image and language play in the case of these children. The manner in which the child learns to view himself has a tremendous impact on his future ambitions, accomplishments and personal happiness (Clock-Clampert, 1981). Following the stages in the development of a sense of self-awareness proposed by Stern (1985), Inghsholt (1990) describes what difficulties a blind child can encounter in the development of his or her identity: fewer reciprocal and also shorter relationships with which to organize his or her world; difficulty in benefiting from the necessary amount of experiences involving a high degree of regulated excitement and difficulties when intentional communication is attempted, all of which would lead to problems in the development of a progressive understanding of inter subjectivity. A substantial amount of the research carried out into self-concept makes use of instruments like: the question “who am I?”, life stories or personal autobiographies based on the stories recounted by the subjects involved. Using L’Ecuyer’s “who are you?” method, the study on self-concept by Ruíz and Esteban (1996) highlights the fact that, in general, the descriptions blind people make of themselves are very much an inner one, i.e. it is focused on themselves, on their qualities and defects, their aspirations, feelings, interests and abilities, with less emphasis on externally-related assessments, i.e. the things that surround them and that they possess, their relationships with others and their ability to adapt to their surroundings. Current study seeks to explore whether visual impairment would influence the process of the development of person’s personal identity. Using narrative inquiry, I have compiled descriptions that visually-impaired people have made of

themselves during different stages of their lives, and summarized extracts of these as an illustration of real life stories. Few important factors that contribute to the development of a blind child's identity are parents' reactions to blindness, lack of eye contact, person and object permanence, body image, overprotection, self-acceptance, imitation of the sighted etc. Physical stimulation, contrary to popular expectation, does not create an image of reality, instead, interpretation and understanding of this reality creates meaning for the individual identity. Blindness, it appears, only cuts off the physical stimulation, it does not close the social window to the world. To a blind person, the interpretation and perception of the world and self identity takes place through alternative channels.

Key words: Blindness, Self Identity, Vision, body image