Gender Identity Construction, Community Environmental Education and Ecofeminism: Untapped Interconnections

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Abstract:- **Research literature on gender identity construction is replete with theories that have been proffered to study gender identities; however, there is a paucity of studies that focus on construction of gender identities in community environmental education as well as those that uses ecofeminism as a theoretical framework, despite its power to elicit the subjective enactment of gender identity. A conspicuous gap in literature this paper contributes to. This paper therefore advances the body of theory around the construction of gender identities, by announcing a point of departure with other identity theories pinning down on Karren Warren's ecofeminist theory as a suitable theoretical framework for understanding the construction of gender identity.Borrowing examples from a study conducted in Zimbabwe between 2013 and 2016, the paper illustrates how this theory can be used to understand the construction of gender identities among women participants in community environmental education.**

Key terms: **Gender identity; community environmental education; ecofeminism.**

Contribution/Originality

This paper makes two contributions to knowledge. First it advances the body of theory around the construction of gender identities by arguing that Karren Warren's ecofeminist theory can be a suitable theoretical framework for understanding the construction of gender identities .Second, the paper introduces the concept of gender identity construction in environmental education that deals with the biophysical environment,an area treaded less by gender identity construction studies

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This paper is premised on two assumptions; first, it notes that though a legion of studies on construction of gender identities exists in many communities of practice. A succinct summary of these studies shows that much focus has been on the political, social and economic dimensions of environmental education such as health (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, Grieg, Peacock and Msimang,2008, Bottorff,et al 2011,Naidu, Sliep and Dageid,2012), sport (Connell, 2008, Knijnik,2015), workplace (Carrier, de Paduci, Diniz,deSouza and Menezes, 2013), media (Cole, 2014), migration (Hoang,2011), violence (Omar, 2011 ,Kamau,2012) and nation building (Ngoshi,2013), with the construction of gender identities in environmental education that focuses on the biophysical component of environmental education being

ignored. This makes this space an uncharted territory that need to be developed also by gender identity studies. There is also a rich tradition of research on construction of masculinities and femininities in formal education set ups (Morejele, 2009, Francis, 2010, Ohrn and Gustaffson, 2012, Bennet, 2015) excluding non-formal education such as Community Environmental Education which is the focus of this paper. This paper argues from the standpoint of Wenger's situated learning theory (1998) that participation in a community of practice is interconnected to construction of gender identities. The paper argues that gender identity formation influences participation in CEE and cannot be general argued away in all intents and purposes. Based on these views, this paper therefore sees the construction and performance of gender and participation in CEE as reciprocal processes that need to be understood.

 Second, another conspicuous gap in knowledge that this paper emphasizes is the fact, that of the many studies from general literature on gender identity construction, common theories used in the study of gender identities included Connell's relational theory (Bottorff, et al 2011, Budgeon, 2014, Bennet, 2015, Söderström, 2015), feminist poststructuralist (Nightingale, 2006,Marshall, Byrne and Ockwell, 2014), social constructionism (Morejele, 2009, Charlebois, 2010), Performativity theories (Palmgren, 2010, Golestani, 2015) and psychoanalytic theory (knijnik, 2015). No attempt has been made to use ecofeminism as a lens to tease out the construction of gender identities despite its potential to do so. It is due to this theoretical backdrop that this paper announces a point of departure from other gender identity construction studies in that it advocates for the use of ecofeminism to study the construction of gender identities in a new community of practice that has been 'treaded' less by identity construction studies. Moreover, feminist epistemology and methodology accentuates knowledge that is contextually specific hence a theory that is specific to environmental issues is necessary as a lens to understand the construction of gender identities in CEE. Theories have been developed to understand the construction of gender. I dwell on these theories in the next section.

II. UNDERSTANDING CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITYIN LITERATURE: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

The thrust of this section is to explore the theories that address gender identity construction .The first part of the section focuses on the meaning of gender identity and construction, followed by an exploration of the theories that have been applied in research studies on the construction of gender identities exposing the lacuna that this paper sought to plug. But before that an attempt is made to unpack the concept gender identity to show how the understanding of this concept influenced the argument raised in this paper that ecofeminism is well placed as a theoretical lens for understanding the construction of gender identities.

According to Wilchins, (2004), gender identity refers to the inner sense most of us have of being male or female. This definition shows that gender identity is the inner feelings that guide a person in identifying as a man or a woman. This shows that gender identity is   subjective and include the entire ways one might understand self to be a man or a woman or both or neither. This definition of gender identity implies that   gender identity, is constitutive of an individual' conceptual framework. Whittle (2000) defines gender identity as answering the question am I a man or a woman or something else entirely. It is a private experience, the intensity with which one inhabits one's own gendered body, feels, desire and expresses oneself physically and materially (Whittle, 2000). Although I agree with Wilchins' notion that how we act, look and dress is shaped by our society this paper acknowledges that   gender identity is centrally concerned with who one considers oneself to be, not how one appears to others because a person's ascribed gender identity may not match his or her subjective gender identity leaving individuals with the agency to perform gender in ways that conform to society's notions of masculinity and femininity   or which may provoke, evoke and rub against the grain. As gender identity is something internal that only the individual can attest to, thus it is the contention of this paper to argue that ecofeminisme specially Karen Warren's ecofeminism and its notion of first person narrative is an imperative tool that can be used to tap into subjective experiences such as gender identities

Many theories of gender identity construction have been applied in research studies as theoretical and tools of analysis starting from sex role theory, socialization theories, psychoanalytic theory, biological determinism, essentialism, social construction and feminist poststructuralist theories. The section below sketches on these theories focusing more on the limitations of each theory as a pointer to illuminate and justify why an ecofeminist perspective is sufficient in understanding gender identity construction. I begin with psychoanalytic theory

2.1. Psychoanalytic theory

Theories that explain the development of femininities/masculinities include, psychoanalytic theory which is based on the work of Sigmund Freud (1927), According to this theory gender identity refers to a fundamentally existential sense of one's maleness and or femaleness. However, psychoanalytic theory of gender identity is limited in that it fails to show that masculinity represents not a certain type of men or women but rather a way that men and women position themselves through discursive practices. Psychoanalytic thinking is also criticised for taking gender identity as essentialist and invariable (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Closely related to psychoanalytic theories are essentialist theories.

2.2. Essentialist theories of gender

Essentialist versions of gender are concerned with the binary construction of men and women. As far as essentialist versions of gender are concerned the binary construction of men and women remain privileging one over the other (Bhana, 2002). The lack of power for women is attributed to socialisation that begins in the family and is reinforced in the community (Bhana, 2002).Bhana (2002) adds that in essence men are perceived to have power and to be free and based on the notions of these theorists to be free is to break free from male oppression and repression. This is a narrower view of domination that focus on one type of oppressional ideology based on sexism, thus failing to recognise that forms of oppression are interconnected as articulated by ecofeminism. Essentialist theories are closely related to biological determinism which assume that people become who they are because of socialisation

2.3. Biological determinism

This perspective sees women and men as products of socialisation They see society as having power over people, men have power over women because of socialization and biology, they are fixed, worse still women are victims, doing what they are told, as unprotestingly beings(Bhana,2002), such a position creates a view that individuals are passive to the social messages around them (Davies, 1989) This way of theorising leads to the perception that women and men cannot decide how to do their gender (Bhana, 2002). It is a view that particular qualities can be attributed to an individual or a group solely or primarily due to their biological constitution (Buege, 1994, pp.44-45). To understand gender as essentialist or biological is to misrecognize the relations between people as in flux, changing and open to change (Bhana, 2002). Biological and psychological assessments of gender provide a simple deterministic explanation of how people make sense of the world; such approaches assume that definitions of masculinity and femininity are unchanging, universal and unitary; power is fixed (McNaughton, 2000a, 2000b). In addition to biological and psychoanalytical theories, there is the sex role theory of socialisation

2.4. Sex role theory

The sex role theory of socialisation is the theory that views boys' and girls' 'experience of gender as a passive sponge-

like absorption of masculine and feminine traits which is mediated through social institutions like the family. Identities and behaviours in this theory are seen as passively acquired through socialisation and are consistent. Sex role theory, though still commonly employed in analysis of gender has been criticised for implying that gender represents two fixed, static and mutually exclusive role containers (Kimmel,1986) and for assuming that women and men have innate psychological needs for gender stereotypic traits (Pleck,1987).Sex role theory also fosters the notion of a singular female or male personality ,a notion that has been disputed for obscuring the various forms of femininity and masculinity that women and men can and do demonstrate(Connell 1995). Another weakness of sex role theory includes the blurring of behaviour and norm, its homogenizing effect of the concept and its difficulties in accounting for power. Connell (1987) concludes that socialisation and sex role theories are flawed because they do not account for the changes in gender relations. Social relations are thus always power relations; masculinity and femininity are relational concepts which have meaning in relation to each other (Connell, 1995). Sex role theory also implicitly assume that our culture values the characteristics of each sex equal and that they complement each other in a balanced way (Hedlin,2013). A fundamental problem with this theory has been its strong link with biological determinism theory, Socialisation theory actually reinforces ideas about gender differences based on biology. Courtenay (2000) has criticised innanist views of gender by arguing that gender does not reside within the individual. This can be seen as a total break from the sex role theories, which argue for an innanist, individualistic account. I argue in this paper that there is need to move beyond dualism and essentialising gender as this difference is not essential or immutable .The same viewpoint of essentialising gender is also evident in reproductionist theories.

2.5. Reproductionist theories of gender

Reproductionist theories of gender focus on what the dominant group does to the subordinated group (Bhana, 2002). She goes on to argue that such a view of gender has tended to stress external social structures and the accompanying one dimensional view of power as repressive. There are many flaws in the idea that roles are simply reproduced. The ideas of resistance and change in social relationships cannot be accounted for by positioning power as a fixed property. By upholding this perspective reproductionist theories ignore how individuals or actors challenge this power, thus underestimating the agency of the individual. This kind of analysis according to Bhana (2002) assumes that power represses, blocks and divides and to gain freedom the individual has to escape, moving away from domination to freedom. Foucault (1980) criticises the repressive nature of reproduction theories and the emphasis on the material base in determining all patterns of conduct. The gender perspectives that follow this kind of thinking in which

ideology and repression are used to account for gendered identities are limiting as they assume material contexts are in the final analysis in determining gender (Bhana, 2002). Reproductionist identity tended to stress social structures and the accompanying one-dimensional view of power as limiting and constraining. I do agree with Bhana's view that people are not passive recipients of socialisation neither are they biologically fixed nor psychological determined. I argue in agreement to Bhana (2002) in this paper that individuals actively construct and impact upon the world shaping their lives and others that there is need to acknowledge the contribution of the individual's agency in the construction of gender identity. Although gender is still seen as a relatively static and biological fixed entity, by socialisation theories, Socialisation theorist take a somewhat, broader view of gender development.

2.6. Socialisation theory

They understand gender based on what society does to children. . It gives greater emphasis to the role of social processes in the formation of gender identity instead of gender identity being acquired through interaction with primary caregivers. Socialisation theories propose the view that ongoing social interaction conditions children to behave in gendered ways Socialisation theories of gender and development theories of gender understand gender in terms of what society does to men and women (Bhana, 2002). In this instance women and men are perceived as passive recipients of received knowledge about their gender identities sidelining their subjectivity in which power also oppresses. Socialisation theory also fails to account for individual agency in choosing ideas and behaviours or the influence of gendered power differentials in different environments. In other words it fails to explain why gendered behaviours are not consistent, the wide variations found within a sex group as well as in different social settings. A significant gap in socialization theories which is well accounted for by social construction of gender theories.

2.7. Social construction of gender theories

In social constructionism, gender is understood as mediated and created through the structure and through language and performance as opposed to following directly from biological sex differences. Social construction theories of gender explain that there is no essential, universally distinct character that is masculine or feminine; instead they view gender as being constructed and reconstructed in an ongoing cycle of social interaction (Edley and Wetherell, 1997). The self and the identity are constructed in social interaction, undergo reconstruction in different contexts and in turn reflexively construct identities of others (Gergen 1985 cited in Edley and Wetherell, 1997. Drawing on social constructionist notion gender is seen as multiple, fluid and embedded in socio-cultural context; behaviours are influenced by a range of factors that include race, class, culture, ability, religion, body shape, sexual preference and age (Carrigan, Connell and Lee

1985). This view shift away and is actively against biological sex essentialist notions of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This notion shows that construction of gender theory recognises the active role an individual plays in the construction of their gender identities. It also shows that an individual can take a range of different masculinities and femininities that may at times contradict each other. This construction of gender identities is also seen as dynamic, ongoing, changing and changeable, rather than static or fixed. Theories that subscribe to the social construction of gender can be divided into two, first there are those termed discursive theories (Weedon 1999; Potter and Wetherell 1987;Foucault,1978) which place emphasis on the meaning which are attached to being male or female within society, stressing the role of language and culture (Barret,1992) .Discursive theories are characterised by their understanding of gender as a structure of subjectivity which can vary greatly in different social locations and the construction of gender is seen as a process rather than a role (Barret, 1992). Discourses shape the way people view the world and are therefore not just a mere reflection of an already ordered reality. Instead, discourses are that with which reality is ordered, they are a means by which gender become produced (Foucault, 1978). This emphasis on discourse has been criticised as risking a potential slide into relativism that can end up denying social inequalities that result due to sexism and racism (Mullender, Hague, Imam, Malos and Kelly, 2002). According to Foucault (1978, p.101), discourses transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" However, the work of Foucault has been criticised for its lack of attention to imperialism, capitalism and patriarchy which according to materialist theorist play an important role in the reproduction and sustenance of gender inequalities in our communities (Hennessey, 1993). A weakness in discursive theories that this paper argues can be well handled and articulated by ecofeminism which recognizes the interplay and interconnections among these ideologies. Discursive theories seem to be incoherent, and self contradictory .For instance, Jager and Meier (2009, p.38), argue that discourses are supra-individual and that they take on a life on their own'' They asserted that it is not the subject who makes the discourse but the discourses that make the subject. The subject is of interest not as an actor but as a product of discourses (p.37). I note an inconsistence in discursive theories because arguing that gender is discursively constructed deprives them an internal essence which describes agency in an individual by arguing that discourses determine reality yet on the other hand they claim to acknowledge human agency. Materialist (Hennessy, 1993), on the other hand stresses the structural features of the social world that ensure that women and men are fitted into discursive pathways within society. Materialist theorist regards the social structures as systems of power and control which give rise to sets of social relations (Hennessy, 1993). They see gender as rooted in social relations who give rise to certain social practices that produce and reproduce gender inequality (Morejele, 2009). As noted by Alsop, Fitzsimons

and Lennon, 2002), materialist theorist perceive gender divisions as exploitative and oppressive People are made into men and women by particular positions which are allocated in the social order. In other words there is a material reality of gender categories which even though socially constructed, constrains and forms men and women into categories (Morejele, 2009). This downplays the meanings that women, and men in these categories make of themselves in relation to gender and to the social positions generally, thus backgrounding self agency. Morejele (2009) argues that even though materialist theories accept the socially constructed nature of these hierarchical categories they tend to focus more on the static hierarchies rather than systemic hierarchies of gender relations and inequalities. Materialist has thus failed to accommodate the discursive construction of gender as an aspect of subjectivity. They have also failed to explain how gender as an aspect of self-understanding is constructed or how this subjective understanding intersects with the structural gender divisions which materialists have accentuated (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon 2002). Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2003, p.39) state that the theoretical position that the social constructionist theoretical framework assumes through their notion of '' no such thing as the individual standing outside the social, however is ignoring the fact that there is an arena of personal subjectivity even though it does not exist other than as already inscribed in the sociocultural domain ''.The notion of seeing individuals enmeshed within a web of social relationships offers little room for agency and change. Social constructionism in general has also been criticised for assigning all power to structures and constructing people as passive and powerless, thus being socially deterministic. The body is seen as in the case of gender as a canvas on which culture point images of womanhood and manhood (Connell, 2009). Gergen (2001) criticises constructionist theories for acknowledging social construction of meaning and at the same time subscribe to a dualist ontology that separates the external world and the internal world. This notion of dichotomies is eschewed by feminist poststructuralist.

2.8. Feminist Poststructuralist theories

It is worth noting that feminist poststructuralist theory finds points of exit from social construction camps, first, by troubling both how discursive and material perspectives limit the ways we think about our gender by presenting several philosophical concepts that aid in understanding the construction of gender identities. Second, Feminist post structuralist like ecofeminism recognises the intersection of race, class, sexuality, dis/ability, which has become fertile ground for the discursive-materialist debate, the problem of masculinity structures and the need to disrupt and transform male/female binaries. Although, I acknowledge in this paper that there is a seamless resemblance between feminist poststructuralist and Karen warren's ecofeminist theory as I will explore in detail below, how the two theories resemble each other. As I discuss feminist post structuralism in this

section. I will try to infuse Karren Warren's ecofeminism to show that significant parallels exist between the two theories to support my argument in this paper that the ecofeminist perspective espoused by Karren Warren can be used as a lens to understand gender identities. Feminist post structuralism is build on four constructs which include discourse, language, power and subjectivity.

According to Best and Kellner (1991, p.26), "discourses are the viewpoints and positions from which people speak and the power relations that these allow and presuppose'' Foucault's discourses includes phenomena such as language, stories, scientific narratives and cultural practices which are organized and structured by the institution and practices of the time which they occur. For example CEE inclusive of its language, practices, activities and a culture that defines it represent a discourse. Dominant discourses are socially and culturally produced, constitute power by constructing objects in particular ways and play a critical role in the interpretation of meaning (Francis, 2000).In feminist poststructuralist discourse interlocks with, meaning, identity and power.

Power is one of the constructs used in feminist poststructuralist to analyse gender construction and it is also one of the construct of oppressive conceptual framework in Karren warren's ecofeminist theory. In Foucault's view (1990/1976), power is not a personal trait or property of an institution or position, rather it is a name attributed to a pervasive and complex strategic situation that can manifest in any particular relation and as such is everywhere. Power is a strategy or process that is exercised within everyday situations of discourse (Sowell, 2004) and is always exercised in relation to resistance(Foucault, 1980). Foucault (1980)'s conceptualisation of power is inextricably linked with knowledge. It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined (Foucault, 1990/1976p.93). A feminist poststructural analysis is interested in exploring how discourses and power relationshave reinforced and normalized certain knowledge and truths about women, exposing'' regimes of truth that operate to subjugate women and other marginalised groups'' (St Pierre, 2000, p.499).Power is exercised within discourses consistent with the ways in which discourses create and govern individuals and social institutions (Weedon, 1997). However, Foucault's model power has received the charge of being ambiguous, presenting power and resistance in a way that presents agency in rather abstract ways .Within feminist post structuralism discourse encompasses subjectivity that an experience will have a different meaning for each person involved.

Subjectivity means the particular ways in which persons give meaning to themselves, others, and the world, which can be taken as a constitute of the conceptual framework in Karren Warren's theory. This means that the subjective meaning of an experience depends on an individual's self- perceptions (subjectivity), personal interpretation (meanings and Language) of the world which can be accessed through first person narrative in Karren Warren's theory and other

competing discourses available at a particular moment (Weedon, 1997). Foucault (1997) has argued that there is nothing fixed about the subject, instead people are positioned and position others and themselves in discourse. This implies therefore that to tap into this subjectivity a first person narrative view of Karen Warren's ecofeminism becomes more relevant. One's subjective meaning of an experience is a function of how one interprets the world and how one interprets current other or competing discourses (Weedon, 1997), hence subjectivity can be taken as one of the components of the conceptual framework of an individual as defined by Warren because it is through the individual's conceptual framework that one interprets the world. For feminist post structuralist, subjectivity is inextricable linked to meaning, language and discourse. The meaning of an experience is conferred through subjective interpretation. This implies that the meaning of language is subjectively intuited because the meaning of language is subjectively logically and it creates discourses (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon, 2002). Feminist post structuralism emphasise the effect of language and discourse to explain how gender is spoken into existence. Discourses are therefore, influenced by language.

Language is fundamental for human to human understanding and communication and for several reasons it is pivotal to a feminist poststructural analysis. First, language is the vehicle through which sense and meaning of one's world is derived (Doering, 1992). Two, language has pre-eminence because it is a mechanism by which society defines, characterise and internalize concepts, structures, and processes. A feminist poststructural understanding of language reveals how women may be active participants in either producing or subverting their own linguistic scaffolding that shapes the CEE context within which they participate.

III. FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORIES VERSUS ECOFEMINISM: THE DEBATE

According to Weedon (2004), discourse within poststructuralist is a set of beliefs and understandings, reinforced through daily practice which frames a particular understanding of the ways we are in the world. Chilton and Schaffer (2002) define discourse as communicative events which encompass certain beliefs, ideologies, identities, politics and the like. Writing in the same vein, Barret (2005) argues that discourse is not specifically a language or a text but the effect of language practices. He goes on to say discourses are embedded in notions of identity, for example what it means to be a woman, the meaning we attach to the words(signifier) we use, and the rules we use to determine what makes sense or is possible.

From the definitions above and the notions of Barret, it is clear that there is no clear cut line that can be drawn between discourse and subjectivity, a discourse encompasses subjectivity (Weedon,1997), yet according to feminist post structuralism, subjectivity is largely the product of discursive networks which organise and systematise social and cultural

practice (Davies and Banks 1995, p.46). I argue in this paper that there is need to work the discourse-subjective hyphen in CEE so that these two are seen as mutual and coexisting to facilitate agency of women in CEE. Agency as conceived by feminist post structural theorist is closely linked to the process of subjectification and involves a tension between speaking the self into different subject positions while simultaneously' 'being subjected to the meanings inherent in the discourse through which one becomes subject (Davies, 2000a, p.2). Subjectivity from this perspective can be understood as embodiment of the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world which is precarious, contradictory and in the process constantly being reconstituted in discourse (Weedon, 1987, p.33).

Davies (2000a, p.53), notes that from post structural perspectives, there is no fundamental or essential self but instead ''we speak ourselves into existence within the terms of available discourses' thus failing to recognise that beyond their control, people are constructors of their society. By arguing this way feminist poststructuralist are undermining and backgrounding self agency. In my analysis discourse and subjectivity are overlapping and mutually complementary concepts, a near combination, inseparable and reinforcing concepts. I argue in this paper that subjectivity is produced by discourse and in part constitute that discourse such that neither can pre-exist the other, hence the need to adopt Karren Warren's concept of conceptual framework.

Although feminist post structural does acknowledge agency, by arguing that we may be able to take up discourses that disrupt hegemonic cultural narratives and given that language and practice produce structure, words and actions can be turned against those very structures they produce (Davies,2000a). They overemphasize on the fact that agency cannot exist outside the discourse since the object claiming (or claimed to be) exempt from discursive production will always require prior delimitation to establish itself outside the discourse (Butler, 1993). This process of setting boundaries itself requires and occurs from within a discourse, we cannot escape its constitutive power (Barret, 2005). This notion would mean that to feminist post structuralist freedom does not lie outside discourse but in disrupting dominant discourses and taking agency as the potential interruption and reversal of regulatory regimes. By arguing this way feminist post structuralism seem to advocate for reverse sexism, reversal of hierarchal value systems not non-hierarchical systems of organizations. As observed by Plumwood (1993) that this can lead to reversal of oppression or reversal of values.

Reversal of values may lead to privileging and prioritising of the undervalued female essence based on female experience, thereby maintaining the dualistic status quo which does not allow for diversity and plurality. This is where ecofeminism with its core commitment to the need to replace systemic structures of oppression with truly equitable models and practices through the creation of non-dualistic conceptual frameworks comes in. Ecofeminism advocates for an ethic of reciprocity, a change from a morality based on power over to one based on power to (Birkeland, 1993). This requires a critical reconstruction and renegotiation of gender identities. I argue in this paper that this can only happen through breaking of the system of dualism, starting with the discourse/subjective binary in feminist post structuralism. According to Plumwood (1993), both parts of a dualism have been defined in distorted ways and both need critical and individual redefinition.

Furthermore, feminist post structctualist subjects are seen to be shifting and can only change positioning within discourses but cannot be agents outside of the discourses that produce them (Butler, 1993), neither are these individuals with independent consciousness who can exercise free choice but rather are always produced through discourses available. In other words it means feminist poststructuralist subjects cannot claim to be authors of their ideologies (Weedon, 2004), instead it is the ideologies that construct one's subjectivity, understandings of oneself and of what is possible and permissible, thus ruling out the possibility of transformative agency. Yet Allard, Cooper, Hilderbrand and Wealands (1995, p.24), assert that we ''are not passively shaped by the larger societal forces but we are active in selecting, adopting and rejecting the dimensions we choose to incooperate, or not into our version of gender. Castells (1997) on the other hand argues that identities are sources of meaning that actors construct for themselves

I therefore, borrow from Morejele (2009) in this paper who argues that subjectivity and self-understanding must be incorporated in the analysis of the construction of gender. Identity formation requires self understanding, which include a combination of personal, inner, intrapsychic dimensions as well as the understanding they create in social landscapes, that is their private and public constructions (Surendra, 2005). The focus on self understanding places emphasis on how the person creates an understanding of him/herself, in contrast to an externally generated understanding. These, notions show that subjectivity is inseparable from discourse, yet feminist post structural subjects are constantly responding to externally regulated subjectivity which might leave individuals experiencing personal detachment and misalignment (Surendra, 2005).

Women may respond by mimicking a changed identity (Surendra, 2005) in CEE for example without really committing to change. In doing this feminist post structuralism also perpetuates like social constructionist the very evil that it seeks to address, that of binarism. On one hand feminist post structuralism acknowledges that people are part of their surrounding, they are constituted by the available discourses in the environment, the environmental discourses determine what humans are ,yet at the same time seem to propagate a dualist ontology that separate subject from discourse, the internal mind from the external mind. I am of the view that when seeing the human subject as essentially

one with the discourses as it is well appreciated in feminist poststructuralist, it would imply that the strict distinction between object and subject disappears as does the subjective-discourse distinction. This is where ecofeminism comes in. I argue in this paper that it through the principle of conceptual frameworks in Karren Warren's ecofeminist theory that we can cross the subject/discourse distinction of feminist post structuralism.

Karren Warren's notion of conceptual frameworks encompasses both the discourse and subjectivity notion thereby providing a revolving door through which we can escape from dualisms, more precisely a dualistic ontology. By viewing subjectivity as discursively and symbolically constructed, feminist post structuralism offers a negative and uni-directional understanding of subject formation that renders the subject passive (McNay,2000),thus undermining the agency of the individual. It offers an oversimplification of the view that culture and social practices affect ways of seeing and thinking as according to them, there is no underlying reality but just interplay of discourses and symbols (Godfrey, 2005). I argue in this paper in agreement to Surendra (2005), that while dominant social structures and discourses may be a force shaping identity, it is only when the individual internalises such meaning that it constitutes identity or contribute to the processes of identity formation. This therefore invokes the individual's agency, which seem to be deemphasised in feminist post structuralist conceptualisation of discourse-subject relations.

It is due to this lack of clarity on the concept of agency, a focal aspect in gender identity formation that makes feminist post structuralism an inadequate theory in understanding gender identity formatiom.It seems to put subjectivity in the too hard basket of discourse and symbols, giving more power to discourses than subjectivity. This tends to undermine self agency, hence, can do more than cloud our understanding of gender identity construction. It is this rigidity of feminist post structuralism on the meaning of subjectivity, tending to subsume it under discourse, failing to notice that these two aspect are mutual inclusive and reinforcing to each other. I argue in this paper that no clear line can be drawn between the discourse and subjectivity. An encompassing theory that will show that there is no distinction between these two concepts is needed in gender identity construction, hence; I find the concept of conceptual framework in Karren Warren's ecofeminist theory more promising.

According to Warren (2000), a conceptual framework is a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions which shape and reflect how one views oneself and one's world. It is the glasses through which one views and interprets his/her surrounding. In this paper, conceptual frameworks encompass the discourses, meanings, subjectivity as well as the language. Although I do acknowledge the social construction of meaning formation but informed by ecofeminism I do not however subscribe to a dualist ontology that separates the internal mind and the external world, the subjective from

discourse. Emphasising more on discourses reduces inequalitities to discourses which fail to acknowledge wider patterns of power and change (MacanGhaill, 2001) as well as the micro politics at individual level which can be clearly articulated through ecofeminism. I argue in this paper that Karen Warren's ecofeminism provides fresh ways of understanding gender identity construction which extends the existing frameworks that guide thinking about gender identity construction, acting as a reconciler to the multiple disagreements noted amongst gender identity construction theories.

Although feminist post structuralism acknowledges resistance as a site of struggle and source of freedom, they seem to take resistance as an end in itself instead as a source of transformation and change, which takes agency to realise. It is in the contention of this paper that resistance is part of a process of transformation. Such a notion is premised on the belief that human agency can effect the necessary changes that may open different meanings rather than current available discourse

I subscribe in this paper to the notion that the formation of narrative self identities is constantly in flux, always in a state of becoming as the selves interact over time, hence I argue in this paper that subjectivity is inseparable from discourse and may change faster than the discourses due to resistance, choice and positioning as positioning in a discourse allows for a merger between personal and public selves (Barret, 2005). Feminist poststructuralists seem to assume that change is gradual and predictable as it is consistent with available discourses. In contrast, researchers within the narrative tradition (Becker, 1997), however suggest that lives are perpetually conflicted and interrupted; hence a single continuous life trajectory is unlikely. In addition, Becker (1997) has suggested that real lives are more unpredictable than the cultural ideal while Wenger (1998, p.46) acknowledges that identity serves as a pivot between the social and individual and it reflects the mutual constitution between individuals and collectives. Wenger describes identity as 'negotiated experiences' as people define who they are, where they have been and where they are going. From this view by Wenger, and Seetal (2005)'s observation that identities only become identities when actors internalise them as such and identities as a construct has become a useful lens through which to understand experience, my assertion in this paper therefore is that although the dominant and counter-discourses and value systems shape how individuals live, but at the same time individuals are constantly revising themselves. There are no fixed sequences or stages in their identity pathway. Identity is dynamic and in a state of formation and reformation (Wenger, 1998). Hence the emerging discourse of ecofeminism was seen fitting for taking up this slack that was left by feminist poststructuralist.

IV. CONCLUSION: THE PROMISE OF ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminism eschews dualisms and recognizes interconnections of ideologies of oppression, its focus on context, narratives and situated knowledge gives a renewed access to the discourses and subjectivity of feminist post structuralism. To signify that one is made subject through discursive practice post structuralisms speak of subjectivity rather than identity (Barret, 2005).People behave in ways that conform to their identities. Identities are sources of meaning that actors construct for themselves through the process of individuation (Surendra, 2005). Identities only become identities when social actors internalize them as such and therefore as a construct have become a useful lens through which to understand experience (Surendra, 2005). While dominant social structures and discourses may be a force shaping identity, it is only when the individual internalises such meaning that it contributes to a process of identifying (Surendra, 2005). Mishler (1999) uses identity as a collective term to refer to the dynamic organization of our sub-identities that may conflict or align with each other, 'we speak or sing ourselves in a chorus of voices (Mishler, 1999, p.8). This paper is premised on the understanding that gender identity is defined as a person's sense of identification with either the male or the female sex. Gender identity as the perception of self as a woman or man, masculine or feminine entails not only what a person think of themselves as feminine or masculine but also what they think this means for their behaviour, actions and opportunities.. This includes their choices and resistance which constitute their agency. Conceptualising gender identities like this makes it possible to use Karren Warren's idea of a conceptual framework. Since gender identity is subjective operating on a personal level as well as on an institutional level (Connell, 2002), They can be identified from the narratives of the individual which is well aligned to Karren Warren's notion of first person narrative. This approach of self-understanding or narrative identity brings together the multiple dimensions of experience within a single story (Surendra, 2005). Narrative as a way of knowing according to Somers (1994) in the human and social sciences has created opportunities to approach the study of identity formation and social agency empirically by bringing together at once the temporal, relational, macro structural, cultural, institutional, personal, cognitive and emotional dimensions. Such emphasis avoids categorical rigidities in locating identity formations in overlapping networks of relations that shift over space and time (Somers, 1994, p.607). This implies that subjectivity of an individual is part of the individual's conceptual framework which in turn defines that subjectivity. This paper therefore, argues that ecofeminism especially ecofeminist thinking as espoused by Karren Warren is equally a valuable tool that can be used to study gender identities. At this juncture I will show how ecofeminism like feminist post structuralism fit consistently in analysing gender identities.

From the analysis of the theories of gender identity construction done above, propositions for the suitability of ecofeminism as a theoretical framework to study gender identities emerge. First, as revealed from these theories, there is a growing need to incorporate subjectivity and self-understanding in the analysis of the construction of gender. This self understanding requires an exploration of the conceptual frameworks of the individual and this conceptual framework is a product of the meaning making of the prevailing conceptual frameworks which can be likened to discourses in feminist post structuralism. To tap into these conceptual frameworks requires Karren Warren's principle of first person narrative. Second, ecofeminism eschews dualisms through its elaboration on the logic of domination which enable the breakdown of restrictive binaries such as male/female as well as masculine/feminine. Ecofeminism like feminist poststructuralist aim to dismantle the binary oppositional and dualisms established by gender regimes and instead create spaces through which fluid unstable and uncertain aspects of identity can emerge (Healy, 1999, p.122). This resonates well with feminist poststructuralist repudiation of dichotomies. Third, the points raised under discourse shows that ecofeminism can be used to study gender identities in that the notion of discourses combined with language and subjectivity can be likened to conceptual frameworks as espoused by Karren Warren. Gender identities are enacted as individuals negotiate meaning through one's conceptual frameworks. Fourth, power which is one of the features of oppressive conceptual frameworks in Karen warren's theory is emphasised also in feminist post structuralist theory.

In recognizing wholeness, and diversity and subjective view of self, ecofeminism allows for interweaving of different ideas and strands (Riley-Taylor, 2002). As a theory that recognizes powerful interconnections between culture and the natural world, it helps to reconcile scholars who put much emphasis on gender identity as deeply embedded in our society and those that emphasize the personal as political. It also bridges the gap between materialist and discursive theories on the construction of gender identities.

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