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Femininities in teaching: dialectic of self and others

Femininities
in teaching

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Abstract

Purpose – Based on grounded theory the purpose of this paper is to explore the gender identity development of 40 Iranian female EFL teachers teaching at Iranian universities to examine how these women's gender identity as part of their broader personal identity is developing through actions and interactions resulting from their job.

Design/methodology/approach – A grounded theory study including theoretical sampling and constant comparison was conducted to address our main research questions. Data were gathered through online focus group interviews, online, asynchronous, in-depth interviews, and reflective memos. Collected data were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding techniques.

Findings – The results of the analysis of data led to the emergence of the final core theme of *dialectic of self and others*. Participants were in constant conflict of being a true woman, a woman behind the mask of a man, and a human wearing no gender.

Originality/value – The paper provides a new portrait of gender identity development in line with Wenger's (1998) communities of practice demonstrating multidimensionality and complexity of femininities. Such a study can shed light on challenges, experiences, and expectations of women working outside the home.

Keywords Grounded theory, Femininities, Gender identity

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Gender identity was defined by Steensma *et al.* (2013) as “the extent to which a person experiences oneself to be like others of one gender. One's sense of being male or female largely determines how people view themselves and provides an important basis for their interactions with others” (p. 289). Gender identity was mainly studied in clinical situations and on clinical populations (Cohen-Kettenis *et al.*, 2006; Deogracias *et al.*, 2007; Hines *et al.*, 2004; Steensma *et al.*, 2013; Strong *et al.*, 2000). The important role of gender identity in structuring society and in deconstructing and reconstructing social justice also made many researchers empirically investigate such a subject in normative individuals (Davis, 2002; Diamond, 2006; Edwards and Jones, 2009; Her and Soria, 2014; Hiestand and Levitt, 2005; Joel *et al.*, 2013; Silva, 2008). Gender was and is also very important in language teaching and studies on language teachers. Varghese *et al.* (2005) argued that understanding language learning and teaching requires understanding teachers, who they are, their cultural, political, and individual identities consisting of race, sexual orientation, and gender. Although considerable research has been devoted to gender as an important variable in EFL situation during the previous two decades by the researchers who focussed on the relationship between gender, discourse, or language (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Goddard and Patterson, 2000; Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002; Prewitt-Freilino *et al.*, 2011), and other researchers who investigated gender as implicated in the construction of the identity of those involved



in the process of language learning and teaching (Johnston, 2003; Norton, 2000; Norton and Pavlenko, 2004; Morgan, 2004; O'Mochain, 2006; Polat and Mahalingappa, 2010; Varghese, 2000; Varghese *et al.*, 2005), rather less attention has been paid to how language teachers perceive their own gender and what is their own conceptualization of their own gender identity and its development. The purpose of this paper is to penetrate deeply into the life of 40 Iranian female EFL teachers to find out what women mean by being a woman and to discover their daily experiences as Vidal-Ortiz called for researchers to move toward further investigation of everyday lived experiences (qtd. in West and Zimmerman, 2009). Similar to the study conducted by Joel *et al.* (2013), the researchers (one female and two males) of the present study focus on participants from a society where "being a woman or being a man are considered as natural experiences within a naturalized dichotomous and binary gender system" (p. 2). The focus of the study is on Iranian female university teachers as the high acceptance rate of Iranian women at Iranian universities in recent years provided the new possibilities for them as women, as family members, and as individual persons.

2. Review of literature

In her attempt to challenge the dichotomous distinction between the language learner and the language learning context, Norton (2000) who acknowledged the dynamic nature of identity explained that "I use the term identity to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 4). In line with poststructuralist theories, she considered identity as multiple, changing, and site of struggle. Further, she argued that gender was implicated in the construction of identity in a complex way. West and Zimmerman in their seminal article *Doing Gender* published in 1987 conceptualized gender as a doing rather than a being embedded in social interaction which was performed by humans and claimed that "a person's gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others" (p. 140). Moreover, Butler (1990), in explanation of Beauvoir's claim that one is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman, argued that womanhood was not a stable product but "woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, and a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification" (p. 44). Butler asserted that identity was not connected to any essence. Considering gender as a discursive practice, she criticized modern feminists because of perpetuating sexism resulted from the distinction between sex as biological and gender as socially constructed although such a distinction indicated that identity was fluid.

Due to the complexity and fluidity of identity and the significant role played by teachers in constructing classroom practices (Varghese *et al.*, 2005), language teacher identity was investigated by several researchers (Huang and Varghese, 2015; Johnston, 2003; Morgan, 2004; Varghese, 2000; Varghese *et al.*, 2005). The present study also addresses language teacher identity development but through the lens of gender as one of the most important aspects of identity in the language classroom (Varghese *et al.*, 2005) which was not sufficiently covered in the existing literature, although various researchers focussed on gender identity development in normative individuals. Davis (2002) explored the impact of socially prescribed gender roles on college men's identity development. Participants of the study discussed restrictions resulting from scripted gender roles and referred to a sense of confusion about masculinity. Hiestand and Levitt (2005) explored the gender identity development of butch lesbian women as well and concluded that the

process of gender identity development was complicated by the societal pressures to conform to gender roles. Diamond (2006) additionally studied masculine identity development throughout life focussing on a case example of a young adult and concluded that the reshaping of the masculine ego ideal resulted from the emergence of a more mature sense of masculinity included the interplay between masculine and feminine identifications. Furthermore, Silva (2008) investigated how women negotiated gender identities within the masculine military institution and what types of transformations in gender ideology and practices were resulted. Results of the study revealed that women selected as the participants of the study reproduced traditional femininity and male privilege. Edwards and Jones (2009) conducted a grounded theory study on ten college men to investigate their gender identity development. A theory emerged from their study revealing that men's gender identity developed through constant interaction with society's expectations of men as men. Joel *et al.* (2013) assessed the perception of gender identity in normative individuals as well and called for a new conceptualization of gender related to the multiplicity and fluidity in the experience of gender. Her and Soria (2014) examined the process of Hmong male college students' gender identity development. The researchers concluded that the participants of their study involved in the complex process of gender identity development which centered on the complex interaction between them as individuals and societies' expectations of them as men.

The present study also seeks to discover and uncover how female teachers become women, change as women, or stop being women through actions and interactions resulting from their job. Focussing on our participants' everyday lived experiences of being and becoming, we seek to further examine womanhood in teaching. The initial questions addressed by the present research are as the following:

RQ1. How do Iranian EFL female teachers perceive themselves as a woman?

RQ2. How do this perception of what it means to be a woman change because of their profession?

3. Method

Grounded theory of gender identity development by Edwards and Jones (2009) including theoretical sampling and three coding techniques of open, axial, and selective was used and elaborated in the present study. In fact, gender identity development was described in terms of interaction and arguments among different expectations.

3.1 Participants

Sampling used in the present study was theoretical. Glaser (1978) defined theoretical sampling as "the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides which data to collect next and where to find them" (p. 36). Strauss and Corbin (1998) have broken down the theoretical sampling process into stages of open sampling, relational and variational sampling, and discriminate sampling, which correspond directly with their stages of open, axial, and selective coding. Open sampling refers to "sampling those persons, places, situations that will provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 181). Through open sampling in the present study, 18 experienced female EFL university teachers were interviewed. Teachers' age ranged from 30 to 42 years old. Focussing on EFL teachers was mainly inspired by personal experience of the researchers as Iranian EFL teachers. Most commonly, studies identify experienced teachers as those who have approximately five

years or more of classroom experience (Gatbonton, 1999; Richards *et al.*, 1998; Tsui, 2003, 2005). Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained that relational and variational sampling was “to purposefully choose persons, sites, or documents that maximize opportunities to elicit data regarding variations along dimensions of categories, and that demonstrate what happens when changes occurs” (p. 186). During this stage, researchers tried to seek out confirming and disconfirming cases. Thus, they interviewed with 22 other female EFL teachers. Eleven teachers were experienced and 11 teachers were novice.

Novice teachers are often student teachers or teachers who have less than two years of teaching experience (Gatbonton, 2008). Experienced teachers’ age ranged from 30 to 46 years old. Novice teachers’ age ranged from 25 to 27. In discriminate sampling, the researcher chooses “the sites, persons, and documents that will maximize opportunities for verifying the story line, relationships between categories, and for filling in poorly developed categories” (p. 187). In fact, the researchers stopped interviewing a new teacher as they thought further interviews would not add to findings. It was the point when data saturation occurred. Data saturation was defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the point at which “no additional data are being found whereby the researcher can develop properties of the category” (p. 65). Researchers turned back to those data sources most apt to help them in validating theory. During a two-year period, 40 female EFL teachers from ten universities in five provinces in Iran participated in the study. Whereas 29 female EFL teachers were selected through nominations from colleagues for open coding, only 18 teachers agreed to take part in the study. For axial coding, 22 female EFL teachers volunteered to participate in the study from among 36 teachers who received our e-mails. All participants were recruited through direct e-mail by which the following points were covered:

- (1) Who the writers are?
- (2) What the research is about and why it can be important?
- (3) Why and how the potential participants were selected?

Ten of a total of 40 participants were single women. Other teachers were married and five of them were mother too. All participants had completed their MA degrees at Iranian universities. Three teachers were PhD candidates.

3.2 Instrumentation

The instruments used in the study were e-focus group interviews or online focus group interviews, online, asynchronous in-depth qualitative interviews and memos which are explained further below.

3.2.1 Online focus group interviews. Focus group interviews nurture different attitudes and are used to collect information for discovery and verifying perceptions, feelings, and thoughts (Patton, 1990). The main advantage of focus group is the opportunity to observe the group and interact on a particular topic (Morse and Field, 1995). Such interviews can be conducted online. As Markham (2004) argued “the internet provides new tools for conducting research and new means for understanding the way social realities get constructed and reproduced through discussion behaviors” (p. 95). According to Millward (2012), there are two types of online focus group or e-focus group:

Real-time focus groups who log on to the network at a set time for a set period to discuss a topic or issue, and ongoing focus groups whose members sign on and off whenever they wish, and contribute whenever convenient and/or appropriate (pp. 433-434).

In the present study, the real-time e-focus group was used. Female EFL teachers were interviewed through G-chat for five sessions. In focus groups, the researchers tried to use open ended questions and avoided dichotomous questions which could be answered with a yes or no and tried to apply questions that made participants involve using reflection, examples, choices, rating scales, drawings, etc.

3.2.2 Online, asynchronous in-depth interview. Online, asynchronous, in-depth interview was defined by Meho (2006) as an interview which “involves multiple e-mail exchanges between the interviewer and interviewee over an extended period of time” (p. 1284). In in-depth interviews, it is possible to change the sequence and pace of interview questions and to add new ones in order to create a unique interview by which interviewees’ experience can be fully described (Hays and Singh, 2012).

3.2.3 Memos. Memos are not limited to thinking about one thing or another, but are textual representations of the questions researchers begin to ask themselves as they analyze the data (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1995). Memos were written immediately when reading and coding interviews. Memos made the researchers ask questions about the potential meanings of what interviewees expressed. Concepts identified in transcriptions of synchronous and asynchronous interviews were also compared with each other.

3.3 Procedure

Initially, the researchers conducted e-focus group interviews with 18 experienced female EFL university teachers chosen in open sampling. These female EFL teachers were interviewed through G-chat for five sessions in three groups. Each group consists of six female EFL teachers. It was preferred to conduct e-focus groups before online, asynchronous, in-depth interviews because as Soklaridis (2009) explained “it would stimulate the respondents’ thinking by hearing one another’s opinions regarding the topic” (p. 724). The sequence of questions was from general to specific. The purpose was to ask questions that made the participants reflect on the entire discussion and then offer their positions or opinions on topics of central importance to the researchers. Questions asked in online focus group interviews are presented in the following list.

Questions used in e-focus group interviews in open sampling:

- (1) Can you give us a picture of yourself as a female?
- (2) Can you give us a picture of yourself as an EFL teacher?
- (3) How do you define your relationship with your family and friends (male and female)?
- (4) How do you define your relationship with your colleagues and students (male and female)?
- (5) How do you think things should be in terms of what females are supposed to be like?
- (6) How do you think things should be in terms of what teachers are supposed to be like?
- (7) How do you think things should be in terms of what female teachers are supposed to be like?
- (8) Describe yourself as a woman before becoming an English teacher.

- (9) Describe yourself as a woman after becoming an English teacher.
- (10) Who do you want to be as a teacher and as a female?

In the last focus group interview, we tried to focus on themes emerging through previous interviews in more details.

Then, online, asynchronous, in-depth interviews were conducted with each one of these 18 teachers. A list of important questions was predetermined and was used. Calls for participants, initial and follow-up contacts plus the organization of the time interviews were carried out by G-mail and by phone. Participants were sent a series of five G-mails based around questions presented in the following list.

Questions used in online, asynchronous, in-depth interviews in open sampling:

- (1) Who are you as a female?
- (2) What are your expectations as a female?
- (3) How do you behave as a female?
- (4) Who are you as an EFL teacher?
- (5) What are your expectations as an EFL teacher?
- (6) How do you behave as an EFL teacher?
- (7) Have you experienced any changes as a female during teaching?
- (8) What are your reflections on who you were before?
- (9) What are your reflections on who you are now?
- (10) What do you mean by saying "I am a woman"?

As there was no opportunity for providing direct probing in G-mail interviews, this limitation was compensated using follow-up G-mails by which participants had this opportunity to send their reflections, views, or everything they ignored to refer to in interviews. Raw data collected from this stage were also coded. The researchers elicited codes guiding them toward the second stage of sampling or relational/variational sampling in which they selected 22 other female EFL teachers as new participants. Experienced teachers were divided into two groups for the purpose of focus group interviews. Novice teachers were also divided into two groups. These EFL teachers were interviewed through G-chat for five sessions in four groups. Five online, asynchronous in-depth interviews were conducted for each one of these 22 female EFL teachers. Main questions used in open sampling were used in variation sampling once again. Thank you letters were immediately sent to all participants at the end of both focus group interviews and in-depth interviews.

In order to judge the validity of the present research, four criteria of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were considered. Credibility of the study was established through triangulation which consists of different methods to gather information about participants including online focus group interviews, online, asynchronous, in-depth interviews, and memos.

Transferability or external validity of the study "is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). As argued by Benz and Newman (1998), "In fact, we have assumed that, if the purpose of the research is to generalize, one should employ quantitative methodology" (p. 54).

But there are researchers enable readers of the research study to make such a transfer but providing sufficient contextual information in qualitative research can also enable. Thus, information about the following aspects was collected:

- (1) factors based on which participants of the study were chosen;
- (2) the number of the participants of the study;
- (3) the data collection methods used; and
- (4) the number and length of data collection methods.

In order to address the dependability of the study, all the processes within the study were reported in detail in method and discussion. Another aim of triangulation or gathering data using different methods was addressing confirmability or objectivity of the study.

Three coding techniques were used to analyze and categorize participants' accounts at different levels. Coding in grounded theory involves going back to the data for different pieces of information at different times (Brown *et al.*, 2002). The first technique was open coding through which participants' accounts were read line by line and were assigned concepts. This followed by writing memos by the researchers in order to record their own reflections of participants' accounts and assigned concepts. Then, concepts were classified into larger categories. Several key themes were identified as the result of open coding of data gathered from 18 experienced teachers selected as open sampling. Open coding led the researchers toward a new sample. Data gathered from the new online focus groups and online, asynchronous, in-depth interviews gathered through variational sampling as well as their corresponding memos were also analyzed.

It should be added that analyzing the collected data occurred through the constant comparison. The constant comparative method is used by the researcher to develop concepts from the data by coding and analyzing at the same time (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Glaser and Strauss (qtd. in Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 339) described the constant comparison method as following four distinct stages:

- (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category;
- (2) integrating categories and their properties;
- (3) delimiting the theory; and
- (4) writing the theory.

The researchers then looked for recurrent themes in addition to the new ones emerging from microanalysis of collected data. In total, 21 categories were provided in open coding as shown in Table I.

The next stage was axial coding during which key categories were analyzed in terms of their similarities and differences and were grouped into larger categories. Axial coding consists of four analytical processes continually relating sub-categories to a category, comparing categories with the collected data, expanding the density of the categories by detailing their properties and dimensions, and exploring variations in the phenomena (Brown *et al.*, 2002). During axial coding, the researchers tried to explore the processual relations among major categories and sub-categories. The aim was to find out how these categories and sub-categories were related to each other or how much they were in contradiction with each other. The researchers also turned back to those data sources most apt to help them in validating theory. This time, the incidents

Table I.
Categories identified
during open coding

Key categories extracted in open coding	Corresponding properties
Physical attractiveness	Facial features/body properties/clothing
Youthfulness	Health/friskiness/passion
Virginity	Chastity/modesty
Simplicity	Easiness/inexperience
Obedience	Compliance/acceptance of roles/acceptance of duties
Diffidence	Shyness/reserved in manner
Fertility	Pregnancy/child rearing
Caregiving	Emotional caring/physical caring
Self-sacrifice	Sacrifice of one's rights/sacrifice of one's desires
Housekeeping	Cleaning/cooking
Conformity	Matching beliefs/matching behaviors/matching interests
Unconditional adherence	Ever loyalty/unconditional love
Toughness	Physical toughness/mental toughness
Detachment	Physical separation/emotional separation
Self-determination	Intrinsic tendencies/self-directed decisions
Solitude	Privacy/deliberate isolation
Commitment to oneself	Self-respect/self-engagement
Commitment to others	Sense of duty/sense of respect
Love	Human kindness/interpersonal affection
Sympathy	Interpersonal compassion/feeling with
Empathy	Feeling into/being there

identified through previous stages were compared with the properties assigned to categories. The researchers tried to evaluate conceptual categories against the new data and constantly compared the products of their analyses against the actual data, made necessary modifications or additions, and then further validated the modifications and additions against the incoming data. As the result of axial coding, 21 categories identified in open coding were subsumed by nine categories which are presented in Table II.

The final stage included selective coding which was defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as "the integration of data, concepts, and categories into a coherent theory" (p. 144). The main aim is increasing the density of the substantive theory (Sorour and Howell, 2013). During stage three, the underlying properties were identified, the irrelevant properties of categories were taken out, and the details of properties were added to the outline of categories interrelated. Many categories could be integrated with other similar ones through selective coding. During selective coding, the researchers sought to find the relationships between extracted categories from the data. Three main themes emerged from comparing and contrasting data collected which involved nine categories. The three main themes and their categories are shown in Table III.

These three main themes were also put under the core theme of dialectic of self and others as can be shown in Figure 1.

4. Results and discussion

Analysis of data collected through online focus-group interviews, online, asynchronous, in-depth interviews, and memos drew the attention of the researchers to three important themes. The first theme was womanhood. True womanhood in the society where participants lived was conceptualized by beauty, purity, subordination,

Table II.
Categories identified
in axial coding

Key categories extracted in axial coding	Corresponding categories extracted in open coding
Beauty	Physical attractiveness
Purity	Youthfulness
	Virginity
	Simplicity
Subordination	Obedience
	Diffidence
Motherness	Fertility
	Caregiving
	Self-sacrifice
Wifeness	Housekeeping
	Conformity
	Unconditional adherence
Restricted emotion	Toughness
	Detachment
Independence	Self-determination
	Solitude
Sense of responsibility	Commitment to oneself
	Commitment to others
Affection	Love
	Sympathy
	Empathy

Table III.
Key theme

Key themes extracted in selective coding	Corresponding categories extracted in axial coding
Womanhood	Beauty
	Purity
	Subordination
	Motherness
	Wifeness
Teacherhood	Independence
	Restricted emotions
Humanity	Affection
	Sense of responsibility

motherness, and wifeness. Following are two quotes from the interviews conducted with the participants:

As a young girl, I should be attractive. It is very important among my family members as they believe this point will help me marry before 30. I always wear makeup and follow fashion trends. I think I have to follow fashion trends and to be beautiful while I want to be admired for my own sake.

Most of the time, I am listening to others. Perhaps, my decisions are the last decisions at home. Perhaps, they are ignored. Anyway, I am a good listener who easily ignores her own wishes. It is a custom. It is a rule. My mother also ignored her own wishes.

The cult of true woman arising between 1820 and 1860 also considered purity, domesticity, and submission as attributes of true womanhood. Purity was defined as an essential attribute for a young woman whose loss was equal to death and as stated by Welter (1966), "without it she was, in fact no woman at all, but a member of some lower order" (p. 154).

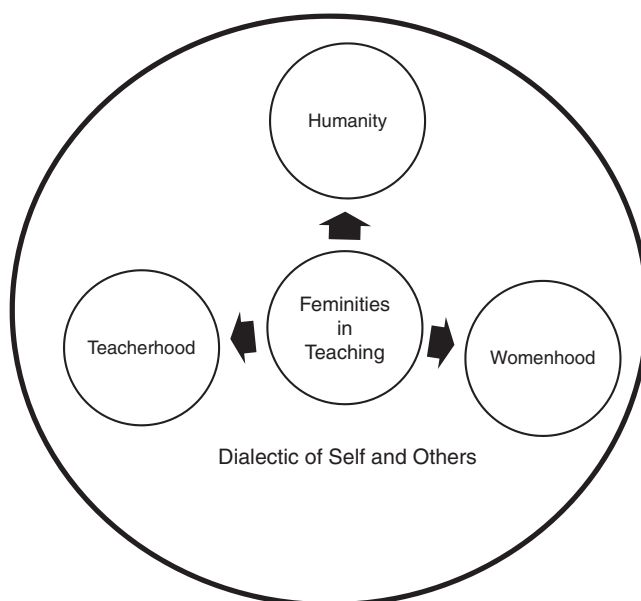


Figure 1.
Three main themes
and corresponding
theory extracted in
selective coding

Welter also explained that “the true woman’s place was unquestionably by her own fireside-as daughter, sister, but most of all as wife and mother” (p. 162). Furthermore, true woman was expected to be obedient, diffident, and submissive to God, to fate, to duties, and to men. Such true women were required to be passive. The fourth category leading to the theme of womanhood was beauty described by physical attractiveness and youthfulness. According to Hume (1757):

Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others (p. 136).

The second theme was teacherhood consisting of categories of restricted emotions and independence. Following are two other quotes from the interviews conducted with the participants:

I am not allowed to show my feelings so easily unlike my male colleagues. You know, I am not allowed. It causes many problems for me. So far, I received many messages from some of my colleagues. Their messages were really disgusting. I didn’t mean what they perceived. I just wanted to express my pure emotions and feelings. I want to protect myself, so I prefer to be cold. I think it is not fair because I am full of energy and happiness.

I love teaching because it enables me to make decisions. Do you know how this can be interesting for me? Here, I have a special feeling. I’m like a baby who has recently started walking and getting free from the hands of adult supporters. But I sometimes face great problems in my interactions. When I am suddenly called by my first name by one of my male colleagues who is not so close to me, I think I am humiliated. Recently, I try to behave more harshly. I think I am getting thick.

Traditional gender ideology specified masculine gender roles including stoicism, independence, physical toughness, dominance, restrictive emotional expression,

competition, and antifemininity (Connell, 2005; Levant *et al.*, 2007; Levant, 2011). It seems that the profession of teaching at university made participants violate gender role norms of their own context and perform masculinity. As was expressed by Connell (2014) “masculinity does not simply equate with men. Women can practice masculinity, though there is always a certain tension about their doing so” (p. 6). Such a view of gender is in agreement with Judith Butler’s (1990) argument in her book, *Gender Trouble*, for a more fluid understanding of gender identity. As Butler (1990) stated “Gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed” (p. 25). Whereas teaching at university made it possible for our participants to grow up and become more independent, they underwent becoming men to get rid of harassments which were unfair from their perspectives.

Paechter (2003) explains that treating masculinities or femininities as localized communities of practice is a useful approach to the question of why specific forms of gender are practiced at specific times and places. The following quotes is from one of our participants:

I have read a sentence from a great person. If you cannot change the world where you live, you should change yourself. Most of my colleagues and students are men. Some of my students are older than me. Some of them see me a young woman. I protect myself. In fact, I prefer formal, dark, and simple dresses. I will never be excited or emotional. Imagine a female teacher with manly voice. I prefer to sound like men.

In communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), knowledge and expertise are distributed among participants, so that each participant has something to contribute and something to learn. Practicing masculinity or other forms of femininity can be considered as a source of coherence in the community of practice. Becoming an experienced member of the community of practice necessitated knowing what to do and what not to do. Compulsories and forbiddens of teaching at Iranian universities asked for solitude, self-determination, toughness, and detachment.

The third theme was humanity consisted of categories of affection and sense of responsibility including commitment to oneself and to others. Following are two quotes extracted from interviews with the participants:

To teach my students a new language as a new world, I do my best to see the world through their eyes. I forget their gender. They are not boys or girls. They are my students. I do my best to feel with their hearts. This make teaching interesting and meaningful to me. When I am in class with my students, I am myself. This is what I really want to be.

It is hard for me to express what is in my mind. I just focus on one important thing that I have learned from my father who was a teacher too. To accomplish my goals in teaching, I should do my duties and obligations as a teacher. Parents of these young students trusted me and I am also accountable to their children. For me, they are not a group of students. They are different individuals and I should be able to know their world, feelings, and ideas.

Two categories of affection and sense of responsibility are reminiscence of emotions, respect and friendship as was explained by Nussbaum (1997) in her list of human capability which “identifies only the set of human capabilities that are necessary for a dignified human existence” (Alkire, 2002, p. 187). Emotions refer to the ability to love, to grieve, and to have attachments with other people. Friendship means “being able to live for and to others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings” (p. 287). Respect is also defined as “having the social bases of self-respect and

non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others” (p. 287).

In fact, these three themes revealed how teachers selected as participants of this study were struggling to find their own gender identity through an argumentation between their mind and their society’s pressure.

The results of this study were in line with findings of a grounded theory studies conducted by (Edwards and Jones, 2009; Her and Soria, 2014) which investigated gender identity development of college men who engaged in the process of gender identity development resulting from interaction between them as individuals and society’s expectations of them as men. Participants of the present study also involved in the process of gender identity development where they chose between femininity coming from society’ expectations of being a woman, masculinity coming from society’s expectations of being a university teacher, and self-expectations of being a human. Gender is a doing by pre-exited subjects collaboratively and competitively involved. Although gender essentialism which considers females and males essentially different was rejected based on the results of the study, affection, and sense of responsibility called for essentialism regarding human nature:

An essentialist account of human nature proposes, as already mentioned, that there are some elements in human life common to all human beings, independently of their cultural, historical or individual situations, that are, when pursued and realised, ways towards a good human life and towards human flourishing (Holma, 2007, p. 50).

5. Conclusion

The present grounded theory study was an attempt to investigate gender identity development of 30 Iranian female EFL teachers teaching at Iranian universities. Data were collected via online focus group interviews, online, asynchronous, in-depth interviews, and memos. The result of the analysis of data led to the emergence of the final core theme of dialectic of self and others. These female teachers were in constant conflict among being a true woman, a woman behind the mask of a man, and a human wearing no gender. Practicing masculinity by the participants who were females can confirm the fluidity of gender identity, but there is a need to researchers to further examine the explicit and implicit reasons, possibilities and limitations, and silence and involvement behind and beyond all these masculinities and femininities. The participants underwent doing gender, undoing gender, and doing the true self. There is a need to researchers to investigate doing the true self in and through masculinities and femininities.

Participants of the study consisted of 40 EFL teachers and this could curtail inferences from the study. Longitudinal and multi-method studies with a larger number of participants can be used to more clearly uncover the development of gender identities of teachers. Since participants of the present study were female teachers, deeper understanding of the new portrait of women requires studies focussing on both men and women especially regarding our participants’ quotes which draw our attention to those men, family members, and situations described and judged when referring to harassments and customs that prescribed either becoming a man or being a true woman. According to Connell (2014):

If we ask why women’s experience was marginalized, why women have been exploited and oppressed, the answer does not lie in women’s experience alone. This has to do with the relations between women and men - and not just individual relationships but relations on a societal scale.

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Further reading

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