

INCLUDING DIFFERENCE:  
ESL FEMALE TEACHERS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

by

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Master of Arts, Shanghai International Studies University, 2000  
Bachelor of Arts, Sichuan International Studies University, 1997

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

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The purpose of this narrative study is to understand the experience of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education. The ESL female teachers will be defined as female teachers who speak English as a second language. The study asks the following research questions: What are the lived experiences of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education? How do ESL female teachers in postsecondary education narrate their experiences and negotiate their teacher identities? How can the above understanding contribute to the inclusion of ESL female teachers in an increasingly diversified educational landscape? The researcher adopts an intersectional stance and a poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity and positioning to study identity.

Life story interviews and narrative inquiry are utilized as methodology to collect stories from ESL female teachers teaching in postsecondary education and to retell the same so as to achieve an informed understanding of the phenomenon under study. The study reveals that the participants have experienced an intersection of multiple identities which collectively function to marginalize them under the discourse of difference as deficit. Apart from efforts to adapt to the dominant discourse, the participants have also acted to utilize their multiple identities so as to resist negative positioning. The participants' experiences have posed questions concerning what institutional and systemic changes are needed in order to help their inclusion in postsecondary education.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

In this chapter of introduction, I recount the origin of my research interest as deriving from my own experience of being an ESL woman trying to continue my teaching career in postsecondary education. The experiences of myself as well as those of others who share similar backgrounds lead to my interest in “diverse teacher” in general, and ESL female teachers of postsecondary education in particular. This chapter also includes my research purpose and research questions.

### 1.1 Situating the problem

My research interest stems from my own biography and lived experience. I came to Canada a few years ago as an immigrant under the category of “federal skilled worker”. Falling within those who hold “eligible occupations” and with a Master’s degree in English language and literature plus 11 years of teaching experience, I presumed that I would be able to continue my previous career – teaching in educational, postsecondary in particular, settings. However, my plan did not materialize. My education, teaching experience and certification, though recognized in the immigration procedure, do not work in securing a relevant teaching position in Canada. Three months passed and I hardly received any reply for my applications. This seems to have convinced me of what I heard before coming here: you need to have *Canadian* education and experience. Therefore, I decided to apply for further education and degrees in Canada, so that I can continue my teaching career after having relevant education and experience. That is how I started my PhD program.



I am not alone in my experience as a teacher who comes from other countries in the middle of career and experiences troubles to continue. Two of my friends who were also postsecondary education teachers and who came to Canada in the same year as I both ceased teaching. Alice, mother of my son's friend, used to be an English teacher in a school in China. Daunted by the recertification procedures and anticipated employment barriers (for sure, who would want an ESL to teach English in Canada?), decided to learn accounting after coming to Canada. A new friend that I met while pursuing my degree in university used to teach in a Chinese university and is now working for her PhD degree in Canada. I always look to her as a sign of hope and a model to emulate, but she often tells me about the difficulty in finding a teaching position in local postsecondary settings after our graduation and receiving degrees. In other words, even if I have those qualifications, for a newcomer who does not grow up in Canadian language and culture, becoming a teacher in postsecondary settings seems rather illusive.

On the other side of the picture, I do hear "success" stories. One of my previous colleagues went to the U.S. for a PhD degree some 7 or 8 years ago and is now already on the tenure track in a Midwest U.S. university. If that is only a U.S. case, a more encouraging example comes from my department, where an Asian immigrant becomes faculty, of course, after receiving her degrees and possessing the needed experience in a Canadian university. In a few engineering departments here, there are also a number of faculty members who came from China with both Chinese and Canadian educational backgrounds. Therefore, I become interested in these teachers who exist but in small

numbers and I wonder about their experience. Do they share some of my puzzles and frustrations? What have they gone through before becoming teachers of postsecondary education in a different culture and language? To be sure, I am attracted to how they “succeed” in their strife to thrive in their career development and I am also eager to learn valuable lessons from their experience.

Although “diverse teachers” have gradually captured most of my attention, they are still the invisible minority in a largely homogenous teaching population here. In the 2013 annual conference of Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE), I attended a preconference of Canadian Association for Teacher Education (CATE) on the topic of diversity. The first thing I noticed was that the conference attendees were very much homogenous, at least from a racial and linguistic perspective. While a fellow attendee was quick to point out the lack of diversity in the group at the very beginning of our discussion, another attendee disagreed and replied that there were many kinds of (presumably other than those of visible nature) diversity among the existing group that warranted the group as diversified. Of course, everybody is different and thus “diversity” is absolute, but the latter attendee’s reply of dismissing the issue of minority representation indicates a general lack of attention to, or, worse, a refusal to recognize, the issue with “diverse teachers”. Furthermore, educational literature on diversity is still framed around the “default” paradigm that the teachers from mainstream language and culture need to prepare themselves for diverse students, rather than the realization that diverse teachers need to be included in the whole educational landscape. As a matter of fact, educational research into diverse teachers is also insufficient. In what follows, I

situate the research problem in the study of diverse teachers in general and of ESL female teachers in particular.

### *1.1.1 Diverse teachers*

With the expansion of globalization in education, which is characterized among other things by the influx of immigrants and the enhanced scale of international student enrollment, the student population in North America has become increasingly diversified. This increased student diversity is present not only in K-12 school systems, but also in post-secondary education. However, more often than not, there is a mismatch between the diversified student population and the comparatively homogenous teacher population (Academic Matters, 2011; Trends in Higher Education, 2011) and the experience of diverse teachers has not been well documented (Rodriguez & Reis, 2012). By “diverse teachers” I mainly refer to teachers who belong to a minority in any or several of the demographic categories of race, gender, class, language, immigrant status, and other differentiating apparatus. Take racially diverse teachers as an example. Despite the increase in the number of teachers of color over the years, the ratio between racially diverse teachers and the racialized Canadian population, as well as the increasingly diverse student population, is actually falling in elementary and secondary level (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009). On postsecondary level, such disparity is likely to be similar, if not more severe, considering the increasing proportion of international students each year (see Academic Matters, 2011; Trends in Higher Education, 2011). Therefore, research into the experience of diverse teacher has become increasingly important.

However, there still exists another issue with research on diverse teachers. Although the experience of diverse teachers is featured in some educational research, the primary categories employed usually turn out to be race, gender and class, rather than language. Linguistically diverse teachers have been referred to in a number of different yet related terms. In the discipline of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), there has been a prolonged academic discussion concerning nonnative English speakers (NNES), but such a categorization still adheres to the dichotomy between native and nonnative speakers and can function as a disempowering construct (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999). The notion of internationally educated teachers (IET) has also received some research attention in Canada, where immigrant teachers experience obstacles in certification and employment (Walsh, Brigham & Wang, 2011). For the purposes of this study, I have settled on “English as a second language” (ESL) as a distinguishing feature of the type of linguistically diverse teacher whom I wish to research into. I understand that the complexity involved in the naming of ESL and I will offer further discussion on this issue in the coming chapters.

### ***1.1.2 Discourse of otherness***

The discourse of otherness prevails in prior research concerning diverse teachers. In what follows, I offer a brief review of the body of educational research and studies in how people are othered and marginalized on account of their affiliation to identity categories such as gender, race and language in postsecondary education settings.

From the abundant research into female teachers in postsecondary education, I select a few to summarize current understandings on how female teachers are othered in academia. Luke (2001) referred to the previously conceived conceptual metaphors of “glass ceilings” and “glass walls” to describe the vertical and horizontal impediments to women’s career trajectories in academy, i.e., women are “vertically clustered in low-level, low-pay, low-status positions” and women are “concentrated horizontally in traditional female areas of study that generally lead to low-prestige, low-pay professions” (p. 10). In the new managerialism context in Australia (probably also in other parts of the world) and the discourse of quality assurance, women faculty are confronted with both the reinforcement of “a host of patriarchal assumptions and processes”, and additional “formal procedures to investigate and reverse gender imbalance” (p. 58). In the U.K., Halvorsen (2002) raised statistical evidence to conclude that “academic women are not promoted as much or paid as much, and do not, in truth, have equality with their male counterpart” (p.9). Also in the U.K., with respect to research activities, Jackson (2002) analyzed the relation between research and power and concluded that “what determines ‘good research practice’ is guided by a male academic culture and institutional discrimination against women” and “feminist research carries little esteem and attracts little money” (p. 21). Apart from the above macro-level understanding of women teachers’ condition in postsecondary education, Lester (2008) investigated the micro-level power relations in day-to-day living by drawing on Butler’s performance theory. The women faculty members in the study are shown to perform a variety of stereotypical feminine gender roles as a result of the college’s male-oriented organizational culture, their socialization experience external to college and their individual construction and

negotiation of gender identity. In the Canadian context, Robbins (2010) observed how exclusionary gatekeeping practices on the rationale of “excellence” over “equity” have contributed to the “chilly climate” for women faculty. Webber (2008) studied how contingent faculty strategy is used by one research university to reduce labor cost in the new managerialism context and how both Women’s Studies and feminism have been undermined as a result. Armenti (2004) investigated how gender-related obstacles from the prevailing social ideology that the primary responsibility of women is in children and family have affected women faculty’s career. In sum, despite the increasing presence of women teachers in postsecondary education and their generally presumed position of privilege (as compared with other women in less influential positions), they still remain othered and marginalized in the male dominated academic culture imbedded in the larger patriarchal social ideology.

In an earlier study on the experience of “otherness” by ethnic and racial minority faculty, Johnsrud and Sadao (1998) observed the pervasiveness of negative experiences by these faculty members on campuses. A number of themes generated from racial/ethnic minority faculty’s experience revealed barriers unique to this group. Their sense of being bi-cultural also contributed to their sense of otherness. The ethnocentrism and “elite racism” (p. 329) pervasive in their institutions tended to devalue or dismiss their scholarship in ethnic issues as out-of-the-mainstream and self-serving. The experience of ethnic and racial minority faculty also indicated the “integrationist approach” (p. 337) in postsecondary education with the assumption that the minority others must change and adapt to the norm of a white male academy. Based on the testimony provided by faculty

of color, Turner and Myer Jr. (2000) concluded that the general academic angst is compounded and aggravated by the dynamics of race and gender for faculty of color. In Turner's (2002) research on women of color in academe, the lives of faculty women of color were filled with "lived contradictions" and "ambiguous empowerment" (p. 75). Proportionally, they were still underrepresented and existed as "tokens". The author also highlighted the interlocking effects of race and gender bias in their workplace. Besides the problems of isolation, marginalization, being underemployed and overused, and being torn between family and career similar to those faced by all women faculty, a salience of race over gender and being challenged by students are additionally felt to be important factors that can describe the multiple marginality faced by women faculty of color. Hirshfield and Joseph (2012) utilized "gender taxation" and "identity taxation" as metaphors to describe the institutionally expected additional services by women faculty of color and exposed how such notions could create inequality and barriers for women faculty of color.

However, research in women teachers of color does not adequately inform an understanding of ESL female teachers due to the additional group membership of the latter in relation to language, culture and nationalism. In this study, ESL female teachers mainly refer to female teachers of color who speak English as a second language, rather than white female teachers who speak English as a second language, in the context of postsecondary education. The subgroup that bears the closest similarity to ESL female teachers is perhaps immigrant / foreign-born female teachers. In the limited studies on immigrant / foreign-born female faculty of color (e.g., Asher, 2010; Li & Beckett, 2006;

Mayuzumi, 2008; Skachkova, 2007; Vargas, 2002), language factors, particularly accent, is singled out as one among many other obstacles that hinder their development. The anthology compiled by Vargas (2002) relied on the power of interpretive autobiography and other postmodern methods to study the experiences of female faculty of color and pointed out that professors who are seen as Others in their campuses have classroom experiences that are quite different from the experiences of both their male counterparts and White faculty. In comparison, in the discipline of Applied Linguistics (AL) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), although language or English as a Second Language is foregrounded in research on female teachers in postsecondary education, the focus is generally on whether or how being ESLs can make them effective in teaching English language and how nativer-speakerism has functioned to marginalize competent ESLs (e.g., Braine, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, 2004; Ilieva, 2010; Lazaraton, 2003, Llurda, 2005, Menard-Warwick, 2008; Pavlenko, 2003; Reis, 2011; Rodriguez & Reis, 2012).

In summary, prior literature have substantiated the theme that diversity is closely connected with otherness. Teachers who are females, ethnic minorities and users of English as a second language have all been othered in particular educational contexts. A more detailed review of literature concerning ESL female teachers in postsecondary education can be found in Chapter Two.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**



Based on my own experience and insights from the brief survey of relevant literature, I find that more needs to be known about the “othered” ESL female teachers in postsecondary education. While my own experience may reflect some of the themes arising from relevant research, I am keen to know and interpret experiences of others who are in similar positions. Further, uncovering such experiences may also inform an authentic understanding and disrupt dominant understandings about the “other”. Therefore, the purpose of this narrative study is to understand the experience and identity of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education and to advocate for their inclusion in the educational landscape. At this stage in the research, the ESL female teachers will be generally defined as female teachers of color for whom English is a second language acquired after their respective native languages.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The study will focus on the following research questions:

- 1) What are the lived experiences of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education?
- 2) How do ESL female teachers in postsecondary education narrate their experiences and negotiate their teacher identities? How do their teacher identities intersect with other forms of identities? How might these competing identity paradigms contribute to their marginalization or/and resistance?
- 3) How can the above understanding contribute to the inclusion of ESL female teachers in an increasingly diversified educational landscape?

The first question is the overarching question that I intend to ask for my study. In other words, what I am most interested in is the lived experiences and the stories of the participants. The second set of questions is actually a reframing of the first question in a more theoretical manner, with an understanding that lived experiences inform people's sense of identity and that ESL female teachers' identities are multilayered constructs. Also, the questions try to discover how ESL female teachers' sense of identity can be the underlying contributor to their marginalization or/and resistance. The third question is an extension of the previous two questions by addressing the issue of action, i.e. how teacher identity as a tool can help to negotiate inclusion and acceptance within a dominant and normative discourse.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

In this section, I make explicit my own perspectives and points of view and acknowledge my situatedness and positionality in the study by clarifying relevant theoretical frames that influence my interpretation of the phenomenon. However, I also realize that experience should be first and foremost treated on its own terms, not as evidence to sustain prior theories and concepts. In what follows, I focus on important theoretical considerations for this study so as to draw up a backdrop of my representation and interpretation of the phenomenon. I also review relevant research on ESL female teachers in postsecondary education in order to set up a foundation to build my present study.

### **2.1 Intersectionality as a conceptual framework**

In studying the experience of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education, I find the feminist notion of intersectionality particularly helpful. It is evident from the above brief review on diversity and otherness that intersectionality reflects the reality of lives for ESL female teachers in postsecondary education and a focus on any one of their identity categories fails to capture the very essence of the phenomenon under study. In what follows, I explore the notion of intersectionality and clarify the rationale why it is established as a conceptual framework in the current study.

#### **2.1.1 *A brief introduction***

Intersectionality is a central tenet of feminist thinking. Shields (2008) summarized that “(i)ntersectionality, the mutually constitutive relations among social identities, has

become a central tenet of feminist thinking” (p. 301) and observed the consistent thread across definitions of intersectionality as “social identities which serve as organizing features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce and naturalize one another” (p. 302). Intersectionality perspective further reveals that the individual’s social identities profoundly influence one’s beliefs about and experience of gender. With its theoretical foundation growing from the production and reproduction of inequalities, dominance, and oppression, intersectionality questions the essentialist assumptions about gender and intends to understand gender in relation to other social identities. In other words, recent development in feminism has come to the realization that multiple axes of oppression must always be taken into consideration in social analysis. Besides being the reality of lives of both the researchers and the participants, intersectionality is viewed by Shields (2008) as having constituent components in the foreground and the background depending on the investigators’ level of analysis and as a way to conceptualize a uniquely hybrid identity created out of intersections of different identity categories.

### ***2.1.2 Relevance and necessity***

Intersectionality as a research framework is an urgent issue. Cole (2009) summarized that social movements which failed to consider the intersection of social categories of race, class, and gender have proved ineffective and left marginalized groups poorly served. In the case of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education, intersectionality is particularly relevant since it reflects their realities of lives and their multiple axes of oppression and otherness, although, depending on context, some components of intersectionality may be in the foreground while others in the background. An

intersectionality framework emphasizes the qualitative differences among different intersectional positions which can explain some surprising observations if these positions are taken separately (Cole, 2009). For ESL female teachers in postsecondary education, intersectionality contributes to an understanding of their challenge and denigration by same gender faculty from different ethnic/cultural groups and by their same gender same ethnic/cultural students as observed in Li & Beckett's (2006) collection of essays. As another example, Skachkova's (2007) research on immigrant women professors in the U.S. identified immigrant women faculty as a distinct subgroup. In fact, "irrespective of their race, ethnicity and U.S. citizenship, none of the narrators in the study self-identified as an ethnic or racial minority" (p. 725) and "almost all of the narrators did not identify with America feminism and women's movement but with immigrant non-professional women from the same national group in the U.S." (p. 723). These observations indicate that many understandings about gender and racial relations in the academia may not neatly apply to immigrant female teachers and that an intersectional stance is indeed a necessity.

### ***2.1.3 Intersectionality and research***

Intersectional analysis is emerging in social science research. According to Weber (2001), intersectional analysis can operate on both the societal/institutional level and individual level. With its historical roots in promoting social justice, intersectional analysis can operate on the societal/structural level to expose the development and maintenance of social inequalities and injustice through systems of power. Dill & Zambrana (2009) treated intersectionality as a systematic approach to understanding

human life and behavior that is rooted in the experiences and struggles of marginalized people. Researchers viewed intersectionality as exerting four theoretical interventions to existing inequitable social relations: 1) centering the experiences of people of color; 2) complicating identity; 3) unveiling power in interconnected structures of inequality; and 4) promoting social justice and social change. Intersectional analysis can also operate on the individual level to reveal the expression and performance of individual identities through interwoven discourses (e.g., Harper, 2011) and narratives. Both levels are important and “intersectional scholarship would choose to place these social structural and interpretative/narrative approaches to social reality in dialogue with one another” (Collins, 2009, xi).

## **2.2 Poststructuralist notions of subjectivity and positioning**

Since the current study is about people and their experiences, it is necessary to clarify an understanding of what the subject (in this case, ESL female teachers in postsecondary education) is and does. In this regard, I refer to poststructuralist notions of subjectivity and positioning as a starting point and relate them to the concept of identity, a central consideration in my research questions.

### ***2.2.1 Poststructuralist subjectivity***

The Foucaudian subject is endowed with the dual meanings of being tied to a conscience or self-knowledge and of being subject (subjugated) to someone else by control and dependence (Foucault, 1982). Weedon’s definition of subjectivity is “a combination of conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions that make up our sense of ourselves,

our relation to the world and our ability to act in it” (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). In this sense, being a woman is “being assigned to the category of female, (of) being discursively, interactively, and structurally positioned as such, and (of) taking up as one’s own those discourses through which femaleness is constituted” (Davies, 2000, p. 70) and the self is seen as “continually constituted through multiple and contradictory discourses that one takes up as one’s own in becoming *a speaking subject*” (ibid, p. 71, italics original). In a Foucaudian sense, through taking up as her own the discourse of femaleness, each woman “becomes at the same time a speaking subject and one who is subjected or determined by those discourses” (p. 72). Mahrouse (2005) explored how the term “minority teacher” and its characteristics, images and expectations were discursively constructed by educational literature and other dominant discourses and how those who were so labeled and positioned, whether consciously or not, took up such subject positions, or, alternatively, were enabled to examine the production of such positions in a way that allowed for ambivalence and change. In the poststructuralist notion of subjectivity, discourse and power are vital in its production and for Mahrouse (2005) “discourse is power, is subjectivity” (p. 39). Poststructuralist theory of subjectivity has overturned some of the traditional conceptualizations of self and human nature, which are now viewed as “not the *cause* of what we do but the *product* of the discourses through which we speak and are spoken into existence” (Davies, 2000, p. 76, emphasis added).

### **2.2.2 Positioning theory**

To further understand the discursive practices that constitute subjectivity, positioning theory can be helpful. Positioning is “the discursive process whereby selves are located

in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines” (Davies, 2000, p. 91). According to Langenhove and Harre (1999<sup>a</sup>), positioning is immanently reproduced moment by moment and is everywhere. Since the position/speech-act/storyline triad are mutually determining, our understanding of the subjectivity of, say, marginalized others, can be greatly enhanced. In this light, we are able to see how the storyline which can draw from the repertoire of an essentialist view of culture and stereotypes (see also Langenhove & Harre, 1999<sup>b</sup>) determines the nature of the speech-act and the position to be taken by the othered. Positioning can also be extended to the intrapersonal (Moghaddam, 1999), where the “I” as the knower and the “Me” as the known position each other in reflexive practices of the self, e.g., autobiographies, to construct subjectivity. Although (the subjectivities of) the speakers and hearers are constituted by discursive practices, the fluidity and immanent nature of positioning also provide resources for them to negotiate new positions and, possibly, new subjectivities (Davies, 2000). In sum, positioning theory can go a long way toward exploring how subjectivity is constituted in multiple discourses and making salient the power relations between subjects with reference to their different capacities to position and be positioned.

### ***2.2.3 Self, subjectivity and identity***

The notions of self, subjectivity and identity have all been circulating in educational literature. In what follows, I intend to build a connection between these notions by exploring relevant literature, though, of course, it is rather impossible for me to launch a thorough discussion on their similarities and differences in here. Since I have already



dwelt on the notion of subjectivity in the previous section, I will mainly focus on self and identity here. If the notion of subjectivity exists primarily in poststructural and various other postmodern discourses, the concept of “self” has been circulating in a much wider range of disciplinary discourses and for an extended period of time. Holstein and Gubrium (2000) reviewed its evolution from a transcendental self in modernism, to various versions of socially constructed self, and to the ambivalent postmodern self. Commenting on the contribution of symbolic interactionists, the authors claimed that “individuals are active agents in their social worlds, influenced, to be sure, by culture and social organization, but also instrumental in producing the culture, society, and meaningful conduct that influence them” (p. 32), and that “the everyday technology of self construction stands at the junction of discursive practice and discourses-in-practice” (p. 103). Such verbalization strongly reflects the poststructuralist notion of subjectivity as being determined by but also exerting some degree of agency to the discourses around it. The interrelatedness of self, subjectivity and identity is further explored in the following statement by Holstein and Gubrium:

Members of particular settings selectively call upon, and make use of, the language games available to them to produce their subjectivities, but in the process they specify meanings locally and contingently. At the same time, the identities that members use, apply, and produce in the course of constructing who they are, are not conjured out of thin air. Culturally recognized discourses come into play. We select from what’s available and tailor it to the interpretive task at hand. The self we live by is not fully determined, but discernibly slips about in the interplay of discursive practice and discourse-in-practice. (p. 99)

In comparison, the concept of identity has increasingly become the interest of educational research in the past decade or so and there have already been several thorough reviews of literature on identity in educational research (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). A good deal of the theorization on

identity in educational research has been greatly influenced by poststructuralist notions of subjectivity, discourse, power, and positioning. Since scholars have followed different theoretical approaches to study identity, I draw on Gee's (2000, 2005) identity typology to explore its interpretive potential and relevance to the current study. Gee (2000) defined identity as "being recognized as a certain 'kind of person' in a given context" (p. 99) and his conceptual understanding of identity is multiple, including natural identity (N-identity), institutional identity (I-identity), discourse identity (D-identity) and affinity identity (A-identity). According to Lee & Anderson (2009), each of the four interrelated perspectives can enable us to understand how identities can be developed and maintained through dynamic and relevant social interactions. This typology of identity also incorporates micro- and macro-social processes for identities' social realization and allows the concept of identity to be understood along different dimensions. The typology can provide a practical tool to analyze otherness and marginalization with reference to identification with and recognition by various discourses that are significant for ESL female teachers' lived experience. For ESL female teachers, their being born in a context where English is not their first language and their gender constitute their N-identity, which can somehow determine their D-identity, such as their particular ways of speaking and using the English language and their gendered behaviors, including their pedagogy of caring and nurturing. However, their I-identity, i.e. their belonging to faculty in academia, may prescribe a compelling D-identity which can resist their original D-identity and position them as marginal. To win recognition, ESL female teachers may feel compelled to adopt personal and professional traits so as to be recognized as legitimate and competent members of the academia. Another salient issue from my

previous literature review is ESL female teachers' sense of isolation and lack of network, which falls into the A-identity realm. In Gee's (2000) theorization, D-identity and A-identity are actually more important for modern people in their identity negotiation. Thus, the tensions felt by ESL female teachers in their identity negotiation is particularly sharp and an analysis with reference to Gee's (2000) identity typology can be helpful in distinguishing and teasing out the diverse elements that influence their identity negotiation.

Gee (2005) extended the linguistic notion of discourse to D/discourse so as to include recognizable forms of language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places that distinguish a particular type of people. He summarized the "big D" discourse as follows:

Discourses, for me, crucially involve (a) situated identities; (b) ways of performing and recognizing characteristic identities and activities; (c) ways of coordinating and getting coordinated by other people, things, tools, technologies, symbol systems, places, and times; (d) characteristic(s) ways of acting-interacting-feeling-emotion-valuing-gesturing-posturing-dressing-thinking-believing-knowing-speaking-listening (and in some Discourses, reading-and-writing, as well). (p. 33)

This extension from "discourse" to "Discourse" is important for the current study of ESL female teachers in that although the study starts from their difference in language and the "discourse" around their difference, it inevitably involves their dressing, emotion, feeling, pedagogy, personal networking and relations, etc., which are more aptly included in the "big D" discourse. In my analysis of ESL female teachers' experience, the "big D" discourse, i.e. Discourse, is applied when I refer to the larger picture of postsecondary

education, and the “small d” discourse is applied when I talk about a more specific aspect, i.e. language, assumption, personality, action, etc.

Also for Gee, identity is realized through being recognized as possessing the above traits and, therefore, must be relational. Although identity was viewed as multiple and relational in the above sense, Gee (2000) also briefly mentioned the existence of a “core identity”, which signified a “unique trajectory through ‘Discourse space’” for a particular individual (p. 111). This reservation on a more “modernist” notion of a coherent and unique “core” (i.e. an internal state) underneath multiple identities (i.e. its performances in society) can also be related to the clarification of the link between teacher identity and teacher self by Rodgers & Scott (2008), who thought of self as the “meaning *maker*” and identity as the “meaning *made*”, and defined that “*self will subsume identity(ies) and will be understood as an evolving, yet, coherent being that consciously and unconsciously constructs and is constructed, reconstructs and is reconstructed in interaction with cultural contexts, institutions, and people with which the self lives, learns and functions*” (p. 739, italics original).

To summarize, identity literature seems to indicate that the poststructuralist notion of “subjectivity”, which is akin to the concept of “self”, and the notion of “identity(ies)” can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. Gee (2000) did not particularly differentiate identity from subjectivity, which were generally referred to as synonyms. Neither did Norton (2000) (see the next section). In my current study, the notion of identity functions as an encompassing term that are built on theorizations of the (poststructuralist) notion of

subjectivity and its broader version of self. The reason why I choose identity rather than subjectivity or self is that identity research is fledging in the discipline of education, which may enable more common grounds for my research to dialogue with other identity centered researches in education. Another reason is perhaps my intension to indicate the pragmatic nature of my research by not foregrounding poststructuralism and other pro-theoretical notions. As a matter of fact, this study is designed with a focus on people's lived experience and the theories that I have used are tools that can assist in understanding the experience. In this research, my understanding of identity will generally feature a focus on negotiation, i.e. between the self and her positioning in a particular discourse, and intersectionality, i.e. a multilayered construct that may include competing paradigms.

### ***2.3 Language and identity***

Also relevant to the present study is another strand of identity literature in AL. Norton's (2000) research on identity and language learning has fueled an increasing enthusiasm toward identity research in the discipline of AL. Norton (2000) defined identity as "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. 5). No differentiation was made between subjectivity and identity, and Weedon's (1987/1997) subjectivity theory was literally adopted to inform Norton's conceptualization of identity as "nonunitary", "a site of struggle" and "changing over time" (Norton, 2000, pp. 125-129). By foregrounding "language as constitutive of and constituted by a language learner's identity" (p. 5), Norton and other scholars

incorporated the notion of community of practice from sociocultural theory (Wenger, 1998) to explore how language learners' investment into an "imagined identity" of an "imagined community" (e.g., of a particular language) can enhance language teaching and learning (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2011). In fact, the "community" metaphor can also be identified with Gee's notion of D/discourse in that both signify a set of normative practices that individuals should adopt so as to be recognized as having a certain "identity". In Norton & Toohey's (2011) recent literature review on identity research in non-native English-speaking English language teachers, the authors devoted a substantial part to poststructural and sociocultural theories on subjectivity (and identity) and explored how research on identity can contribute to language teaching and learning and can have the potential for social change.

Although Norton's conceptualization of language and identity is primarily intended for language learners, its practical use can also be extended to ESL female teachers, who, to a certain extent, are English language learners and, more importantly, are learners in the community (imagined or in practice) of postsecondary education. ESL female teachers' existence in the academia and their potential otherness signify their status as "legitimate peripheral participants" (Wenger, 1998), who may take different trajectories in their career as a result of their investment (and desire) into this imagined identity and multiple constraints imposed by ideology and hegemony. However, the "community" metaphor should also be viewed with caution. In an empirical study on overseas-born teachers (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007), although practical advice was given to help peripheral teachers to move to the center, the homogenous nature of a "community" connotes

boundaries and a common identity. Thus, achieving desired identity in a community often means being assimilated into the mainstream, the Discourse, leaving little if no room for resistance and alternatives. In other words, the liberating “imagined communities” may also function as “regime of truth” that reproduces the status quo (see also Carroll, Motha & Price, 2008) and keeps members at the margins permanent strangers and others, unless they change themselves. Therefore, while it is highly important and practical for marginalized groups to establish themselves as legitimate members of a community/Discourse, research into identity must also facilitate possibilities for alternatives.

## **2.4 Possibilities from identity as research lens**

So far, it is evident that identity as a research lens can be helpful in revealing and making explicit the nature and the process of othering. However, the ethical call for imagining what can be done to counteract such othering is equally imperative. Prior identity research offered two possible ways that such counteractions can take place. The two approaches that I will explain here are intended to counter the othering discourse in both the interpersonal and the intrapersonal domains.

### ***2.4.1 Problematizing identity categories and differences***

Since “identity is categories” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004) and categories tend to be problematic when essentialized, countering the othering discourse must start from problematizing the taken-for-granted notions of categories and differences. In Lee & Anderson’s (2009) review of categories and identity work, labels such as English learners

reproduce the social inequalities among different individuals and groups. Since identity is constructed out of difference, the dominant identity generally becomes transparent, invisible and unquestioned, while the “different” stands out as deviant. Commenting on the discourse of colonialism, Bhabha (1994) pointed out the “fixity” in the ideological construction of otherness. Categories and their essentialized version of stereotypes have been taken up as knowledge that must be “always ‘in place’” and “anxiously repeated” (p. 66). As an apparatus of power, differences have “construed the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (p. 70). The stereotypical discourse made possible and plausible the processes of subjectification for both colonizers and the colonized. In regard to ESL female teachers in postsecondary education, the language imperialism in TESOL and the fact that many ESL female teachers come from the formerly colonized countries indicate that the colonial discourse is very much pertinent to their experience of being othered. Their differences in language and their colors of skin are visible and can function as sources of expectations for what they are (e.g., Holliday, 2005; Li & Beckett, 2006). Any effort to claim a legitimate identity within this colonial discourse only leads to a colonial mimicry, “a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86, italics original). Shrales’ (2006) reflection on her own experience of feeling apologetic and like an imposter is such an example.

Ellsworth & Miller (1996) called for “working difference” as a means to problematize and make use of difference. Following Butler’s (1993) claim that identity and difference



are social constructions whose meanings shift and slide across time and places, Ellsworth & Miller (1996) viewed identity and difference as “a resource for revealing interrupting, and reconstructing meanings and power relations that would otherwise position her within static, fixed categories” (p. 247). In this way, rather than being conceived as serving oppressive relations such as racism and sexism, differences can also be in the service of contesting such oppressions. Some ESL female teachers in postsecondary education have in practice asserted their difference in pedagogy (e.g., Liang, 2006; Lin et al. 2006; Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007) by hybridization and fostering a third place, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. In sum, when identities and differences are not taken for granted and their constitutions are made explicit, a change in social attitudes and beliefs about categories such as ESL and women can gradually take place to counter the othering discourse in postsecondary education.

#### ***2.4.2 Identity and agency***

The second possibility stems from the individual “subject” and her sense of agency as a counteraction against otherness. In this respect, feminist poststructural theory (Claiborne et al., 2008; Davies, 2000, 2006) provides a helpful guide as to how the “decentered” subject can avoid being totally predetermined by the dominant discourse and exert influence on the discourse instead. Different from the “modernist” notion of agency with its normative nature of the so-called rational (rather than emotional) agent, the agency in feminist poststructuralism grows out of an acute awareness of the power of discourses and positioning. According to Davies (2000), “agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognize that constitution and to resist, subvert,

and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted” (p. 67). For Davies, since individuals who are positioned on the negative side of the male/female or any other dualism are rarely heard as legitimate speakers or positioned as having agency, the language that embeds such dualisms needs deconstruction. Therefore, by making clear the way in which a person is subjected by discourses and positioned as inferior, poststructuralist theory opens up the possibility of changing the existing structure. From my review of position theory in a previous section, the fluidity of subject positions can offer possibilities to disrupt oppressive storylines. For example, in Mahrouse (2005) analysis of a minority teacher’s response to students’ questioning “where are you from”, the students’ positioning the teacher as a different “other” was disrupted by the teacher’s effort to challenge the students’ assumptions. Extending Butler’s claim that the postmodern subjects have a “radically conditioned agency” in which they “can reflexively and critically examine their conditions of possibility” and “can both subvert and eclipse the powers that act on them and which they enact” (Davies, 2006, p. 426), Davies and colleagues examined how the dual processes of mastery and submission can take place simultaneously and how dominant and normative discourses have been exceeded and transgressed by subjects who possess such conditioned agency (Claiborne et al., 2008; Davies, 2006).

Similar views are also present in postcolonial conceptions of going “beyond” and hybridization (Bhabha, 1994), which “entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (p. 4). By claiming a hybridized identity and entering a third place, the othered in a dominant discourse can thus exert their authority and agency without

negating their embeddedness in the discourse of difference and identity categories. However, this more agentive position as an alternative to the “assimilation” to the dominant discourse does not often appear as an easy option and may require a conscious effort on the part of the individual to take risks and to imagine. Therefore, to counteract their otherness, ESL female teachers in postsecondary education must face the dual challenges of adaptation (submitting to the normative Discourse of the academia) and resistance (subverting the assumptions of the norm). In other words, they are involved in a seemingly paradoxical action of asserting and disrupting differences and categories. With an understanding of identities and subject positions as multiple, fluid and sometimes contradictory, I believe that the above visions of ESL female teachers’ agency are based on nothing other than their lived experiences of tensions, discontinuities and contradictions produced by the intersections of multiple discourses.

## **2.5 Research into ESL female teachers in postsecondary education**

Over the past decade or so, research into diverse female teachers in postsecondary education has been on the rise, but studies featuring ESL/foreign-born/immigrant female teachers are still limited. In what follows, I select some relevant literature to identify common themes so as to set up a foundation for the current study.

Drame, Martell, Mueller, Oxford, Wisneski & Xu (2011) explored the experiences of a diverse group of six women teachers/scholars within the culture of academe. Their collaborative inquiry demonstrated that such a culture does not necessarily value the kinds of scholarship they engage and that diverse women teachers/scholars, who do not

closely match the norm and the ways of knowing of the dominant culture or status quo, are put in a disadvantaged position. The women scholars claimed that “if academic institutions are truly committed to the long-term success of women faculty, it is crucial to understand the personal and professional challenges women faculty face during the process of becoming acclimated, assimilated, socialized, and enculturated into the academy” (p. 552).

Mayuzui’s (2008) summary work of the scant literature on Asian women faculty (AWF) employed a transnational feminist framework to locate participants’ experiences in the historical and contemporary discourses of power in the academy. According to the author, the existing body of literature revealed that AWF were positioned as illegitimate citizens in the academia because of the Asianness stereotype, their English accent and their questioned authority/credibility. The author also summarized how AWFs experienced their sense of identity and “create(d) a space for their own legitimacy, whether they conform to the dominant ways or go against the grain” (p. 178). While acknowledging the interpretive potential of the framework, the author also considered how the framework can give agency and create solidarity to effectively rupture the academic hegemony in knowledge production.

McNeil (2011) self-studied her own experience as an African-Canadian teacher educator in a predominantly White setting. Her study reflected the observation of many previous studies that the non-White professor is positioned as an inferior, outsider and “other” based on their body image and their ways of speaking. Drawing on critical race theory,

critical pedagogy and poststructural feminism as analytical framework, the author explored her experience of not belonging, her effort of strategically bridging her pedagogy, her encountering systemic Whiteness and subsequently her reflective turn to tone down critical discourses. This self-record of conscious construction and negotiation of her experience and identity can be helpful to similarly positioned diverse teachers who must necessarily undergo a similar struggle.

In sum, “the new academic generation of foreign-born women” are still treated as “strangers” in U.S. (and North American) academia (Skachkova, 2007, p. 728). The “stranger” metaphor is also echoed in a collection of essays on Asian women scholars in North America by Li & Beckett (2006). The theme of questioned credibility and student resistance also emerged (Li, 2006; Liang, 2006; Lin, Kubota, Motha, Wang & Wong, 2006), particularly for immigrant women teachers of color in the discipline of TESOL, due to its powerful native-speakerism discourse (see the next paragraph for details). However, such challenge and resistance may well be present in many disciplines, such as British or American literature, other than those in the instructor’s own ethnic language or culture (see also Rong, 2002). In Li’s (2006) contextualized analysis of her own experience, students, colleagues and administrators can tacitly accept dominant discourse and social ideology to reproduce the status quo of an othering discourse. Shrake (2006) revealed how, at the beginning of her career, she lived up to the seemingly harmless stereotype of Asian women to present a face that is acceptable to the dominant society. However, she later realized the danger and constraining power of such positioning and consequently shed of her mask by reclaiming her identity. A further burrowing into

studies on Asian women in academia (Asher, 2010; Mayuzumi, 2008) showed the importance of incorporating understandings about colonialism, postcolonialism, nationalism and feminism and of looking at the in-between places of local and global in research on immigrant women of color in academia.

In the discipline of AL and ESL/TESOL, the dichotomous categories of “native-speaker” and “nonnative speaker” have generated substantial research and debate among scholars. The relation between language, ethnicity and culture was explored by Holliday (2005, 2008), who claimed that the seemingly neutral category of ‘non-native speaker’ can be a label for the non-‘white’ Other (Holliday, 2008, p. 122). Further, the definition of a “native speaker” is a “political construction” (Holliday, 2005, p. 7), which is related to linguistic imperialism in the whole TESOL profession and is also present in the power relations in smaller and everyday discourses. The assumption of “nonnative speakers” being deficient and in need of a cultural change leads to what Holliday termed “culturism” which “relate(s) to any thought or act which reduces a person to something less than what she is according to an essentialist view of culture” (ibid., p. 17). He also claimed that culturism is practiced by both the dominant West and the othered for various reasons and further advocated a non-essentialist view of culture as being discursively constructed. In sum, the ethnic and cultural implications of speaking English as a second language have validated a focused attention on language as an identity category that can intersect with race and gender in the othering and marginalization of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education.

As observed by Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli (2009), “one starting point of countering the marginalization that people of color face is for racialized people to occupy positions of influence, like teaching” (p. 595). Therefore, ESL female teachers’ entering into influential positions such as those in postsecondary education and their increased authority in these positions holds much promise for the welfare of social groups marginalized by identity categories such as gender, race, language and country of origin. However, my current review shows that ESL female teachers encounter severe cases of marginalization and othering and that their empowerment and authority may still be long way ahead. Although it is absolutely necessary to continue critiquing the institutional and social origins of racism, sexism and discrimination, what is equally important is to focus on the everyday practices of otherness and marginalization. By using identity as a research lens, a more informed understanding about the lived experiences of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education can be achieved. Such an understanding would necessarily include an intersectional analysis of how their multiple memberships in identity categories mutually construct and influence each other, how power operates to disadvantageously position them in everyday discourses, and how they can create possibilities to subvert and counter positions that would lead to otherness and marginalization. To see the above theoretical visions of resistance translated into practical actions by ESL female teachers in postsecondary education is, needless to say, an even greater challenge that warrants the types of research that are reflective, collaborative and emancipating.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

This section centers on research methodology. For the current study, I adopt a qualitative research framework. Realizing that researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or set of beliefs to the research project, and these can influence the conduct and writing of the qualitative study (Creswell, 2007), I plan to make these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit. I start with my overall philosophical assumptions concerning how experiences are studied. I continue to focus on narrative research as a general research methodology and narrative inquiry, as well as life story interview, as specific methodologies pertinent in educational research. I conclude with a discussion of relevant ethical issues and details of data collection and analysis.

### **3.1 Interpretive communities**

The current qualitative research is situated at the crossroad of various interpretive communities in social science research. Creswell (2007) briefly described several important interpretive communities, their distinct body of literature and unique issues of discussion. Among these interpretive communities, I find three that are directly relevant to my research: postmodern perspectives, feminist theories and critical theory. Their relevancy is determined by my main research question: what are the experiences of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education? In what follows, I review these relevant interpretive paradigms and clarify how they shape my current research design.

#### ***3.1.1 Interpretive research***



With a postmodernist understanding that knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations (Creswell, 2007), I locate my research within the larger endeavor of interpreting participants' experiences. In this regard, Denzin and Lincoln's (Denzin, 2001, 2003; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003) theorization on interpretive research provides a useful guide. Denzin (2001) summarized that "(h)umans have no direct access to reality. Reality, as is known, is mediated by symbolic representations, by narrative texts, and by televisual and cinematic structures that stand between the person and the so-called real world. We can never capture this world directly; we can only study representations of it" (p. x). Therefore, from the postmodern perspective, life experiences exist only as interpretations, e.g. those of the participants in the form of narratives and also those of the researchers as research texts. The attempt to make the problematic lived experiences of ordinary people available to the reader is thus referred to as "interpretive interactionalism" by Denzin (2001). According to Denzin, the subject matter of interpretive research is biographical experience with a special focus on "epiphanies", "those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects" (Denzin, 2001, p. 34). Also, interpretive interactionalism speaks to the interrelationships between private lives and public responses to personal troubles (Denzin, 2001, p. 2). Interpretive researchers collect personal experience stories and self-stories as major narratives to form thick descriptions and interpretation, during which they make their meanings and values explicit. However, interpretive interactionalism only roughly applies to my research questions. For one thing, the epiphanies that I seek to find may only exist as cumulative, minor, and

illuminative, rather than major ones. For another, the private lives and personal troubles of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education may have just begun to be articulated and public policies and responses to this emerging personal trouble may have largely been absent. Nevertheless, locating my current study in the larger realm of interpretive research helps me to avoid viewing experiences as realities that could answer my research questions. In other words, instead of trying to find out “why such experience”, I begin to ask “how such experience comes about”.

Lincoln and Denzin (2003) summarized the seventh moment of qualitative research with four themes: breaks and ruptures; an elusive center that is committed to study the world always from the perspective of the gendered, historically situated, interacting individual; a continued performance turn; and moral discourses (p. 611-613). These theorizations on qualitative research also inform my research design, from identifying the private problem to be studied, discover its public significance, locating the institutional sites of these problems, and formulating the research questions for my study. Furthermore, Lincoln and Denzin (2003) also made explicit the basic issue at present for qualitative research: How best to describe and interpret the experiences of other peoples and cultures, also known as the crisis of representation. The short answer provided is that “we move to including the Other in the larger research processes that we have developed” (p. 616), which means participatory, or collaborative, research and evaluation efforts. In what follows, I move on to theorizations on feminist inquiry and racialized discourses in interpretive research.

### ***3.1.2 Feminist inquiry and racialized discourses***

Bruns and Chantler (2011) identified four key characteristics of feminist research: feminist research as critical enquiry; “voice” and grounding research in women’s experiences; reflexivity; and an ethic of care. These themes highlight some distinguishing features of my current study: a critical inquiry that facilitates women’s voice and focuses on women’s subjectivity in a non-hierarchical and collaborative research relationship.

Olsen (2003) pointed out some emergent complexities in feminism and qualitative research. Writings by women of color, more than reminders of diversity of women, emphasized that multiple identities and subjectivities are tentatively constructed in particular historical epochs and social contexts. Postcolonial feminist thought raised questions about whether all women could be conceptualized as unified subjectivities easily located in the category of women and argued that western feminist models were inappropriate for thinking of research with women in postcolonial sites. Postmodern and deconstructive thoughts were concerned with the difficulties of even producing more than a partial story of women’s lives in oppressive contexts, since the world is of a series of stories or texts that sustain the integration of power and oppression and actually constitute us as subjects. These complexities highlight the tension between humanist and poststructural perspectives in feminist research and exist as a sharp reminder of the ambivalence and dialectics in such terms as “experience” and “difference”. Women’s experience is an important starting point of my research, but merely focusing on experience does not take into account how such experience has emerged. Since experience is at once already an interpretation and is in need of interpretation, feminist research must analyze the material, social, economic, and gendered conditions that articulate women’s experience. Differences within the subject not only complicate the

holistic notion of (women's) identity but also addresses connections between subjects by recognizing affiliations, cross pollinations, echoes, and repetition. Thus, difference should be seen as autonomous, not fragmented, producing knowledge that accepts the existence of and possible solidarity with knowledge from other standpoints.

Another relevant theorization in interpretive research is racialized discourses. Ladson-Billings (2003) explained how the dominant ideology of the Euro-American epistemology has constructed racialized identities for the Other and how racial groups are forced into an essentialized and totalized unit that is perceived to have little or no internal variation. However, referring to Du Bois' notion of double consciousness, a transcendent position that allows one to see and understand positions of inclusion and exclusion, margins and mainstreams, the author commented that "others" have a perspective advantage and "wide-angle" vision, and called for a "liminal perspective", which helps to reveal the ways that dominant perspectives distort the realities of the other in an effort to maintain power relations that continue to disadvantage those who are locked out of the mainstream. Such propositions validate the importance of research "with" the Other and "by" the Other, who can thus exert their agency by challenging the dominant epistemology.

### **3.2 Narrative research**

Following an explication of interpretive communities and a reviewing of my initial research questions, I further narrow my methodology to narrative research. In this section, I try to answer two questions: 1) why narrative research; and 2) what is narrative

research. While these questions may seem too big for the space allowed here, I intend to relate them directly to my current research and limit the answers to the questions at hand.

### ***3.2.1 Why narrative research***

The focus of my research questions on minority women's lived experience determines that narrative research is the most appropriate methodology. Firstly, following Ricoeur (1983) and Barthes (1975), Gill and Goodson (2011) argued that the meaning of life only becomes explicit in our narratives or stories and that narratives are considered as constituting our being human. Furthermore, the chaotic nature of life assumes a certain structure, coherence, direction and unity through our narratives and narratives permit us to adapt, modify and shift our stories towards transformation. Thus, narratives can be a helpful means to explain human actions and can provide an opportunity for human agency. Secondly, based on the above relationship between narratives and human life, narrative research can also shed light on identity construction. The intrinsic link between identity and narrative (Ricoeur, 1992, as cited in Gill & Goodson, 2011) and the notion of narrative identity suggest that narrative research is ideal for studying identity related topics. In narrating lived experience, the participants construct and achieve a sense of who they are and hence their identity.

### ***3.2.2 What is narrative research***

Creswell (2007) differentiated two types of narrative research according to how narratives are analyzed. I situate my research in the realm of "narrative analysis" instead of "analysis of narratives", where narratives are used to create themes through

paradigmatic thinking to support theories. In “narrative analysis”, researchers collect descriptions of events or happenings and then configure them into a story using a plot line. In this light, although postmodernist, feminist, and critical lens may be used to guide my narrative research, I do not plan to treat narratives merely as data to explicate prior theories. In what follows, I mainly draw on Riessman (1993) and Creswell (2007) to review in greater detail issues on collecting and analyzing narrative data, presenting narrative research, and discussing the issue of truth and validity.

Riessman (1993) commented that narratives of personal experience were ubiquitous in everyday life. However, traditional approaches treat narratives as realistic descriptions and “language is viewed as a transparent medium, unambiguously reflecting stable, singular meanings” (p. 4). Furthermore, traditional approaches to qualitative analysis often fracture these texts in the service of interpretation and generalization by taking bits and pieces out of context. For Riessman (1993), narrative analysis has to do with how participants narrate and interpret things and how researchers systematically interpret their interpretations and subjectivity. Its rootedness in time, place and personal perspectives is precisely the reason why personal narratives are valued. In regard to data collection, Gill and Goodson (2011) pointed out that narrative data were collected in a collaborative process built on trusting and close relationships and, like Riessman, they argued that the purpose of narrative analysis is to “unfold the ways individual make sense of their lived experience and how its telling enables them to interpret the social world and their agency within it” (p. 160). In other words, narrative research collects authentic personal narratives to answer the question of *how* the stories are told as such. Creswell (2007)

emphasized “restorying”, the process of reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework, as part of narrative analysis and presentation. Creswell’s summary on narrative analysis is more inclusive: from a description of both the story and themes that emerge from it, to a deconstruction of the stories, an unmaking of them by exposing dichotomies, examining silences, and attending to disruptions and contradictions (p. 56). Despite the varieties that may exist for different types of narrative analysis, I agree with Riessman (1993) that we must “avoid the tendency to read a narrative simply for content, and the equally dangerous tendency to read it as evidence for a prior theory” (p. 61). Following such an understanding of narratives as data, it is thus easier for us to realize that a personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of reality in the world and that the historical truth of a narrative is not the primary issue. In the previous section on interpretive research, life experiences in the form of personal narratives are already interpretations that require interpretation. Researchers’ analytic interpretations of narratives are, therefore, only partial, alternative truths that aim for “believability, not certitude, for enlargement of understanding, rather than control” (Stivers, 1993, cited in Reissman, 1993, p. 23). For Reissman (1993), “‘trustworthiness’ not ‘truth’ is a key semantic difference” (p. 65) and the validity issue in narrative research attends to criteria of persuasiveness, correspondence and coherence, which cannot be reduced to a set of formal rules or standardized technical procedures.

### **3.3 Narrative inquiry and life story interview in educational research**

With the above review on narrative as methodology in social science research, I now turn to the specific narrative research methodology that bears direct relevance to educational

research. Among the huge array of narrative research that “has many forms, uses a variety of analytic practices, and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines” (Creswell, 2007), I concentrate on a particular strand of narrative inquiry initiated by Clandinin and Connelly (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) and practiced by many educational researchers with an adherence to its three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of interaction, continuity and situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which is later described as its commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007). I continue to focus on life story interview (Atkinson, 1998, 2007) as a bridge to narrative inquiry and a more specific method of inquiry. I further propose a possible combination of these two research methodologies and illustrate the advantage of such a combination.

### ***3.3.1 Narrative inquiry***

A working concept of narrative inquiry proposed by Clandinin and Connelly is:

a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social. Simply stated, as we wrote in the Prologue, narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

This simplified understanding of narrative inquiry as “stories lived and told” must be distinguished from simply telling stories, since telling stories is not enough. Narrative inquirers need to “move to the retelling and reliving of stories, that is, to inquiry into stories” (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 33). As a matter of fact, Clandinin et al. (2007) outlined seven elements for designing, living out, and representing narrative inquiries as a practical guide for empirical studies. Different from traditional qualitative research



methodologies, narrative inquiry does not foreground a theoretical framework which is representative of a formalistic view. Instead, narrative inquiry “begin(s) with explorations of the phenomena of experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 128) and intends to create a new sense of meaning and significance for, or add incremental knowledge to, the research topic, not to apply and test prior theories. Stories of personal experience are collected in the form of field texts, which include interviews, correspondence, observation and a diverse source of data, retold on the basis of narrative elements, and rewritten into a chronological sequence with the particularities of the setting or place incorporated (see also Creswell, 2007). Also central to narrative inquiry is the researcher’s own experience and biography, as the researcher is also in the “parade” he/she presumes to study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry can be particularly powerful in studying the identity of othered ESL female teachers in postsecondary education. The participants in narrative inquiry are viewed as co-researchers who look into their own stories and try to make sense of them. Thus, the voice of the participants is facilitated and promoted as a means to critique and change the existing inequalities in academy, which also constitutes a goal for my current research into the othered ESL female teachers. However, practical applications of narrative inquiry in educational research have confronted tensions and “bumping places” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) with other ways of thinking, particularly the reductionistic and formalistic boundaries in research. In mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) illuminated the borderland spaces between narrative inquiry and post-positivism, Marxism and poststructuralism, and revealed how narrative inquiry

can slip into a search for generalizable patterns in human experience, a struggle between the commitment to listening to stories on their own terms and an awareness of the determination by oppressive social systems, and a privileging of macro- and micro-social discursive formations in understanding experiences. In many empirical studies that claim to use narrative inquiry (e.g., Reis, 2011; Rodriguez & Cho, 2011) in research into non-native ESL teachers' identity, it is also a common practice that narratives and stories are collected as data to generate themes and categories. Or, alternatively, narratives are selected as evidence or proof to support the researcher's evolving theory (see also Riessman, 1993, p. 32). These practices, though an understandable outcome of the need for generalizable knowledge and of the important role of theories in social science research, can harm the integrity of narrative inquiry as a distinct research methodology. Clandinin and Connelly's own empirical research (Clandinin, Connelly & Applebaum, 1999; Clandinin et al., 2006) may be a useful guide as to how narrative inquiry can stand alone as a distinct research methodology in researching identity issues. However, their research seems to be more focused on the "what?" question, i.e., what are the stories that people live by and there may be different versions from the perspectives of the participants, the researchers, or perhaps the readers, rather than the "How?" question, i.e., how do people live by these stories. In this regard, the above borderlands need to be explored, rather than avoided so as to move from a description to an interpretation of stories. In research into the identity of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education, the borderlands with critical theory and poststructuralism are not only unavoidable, but also welcomed to enrich the telling, living, retelling and reliving of a life on the margins. Another issue with empirical application of narrative inquiry is the reporting. As

previously mentioned, many narrative inquirers only use narratives as data to produce a traditional social science report, while the participants' stories remain vague and fragmented. There are a few useful experimentations with the form of reporting in narrative inquiry. Murray Orr (2002) used unsent letters as a representational form and Xu (2006) used the form of play or drama to represent the stories of participants (characters). Narrative inquirers are therefore encouraged to creatively craft their research texts to best reflect the narrative inquiry commonplaces for their intended audience.

### ***3.3.2 Life story interview as a bridge***

Life story interview (Atkinson, 1998, 2007) as a research methodology is distinguished from oral history and life history, which have long been used in many disciplines and can be regarded as the historical roots of life story interview. In comparison, Atkinson (1998) defined life story as:

the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another.... A life story is a fairly complete narrating of one's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects. (p. 8)

While the historian has more power than the informant in oral history and life history, the storyteller in the life story has the final say to the story told. Life story interview is designed to "help the storyteller, the listener, the reader, and the scholar to understand better how life stories serve the four functions of bringing us more into accord with ourselves (psychological), others (sociological), the mystery of life (spiritual), and the universe around us (philosophical)" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 225). A unique feature of life story interview is that it is first and foremost concerned with getting the entire subjective story of the life lived in the teller's words rather than with primarily addressing a

particular research agenda. This view on the place of theory is somewhat similar to that of narrative inquiry, where the researcher is primarily concerned with experience itself, rather than a theoretical framework. Although Atkinson (1998) claimed that story told in the teller's own words can be the final product of a life story interview, the researcher can also apply a theoretical stance to understand it, but only after the story has been collected. It is also possible that the researcher, when eliciting the story, embeds specific research questions in the interview so as to raise the teller's awareness of the meanings while telling the story. After the story has been told, the researcher can subsequently analyze the data of the life story by exploring themes or interpreting the story with particular theories. The researcher can also add his or her "commentary" as a combination of the theoretical and subjective response to the story.

In relation to studying the othered ESL female teachers in postsecondary education, life story interview can be helpful in at least two ways. First, "there may be no equal to the life story interview for revealing more about the inner life of a person" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 235). Thus, the subjectivity and identity of ESL female teachers can be put into better perspective in terms of what they conceive themselves to be who they are. Second, the fact that the tellers of the stories have the last say about the stories told is a subversion of the power relation between participants and the researcher and a materialization of how stories from the margins have the opportunity to be told and heard. However, there have been few empirical studies carried out solely with life story interview as the methodology. More often, life stories are a form of narrative data used in combination with other data in educational research. Atkinson (2007) himself positioned life story

interview as a methodological approach for collecting personal narratives and “a bridge” in narrative inquiry. The “bridge” metaphor is important in that life stories can be conceived as a bridge from narrative inquiry to the concrete experience of individuals. Life story interviews provide the narratives for inquiry purposes.

Nevertheless, life stories and narrative inquiries also have “bumping places” that require further negotiation. According to Riessman (1993), “‘narrative’” is an encompassing term of rhetoric, whereas ‘story’ is a limited genre” (p. 41). Life story interview is described by Atkinson (2007) as a “qualitative, ethnographic, and field research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person’s entire life experience” (p. 225). The sense of completeness and closure in the claim is in divergence with the commonplace of temporality in narrative inquiry. Further, according to Atkinson (2007), the stories we tell of our own lives are still guided by “universal themes and ageless motifs and archetypes” with “a recognizable structure of beginning, muddle, and resolution” (p. 231). However, narrative inquiry foregrounds the messy and fluid nature of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Third, as to the concern over reliability and validity, Atkinson (1998) claimed that life story interview was not intended to seek historical truth but trustworthiness, subjective reality, internal consistency, subjective corroboration and persuasion (pp. 58-60). As a limit to all life stories, all autobiographies and all interviews, the researcher may not get the whole truth in a life story interview. For narrative inquirers, although trustworthiness rather than historical truth also applies, they can supplement or triangulate participants’ stories with other forms of data, e.g., observations, documentary and other historical data, so as to tell people’s life stories in

integrity, sometimes in several true versions depending on the contexts in which the stories are told; thus, the messiness in narrative inquiry.

Life story interview also differs from interviews in narrative inquiry. Life story interview is primarily built on the participants' own words in response to the inquirer's questions, while in narrative inquiry interview is only one among many other forms of data.

Interviews in narrative inquiry generally constitute a kind of "field texts" that the inquirer uses to compose the final "research texts". Therefore, the final research texts in narrative inquiry is the inquirer's reconstruction of the participants' stories based on diverse data collected, including interview data. In life story interview, the interview itself, in the participants' own words, is the final research texts. In my current research, I intend to focus on the participants' own words in their interview to answer my research questions and I do not plan to "rewrite" their stories from my "objective" observation. Therefore, I consider life story interview a more suitable medium for my research design. In sum, for a complicated topic such as the othering of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education, which features overlapping discourses and power relations, life story interview can best be applied as a bridge in the continua of narrative approaches to facilitate the telling and living of participants' narratives and be used as a starting point in shedding light on their lived experiences to critique the existing inequalities.

### ***3.3.3 A combination of methodology***

The combination of narrative inquiry with life story interview can achieve the dual goals of honoring the participant's voice in telling his/her story and of facilitating the

researcher's interpretation and analysis. Though not explicit in such a combination of methodology, Beckett & Zhang (2006) recorded, with almost half of their chapter, a life story told by their participant, a Chinese American medical professor, in the first person and in what I perceive to be her own words. The researchers supplied necessary literature review to contextualize their study and analyzed the story from the theoretical perspective of Eastern Confucian and the Western Deweyan educational culture. This strategic arrangement to present the participant's story separately from the researchers' interpretation and analysis can yield multiple versions of understanding and meaning making generated from the dynamics among the participant, the researchers and the readers. Unfortunately, such combination is rare in narrative research. Although some narrative inquiries (e.g., Chen, 2009; Park, 2009) incorporated the long-established "life history interviews" (not life story interviews) in the research, the stories collected from such interviews generally constitute a data source to be recast in researchers' words, or just quoted in segments and sometimes out of context to illustrate the researchers' points. Therefore, to live up to the aspiration of narrative inquiry to establish an equitable and ethical relationship between the researcher and the participant, researchers need to make room for the participant's authentic voice to be heard, not filtered through the interpretative lens of the researchers.

### **3.4 Ethical issues**

Ethical concerns in qualitative research typically revolve around "the topics of *informed consent* (receiving consent by the subject after having carefully and truthfully informed him or her about the research), *right to privacy* (protecting the identity of the subject),

and *protection from harm* (physical, emotional, or any other kind)” (Fontana & Fery, 2003, p. 89, italics original). However, for narrative inquiry, Josselson (2007) pointed out that there is simply no good general set of rules or guidelines and that there exists an ethical conundrum which derives from the fact that the narrative researcher is in a dual role—in an intimate relationship with the participant and in a professional responsible role in the scholarly community. “Fulfilling the duties and obligations of both of these roles simultaneously is what makes for the slippery slopes” and “the only solution is to demonstrate a clear recognition of the inherent dilemmas” (p. 539). Although, due to the nature of my current research, I do not anticipate severe ethical dilemmas such as those described by Fontana and Fery (2003), as a narrative inquirer, I do my work by intruding on people’s lives and I may bring them benefits or harm during the course of my research. In what follows, I briefly summarize Josselson’s (2003) three kinds of ethical dilemmas in narrative inquiry and explain how they relate to my current research.

Firstly, narrative inquirers face ethics of the relationship. Since the data collected in narrative inquiry are influenced by the nature of the research relationship, inquirers must attend to both the “explicit contract” (e.g. informed consent form) and the implicit contract (e.g. the trust and rapport built between the researcher and the participants). Moreover, as narrative inquiry is an evolving research, the emerging relationship between the inquirer and the participants has made it difficult to predict and plan for ethical issues beforehand. Therefore, getting ethical approval before the research is not sufficient for narrative inquirers and it is absolutely necessary to look back to ethical issues during the whole course of research. Secondly, narrative inquirers have to consider ethics of the



report. For Josselson, the primary ethical attitude in the report rests in the researcher's authority and the report is the researcher's understanding or interpretation of the text. Although narrative inquirers can claim that their research intends to give "voice" to the participants, the task in the report phase is to analyze the conceptual implications of the meanings in individuals' stories to the academy. Therefore, narrative inquirers have to admit that they possess the interpretive authority of the report and they should resolve the potential ethical dilemmas that may arise out of the participants' own telling of their stories and the inquirers' obligation to the academia. Thirdly, narrative inquirers have to attend to ethics of the design by considering the wider social context of the research. Josselson summarized that a pragmatic ethical attitude of design must ensure that the research carried out is at least not exploitative, involve deep contemplation about what it means to encounter and represent "otherness", and necessitate sensitivity to the (sub)cultural values and framework of the participants. Working in a critical and social justice framework, I intend for my research to empower the participants and the group they represent, rather than to be simply a means of producing "cool" knowledge from a detached point of view. In other words, while I am making an effort to represent the participants' voice, I plan to make explicit the research lens that I use for my interpretation and the social justice purpose that attracted me to the research. My decision to seek participants' approval of the transcripts before data analysis is also an attempt to bring them deeper into the research by formulating a negotiated text and making this research a collaborative project.

### **3.5 A sketch of participants**

Since I know people who fit the description of “ESL female teachers in postsecondary education”, I used “snowball” sampling to locate suitable participants. I anticipated that the number of participants would be four to five, preferably from diversified origins. However, although I ended up with an ideal number of participants, i.e. four, they are all from China with Chinese as their native language. I had planned to “remedy” the lack of diversity in participants’ linguistic and cultural background by trying to recruit a couple of new participants. However, the interview process with the four participants made me change my mind since I discovered the richness and the diversity in these interviews. I realized that perhaps the “representativeness of the sample” should not be a primary concern for me. Rather, to listen to the stories of my participants and to dig into their existing stories are of greater importance. In what follows, I provide a brief sketch of the four participants, Tracy, Mona, Sally and Olivia (all alias).

Over ten years ago, Tracy worked as a teacher in the same postsecondary education institution as me for a couple of years. In the year 2005, she left her lecturer position in China and went to the United States to pursue PhD study in literature and we have had little contact with each other ever since. A few year ago, from one mutual friend, I got to know that she became a teacher in a U.S. university. Therefore, when I began this research, I immediately thought of her and contacted her. She was happy to help me with my research and we exchanged emails about the research details. I also sent her a brief summary of the interview questions that I intended to ask. Together we agreed on the time of an online interview, which took place in March 2014. By talking to her I got to know her journey of becoming a teacher in a “teaching school”, i.e. a postsecondary

educational institution that focuses on teaching undergraduate students, rather than graduate students. Tracy completed her PhD in literature in the year 2009 and started looking for teaching positions in postsecondary educational institutions. She went through the preliminary selection by the Modern Language Association (MLA) and received a campus visit invitation from a Midwest “teaching school”. She considered herself very lucky to have successfully gone through two rounds of selections, since she said she did not cherish much hope of being hired before these interviews. At present, she is a tenure-track assistant professor in the Department of English, teaching a variety of courses and waiting for her permanent residency to be approved.

It is quite by coincidence that Mona became a participant in my research. At a conference on campus in early 2014, I happened to be talking about my research to a faculty member in my university and she told me she could help me get in touch with potential participants. A couple of weeks later, I received an email from Mona who expressed her interest in participating and I was very grateful for her enthusiasm in my research. Since Mona lives in California, we arranged an online interview in March 2014, just a few days after my interview with Tracy. Mona impressed me with her dynamic personality and her vivid way of telling personal stories. She is the only participant who chose to speak English in the interview. She talked about how she came to the United States as an international student “in the same year when September 11 happened”, how she sent out about 200 job applications upon her graduation and how she finally succeeded in becoming a teacher in a “Master’s institution”, i.e. an institution where the Master’s degree is the highest degree offered, in the year 2007. As an assistant professor in the

Department of Mathematics, she would probably have got her tenure in the year 2014. However, she admitted that the tenure process is exhausting since the stakes are very high.

I got to know Sally primarily as a professional contact and fellow colleague in the discipline of education. With more experience in this area of study, she gave me a lot of help and advice in my study. Sally used to be a teacher of English in a Chinese university before immigrating to Canada about ten years ago. She received her Master's degree in Education from a Canadian university and continued with her PhD. She is now completing her dissertation for her PhD and currently teaching as a sessional instructor in a Canadian university. Unlike other participants who are teaching at postsecondary education institutions on a full-time basis, Sally is only a sessional. However, I still invited her to participate since she is representative of many ESL female teachers who are employed on sessional or contractual basis and who have much less sense of job security in postsecondary education. We arranged a face-to-face interview on university campus in May 2014. Sally expressed her feelings of uncertainty concerning her becoming "a regular faculty member" despite the fact that she is already teaching in postsecondary settings.

Olivia became a participant through a friend of mine who knows her personally. After my friend got some ideas about what kind of participants I was looking for, she thought Olivia could be a suitable participant and asked Olivia if she would like to participate. I feel grateful to them both because of their helpful support. Olivia and I met in mid May

2014 at Olivia's home since we found out that we actually live very close to each other. Olivia came to Canada as an undergraduate of Economics around the year 2000. She became a TA in her discipline of study and, according to her narratives, she found that she had a passion for teaching. Although in 2004 she started her co-op in the government sector and finally became a government employee, she accepted a part-time teaching, or sessional teaching position offered by a local college. According to Olivia, due to staff shortage one of her former teachers who later became a dean in a local college sought her out and wanted her to teach because of her previous excellent TA work. This experience helped Olivia to discover that teaching is her passion. After being a sessional for a few semesters, she quit her government job and became a full-time instructor in the same college when a permanent position appeared. She told me that she had to compete with more than 50 other candidates for this position, but her excellence in teaching for several semesters in a row and her passion for teaching convinced the decision-making panel. Olivia impressed me as a very active person, always taking initiatives to talk in our interview. She constantly referred to another passion in her life – dancing, and in fact she is also running a dancing school and teaching Chinese traditional dancing to younger students.

### **3.6 Data collection and analysis**

The major type of data that I collect for my research is from semi-structured and co-constructed interviews. Fontana and Frey (2003) pointed out that typical interviews implicate a hierarchical relation between the researcher and participants and are often regarded as a masculine paradigm. Therefore, the kind of interview that I decided to

adopt is intended to avoid such a hierarchical relation so as to allow the development of a closer and more equitable relationship between the interviewer and the respondent. Thus, the interviews as negotiated texts can make room for personal feelings and emotions on both parties. I am also fully aware that the researcher's gender, race, class, status, age, etc." are all part of the complex, yet often ignored, elements that shape interviewing" (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 85). Besides, the interviews are so designed as to elicit the participants' life stories, which will be recorded and transcribed in the participants' own words. I formulated interview questions to help the telling of life stories and I also tested my questions on a colleague who roughly fits my description of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education so as to determine their appropriateness.

As the specific method of data collection, life story interviews (Atkinson, 1998, 2008) provide an opportunity for me to ask questions that both facilitate the participants' talking about their lived experience and reflect my own research interest (See Appendix I for an outline of the interview questions). However, these interview questions served only as a rough guide and the participants took the lead in talking about their own life. I use the questions to assist them in talking and to pursue my research questions if the participants failed to elaborate on them. Two interviews took place online in the form of a video chat due to the distance between me and the participants and the other two happened face-to-face. Three interviews were conducted in Mandarin in response to the participants request and one interview was in English according to the participant's preference. All interviews were transcribed and translated (See Appendix II for a sample of transcript and translation) for my proceeding analysis. Transcripts of all interviews were returned to the

participants for member check and approval. Approved interview data were edited to formulate the participants' respective life stories. In the end, what is presented in the research text as "life stories" of the participants are in their own words, representing their own voices.

"Analysis cannot be easily distinguished from transcription" (Riessman, 1993, p. 60), so the interview transcription centering on participants' life stories is actually a form of analysis. However, of equal importance to the participants' "telling" is the "retelling" of their stories. As has been previously mentioned, my narrative inquiry is an interpretive research into the participants' own interpretation of their life experience. Since I do my research with an academic purpose, I rely on my preferred concepts and theories to analyze these stories. In the phase of data analysis, I understand that I have to work on the "borderlands" of narrative inquiry as described by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) and I have to live with blurred genres. Although Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry is based on a pragmatic ontology of experience, yet its focus is not only on individuals' experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted. In other words, narrative inquirers "study the individual's experience in the world" (p. 43), which makes feminist poststructuralism very much relevant in data analysis. Furthermore, "narrative inquirers study an individual's experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others" (p. 42), which indicates a critical stance to change things for the better. Thus, I situate my data analysis

in working on borderlands between narrative inquiry and other forms of scholarship, primarily those of feminist poststructuralism and critical theory.

I grouped the participants' interview responses into three main topics: multiple identities, intersection of identities, support and change, with the first topic consisting of three sub-topics: speaking English as a second language, female, and ethnic minority. Since these topics are embedded in my interview questions, I was able to group relevant participants' stories with comparative ease. Nevertheless, participants' narratives often cross these artificial borders set by the interview questions, and I found it necessary to break down participants' narratives into sections and to re-group these sections into the main topics and sub-topics. I also discovered that some narratives may fit into more than one topic. The next step was to read these narratives "horizontally" and "vertically", which means to analyze different participants' narratives on the same topic so as to find similarities and differences and also to concentrate on each participants' narratives so as to describe and interpret each of their experiences as a unique case. The former results in part one of my finding – multiple identities, and the latter forms part two – an intersection of identities. The third and final part of the finding is about support and change, which basically follows the "horizontal" analysis format.



## Chapter 4 Multiple Identities

In order to explore the participants' lived experience of being ESL female teachers in postsecondary education, I invited them to interviews to talk about how they become teachers and about how they view their multiple identities. In what follows, I first deconstruct the dualisms in the naming of the participants along identity categories and explore from a poststructural perspective how their subjectivity is constituted. I then analyze the participants' experience of their multiple identities following the three major categories of ESL, female and ethnic minority.

### 4.1 Deconstructing the dualisms

These four participants are all originally from China and speak Mandarin as their first language. All acquired English as a second language in their youth and all have stayed in North America for an extended period of time, ranging from 10 to 14 years. They become participants in the research because they “fit” the identity descriptions of “speaking English as a second language” and “being female”. As they are all visible minority, they also belong to the identity category of “being racial/ethnic minority”, which is not the primary requirement for participants though. However, I am also fully aware of the terms that I use to describe the multiple identities that the participants have. I understand that these terms do not have any essence concerning who my participants are. In what follows, I intend to problematize the discourses, or frame of reference, that I use to name my participants. I hope that by doing so I will be able to situate my findings on a more explicit backdrop of the tensions and struggles in the naming.

During the whole process of my research, I am constantly reminded of a number of dualisms that are seemingly neutral and innocent. Some of these dualisms have explicit opposites, such as native vs. non-native speakers, and males vs. females. Yet, others do not have a readily recognizable opposite, e.g. ethnic and racial minority. What is the implied opposite of “ethnic and racial minority”? With the normative side of this dualism remaining implicit, the inherent privileges of the “majority” remain unexamined and the marginalization of the deviant “minority” goes unquestioned. In this world where humanist conceptualization still prevails, a person is viewed as belonging to these dualisms. However, these terms are more than transparent categories that simply function to “describe” a person. Embedded in the naming along these dualisms is the approval of one and disapproval of the other. For example, the term “non-native speakers (of English)” or “speakers of English as a second language” has the implicit meaning that the person who belongs to this category has inferior linguistic ability in English and thus less cultural capital in a world where English is used as the language of communication. Poststructural theories, however, intend to deconstruct these dualisms by pointing out that they do not have any essential meaning. For example, what is a native speaker of English? Holliday (2008) mentioned the difficulty of describing what a “native speaker” really is and he questioned and resisted the use of “native speakers” and “non-native speakers” for the inherent favor and disfavor in these names. However, he still appropriated these terms since they are widely comprehensible in his research discipline. Likewise, I am using these terms with an awareness of their humanist tone and with an attempt to deconstruct them and “all the other dualisms that are fundamental to modern

Western discourse if we are to move beyond the limitations and strictures of humanist and masculinist versions of the world” (Davies 2000, p. 58).

#### **4.2 How the subject is constituted**

Following poststructural theories, being a person is captured in the notion of subjectivity. When the participants are described as “speakers of English as a second language”, “female” and “racial/ethnic minorities”, it is vital to explore the discourses that enable such naming and how a person is subjected by the discourses to take up certain positions. In the research, I record the participants’ narratives, but these narratives are not primarily intended to show how they struggle against the odds to succeed. Indeed, such would be stories of individuals with agency and choices. What I look for in the participants’ narratives is how they take up choices and desires that seem to have derived from an agentic subject, but are actually “approved of by those who are squarely located in and powerfully positioned within the dominant discourses” (Davies, 2000, p. 56). For instance, being positioned as ESL or “non-native speakers” in the discourse of English dominance in North American postsecondary education, the participants feel the desire to prove and improve their linguistic competence. They seem to be making a “free choice” and taking initiatives because they want it. In this sense, they seem to be knowledgeable “speaking subjects”. However, what goes unexamined is how the discourse of native-speakerism has determined that their particular versions of English are less desirable than the “native” norm and that they need to improve themselves to conform to the norm. By having a poststructural understanding of how the subject is constituted, “the speaking/writing subject can move within and between discourses, can see precisely how

they subject her, can use the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse, or go beyond the other” (Davies, 2000, p. 60). In other words, understanding how the subject is constituted provides opportunities to question normative practices and to imagine other possibilities.

Davis and Harre (1990) proposed four processes on how we develop our sense of ourselves. The first process is the learning of the categories that include some people and exclude others. For ESL female teachers, it means knowing the dualisms of male/female, and native/non-native speakers. The second process is participating in the various discursive practices through which meanings are allocated to those categories. In the life of ESL female teachers, they interact with colleagues and students to participate in relevant discursive practices in relation to the categories of “female” and “ESL”. For example, once the participants in my research have entered postsecondary education as teachers, they necessarily participate in such practices that make them teachers, or enable their teacher identity. The third process is the positioning of self in terms of the categories and storylines. This involves imaginatively positioning oneself as if one belongs in one category and not in the other. I view this process as being closely related to the second process since participating in discursive practices often happens concurrently with the process of positioning – by others and by oneself. For example, the participants in my research may be positioned by others as “non-native speakers” who do not have adequate English proficiency. This “other positioning” can also influence the way the participants position themselves, so they may also conform to such a storyline and internalize a deficit perception of themselves. The fourth process is the recognition of oneself as having the

characteristics that locate oneself as a member of various subclass categories and not of others, i.e. the sense of being a certain type of person, or having a certain identity. I would like to cite a narrative from Mona as an example of how the subject is constituted.

*I remember I showed my advisor my thesis and he said, "I am not going to read it. I tried to read it... You need to have somebody proof read for you..." I thought my grammar was not that bad. I thought he could understand my meaning, but he said, "No. Get somebody proof read it and get back to me. I am not going to do this." I felt, "Oh, my God", so I got somebody, some native speaker, to proof read. Now, when I write stuff I feel it important to have somebody proof read for me, because I just cannot. (Mona)*

In this narrative, Mona's advisor rejected Mona's thesis as "unreadable" and thus positioned her as deficient in language, which may or may not be true, since Mona obviously had a different view on her English competence. However, located in an inferior position in the conversation, Mona was forced to take up the storyline and accept the "reality" of her poor English. Further, she internalized and strengthened such a positioning by recognizing herself in the category of "non-native speakers" and by turning to a native speaker for help whenever it comes to academic writing. However, what if Mona problematized such a storyline in the first place, positioning herself as competent in English and working on her thesis without external help? What if her self-revised work was subsequently accepted by her advisor? Would Mona's self-perception of her linguistic identity be different from what it is now? A poststructural understanding of subjectivity would thus permit the retelling of the stories from a different perspective and may open up other possibilities for the subject.

### **4.3 Speaking English as a Second Language**

The participants seem to have mixed feelings about themselves as speakers of English as a second language. When I listen to their stories, I am under the impression that for the participants speaking English as a second language cannot be neatly identified as being an advantage or disadvantage. If that is a general impression I get from listening to their stories, I am also able to tease out and identify four different layers of their mixed feelings: 1) language as a barrier; 2) language as not a problem; 3) language as a bridge; and 4) language as an advantage.

#### ***4.3.1 Language as a barrier***

The first and perhaps the most strongly felt layer of such mixed feelings is their sense of language as a barrier. All but one of the teachers have reflected on their inadequacy in the English language and they seem to have readily acknowledged their language as a “drawback” in their teaching and academic work. Tracy has acknowledged that English is a barrier that she can never overcome and that she can never use the language like a “native speaker”.

*I am still poor at it (English) ... I always have difficulties with it in my teaching, difficulties that I am trying to overcome and that I can never overcome. My English is indeed better than when I was in China, but definitely it cannot be compared with that of the native speaker teachers. The gap is always there, no matter how long I stay in the States and no matter how many years I teach. I can never speak English the way the native speakers do. It is a long process of improvement, I think. But the improvement is so slow... (Tracy)*

Her feeling of inadequacy is so strong that she has used quite a number of absolute words, i.e. “always”, “definitely”, “never”, in her talk. Additionally, she views her inadequacy in English as a near permanent drawback which has little hope of being

remedied despite her efforts. Likewise, Mona has cited a vivid personal story to show how she was positioned as inadequate in the English language by her graduate director.

*I remember when I got to the U.S. and I went to my department to say “Hey, I am here”. Then the graduate director talked to me and he said, “Get a TV, watch TV with captions on. You’ve got to improve your English”. OK. For the first time in my life a professor told me that I should watch TV. That’s how bad my English was... (Mona)*

When Mona was excited to get started with her academic work, she was told to watch TV so as to improve her English. In this way, she was sharply reminded of her inadequacy in even daily speech, not to mention academic English. In addition, a previous example I cited about Mona’s need to find a native speaker to proof read for her also reveals that the English language has posed difficulty and inconvenience in her academic work. In other words, she is considered, and also she considers herself, as not being able to do research as an independent researcher.

In these cases, it is evident that native-speakerism plays a prominent role in positioning these teachers as deficient in language. Although the English language is now generally considered “a world language” or “an international language”, there still exists a “Center” and a “Periphery” (Holliday, 2005, 2008), where some people, i.e. the “native speakers”, have more claim and ownership of the language while some, e.g. ESL speakers, tend to be othered and dismissed as needing to improve their English language. I believe that the teachers that I talked to have the ability to express themselves in the way they consider to be effective. Yet, they still feel the need to improve their English so as to use it like a native speaker, although such a vision seems to be rather illusive and they may never use the language exactly the *same* as a native speaker. Personally, I was also confronted with

a similar situation where I wondered if I could ever achieve the same type of “competence” as a native speaker, and perhaps “disguise” my ESL identity in my writing. When I was in a workshop brushing up my narrative statement in my teaching dossier, I went through three drafts and still ended up correcting minute expressions to sound “idiomatic”. Although polishing the language is necessary for everyone in the academia, the same task demands much more on the part of those who speak English as a second language. From the perspective of Gee’s (2000) identity typology, speaking English as a second language originates from a person’s birth and thus is a nature-identity (N-Identity). When these teachers enter the discourse of postsecondary education in North America, they tend to be positioned as marginal and as needing to adapt to the Discourse (the “big D” discourse which not only refers to the language but also other institutional and personal traits) of the academia. The tension between the prescribed Discourse and their embedded sense of D-identity of an ESL speaker has urged these teachers to improve their English so as to be like the native speakers and has prompted my hope of “disguising” my ESL identity in writing. The teachers’ feeling that language is a barrier indicates that teachers who speak English as second language have, to some extent, internalized such positioning and constructed their discourse-identity (D-Identity) of being inadequate in English as an ESL.

#### ***4.3.2 Language as not a problem***

The second layer of understanding seems to dismiss the English language as a big problem, but acknowledges that teaching in a second language is still demanding. After about ten years living in an English-speaking country, Sally feels that her English is good



enough for her to communicate effectively with her students. Her experience of doing research in English for a number of years has also enabled her to have sufficient confidence in writing academic work in English. However, she still feels that there is much room for improvement in regard to teaching in English.

*For example, after students' discussion, I have to make a concluding remark. That demands a lot of quick response... in a second language... There is one occasion when I couldn't understand a particular expression used by a student. I couldn't comprehend it. Then I told them that I couldn't quite understand and the student repeated it. I also asked the student to spell it out, then I understood. (Sally)*

This narrative has described Sally's experience of not being able to respond quickly to students, probably due to differences in pronunciation and vocabulary. Sally feels that doing research in English is not a big problem for her since she can take the time to revise her work, but her reflection on her teaching experience has indicated that even if she has acquired sufficient English to "survive" in the academic discourse (linguistically), she still feels uncomfortable teaching in a second language.

*Research is easier than teaching, I think, since teaching is like a live performance. It's not like some TV programs where materials are recorded and edited, showing the audience the finished product. Teaching is a live performance. So, I feel that in teaching the demand for English is even higher, more challenging. (Sally)*

From the above narrative, it seems that Sally's understanding of speaking English as a second language is more comprehensive. She is able to identify a particular challenge for ESL. For her, English for general communicative use and even English for academic writing purposes can be cultivated gradually by teachers who are ESL, of course with much effort and years of experience, but when it comes to live teaching, these teachers may still run into difficulty and thus fail to achieve the *same* kind of competence as

native speakers. Her narratives have also touched upon the *performance* aspect of teaching, where the teacher's cultural background and personality may affect their performance in classroom. Talking about teaching, Olivia made the following comment and suggestion:

*You don't have to speak perfect English, but you need a huge vocabulary. You need to know the most "fashionable" words. In this way, students can feel connected with you. We can all speak some English, but the most important difference is the words you use. With the "right" words, you can get connected with your audience, like professors and students. (Olivia)*

This comment has indicated the importance of staying in the same discourse (linguistically) with your colleagues and students. In Gee's (2000) identity typology, this belongs to the D-Identity, where people share similar vocabulary and cultural understandings, and this may help to construct an A-Identity, where the teacher and students build up bounds because of their shared goals or interests. Needless to say, ESL teachers who often stay at the margins of the language discourse run a higher risk of being left out. The teacher's personality also plays a part in the performance of teaching. According to research in teaching, extroverted and active people seem to have an advantage to perform better in classroom (Svinivki & McKeachie, 2011), but that is an issue common to all teachers, not restricted to teachers whose native language is not English. Despite it being a common issue, I personally feel that teachers who use English as a second language, particularly those from Asia, may be more likely to be introverts. Growing up in a culture where modesty is regarded as virtue and speaking out personal views as imprudent, I often find myself refraining from taking an initiative in interpersonal communication. As a researcher who speak English as a second language, I also tend to be cautious with the use of the English language. These characteristics may

be interwoven to hinder these teachers', myself included, performance in classroom. Presumably, an extrovert personality also belongs to the "big D" discourse of a postsecondary education teacher.

### ***4.3.3 Language as a bridge***

On the other hand, speaking English as a second language does not only bring barriers and it sometimes functions as a bridge for teachers to make connections with students, which forms a third layer of the participants' perception of speaking English as a second language. Mona finds her accent a connection point with her diverse students and her occasional difficulty in expressing in English an opportunity to enliven the classroom atmosphere and exchange conversations with students.

*Well. I have an accent. The lucky thing is that when I am in California, everyone has an accent. So, they are more tolerant here... When I teach, I would say... "x and y... oops, this is bad English. Let me rewrite it". My students are used to me like that. "Okay, don't start writing because she is going to change..." Sometimes I couldn't finish constructing my sentence, I'd say, "Do you know what I am going to say? Then start writing your own sentences". The kids here are pretty nice. Sometimes I ask them questions like how do you spell xxx, and they will spell it for me. (Mona)*

Similarly, Olivia has made use of her "not knowing the English for that" as a trigger to get students' attention and make them think actively. She also regards it as an opportunity for her to learn more words and expressions from her students. To a certain extent, she has taken this opportunity to engage students and enhance students' learning by using language difference as a pedagogical tool, a strategy that may have exceeded the language-as-a-bridge phase.

*I always ask in my class, "Do you know how to say that?" I would say, "You know my Chinese is way better than my English", and they all burst into laughter.*

*I continue to say, “I can teach you the Chinese for that, but now I am brain dead, and can somebody tell me how to say this”. And I ask them, “How do you describe this”, and they would tell me one word after another, so in this way, I learn from them. Afterwards, I would tell them, “actually the economic term is xxx, but what you said is better to explain it and your way makes more sense and remember that. This is terminology”. I make students feel that they are also teaching me. (Olivia)*

It should be noted that both Mona and Olivia seem to be unafraid of revealing their not knowing the English language well in class. Both of them mentioned, jokingly, that they have a “thick face”, which means not being afraid of making mistakes in English and acknowledging to students that they do not know how to express certain ideas in English. It is also important to consider the disciplines of teaching. Mona is teaching Mathematics and Olivia Economics. However, Tracy and Sally, who are in Literature and Education respectively, have not mentioned admitting their not knowing the language nor their learning English expressions from students. Therefore, I wonder if there are some disciplines that are “safer” for speakers of English as a second language to admit their language inadequacy and some that are more risky. In disciplines where students may hold high expectations for a teacher’s command of the English language, revealing such a vulnerability can be problematic, although more research may be needed to substantiate such a claim. As a matter of fact, openly admitting the language inadequacy may prove to be effective in connecting with students and improving students’ learning in some but not all disciplines.

The narratives also reveal the process of identity negotiation. Mona and Olivia, for example, are negotiating their unique identity by admitting their difference in language and culture and by putting such difference to good use. The fact that they are no longer

afraid of facing their language difference is indication that they have come to incorporate such a difference into their perception of their teacher identity.

#### **4.3.4 *Language as an advantage***

The fourth layer of their perception on speaking English as a second language is the teachers' efforts to make use of it as an advantage in their teaching. For Tracy, her perspectives in her literary analysis and her choices of teaching material provide advantages for her to do her teaching and research, but that seems to be more on the cultural part of the language and cannot be separately from her ethnic and cultural identity.

*My advantage is not in the language. It is in other aspects. For example, I can offer a different perspective on things. For the same course, I am more inclined to choose non-European or non-western writers, such as Asian, South American and African writers. I think this is a big difference. I will choose non-western, non-mainstream works to teach. This can bring more international perspective to the course. Another aspect is in my analysis of literary works. I think it has to do with the culture and the individual. As an Asian, I think, we have our prior culture to refer to and our literary foundation to bring to the analysis. (Tracy)*

Her narrative about her advantage of speaking other languages and growing up in other cultures is important in that diversity should be a point that postsecondary education needs to incorporate, not something it has to accommodate. Tracy's diverse perspectives and approaches are valuable for both the students and the academia. Likewise, Olivia has ingeniously taken advantage of her "difficulty" in comprehending complicated English language in statistics and thus created a rapport with students who may have also experienced similar difficulties in reading. Besides a previous narrative by Olivia on having students express terminology in their own words, the following story further

illustrates how Olivia has made use of her identity of speaking English as a second language to develop an effective instruction method. In this example, her “poor English”, as she told her students, has become an advantage in teaching students how to solve maths problems effectively.

*Since problems in statistics are always very long and complicated, I usually tell them, “I feel sick looking at the whole bunch of these words”. I then ask them, “Do you feel sick? I don’t believe you still remember the beginning when you come to the end.” “So what should we do? My eyes are first drawn to the numbers, and the term Standard Deviation before the numbers, and I rush to write down SD 6.8 beside it. I take all the information out and write beside it. I don’t need to go back to the statement part of the problem. I just go to the question and put all the numbers in the formula and here comes the result.” So, the students told me that what they learned in my course is not just knowledge about statistics, but also the ability to transform complicated information to very simple points. (Olivia)*

By putting herself on the same ground as students, i.e. not being able to “read” the problem, Olivia has managed to establish the same affinity-identity (A-Identity) with students and work together with students to solve problems. The following comment again illustrates how speaking English as a second language is turned into an advantage in the discipline of statistics.

*I sometimes told them, “you know why you have to spend 5 minutes reading a problem statement, it’s because your English is too good. But I am poor at English, so I can just grab the most important information.” (Olivia)*

Still, back to the point I made previously in the third layer of understanding, the discipline of teaching is of importance. Since Olivia teaches Statistics, it is important for her to teach students how to bypass the confusion caused by language and transform linguistic expressions into components that fit into a formula. However, such a potential may not be present in other disciplines of teaching. Also important from the above

narratives is that the participants have shown some signs of negotiating a “hybrid identity” concerning their speaking English as a second language by claiming their language difference as an advantage that they personally possess.

As can be seen from the above four layers of understandings, there seems to be a continuum in the participants’ perceptions of speaking English as a second language, and such a continuum may even exist concurrently in a single participant. On one side of the continuum is the sense that speaking English as a second language brings barriers and deficit that they must constantly tackle, but often with limited success. On the other side of the continuum is an effort to overturn this label by taking advantage of their language difference to enhance teaching and learning. In between lie the feelings of an awareness and acknowledgement of the challenges they face in teaching live in a second language and of the intentional reaching-out to students, often diverse students, by sharing a common ground with them. For Tracy, her sense of being deficient in language is strong, but she also shows signs of taking advantage of her diverse language and culture to enhance her teaching. Mona also considers her language a problem and a major disadvantage, but she feels comfortable staying in a diverse environment so that she can strike a common ground with her diverse students and achieve better interaction with them. Sally feels confident with her English proficiency, but stays aware of the challenges of responding quickly in class and occasional uncomfortable moments when her impromptu use of the English language runs into trouble. Olivia is aware of her inadequacy in English, but she explicitly opens herself to learning new expressions in English so that she can also gain an opportunity to engage students. She has also made an

effort to turn her language difference into an advantage by introducing effective teaching and learning strategies in class.

In summary, speaking English as a second language constitutes a vital part of language diverse teachers' sense of identity and they may position themselves at different places of a continuum depending on how such an identity is negotiated through social interactions. The native-speakerism dominant in the Discourse of academia can exert sufficient power to position them as deficient and marginal. The teachers who speak English as a second language, as a result, are subjected to take up such positioning and are constantly reminded of and have become aware of having a negative identity, which requires their improvement toward an illusive goal of being like a native speaker. It must be noted that the teachers' urge to improve their English language is not for language per se, but also and more importantly, for becoming full members and for acquiring legitimate D-Identity and A-Identity in their social interactions with colleagues and students. Nevertheless, the teacher participants have also shown their efforts to resist negative positioning and exert their agency. A diverse environment seems to be more conducive to enabling the teacher participants to resist a negative identity and to connect with a diverse student population. Some teacher participants have also taken advantage of their language difference by putting themselves at the same level as students, e.g. having problem reading the language in the question, and by introducing teaching methods that are collaborative and inquiry-based. Still others have carried out their resistance by introducing different perspectives to their subject area of teaching. However, what seems to be lacking is the explicit institutional acknowledgement of the value language diverse teachers can bring



to students and the disciplines as a whole. In other words, speaking English as a second language is generally not considered an asset by educational institutions and language diverse teachers are largely left to tackle the issue by themselves. Consequently, they may locate themselves at different places of the continuum as a result of their individual identity negotiation process.

#### **4.4 Being Female**

Prior literature (Halvorsen, 2002; Jackson, 2002; Lester, 2008; Luke, 2001; Robbins, 2010) has substantiated the theme that female teachers in postsecondary education have been persistently marginalized. The narratives of the four female teachers in this study have largely reflected a similar perception. However, there still exist minute differences in how such marginalization is perceived by different teachers. In what follows, I focus on three main aspects of how the participants are positioned in postsecondary education as evidenced from these narratives: 1) gender equity and gender balance; 2) gender embodiment; 3) gender and teaching effectiveness.

##### ***4.4.1 Gender equity and gender balance***

The female teacher participants have provided different accounts concerning whether male or female teachers are preferred in their respective disciplines. As a matter of fact, their accounts of such preference vary according to disciplines. According to Luke (2001), females in postsecondary education are horizontally concentrated in the traditionally female areas of study, such as education, language and literature, which generally lead to low-prestige and low-pay professions. However, according to the

current study, the concentration of females in these disciplines and the tendency of female domination in these disciplines have not functioned to increase the power of female teachers but have caused their loss of power in the name of gender balance. Sally commented on how female teachers are at a disadvantage as a result.

*I don't think it (i.e. being female) brings advantages. Say, if I were in the administration, or the Dean, if there are too many female teachers, I would feel inclined to employ more male teachers. I feel there should be a balance, not imbalance. (Sally)*

What is interesting in Sally's comment is that she seems to agree that there should be a "balance" in her discipline of teaching. A similar attitude can be found in Tracy's narratives on how her institution made an effort to attract male teachers with a higher incentive.

*The funny thing is that for those who came the same year, the male teachers and female teachers have different salaries... They want to attract more male teachers with a higher salary, since the market value of male teachers is higher than that of the female teachers... (Tracy)*

Although Tracy was talking about a gross inequality between female and male teachers in postsecondary education, her tone of speaking is matter-of-fact, showing no surprise or any intense feelings. In other words, Tracy seems to have accepted such inequality as the way things are and have recognized the justification behind, i.e. "gender balance". Nevertheless, Tracy's use of "market value" has sharply pointed out the tendency toward corporatization in higher learning institutions, where the value of the personnel is measured in market terms. These narratives can reveal how female teachers may have internalized this discourse of marginalizing female teachers in the name of gender balance and gender equality.

If Tracy and Sally feel that male teachers are favored in the female areas of study, i.e. literature and education, I wonder if a reverse tendency is present in a traditionally male-dominated discipline – Mathematics. When talking about being female in her discipline of Mathematics, Mona first talked about her becoming aware of the scarcity of female professionals and researchers in this discipline.

*Once one of my colleagues came to do class observation, and after that we talked and she said you have very few girl students in your class. I said, “Really?”, then I started counting and yes right... After she told me that, I started to try to be more aware. One year I went to a conference, I was giving a talk and I looked at all the audience. There were about 50 people in the audience and I was the only female and I was giving a talk. I was... hey... now I am aware of this. (Mona)*

In this situation of significant gender imbalance, we would assume that female teachers may be preferred. As it turned out, Mona did narrate on a preference for female teachers in her institution.

*We try to attract female. That doesn't translate into money, really. We did a search and I was on the searching committee. We presented our candidates and our administrators asked us [to explain our decisions] ... [like] why [do you think] this female candidate is not as strong as this male candidate that you picked... we had to justify... They were like... “Really?” “Hum...” Very strange actually. Depending on discipline I guess... (Mona)*

Is it evidence that female teachers are indeed positioned as more valuable and advantageous in some disciplines? First of all, it is ironical that although the institution tries to attract females, it does not mean that female teachers get a higher salary, as compared to a similar scenario narrated by Tracy about higher salaries for male teachers. Therefore, such preference seems to be only paying lip service to female teachers in an increasingly corporatized and market-aware discourse of postsecondary education.

Secondly, in her narratives, Mona talked about how her undergraduate students succeeded in interviews to get jobs in industry and received a much higher salary than herself. Therefore, there is reason to believe that teaching may be considered less desirable in her discipline and that females are still vertically clustered in the comparatively low-paying and less prestigious positions such as teaching if we take the whole landscape of her discipline into consideration. When we consider that Mona's institute is a teaching-focus institute, where the main task of faculty is to teach undergraduate and a small percentage of Master level students, it becomes even more evident that females tend to be restricted to the lower end of the academia. Thus, we have reason to believe that being female does not contribute to advantage for these teacher participants. Being female tends to disadvantage them in traditionally female areas of study under the claim of gender balance. Being female does not bring them genuine advantages in disciplines where females are already the minority since they tend to occupy lower level positions in these disciplines.

#### **4.4.2 Gender embodiment**

Another important theme in these female teachers' narratives is their embodiment of the female gender in their teaching. I identify two rather opposite aspects of such embodiment. The first aspect is their abandonment of the female look and taking up a masculine image. In the following narrative, Mona reflected on how being female had influenced the way she teaches and how she has learnt to "look serious" in front of students.

*But I think it (being female) could influence something... I remember one day I was teaching calculus I ... my students... they will act differently according to*

*how you present yourself. So I remember two things... one is that when I started this calculus class, they are really... disrespectful, so I was upset and I talked to my chairman. And he told me... look, Mona, you smile. These college kids, they are freshmen, they think you are just nice and then they take advantage of you. Then I say, okay, so what do you suggest. He said ... I will suggest either you don't teach the first semester, the freshmen class, or you just look serious. This is one thing I didn't think about before. (Mona)*

In this scenario, the feminine feature of smiling is considered inappropriate while a stern face is appreciated in postsecondary education. Students positioned her as to be taken less seriously due to her female body and her smiles. Her chairman reinforced such a positioning by giving “valuable advice” on how she should present herself. To be sure, such positioning has to do with the larger context or Discourse of postsecondary education, where the male is regarded as the norm. A similar narrative by Mona comments on how the way female teachers, particularly young female teachers, dress themselves can affect their effectiveness in teaching.

*I remember the first year I started teaching and I just wore what I wear, I mean jeans. Then I started to think about this “authority” and I started wearing trousers and things changed, for “no” reason. So when you are just out of graduate school, the students think you are just TA. When they don't think you are professor, it affects how they treat you and how they treat the subject. (Mona)*

Of course, this scenario may also involve the age issue. In other words, the “norm” of a university teacher is perceived as a middle-aged or senior male, most probably white, which is another aspect to be dealt with in a later section. Therefore, young female teachers tend to have questioned authority and credibility in student-teacher interactions. Similarly, Olivia also mentioned how students took her less seriously due to her look of a young female.

*Due to my small stature and my look, I'm often taken as a fellow student. My first lesson is always a joke. Since students don't know I'm the instructor, when I enter*

*the classroom students simply look up and ignore me. Even after I turn on the computer and stuff, they just stare at me, not realizing that I'm their instructor, until I start to teach... (Olivia)*

It has to be noted that such incidents are by no means rare, since Mona also talked about other female teachers in her department who took up similar strategies of “looking serious”.

*Then my next office colleague. She is also female, and younger than I. And she told me that she always looked very serious, never smiled. She said she never smiled to students in class. Always look stern. So you have to have this authority. (Mona)*

Therefore, it seems that these female teachers are practically living “a dual life”, restraining their femininity and putting on a masculine image of being stern and serious in classroom. To some extent, they experience a fragmented gender identity as a result of the expectations students and the administration have on how a postsecondary education teacher should look like. To be sure, such expectations are the result of the dominant Discourse of postsecondary education where males hold the authority and credibility as legitimate members and where females are still considered “others” despite their increase in number.

The second, rather opposite, aspect of gender embodiment is the fact that these teachers consider themselves as caring and nurturing to their students. Some of the teacher participants believe that as female teachers they genuinely care for their students. Sally reflected on her previous experience of teaching in China where she adopted the pedagogy of “caring” and on the lack of such pedagogy in her present teaching.

*I cared a lot for my students when I was in China. I became friends with them and cared for their life outside classroom. In here, it was not quite like that. Maybe it's because of the extent of responsibility. As a class teacher (for students in China), I must find out what kind of help students need and go out to help them, so I visited them in their dorms and talked to them. But, in here, I do not have such responsibility [or permission]. (Sally)*

Nevertheless, Sally still tried to implement her student-centered pedagogy by listening to her students and by tailoring her teaching to students' needs.

*And (I must genuinely care for them and) understand them, their needs. At the beginning of the course, I ask them what they want to learn and about their purpose of learning the course. I compare it with my syllabus. I also want to understand what they know about the course, because you can't just teach what they already know. (Sally)*

Sally considers herself a teacher who cares for the students and her self-positioning as a “caring” teacher reflects an important female feature. To be sure, the feminist pedagogy of caring has only recently been recognized as beneficial and effective teaching. In other words, Sally's feminist pedagogy may not have been considered an advantage a decade or two ago. Similarly, Olivia also regarded her being female as an advantage in her teaching, since students are more inclined to establish connections with her.

*But, they (students) also feel close to you. Many of them actually approach me and talk to me about their own life, their private problems. They regard me as a big sister. So, I think there is an advantage here. Sometimes, when the senior and older teachers cannot deal with some of their students, even if they are not my students, these teachers would tell these students that Olivia is a great person to talk to. So, I think it's my advantage. (Olivia)*

However, there is also a risk in taking up such positioning as a “caring” and “nurturing” teacher. Although Olivia gains by caring for her students, she may have also been positioned as suitable for talking about personal matters with, rather than as an outstanding instructor or researcher. In other words, the feminist pedagogy the teacher

participants have embodied can somehow overshadow their other, more “valued” achievements in the Discourse of postsecondary education, where the merit system does not give full credit to these activities (e.g. Drame et al. 2011). By far, none of the teachers have narrated on such a tension between what the academia values for postsecondary education teachers and what they value as feminist pedagogy, but by claiming to be caring and nurturing, Sally and Olivia have obviously woven a unique strand into their teacher identity.

#### ***4.4.3 Gender and teaching effectiveness***

It is interesting to observe that when asked about how being female has influence them as teachers, many participants instantly responded that female teachers have the same teaching effectiveness as male teachers, which indicates that the teacher participants regard teaching effectiveness as a vital standard for good teachers. The teacher participants in this study believe that there is no significant difference between genders. Tracy cited an example to show that minority female teachers can achieve high effectiveness in teaching.

*I see female teachers who teach really well with very good student evaluations... there is no significant difference... I remember that we still have another female teacher from Japan, but she has been here for many years and married an American. The couple are both in our department... Her English is almost identical to that of the native speakers, but her face and her culture are different. Her teaching evaluation is very high. So, I think as long as you are a good teacher and as long as you have that rapport with the students, gender does not pose a big problem. (Tracy)*

Although this example is intended to show female teachers who are non-native speakers of English can also succeed, it is interesting to note that Tracy particularly mentioned that



this teacher's English proficiency is "identical" to that of the native speakers, a reflection of the embedded native-speakerism discourse in her discipline of language and literature. On the other hand, the effectiveness of female teachers in teaching can take a different form as compared with that of male teachers. Sally has commented that gender can influence the way teachers communicate with students, but that does not make a real difference between their teaching quality or effectiveness. While she can achieve a more in-depth understanding of her female students, she does not know her male students well, perhaps due to the fact that they do not share similar interests. Male teachers, in her view, may be able to establish a better connection with male students.

*So, I think there are definitely differences between male teachers and female teachers as far as communicating with students are concerned. But as for effectiveness... well... it seemed that it (difference in effectiveness) was not obvious. (Sally)*

According to Sally, the difference in communication does not mean a difference in teaching effectiveness. Additionally, Olivia cited herself as an example to show how she, as a young female, managed to win recognition among her colleagues by teaching effectively.

*Sometimes, the older and more conservative teachers may think that I don't look like a teacher, but with the time goes by, they will change their view. For example, one teacher suddenly found that her students were easier to teach in a particular year, so she asked the students who taught them the previous term. The students told her that I taught them. She became so happy since I well prepared the students. Gradually, she developed a liking for me, and she, a very conservative senior lady, now can crack jokes with me. (Olivia)*

Olivia's narrative does not specifically refer to female teachers alone, but integrates multiple identities of being female, young and energetic. Since Olivia is also a dancer, the liveliness in how she presents herself may not quite conform to the "norm" of a

postsecondary education teacher. All these characters may have initially contributed to some of her colleagues' "othering" her as "not look like a teacher". However, she managed to expand the dominant Discourse on a postsecondary education teacher by proving her effectiveness in teaching. Narratives from the teacher participants have highlighted their endorsement of teaching effectiveness as a standard to work at so as to claim a legitimate teacher identity for female teachers. Yet, the participants' determination to prove their effectiveness is also indication of their otherness as females in the academia.

In conclusion, from the teachers' narratives of being female in postsecondary education, it is evident that the masculine and patriarchal discourse still prevails. Despite the fact that female teachers are considered as effective as male teachers in teaching, female teachers are still likely to be at a disadvantage in employment and income. This masculine and patriarchal discourse has also made demands on how female teachers should present themselves in the postsecondary classroom. In other words, the Discourse of postsecondary education has othered female teachers as deviant from the "male" "authoritative" norm and students can take female teachers less seriously unless female teachers change themselves to look like the male norm. Nevertheless, some female teachers have resisted and expanded such a normative Discourse. They consider caring for students and being approachable an advantage in enhancing their teaching effectiveness. However, these features still require institutional recognition under the present meritocratic system of postsecondary education.

## **4.5 Being an Ethnic Minority**

Although my research is primarily designed to study ESL female teachers in postsecondary education, regardless of their ethnic background, all the four participants happen to be visible minorities and ethnic Chinese. Since all of them are from China, they share a similar cultural identity, although I am fully aware that within the cultural identity of being ethnic Chinese, there are also variations that result from their individual life experience. The following exploration of their being an ethnic minority centers around two major aspects: 1) an ethnic identity constituted by discourse; and 2) appropriation of ethnic identity.

### ***4.5.1 An ethnic identity constituted by discourses***

As I have just mentioned, all four participants share the similar identity of being ethnic Chinese. Since they all left mainland China 10 to 14 years ago to live in North America and fall into roughly the same age group, I assume that they share many similarities in their cultural identity. However, their individual experiences of being an ethnic Chinese in North America show remarkable differences. Following a poststructural understanding of subjectivity, I looked into their particular context of living and relate their different experiences with the discourses they are subjected to. Tracy teaches in a university in a Midwest American state and her students are primarily Caucasians. Obviously, her presence as a teacher in this discourse can hardly avoid the position of being the “other”. Tracy narrated four major aspects that she regarded as having negative influences on her as an ethnic minority. Firstly, as I have discussed in a prior section, language, as a part of culture, exerts a negative influence on her.

*For the first thing, I am not as fluent and eloquent as the native speakers. You cannot express yourself with the same ease. You have to struggle for the right expression to express yourself. (Tracy)*

Another aspect Tracy mentioned is the lack of connection and rapport with students.

Tracy talked about how her American colleagues can establish rapport with students after just one session or two, but for her it takes a much longer time for her students to know her.

*Secondly, you grow up in a different culture, so you do not have a natural rapport with the students. When you teach, students always feel that “wall” between you. It is impossible that they will feel very close to you and feel that you are their friend. It is also slow for the mutual trust to develop. There is always that ice to break. It is also a problem that I am trying to overcome. (Tracy)*

It is interesting to consider how such a difference between an “American teacher” and an ethnic minority teacher would emerge. According to Tracy, other ethnic groups are rare in her university and many of her students have never been to their state capital or major cities in their state, thus having fewer opportunities to meet people from other ethnic groups who are more common in bigger cities. The contrast between the “majority” and the “minority” is sharp and both the students and the teacher seem to be acutely aware of their differences and tend to position themselves according to the storyline of the “majority” vs. “minority”. The students seem to be cautious with and suspicious of the minority teacher, who, in turn, feels othered and rejected, and thus convinced of the cultural difference and the “wall” between students and the teacher. The third aspect of influence narrated by Tracy is how her teaching style and her pedagogy run into resistance. Growing up in a Confucian culture, Tracy finds it natural and necessary to tell students what she knows about the subject and to expect students to follow her

instructions. In Confucian culture, teachers are in the position of having much more knowledge than students and thus can direct the way students should go, and students are positioned as followers, respecting the teacher and listening to the teacher. However, her direct instruction did not work for her students in North America, where democracy is prioritized and individual freedom is cherished.

*I feel that I cannot transfer the way I teach in China to the American context. It is entirely different. For Chinese students, teachers' words are accepted without much questioning... At least, Chinese students don't challenge teachers. Students here can question and challenge you at any moment. So, in my first semester, I spent much time arguing with them. The result is disastrous. Students think that I was forcing them to accept some ideas, although their views were often problematic. They simply could not accept this way of teaching –the teacher imposing his/her view on students. They cherish freedom of speech. The teachers cannot force their ideas on students. As a result, my evaluation for the first year is very bad... (Tracy)*

As Tracy's teaching method was rejected as inappropriate in the discourse of freedom of speech and democratic negotiation in North American universities, she had to make improvements and adaptations so as to negotiate a legitimate identity as a teacher.

*So, now when I find that a student has problematic conceptions, I will not directly tell him/her it is wrong, I will ask other students if they agree with him/her. In this way, the students can argue among themselves. If I point out their problems, they feel that I am not granting them the right to speak and I am the dictator. You have to make students feel that it is THEY who explored and discovered the "truth" or the knowledge with your guidance. You must have this process of guiding students to discover the truth themselves, or making them realize by themselves that they are wrong. Teachers cannot do that directly; otherwise, students will think that you are suppressing their ideas and words. (Tracy)*

The fourth aspect of influence is about communicating with students on non-academic issues, such as assignment instructions. While she considered her instruction sufficiently clear, her students still requested clarification. What the teacher and students took as

implicit norms did not naturally overlap, so the teacher felt that the students did not understand what she thought they could understand.

*Also, there is another thing for a foreign teacher. Sometimes I think I have given a very clear instruction. For example, I think I have given a very clear instruction on the requirements for their first paper, i.e. what they should write about. But students think it is totally unclear. I have to break down the whole process into small steps and show them how to do it. I have to gradually explore and find the type of teaching that suits them. They don't understand what I think they can understand. So, I think it has to do with the fact that I don't have a good understanding of their culture and background... (Tracy)*

Therefore, from the above narratives I find that in the particular experience of Tracy she is subjected to the dominant discourse of American culture, which has constantly positioned her as the “other”, speaking a different language and with a different, less valued or even deficient, culture. Students’ resistance can also exert considerable power on Tracy since poor evaluation directly threatens her legitimate institutional identity (Identity) of being a teacher. In this case, Tracy has no choice but to make adaptations so as to be re-positioned as a legitimate teacher.

The experience of Mona, however, differs significantly from that of Tracy. Talking about her being an ethnic minority, Mona actually said that she felt “at home” since she teaches in California, where the population is very diverse and where Caucasians do not constitute the majority of the population. Mona narrated a story about how her white husband was positioned as the minority and the foreigner in a discourse where the dark-haired and brown-skin population dominate in number.

*My husband is an American... And a funny thing is that ... we live in this place and most people you see here are actually... dark. Once we went to a restaurant... eating... and then we went to a Vietnam restaurant and he wondered what's that (food)... I told him I have no idea and he said should we ask. So I said*

*Okay... do you want to ask or do I want to ask. Then I said something that was really... we actually kept laughing at it. I said to my husband, how about you ask, because you are a foreigner and they will not be... offended... or surprised that you don't know about it. Then he said what did you just call me... Then I said, oh sorry, I am the foreigner and you are not... In a restaurant, a lot of Hispanic... we are all... like... dark haired and so... I said you are the foreigner. So... it's how it's like. (Mona)*

Nevertheless, the dominance in number does not naturally translate into dominance in other aspects of social life, but Mona's story still indicates that when the presence of those traditionally considered "ethnic minorities" has reached a certain (high) percentage, the social mentality of who belongs to the "majority" or the "minority" can somehow be challenged and even overturned. In this way, those traditionally considered "ethnic minorities" may gain more power to disrupt the monolithic ethnic and cultural norms and to establish legitimacy for their diverse cultures. Since Mona once lived in Midwest when she was a student, she made a comparison between the Midwest and California in regard to how ethnicity was experienced by her in different contexts.

*In Midwest, you see white kids hang out together, Asian kids hang out together, African American kids hang out together. They all have different accents. When I came here I realized it's totally different, because... on my campus, kids hang out in... every ethnicity... and the African American kids here do not have the southern accent at all. So everybody's English sounds the same and they hang out with whoever, so when they come to my office hour, I have an African American, a Hispanic, and... we have Midwesterners... everybody hang out together, they don't group by ethnicity at all. This is one thing I like. So... I don't feel about anything... (Mona)*

The importance of one's location, i.e. where one stays, for the construction of ethnic identity is also echoed by Sally, who commented that a more diverse population, both in students and teachers, would be more contributive to positive experiences by racial and ethnic minorities. In the Canadian city she lives in, ethnic minority population in both

students and teachers are small, though gradually increasing. In this context, white teachers and students need to “get used to” ethnic minority teachers and students. However, when she went to conferences in the U.S., she observed a much higher percentage of ethnic minority teachers. Some of her former colleagues who went to teach in U.S. universities also mentioned the higher percentage of ethnic minority teachers who speak English with an accent and the fact that students “seem to have got used to it”, i.e. the presence of ethnic minority teachers. Therefore, she concluded that if the population is more diverse in a place, both diverse teachers and students can feel more at home. In regard to English in particular, Sally made the following comment:

*So... I feel it has to do with where you are. Although English is now a “world language” and it doesn’t belong to the States or Canada, students, also your audience, who have seldom met people who speak English with an accent, would certainly have difficulty understanding another version of English. So, I think teachers who are ESLs themselves would feel much better if they go to bigger cities with a more diverse population. (Sally)*

Also, a more diverse population, be it among students or teachers, can help white teachers to have a more positive experience with diverse students. Sally made the following comment.

*In here, I heard some teachers telling me that they couldn’t understand the English spoken by Chinese students, as they (teachers) had little previous contact with them (Chinese students). Only after increased contact with Chinese students could the teachers gradually understand their English. (Sally)*

Nevertheless, the following story by Mona is also a good reminder of how people tend to be positioned as belonging to subgroups, particularly along the storyline of ethnicity. It is also important to notice that such positioning is considered natural and familiar both by the person who positions and those who are positioned.



*And my chairman was funny. In our department we have different groups, different ethnicities... right. So when he passes by, he would say, there is a bunch of Chinese people hang out together speaking Chinese, and he would say, there is a Chinese conspiracy! There is a Chinese conspiracy! Then, there is a bunch of Korean, speaking Korean, when he passes by he would say, Korean conspiracy! Korean conspiracy! He is really funny... There is one day I was talking to a bunch of people and we are all different, speaking English I think, and he said, a bunch of maths people are making a maths conspiracy. (Mona)*

It can be observed that the “naming” of people as Chinese, Korean and many others are rampant in everyday conversations and there are endless ways of such naming. Even a diverse group who happen to be in the discipline of maths can also be named as belonging to the group of “maths people”. Just because of the commonality of such practices, we tend to be unaware of how people constitute their subjectivity of who they are along certain categories. To a certain extent, people cannot avoid such positioning and such naming. However, it is important to clarify how these names come into being and how people appropriate their ethnic identities.

#### ***4.5.2 Appropriation of ethnic identity***

With their ethnic identity constituted by the discourses in which they live, the participants in my research have also appropriated their ethnic identity to their advantage. By appropriation, I refer to the dual sense of simultaneously appropriating and being appropriated by the collective discourse (Davies, 2000), where they are positioned as ethnic minorities and where they also assume such positioning and utilize it to exert an influence. Olivia talked about how she used her ethnic Chinese background to illustrate the concept of “planned economy” to her students who do not have lived experience of it.

*For example, when I talked about planned economy and market economy, I told them my own story in childhood. I gave them the example of “staple food*

*stamps”, which was used to get needed staple food, such as rice and flour. If the stamps are used to get candy, then it cannot be used for staple food. So, under that circumstance, these stamps are even more precious than money. It’s a kind of quota card. (Olivia)*

Obviously, her own experience of planned economy is a valuable asset in teaching an unfamiliar concept to her students. When she continued to talk about the controversial one-child policy in China to illustrate the idea of things being “planned”, her vivid stories definitely moved her students and successfully attracted students’ attention.

*I also gave them the example of one-child policy. I was born in the year 1979, when one-child policy was already enforced. My sister and I are twins. On June 1, the National Children’s Day, the only-child could get two bags of candies each while those who were not could only get one bag of candy each. So, the three kids in my class, my sister and I as well as another girl who has a brother, cried our hearts out. Since we couldn’t use our more valuable “staple food stamps” to get candies, this was our once-in-a-year occasion to have candies. How we envied others who got two bags of candies. Our father is very creative, and optimistic too. He turned our one bag of candies into two by repacking the candies in two bags. We were too little to have the sense of size and were over-joyed to have two bags of candies each. When I told them this story, my Canadian students were crying. (Olivia)*

However, such direct appropriation of one’s ethnic identity may seem a deliberate move to satisfy students’ curiosity and can lead to the formation of cultural stereotypes among her students. In this sense, while Olivia is appropriating her ethnic minority identity to serve the purpose of attracting students’ attention and of explaining certain concepts, she is simultaneously reinforcing a storyline that can contribute to the essentialization of the ethnic identity of being Chinese. The dual sense of appropriation is also present in the following narrative where Olivia mentioned how she utilized her culture to teach diverse students, i.e. students from ethnic minority groups.

*I told them that Chinese people, Japanese people and Korean people are all intelligent, but why we could not go up to the management as a rule? It’s because*

*we are not willing to take initiatives. Like, when someone asks me if I would like to be the chair and I would say no. That's my nature. So we must overcome this obstacle. Of course, compared with average Chinese people, I have taken enough initiative and I am already pretty aggressive. But I need to do more... In fact, I'm taking advantage of my culture to teach students. (Olivia)*

By mentioning that East Asian ethnic people are unwilling to take initiatives, Olivia may have reminded her students of a potential obstacle that they need to reflect on and overcome, or she may also have unintentionally and tacitly reinforced such cultural stereotypes by hinting that since they have the ethnic identity of being East Asians, they generally lack initiative and thus have such a deficit.

All of the participants believe that their ethnic identity can bring benefits to students. They have also deliberately taken the opportunity to introduce other perspectives to students and to expand students' horizons. As explored in a prior section on speaking English as a second language, Tracy believes that she has an advantage in teaching literature since she tends to include non-western authors in her course. She also mentioned that many of her students seemed conservative and had very little contact with other cultures. Therefore, she thinks that her work is meaningful because she is introducing other cultures to a mono-cultural student population. Sally also believes that being an ethnic minority can bring a different perspective to the department and introduce a wider world to students. Likewise, Olivia believes that students can know more in her class thanks to her ethnic identity. Besides, she thinks that being Chinese brings her advantages in her discipline of Statistics and Economics, since Canadian schools have a lot to learn about maths from the Chinese. In fact, in the world of business, international experience and diverse cultures are necessary. Olivia cited an example of how she

successfully organized a project in her department called “field school” where students took two courses, five weeks in Canada and two weeks in Beijing, China. In this case, experience of other cultures is regarded as an advantage in her discipline of business and economics.

*I ask them in the opening speech for the field school, “What kind of advantage do you think you have if you go on to the international business world, compared with all the other people”? English? I bet everybody speaks English. Maths? They all laughed. You know they are really poor at Maths. Personality? But not everybody has an open personality. But I can tell your advantages. Then I started listing and this made them happy. But for disadvantage, how many of you can say that you have international business exposure, or experience? Oh. I worked in a grocery store and I served a Chinese customer... They all laughed and I said you get the point. So I told them they had to take every possible ways to know other culture, to know how business works at the other end of the Earth. For our last year’s students, it’s a life-changing experience. No doubt. I often make them feel that if they simply stay here they have disadvantages. (Olivia)*

The participants’ narratives have also revealed their deeper reflections on the issue of being Chinese, or of being an ethnic minority. They have sensed the expectations people have about them just because of their ethnic identity. Some of such expectations are aptly described as “gender taxation” or “race taxation” by Hirshfield & Joseph (2012). In the sense of appropriation, their ethnic identity may be appropriated by others as “advantages” that can be put to good use, like doing translation for their institutions. However, such practices also put an additional burden on them and position ethnic minority teachers as suitable for these additional tasks. Olivia talked about her personal experience of being subjected to such expectations and expressed her puzzlement over such expectations.

*Sometimes my college would ask me to do something which is not my required responsibility. They would constantly ask me to do it... like translation for some projects. They can actually seek a translator to do it, then there would be no legal questions. But for me, not as a professional translator, what if there are some*

*problems. These documents are usually contracts. They constantly asked for my service and at the beginning I really didn't know what to do about it. You know Chinese people don't often say no. (Olivia)*

Olivia's narrative is a good example of her lived experience of how being an ethnic Chinese has the implication of being suitable to do translation work and of being willing to do additional task without complaint. Her choosing to talk about this experience indicates her awareness and rejection of such positioning. Her questioning about additional tasks and her self-reflection on her feeling reluctant to say no are also signs of her resistance to cultural stereotypes about being an ethnic Chinese.

To summarize, the participants' experience of their ethnic identities is closely connected with their respective living contexts and their ethnic identity is constituted by the discourses they live in. In a discourse of less diversity, their difference tends to disadvantage them as the "other" and to create barriers in their teaching. In a more diverse social discourse, on the other hand, they can feel at home. The participants' narratives are examples of how their ethnic identity comes into being through social interactions in their respective social discourses. The participants have also appropriated their ethnic identity to their advantage by using their cultural knowledge to assist their teaching and research. Some participants have also deconstructed their ethnic identity by questioning and resisting some discursive practices that have othered them.

## Chapter 5 Intersection of Identities

In the previous section, I have looked into different identity categories that the teacher participants belong to and explored how these categories constitute their identity as ESL female teachers in postsecondary education. In this section, I intend to re-examine the same categories in the light of intersectionality, i.e. how different identities constitute and reinforce one another, which identity or identities stand in the foreground and which in the background, and whether there are tensions among these identities. To best illustrate the intersections of identities for each participant, I present four mini cases, starting with an overview of their life story. Since previous sections have mainly focused on themes across different participants, my current focus on individuals can enable the reader to have a more comprehensive view of each participant as a unique case and to appreciate the complexity of their teacher identity.

### 5.1 Tracy

Tracy's experience of becoming a teacher in postsecondary education is typical of many international students who pursue further study in North America. The uniqueness lies in the fact that Tracy had been a teacher in postsecondary education in China for a few years and that she had already established her family in China before furthering her study in North America. For the past nine years or so, she has grown from a PhD student and novice researcher into a tenure track assistant professor in her discipline of English literature. Meanwhile, she has also moved her family – her husband and son – from China to North America and given birth to another baby daughter in North America. Her

present life as a teacher and researcher is pretty busy, since she is currently teaching a few courses and we had to postpone our interview once due to a proposal she had to submit. Although she experienced the initial few years of struggle when she began her teaching, she now seems to be right on track, getting good reviews from students for the three courses she had just finished teaching. Besides, she enjoys teaching and she feels that her work in North America is important because she can enable her students to know other cultures and other people. However, she said that she would not describe her current life as a particularly happy one. One issue is perhaps the family. Her family is still waiting for their Permanent Residency Card, or the Green Card, which seems to symbolize a legitimate identity for the “others” in North America. Also, since her husband has to make do with odd jobs that contribute little to his own career development, living in North America almost equals abandoning her husband’s personal career plans. With Tracy as the principle bread-winner, and her salary is not actually a high one, the family is just able to make a modest living. Another issue is her sense of loneliness teaching in North America. She seems to have very few friends that she can communicate heart-to-heart with, like those in China. For future, getting her tenure and continuing to improve her work and life still seem to be the best choice for Tracy, despite the above-mentioned issues. Her children is another practical reason for her to stay, since they may not be able to adapt to the Chinese school system. Nevertheless, Tracy may still have to go back to China if she fails tenure. For Tracy, being a teacher in North America just equals teaching at any location, with its own gains and pains.

Tracy's narratives reveal how her language identity and ethnic/cultural identity constitute and reinforce each other. As a speaker of English as a second language, Tracy is clearly aware of how her language may have constituted cultural barriers for her. Likewise, her Chinese identity has also reinforced her self-awareness of not being good enough in English and of needing constant improvement in her language. In fact, for Tracy the combination of language and culture constitute barriers for her in negotiating her teacher identity in North America. However, this does not mean that Tracy herself rejects her own language or culture, but that she is positioned by the dominant Discourse of postsecondary education to realize that her own language or culture are not contributive to a desirable teacher identity. In other words, she is made to be aware of her otherness. From the perspective of intersectionality, her language and her Chinese culture, as the reality of her life, have made her the "other" in her discipline of teaching – language and literature. Her gender identity, however, still stays in the background. Although Tracy is aware of the inequality that female teachers face in salary, she seems to have no objection, or she may simply feel powerless to raise any objection, although that sense of powerlessness has also indicated the marginal position of female teachers in the academia. Other than that, she acknowledged that both males and females can be great teachers and it seems that gender is not a particular concern for her in negotiating her teacher identity.

Besides a reflection of the reality of life, an intersectionality analysis also provides an opportunity for the creation of emergent, or hybrid identities (Shields, 2008). However, hybridity in identities cannot be observed in Tracy's self-identification, despite the fact



that she has been immersed in both Chinese and American cultures. When asked about her own description of her identity, Tracy made the following firm statement:

*I am still a Chinese. I tell my students that I am from China. I am now teaching in the States, but for me it is just that the location of my job happens to be in the States. Of course, during the process, I get in touch with the American way of life and culture, but I always regard myself as a Chinese... For me, no matter how long I have been staying in the States, even after I get my Green Card ... I haven't got it yet..., I will still regard myself as a Chinese. Most probably I will not become an American citizen, since it is impossible for me to think of myself as an American... I lived in China up to my 30s and my identity is sort of "solidified".*  
(Tracy)

By stating that her identity is "solidified", Tracy seems to be expressing her intention of choosing to be the "other", of not willing to change or hybrid her original cultural identity. Yet, in her narratives of how she adapted her pedagogy to suit her American students, we can clearly observe her effort to change and to be in the "majority". Such a contradiction is both interesting and important. To understand such a discrepancy, I believe it is necessary to distinguish the personal and the professional aspects of teacher identity. Therefore, Tracy as a person and Tracy as a teacher may be viewed as two interconnected but distinct aspects of her identity. As a person, she feels that her language and her culture are "solidified" and unchangeable. However, as a teacher, she feels the obligation to change so as to be competent for this profession in her present context. Additionally, a passion for teaching and the recognition of the value of her work, which is reflective of her "postcolonial" stance, also constitute her professional identity. In other words, her "othered" language and culture is a rich resource for her to construct her unique teacher identity.

*I am working here since I recognize the value of my work here. Just because this place is not so open to other cultures and people, I feel it is necessary for me to work here. Besides, I really enjoy teaching, particularly when a session goes on*

*very well. I also feel that I am teaching something I think valuable to the students. (Tracy)*

If the above monologue is indicative of the professional aspect of her identity, the upcoming narrative has pointed out the tensions involved in the personal and the professional.

*Despite the value of my work, I don't really think that I am totally happy staying here, at least not as carefree as in China. I feel that it is necessary for me to be here. Of course, there is a concern on the family part. My children just cannot fit in the Chinese school system any more. These are practical concerns. In general, I think that I am doing something meaningful and something I am also interested in. But life becomes a little inconvenient, and I have fewer friends now. So, I cannot say that I am very happy or fulfilled, and there is that strong sense of loneliness, you know. (Tracy)*

I believe it is important to attend to such tensions between the personal and the professional. The case of Tracy is just one example of the contradictions ESL female teachers in postsecondary education may feel in the dominant Discourse. As a person with a different language and culture, they are likely to feel like the “other”, or are constantly reminded of their otherness. To be sure, they have a strong awareness of their otherness. However, as a teacher, they also feel obliged to be competent for their profession, which usually translates into more culturally-specific demands, such as speaking the professional language, enabling positive student-teacher communication, promoting the spread of knowledge, and improving students’ learning. For Tracy, there is also the additional aspiration of promoting inter-cultural understanding. All these demands require the teacher to take up the role of an insider, not the other. Therefore, the tensions between the personal and professional identity can be particularly strong for ESL

female teachers and must be made explicit if we are to understand them and their lived experience.

## **5.2 Mona**

Mona also followed the general route of most international students, studying for her PhD degree first and then seeking employment in postsecondary education. Her process of studying and teaching is also a process of adapting to the local environment, which features diversity in population. She married an American and made friends with people from different ethnic groups. At present, her life is typical of many postsecondary education teachers, busy working almost year round and postponing vacations and trips, but she is confident as an instructor and she still holds curiosity for researching the unknown. She impresses me as having integrated some cultural traits from her host country, e.g. choosing to speak English in our interview and asserting personal views without constraint. Indeed, it seems that she may have constructed a hybrid identity with the backdrop of her international and intercultural experience. In future, she will continue to gain confidence as a teacher with her upcoming tenure and will probably become one of the backbones of her department. Her personal network of family and friends in North America will also continue to expand. It seems that she will increasingly become immersed in the diverse environment that she lives in.

In Mona's narratives, it is her gender identity that stands out among other identity categories. Although her language and ethnic identity have created barriers in her PhD study and research, she is not significantly influenced by language and culture as a

teacher. In other words, she does not feel that language and culture constitute her otherness as a teacher. There may be two reasons for that. One is that in her discipline of instruction, i.e. Mathematics, there seems to be more tolerance for the instructor's lack of English proficiency. This can be evidenced by Mona's narrative on how her students accommodated her accent and her non-native version of English in class instruction. Another reason perhaps has to do with her location. Since Mona's colleagues and students are very diverse both linguistically and culturally, she actually feels "at home", without much sense of being othered. Therefore, Mona's experience of being a speaker of English as a second language and an ethnic minority is very much different from that of Tracy. For Mona, her language and ethnic identity stay in the background. On the other hand, Mona cited a number of examples around her to illustrate how hard it is for females to stay in her discipline and how she feels like a lone fighter who still stays.

*I don't know why there are more females (who dropped out)... I have my classmates, my colleagues... in high school, in college, in grad school... my professors always tell them you can do it... you have the talent... you should develop it... that stuff... But the real sad thing is that... I was counting that day and... almost none of them stayed... There are really really few... I don't know if maths is the problem... Then there are two more (fellow students), in college, our professors said oh they are going to be our female mathematicians of the future... both gave up... One said... I want to be a housewife... and we said...no...no..., and the other decided... I want to be a nun... oh, you can still do maths... (Mona)*

While being aware of the high drop-out rate of females around her, Mona attempted to seek reasons. Although the following is a quote from one of these females who dropped out, I believe that Mona actually shares the same feeling since she chose to quote them.

*And there is another classmate... she finished her PhD... she did her postdoc... both in first rate universities... and then in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of her postdoc, she told me... I'm going to quit academia... I said why... and she said this road is too hard... I said you mean it's hard to find a job?... she said no... this academic job is too hard... I agree... there is no vacation whatever... you are always working...*

*I tell people that I go to school at seven and go home at six thirty everyday... This is difficult I understand... (Mona)*

In this narrative, Mona and her classmate believe that the road of academia is too hard for females. By saying that academic jobs are too hard for females, she is not saying that females are not good enough to take up academic jobs since those females she referred to seem to be very talented. Rather, she feels that a “chilly climate” (Luke, 2001) for females has perpetuated the academia. Mona also wondered if “maths is the problem”, indicating that science disciplines may have been an even chillier climate for females. Additionally, reflecting on her lived experience of being a female in academia, Mona has also questioned the whole Discourse of academia.

*I think it (the academia) is wrong... It's hard on the female in a sense that we have biological clock... but that's an issue that nobody can change... unless we can get men pregnant... Other than that... I think academia is really competitive... it's not only to females... but also to males... (Mona)*

From the above comment, it is evident that Mona is aware of her otherness as a female in academia. Her sense of otherness is set against the backdrop of the masculine discourse in academia, which, according to Mona, is wrong, not only to females, but also to males. Therefore, in the intersection of multiple identities of Mona, being female and thus being the other in the masculine academic discourse functions largely to construct her sense of self and her identity. In the aspect of her professional identity, Mona particularly mentioned a tension between being a teacher and being a researcher.

*My university is having this ... teaching program, because most of the professors hired were to do research. And we don't have any training for teaching, I have teaching credentials before, but not everybody. So... basically we were exposed to different teaching methods... flipping classroom... all that inquiry learning stuff. So we went through this training and they asked us before and after. So we have four choices, Do you think you are researcher ... teacher. After the training, more*

*people identify themselves with teacher. I didn't change. I think what happened is that I still have this pretty strong appetite for research. I don't want to give up on that. I still feel that there are lots of things that I want to know... I am resisting the trend of basically to spoon feed, but we are treating them like kids, so... we chop things into small pieces and say, okay, do this problem... we are trying to do more than that... but it's not always easy. I keep reminding myself that I need to challenge them, because I'm not here to give them knowledge, but give them knowledge in a sense that I keep challenging them so in the end they go out to do other things they will be able to work it out. (Mona)*

In fact, the professional identity of being a teacher or a researcher is just a matter of naming, having little essence concerning who she actually is. However, Mona's subsequent explanation on how she did not change from researcher to teacher actually reveals a resistance to the tendency of deskilling for teachers in postsecondary education. In a "Master's university", Mona's major responsibility as an instructor is to teach undergraduate level, i.e. foundational level, courses. Nevertheless, Mona commented that she still has the aspiration to do research and to explore the unknown outside her teaching load. In regard to teaching pedagogy, Mona resisted a tendency to spoon feed and to simply give students knowledge but embraced a learning discourse in instruction in order to enable genuine learning for students. Mona's narrative on teacher and researcher is indicative of her professional identity of being a learning-centered teacher, who learns to enable better learning for students. Her determination to improve learning through inquiry and research is an act of resistance toward the prevailing discourse of deskilling and corporatization in an undergraduate university.

### **5.3 Sally**

Sally's experience differs from that of the other three in that she came to North America with her family as an immigrant instead of an international student. However, her

immigrant identity does not contribute to a smooth transition of her teacher identity from China to North America. In fact, she has experienced a downward mobility in her career. Before coming to North America, she was already a university teacher, but after ten years' of study and work in North America she is still trying to become a university teacher here. At present, although she will soon receive her PhD degree, she is uncertain about getting a compatible teaching position. Indeed, she is only partially included as a sessional instructor and stays on the margins of the Discourse. As an immigrant, she may almost inevitably find herself marginalized. While her educational and professional experience as a university teacher are recognized as valuable assets that the host country wishes to incorporate, she is not automatically included in her discipline. Since Sally and her family have stayed in North America for ten years and have already become citizens in the host country, it is unlikely that they will return to China in the near future. However, unless she finds a teaching position in the near future, her prolonged marginal status will probably persist and her original aspiration of continuing teaching in the host country will still have to be grounded.

Although language identity and ethnic identity are often closely connected in the case of Tracy and Mona, they do not necessarily constitute and reinforce each other in the case of Sally. It is Sally who stated that language is not a problem, at least not a major concern for her, and she seems to be fairly confident in her language competence. The only reservation she has is the impromptu use of English in class. However, Sally finds her being an ethnic minority a major influence on her teacher identity. Since the demographic composition of her working context still lacks diversity, she believes that ethnic minority

students and teachers need to be got used to by the dominant population. In fact, behind Sally's comment lies the tacit understanding that ethnic and cultural minority population still stay as the other, a foreign element that needs to be seen often so as to "get used to". Particularly, Sally mentioned her disadvantage of not having much "local experience", which, as she understands it, could be a major obstacle for her teacher identity.

*The discipline I am in expects you (teachers) to have Canadian experience. But as a racial minority (an immigrant), I do not have such experience. I think it has posed a barrier for me. The teachers/professors in my department, most of them, used to be school teachers and later became teachers in postsecondary education. But in China, no such experience is required for you to become a professor in education... and what is emphasized in China is your acquisition of theoretical knowledge and your understanding of practical knowledge. But here, they pay attention to your practical experience... In the job descriptions in education, most of them require that you have 3-5 years of teaching experience in schools. I think this for me is the biggest barrier. (Sally)*

As an immigrant in her adulthood, Sally has no personal experience of the local school system, nor is she able to teach in local schools without a teacher's credential. Therefore, she wondered about her legitimacy in teaching education in postsecondary settings. Confronted with the demands prescribed in job descriptions, she questioned whether she has constructed a desirable teacher identity. She feels like the other and she is uncertain about her future. Therefore, although Sally claimed that language is not a problem for her and it seems that her ESL identity has not reinforced her ethnic and cultural identity, her being an ethnic and cultural minority still stands out in the intersection of her multiple identities. She believes that her cultural identity can bring benefit to the profession, but her lack of local experience, as compared to those who sit squarely in the center of the Discourse, has significantly troubled her and othered her. The local experience that she desires is but a more tangible version of the dominant "Discourse", including the



dominant language, culture and mindset, in the discipline of education. In comparison, her gender identity stays in the background, with only a recognition that female and male teachers communicate with students and perhaps teach *differently*. Despite these doubts and wonders, Sally seems to be fairly clear about her professional identity. She described herself as a “student-centered teacher who cares much for the students”.

*Even in China, although the education is not student-centered, I had been exploring a pedagogy of student-centeredness and how to motivate students to learn. I very much cared for students when I was in China. I became friends with them and cared for their life outside classroom... As a class teacher (in China), I must find out what kind of help students need and go out to help them. (Sally)*

Since many students in China are “assigned” a major, much like what happens in a planned economy, Sally needs to convince and motivate her students to like a major which may not be students’ first choice. Therefore, caring for students as people is as important as preparing for her own teaching. In Canada, Sally does not find such a need to motivate students to like their major, since students take up their major out of free will. The new issue with students in Canada is that students often have to work to pay for their postsecondary education and thus must balance their part-time working with their academic work. No matter where she stays, Sally feels that caring for students’ needs and interests is very important and she tries to know her students.

*At the beginning of the course, I ask them what they want to learn and about their purpose of learning the course. I compare it with my syllabus. I don’t want just implement a syllabus, and I also want to understand what they know about the course, because you can’t just teach what they already know. I want to know why they learn this course... (Sally)*

Sally’s self-identification of a teacher who cares for students corresponds with the feminist pedagogy of caring. She believes the value of her pedagogy and she identifies

with the professional identity of a caring and student-centered teacher that she has gradually constructed over her prior teaching experience. However, I still wonder how her uncertainty about her lack of local experience may have affected her sense of a professional identity. Would the lack of a desirable background shake her sense of legitimacy as a caring and student-centered teacher? What can be done to deal with the tensions between being the other in the dominant Discourse of postsecondary education and claiming legitimacy for a professional identity as a caring teacher? The impression I received from Sally was that she is still uncertain about negotiating a professional identity that works in the dominant Discourse.

#### **5.4 Olivia**

Olivia is the only participant who does not hold a PhD degree and who teaches in a college instead of a university. Since she completed her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in North America, she seems to have been subjected to the local environment much earlier in life than the other three and have thus more opportunity to construct her own teacher identity with her past experience in China and with her recent experience in North America. Her outgoing personality may have also contributed to her ease in adapting to the local environment and hybridizing her identity from her Chinese origin and her trans-national and trans-cultural experience. Like Mona, she started her family locally, but with a Chinese husband, and she already has two children. At present, she seems to be quite contented with her life, teaching in her discipline of study as her career and teaching her hobby, i.e. dancing, as an important additive to her life. Indeed, her present life is one of fulfillment, in terms of both professional achievements and personal interests.

Furthermore, she is also able to influence people around her, both colleagues and students, with her own dynamic personality and critical observations. In the eyes of those in similar situations, Olivia is fairly “established” in another country and the future looks quite bright for her.

In Olivia’s narrative, her language and ethnic identity seems to have stood out. The difference between Olivia and other participants is that Olivia has always been trying to turn her language and ethnic identity into a motivational force for her to do a better job and to win recognition. It must be pointed out that such a motivation begins with an awareness of being the other, who lacks legitimacy and who stays in the margins of the dominant Discourse. Olivia talked about why she took her TA position very seriously and about her innate motivation to do even better just because of being an ethnic Chinese and speaking English as a second language.

*During my master’s study, I became a TA... There are so many BAD TAs, who don’t really do it seriously. So, I was extremely serious with my duty when I became a TA. I also have what you call “self-esteem as a Chinese”, and the least I want is to hear people say that Chinese students speak poor English. So I was very hardworking. The result of my hard work is that after one month, I have double the students in my TA lab. Students came to my lab from other Canadian TAs. (Olivia)*

Besides her effort to work hard for recognition, Olivia also wanted to influence her students to do the same thing, i.e. to do well so as to prove their worth as a member of their original culture/nation.

*I am very strict with my students, both Canadian ones and Chinese ones. But, they all get good grades. [With Chinese students,] I always tell them that for the Canadian students and teachers, they would not say that xxx is good or bad, but that the Chinese are good or bad. I told them that they must have a sense of national esteem. Maybe their families are so well-off that they don’t care, but 20*

*or 30 years later, when the Chinese are still prejudiced against, they have to think about why it is like that. Whenever we Chinese meet stumbling blocks, we tend to say well we are again prejudiced against. But why? Since you live in this beautiful land, this healthy natural environment and good social environment, why don't you improve yourselves? (Olivia)*

In the above narrative, students' ethnic and cultural identity have been called on by Olivia to motivate their sense of self-esteem. The cultural stereotype of being prejudiced against has also been utilized to exert an additional force. Moreover, the superior natural and social environment of the host country have been cited as another justification for ethnic minority students to "improve" themselves, i.e. to identify more with the dominant values and codes of conduct in Canada. Of course, Olivia also mentioned that not everything in Canada is good and that Canadians also have some wrong conceptions. However, in general she believes that her (and her students') ethnic and cultural identity should translate into efforts to work hard for recognition and contribution. It must be acknowledged that Olivia's perception of being an ethnic minority corresponds closely with the "model minority" mentality, which is often experienced by people of Asian origin (e.g. Shrake, 2006) and which is actually a position that the minority population are expected to take under the dominant Discourse.

In comparison, Olivia's gender identity falls in the background. As a young female instructor, she tends to be taken less seriously by students and sometimes by other colleagues. However, Olivia does not seem particularly troubled by it. Moreover, she seemed to welcome such descriptive words like "cute" and "China doll", which may sound unacceptable to a feminist ear. She also cited examples to show that students like her because she is approachable as a young female teacher and that other colleagues

appreciate her ability as a young female teacher to mentor students in non-academic matters. Olivia's "unawareness" of her otherness as a female is an example of how females can internalize social expectations for them and position themselves according to such expectations.

In the professional aspect of her identity, Olivia talked about how she discovered that teaching is her passion. Having worked in an office doing paper work for a couple of years, she made a career shift to become a college teacher. Her personality and her disposition seem to have contributed to such a shift. Upon analysis, Olivia's teacher identity includes three major elements, as indicated in the quotes below.

*Whenever I enter the classroom, I feel as if the spotlight is switched on... like that... At that time, I found that I actually have a passion for teaching... Another point is that, maybe it's because I am engaged in art (dancing), I'm very active in my teaching. I'm like dancing in my classroom. (Olivia)*

Olivia's personal identity of a dancer and performer seems to have greatly influenced her professional identity of a teacher who performs energetically to engage students in classroom. Therefore, to perform the role of a teacher can be identified as the first important element in her professional identity. Indeed, Olivia's ability to perform the act of teaching proves a great help in constructing a legitimate professional identity in the prevailing discourse of teaching as performance. Positive feedback from students has therefore reinforced the validity of such a professional identity.

Secondly, since Olivia's students are learning practical skills which are to be applied to future jobs, the professional identity thus required of teachers also includes effectiveness

and efficiency. Olivia has therefore adopted an outcome-based pedagogy to enhance her effectiveness and the students' satisfaction.

*We have to teach students how to solve problems, teach them how to use a program by using computer and projector, step by step, tell them why and for mid-term test I also helped them to pin down the questions that may appear. I think I have this "bad habit" (guessing what will be in a test) ever since my childhood. I just couldn't help it. I also brought this bad habit to my teaching. I would ask my students, "do you think this would be in the test?" This is not even a key point in the course. And I also told them what "style" a particular teacher had in her/his teaching. So, later I became reputed as good at "guessing the test items" and students swarmed to my lab. As a result, my evaluation is very very high. (Olivia)*

The above narrative shows that Olivia seems to be very good at adapting to the dominant request of the profession, i.e. enhancing students' outcomes and meeting the institutional requirements. To this extent, her professional identity of a college teacher corresponds neatly with the present educational discourse of effectiveness and corporatization. At the college level where practical skills are the main teaching target, outcome may have been a valid contributor to a teacher's professional identity.

A third element in Olivia's professional identity is the belief of the value of teaching and, in Olivia's words, the difference that teaching makes.

*I told them [my colleagues] that I left my cushy comfortable government job because I was not a desk person. Whenever I wrote those reports, I wondered who or anyone would be reading it. Is it really useful? I don't feel that I am productive or helping. Well, I'm helping but I don't feel like it. But it's different in a classroom. When I explain a problem to students and they understand it and they can solve a similar problem, I will be singing the whole day... Yes, I see the difference. Although I feel tired after two or four hours of teaching and I feel thirsty, I also feel that I've accomplished something. (Olivia)*

It is the belief that teaching makes a difference that has motivated Olivia to choose teaching as her career. Therefore, like the case of Tracy, it seems that believing the value of teaching has contributed to Olivia's construction of her professional identity of a teacher. Being a teacher means believing that teaching is important work that makes a difference to students' lives. The above mentioned three elements are also cited by Olivia as important reasons why she competed successfully with other candidates to gain a teaching position in postsecondary education.

*After teaching this course, the Dean convened a meeting and told other teachers that there was a very strong sessional. It's her first time to teach (a certain course), but her students surpassed the average score, even though this session is scheduled in the evening. You know students who attend evening courses are generally poorer, since they usually have to work during the day time and have little time for serious study. Besides, she got a very high review despite the fact that English is not her first language. There was a few complaints about her English, but those who complained were those who only got 30% or 40% in the test... For other candidates, teaching is a job, but for Olivia it's a passion.  
(Olivia)*

The above narrative describes in detail the institutional process of how Olivia became a teacher in postsecondary education. Her student outcome, language competence and passion for teaching were cited by the Dean as positive attributes, also understood as desirable identity traits, which led to Olivia's appointment. In this way, the institution has validated their requirements of an acceptable professional identity by choosing Olivia, who has embodied these features. Likewise, Olivia has also reinforced her perception of a legitimate professional identity by picking up the institutional hints from such practices as appointment decisions.

## Chapter 6 Support, Personal Efforts, and Change

In this chapter, I tackle the issues of support, personal efforts, and change in the existing Discourse. The participants were asked about the support they have received from their colleagues and institutions and what changes they expect in the present Discourse of postsecondary education. Apart from narratives about support from their colleagues and institutions, the participants have also dwelled on their personal efforts to seek inclusion and to expand the dominant Discourse. Therefore, I organize their narratives around these three major aspects of support, personal efforts, and change.

### 6.1 Support

The participants' narratives show differentiated degrees of support they have received from their colleagues and institutions. Generally speaking, the participants mentioned more about help and support from individual people, colleagues and administrators, but less about institutional help and support. The quantity and quality of support they receive also differ from person to person. Tracy and Mona are two of the participants who explicitly talked about the support they received from their colleagues and institutions. Tracy talked about how her deans and her colleagues helped her to improve her teaching. Since Tracy ran into considerable trouble in teaching during the initial years, she sought help from her colleagues, who have offered much wanted support to her.

*I think my department is good. It is very supportive. The previous dean and the present dean, as well as the colleagues, are all good to me. For example, when I asked to observe their lessons, they were willing to let me in. When I have a new course to teach and do not know what to do about it, they will share their syllabus with me. Yes, they are very good to me. (Tracy)*



An interesting observation from Tracy's narratives is that despite the support from her colleagues, Tracy did not become friends with these colleagues. When comparing her American colleagues with her former colleagues in China, Tracy feels like the "other" among her American colleagues and she still misses her Chinese ones. In this regard, Tracy seems to feel more "compatible" making friends with someone from a similar culture and background. Therefore, the support she has received from her colleagues can only be counted as practical, rather than spiritual, support. She described her relation with her American colleagues as below.

*But, you always feel that you cannot become one of them. You can chat with them about your children, and also your teaching, but you cannot become their friends. They are nice and supportive people, but you cannot mingle with them as you would with a Chinese colleague in China. You can even go shopping or go to the bar with your American colleagues here, but the "wall" is always there. You forever feel that you cannot "melt" into their group... (Tracy)*

Mona explored how her institution, and maybe many other teaching institutions, made an effort to cultivate personnel by providing support. What strikes me as a very important reason for differentiated degrees of support for ESL female teachers is the following comparative analysis given by Mona to show the difference between some so-called "research universities" and her teaching university.

*I think my department is really supportive. We just finished our search committee this year and I was on that. I see how the decision was made before a person gets in. Because we are not a research one university... in U.S., they are really high level ones. UCLA, UC Berkeley... they don't care much about their tenure track, which means... Yeah, this guy is great, let's hire this guy... then at the time of tenure, they basically keep really really few. So the tenure rate is low, because they kick almost everybody out. And then just get a new batch. Let's look at these experienced (candidates) level and get the best ones, because they can pick whoever they want. They don't really have to grow their own faculty. They can just "harvest". We are not a research university, and then we teach a lot... we are not so attractive... what we want is that... we want to hire somebody and we try to help them. What happened in this conversation that we were doing in the search*

*committee is something like this. Okay, let's look at this person... this person has really good potential and we like this person. Who in our department can work with this person if for this person, time is running out and we need publication.... So who can help this person ... So before we even make an offer to anybody, we think how to support this new person we hire. We want whoever we hire to succeed. (Mona)*

Mona compared the practices of her institution, a teaching university, with those of most research universities and concluded that ESL female teachers (and maybe all teachers) receive more support from the former than the latter. Since Mona said she was on the search committee for new teachers, she was in the position to comment on the supporting practices of her department. On the other hand, the research one universities, according to the narratives by Mona, seem to be “dehumanized”, providing minimal support to new teachers, but still having top-level candidates swarming to get in. Mona particularly used the word “harvest” to refer to their practice of hiring the best candidates and the words “kick out” to refer to their lack of support for them and the fact that new teachers have to struggle by themselves. Of course, whether that is one of the reasons that have contributed to the lower tenure rate in research universities cannot be verified just from Mona’s narratives. Yet, there is still reason to believe that the support ESL female teachers, and perhaps all teachers, receive from their institutions varies, with only some institutions genuinely caring for the well-being of their teachers’ development.

While Tracy and Mona both declared that they have received support from colleagues and their institutions, Sally and Olivia did not talk much about the support they have received. Since Tracy and Mona are teaching in the States and Sally and Olivia in Canada, this difference may be hinting at a national difference, though, of course,

additional research is needed to determine whether such a difference really exists. Sally's narratives seem to indicate that the support ESL female teachers can receive from their institutions also varies according to the teachers' status of employment. Since Sally says she is "only" a sessional instructor, she feels disconnected with her colleagues and the larger environment.

*I have very little contact with other teachers ... It seems that I have little to do with their environment. You know in China, I went to meetings on campus and I also had my annual review at year end, and I might also get an excellent review. But here, I do not participate in anything [except my teaching]. So, I feel disconnected with the wider environment ... I really feel that it has little to do with me. (Sally)*

Although Sally also mentioned the support from her colleagues, it seems more like the result of her intentional effort to make preparation for teaching, not the result of an institutional support system provided to new teachers.

*When I started this course, there are other teachers who gave me their syllabus. I did go to observe lessons given by some teachers, for example, by my supervisor. I also observed lessons given by my fellow PhD students, if you count that as support. But it happened when I was still a PhD student, not when I am teaching this course. (Sally)*

From the above narratives, it seems that Sally is very much aware of her status and the differential treatment she would receive. Indeed, the teachers employed on temporary and contractual terms are positioned as the most powerless in the Discourse of postsecondary education, and among those temporary and contractual teachers minority and females take up a disproportionately high percentage (e.g. Turner, 2002; Webber, 2008). With the corporatizing of postsecondary educational institutions, the percentage of temporary and contractual staff will be on the increase, which means more minorities and females will be positioned as mere labor force instead of talents to be supported and cultivated.

Therefore, we should raise the question of whether and how these teachers can be supported. The lack of support for these teachers can also be evidenced from the following comment by Sally.

*I don't think anyone would "invest" heavily on me, a sessional instructor... I think the teachers you just mentioned are already staff members in their department, so if they encounter problems in teaching, the administration would certainly deem it necessary to invest more effort into helping them. But for me, if I have problems in teaching, they may simply discontinue my appointment. (Sally)*

Likewise, Olivia did not explicitly mention the practical support provided by her colleagues and her institution. In fact, Olivia's narrative on her TA position and her present college instructor position gives me the impression that she actually has practical advice to offer to others who may wonder about how to teach in postsecondary education. However, this cannot be constituted as a proof of lack of support for her on the part of her institution. In fact, the decision her institution has made to employ her may indicate the trust and also support she has received from her colleagues and her dean, who voted for her in the heated competition for a single position in the institution. Therefore, such practice of institutionally including an ESL female teacher is perhaps the much needed first step to support them in becoming postsecondary teachers. Other than that, Olivia also talked about how her colleagues shared her work load when she had to leave for China for personal matters. While there is little mentioning of practical support from colleagues and the institution, Olivia narrated extensively on the importance of personal efforts if ESL female teachers hope to be included in postsecondary education. Olivia's emphasis on personal efforts as the way to get included in the Discourse of postsecondary education is typical of the mentality of many minority people in seeking the way to "succeed", which in my view means to get into the mainstream of the host country

society and thus to identify with the dominant Discourse. Therefore, in what follows, I look into the narratives of the teacher participants for evidence of their personal efforts which help to get themselves included.

## 6.2 Personal efforts

As I have just mentioned, Olivia is the one who talked most extensively about how ESL female teachers like herself can make efforts to get included in postsecondary education. Basically, she dwelt on three major aspects of efforts: language, professional excellence, and inter-personal relationships. These three aspects can all be construed as vital components for identity construction. For language, Olivia made the following comment:

*I don't think it is that hard to include them (ESL female teachers). The first thing is the language. You don't have to speak perfect English, but you need a huge vocabulary. You need to know the most "fashionable" words. In this way, students can feel connected with you. We can all speak some English, but the most important difference is the words you use. With the "right" words, you can get connected with your audience, like professors and students. (Olivia)*

As analysed in the section of "Speaking English as a Second Language", speaking the "right" version of the language is vital to getting included. Since teaching is generally expected to be a normative practice of spreading the dominant values and the "normal" ways of life, the teacher who sits at the center of this practice must necessarily be a member of the dominant Discourse. In this case, language signifies identity and only those who speak the "proper" language are deemed as having the legitimate identity of a teacher. For those who do not have the "look" of a member in the dominant Discourse, they must make up for such an inadequacy by at least "sound" like such a member.

*The second thing, for those who plan to enter research institutes, is your research ability; for those who teach only, your prior TA position should be taken very*

*seriously, not just for a TA salary. Of course, money is important, but when we think of the gains we mustn't think of it in terms of money. We should take the opportunity to improve our comprehensive competence ... After you've built up your competence in this way, in interviews or demonstrations, when you open your mouth to speak, you make an instant impression. So, I think doing TA and presentations are very important for people like us [ESL] to be included. As a dancer, I know that practice definitely makes a difference. (Olivia)*

From the above narrative, professional excellence is another embodiment of the requirements for a legitimate teacher identity. Through research and teaching practice, ESL female teachers can thus identify more with the dominant educational Discourse and thus have the valuable “competence” in doing their job well. In here, professional practice refers to the efforts by ESL female teachers to adapt and change themselves over an extended period of time so as to acquire the professional and personal traits of a teacher in the dominant Discourse. Besides acquiring the “proper” professional and personal traits, ESL female teachers had better exhibit a higher degree of diligence so as to prove their worth and subsequently to succeed in the competition. Such a mentality to do much better in order to succeed is again indicative of the lack of equality for ESL female teachers in regard to employment.

*As for inter-personal relationships, I have a suggestion for all those who come here from China for Masters and PhD degrees. In Canada, you should get to know more people and also enable others to know your personality. But, you shouldn't try to please others, since in Canada cases are few when one person has the last say. There is an interview panel. You should do your job really well and concurrently let others know that you are doing well. This doesn't mean that you should show off. That's why I believe doing your work well comes first and I also think this is no problem for Chinese people. But many (Chinese) people spend their energy on other things that are not so important. I think doing our job well is the priority and then we can open our door, open our heart, open our personality and enable others to know you are good. This is the way to success. I'm sure people will come back to you and you'll be included. The relationship is like this (gesturing in circular motion). If I hadn't sat in the middle of the front row and got full mark in the test, if I hadn't taken my TA position so seriously, the Dean wouldn't have thought of asking me to teach... (Olivia)*

At first glance, Olivia seemed to negate the importance of inter-personal relationship by emphasizing that the most important thing is doing a good job. However, without the effort to let others know them and their professional excellence, ESL female teachers can still fall short of their aspiration to get included. Olivia herself is a live example. Since she was known by her instructor, who later became her Dean, as an excellent student and TA, she was given the chance to teach and to become a teacher. Therefore, both professional excellence and inter-personal relationship are important and the connection of the two is “circular” rather than linear. The importance of inter-personal relationship has thus put another demand on ESL female teachers to establish personal networks within the dominant Discourse, but personal networks are just what many new-comers, including ESL female teachers, lack.

Mona and Sally both mentioned their process of adaptation. Mona acknowledged that she “struggled” in this process and that her colleagues supported her during her struggle. According to Mona’s narrative, since she is among the very few females that she knows who still stay in academic sector of her discipline, we have reason to believe the immense personal efforts that she has made in order to stay in this competitive environment.

*When I came here... I struggled a little bit... It’s a big change and I have to figure out everything... being a faculty for the first time... try to get research established without my professor... My advisor went back to Israel and then lost contact... And you have to teach these new courses that you never taught before. You have to manage all these stuff. I was kind of out of balance a little bit and then my colleagues came to me and asked me would you like to do something together. So... my department is really supportive. (Mona)*

Sally commented that struggling to adapt to the Discourse is common for all teachers and that it is a necessary process on the part of a new teacher.

*According to my previous experience as a teacher, when you first start teaching, you have to struggle a little bit. After one or two semesters, you start to develop a “sense”. Since the department of education focuses on educating people, it would give their staff members the time to grow up. It needs time for a new teacher to teach a new course. Anyone who has been a teacher before could understand what I mean I think, to adapt and to “test-run”. For many things, you have to “run through” them a couple of times before you have any sense of how to do it right. (Sally)*

However, Sally also reflected on the relationship between personal efforts and the practical result of inclusion, i.e. not all personal efforts lead to the result of inclusion. In Sally’s view, professional excellence is the prerequisite for inclusion, but professional excellence does not guarantee the inclusion of ESL female teachers because they may not be “suitable” for a particular position. However, I wonder about what underlies the term “suitable”. Will it be but another reason to exclude ESL female teachers from postsecondary education? Is it paying only lip service to acknowledging their competence, but still refusing to give them legitimacy just by deeming that they are “not suitable”? We have reason to be cautious of what might be disguised under the claim of “not suitable”.

*Whether they want you or not depends on whether you can stand out in the “pool” (of talent). If you are not excellent enough among all applicants....Or, sometimes they think you are not “suitable”... One teacher told me that for everything you need to adjust your attitude. She said that finding a job is like a marriage. It’s a match. It doesn’t mean that you are not excellent enough, but it’s because you don’t match. I find it makes a lot of sense. It is challenging to find a job here. For example, I mentioned the 3-5 years of teaching experience in Canadian schools. So that is a barrier that I can do nothing about. (Sally)*



In the above narrative, the requirement for local experience is raised by Sally as an example of the many reasons that can cause the exclusion of ESL female teachers. For Sally, she cannot ask those institutions to change the requirement for her and all she can do is to adjust her attitude and accept it as a fact that she is not suitable for the job.

### 6.3 Change

The teacher participants were also probed to narrate on what changes they expect in their working environment. It seems that they do not expect much change in the present Discourse and that adaptation seems to be their prevailing mentality. Particularly, Tracy talked about changing oneself and changing the environment as two inseparable aspects in the topic of change.

*As for change, maybe if I stay here long enough, I can change myself more, or change people around me. But it is hard to ask people to change for you... I don't think there will be systematic changes in the administration. Perhaps, my presence here is a little power that can slowly but gradually make a change to the environment, a change in people's attitude toward Chinese, and other foreigners. I am also changing myself. The longer I stay here, the more adapted I feel to the American culture. Maybe I can make a few friends too later... I concentrate on what I do, introduce the non-European and non-western literature and culture to my students. (Tracy)*

It is interesting to observe that when talking about changes in the environment what immediately came to Tracy is changing herself to adapt to the environment. Although Tracy believes that her cultural identity is “solidified” and thus difficult to change, she still expects to change herself more so as to feel more at home with the host culture. As for changing the others and then the dominant Discourse, Tracy emphasized her presence as an ESL female teacher and her efforts to introduce other cultures as the starting point of institutional change. While totally in agreement with Tracy's view on the importance

of “being present”, I find that “being present” itself is *the primary but often hard to get* support for ESL female teachers and the basic purpose of my doing the present research. Only by including ESL female teachers in the Discourse of postsecondary education can we expect to see improvement in the experience of and the construction of a more viable teacher identity for ESL female teachers. However, the institutional barriers that need to be changed are still severe. Sally cited PhD education and the requirement of local school experience as examples.

*The improvement cannot be achieved easily. It requires institutional or systematic improvement. Take PhD education as an example. If they [administration and institutions] think PhD education is for faculty cultivation, they need to reconsider why students come for PhD education and where they will go after graduation. If the 3-5 year school teaching experience is a systematic barrier for PhD students who intend to teach in Canadian institutions, it (the requirement) is a big challenge for PhD students. (Sally)*

In Sally’s view, the expanding PhD education has created a mismatch between the number of PhD degree holders and the potential postsecondary education positions in the education system. Since many international students and recent immigrants choose to pursue further study, including PhD study, in their host country, they may be at a higher risk of being harmed by this systemic mismatch. As a member of this group, ESL female PhD holders may have substantial difficulty in acquiring a compatible teaching position in their disciplines of study. The requirement of local school experience is again cited by Sally as a particular concern she has for ESL female PhD holders who wish to be included. Nevertheless, Sally also acknowledged that she is uncertain about to what degree such a requirement would influence her inclusion.

*Despite all that, there seem to be a lot of, say, faculty members with Chinese background. So, it seems that we don’t really know the extent of how important that requirement is. We don’t have much idea about how much they take that into*

*consideration. Just that when you see this requirement you feel disappointed, or rejected not being included. But when I go to conferences, I do meet professors who seem to have similar background as me. If you always run into difficulties (in finding a job), then it may really be a challenge. But if you don't have problem (in finding a job), maybe you would never realize that it's a challenge. It's so subtle. (Sally)*

Her uncertainty points directly to a constraint in the dominant Discourse of her discipline, i.e. the lack of consideration for the practical situation of most, if not all, ESL female teachers in the discipline of education. Since they do not grow up in the local education system and they are also unlikely to have been school teachers in the same system before their PhD study, such a requirement, which is fairly attainable and which makes a lot of sense for local PhD holders, can prove an insurmountable barrier. For employing institutions, the present practice which lacks consideration for special cases like ESL candidates may also prove problematic in their decision making process. Should an institution reject a potential candidate who meets all requirements but the local school experience one? Therefore, it is high time for the postsecondary education sector to acknowledge the increasing presence of “others”, like ESL females who may also be cultural and ethnic minorities. Recognizing that there are already greater diversity in postsecondary education could mean that some practices, like the local school experience requirement, will be subjected to reconsideration and possible modification. Otherwise, the uncertainty felt by Sally will continue to trouble people in a similar situation as her. It seems that an awareness of the presence of “others” is a necessary first step in institutional changes for their inclusion.

In summary, the present Discourse of postsecondary education must be changed to include ESL female teachers and an awareness of their increasing presence in postsecondary education comes before any substantial change. Such an awareness will gradually change people's perception of the diversity in the present Discourse so as to reconsider existing practices that generally exclude the "others". To achieve this change, institutional support and personal efforts are vital. Postsecondary educational institutions that open themselves to and provide support for ESL female teachers stand at the forefront of this change, since they choose to include the "others" in the first place. ESL female teachers who have developed an awareness of their otherness and who have appropriated their multiple identities to resist being positioned as others in postsecondary education are also making immense personal efforts to change the dominant Discourse. Indeed, all four teacher participants in the research have shown signs of such awareness and resistance and have made such personal efforts. That is exactly the reason why I feel optimistic about the future inclusion of more ESL female teachers. However, what seems to be lagging behind is the institutional and systemic change, which demand a change of people's mind about the "others". I believe this research will somehow enable such a change of mind.

## Chapter 7 Discussion and Reflection

On the basis of the above chapters on my findings from the participants' narratives, I intend to "burrow" deeper so as to critically interpret these narratives for the purpose of this study. I re-read participants' narratives, reflected on my own experience and exchanged conversations with my peers and colleagues. Two major themes emerged from my deeper reading and reflection: 1) difference as deficit, and 2) struggle for inclusion. In this chapter, I elaborate on these two themes that characterize the participants', and also my, lived experience as female practitioners who speak English as a second language in post-secondary education.

### **7.1 Difference as deficit**

The four participants are considered different in language, culture, and gender from the norm of post-secondary education teachers. However, their difference is generally perceived as a deficit in their teacher identity. To better understand the theme of difference as deficit, I refer to relevant literature on the deficit discourse surrounding linguistic and cultural difference. I continue to explore how such a deficit discourse works explicitly and implicitly on the teacher participants. I conclude with the question of how such a deficit discourse can be resisted and subverted.

#### ***7.1.1 Deficit discourse surrounding difference***

As has been mentioned in chapter 2, the nomenclature of "non-native English speaker" (NNES) carries the assumption that NNESs are deficient and in need of a cultural change

(Holliday, 2005, 2008). Likewise, a recent research study focused on English language learners (ELLs) shows that speaking English as a second language is closely connected to a deficit discourse on multiple aspects, including intellectual competence, of the language learner (Shapiro, 2014). In fact, such a deficit discourse may have originated from prior Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, which idealized the native speaker model and characterized the learner language as deficient by definition. Fortunately, in the past decade or so the NS-NNS dichotomy has been gradually problematized and discarded in language learning and instruction. In the discipline of TESOL, for example, the recent non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST) movement has further legitimized NNESTs and helped to promote and institutionalize discourses of multilingualism, multiethnicism, and multiculturalism (Selvi, 2014). Despite such development in TESOL, the deficit discourse surrounding English as a second language speakers continues. In Yep's (2014) latest research on international instructors in U.S., internationally educated teachers are generally invisible in pedagogical literature and "are typically viewed as deficient, i.e. lacking in knowledge and skills – linguistic, social, and cultural, among others – to teach in U.S. classrooms" (p. 86). Yep's research points to the dominant cultural discourse about international instructors, i.e. their lack of cultural and pedagogical competence. As a result, this deficit thinking surrounding linguistically and culturally different teachers can "implicitly or explicitly marginalize, degrade and pathologize difference" (p. 86). In Australia, Reid, Collins & Singh (2014) concluded that a key factor in determining whether an immigrant teacher enjoys his or her teaching experience and living experience is the extent to which this difference [in language, culture, etc.] is racialized, devalued and penalized in the school and community. In

summary, recent literature have uncovered the connection between difference and deficit, which is relevant to the four participants' teaching and living experience as ESL female teachers in postsecondary education.

### *7.1.2 Deficit discourse at work*

It has been a struggle for me to decide on the use of such terms as “ESL” and “non-native English speakers”. Undoubtedly, these terms may function to make the difference salient and reinforce the deficit discourse. However, many other researchers still use these terms, mainly for lack of better terms to describe the phenomenon under study. My decision to use these terms may also originate from an aspiration to point to an issue that is often kept unsaid, or refrained from mentioning for fear of discrimination. I noticed that my participants did not proactively identify themselves as “ESL” or “ethnic/racial minority”, nor would my mainstream colleagues proactively use these terms to identify me. This is indication that people are well aware of the negative connotations surrounding these terms. Nevertheless, although these terms may thus be rendered silent in our talk, the deficit discourse that is implied with these terms is far from disappearing. Therefore, I consider my decision to use these terms as an act of pointing out the root of the problem.

For the participants, linguistic difference functions as an indicator of intellectual inferiority. Mona's narrative on how “poor” her English was when she first came to her university as a PhD student and her narrative on her supervisor's advice for her to find a “native speaker” to proof read her research work is such an incident; the deficit discourse works on her to represent her as intellectually inferior as compared with the native-

speaker norm. Perhaps a more telling example is from Olivia, who mentioned a puzzling incident in her narrative on her teaching. When talking about her teaching strategies, Olivia explained to me how she encouraged her students to transform complicated wordings into simple points in the discipline of Statistics. However, her subsequent comment surprised me:

*I told them, “I hate reading long and complicated English”, but to tell you the truth, I often read that stuff in my government job, but the students laughed and found it makes sense. (Olivia)*

She told her students that she hated reading long and complicated English, indicating her lack of linguistic competence, which is not true since she definitely has such competence to do the reading. It seems that she readily complied with or pretended to live up [down?] to the dominant expectations of being deficient in language as a pedagogical hook to identify with and encourage her students, who presumably possess less intellectual ability. Olivia also made fun of her “presumably poor” English by telling her students that linguistic incompetence could sometimes be a help for her.

*I sometimes told them, “you know why you have to spend 5 minutes reading a problem statement, it’s because your English is too good. But I am poor at English, so I can just grab the most important information.” (Olivia)*

Although Olivia is playing with and making use of the deficit discourse, it is evident that such deficit discourse still exists and functions to define the identity of linguistically different teachers as being intellectually inferior.

Parallel to the deficit discourse of linguistic and intellectual inferiority is the lack of appreciation for linguistic and cultural diversity of the participants. Although the ability



to speak more than one language is a salient character of the four participants, they seldom narrate on how speaking other languages are appreciated in their teaching. Olivia is the only one who actually mentioned that her ability with the Chinese language is put to use, but only for additional tasks like translating for her college, tasks that she is not responsible for, nor is she willing to take. Tracy has also mentioned the fact that her university appreciated her diverse perspectives on literature, but she still finds it challenging to convince her students that her diverse perspectives are relevant to their learning. Sally and Mona never mentioned that their competence in the Chinese language and culture has been put to use in their work or in the academic community.

Another aspect where the deficit discourse works is in the participant teachers' social networking, since their difference in language and culture may represent them as deficient instructors, colleagues or friends. Tracy narrated extensively on the "wall" between her and her students and colleagues and on how she got on well with her colleagues but failed to make friends with them. She suspected that her personality is a cause, meaning that she is not a particularly outgoing person. However, I wonder if this "wall" has originated from the dominant deficit discourse on linguistic and cultural difference. Indeed, can we make friends with people who speak a different tongue and live in a different world? As a Chinese idiom goes: we do not have a common language *wo men mei you gong tong yu yan*, which carries the meaning that we do not have the common topics and therefore not friends. Tracy narrated and commented on her experience and feelings of socializing with her American colleagues as follows:

*Sometimes, you cannot follow their talk when they are talking about a film which you have not seen. You feel so exhausted. Talking with American colleagues*

*seems like a job rather than relaxation. You have to talk in English, while I feel much more at home talking in Chinese. You may not fully understand what they say, and it is rather tiring. (Tracy)*

Therefore, Tracy's less comfortable feeling of talking to her American colleagues may have contributed or exacerbated her position of being the "other", not a good choice for friends.

Similarly, Sally also mentioned that the academic environment around her had little to do with her and her institution would not take much interest in her. Although Sally knows quite a number of colleagues in her university, her social network is still rooted among fellow Chinese. In fact, even for Olivia, who described herself as outgoing and active, she still feels more comfortable maneuvering among people of the same language and culture. Therefore, difference in language and culture has implicitly rendered the participants deficient in their local social networking. The only exception is perhaps Mona, who married an American citizen and who actually chose to speak English in our interview. Thus, it is important to stay aware of the diversity within "ESL" or "NNES", depending on their length of stay in North America and their frequency of using the English language in daily life. For Tracy, Sally and Olivia, Chinese is still their major language of communication outside classroom. While for Mona, Chinese may have been restricted to phone conversation with her parents in China and to conversations with her Chinese-speaking friends.

Last but not least, being female is also conceived as a deficit that must be corrected by adopting the expectations of the discourse of masculinity. Mona's experience can provide

a case in point on how female teachers consciously and unconsciously incorporate the discourse that the female gender is deficient as compared to the male gender. Mona mentioned in her narrative that she is “insensitive” to her being female and thus often unaware of the gender issue. Her feelings of being “gender-blind” is far from an indication of the non-existence of gender as an issue for postsecondary teachers, but rather a proof of the presence of the powerful normative discourse of masculinity. Such a discourse which positions females as the deficient “other” is first legitimized by Mona’s reflection on her being the only girl in her brother’s circle of playmates, and on her “getting used to staying among boys” in her childhood, indicating her picking up behavioral and personality traits of boys early in her life. It is further consolidated by her chairman’s “kind” advice to her to look serious and thus to be taken seriously by her students. Moreover, her female colleagues have also identified with the male norm by dressing formally, looking stern in front of students and teaching “hard stuff”. Mona talked about one of her female colleagues in this way.

*And the other colleague... she is really good. So good that I wonder why she is not in a research university... She is tenured and full professor, so she does not worry much about how she treats the students. But... she is... hard, in the sense that she teaches hard stuff in the program. I also teach hard things... but I smile... I told them it's hard and you should learn this. If you do not... I am not doing my job. I will help you but I am not going to lower my standard. (Mona)*

This snapshot of Mona and her female colleague has carried much information about being female in academia: they tend to be under-employed and they are inclined to be “hard” teachers so as to fix the deficit of being the “soft” female in academia. Similar efforts of trying to be “strict” with students and trying to “do a good job” can also be found in Olivia’s narratives. Therefore, although being female is not explicitly related by

the participants as an issue, their experience as teachers in postsecondary education has sufficiently revealed such a deficit discourse.

### ***7.1.3 Resistance and subversion***

The participants' narratives reveal that they care deeply about how they are represented in academia. They wish to be portrayed as competent teachers in the eyes of their students and colleagues. However, the deficit discourse originating from their difference in language, culture and gender has disadvantageously positioned them as lacking in the valued cultural and pedagogical competence. Mona had to struggle with her "poor" English and thus her questioned intellectual ability, at least in the earlier phase of her academic life. Tracy must abandon her teacher-centered pedagogy in a Confucian culture and adopt a more "democratic" pedagogy, although she believed more in the effectiveness of the former. Despite such a deficit discourse about them in language, culture and gender, they have also demonstrated varied degrees of resistance and subversion to the dominant discourse concerning their difference. Indeed, another way of viewing difference is not to see it as a problem, but to conceive it as a reality in our increasingly globalized world and to view difference as an asset rather than a liability (Reid et al., 2014). In this respect, all participants have shown substantial awareness of their difference as an asset. Tracy explicitly mentioned the value of her perspectives in literature teaching and the importance of her students' learning such alternative perspectives. While feeling regret for many of her female colleagues who quit academia, Mona showed considerable determination to stay in the discipline of math and thus make a difference in this male-dominated sector. Sally stressed the importance of "getting used

to” different languages and cultures in the global world and how the presence of diverse teachers and students could help. In particular, by explaining unfamiliar terms with her personal experience and by demonstrating her international experience, Olivia proactively utilized her difference as pedagogical tools to aid her teaching.

A point to note is that none of them explicitly named the deficit discourse that they are actually experiencing, although they all acted to resist such a discourse. Their silence in naming the deficit discourse on difference can indicate the normative nature of postsecondary education that they work in. People are supposed to “adapt” to the academic community by adopting the expected behaviors. Much like a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), the academic community is also conceived as a place with a “center” and “peripheries”, where ESL female teachers are positioned on the margins of the community and are supposed to make a personal trajectory toward the “center”, if they care for their livelihood. To make this inward trajectory, the participants all seem to stress the importance of doing a good job, i.e. making efforts to identify with the requirements of this community and to fix the undesirable traits in themselves. Tracy has made immense efforts in adapting her pedagogy and in improving her communication with students. Olivia doubled her workload in order to upgrade her “comprehensive competence”. To make this inward trajectory, attitude seems to be an important element. Olivia mentioned a “positive attitude” in making such a trajectory.

*I also believe in the idea of charisma. If you are often exposed to positive influence, your whole person becomes positive. So, if there are negatives things coming up, you have to be exposed to more positive influence. So, I don't want to be with “negative” people, those who always take a negative attitude to life. The “problems” are no problem at all and we must think of ways to deal with the “problems”. That's the attitude I like. (Olivia)*

In this narrative, “problems” only need to be dealt with or solved, not to be grumbled or complained about. This “positive” attitude may have also contributed to their silence in a sense that making explicit the deficit discourse can only lead to “negative” experience and feelings and can do little to help them make an inward trajectory in the existing community. In fact, this attitude may be the only strategic move ESL female teachers can make with their existing resources. However, for the purpose of my research, I find it my responsibility to bring the unsaid to light and to raise an awareness to the prevalence of such deficit thinking around difference.

## **7.2 Struggle for inclusion**

An important purpose of this research is to enable more inclusion for ESL female teachers in postsecondary education. This inclusion functions on dual sides. On the part of the teachers, inclusion signifies making personal efforts to get into the system, while on the part of the system and institutions, inclusion means acknowledging the legitimacy and value of these diverse teachers for the benefit of all students and of respective academic disciplines. However, the issue of inclusion seems to be the place where complexities arise. In what follows, I first refer to relevant research on the inclusion (or should I say exclusion?) of internationally educated teachers in K-12 education in Canada, due to the scarcity of relevant research on inclusion of linguistically and culturally diverse teachers in postsecondary education. I also refer to statistical records on employment outlook of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education. I then examine my participants’ experience of struggling for inclusion and question the lack of systemic

and institutional effort for their inclusion. To conclude, I propose an alternative conceptualization of the academic community based on complexity thinking.

### ***7.2.1 Inclusion as an issue***

Little research has been carried out to examine whether ESL female teachers face the issue of inclusion in postsecondary education, yet a limited number of research studies have been done to discover that internationally educated teachers (IET) have been insufficiently included in K-12 education in Canada. Beynon, Illieva & Dichupa's (2004) earlier research into the experience of IETs in BC, Canada examined the authoritative discourse of re-certification for IETs and recorded the participants' feelings of not belonging, of not being emotionally affiliated to their host country, and of their professional identity being negated due to the re-certification practice. Even for those who managed to get around the tedious re-certification process, their lack of Canadian experience posed an employment barrier that is paradoxical in nature. If the employers denied them the opportunity to teach for lack of Canadian experience, how can they actually acquire such an experience in the first place? Therefore, the researchers concluded that authoritative discourses such as the re-certification requirement for IETs function as gatekeepers to "ensure that teaching positions in mainstream schools are filled by individuals who will transmit the cultural capital of the dominant society" and to "render the social and cultural capital of 'others' valueless" (p. 442). Pollock (2010) looked into the marginalization of IETs in Ontario, their disproportionate over-representation in occasional teaching positions, and how the latter further reinforced their marginalization and exclusion. Cho (2010) recorded the counter stories of IETs in their

struggle to qualify as teachers. The research showed that the dominant discourse of the prototypical teacher put IETs in a position to value assimilation and enculturation and left them little opportunity to share their diverse language, knowledge and experience. From the perspective of education policy, Schmidt & Block (2010) pointed out the much lower rates of employment for IETs and examined the limitations in existing employment policies to integrate IETs. Therefore, the researchers concluded that employment equity for IETs is still a distant goal and advocated that educational policy making and implementation should prioritize a more diverse teaching force. In summary, existing literature on the inclusion of linguistically and culturally diverse teachers has demonstrated that their inclusion is an issue that is closely connected with the established institutional practices and the present educational policy.

### ***7.2.2. Employment outlook for ESL female teachers***

While the participants' narratives seem to convey the story of employment barriers, since it may be argued that all academics can face severe competition in employment, I turned to statistical information on the demographics of full-time faculty in Canadian universities so as to find clues for potential employment barriers.

Major statistical information on the demographics of university faculty includes gender and visible minority, but not language, which again points to the gap in literature. I will first address the category of female. In Statistics Canada (2012), women faculty have made an increasing presence in universities in the past 20 years also and at present approximately one in three full-time faculty in Canadian universities are female. The



same observation was made by Academic Matters (2011) and Trends in Higher Education (2007). While the number and proportion of female teachers are increasing, they still remain lowest in the most senior ranks and internationally the share of women in the most senior ranks of universities is much lower than in the junior ranks (Trends in Higher Education, 2007). This observation reflects the “glass ceiling” phenomenon reviewed earlier. Another issue that bears direct relevance to my current study and some of my participants’ narratives is that women currently make up 44% of all PhD graduates and the hiring gap between men and women did not close. In particular, the growth in the share of women completing doctoral degrees has outpaced the growth in the appointment of women to new faculty positions since 1998 (Trends in Higher Education 2007). This situation is actually described by one of the participants as a “mismatch” between PhD graduates and the available faculty positions and is obviously an employment barrier for ESL female teachers in postsecondary education. An additional issue associated with female faculty is their consistent lower salary range as compared with male faculty members (Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics: Research Papers, 2011), which is probably derived from female faculty’s general lower ranks in universities.

Since major data information does not have any categories that reflect the language status of university faculty, the closest categories that I can locate are “visible minority”, “Canadian citizen” and “faculty who receive their highest degrees outside Canada”. As has already been mentioned in Chapter 1, white faculty account for about 84% of all full-time Canadian university faculty, as compared to visible minorities who constitute only

about 16% (Academic Matters, 2011). The gap is significant considering the fact that immigration and international student population has been growing strongly over the past decade (Trends in Higher Education, 2011). Most full-time faculty are Canadian citizens (89%) and more than half are Canadian citizens at birth (59%). According to Trends in Higher Education (2007), from 1999-2004, among the 20,000 new appointments in Canadian universities, 13,000 went to those with their highest degrees earned in Canadian universities. However, the data do not show how many of the 13,000 speak English as a second language. Among the remaining 7,000 who earned their highest degrees outside Canada, the majority of them (4,500) are actually repatriate Canadian citizens, who are unlikely to be ESLs. Also, the majority of the 7,000 received their highest degrees in U.S., U.K., France and other western countries and only a little more than 15% earned their highest degrees in Japan, China, India and 60 other countries. Although the language status of the 7,000 still cannot be determined through the data, it is very likely that those who speak English as a second language comprise a very small proportion among the 20,000 appointments. When this information on university faculty is read against the data on university enrollment (Trends in Higher Education, 2011), the question can arise that many of those PhD graduates who speak English as a second language may not have been adequately appointed faculty positions in general.

Another issue with whether employment barriers for ESL female teacher really exist is that people's efforts in finding employment and their unique experiences vary substantially. Therefore, existing data from this study cannot establish a cause-and-effect relation between the multiple identities of the participants and some of their experiences

of employment barriers. Nevertheless, the participants' narratives reflect their interpretation of how gender, language and culture influence (both positively and negatively) their employment and their career development.

### ***7.2.3 Participants' experience of inclusion and/or exclusion***

All participants in the study have made considerable efforts for inclusion, which also implies that they all have encountered barriers to access the system. Tracy and Mona have worked to fix their "deficit" in language and culture. Tracy believes that she is constantly improving her English and adapting to the American teaching methods. Mona sent out 200 job applications in order to get two offers. Olivia tried to assimilate into the system by learning the particular form of the English language from students. Sally, on the other hand, felt excluded from the system when she encountered the "local K-12 education experience" requirement in job postings. There are also a few occasions for them to infuse their cultural wealth into the system. For example, Tracy had chances to demonstrate her diverse perspectives in literary analysis and choice of teaching materials. Olivia took opportunities to influence her Chinese, as well as local, students with a more global perspective in economics.

Since three of the participants are already in permanent or near-permanent teaching positions, only Sally, the one with temporary employment, expressed concerns about the gatekeeping practices in postsecondary teaching and worried about whether she can be included after receiving her PhD degree. Most participants seem to consider themselves lucky enough to be in their present positions. Olivia, for example, talked of how her

parents would feel proud of her success in becoming a postsecondary teacher in a western country. None of the participants criticised the possible discriminatory practices in their way to become teachers in postsecondary education. Even Sally, who expressed concerns about the requirement for K-12 teaching experience twice in the interview, did not pin down such gatekeeping practices as discriminatory. Rather, she tried to modify the impact by saying that she may not be “suitable” for the jobs posted and thus failed to get them. Once they somehow get included (like what already happened to the other three participants), they feel relieved and grateful since their final inclusion seems to prove that exclusionary and discriminatory practices are non-existent. Admittedly, there is the possibility that they may not feel it appropriate to criticize their employers, or potential employers. After all, they may not be powerful enough to make such a move and they may also feel that it is not safe enough for them to give negative comments. However, should it be the case, we have more reason to believe the lack of power on the part of these participants and the existence of exclusionary practices that threaten to “disqualify” them if they do not show gratefulness to the “privileges” they have been given.

While I try to problematize their silence toward the exclusionary practices that they may have been subjected to and the mentality of feeling grateful for being included in the dominant Discourse of postsecondary education, what has also impressed me is the complexity and subtlety of the issue of inclusion. The first layer of the issue is whether ESL female teachers are allowed to be present in postsecondary education, since they are often conceived as less than ideal candidates by the deficit discourse around them. In more practical terms, the inclusion of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education

first means equitable employment opportunities. Following theorizations on communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), inclusion also means their becoming “legitimate peripheral participants” (LPPs) in the academic community. Unfortunately, the employment barriers encountered by ESL female teachers are still substantial and the experience of the participants in my research stand as proof. The second or deeper layer of the issue of inclusion is connected with their experience *after* being allowed to enter the community. In this respect, I would like to put the academic community in a more critical perspective. Is the academic community simply a form of community of practice where LPPs are only supposed to adapt and make an inward trajectory so as to be full members of the community? Or, alternatively, should the academic community be conceived as a complex system (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Mason, 2008) where there is no “center” or “peripheries” and where different elements interact with each other to enable changes and adaptations to its environment? In the latter conceptualization, the presence of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education should necessarily bring changes to the academic community by being diverse elements in the system. The latter conceptualization of the academic community as emerging and adaptable may be more promising for the inclusion of ESL female teachers since it engages more stakeholder buy-in. I would offer a more detailed analysis of this “hunch” at the end of this chapter.

#### ***7.2.4 Systemic and institutional change for inclusion***

As has been mentioned in the literature on insufficient inclusion of IETs in K-12 education, established institutional practices and the present education policy are important contributors of IETs’ lack of inclusion. In my research on ESL female teachers

in postsecondary education, the participants' narratives have also touched upon a similar inadequacy. Sally, for example, questioned the mismatch between the growing scale of PhD programs in many universities and the insufficient employment opportunities. The fact that many PhD students are linguistically and culturally diverse students, who are deemed as lacking in the valued cultural capital, has further exacerbated the problem of including them in the system. She also singled out particular institutional practices, such as "relevant experience in local school system", as exclusionary and as points of change in order to integrate ESL female teachers in postsecondary education. Tracy talked about how she went through two "screenings", one by the Modern Language Association (MLA) and another by the hiring university for a campus visit. She mentioned that only one university among the many universities that she had applied for actually sent out such an invitation to her and she went for the only campus visit, cherishing little hope of being hired.

*... Then after a wait of one or two months, a pretty long process, and they [the university] called me saying that they would hire me. So I went, as there was no other places to go. They are the only place that wanted me, so I went. (Tracy)*

Tracy's narrative on how she was included in the system gave me the impression that it is a very narrow passage, which did not offer her any options but to grasp the only one that showed up. Additionally, participants such as Sally and Tracy expressed pessimism in immediate changes on institutional and policy level in the near future. Therefore, as I have explored in the previous chapter on "Support and Change", the very first step to promote the inclusion of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education lies in the changes and modifications of institutional practices and educational policies, so that these teachers can enter the system on a more equitable basis. Although we may not be able to

do it right now, we can enable microscopic changes step by step so as to impact the whole landscape. In our interview, Mona offered a narrative on how females in science can be influenced by the dominant discourse regarding their ability to do science.

*Support is really important... I actually heard this... [from a staff member in science education]... they discovered that for girls, American girls, in K-12, ... They have two groups and they are all female students... and they told them different things... One group they told them the ability to do mathematics is inherited and it's not that you work hard and you get it. For the other group they told them it's an ability you can build... and then... of course you can guess [the result] ... (Mona)*

After this narrative, Mona reflected on her own journey to becoming a professional in the discipline of maths despite negative discourses.

*From the beginning, I don't think I am going to be a famous mathematician anyway... This I know I will not be... but that doesn't mean I cannot do anything... that doesn't mean I cannot do something I'm interested in. So I stayed... I'm not that old but I have seen quite a lot of things that made me feel... yes, getting the word out to girls is important in a sense that... yeah, people will tell you, you are not suitable for this and that you cannot do it... tell you it's hard... [but] it's fine... you just work hard... if you are really interested... do it... (Mona)*

It seems to me that the same also applies to diverse teachers such as ESL female teachers who are struggling to be included despite the deficit discourses that have been othering and marginalizing them. Just like a supportive discourse would make a difference to girls' experience and achievement in science, inclusive institutional practices and policies will definitely improve the experience of and contribute to the achievement of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education. Since we have been disrupting the gender differences and stereotypes in issues such as girls in science, it is also time for us to stretch it to diverse teachers in education.

### *7.2.5 Academic community as a complex system*

If the above advocate on institutional and systemic changes for the inclusion of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education is made from a critical theory perspective and from a poststructuralist understanding of diverse teachers' identity construction, I would like to propose an alternative conceptualization of the academic community as a complex system and explore the potentials of such a conceptualization for the inclusion of ESL female teachers.

Although it is impossible for me to give a definition of complexity thinking due to the nature of the term itself and the limited space in this study, I could offer Morrison's (2002, p. 6, as quoted in Mason<sup>a</sup>, 2008, p. 36) words as a reference: complexity theories is, 'a theory of survival, evolution, development and adaptation'. It concerns itself with environments, organizations, or systems that are complex in the sense that very large numbers of constituent elements or agents are connected to and interacting with each other in many different ways. According to Davis & Sumara (2006), complexity thinking has a connection with poststructuralist theories and supports many of the tenets in poststructuralism. Davis & Sumara (2006) related to a focus of poststructuralist-informed studies as being the construction of normal and abnormal, and the implicit understanding of the "most common" as being "natural". Complexity thinking supports poststructuralist critiques on normative discourses that "impos(e) a series of calculated norms on the agents that comprise a complex system" (p. 123) and claims that the differences and diversity among the agents of a system is necessary for its viability. Obviously,



complexity thinking is compatible with the focus of the current poststructuralist-informed study on ESL female teachers' experience of othering and marginalization.

From the past decade or so, complexity thinking has been changing educational research, since education can be understood as an inherently complex phenomenon. In Mason<sup>b</sup>'s (2008) important theoretical piece on complexity and education, complexity generally exists in situations in which a large number of agents are connected and interacting with each other in dynamic ways. In this light, schools exhibit many features of complex adaptive systems, "being dynamical and unpredictable, non-linear organizations operating in unpredictable and changing external environments" (p. 19). For other scholars, physical education phenomena are inherently complex and complexity thinking bears relevancies with this particular field of education (Ovens, Hopper & Butler, 2013). In a similar vein, the academic community could also be conceived as a complex adaptive system. Davis and Sumara (2006) listed the "conditions of emergence" (pp. 129-152) vital to complex systems, among which "the extent of internal diversity of the elements or agents that constitute the systems" is at the very top and "the extent of neighborhood interactions" follows. Both of these conditions apply to my current focus on including diverse teachers in postsecondary education. For the academic community to be an adaptive system and to possess "conditions of emergence", i.e. conditions to learn and to change, its component agents need to be diverse instead of uniform. Moreover, diverse agents within the system need to interact with each other about ideas and information as a condition for emergence. Therefore, my previous advocates for the inclusion of ESL female teachers in the academic community, the recognition of their

value of difference in language, culture and gender, and more chances for them to infuse their difference into the system, though made under a poststructuralist and critical theory framework, are also important conditions for the academic community to evolve and to change with its environment from a complexity thinking perspective.

My proposition of conceiving the academic community as a complex system may bring two potential benefits for the inclusion of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education. First of all, it may have the potential to win more stakeholder buy-in by pointing to the importance of diversity and interaction for a complex adaptive system such as the academic community and to how diverse teachers such as ESL female teacher could be of value. Secondly, it may generate the momentum for change in view of the participants' anticipation that substantial systemic and institutional changes are unlikely in the near future. To change the dominant discourse, or in terms of complexity thinking, to "displace the inertial momentum of the current dispensation", the macro-structural level and the intentional human agency level both need to be targeted so as to "create a dominant inertial momentum for the desired policy" (Mason<sup>b</sup>, 2008, p. 39). In other words, conceiving the academic community as a complex system may help to change the current normative Discourse of postsecondary education that marginalizes ESL female teachers and create a more dynamic system that is capable of self-generation and evolution.

## Chapter 8 Conclusion

In previous chapters, I have described the lived experience of four ESL female teachers in postsecondary education and explored how they negotiated their teacher identity with intersectionality as a conceptual frame and identity as a research lens. In this concluding chapter, I highlight my major findings and discuss the implications of my study. The findings are organized around but not limited by my research questions. I end this chapter with a reflection on the implications of my research and a plan for future research.

### **8.1 How do ESL female teachers in postsecondary education narrate their lived experience and negotiate their teacher identity?**

The four participants have experienced multiple identities due to speaking English as a second language, being female and belonging to an ethnic minority group. Their multiple identities are mainly considered as barriers for them, but sometimes also as advantages to be made use of in their teaching. In order to negotiate a viable teacher identity in postsecondary education, the four participants generally make efforts to adapt to the dominant Discourse by fixing personal traits that are considered less desirable, e.g. speaking English with an accent, having less knowledge of the dominant culture, and embodying “feminine” behaviors.

#### ***8.1.1 Speaking English as a second language***

Speaking English as a second language is considered a vital part in the four participants’ sense of identity and is regarded as a barrier, as not a problem, as a bridge and also as an

advantage by the four participants. They position themselves at different places of the above continuum depending on their different experiences in social interactions. On one end of the continuum, their sense of language as a barrier originates from the dominant Discourse that values native-speakerism as the norm. As a result, the participants are positioned as the “other” who need to fix their language so as to identify with the native-speaker norm. Such a negative positioning also leads to the participants’ urge to improve their English and to learn the dominant (and favored) way of speaking in order to acquire a legitimate teacher identity. On the other end of the continuum, the participants have considered their speaking English as a second language an advantage and have used language difference as a pedagogical tool in their teaching.

### ***8.1.2 Being female***

The four participants’ experience of being female teachers in postsecondary education is also fraught with a sense of othering in the masculine and patriarchal discourse. Being female tends to disadvantage them in traditionally female areas of study under the claim of gender balance, but it does not bring them genuine advantages in disciplines where females are the minority since females tend to occupy lower level positions in these disciplines. Furthermore, female teachers are also tacitly required to disembodied female characteristics in manners and adapt to the male norm in order to acquire credibility and authority in this dominant Discourse. Nevertheless, some participants have been resisting and expanding such a normative discourse by adopting a pedagogy of care in teaching and by presenting themselves as nurturing and approachable to students.

### ***8.1.3 Being ethnic minorities***

The participants' experience of being ethnic minorities is closely connected with their respective living contexts and their ethnic identity is constituted by the discourses they live in. In a discourse of less ethnic diversity, they tend to be positioned as the "other" and encounter barriers in their teaching. In a discourse of greater ethnic diversity, they can feel more "at home". Apart from having their ethnic identity constituted by discourses, the participants have also appropriated their ethnic identity to their advantage by using their diverse cultural knowledge to assist their teaching and research. There are also signs that the participants have deconstructed their ethnic identity by questioning and resisting some discursive practices that have othered them.

### ***8.1.4 Summary***

The lived experience of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education is a manifestation of their multiple identities and it is fraught with tensions and contradictions. They are positioned by the dominant Discourse of postsecondary education as the other who needs adaptation and simultaneously they are claiming their unique identity by appropriating their diversity as a source of power and agency.

## **8.2 How do their teacher identities intersect with other forms of identities?**

The multiple identities of the four participants intersect differently for different individuals, with particular identity categories standing in the foreground and others in the background depending on their lived experience. Generally speaking, their linguistic,

gendered and ethnic identities influence their construction of teacher identity, but the outcome of such influence varies from individual to individual.

### ***8.2.1 Tracy's "solidified" cultural and ethnic identity***

Tracy described her ethnic and cultural identity as "solidified" and as distinct from that of her North American colleagues and students. For Tracy, her ethnic and cultural identity stands out in the intersection of her multiple identities. However, such self-perceived identity has posed a barrier to her construction of a viable teacher identity and may have threatened her legitimacy as a teacher. As a result, Tracy has made great efforts to adapt to the cultural expectations for a North American teacher by changing her pedagogy and by adopting linguistic and cultural traits of the "norm". In this process of reserving her "core" identity but modifying on particular linguistic and cultural traits, Tracy has gradually established her "legitimacy" and negotiated her professional identity as a teacher.

### ***8.2.2 Mona's gendered identity***

Mona's awareness of her otherness as a female in academia stands out among her multiple identities. Although language and culture had posed barriers for her before, she now feels "at home" in a culturally and linguistically diverse context. She is greatly touched by the drop-out experience of other female scholars that she knows in her discipline of study. She regards the academia as a harsh place for females, but she is determined to stay. In this "chilly" climate for females, Mona's perception of her teacher identity is around a learning-centered and research-centered paradigm, partly indicating

her aspiration to strive for excellence and high-standard as a female despite being negatively positioned as the other.

### ***8.2.3 Sally's "uncertain" teacher identity***

Despite her past experience of being a postsecondary teacher outside North America, her self-perception of language as “not a problem”, and her female-dominated discipline of teaching, Sally has encountered much uncertainty in negotiating her teacher identity.

Sally's sense of uncertainty is the outcome of her difference in her previous geographical location and thus her lack of local experience. Therefore, such uncertainty still originates from her ethnic and cultural difference, which stands out in the intersection of her multiple identities. Sally's experience also points to the institutional barriers for those perceived as the “other” and the need for institutional changes for her to negotiate a legitimate teacher identity.

### ***8.2.4 Olivia's "charismatic" performer identity***

Olivia is aware of her otherness due to her linguistic, cultural and gender identity.

However, her responded to such otherness by “doing a good job” and by proving her worth. She utilized her language difference as pedagogical tools, her cross-cultural experience as motivational force for her diverse students, and her gender as a bridge for easier teacher-student communication. In this sense, the intersection of Olivia's multiple identities is characterized by tensions and contradictions. She is simultaneously appropriated by the dominant Discourse as “deficient” and thus in need of proving herself and is appropriating such a deficit discourse to turn her difference as assets. She regards

her strategic appropriation of her multiple identities as “being charismatic and positive”, which also translates into her efforts to raise students’ outcome and her enjoyment of teaching as performance in class.

### **8.2.5 Summary**

For the participants, a viable teacher identity happens on the institutional and discourse level, i.e. Gee’s (2000) I-Identity and D-Identity. The participants must adapt to institutional expectations through practice in order to be “recognized” as a legitimate teacher. Therefore, it seems that the participants’ negotiation of their teacher identity is still subjected to normative practices of adaption and Wenger’s (1998) Community of Practice theory also applies to the teaching community in postsecondary education. The participants care about their acceptance or recognition by their students and colleagues and they make efforts for “inbound trajectory”, i.e. to change from legitimate peripheral participants to full members of the community. In this process of adaptation, their more “personal” aspects of identity may run into conflict with the “professional expectations” of being a teacher and each participant has thus negotiated their unique identity path through such tensions.

### **8.3 How might these competing identity paradigms contribute to their marginalization or/and resistance?**

The four participants’ experience of their multiple and competing identities have led to dual outcomes: their marginalization and their resistance. Their marginalization in postsecondary education comes as a result of the dominant Discourse which views their



difference in language, gender, culture and ethnic origin as deficit. On the other hand, the participants have also acted, both consciously and unconsciously, to resist such negative positioning.

### ***8.3.1 Marginalization***

The participants' narratives reveal them as being marginalized in postsecondary education. Consistent with prior literature on difference as deficit, their differences in language, gender and culture tend to position them as deficient in intellectual competence, in professional excellent and in ability for social networking. Parallel to such deficit thinking concerning their difference, their capacity to speak other languages, knowledge of other cultures and competence as caring and nurturing teachers receive insufficient appreciation in the dominant Discourse.

### ***8.3.2 Resistance***

Despite their marginalization, the participants have also exerted their agency to resist being positioned as deficient. Their action of resistance takes two forms: 1) maximizing personal effort to do a good job; and 2) infusing their difference into their teaching. All participants care much about getting positive recognition from students and colleagues through hard work. Their effort to do well in their work is indicative of their desire to rupture the deficit discourse about them, although it is also proof of how powerful the existing Discourse of postsecondary education is. On the other hand, the participants have also engaged in a more agentic act of claiming worth and legitimacy for their diversity.

They all believe in the value of their diversity in language, culture and gender and they have taken the opportunities, though few, to infuse such diversity in the system.

### ***8.3.3 Summary***

Through unpacking the tensions between institutional expectations for a legitimate teacher identity and the participants' multiple personal identities, the study has explored the origin of the dual outcomes of marginalization and resistance experienced by ESL female teachers. Both outcomes offer important insights into the reality of life for ESL female teachers and raise an awareness of discriminatory practices that are subtle and hidden. Such an awareness of ESL female teachers' marginalization and resistance also paves the way for change.

## **8.4 How can the above understanding contribute to the inclusion of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education?**

All participants have stressed the importance of support from colleagues and institutions and their personal efforts in their becoming teachers in postsecondary education.

However, they have also indicated that institutional and systemic support is still insufficient. Therefore, the institutional and systemic change to include ESL female teachers in postsecondary education is imperative. In this respect, the conceptualization of the academic community as a complex system rather than a community of practice may hold greater hope for the inclusion of ESL female teachers in the future.

### ***8.4.1 Importance of support***

For Tracy and Mona, support from their colleagues have largely contributed to their adaptation and their negotiation of a viable teacher identity. For Olivia, the most appreciated support for her is the institutional decision to employ her among a pool of applicants. Without such support, their inclusion would have been much more difficult. However, for Sally, who obviously lacks the much needed support from her colleagues and her institution, inclusion seems a big issue and she is still uncertain whether she will finally be included.

#### ***8.4.2 Change for greater support***

Despite evidence of some support for ESL female teachers, there is still the need for greater support, especially from the institutional and systemic level. The primary support is the removal of employment barriers. Some participants encounter exclusionary employment practices and some participants are still underemployed. Moreover, there is also the need for institutional recognition of their difference as assets and their diversity as wealth. In other words, the dominant Discourse of postsecondary education is yet to recognize that their diverse languages, cultures and their female pedagogy of caring and nurturing are valuable to the increasingly diversified education landscape. Therefore, rather than conceptualizing the academic community as a community of practice, and the teacher identity negotiation as a process of adapting to the existing “regime of truth”, a complex system approach may be a more apt conceptualization, where diverse elements interact and bring about emergent changes.

#### ***8.4.3 Inquiry and collaboration***

Other than changes on the institutional level, research into ESL female teachers' experience in the system also helps to raise an awareness of such issues as difference as deficit, inclusion and exclusion. By talking about their own experience, ESL female teachers can also deepen their own reflection on these issues and work proactively to assert their agency. Furthermore, inquiry into ESL female teachers' experience may enable collaboration between them and accelerate the process of their inclusion.

#### ***8.4.4 Summary***

The inclusion of ESL female teachers in postsecondary education can best be promoted through institutional and systemic support, and the removal of employment barriers stands at the very forefront of all practices of inclusion. Additionally, research and inquiry into ESL female teachers' experience also helps to articulate the issue of inclusion and promote reflection and collaboration. Furthermore, inclusion also means to appreciate the value of difference and diversity that are connected with ESL female teachers' multiple identities. Therefore, a complexity view of the academic community is a promising alternative to community of practice.

#### **8.5 Implications and future research**

The study holds educational implications for diverse teachers in education. It adds to our knowledge about the experience of female teachers who speak English as a second language in postsecondary education. It has also provided an intersectional analysis of their teacher identity and revealed the outcomes of their identity negotiation process. More importantly, it points to the lack and the need for institutional and systemic change

so as to promote the inclusion of female teachers who speak English as a second language. The study also holds potential for future research. A longitudinal study on particular participants, e.g. Sally, who is still waiting to be included, can offer more insights into the issue of inclusion and institutional change. Future research can also study the outcome of the participants' intentional infusing of their diverse identities in teaching and research and analyze how the academic community can change as a result so as to adapt to the increasingly diverse educational landscape.

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## Appendix

### Sample of interview transcripts with English translations

我：那你的英语怎么样？你觉得你的英语流利吗？

Tracy：还是很差啊。

我：你如果还是很差，那你怎么去教呢？

Tracy：我在教书中一直有困难存在，这个困难是永远都没有办法克服的，而且是永远在克服当中。你说我现在的英语吧，可能比国内好一点，但是不能跟美国本地的老师相比。差距是永远存在的，不管我呆在美国多少年，不管我教书教多少年，我永远不可能像“native speaker”那样子。这是一个漫长的，不断改进的过程吧，我觉得。但改进得也挺缓慢的。

我：那英语不是母语对你影响还是很大的了？

Tracy：那肯定啊！

*Me: So, what about your English... Do you think you are very fluent in the language?*

Tracy: I am still poor at it....

*Me: If you are still poor at it, how could you teach it?*

Tracy: I always have difficulties with it in my teaching, difficulties that I am trying to overcome and that I can never overcome. My English is indeed better than when I was in China, but definitely it cannot be compared with that of the native speaking teachers. The gaps is always there, no matter how long I stay in the States and no matter how many years I teach. I can never speak English the way the native speakers do. It is a long process of improvement, I think. But the improvement is so slow.

*Me: So being an ESL does have a huge influence on you?*

Tracy: Definitely!