Exploring the Body Politics of Female Teachers from the Perspective of Intersectionality and Agency in Education Locale

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This paper explores how the body discourses constructed by patriarchal culture influence individual’s body viewpoint and form teachers’ body image in educational fields in gender perspectives of feminisms and the concepts of power and discourse from Foucault. At the same time I will also demonstrate that the body politics of women teachers in secondary education do not represent the stable and rigid hierarchy of traditional teacher-student relationship but shape the subjectivity which are deployed and suffused as a capillary action by the disciplines and power relations interwoven by gender, sexuality, class and age throughout the individual’s cognition and behavior, thus produce self-monitoring in the meantime monitoring others for social function. Finally, I will argue that how the subjectivity under the social structure and cultural norms generates an individual’s agency of resistance and subversion to existing gender structures through reflectivity in the cracks produced by the collision, fragmentation, consultation within different discourses, and then finds the temporary strategic and political positioning and identity.

Keywords: body politics, female teacher, poststructural feminism, Foucault, teacher-student relationship, agency, power relation

Introduction

Education which is ancient activity existing with human life, is a major and effective method of ruling class to promote and spread the specific knowledge and behavior norm to people. In other words, schools become the conceptualization tools of social, economic and politic values to produce and reproduce the dominant ideologies through daily interactions, structure and teaching environment (Shapiro, 1999). However, male-centric knowledge systems shape the rules, schemes and culture within the organizations for a long time, and are subtly embedded in the context of the institutions whether expressly proclaimed by regulations or in an esoteric form. Therefore, the value of campus culture in the school and the operation of power relations are all filled with gendered gaze and provocation, and female bodies at school especially are fiercely objectified and disciplined by different discourses. In the process of socialization, female bodies are controlled on the constraint of patriarchal cultural values and regulations, and inscribed with body politics of taming which are intertwined with the manipulation of different discourses and power relations such as gender, sexuality, class and age. Nevertheless, multiple discourses make the subjectivities of female teachers represent uncertainty, fluid and fragile performativity.

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Gender and Body Discourses

Body is the field of producing and employing a large number of symbols. Body is the object of our labor, including eating, sleeping, cleaning, diet and exercise, which can be called physical labor as both personal and collective practice. As the object, field and tool of our labor, the body is not only the practicing object but also our practical instrument (Turner, 1984). However, the dualism of cultural thought makes body long-term excluded by discourses which make disciplines and power relations be inscribed on body that is too implicit to be conscious of, so that the closely relevance between body and ideology, state power and cultural regulations is ignored. In fact, the body is often as the arena of political wrangling. The body is always defined by multiple discourses which also shape various body language and thus discursive power decide whether body can survive or does not deserve to be concerned with. Therefore, it is necessary for humans who live in the world constituted of discourses to obtain the power of articulation for the meaning of existence. The same discourse that exists in the strategy of the superiority ruling the inferiority and the same time reversely as the resistant point of the inferiority is an institution of oppression and liberation as well because linguistic manipulation can be learned and imitated so that discourse does not belong to specific stratum.

Since the Age of Enlightenment, the binary discourse of mind/body dominates the basic assumptions of epistemology, therefore body is not only excluded beyond the intellect in opposition to rational thinking, but also the controlled object of investigation (Turner, 1984; Harding, 1998). For most feminists, the body is the gendered disciplinary objectivity which is the object of manipulation by patriarchal culture to become the instrument and profitable foundation for rationalization of female subordination. Kate Millett pointed out that this biological determinism of the physical differences generates sexuality and sex politics in accordance with complicated patriarchal discourses, extending to sociology, anthropology, psychology, economic and educational fields to implement the set of power relations of domination and oppression on women (Millett, 1970). Therefore, compared to men as a subject of knowledge and a symbol of objectivity and rationality, the female body not only becomes mysterious and bizarre but must be strict disciplined and monitored as an alienation body in hegemonic phallocentrism discourse. Moreover, women cannot see their bodies as if “existence without existing” which is due to the presence of the body only in the male gaze so that women’s subjectivity of self body seems to not exist or be neglected in patriarchal context (Chen, 2006; Magezis, 1996). Such female body alienative with real corporeal experience and lack of agency becomes the field which is Foucault’s so-called panopticon that a woman is trapped and surrounded by the male gaze, whether monitored
by the public oral one in a room. While women watch others from the male perspective likewise discipline their own demean or because individuals still can not help but to look at themselves even alone with the criterion of mainstream culture and regulations through the shaping and internalization of discourses.

In addition to employing the pathologization and medicalization for women’s bodies, it is the worst lash back for women’s movements that the discourse of beauty myth disposes the manipulative network of power. Not only does it exist in gender role models and popular culture which are manufactured by patriarchal ideology, but also it colludes with capitalism that forms the constraint of corporate network shackles women, and do expand the maximum of the monitoring power of patriarchy on the female body (Wolf, 1991). As to women, the norms of physical and appearance are not out of the influence of beauty myth discourse in professional workplace but female’s body image is interwoven with their intelligence and capability to be the object of examination and appraisal. Compared to male as a transcendent subject with purely rational mind, the only way for female/natural/physical/emotional as a subordinative objectivity to obtain self-identity of professional ability is to rely on self-restraint and self-discipline to make their demeanour and appearance tamed and fit in with the request of mainstream discourse.

Teacher’s Body in Educational Locale

Texts are the primary medium (though not the substance) of power. It is an ideologically structured mode of action—images, vocabularies, concepts, abstract terms of knowledge are integral to the practice of power, to getting things done. The ways in which individuals think about themselves and one another and about out society are given shape and distributed by the socialized work of people in schools and other organizations forming the “ideological apparatuses” of the society (Smith, 1987). Moreau, Osgood and Halsall (2007) demonstrate that three main gender imbalances are generally identified within the teaching workforce: gender imbalance across education phases (women concentrate in the nursery and primary sectors, overall less valued and rewarded), across subjects taught (there is a lower proportion of women in math and science, compared with other subjects) and across positions (women are under represented in promoted posts, across all education phases). Both the administrative organization in school cultural context and disciplines form the performativity of gender discourse through the connection with the stereotypes of gendered biological instinct and capabilities. Furthermore, such power of discourse constantly reproduces and consolidates the gendered stratifications of administration and gendered segregation of labor markets. The school administrative bureaucracy is mutually connected with masculinity as “strongness” / “superior” as well as compared with teachers and instructors’ work is considered as feminized “weakness” / “inferior” (Lee, 2007). Patriarchal institutions elaborately design the disciplinary regulations for female teacher’s body and make the power of discourse manipulate unconsciously and work in it by school rules, educational systems and legal provisions, even social expectations, public pressure, students’ evaluation and learning attitude. Just like what Smith (2004) points out that female sociologists encounter a double estrangement in academia that their bodily experiences are excluded as well as their authority devalued to the subordinate position, female teachers also confront the same predicament in their workplace. Especially schools have the important function of knowledge transferring, and mind therefore becomes the chief part of teacher-students interaction to such an extent that corporeal presence and value are depreciated / banished.

What paradoxical is that body is intentionally neglected by mainstream knowledge and discourses but Foucault indicated which body is trained to be docile as the process of socialization through specific institutions
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(schools, military, prisons, etc.) to reproduce the behavior permitted by patriarchal culture (Benson, 1997). In other words, body as a locus of control upon which power relations are inscribed as well as a social culture imprint, Golden (2004) further focuses on schools, which manifest disciplinary power by classifying and judging individuals through the use of hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination, serve as a major institutional site under whose auspices the training of “docile” and therefore “useful” bodies takes place.

Therefore, feminist critical pedagogues take into account the body as the discursive manifestation of desire, pleasure, and power in the classroom. Student and teacher bodies are explicitly connected to power and resistance, control and hegemonic oppression. Knowledge in schools is explicitly connected to the mind; bodies are to be disciplined in these spaces in order to properly train the mind (Cooks, 2007, p. 307). Mind absolutely occupies the superior position in educational field so that the visibility of the body is constructed by discourses for operation and monitoring of disciplinary power, and then the effect of self-discipline can be formed. Instead of recognizing the booming of body discourses as the reversal of body devaluation or the presence of bodily subjectivity, I argue that it is just a more rigorous physical monitoring technology to strengthen individual self-discipline. As the primary ideological state apparatus to manipulate people’s thought and behavior, schooling influences individuals’ cognitive schema much as well as social and cultural regulations.

Teacher’s body represents the wrestling between the double contradiction discourses of invisibility and visibility at the same time. On the one hand, teachers are recognized as a corporeal symbol of intellectual whose body is ignored to its presence. Not only students connect teachers’ image with classroom, knowledge and exams, lack of the materialized imagination of teachers’ body, but also teachers unconsciously desire to conceal the other part of themselves as if they can in front of students’ gaze, and automatically convert themselves into teachers’ role and image. Teachers are not supposed to have bodies, let alone sexually functioning ones. Just like what Johnson (2006) mentioned about her own bodily experience that the deer-frozen-in-headlights syndrome she used to get when she ran into students in the local store and it is common for teachers to encounter such a confrontation. Schools reinforce the myth of disembodiment in their structure; as most teachers are expected to be in the classroom monitoring students at all times so that women teachers who restrict their water intake in order to avoid this necessity are likely to get urinary tract infections. That demonstrates the real effects of disembodiment on teachers. In the field of education where bodies are contained and sexuality is suppressed, women teachers are in a double bind because they are expected to deny the very bodies and biological processes with which they are culturally associated. Furthermore, the discourse of “good teacher” frames the boundary and norms of which a teacher’s body should act and perform and any images connected with sexuality can not be admitted in educational fields.

Accordingly, teachers are regarded as instructors or a living database of knowledge so that body is ignored and then individuals with the role of teachers often feel uncomfortable and do not know how to deal with their own body especially standing surrounded by students’ gaze. In addition, teachers appear as the image of ordinary people outside school for day-to-day activities such as dumping, shopping, exercising or lining up to buy lunch and so on, whereas students are always amazed at and then take delight in talking about what they see as if teachers should not engage in ordinary activities. Teachers avoid meeting students in the school toilets because of embarrassment and choose another timing or the other empty toilets. I have ever heard about that students talked about teachers’ demeanor such as the noise behind the toilet door made by the teacher or exaggerated and imitated what teachers act and behave. Therefore, the disjuncture appears when individual who
performs the image of role model as a teacher constructed by social culture falls into what he/she actually is as ordinary person, because the discourse that the super authority and purity of mind/knowledge “should not be contaminated” by materiality lest teacher’s disciplining effect are weakened make the contradiction of teacher as a wisdom norm simultaneous with corporeal needs confuse students’ cognition and also make the teacher’s alienation of his own body experience.

On the other hand, as the performative corporeality of intellectual and cultural norms, the visibility of body inevitably exists in education locale. Discipline is a physical political technology. Individuals produce a submissive and useful “docile” body because of the arts of allocation (based on the level, power and functions, which serves their duties in their positions), the control of activities (domination extended to the physical performances), and the original organization and so on. In other words, a tiny individual is produced with functionality and adaptation (Gros, 2004). As a vital executor of discipline, a teacher does not naturally and actively supervise and control the process of taming students. On the contrary, a teacher is strictly under surveillance and constrained by cultural norms and the division of labor in roles. Even teacher functions as an embodiment of the model of social roles and regarded as the primary instrument of the official model and continually dominating the ideas because they follow the mainstream knowledge and ideology. A teacher is constantly inspected and supervised with layers of disciplinary check. Mistakes are not allowed in order to make sure that the “normal paradigm” of a state is passed on safely and dominantly from generation to generation.

As a member of patriarchy and an extension and executor of the cultural will of patriarchy, the concrete presentation of the institutes of teacher education and development is the discipline on female figures (Hsiau, 2004). The image of “a good teacher” in the education, which the institutes of teacher education and development convey, includes the deepening training of professional knowledge. The educational courses of the system of normal education, which the author receives, implicitly demonstrate a statement of gendered differentiation. In the student-oriented teaching process, teachers should avoid arousing the attention of the students to their figures. Especially female teachers are not supposed to wear heavy makeup. They should wear light and natural makeup and should not wear glittering accessories or bright clothes, or some informal clothes, such as jeans or sleeve-less tops and so on. The content and boundary of being “formal” is defined and controlled by the male experts and professionals. As mentioned, the surveillance of power extends to layers of checkpoints. At the scene of the interviews and examinations of recommendation, it is seen that female candidates are dressed in long skirts or loose suits in a conventional way. The colors are black, white or dark. Their figures are not only hidden but also deliberately shown in a powerful position (or to be described as masculine professional images). Here, lace and flowers are not allowed because they are too “feminine”. Particularly when candidates enter the stage of the interviews and teaching demonstrations, the male examiners outnumber the female examiners (this constantly and accordingly displays the hierarchy of gender differentiation at school: males control the decision-making process and the higher level of power). With the norms and cultural discipline made by males, a “suitable” teaching talent is selected. The intersectionality of gender and power is beyond description.

Moreover, schooling is not only about formal surveillance but also informal control so that school culture and curriculum filled with four forms of control: hegemonic masculinity, gendered discipline patterns, sexual harassment and compulsory heterosexuality (Mirembe & Davies, 2001). Even when female teachers earn professional certificates in teaching, it doesn’t mean that female teachers can escape from the statements of
gender in patriarchy. Instead, they are comprehensively supervised and controlled under a system of disciplines. With the reminders of colleagues and mutual discipline, the cultures at school are manipulated by the scripts written by the males at the higher level of administration. Once in a while, there are gossips that “you will be interviewed by the principal or labeled as an inappropriate teacher because of your clothes.” This manipulates the power of discipline as if the blood vessels scatter. In addition, the result of the discourses does not merely exist from peer pressure and mutual monitoring and supervision. Sexual harassments at education locales are everywhere. Boys or male teachers harass young female teachers particularly by commenting on their clothes, whistling or publicly discussing what they dress up and how they act or present their bodies and so forth. Female teachers and girls merely tolerate these behaviors instead of fighting against them (Chen, 2009). Sometimes other females would stop those sexual-harassed females striking back. The reason is that in the social and cultural context in patriarchy, it is not a ladylike behavior to challenge boys and males. At the same time, it fails the social expectation and norm for the role of teachers. Moreover, patriarchy disciplines, supervises and controls the production of the standards of female teachers’ figures by means of the implicit but comprehensive surveillance and threats of stereotype (Chen, 2009; Yen, 2011).

Smith (1987) points out, in the cases of the exclusion of females in male cultures, the process and apparatus of policy making is controlled by statements of male-centered hegemony in numbers of people or the levels of management. Based on this, bodies are considered a physical existence of consciousness and as the reading texts, they are full of the imprints of male creeds, standards, and discipline. Ford’s (2011) research about the women of color faculty experiences with white students in the college classroom demonstrates that as misrecognized invisible/visible raced and gendered bodies, outsiders—within the academy, women of color faculty confront the misreading of students due to traditional Western hegemonic cultural expectations. As Sing-Cheng Yang (2010, p. 188) points out, “being the role model as teachers” conveys the roles of teachers and the way teachers are supposed to be which is ruled by cultures. The physical experiences of female teachers are not only constructed in the life and the world where individuals live but also more importantly organized, dominated, and governed by the institutions of education and the broader structures of the society through the forces of ideology, mediation of the texts and the institutions of power. Therefore, the discipline on bodies, for female teachers, does not start its operation in the institutes of teacher education and development. In fact, before they have the roles of teachers, the physical gender discourse forms great power of supervision, control and discipline because of the stigma of discourses made by biology and science. Whether the discourses are related to the reproduction, motherhood, medication or the professional abilities at workplaces, they are mutually linked to female figures. The cultural values and behavioral norms in patriarchy are internalized in the self-concepts of female figures by means of the knowledge and discourses constructed by males. The position of the subjectivity through the male’s gaze at is produced to supervise others and control themselves at the same time.

In Grumet’s (2003) discussion of the subjectivity of the teacher body, she argues that body is simultaneously both subject and object and this reality in Lacan’s notion of the gaze, which “freezes us in another’s appraisal”. Standing in front of the classroom, receiving the gaze of students, teachers take the risk in objectification and often cope with it by assuming stereotyped costumes or by turning students’ attention elsewhere (as cited by Ingalls, 2006). Especially when the professional images are connected to the discourse of abilities, the embodiments of knowledge become the modes of behavior deliberately performed at educational workplaces. Mainstream ideology operates the power of discipline with the collective gazes of students, then
individuals with the roles of teachers discipline themselves internally at the same time when they continually perform the roles of teachers. In order to protect and maintain the altitude and the power of the authority of teachers, whether they are on the stage, on campus and in the private space where they don’t perform their professional identities, individuals have to take the risk of being questioned and recognized by students or parents and timidly limit their private living space.

**Female Teacher’s Body Politics as a Performativity of Intersectional Subjectivity**

Young (2005) points out the three basic axes in the structure of gender, which are the gendered division of labor, the normalization of heterosexuality and the hierarchy of power in gendered differentiation. Social roles, the structures at workplaces, and the systems of institutions form rules, which have nothing in common logically and some of them even contradict each other. The social roles of female teachers require the demonstration of knowledge and professional abilities, whereas the structures at workplaces are hierarchical based on the gendered division of labor by dividing them to the lower positions and assigning them with less important work. Even the choice of casual clothes and the habits of clothing are produced from the division of classes and occupations, distributions of incomes, hegemonic heterosexuality, the space and anticipation of occasions and activities, and the multiple structures of the possibilities of submissions and transgression of human beings. Therefore, bodies are used as the cultural metaphor, the facts of the practice of meanings and being-in-the-world. Females are in the multiple gendered structures of patriarchal cultural system so that multiple discursive power on physical politics, which is linked, connected, collided, fragmented, compromised, negotiated, reorganized with each other and even flows and transforms, is dependent on the hegemony of male-centered ideology.

Baker supposes the subjectivity is closely connected to the identity. Not only does it merely exist when human beings are being-in-the-world, but also it is a social process constructed and experienced by the subjectivity. In other words, human beings are the production of the society and the culture, and the identity of the subjectivity from the essentialization, generalization and perpetuation from Enlightenment is turned to the decentralization, fragmentation, and multiple-selfness of postmodernism (Baker, 2000). Therefore, the subjectivity of body discourse not only is inscribed with the imprints and meanings of the social cultures but also interacts with gender ideology, sexuality, races, classes, and ages. They manipulate with each other to form the positions and performativity of the subjectivity in different fields and discursive situations. As a result, the interactions and relationships between human beings in the society are embodied by corporeality as the fluid and unstable relationships of power and political forms. Kazan (2005) encountered a male student’s resistance who challenged her authority as a teacher by asking about her age, and she argued that the male student’s resistance may have to do with cultural practices of respecting only elders as teachers or may be more related to gender issues. When teacher’s body embodied this classroom site, students see the embodiment in tension with the cultural norms for the female body and the pedagogical body.

How is a classroom constituted? The discourse of classroom practice is primarily situated in teaching and learning. A complex tangle of many elements, including rules, regulations, spaces, intentions, behaviors, and language(s), all compete—clashing, overlapping, and intersecting within an arena largely shaped by societal expectations, dominant cultural practices, and historical legacies (Connor, Newton, Pennisi, & Quarshie, 2004, p. 506). As female teachers shoulder the subjectivity of the authority in knowledge and the positions of identities, as well as the gap in age, they hold more power, superiority and resources when they face students.
However, once they are placed in the frame of discourses of gender and sexuality, they easily become the object which male/female students gaze at with deepening ideology of patriarchy and are supervised and disciplined. Once when a female teacher is pregnant at the early stage, male students gaze at her abdomen in an unfriendly way and ask to her, “Are you pregnant?” She replies that she just finishes her breakfast, so her abdomen looks a little bit protrudent. Afterwards, she hides her abdomen unconsciously. She tells a white lie because she is not willing to be asked of her private life and being supervised, whereas the male students laugh at her for quite a long time when she has a bulging stomach day after day. Male students also talk about her figure publicly, and say that it is better for a mother to give birth to a baby with a big ass and pelvis. By doing so, the students want to challenge the authority of the images of conventional teachers and transgress the boundary of the relationships between teachers and students. The discourses on gender go beyond the classification of class in education discourse and produce intersectionality and collisions. The relationships between teachers and students are not purely the distinctively separate hierarchy and show the pull and drag of power. Even if teachers have the social power of giving scores, rewards, and punishments, students conduct a battle of power and a fight of collisions by means of criticizing the teachers’ appearances and behaviors, and passively refusing the classes (the down-hearted or absent-minded reactions in class) and so on. Sometimes, the networks of struggling power between both sides of teachers and students even spread to the vertical and horizontal alliance in the social relationships. Originally it is a combat between the teachers/administrative resources and the students/public opinions and sanctions, and then it is turned to be a battle where legal rights of teachers, and parents with mass media attack mutually.

Once when a teacher in a junior high school enters a 9th-graders’ classroom, a student publicly takes out his cell phone and says to her, “Teacher, you can’t scold and blame us for no reasons. Otherwise, I can collect the evidence recorded by cell phone and sue you!” Students are supported by the rising discourse of humanitarianism and then the media shapes the stereotype that students are the minority relatively compared to teachers. Moreover, the statement made by parents is that children are less likely to lie. All the factors lead to the result that a female teacher’s gestures, such as nudging, waving, or touching students on their bodies, would be interpreted and commented with numerous discourses. As a result, an “accidental touch” is prone to be interpreted as an “emotional punishment” by children, parents or mass media and it causes a great disturbance on news and news reports in the end. However, the students who criticize or verbally abuse the teachers get immunity in the position of the subjectivity from the discourses, such as “Children are always allowed to make mistakes” and “Forgiveness is the love of education.” This leads to the battle of power between teachers and students that the shifts of positions and the appearance of the fragmented uncertainty are produced from the conventionally unshakable ideologies of “the heaven, the earth, the emperor, the family and the teachers” to the Western discourses on human rights. Teachers’ authority keeps being challenged and then the boundary of the relationships between teachers and students starts to disappear. The cross-boundary intersectionality of the subjectivity appears at the education scenes.

As figures of teachers are the cultural and intelligent carriers, Harding (1998) points out that the visibility is a political issue, which means the existence in front of the public, the judgment inspected publicly and evaluation. Therefore, it implies the relationship of power and the ownership helps to expand the social control over other subjectivities. The discourses on the authority of teachers empower teachers in the subject positions and with the power of discipline when they convey knowledge. However, because of the visibility on the stage, the power of the discourse on body politics, particularly the ideology of hegemony involved in gender, is
shifted in the hands of students. The physical politics of female teachers are suppressed and constrained by the discourses of patriarchy. The gaze is a particular way of looking: one that is detached, dispassionate and, at the same time, powerful. The gaze contains within it a power/knowledge relation that confers, through its exercise, power to the gazer with respect to that which is gazed upon (Paechter, 1998). Therefore, in order to resist such discipline power of gaze and maintain the professional image and establish authority within the classroom space, female teachers learn to employ various physical and behavioral body management strategies such as presenting themselves as scholarly and non-emotional, holding some distance with students or displaying their wisdom and abilities.

From the perspective of traditional cultures, the requirements on teachers are not merely to convey knowledge and solve questions but also to elevate the social expectations and moral standards of “the models of teachers”. The body voices that we encountered through our own experiences seem to allow a greater sense of agency and personal control (Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003), otherwise a teacher’s body is on stage, and at the same time it is “in the audiences”, close to students. Teachers always recognize that being a model—one who is watched and the figure that copy—but at the same time they are teaching to help students learn, to keep them active and involved. Therefore, the physical images of teachers must conform to the model of the cultural paradigm. The moment teachers enter the classrooms and stand on the stages, their individual preferences, tastes, and even self-cognition and self-comprehension are confronted with the strict scans and inspections of the gazes from the students. They are judged from what style the clothes belong to, whether the hairstyle and makeup are paired appropriately, and even whether the overall cutting fits their figures and sizes and so on. Teachers are examined carefully as if they are placed under X-rays. According to Benzer’s (2012) research, 96% of teachers highlighted the importance of their dress in the classroom. The opinion that implicates teachers’ duties demonstrates the awareness of the teachers about students’ careful observations and imitations of their teachers. When my students point at a tiny piece of tissue on my hair and mistake it as a piece of dandruff, I have to try my best to make a clarification to erase the facial expressions of my students, which shows doubts. Also, I am kept being corrected constantly with exclamation because I wear a top with some tiny holes by design. Before I show my true colors, my identity is a teacher, and a teacher is not allowed to make any mistakes. As a teacher demonstrates knowledge or solves a question, and when there is a mistake, the position and power of authority and wisdom is collapsed because of the doubts and corrections of students. Similarly, teachers’ figures are the cultural symbol of knowledge, morals, and norms. Once it escapes from the domination of the interpellation of ideology, the manipulations of power and knowledge which students gaze at overwhelm the resistance of selfness. Although teachers debate and clarify with efforts, still students exercise the power of setting the standards and discipline on teachers with the gazes they have. Sometimes the impacts of the rumors from students do not disappear when students graduate. With the spreading power of technology, the Internet and interpersonal networks, the comments made by students and the relationships between teachers and students last year after year so that it is difficult for teachers to overturn the inferiority and make it right. That is one of the reasons why teachers remind each other to “suppress first, and then it is easier to behave the students” and why these discourses are regarded as the standards of teaching.

Therefore, the traditional concept of power can not explain the fluidity of power and the essence of pull and drag represented by the interactions between teachers and students. On the contrary, from the perspective of poststructuralism, Foucault’s explanation of body and power more involves the intersectionality of the discourses on power and figures. In Foucault’s opinion, discourses, technology, and surveillances are
instruments of power to maintain the social order and the interests of the privileged. However, power is not the result of the pure resistance or fixed subjugation from both sides. Instead, it is a form of government (Drefus & Rabinow, 1983). There is not a so-called top-down mechanism of power and control. Instead, it is a fluid relationship of mutually intersected collisions and compromises, and also a micro process of management and control. Students’ physical display of bodily aggression or resistance such as disrespecting gestures, eye rolling, inattentive gaze or silence always indirectly challenge the presence of teachers in the classroom through a series of “micro-transgressions” (Ford, 2011), and teachers may shift the disadvantaged situation by using their role as an authority figure to attain deference and respect. Therefore, teachers are viewed as the prime instruments of conveying mainstream knowledge and the governance of power that operates above them does not always come from the levels of managements in the upper structures. It may come from the politics of public opinions everywhere, and even the power of supervision and discipline from students, as well as the combination of social control and self-discipline. By the analysis of poetry as texts about the body constituted as schooled beings in the process of schooling, Connor, Newton, Pennisi and Quarshie (2004) argue the dynamics between students and teachers that are full of visible dominant and resistant forces operating within the classroom. Students and teachers come to understanding order through the creation of boundaries and regulations along with the consequences of transgression such as touching and hitting between each other.

However, feminists argue the system of gender differentiation comprehensively cover all institutions and structure of patriarchy. As a result, the physical gender of female teachers is highlighted and signified ahead of their professional roles and still the sexualization of teachers’ bodies truly exists in the interactions between teachers and students. Johnson’s research (2006) demonstrated that no matter how thoroughly the women student teachers disguised themselves in the teacher uniform, they were acutely aware of being noticed by students—particularly males. It didn’t seem to matter how unlikely or unattractive the potential pairing might be; the underlying sexual tension was still present. The bodies of women teachers are appraised with a high level of surveillance. Classes give female teachers “ratings” on their physical attributes so that students use body appraisals as power tools to dilute female authority. Female teachers often seek to control this process by covering up, concealing their bodies and censoring bodily movement such as hovering behind lecterns for concealing breasts or sitting rather standing for concealing legs (Sinclair, 2005). No matter how much a teacher tries to downplay her sexuality through dress and demeanor, her position of authority is attractive; in reducing the teacher to sex object, a student captures some of that power for himself. To believe a teacher-student relationship, sexualized or not, can ever be in balance overlooks the back-and-forth negotiation that constitutes power and resistance. Compared to the subjectivity of male teachers and their undoubted positions of authority, it is an existence of self-evident “truth” that there is a surmounting control of intelligence over figures. When female teachers execute the missions of supervising and disciplining the students, it is mandatory that they have to behave themselves with self-discipline and control their physical appearances, such as tidiness, being well disciplined and not being overweight. All of the actions are made to avoid the connection between disorder and irrationality, and even to present themselves as non-sexuality (the clothing is not allowed to be overly fit or show sexual characteristics, in order not to lose the function of conveying knowledge due to the fantasies of the males). It is an embodiment of self-clarification and self-improved profession with efforts.

Furthermore, students give positive comments on female teachers because of their figures, outlooks or appearances. Also, female teachers are overall questioned about their teaching abilities and personalities because they fail the social expectations or the desires or demands of the students. As a result, female teachers
have to internalize the standards of mainstream discourses and cultural norms, and fall into a vicious cycle of regular discipline and self-supervision in order to maintain their positions in the field of education. Cooks (2007) demonstrates that as teachers, we might assume our competence to be rooted in how we teach and how we help others to learn and yet our bodies also reflect the power and desire of the dominant culture. Our race, our size, our physical ability (and less visible signs of class or sexuality) are dimensions of cultural performance both attached to and often separated from our teaching. Additionally, mirroring the representations of females in general the female teacher is fetishized in popular culture as both the highly sexed object of adolescent male desire and the asexual mother figure totally divorced from sexual appetites or bodily desires. The operations of such conflicting discourses on female teachers produce abnormal “unconventional female teachers” whose symbols are about showing their physical sexual characteristics, such as their cleavages and curves, or conversely another image of loving, caring, simple and devoted traditional mothers. Mass media duplicate and demonstrate these two extreme cases so that the former is pair with the passionate and mad responses from male students; on the contrary, the latter shows heart-warming and thankful hugs. However, the minds of female teachers are invisible. Before showing wisdom and professional abilities, they are merely women, and only can be seen and gazed at with the attributes of women. Isn’t this exactly the embodiment of the depression, desire, depreciation and confusion on female figures in the gendered structures and cultures of patriarchy?

The manipulation of power of physical politics on female teachers not only just exists in the system of education but also be supervised and controlled by the entire society every time and everywhere like what Foucault called the panopticon. The body politics with public opinions is conducted by the power of the gazes and the discipline on figures with instant, collective and anonymous gazes (Fillingham & Susser, 1995). In order to achieve the purpose of the inculcation and communication of dominant ideologies, teachers are strictly disciplined and monitored, and viewed as the material existence, the visibility of bodies is used as the main domain and base for the conflicts among the discourses. Just like what Esposito (2011) argues that female students of color at a predominantly white institution encounter uncomfortable gaze exerted by the Whites and feel hyper-visible on campus, female teachers’ bodies in high schools in Taiwan are marked with a role model (femininity/professional) that looks different from the majority of the students. Even if teachers leave the education locales and unload the roles of teachers, as what Althusser points out, with the recruitment of ideology and the constant calls of identity, many female teachers share the same experiences: they can’t stop reacting intuitively and looking backwards when they hear greetings of “teacher”; or they are concerned that they are recognized as teachers based on the clothes they wear or the characteristics of their behavior with the fear of comprehensive inspections. The former is the evidence of internalization of self-supervision with the strict discipline and the latter is the resistance of the subjectivity produced by/on the power of discipline. The moment when teachers privately seek freedom, the recognition of the roles of the teachers is the same as the web of power of expectations of social roles and cultural norms of morals that overwhelm them. As long as they are positioned, the statements, such as “A teacher is not supposed to be narrow-minded” or “Does a teacher do this kind of stuff?” and so on, come out. Things that common people can do, such as bargaining in the traditional markets or jumping with joy, teachers are not allowed to do so because they are viewed as the paradigm with the higher standards and expectations. Even some teachers choose to purchase or live in distant places in order to flee from the discipline of gazes everywhere (Johnson, 2006). Nevertheless, teachers don’t escape from the operation of the power of discipline. When they go shopping or clubbing, they take into
consideration whether the ways of getting dressed arouse some criticisms or whether they would be judged in a negative way when they do such “misfit” activities and so on. Such supervisions and panic follow the teachers. Besides, with the constant reinforcement of comments and mass media, including the politics of public opinions, all kinds of technological methods are all-set and established and serve their duties of supervision, which makes the female teachers’ bodies inescapable.

Dow-ling Huang (1986) analyzes the mutual penetrations of the intersectionality of power and discourses. Power lies in discourses, and discourses themselves are power. Power is like the blood circulating in the inner of the discourses, and discourses are like the pulses of power. Based on this concept, the more there are discourses, the higher the density of the network of power is. Also, when the force of the manipulative mechanism of power is stronger, the individual involved is not only disciplined by discourses but also given freedom by the positions of the subjectivity produced by discourses. Then, the level of rationalization in the relationships of power extends to the fullest. In view of this, the discourses that female bodies are objectified, and are formed and positioned by the myths of beauty, the medical technology, and the scientific knowledge constructed from the perspectives of males, and they perform the subjectivity of selfness. Freedom and resistance, as the opposite of the enforcement of power, are a mutually inducing and competing relationship (Drefus & Rabinow, 1983). The subjectivity has the freedom of resistance, but still is trapped in the web of discourses. Instead, power manipulates and spreads because of the resistance. As a result, the resistance can’t be independent from the relationships of power. In fact, it scatters at the intersections of the networks of power. The physical politics of female teachers at education locales is the embodiment of the complicated flows of power.

The Resistance and Performativity of Agency of Female Teachers

However, from Foucault’s perspective, the discipline penetrates individuals by means of the division of practice, training and standardization, and systematization in space, and at the same time knowledge, power and control are included in it. Subjectivity is produced by means of hierarchal classification and denominating in an efficient, productive and “normalizing” way (Baker, 2000). From Foucault’s perspective, the subjectivity is constructed by discourses, and constrained by the norms of discourses and as the product of power because discourses set the norms of what human beings can say in the context of the society and culture. However, the impacts made by discourses are that the subjectivity is described as the “docile bodies”, which deprives the agency of the subjectivity. In view of this, the position of the subjectivity from Foucault’s discourses and perspectives on bodies lack of the positive dimensions of the agents and the foundation of political movements. Shi-Ching Wu (2007) compares Foucault’s viewpoints of bodies with Bourdieu’s and points out that from Foucault’s perspective, the bodies of agents implicitly include the limited agency of passive subjectivity, while from Bourdieu’s perspective, on the restriction of social structures, the agents with social customs conduct a dynamic relationship of dialectics on physical habits and fields. Even though both discourses contain the meanings of social criticism on bodies, they ignore the political agency and the practical effectiveness on the transformation of female bodies, and particularly the possibilities of positions of articulation and politics of physical resistance of the inferior women. Turner (1984) also criticizes that the perspective of Foucault’s “subjectivity of discourses” is pessimistic and lack of the life-affirming instinct in physical phenomenology. Turner thinks the physical embodiments of the subjectivity swing on the tense axes of these discourses, such as individuals and society, nature and culture, and structures and agency and so on whereas the importance of the
agency and consciousness of human beings should not be neglected. In particular, the discourses of feminisms, which promote the necessity of political movements, support the perspective that Foucault’s critical viewpoints on discourses and physical discipline offer the appropriate foundation of liberation on female bodies, but criticize the unlimited constraints and strength of his discourses which suppress individuals’ energy of swaying and overturning the structures and lack the concrete resources of taking political actions.

Generally speaking, it is believed that humans’ agency is determined by society. Human behaviors and the potentials that produce differences are constructed by actions. Human beings have the wills to make selections and decisions according to not merely self-consciousness but also the regular customs that society determines. Actions are constrained in the existing life experiences, social situations and cultural contexts, and the differences of judgments are produced (Baker, 2000). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) define human agency as the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. That is, agency is a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its “iterational” or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a “projective” capability to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a “practical-evaluative” capability to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). Actors are always living simultaneously in the past, future, and present, and adjusting the various temporalities of their empirical existence to one another (and to their empirical circumstances) in more or less imaginative or reflective ways. They continuously engaged patterns and repertoires from the past, project hypothetical pathways forward in time, and adjust their actions to the exigencies of emerging situations. Moreover, actors may switch between (and reflexively transform) their orientations toward action thereby changing their degrees of flexible, inventive, and critical response toward structuring contexts.

Figures are not just a production of cultural metaphors and power relations. It is a place for self-knowledge, performativity, compromises and negotiations (Benson, 1997). The conflicts, fragmentation, recombination and reconstruction among discourses oscillate at the boundaries, disjuncture or the fractures of discourses. There is always a possibility of transgressing over the boundaries and resistance. Teachers are not always unchallenged at higher positions even though they hold the power of knowledge and positions given by the society, the sense of authority associated with the age gaps, and even the determinant power of scoring and labeling and classifying the values of students. The passive resistance of students in class, the whispers of public opinions or even the gazes and inspections of criticism and examinations undermine the social authority for teachers, and lead to the slope and flow of power relations. Moreover, the positions of the sub-cultures of students are overturned by the comments on human care and political verbal expressions exaggerated by mass media, and then the stigmatized reputation and the collapse of professional images of teachers are produced in the institutions of secondary education. The bodies of female teachers are used at the intersections of mental-intellectual and material-physical dimensions and become both the main objects of objectification and the subjects covered with discourses and networks of discipline. How to exercise the cultural and social capital and form the agency to shake the frames of gender in patriarchy in the restrained social structures in different fields and contexts of relationship becomes one of the focal points of political dynamics what feminisms concentrate on.
Yi-Fang Li and Jui-Fu Chen (2009) analyze the reproduction and the looseness of the frame of gender in the fields of sports with the reproduction theory of Bourdieu, the subjectivity of Foucault’s discourses, and the concept of consciousness awareness of self-reflection in the dualism of structure-agency of Giddens and so on. They demonstrate that process of the agency of individuals that includes “self-reflection—conscious awareness of the subjectivity—action” can shake the existing social structures and cultural norms so that generate physical politics of resistance and deliberately overturning. Therefore, even though female teachers are put under the tough institutions of discipline with the ideological apparatus of a state, they always have some off-track possibilities and opportunities in the cracks of the collision, negotiation and fragmentation among several discourses. The appearances of teachers in the discourse of discipline on “good teachers” should be tidiness, simplicity, long skirts and pants, and elegance and the avoidance of overly “informal” clothes such as jeans, slippers or shorts. Though the discourse of “good teachers” manipulates invisibly in multiple styles gradually, at the same time the demonstrations and performativity of female teachers’ bodies with unconventional behaviors also quietly break the limits. They perform the individual agency accumulated with the growth of age and intelligence with putting their position of the subjectivity in different discourse temporarily, shifting the impermanent identities and dissolving the boundaries of role regulations. Thus, the cohesion of identities may not be confirmed or necessarily supposed. In the atmosphere of postmodernism, the agency is accumulated, pieced together, reorganized and penetrated in different fields and contexts of relationships. The intersectionality and fluidity of the subjectivity always positions its site and finds the ways to survive and respond.

Therefore, individual’s agency what Ford (2011) argues includes assimilative, pluralistic, and transformative strategies. Transformative strategy is to create a counter-hegemonic narrative, that is, bodily misrecognition can potentially provide an important opportunity for change, it might be advantageous for female teachers to view these exchanges as teachable moments. In other words, rather than regarding misrecognitions or stereotypes as a wholly negative process, female teachers could use the gap between societally constructed images of female teachers (e.g., mother/caregiver, feminine, conservative, overcautious, emotional) and students’ lived experiences with them as a mechanism for confronting their previously held beliefs. Moreover, multiplicity offers an alternative, a way for female teachers to strategically resist identity constructions through stereotype manipulation; in doing so, students might be better able to accept the tensions inherent in ostensibly conflicting gender, class, age, and professional identities, tensions that fuel bodily misrecognition.

**Conclusion**

Politics is a phenomenon of the flow and conflicts of different power relations. In fact, a society is an interpersonal social network of interaction constructed by intricate power relations. Power is everywhere. What is truly dreadful in power is not the traditional top-down suppression and coercion, but the unconscious spread in details. It gradually influences and forms individuals’ bodies and the viewpoints of the world. Bodies are used as a primitive “stuff” to carry and load power so they reflect how individuals understand the living world, and then decide how they should/can act. Besides, bodies are used as the mediation of how we understand the world, also as the existing organisms and the carriers of culture. They involve the variation of population of the living, the elder, the sick, and the dead. Bodies display the behaviors with biological and natural meanings but at the same time demonstrate the symbolic codes and metaphors of many cultures and societies, and therefore become the fields where many struggles over knowledge and discourses happen.
Since individuals can’t escape from the influence and formation of discourse power, then the converse statements offered by feminism, the resistance and the subversiveness on the male-centered knowledge in patriarchal culture and the discourses dominated by males, can be regarded the better knowledge of female recognition of the world and interpretation of physical experiences. Since gender is a differentiated politics positioned in the society, history, culture and symbols, the viewpoints from poststructuralism feminisms, may offer the position of subjectivity for such the melt, flow, fragmentation, intersectionality and uncertainty of power in discourses of gender, interpretation, reading, boundary on bodies. Poststructural feminists form a mobile positioning but keep the critical spirits of passionate detachment for dominant ideologies (Haraway, 1991). Subjectivity of the body, then, is not a static clip of a motion picture. The social-constructed nature of body, for it is indeed a postmodern formlessness, an ephemeral cultural artifact. It is, in the Derridian sense, absent of a center, always discursive. The body is always redefined. This constant violation of any notion of centrality or stability of body—whether we think that origination is in our sense of self, in student expectations, in our performed intentions or in the elements of our epistemological approaches to teaching—can always open to interpretation (Ingalls, 2006). Therefore, the body politics of female teachers in secondary schools has been manipulated mutually by the knowledge and the discursive power formed in patriarchal culture, and informed the function of internalization of supervision, control and discipline. Female teachers generate simultaneous the self-discipline and the resistance of subjectivity in the conflicts and contradictions between teachers’ roles and physical identities when they are trapped in the systems of gazes, supervision and surveillance everywhere. The analysis from Foucault offers delicate and implicit manipulations and influences of discourses. However, the gender perspectives of feminisms can broaden the radical space of political movements and find out the positions of agency in their own bodies and the positive subjectivity of discourses.

References
EXPLORING THE BODY POLITICS OF FEMALE TEACHERS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE


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