

***“A simple gal here, longing for loving, mutual understanding and stable relationship”*: Gendered performances in online personal advertisements**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representations of femininity and masculinity in the discourse of 200 online personal advertisements by Malaysian men and women. Using quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this study investigates the ways in which identity is gendered in the personals – how male and female identities, via nominal group and clauses, may be associated with certain behavioural traits, emotions and social activities – and to demonstrate identity variations that are construed by these categorizations. Nominal group and clause (Halliday, 1994) form my points of entry and patterns are semantically classified according to ATTITUDE (Martin & White, 2005) and Social Actor categorization (Van Leeuwen, 2008). Advertisers appear to orient to what is expected in the context of courtship initiation in this particular genre, and are found to produce socially specific verbal practices that correspond to stereotypical constructions of gender identity. More significant, however, is the construal of an identity type that is specifically Malaysian – i.e. the simple person.

Keywords: Femininity, masculinity, systemic functional linguistics, attitude, social actor categorization

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the construction of feminine and masculine Malaysian identities in a selection of personal advertisements

from an online dating website called my.match.com. This investigation follows a corpus-based discourse analysis approach, employing the tools from Social Actor categorization (van Leeuwen, 2008) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), including nominal group, transitivity analysis (e.g. Halliday, 1994) and appraisal analysis (Martin & White, 2005). The aim is to contribute to an understanding

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of the ways in which gendered identities are construed and social relations enacted between the advertisers and the readers.

PERSONAL ADVERTISEMENT AND IDENTITY

A personal advertisement (hereafter personal ad) constitutes a distinct generic form, which is related to the small ad family of genres. While small ads traditionally offer a thing (e.g. a car) or a service (e.g. plumbing), the personal ad ‘offers but, most essentially, seeks’ (Shalom, 1997, p. 186) a romantic partner. Each construed identity in a personal ad is an offer that is intended to be exchanged for what is sought by others in the dating scene. The self becomes a commodified entity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) and advertisers compete for the time and effort of other members to read and respond to their profiles. With these aims in mind, advertisers are pushed into crafting a description that will positively highlight their identity in ways that they believe will help them achieve these objectives.

Personal ads are an ideal site for examining the construction of identities. Salient preferences emerge in the selection of traits and the associated identity categories (e.g., physical attributes) and accordingly, these advertisements provide insights into advertisers’ idealizations of self-identities and the behaviour of people seeking relationships in different societies and cultures (e.g., Baker, 2003; Gama e Silva, 2007). To date, studies of personal ads have mainly focused on the patterns of represented attributes in relation to identity,

gender, age, sexuality and ethnicity in the written text (e.g., Jones, 2000; Kesumawati *et al.*, 2006). Additionally, advertisers also evaluate themselves positively in their written descriptions. Thus, attitudinal expressions are very common in the texts, forming one of the main resources used for promoting identity and aligning with others. Accordingly, this study attempts to examine the features and interaction of identity categorisations with attitudinal resources in advertisers’ written descriptions. In examining the range of resources that are used in constructing identities, this paper sets out to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the linguistic resources used in the personal ads? What are the traits frequently tendered by the advertisers?
2. What type of feminine and masculine identities do the resources construe?

Performing Gender

Gender in this paper is understood using Butler’s (1990, 1996) performativity theory. This theory perceives gender not as a simple duality of feminine and masculine characterization, but rather as a fluid concept resulting from and materializing through continuous and persistent discursive performance of ourselves as male or female, influenced by our social surroundings and social expectations. Butler states that “gender is a matter of doing and its effects rather than an inherent attribute, an intrinsic feature” (Breen *et al.*, 2001, p. 18). She

questions the notion of natural, biological or true gender identity, and persuasively argues that there is no such thing as a natural gender identity. This forms the basic premise of Butler's gender identity; as opposed to being a stable category and entity, gender identity is a shifting and fluid concept that comes into being by virtue of our discursive performance.

Performing Masculine and Feminine Identities

The identity that we develop based on our gender identification as a man or woman is termed as 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. In this study, following Stets and Burke (2000, p. 1), femininity and masculinity are defined as one's gendered identity, which refers to the degree to which individuals see themselves as being masculine or feminine, given what it means to be a man or a woman in a specific community. For example, being the bread-winner of the family, or fit, muscular and sporty are two common types of masculinity (Baker, 2003, 2005), whereas being emotional, caring, slim and attractive is the typical displays of femininity (Williams, 2007). In any community of practice, some forms of masculine and feminine acts tend to be more typical. These behaviours are thus perceived as the normative standards of masculinity and femininity, labelled as hegemonic masculinity and femininity (e.g. Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). However, diversity in personalities – in behaviour, beliefs and attitude – of each individual man and woman naturally creates

competing ways of performing masculinity and femininity, leading to the concept of pluralized masculinities and femininities (e.g., Bordo, 1999; Baker, 2008).

SFL and Identity

The concepts of metafunctions, instantiation and individuation in SFL frame the current investigation, providing a means of accounting for verbal mode of meanings in identity construal.

Metafunctions

In SFL, there are three patterns of functions that language is used for: the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunction (see Halliday, 1985). As I am only focusing on the ideational and the interpersonal metafunctions, my example will only focus on how these two simultaneously unfold in text. For example, *sweet-looking and lovely girl* is construing ideational representations of the advertiser's physical 'reality', as well as interpersonally evaluating her physical appearance. These demonstrate the simultaneous realizations of both ideational and interpersonal aspects of identity in a clause.

Instantiation

In SFL, instantiation is a relation between the language system and an instance of use in text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). For example, *I am a sweet-looking and lovely girl* is one instance of the attributive clause from the clause system network (e.g. Halliday, 1994). Three concepts have been

proposed to help understand the process of representing meaning as they are formulated and re-formulated in text – these three concepts are coupling, commitment and iconisation (see Martin, 2008; Zappavigna *et al.*, 2008). As this study is concerned with how identity is performed ideationally and interpersonally, coupling is the most relevant concept to this study.

“Coupling refers to the way in which meanings combine - across strata, metafunctions, ranks, and simultaneous systems (and across modalities).”

(Martin, 2010, p. 17)

A sweet-looking and lovely girl is an example of metafunctional coupling in which ideational (physical attributes) couples with interpersonal resources (positive attitude) to construe a positive representation of self in a personal ad.

Individuation

Individuation relates the use of language to its users. It is a way of theorizing the construction of a community by virtue of the language that is used by individuals. Individuation requires a researcher to look at how an individual uses language to categorize her/himself and to construe her/his identity, the reason for choosing one meaning choice over another and the purpose for which it is used in the text.

Affiliation

Affiliation is enacted as identities are negotiated through similarities and differences in values. Knight (2010) conceptualizes shared (similarities) and unshared values (differences) as couplings of ideational and interpersonal meanings. These couplings are offered as social bonds by which affiliation is built around in an interaction. Accordingly, a bond is defined as “the smallest social unit that can be negotiated discursively (communed around, laughed at or rejected...)” (Knight, 2010, p. 207). A proposed bond in this study could be understood as a frequently tendered unit (e.g. a noun) in the data. The following is the rationale. If couplings are values around which people commune, the number of people communing around a value is the indicative of the bondability or in the case of personal ads, the mateability of that value. If *travel* is a word that is frequently tendered by the advertiser (i.e. through its high number of occurrence) then *travel* is a value around which many single people on the website are communing around. Corpus linguistic programmes are used to generate frequency lists of words in the corpus and for determining the presence of bonds in the data.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data

The corpus for this study consists of 200 personal advertisements from my.match.com sampled between March 2008 and September 2008 placed by Malaysian men

from the age of 22-36 and women from the age of 20-32. The 200 adverts constitute the specialized corpus (Baker, 2006) used in this study. This corpus was sub-divided into 2 sets of 100 personal ads based on gender, with tokens of running words totalling 31,899 for women and 33,730 for men.

Methodology

The methodology involves a combination of corpus linguistic techniques and discourse analysis of texts. The corpus of 65,659 words requires the use of a large-scale computerized corpus analysis method, a semi-automated small-scale corpus analysis and a manual analysis of patterns of meaning-making resources. Linguistic features are grouped according to a number of parameters, drawn upon transitivity categories from systemic functional grammar (e.g. Halliday, 1994), ATTITUDE from systemic functional discourse semantics (Martin & White, 2005) and discourse-analytical concepts from social actor categorization (van Leeuwen, 2008). The corpora of text are annotated using two complementary corpus software programmes called Wordsmith (Scott, 2004) and UAM Corpus tools (O'Donnell, 2008) for identification of linguistic instances and patterns of usage in the data. Frequency lists, concordances and collocational analyses of the lexical and clausal items form the basis upon which discursive themes are determined, construing different types of online gendered identities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Linguistic resources realizing two masculine, two feminine and one Malaysian identities are identified based on the semantic categorizations of grammatical and discourse patterns found in concordance and collocation analysis. Section 4.1 examines the representations of masculinity in the men's ads. Section 4.2 examines representations of femininity in the women's ads and section 4.3 focuses on the Malaysian identity.

Masculinities in Malaysian Personals

Corpus evidence points to a reproduction of hegemonic masculinity through physical, financial and occupational strength. The two main masculine themes that have emerged from the results of the analyses are discourses of 1) educational, occupational and financial capacity, and 2) male athleticism and fitness. These will be described in next sub-sections

Successful and Financially Stable Man

A successful and financially stable man is realized through a variety of linguistic and socio-semantic patterns in the texts. There is a total of 64 clausal instances of occupational functionalisation by the men with instances commonly realized through material processes construing occupational activities (i.e. different ways of behaving at work). The frequent number of material processes suggests that the working men are generally construed as doers of occupational activities as demonstrated in the following statements:

(I) Assist client in identifying corporate/engagement objectives and provide strategy and solutions. Actually I spend a lot time reading online technical article everyday and every morning.

Attributive relational clauses are also frequently deployed in the men's texts, rendering them as Carriers with ascribed occupational roles, as can be seen in the following examples:

I am a photographer.

I am a land logistics consultant.

If the ability to provide for one's family is one characteristic of a successful man (e.g. Smith & Beal, 2007), then a successful working man could be defined as someone who is financially competent and professionally thriving. Successful masculinity in the personal ads is a linguistic configuration involving patterns of possession, emotion and positive JUDGEMENT of behaviour. Analysis shows that the Premodifier *stable* frequently couples with the nouns *career* (and its synonyms such as *job*) and *income*; accordingly, *stable* is therefore a collocate of the two words, inscribing positive judgment of TENACITY (stability implies dependability and security) and CAPACITY (one's ability to hold down a job as well as his ability to provide for his partner). Baker (2003) commented that traditionally the concept of the breadwinner has always been associated with the man of the family, and by demonstrating their financial security, these advertisers appear

to be invoking a positive judgement of CAPACITY – implying their success at being a man. What follows are instantiations of financial and occupational CAPACITY and TENACITY:

i have more income, a stable job...

I'm 30 this year, with a stable career and income.

As observed by Dunbar (quoted in O'Kelly, 1994), people indicate personal success by 'identifying what job they do, whether they are educated, or what kind of car they drive', all of which are found in the men's description. The statements below encode personal and social achievements through a variety of processes and nominal groups. The relational possessive *have* and material possessions are not only used repeatedly to mark ownership of qualification, experience and entities that invoke status symbol (e.g. *Omega watch*) and success (e.g. *a degree*), but also to assign these men into a class of people who have made it professionally.

My car, I drive an Altis. My laptop, it's a new Acer model. My watch... Omega Seamaster 2005.

(I have) A dream job for many others out there. Where everything is paid for...

Related to this concept of achievement is the idea of solvency, a feature not often mentioned, but when it is mentioned (interestingly only by the men) it can be an overt declaration of solvency such as

I am financially stable. Solvency is also invoked through occupational activities such as *I have built a successful business*, and leisure description such as *enjoy travelling – current and past jobs afford me this lifestyle*. Social researchers have consistently found that women value social status, the ability to acquire resources and the willingness to share them when searching for a partner more than men (e.g. Okami & Shakelford, 2001). My corpus of Malaysian ads appear to point to an awareness by some of the male advertisers of which traits are highly valued by women in general and hence, the frequent inscriptions of educational/professional capacity and solvency by them in their ads.

Success is not only linked to achievement or displays of material belongings, but also, to the ways in which enthusiasm and interest are expressed towards their jobs. These successful men are also observed to demonstrate positive AFFECT towards their job through inscriptions of directed happiness, exemplified in the examples below.

I love my current job, challenging.

I like my job because i like to take a nice picture.

How success comes about and how it is handled is also a distinct theme in the discourse. Integrity and dedication among these working men are inscribed through positive judgement of VERACITY (e.g. *honest*) and TENACITY (e.g. *work hard*) as illustrated in the following examples:

(I am) making a honest living,

I become full-time blogger... It was a bold but right decision.

(I am) working dedicatedly, smart & hard...

Occupational and financial success among these men is the sum of all of the above realizations. It is not only a matter of displaying capacity through occupational, educational and material possessions as previous scholars have repeatedly claimed (e.g. Smith & Beal, 2007); the masculine working man is also constructed through repeated displays of positive VERACITY, TENACITY and AFFECT, revealing the ways these men behave and feel towards their profession.

The Fit and Athletic Man

Masculinity is associated with qualities such as strength or confidence that are considered typical of men. Semi-automated analysis of the men's personal ads have revealed frequent displays of physical strength realized through leisure activities associated with competence and mastery. The following are instantiations of this feature:

I engage a lot in outdoor activities

Last year i went for bike rally event that cycling around Singapore

There is a prosody of positive emotions realized through affective states such as *like, love* and *enjoy*, construing directed

happiness towards sporting activities and entities. Athleticism among the men is not only constructed by means of doing activities to keep fit and healthy, it is also about *liking* and *loving* whatever sporting activities they are engaged in.

I like martial art...

I love to swim, most of the swimming pools in Klang Valley area i did pay a visit.

AS AFFECT is construed, what the advertisers are also constructing are social categorizations based on the articulation of emotion (*like, love, enjoy*) towards sporting activities. This is termed as social lifestyle by van Leeuwen (2007, p. 214), "Such forms of expression are social because they not only allow people to express interpretations of the world, and shared affiliations with certain values and attitudes, but also to recognize others, across the globe, as sharing these interpretations and affiliations". The fit and athletic type is inextricably linked to a lifestyle based on competence and mastery.

Being active and sporty also implies being fit and therefore toned in appearance. Several adjectives are used as Premodifiers to represent the athletic masculine man (e.g. *fit & athletic-built*). Realizations of physicality also include overt declarations of height and weight (e.g. *I am tall about 178cm and weight 73kg.*). Corpus evidence reveals that the word *tall* is often tendered by the male subjects. Research has shown that taller men's ads get more responses than those who are smaller in stature (Lynn

& Shurgot, 1984). Higher responses clearly suggest that being tall is a desirable quality in a man. Accordingly, the adjective *tall* (and its numeral equivalent e.g. *I am 175cm tall*) is not only construing a physically tall man, but is also implying a desirable male persona. The fact that the word conveys both ideational and interpersonal meanings renders it a mateable coupling which women gravitate towards. The frequent tendering of the trait appears to suggest that some of the advertisers are aware of the value it carries, and are playing up on the word, by offering it as a bond to affiliate with women.

Consistent with the results from previous studies on gender identities (e.g. Baker, 2005; Williams, 2007), stereotypes of masculinity are still being performed in the adverts. Men frequently focus on their occupational and financial capacity and also their physical appearance and sporting behaviours, constructing two representations consistent with the hegemonic masculinities of success and strength.

Femininities in Malaysian Personals

Overall, patterns of linguistic resources come together to create two forms of feminine identities based on 1) positive AFFECT (e.g. *loving*) and 2) positive judgements of CAPACITY (e.g. *intelligent*) and TENACITY (e.g. *hardworking*).

The Affectionate Woman

Stereotypically, women are expected to behave in ways that exude submissiveness, nurturance and to display a higher moral

sense than men (Fiske *et al.*, 1999). In general, findings reveal frequent instances of nurturing and emotive expressions in the data. These characteristics consequently construe one type of hegemonic femininity (Bordo, 1999), i.e. the affectionate woman.

The affectionate woman comes into being by virtue of positive AFFECT. AFFECT involves displaying some kind of emotional response or being in a particular emotional state such as *loving*, *jovial* and *cheerful* are frequent in the data. In the following examples, affective mental states enact forms of positive dispositions.

I am caring, jovial, friendly, humorous, very loving...

I'm romantic...i love being close and affectionate.

The word *passionate* is found in both sets of corpora, albeit four times more often in the women's personal ads than the men's. There is a marked difference in usage by the men and women. *Passionate* is typically used as an affective process directed towards entities such as *work* and *things* by the men, whereas women in general used it to characterize their behaviour (e.g. *I am a passionate gal*). However, when *passionate* is used by the women as an affective state directed towards a phenomenon, targets tend to be of an abstract nature, for example an interest (e.g. *about dance*), religion (e.g. *servicing God*) and life in general (e.g. *about life*). Overall, the higher rate of occurrence in the women's texts is itself suggestive of the passionate nature of some feminine

personae.

What makes these women affectionate is also indicated through their frequent usage of the word *love*. Structurally, *I love* makes up nearly 30% out of all clausal instances in the corpus – but only 13% of the men's. Semantically and collocationally, there are 55 instances of happiness directed at a variety of leisure activities ranging from social to stimulus-avoidance to intellectual endeavours, as shown in the following examples.

(I) Also love learning and self improvement

I do love my friends and dogs a lot! i have 2 brothers, both whom i love dearly

People make up 12% of their objects of affection (e.g. *family, friends, you*). *Me* is also used but it forms a part of the configuration of their statement of goals, for example *I wanted to have a guy who can love me*. Related to this affective feature, behavioural traits inscribing positive NORMALITY such as *easy going* are also frequently taken up by these women as part of their identity representations.

Consistent with results from previous research on personal ads, gender stereotypes of femininity are still being performed in the verbiage; the female advertisers convey their warmth and affectionate nature through frequent instances of positive affect.

Empowered and Successful Woman

Analysis has revealed frequent patterns of linguistic resources performing success and empowerment through assertiveness and self-reliance. As opposed to the narrative of the affectionate, the empowered woman is characterized by social-psychological qualities inscribing positive TENACITY (e.g. *aggressive*) and CAPACITY (e.g. *intelligent*) through her occupational activities and roles, her educational achievements and her joy in performing leisure activities.

The frequent occupational and educational functionalization suggests that empowered women are generally construed as doers of activities and performers of institutional and leisurely roles, as demonstrated in the following examples.

*I am a dance instructor/dancer/
choreographer/rhythmic
gymnastics coach.*

*I'm managing the company's
branding and marketing
communications efforts...*

Representations of empowered women are also realized through identification statements (i.e. who I am), where the advertisers are construed as Carriers of inherent Attributes through attributive relational clauses. As the examples below illustrate, social-psychological qualities construe the essence of mental (and occasionally physical) capacity and tenacity among these women.

*I am intelligent, inquisitive and
optimistic...*

*I am responsible, energetic,
independent, outgoing and self-
motivated person.*

Positive CAPACITY is linked to educational achievement through the appropriation of discourses of literacy and education. If the men's success is ideationally construed by means of attributive possessives (e.g. *I have an MBA*), the women appear to be more inclined towards perceiving achievement as a process-oriented experience rather than an object of possession, as shown in the following examples.

*I took a double major in International
Studies and Communications &
Media*

I have also completed my MBA...

In addition to the above activities, the women are also expressing their positive emotion towards educational experience and knowledge and also towards occupational and intellectual activities. These are instantiated in the following statements.

I love exploring the world of ideas...

*I love what I do and am hungry for
more opportunities.*

Woods (2007) noted a theme running through the discourse of women in articulating their femininity. This theme involved having it all – of having the capacity to be a 'superwoman'. To be a superwoman, it is not enough to just have a career; one also must be adept in other skills such as homemaking, entertaining and maintaining

a relationship. Thus, empowerment is about multi-tasking, enunciated in terms of agency. Agency is understood as the ability to exercise their autonomy and control over their lives (Woodward 2004). This agentic capacity, as shown in the following instances, demonstrates the women's instrumentality and self-determination through a variety of material processes.

Someday i plan to quit my job, open my own cafe/bookstore so I can do the two things i love at the same time.

Besides working, I am also doing my doctorate of business administration in Multimedia University.

I move on next to a distinct construction of Malaysian identity that has emerged based on the clustering of behavioural traits and positive judgment of normality – i.e. the simple person.

REPRESENTATION OF THE SIMPLE PERSON

The similarity in the adjectives used to realize positive NORMALITY by the men and women are striking. Instances point to a consistently similar representation of NORMALITY across the two sets of data through the word *simple*. *Simple* is commonly used by these adult advertisers in their identity descriptions, echoing the results found in personal ads placed by Malaysian adolescents (Bahiyah & Kesumawati 2007, 2011). Additionally, a concordance analysis of *simple* reveals that more women (a total of 30 instances) than men (a total of 22 instances) make use of the

adjective *simple* in construing their identity, as displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Simple in the women and men's corpora

	Adjective	Freq	Judgement type
Women	<i>SIMPLE</i>	30	+ norm
Men	<i>SIMPLE</i>	22	+ norm

Frequent occurrence of the word implies the importance of being *simple* among single Malaysians. The choices that are made by these men and women with regard to their attributes and how, regardless of gender, some are instantiated more often than others in identity representation, appear to conform with the concept of value and its importance in mate selection process. Findings have shown that people with similar values are more likely to select each other as partners as similarities are instrumental in forging and strengthening interpersonal relations between two people (e.g. Lippa, 2007). Interpreting this from the perspective of affiliation, this personal trait could be perceived as a coupling of ideation (gender classification such as *girl, gal & guy*) + *simple* (positive judgement) (see Figure 1) because as these advertisers tender *simple*, they are simultaneously proposing a bond that can align them on my.match.com.

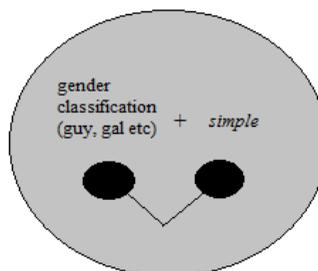


Fig.1. A bond consisting of gender classification + *simple*

The word *simple* according to Collins Cobuild Dictionary (2003) conveys three different meanings. *Simple* has the meaning of (1) ‘not being very intelligent and have difficulty learning things’, which carries a negative judgement of CAPACITY. In the context of the personal ad where positive impression management is important, characterizing oneself as not intelligent would be unusual. A *simple* person also means that (2) ‘s/he has all the basic or necessary things she requires, but nothing extra’, which, if contrasted to its antonym ‘extravagant’ or ‘lavish’, invokes a positive judgement of NORMALITY. And lastly, (3) if something is described as *simple*, we mean that it is not complicated and easy to understand. Contrasting a simple identity with ‘a complicated’ or ‘difficult’ identity, a *simple* person could therefore mean an uncomplicated person, consequently construing a positive judgement of CAPACITY.

Simple in the data does not appear to function as a negative judgement of CAPACITY (meaning number 1). In order to substantiate this claim, it is useful to look at semantic prosody of the word. Semantic prosody refers to the negative or positive attitude of these co-occurring words (Baker, 2006). An examination of the semantic prosody of *simple*, reveals that *simple* is used with positively charged words, creating ‘a consistent aura’ (Baker *et al.*, 2008) of positivity. Concordance analysis reveals that *simple* collocates with lexis that inscribes positive affect and positive judgement of behaviour such as *caring, open-minded, friendly, laugh, jokes* and *easy going*. The

following are instantiations of this positive prosody.

I'm just a simple person... An optimistic, happy go lucky & cheerful type of person. Likes to smile.

Im just a simple guy who is easy going, caring and understanding.

Simple is used to mean having the basic or necessary things required and nothing extra can be determined from looking at the sample of instances below. Meanwhile, ‘s/he has all the basic or necessary things she requires, but nothing extra’, which, if contrasted to its antonym ‘extravagant’ or ‘lavish’, invokes a positive judgement of NORMALITY. In some, *simple* behaviour is reflected in the way lives are lived and built – *living simply* means being content with basic necessities and showing restraint towards excessiveness. Additionally, the concept of practicality is also linked to this idea of *simpleness*.

Really a simple person at heart - I choose to focus on just a few basic needs...

I am just a simple guy who own a simple life style and easy to deal with.

Corpus evidence shows that the discourse of the *simple* person is associated with positive NORMALITY (e.g. *ordinary, normal*) and AFFECT (e.g. *happy, smile*). More importantly, its repetitive usage, in both the men and women’s personal

ads, renders *the simple person* a typical Malaysian persona. If in appraisal terms, typicality is realised by *NORMALITY*, then by virtue of this high frequency, the word inscribes a positive judgement of *NORMALITY*. Clearly, the frequency of the word *simple* is itself an indication of its positivity and mate-ability potential. Being typically and uniquely Malaysian, the word *simple* is loaded with interpersonal value around which single Malaysians bond.

To this point, I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which quantitative and qualitative methodologies help to identify patterns of ideational and interpersonal resources that are deployed in the construction of gendered identities. My analyses have revealed results that concur with findings from previous research – i.e. the successful man, the fit and athletic man, the affectionate woman and the empowered woman – which are construed by different means of ideational and interpersonal resources. The above findings demonstrated that feminine, masculine and Malaysian identity types are not only constructed through ideational resources, but also through the evaluations they make about themselves, their behaviour and the entities and phenomenon they are interested in. Additionally, results have also shown that identity is not solely a matter of being, but also of doing, behaving, feeling and thinking. And ultimately, what these findings empirically demonstrate and encapsulate is the concept of identity as a form of discursive performance.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The combination of SFL, social actor categorization framework and corpus linguistic techniques employed in this study was used in the pursuit of discovering the performative “expressions” (Butler, 1998, p. 25) of gender identity in online personal ads. General patterns construing typical and atypical representations of gender identities were observed by comparing the kinds of structure, semantics and collocates revealed through the analyses of clauses and nominal groups. A close analysis of these linguistic items has demonstrated how the verbal mode of identity construal - conditioned by the demands of the genre, affected by the interpersonal demands of courtship initiation - can ideationally construe a range of identity categorizations, interpersonally enact a variety of attitudes and holistically produce a range of performances consisting of the stereotypical, the countertype and the uniquely Malaysian. From the social constructionist perspective, ideational/interpersonal couplings capture the notion of identity as a discursive performance; they demonstrate the interaction of feeling, being, doing, behaving and thinking in the construction of different identity types. As such, this study is a contribution to scholars working in the area of gender identity and linguistics in so far as it identifies linguistic realizations of femininity and masculinity, but more significantly demonstrates the interaction of linguistic features through a corpus-based quantitative and qualitative analysis of personal ad texts.

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