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## Research Paper

# Self, Face, and Identity in the Iranian Culture: A Study on Three Lexemes

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## Abstract

The paper investigates the relationship between self, identity, and face in the Iranian culture by examining three lexemes *shaxsiat* ('personality', 'character'), *āberu* (lit. water-of-face), and *ru* (lit. 'front part of head'). Drawing on Goffman's theory of face (1967) and the Self-Aspect Model of Identity (Simon, 2004), instances of the use of the lexemes in online sources and in daily conversations are ethnographically analyzed in their contexts of use to explore which aspect(s) of self are foregrounded in each case and what they reveal about a person's identity and face. The findings suggest that *shaxsiat* comprises the individual self or identity of a person by foregrounding both the positively and negatively valenced self-aspects, and while *āberu* and *ru* are both relational aspects of *shaxsiat*; the former foregrounds primarily positively evaluated self-aspects that comprise collective identity, or face in its Goffmanian sense, and the latter highlights self-aspects that under traditional Iranian ways of thinking have to be concealed, suppressed, denied. The findings also suggest that facework is embedded in identity work and they co-construct each other.

**Keywords:** Self; Face; Identity; *Shaxsiat*; *Ru*; *Āberu*.

## 1. Introduction

Researchers in interpersonal pragmatics have been invited to take first order, emic conceptualizations of face, as experienced by ordinary people, into consideration before any theoretical notion of it can be designated (Arundale, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2020; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Haugh, 2009, 2013; Haugh and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2010). Haugh argues that "face and facework should be a focus of research in their own right, as they involve issues broader than simply politeness" (Haugh, 2009, p. 3; 2013). Simultaneously, research on face from a constructivist point of view has resulted in new questions regarding the relationship between face and identity. Spencer-Oatey (2007, p. 640) maintains that theories of identity can provide "very useful insights for both the conceptualization and the analysis of face". Hall and Bucholtz (2013) call on researchers to investigate "the place of identity in facework" and "the place of face in identity work". They maintain that "facework, at once rational and emotional, is fundamental to the workings of identity, as human positioning is always sensitive to the reflection of one's image in the eyes of another" (p. 130).

Although research in pragmatics has highlighted the significance of cultural keywords (Wierzbicka, 1997), in Persian few studies have attempted to use them in the conceptualization of face in the Iranian culture. Careful analysis of the cultural lexemes related to face with an ethnographic lens can specifically provide insight into the ways face concepts and identity are related in this culture. This is significant in that there is a divide in pragmatics literature as to whether or not face is the same as identity (cf. Spencer-Oatey, 2007). Scholars in Persian pragmatics have proposed that *āberu* (lit. radiance/water-of-face) is the equivalent of face (Izadi, 2017b, 2018; Sharifian, 2007), and that it is tightly related to the concept of *shaxsiat* ('personality', 'character') (Izadi, 2017b; Koutlaki, 2002) and even *heterām* ('respect', 'deference') (Koutlaki, 2002).

This research is an ethnographic attempt to analyze understandings of the concept of face in the Iranian culture and investigates their relationship with the concepts of self and identity. Specifically, the lexemes *shaxsiat*, *āberu*, and *ru* (lit. 'front part of head'), and their collocations and idiomatic expressions will be examined. To do this, we will adopt Goffman's sociological concept of face and facework (Goffman, 1967) as well as Simon's social psychological model of



identity (Simon, 2004). It is hypothesized that face and identity in the Iranian culture are conceptualized in *shaxsiat*, *ru*, and *āberu*. I hope to show that *shaxsiat* comprises the individual self or individual identity of a person and while *āberu* and *ru* are both relational aspects of *shaxsiat*, the former foregrounds collective identity or face, and the latter predominantly highlights those aspects of self that are expected to be denied or concealed in the Iranian culture.

In what follows, first, the theoretical background of the research will be presented. I will specifically focus on Goffman's (1967) classical theory of face, the Self Aspects Model of Identity (Simon, 2004), and scholarship on the relationship between face and identity. Section three will be devoted to previous research on self and face in the Iranian culture followed by methodology in section four, which will focus on the procedure for data collection and analysis. Section five will analyze and discuss the data followed by putting the findings in the larger context of face and identity in the last section.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Goffman on Face

The subject of face and facework was introduced into pragmatics in Brown and Levinson's (1987[1978]) theory of politeness where politeness was equated with facework. Brown and Levinson defined face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (1987, p. 61). The model, however, has been criticized on various grounds including, *inter alia*, its ethnocentric bias. Bargiela-chiappini (2003) criticizes Brown and Levinson's conceptualization of Goffman's face on the grounds that Goffman's face is a sociological construct that has been reduced to psychological needs. She calls for a return to Goffman's original understanding of face.

Goffman's (1967) classical definition of face is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (1967, p. 5). By *line* he meant "a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself". Face "is an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (p. 5). A person's "social face can be his most personal possession and the center of his security and pleasure" but it is not permanent and may be withdrawn if the person cannot prove that he/she is worthy of it: "it is only on loan to him from society" (p. 10). He defines facework as "actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (p. 12) and identifies two basic types of facework: (i) the avoidance processes whereby the person avoids some contacts in order to prevent a threat to face (p. 15) and (ii) the corrective process which occurs when neither preventing face threat nor overlooking it is possible. If avoiding a face-threatening contact is not possible, then defensive or protective measures could be adopted. Defensive measures are self-oriented and are designed to defend one's own face and include strategies such as changing the topic of conversation or changing the direction of the activity, suppressing the show of feelings, expressing modesty, etc. Protective measures are other-oriented and protect another's face and include leaving embarrassing facts unstated, circumlocution, the use of ambiguity, etc. The corrective process is employed in stages after a face threat has occurred and repair has become necessary (Goffman, 1967, pp. 19-22).

### 2.2. Face and Identity

There are several models and theories of identity on the social psychological market most of which propose a tripartite concept of self, variously called private self, public self, and collective self (Triandis 1989), independent self and interdependent self with the latter consisting of public and collective selves (Markus and Kitayama, 1991), individual self, collective self and relational self (Kashima et. al., 1995; Kashima 2002), and personal self, relational self and collective self (Brewer and Gardener, 1995). In this paper we will adopt the Self-Aspect Model of Identity (SAMI) (Simon, 2004) which is an integrated approach to identity that views identity as both relational, defining one's place or position in relation to another interlocuter's place in an interaction, and situation-specific, since a person's position changes in each interaction situation. SAMI assumes individual identity is multi-dimensional, i.e., it is constructed on the basis of a "configuration of different ... self-aspects" (p. 50)—a self-aspect being "a cognitive category or concept that serves to process and organize information and knowledge about oneself". Self-aspects can, among other things, refer to psychological personality traits, physical features, social roles, abilities, tastes, attitudes, behavioral characteristics, and group or category memberships (p. 45). Self-aspects have seven interrelated characteristics: (i) they are both cognitive and social because, they both provide knowledge about self and are products of social interaction; (ii) they are relational;

(iii) they reflect the social position of a person in relation to other people in the society; (iv) people often have access to several aspects of their identity; (v) there is a mutual relationship between different aspects of the self; (vi) different aspect or aspects of self-interpretation become prominent as a function of the immediate situation the person is placed in; (vii) self-aspects are not an inseparable part of people's mental/cognitive structure (Simon, 2004, p. 46).

Collective identity is an understanding of self “derived from membership in a collective or group” (p. 51). It is one-dimensional because normally one single, socially shared self-aspect is foregrounded and the other self-aspects move into the background for increased ingroup homogeneity (p. 49). Individual identity and collective identity are made from the same self-aspects (p. 52). Since what is individual and what is social varies from situation to situation, a self-aspect that is considered individual in one context can become the salient shared aspect of the identity of a group in another situation. Therefore, “most, if not all, self-aspects can be experienced as socially shared or socially categorical and thus serve as a basis for a collective identity under the appropriate social conditions” (p. 53). As a result, “the relationship between collective identity and individual identity is a dialectic one in that there is a continual, dynamic dialogue between the two, in the course of which they make each other possible” (p. 56).

About the relationship between face and identity, the literature is divided. As Garcés-Conejos Blitvitch (2013) shows, Goffman himself unproblematically uses ‘identity’ instead of ‘face’ in his later works and even in his main work on facework (Goffman, 1967) he uses the words ‘line’ and ‘face’ as indistinguishable concepts. Some scholars see identity and face as distinct categories. For example, Spencer-Oatey (2007) maintains face and identity are similar in that both are about the self and both involve multiple attributes or aspects of the self but they are different in that

face is only associated with attributes that are affectively sensitive to the claimant. It is associated with positively evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others to acknowledge (explicitly or implicitly), and with negatively evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others NOT to ascribe to him/her (2007, p. 644).

Other researchers, however, maintain that identity is emotionally charged too. As Garcés-Conejos Blitvitch (2013, p. 8) shows “both identity and face are essentially affective phenomena and are associated by claimants with certain attributes and not others”.

Locher (2008) conceptualizes the relation between identity and relational work in terms of process and product. For her, identity work, relational work, and facework refer to the same phenomenon, i.e., to “the negotiation of relations and identities in interaction” (p. 533). In her view, “relational work refers to the ways in which the construction of identity is achieved in interaction, while identity refers to the “product” of these linguistic and non-linguistic processes” (p. 511).

Garcés-Conejos Blitvitch (2013) maintains that identity has to be taken into consideration in conceptualizing face. She argues that the relation between face and identity is “one of co-construction” (p. 18). In her view, “relational work is embedded in identity work” and face is “an identity based resource, a cluster of identity and relational based issues” (p. 17).

To sum up, three possible relations between face and identity have been envisioned in the literature: face and identity are different phenomena with similarities and differences, facework is the process that produces identity, and face and identity co-construct each other.

### 3. Self and Face in Iranian Culture

#### *3.1. Self in the Iranian Culture*

Ahmadi and Ahmadi (1998) argue that the concept of the individual as understood in Western cultures, i.e., an autonomous and independent moral being, is an alien concept in the Iranian way of thinking. Instead, Iranian society operates by the concept of conformity, defined as “the crystallization of the idea of being unified with a greater entity in the social relationships of individuals” (1998, p. 2). They believe that the main obstacles for the development of the idea of individual self were (i) the influence of the Sufi doctrine of Unity of Existence, “which brought about ideas of supremacy of the Universal Self over the individual self and of the complete identification of the individual human self with God” (p. 15), and, by extension with prophets, saints and at a lower level, with all other individuals; and (ii) millennia of life under monarchs who were considered to be Shadows of God.

Citing Sufi sources, Sharifian (2011) explains that the concept of *nafs*, the equivalent of self in Sufi literature borrowed from Arabic, has four stages or levels, two of which (*nafs ammārah* ‘commanding self’ and *nafs lawwāmāh* ‘blaming self’) are negative and have to be controlled and negated, and two of which (*nafs molhamāh* ‘the inspired self’ and *nafs motma’enah* ‘self at rest/peace’) are positively evaluated. The goal of Sufi practices is to step on material nature, i.e., bodily desires and wants, to reach peace of mind, purity, and certitude and achieve Unity with God.

Despite this, Iranian society has been a society in transition since its familiarity with European cultures about two centuries ago, and there is an ongoing dialog between the culturally sanctioned values of conformity and self-denial and the new ideals of individuality and distinctness (Adelkhah, 1999). Younger generations of Iranians and those more inclined to modern ideals strive for greater individuality and the expression of self as distinct from others, but older generations and those inclined toward traditional values of collectivism emphasize conformity and the denial of self.

### 3.2. Face in the Iranian Culture

Echoing Goffman’s notions of pride and honor, Koutlaki (2002, 2009) maintains that Iranian face comprises two folk concepts of *shaxsiat* and *ehterām*. *Shaxsiat* (“‘personality’, ‘character’, ‘self-respect’, ‘social standing’”) is rooted in the individual and their socialization, is unalterable and is judged on the basis of the way a person behaves (2002, p. 1742). Someone who is polite is characterized as having *shaxsiat* (*bāshaxsiat*, lit. ‘with-*shaxsiat*’) whereas someone who does not follow the expected norms of behavior and behaves in a manner that may potentially be considered offensive is characterized as *bishaxsiat* (lit. ‘without-*shaxsiat*’). Anyone who wishes to keep up their own *shaxsiat* will try to maintain their interlocutor’s *shaxsiat* (Koutlaki, 2002, p. 1742). *Ehterām* (“‘respect’, ‘esteem’, ‘dignity’”) involves indexing one’s position in relation to others in an interaction and is “demonstrated through conformity to the conventions of ritual (*ta’ārof*) politeness and to other behavioural norms in interaction with others” (2009, p. 117). In her view, *shaxsiat* is the static aspect of face and *ehterām* is more dynamic in that *shaxsiat* is rooted in the individual and their upbringing but *ehterām* flows from the speaker to the addressee and is often dependent on the person’s *shaxsiat* (2002, p. 1743).

I have excluded the notion of *ehterām* from my analysis because, firstly, looking up the word and its cognates in bilingual dictionaries reveals that *ehterām* is not normally used as an equivalent for ‘face’ but is often translated as ‘respect’, ‘reverence’, ‘esteem’, regard’ and ‘honor’ (Emami, 2006, pp. 44, 795) as well as ‘consideration’, ‘courtesy’, ‘attention’, ‘admiration’, ‘approbation’, and ‘homage’ (Aryanpur and Aryanpur, 1976, p. 40). Secondly, as Koutlaki herself (2002, 2009) mentions, *ehterām* is about social indexing in the hierarchical society of Iran. Therefore, it is reminiscent of the notion of discernment politeness (Ide, 1989; Kádár and Mills, 2013) rather than “the positive social value” of a person.

Another face-related concept is *āberu*. Morphologically, *āberu* is a compound noun consisting of *āb* ‘water’, and *ru*, and the head marking clitic ‘-e’. It literally means ‘water of face’ or ‘face-water’ (see below). As well as being used in daily conversations, the lexeme is frequently referred to in both literary and religious texts (see Rodziewics (2022) on the place of *āberu* in religious rulings (*fatwā*) of prominent Iranian Shiite leaders). Sharifian refers to *āberu* as “[p]erhaps the most dominant social schema in Persian cultural cognition” (Sharifian, 2007, p. 36). He believes that *āberu* may refer to two things, either the “freshness and healthiness of one’s face,” or “the sweat on one’s face” (ibid.). In its first sense, he maintains, *āberu* seems to metonymically refer to an individual’s ‘general wellbeing’, and is a metaphor “associated with a schema that embodies the image of a person, a family, or a group, particularly as viewed by others in the society”. In the sense of ‘sweat on one’s face’, it is “a metonym for cases where damage to one’s honour and social image has made him/her upset to the point of sweating” (ibid.).

Izadi (2017b, 2018) maintains that *shaxsiat* comprises a person’s ‘self’, ‘whole personhood’ or ‘individuality’. He describes *bāshaxsiat* as an ideal person, “who depicts a polished demeanor in adhering to social norms and who has integrity” (Izadi, 2017b, p. 211). From the point of view of an individual, *shaxsiat* is what one thinks one is and is equated with one’s whole identity (Izadi, 2017b). About the relation between *āberu* and *shaxsiat* he writes: “one’s *āberu* is what one thinks others think of one’s *shaxsiat*, whereas others’ *āberu* is what one thinks of their *shaxsiat*” (p. 211). He mentions financial competence and knowledgeability competence as two important aspects of *shaxsiat* that have implications for *āberu* (2018). Izadi’s main concern is how face in the sense of relational connectedness and separateness (Arundale, 2006, 2010, 2013, 2020) is co-constructed in everyday and in professional interactions (Izadi, 2015, 2016, 2017a&b, 2018; Don and Izadi, 2011, 2013).

Hosseini et. al. (2018a) show that in *āberu* idiomatic expressions and collocations the domain of economic transaction has been mapped onto the domain of interpersonal relations allowing for the conceptual metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) of “ĀBERU IS A COMMODITY”. According to this metaphor, *āberu* is the most valuable commodity a person, or group, can ‘possess’ that can be ‘purchased’, ‘sold’, ‘pawned’, ‘exchanged with money’, or ‘put up for sale’. Hosseini et. al. (2018b) argue that *āberu* and *ru* are two aspects of face, or “two sides of the same coin”. *Āberu* comprises the collective face and *ru* the individual or private face. They maintain that *āberu* represents the positive aspects of the public image of an individual and *ru* represents negative ones.

Zaborowska (2014) and Rodziewics (2018) combine philological and philosophical approaches in the study of *āberu*. Rodziewics maintains that *āb* ‘water’ is a homonym of *āb* ‘splendor’, ‘shine’, ‘radiance’. She believes that “*āberu* encodes a peculiar ‘memory’ of glow and brightness that surrounds everyone who enjoys splendour and good fame in the eyes of others”. Zaborowska (2014) defines “*āberu* as net, aura or veil which conceals man and envelops him with its shining mantle” (p. 120). The veil of *āberu* is woven from values and principles that protect a person’s dignity or *shaxsiat*, which she defines as “personality and character”, “a certain set of features and attributes ascribed to every man”, and “a human ego, his ‘real’ ego, the human face, his *ru*” (p. 119), implicitly taking *shaxsiat* and *ru* to be synonymous.

Rodziewic’s etymological analysis seems plausible and convincing. However, the relationship between *āb* and radiance is not transparent in modern Persian except in the common saying and belief that ‘*āb roshanāyi ast*’ (‘water is light/radiance’), which is said when someone accidentally spills water, implicating that what has happened will hopefully result in something good.

As can be discerned from the above review, *āberu* is variously conceptualized as an interpretation of *shaxsiat*, and a veil protecting *shaxsiat*. *Shaxsiat* and *ru* have also been considered as equivalents. Moreover, *āberu* and *ru* have been claimed to comprise different, positively and negatively valenced aspects of face. This paper hopes to clarify the relationship between the three concepts. It also hopes to tease out the three concepts in relation to Goffman’s theory of face and Simon’s self-aspects model of identity.

#### 4. Methodology

A good source of data for the analysis of face is interactional data, i.e., conversations in real situations, especially if the focus is on how face is negotiated in talk-in-interaction (see Locher and Watts, 2005; Arundale, 2010, 2013, 2020; Izadi, 2015, 2017a&b, 2018). Spencer-Oatey (2007), however, suggests that people’s evaluative reactions gleaned in post-event interviews can be enlightening too. In Persian, as in several other collectivist linguacultures like Chinese and Japanese (Hu, 1944; Yabuuchi, 2004), Zulu (Nwoye, 1992), Igbo (de Kadt, 1998), Arabic (Labben, 2017) and Greek (Sifianou, 2011) there are words and idioms that encode metapragmatic comments (Verschueren, 2000) on communicative events that provide access to ‘assessments of the communicative status and meaning of the described speech events’ (p. 450), because they involve interpretations by participants and their emotions. In Persian, most instances of the use of *āberu*, *ru* and, to a lesser extent, (*bā-/bi-*)*shaxsiat* involve metapragmatic post-event comments on everyday incidents where face or identity is involved. The focus of this research is on these comments. Because of the unavailability of a corpus of contemporary Persian, a corpus was constructed from the uses of the lexemes from two main sources. After looking up each lexeme in monolingual Persian dictionaries, the idioms and collocations listed were googled and tokens of the use of each word on personal weblogs, and short video clips that had the words in their titles were recorded with their contexts of use. Another source of data was daily conversations in which the researcher was either a participant or an overhearer. The data represent authentic language use because the tokens are produced by real authors/speakers for real audiences in natural situations, whether online or in daily interactions. Each token of the use of the word or idiom was closely analyzed ethnographically, using the researchers’ cultural insider knowledge, paying special attention to all possibly relevant contextual variables. The findings were analyzed in the light of Goffman’s (1967) theory of face and Simon’s (2004) self-aspect model of identity. The findings will be reported in three subsections.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

### 5.1. *Shaxsiat* or the Ideal Self

*Shaxsiat* is the main equivalent for ‘personality’ in translations of western psychological texts and the first meaning listed for it in *Great Sokhan Dictionary of Persian* (Anvari, 2002, p. 4461) is its psychological description. In the corpus of historical Persian (www.dadegan.apll.ir), the earliest use of the word dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (7<sup>th</sup> century A.H.) in the sense of ‘personhood’ in a philosophical text. In the tokens listed there, the term is rarely used and only in philosophical texts until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (13<sup>th</sup> century A.H.) when other senses start to emerge, particularly in the sense of a person’s social persona, in psychological and legal texts and in novels and travelogs.

*Shaxsiat* collocates with only a few verbs of related meanings, namely, *xord kardan* (‘to grind’, ‘to shatter’), *leh kardan* (‘to crush’, ‘to squash’), *lagadmāl kardan* (‘to tread’), *taxrib kardan* (‘to demolish’, ‘to ruin’), and *be shaxsiat-e kasi tohin kardan* (‘to insult someone’); *dāshtan* (‘to have/possess’ i.e., to be of great character and to have a polished demeanor); *dādan* (to give *shaxsiat*) and *ghā’el shodan* (*shaxsiat ghā’el shodan* ‘to assume someone has *shaxsiat*’, ‘to bestow *shaxsiat*’) i.e., to treat someone as if they are of a higher social position than they presumably are. The verbs that collocate with *shaxsiat* suggest that it is metaphorically understood as a solid that can be demolished, possessed, or given. This is in line with folk understandings of *shaxsiat* and is probably the source of Koutlaki’s (2002, 2009) ‘static’ description of it.

*Shaxsiat* also occurs with some lexemes related to the person in relation to an occupation, e.g., *shaxsiat-e herfe’i* ‘professional/occupational character’ and *shaxsiat-e ākādēmik* ‘academic character’, implying how far a person meets the behavioral expectations associated with that, usually high status, profession and, finally, in relation to a high position like *shaxsiat-e siyāsi* (‘a political figure’, *shaxsiat-e adabi* ‘a literary figure’. There are also *shaxsiat-e haghghi* (‘private person’) and *shaxsiat-e hoghghi* (‘legal person’) in legal terminology. In the following paragraphs, I will focus on the noun *shaxsiat* and the adjectives *bāshaxsiat* and *bishaxsiat* used as metapragmatic comments. Such an analysis will hopefully shed light on socially sanctioned aspects of self or the “publicly relevant content of personality” (Brown and Levinson, 1987, pp. 61-62) in the Iranian culture.

In (1), a young woman expresses feelings towards an ex and when he does not respond, she feels she has lowered her ‘self’ and her *shaxsiat* has been shattered:

(1) Ehsās mikonam shaxsiatam xord shode

Dus pesare sābegham-o xeyli dus dāshtam. Chan vaght belāk budan. Dobāre fālom kard instā dayrekt dād dāshtim rāje be kār harf mizadim yeho goft delam barāt tang shode. Manam goftam manam delam tang shode-o inā. Ba’d dige javāb nadād. Dobāre kermam gereft payām dādam to bimarefat shodī. Did javāb nadād. Bāz shab behesh payām dādam aslan payāmamo bāz nakard. Xodam-o kuchik kardam. (<https://www.ninisite.com/discussion/topic/3316580/>, accessed: 22/06/2022)

I feel my personality is shattered.

I really loved my ex-boyfriend. He was blocked for a while. Then he followed me again on Instagram and sent a direct message. We were talking about work that he suddenly said he missed me. I said I miss you too and the like. Then he did not answer. I couldn’t control myself and mischievously sent a message saying: you act caddishly. He saw the message but didn’t reply. I texted him again at night, but he didn’t open my message. I belittled myself.

In this post-event report, she feels that her whole being referred to as ‘*xod*’ (the Persian equivalent of ‘self’) has been damaged because she failed to control her emotions and expressed a passion that remained unanswered. A relevant observation about (1) (and there are many similar instances in my corpus) is that if the ex-boyfriend had accepted or reciprocated the emotion, then the feeling of damage to ego would not have arisen. Therefore, *shaxsiat* is an image of self that is relational and situation-specific (see also, Izadi, 2017b, 2018), in the sense of being negotiated within situational interactions, rather than a static concept, as argued in Koutlaki (2002). In the rest of this section, I will focus on the two lexemes *bāshaxsiat* and *bishaxsiat*.

A revealing observation in online searches for these adjectives is that there are various essays and comments that list a set of attributes and conducts that distinguish *bāshaxsiat* from *bishaxsiat* people as well as articles that aim to instruct

how to be *bāshaxsiat*, how to avoid being *bishaxsiat* or how to react to someone *bishaxsiat*. This is not the case for *ru* and *āberu*. For example, in an online discussion group, a question was asked about the characteristics of a *bāshaxsiat* person. The two responses ‘liked’ the most are the following:

(2) Shaxsiate asli afrād dar bestare xānevādeh shekl migire vali in amr manish in nist ke age xānevādei bestare monāsebi barāye sheklgiri shaxsiate matlub nabud nemishe ādame bāshaxsiati shod. Che basā afrād ke bā xodsāzi va gozineshe raftārhāye dorost va hanjār tunestan xodeshun ro az sathe tarif shode erteghā bedan. Bā motāle’eye daghigh dar raftārhāye doroste javāme’e moxtalef va parhiz az raftārhāye ghalate rāyej, estentāje eteghādāte sahih, yādgiriye adab va mo’āsherat, afzāyesh āgāhi, ehterām be marzhāye afrāde jāme’e, ra’āyate osule axlāghi, ehterām be hamno’, ....

(<http://hyperclubz.com/main/Club.aspx?qClub=golestan&qCat=club-lifestyle-gr1&qId=68137&page=11>, accessed: 15/05/2022)

People’s main *shaxsiat* is formed in the family context but it doesn’t mean that if a family doesn’t provide an appropriate context for forming a desirable *shaxsiat*, then one cannot become *bāshaxsiat*. There are many people who have been able to promote themselves from the predefined level by self-renewal and selecting correct and normal behaviors. By closely studying correct behaviors of various societies and avoiding wrong behaviors, finding right beliefs, learning social manners, increasing knowledge, respecting others’ boundaries, following moral principles, respecting other fellow humans, etc.

(3) Be digarān ehterām bezāre, sādegh bāshe, xodāshenās va xodātars bāshe. āghel va bālegh bāshe. Rurāst bāshe. Dorughu nabāshe. Ahle baxshesh va bozorgi bāshe, va ....

(<http://hyperclubz.com/main/Club.aspx?qClub=golestan&qCat=club-lifestyle-gr1&qId=68137&page=3>, accessed 15/05/2022)

Respects others, is honest, knows God and is God-fearing. Acts wisely and maturely. Is straightforward [rurāst]. Doesn’t lie. Forgives and is magnanimous, etc.

These comments highlight various self-aspects that are culturally valued in the social cognition of the Iranians. The cognitive-behavioral features of respectfulness and manners, beliefs, common sense, maturity in decision-making, honesty, forgiveness and magnanimity as well as knowledgeability are listed as traits of a *bāshaxsiat* person. In still other comments, not reported here for space restrictions, the qualities of reticence, politeness, sportsmanship, dignified and courtly manners are listed too. Observations also show that, not infrequently, people evaluate a stranger’s *shaxsiat* based simply on the way they are dressed and their self-possessed and stately manners. People who dress formally and stand upright are likely to be judged as *bāshaxsiat*, even before they speak or are spoken to. *Bāshaxsiat* is sometimes used as a synonym for *bāfarhang* (lit. ‘with culture’, i.e., cultured, sophisticated), and *bāsho’ur* (‘having common sense’), but there is also the common expression “*tahsilāt sho’ur/shaxsiat nemiyāre*” ‘Formal education doesn’t make you *bāshaxsiat/bāsho’ur*’. The relatively high frequency of this sentence, points out to the salient role of education in the perception of self-concept, but places it in a lower position than manners.

A *bāshaxsiat* person is also often described as *asil*, someone ‘of noble birth’, i.e., raised in a decent family, *sabur* ‘patient’, *bāgozasht* ‘forgiving’, *bāvaghār* ‘august, and dignified in manners’, *matin* ‘maintaining composure’, and *forutan* ‘modest’. The list of adjectives and attributes, which apparently constitute the culturally most significant aspects of self, point out to one behavioral characteristic, namely, *self-restraint*. A *bāshaxsiat* person is one who practices self-control in their social interactions, subsequently resulting in the suppression of emotions and sometimes avoidance of self-expression, which is often observed in advice on how to react to someone *bishaxsiat* as in the responses to the following question, asked in an interactive website by someone whose ID introduced them as a lawyer:

(4) Chetor bā ādame *bishaxsiat* barxord mikonid?

Agar shomā ādame mohtarami bāshid va birun ham dar jāme’e afrāde ziyādi shomā ro beshnāsan, ba’ad masalan be ye markaze xaride sholugh berid yā bāzār berid va ye ādam ke nāshenāse va az nazare moghe’iate ejtemā’i sathesh pāyin ast be shomā tohin kone harfe zesht bezane va harcheghadr shomā mohtaramāne barxord konid un bisho’urtar beshe chekār mikonid? Bā tavajoh be moghe’iat ejtemā’itun ham nemitunin bāhāsh dahan be dahan beshid chon

digarān nemidunan mājarā chiye va shomā ro bad ghezāvat mikonan va aslan dar shaxsiate shomā nist chenin dahan be dahan shodani. Vāghe'an chekār bāyad kard? (<https://www.ninbsite.com/discussion/topic/6670170>, accessed 25/05/2022)

How do you react to a *bishaxsiat* person?

You are a respectable person and many people know you. You go to, say, a busy shopping center or marketplace, and a stranger who has a social status lower than yours starts insulting you by saying ugly [i.e., abusive] words, and the more you treat them with respect, the more *bisho'ur* ['lacking in common sense'] they become, then what will you do? Considering your social position, you can't give them back talk because others do not know what's going on and will judge you negatively, and talking back is not in your *shaxsiat*. What should be really done in this situation?

This question and the context created for it reveal several points about self-aspects: referring to self as 'respectable', 'known by many', 'busy' place and referring to the other person's low social position, and rude verbal behavior indicate that in considering one's or another's self these situational and relational aspects are important. The majority of the responses that followed the query advised avoiding *bishaxsiat* people, in order to maintain one's *shaxsiat* relative to one's social position. Some even expressed their desire to respond violently if they could do so without being seen. All these indicate that *shaxsiat* reflects a person's social position, and the expectations of others relative to that position, and that one should avoid doing things that lead to a negative evaluation of others about their perceived *shaxsiat*. It also highlights that some personality traits/aspects are (not) part of a person's *shaxsiat*. However, saying that one would physically react, or would talk back if others were absent highlights the relationality, situation-specificity, and separability of self-aspects.

(5) Az dishab xeili nārāhatam ham az daste xodam ham az daste hamsāyeye *bishaxsiatam*

Aval az har chiz begam ke man zamāne bachegim ye gorbe behem hamle kard va az hamun moghe be shedat az gorbe mitarsam hamishe hamsaram movāzebe ke gorbe samtam nayād maxsusan ke alān bārdāram atrāfe xune māmānam inā jadidan chand tā bache gorbe va mādaresh hast. Dishab dāshtim miraftim xune xodemun ke yehe ye bache gorbe az zire ye māshin daromad manam nazdikesh budam yehe jigh zadam hamun moghe hamsāyeye mādam inā ke man jāye navashunam umadan beran tu parking bā māshin herher be man xandidan va doxtarashun ke do tā bache dāre be man goft ahmaghe osgol manam goftam xodeti *bishaxsiat* [...] (<http://www.ninbsite.com/discussion/topic/1365261>, accessed 27/07/2017)

I've been very upset since last night, both for myself and for a *bishaxsiat* neighbor

First, I must say that I was attacked by a cat when I was a child, and have been very afraid of cats since then. My husband is always careful that cats don't approach me, especially now that I'm pregnant. Near my parents' place live a few kittens and their mom. Last night we were returning home when suddenly a kitten came out from under a car. I was near it. I shouted at once. At that moment, my mother's neighbor, whom I could be their granddaughter, drove into the parking and started laughing at me, and their daughter, who has two children, called me a saphead idiot. I also said: it's *you, bishaxsiat* [...].

In this post and the comments following it, a person who has made fun of another's weakness, a behavioral self-aspect, is deemed *bishaxsiat*, lacking in common sense. Mentioning the age of the neighbor and their daughter ('I could be their grandchild' and 'who also has a child') foregrounds the salience of age as a pertinent self-aspect. In the comments section, all agreed that the neighbor had been *bishaxsiat* using the words *bisho'ur* (numbskul), *ahmagh* (idiot), *bitarbiat* (lit. 'untrained', 'rude') and *sath* (level, standing) ('they have shown their level'). The word '*sath*' (lit. 'level') interpreted as '*sathe pāyin*' (low level, 'lowbrow') of 'culture', or 'position in society' reinforces the significance of social class as a self-aspect (also seen in 4). Thus, multiple aspects, real or perceived, of the perpetrator's self have been highlighted here.

From the above illustration, it can be concluded that *shaxsiat* is the multi-dimensional self-concept of a person, their individual identity, made of various aspects, including psychological personality traits, behavioral characteristics, beliefs, social position and standing, age, manners, etc. These self-aspects are either claimed by self or ascribed by others, making them relational, situation-specific, and a separable part of people's mental structure (cf. Simon, 2004). The higher frequency of some behavioral attributes like maintaining composure, avoiding conflict, conformity to the norms and good manners in the face of insult suggests that self-restraint and the suppression of feelings are the most relevant aspects of



personality in the collective consciousness of the Iranians. This is dissimilar to identity in individualistic cultures where independence and differentiation are the main sources of individual identity (Simon, 2004, p. 91). Similar attributes or aspects of self will show up again in the concepts of *ru* and *āberu* which will be addressed below.

## 5.2. *Ru or Self-in-interaction*

*Ru* is a polysemous word to which 12 pages are devoted in an eight-volume monolingual dictionary (Anvari, 2002: 3692-3704). There are many *ru*-based compounds as well recorded on other pages, illustrating the lexeme's significant place in the Persian linguaculture. Aryanpur and Aryanpur (1976, pp. 578-588) list as equivalents, among others, 'face, visage, complexion', 'surface, exterior or upper part, top', 'recto, obverse' and 'cheekiness, audacity'. *Ru* is a metonym for the whole body in many expressions as in *ru āvardan*, 'to turn to someone/something' (lit. 'to bring face') or *ru gardāndan*, 'to turn away from someone/something' (lit. 'to turn over face'). There are records of the use of the lexeme as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (see Dehkhoda, 1998, p. 12274).

Hosseini et. al. (2018b) classify *ru*-based expressions and idioms into four categories which will be explored here from the point of view of self-aspects. The first category is that of *ru (na)shodan* (lit. 'face (not) becoming' i.e., '(not) having the face'), frequently used in the negative or in questions (*rut mishe?* 'Do you have the face?', *Chetor rut shod?* 'How did you get the face [to (not) do something]?'). In the following example "*chetor rut shod?*" i.e., 'how dare you [say that]?' implies that the speaker is not thankful enough of God for what she already has:

(6) *Āxe chetor rut shod ke bade un jomalāte aval ino begi? Yani pedarmādare tahsil karde va mogheiyate āli va surate zibā ro xodet tanhā be dast avordi, faghat ye ezdevāj bā xodā bud ke nadād?* (<https://khabartar.blog.ir/post/1732>, accessed 12/05/2020)

(How dare you say this after those first sentences? Do you mean educated parents, and excellent conditions and beautiful face are your own achievements and God's part was only to get you married?)

The comment is a response to a single girl who complains that despite her good conditions she is still single because God has left her alone. Ungratefulness is an aspect of *shaxsiat*, though it is not something permanent and is specific to this situation. *Chetor rut shod?* in (6) is a kind of post-event criticism, a form of face attack. In other examples cited in Hosseini et. al. (2018b), *ru nashodan*, *rudarvāsi* and their equivalents involve an avoidance process because one feels shy, incompetent, or finds it inappropriate for the kind of relationship they are in or relative to their position.

The second category consists of *porru* 'full-faced', *porruyi* 'full-facedness' and *rudāri*. According to Hosseini et. al. (2018b), this category involves claiming a social or relational credit beyond expectations, unapologetic or immodest display of knowledge or skills, non-conformity to the norms, bold disregard for a moral value, rule or norm, non-submissive behavior toward one's elders, as well as self-assertion and expression of individuality beyond expected norms. Examples below illustrate how *porruyi* is associated with the presentation of aspects of self:

(7) In a video clip, a boy of about eight is asked how he feels now that the new school year has started. He answers that he has no feelings. The interviewer then asks: "Aren't you happy?" The boy answers: "No. How can I be happy when I have to get up at 6 o'clock every morning?" The clip is shared with the title "Look how *porru* a child can be!" (<https://www.aparat.com/v/CEH4k> accessed 12/06/2021)

In (7) *porruyi* is a comment by an onlooker on a behavioral attribute of the child where his frank and uncensored expression of emotion is evaluated as full-facedness or impudence. The expected norm in such situations is the suppression of the negative emotion and ostensible expression of joy.

(8) At the end of a long post in a weblog on a social problem the author writes: *bebaxshid porruyi kardam in mozu ro gharār dādam* (I apologize for being too audacious to write on this subject here). A reader comments on the topic and then adds: *bebaxshid porru shodam* (Sorry I was rude [and wrote this comment]).

In (8), cited in Hosseini et. al. (2018b), *porruyi* is a self-assessment of behavior expressed with an apology. In the expression of opinion, there is a claim to knowledge and competence. In (8), a person who has displayed a show of knowledge and a reader who has contributed to the topic both apologize, labeling their behavior 'audacity and boldness'. Such apologies and the self-attribution of *porruyi* are ostensible, and a show of modesty or *shekastenaftsi* (Sharifian, 2005; Sharifian and Jamarani, 2011), and serve only as defensive facework, to avoid the potentially negative assessment of their *shaxsiat* as immodest, and proud.

Similarly, *ru* can be given and taken, as illustrated in the following popular sayings:

(9) Be gedā ke *ru* bedi sāhebe xunat mishe.

If you give face to a beggar they will claim ownership of your house.

(10) *Ru* dide ke *porru* shode ‘s/he has seen face that’s why s/he is full-faced’

In *ru dādan* (‘to give face’) the person who has *given face* e.g., by being too lenient or kind is to blame and one may hear a comment like (10) which is sometimes said in disapproval of the behavior of the one who has given more credit than the emboldened recipient supposedly deserves. *Ru kam kardan* ‘to deduct face’ or *rukamkoni* ‘face-deduction’, are related idioms that mean outwitting or outperforming someone by showing one is equally, or more, skillful, knowledgeable, or competent, etc. than someone else, as in (11):

(11) In a short video clip, after several men’s failed attempts at spinning a hula hoop, a young girl of about 10 successfully twirls it around her waist. The video is shared with the title: “*doxtari ke ruye hame rā kam kard*” (lit. ‘the girl who deducted everyone’s face’), i.e., ‘the girl who defeated/outperformed everyone’ (<https://www.aparat.com/v/MaNgZ>, accessed 14/05/2022)

Some other aspects of self-presentation in Iranian culture are conceptualized in *ru zadan* ‘to hit face’ and *ru andāxtan* ‘to throw face’, denoting ‘making a request’ or ‘asking for a favor’ and *ruye kasi rā zamin zadan/andāxtan* ‘to hit/throw someone’s face on the ground’, meaning ‘to decline or turn down someone’s request’. As Hosseini et. al. (2018b) show, ‘hitting/throwing face’ is often associated with feelings of inadequacy, ineptitude, and incompetency. In Goffman’s theory of self-presentation, ‘hitting/throwing face’ is a form of intentional disruption in performance (‘scene’ in his dramaturgical metaphor) and when the request is turned down or “refused to the individual’s face” (Goffman, 1956, p. 134), the person’s dignity will be damaged and humiliation can occur.

Ignoring another’s misstep, gaffe, oversight, incompetency or behavior that breaches the norms is another aspect of self-presentation expressed with *be ru (nay)āvardan* ‘to (not) bring to face’ and *be/tu ruye kasi (na)zadan* ‘to (not) hit in/on someone’s face’ which are frequently used in the negative. ‘To hit in another’s face’ is used when someone reminds another of their wrongdoing, incompetence or lack of skill, or when one reminds someone of one’s own help, mercy, or good deed in the past. In its negative form, it is a defensive facework strategy. However, if *be ru nayāvardan* is done by the person who is disregarding social norms then it is the same as *porruyi*, as in (12):

(12) A man was driving on the wrong side of the street. Others blew horns as a sign of protest. He ignored them (‘*be ruye xodesh nayāvord*’ lit. ‘He didn’t bring to his own face’) and just smiled and drove on. A witness said: *ru ke nist!* (It’s not a face! i.e., He’s so brazen-faced!)

In (12), the driver pretended that nothing had happened (‘tactful blindness’ in Goffman’s words) to protect his face, but his contempt for the law was met with the negative evaluation by a witness as an instance of *porruyi* with ‘*ru ke nist!*’ which is the truncated form of ‘*ru ke nist, sange pāye ghazvine*’ (lit. ‘It’s not a face, it’s pumice from the city of Ghazvin’), meaning his face is made of stone, emphasizing bold disregard for rules, duties or others’ rights, often considered as an aspect of the person’s *shaxsiat*..

To sum up, in *ru*-based expressions and idioms, *ru* appears to be invested with a degree of credit or value either attributed to an individual or claimed by the person associated with one’s position relative to other persons in the social hierarchy. Drawing more than the allotted credit or claiming more value than the perceived worth of a person, may result in the negative appraisal of aspects of the person’s *shaxsiat* as *porruyi*, *rudāri*, etc. From Goffman’s point of view, the *ru*-based idioms primarily involve defensive or protective facework strategies. From a self-presentational point of view, *ru* appears to be the person in interaction with other persons. This self-in-interaction has to be presented in an apologetic way or with self-lowering strategies and denigration, and in the case of personal achievements or skills, with *shekastnafsi*, and denial. It appears, then, that *ru* represents aspects of an individual’s identity or *shaxsiat* that are associated with what is known in the culture as *nafs*. *Ru* appears to be primarily associated with the negative attribute *maniyat* (‘*man*’ ‘I’ plus ‘-iyat’ denominal suffix), meaning ‘egotism’, or ‘boastfulness’, whether in presenting one’s achievements or competencies, which must be presented with mitigating devices like an apology, or should be concealed,

denied or abnegated altogether. If one wants their *shaxsiat* to be evaluated positively, they must present their abilities and achievements as insignificant and trivial or “as a result of various factors and forces and not simply a self-achievement” (Sharifian, 2005, p. 344).

In the following section, I will address *āberu* as the positive social image of a person. I will argue that *āberu* is associated with those aspects of *shaxsiat* that have the potential to serve as a basis for collective identity.

### 5.3 *Āberu or Collective Identity*

Like *ru*, there are records of the use of *āberu* dating back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (see Dekhoda, 1998, p. 53). The list of *āberu* idioms and expressions highlights two issues: the significance of saving *āberu* and preventing threat to it or its loss as well as comments after it has been presumably lost. In this section, I will focus on *āberu* and its relation to self and identity.

The feeling of *āberu*-loss and the embarrassment following it, may be aroused after an “unmeant gesture”, i.e., something that potentially presents a definition of self “that is different from the definition officially projected” (Goffman, 1956, p. 33), as in:

(13) Vāi āberum raft

Ye esemes mixāstam barāye shoharam befrestam, dastam raft ru send ferestādam barāye kasi ke tāze bā ham āshenā shodim va rudarbāyesti shadidi bāhāshun dāram. Kalameye xeili zeshti tush bud. Engār ye satl āb yax rum rixtan. Chikār konam? (<https://www.ninisite.com/discussion/topic/1025312/page=1>, accessed 05/12/2019)

Oh, no! My *āberu* is gone [lost].

I wanted to send an SMS to my husband. I [mistakenly] touched the send button and sent it to a person whom we just met and I have a strong standoff with them. There was a very rude word in it. [I feel] as if a bucket of ice water is poured on me. What should I do?

In this advice-seeking query, the speaker is embarrassed because an aspect of her *shaxsiat* is revealed that the receiver of the message was not aware of and she did not want it to be shared. In response to questions in the comments, she mentions that her message included the name of a body part and that the receiver is very well-mannered and polite. Thus, in this and many other instances of *āberurizi* an aspect of the person’s identity is unmasked to somebody whose relationship with the speaker is too distant for the aspect to be unapologetically shared. The dependence of *āberu* on the level of relationship is more explicitly mentioned in (14):

(14) dughe gāzdār gāze dughdār. Shāns āvordam jelo dāyim bud. Age jelo gharibe bud āberum miraft.

[Once instead of saying] dughe gāzdār (‘fizzy yoghurt drink’) [I said] gāze dughdār (lit. ‘gas with yoghurt drink in it’ implying ‘liquidy fart’). I was lucky it was before my uncle. If it had happened before a stranger, I would have lost *āberu*.

A slip of the tongue causes embarrassment only in the presence of a ‘stranger’, which renders the situation more formal, where *rudarvāsi* (see Babai Shishavan, 2016; Babai Shishavan and Sharifian 2013, 2016) will rule. Regardless of what the definition of ‘stranger’ is, the example points to the fact that *āberu* is lost, or gained, relative to other people in specific situations and, therefore, is not an inseparable possession of the person. The observation in (15) shows another aspect of self that is at stake in *āberu*:

(15) When a well-known soccer player leaves his team and joins a rival or lower ranking team for a higher wage, some people comment: *āberuyash rā bā pul avaz karde*, ‘he has exchanged his *āberu* with money’.

In (15), the footballer may not think there is any problem in his decision but because of his long membership in a team, it is expected that he should remain loyal to it. Leaving his team for a larger sum of money triggers negative evaluations. The decision presents him as someone who plays for mercenary goals only. It involves a contradiction with the line he had taken, or was perceived to have taken, previously. It is also a breach of the ethical code that one should not sell their good name for material benefit.

The *āberu* of an individual is dependent on the group(s) one is associated with and the most significant group in Iranian culture is the family (Sharifian, 2007; Izadi, 2017b). Any contradiction observed in the behavior of family

members with the image projected by the family has the potential to invoke feelings of embarrassment as illustrated below:

(16) Xāharshoharam bābāmo bā zanike (dustdoxtare bābām) dide. Āberum raft xodāyā chikār konam.

My husband's sister has seen my dad and the bitch (his girlfriend) together. I lost *āberu*. Oh God! What should I do?

In (16) the speaker's concern is with what her in-laws would think of her after her father's extramarital relation was disclosed. The concern for *āberu*, in this case, is for self-face rather than the face of the family. This becomes apparent from what she tells her friends after they inquire about the details:

(17) Chizi ke hamash azash mitarsidam belaxare etefāgh oftād. Nemidunam chikār konam shāyad shanbe beram be rush biyāram kesāfat belaxare unghadr harzegi kard tā āberuye mano bord.

What I was always afraid of finally happened. I don't know what to do. I may go to him on Saturday and confront him ('*be rush biyāram*'). The filthy scumbag's engagement in debauchery finally lost *āberu* for me.

In (17) the fear of loss of *āberu* occurs because the father and daughter are members of the same family. Because membership in a group ascribes characteristics to an individual that "constitute the line I am assumed to be taking" (O'Driscoll, 2011, p. 34), and since in Iranian culture one's *shaxsiat* is assumed to be almost fully formed in the family, then we can infer that the young daughter is afraid that her father's negatively valenced aspect of his *shaxsiat* could be seen as a feature shared by all family members, damaging her in-laws' perception of her moral integrity, threatening her positive image with them, or as Rodziewics (2018) shows, removing the glow surrounding her *shaxsiat*.

An aspect of identity that frequently emerges in the uses of *āberu* and face-saving practices (i.e., *āberudāri*) is the financial success of the individual and their family, sometimes referred to as *cheshm-o-hamcheshmi* 'keeping up with the Joneses' (Izadi, 2017b). Afshani et. al. (2018) report various practices involving conspicuous consumption among middle-class women only to protect the *āberu* of themselves and their families by projecting an affluent lifestyle. The extreme case below was narrated by a school teacher in a family get-together:

(18) A girl from an indigent family secretly takes her mom's favorite dishes to school on Teacher's Day and offers them as gift to the school. Some weeks later, the mother goes to school on some errand and when the teachers thank her for her valuable gift she angrily grabs the dishes and takes them home saying: 'They are my *āberu*'.

In this example, the girl tried to enhance her positive public image in school by giving a gift worthy of the occasion. Of course, the mother's 'scene', in Goffman's (1956) terminology, would lose *āberu* for the girl and can even be labeled as *biāberuyi*, lit. 'lack of *āberu*' or 'disgrace'. The mother's sentence 'They are my *āberu*' points to the fact that one's possessions are a source of prestige, esteem, and social worthiness. In this instance, however, she considers her *āberu* (i.e., 'purported good financial condition') more important in the eyes of people who would visit her home, and who share with her similar financial conditions, rather than before teachers whose relation would be short-lived and are not in the same financial class with her.

Two recurring features in the use of *āberu* with groups are that (i) except for the family, the shared bonding with the group is transient and situation-specific, and (ii) there is often an element of comparison involved as in (19):

(19) Woman: Āberuye mā ro nabari taxfif bediyā inā māle tehrānan nagan arākiyā gerun forushan

Salesman: Rusefidetun kardam

Woman: Don't lose *āberu* for us. Give them a discount. They're from Tehran and may think Arakis have overcharged them.

Salesman (a few minutes later): rusefidetun kardam (lit. 'I made your face white', i.e., 'You can be proud ma'am.', implying 'I gave a discount')

In (19), witnessed by the researcher as a bystander, the middle-aged woman is accompanying her guests from Tehran on a shopping expedition in her hometown. She asks the salesman to give a discount as a sign of hospitality so the guests will not form a negative impression of the people in Arak. By asking for a discount for her guests, the woman invokes a temporary, albeit potentially existing, link between herself and the salesman distinct from the Tehrani guests.

The potential for bonding is evoked only when a comparison is called for which foregrounds primarily one aspect of the identity of the city and its people.

The above illustration points to *āberu* as the equivalent for collective identity in Simon's (2004) integrated model of identity. As noted above, Simon defines collective identity as "based primarily on a single self-aspect that one shares with other, but not all other, people in the relevant social context" (Simon, 2004, p. 49). This is true about the uses of *āberu*. In examples (13), (14), (17), (18), and (19), politeness, verbal skills, moral integrity, financial conditions, and hospitality are the salient shared aspects.

*Āberu* is also the closest candidate for face in the sense of "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (Goffman, 1967). Considering the etymology of the word, one can say *āberu* is a mask or a veil, as is Goffman's face, made of light (i.e., 'approved social attributes') held before a person's vulnerable *ru* to display a positive social image of their *shaxsiat* or individual self. This glowing or radiant veil is on loan and may be removed the moment a discrepancy is exposed between what is already projected and what is projected in the here-and-now of interaction. However, the feeling of *āberu*-loss is, in most cases, transient and restricted to the situation and in relation to some significant others.

To summarize the findings, it was shown that the three concepts of *shaxsiat*, *ru* and *āberu* comprise the Iranian concept of self. *Shaxsiat* is the individual self/identity that is made of multiple aspects. *Ru* is associated with those aspects of self in relation to others that are either related to the display of competence or defiance to established norms but which are surrounded by moral values like *shekastenaftsi* 'modesty'. It reflects the avoidance of those behaviors that are disapproved of and whose performance, if disclosed, may lead to a loss of *āberu*. *Āberu* is the positive social value of an individual (i.e., face in Goffman's sense), that represents self-interpretation as it is viewed by other individuals and is judged based on conformity to the positively evaluated norms of the situation. However, since it primarily involves the comparison of one self-aspect shared with at least some other members in situation-specific interactions, and since, unlike *ru*, *āberu* is claimed by either an individual or a group, then it can be postulated that *āberu* reflects those aspects of a person's *shaxsiat* that provide the underlying sources for collective identity. *Shaxsiat* is the locus where the two modes of self-presentation meet: while *ru*-idioms imply the concealment, denial, or the inhibition of some self-aspects, *āberu*-saving practices involve the display of competence, skills, or adherence to norms. *Shaxsiat* of an individual is measured based on their success or failure in forging a balance between the two.

Both *āberu* and *ru* are relational and are evoked in the presence, or perception of the presence, of another being, and both are negotiated within situation-specific interactions. And since *āberu* and *ru* highlight aspects of self, are relational and interactional, then *shaxsiat* is also relational and is constructed within situation-specific interactions. However, people may perceive *shaxsiat* as a collection of positive or negative hard-wired qualities because of the personal importance of some self-aspects and their association with the person in various social contexts for long periods of time (cf. Simon, 2004, pp. 46-47).

Both *ru* and *shaxsiat* concern the individual. Some of the aspects encoded in *ru* are closest to what is considered 'individual' in individualistic cultures, i.e., self-assertion and the presentation of a competent self, that have to be denied or abnegated in a collectivist culture. Although both *shaxsiat* and *ru* refer to the individual, the former highlights all aspects of self and the latter underscores only aspects of *shaxsiat* that need to be concealed or denigrated in a particular situation. Therefore, I propose that *ru* with its millennium-old presence in the Iranian culture is about the traditionally perceived self in the Iranian culture that, because of the requirement of conformity to social norms of the collectivist society of Iran and influenced by the Sufi concept of self-identification with God, had to be denied, but *shaxsiat* foregrounds Iranian's move toward the more individualistic concept of self as a distinct and independent agent, though the emphasis on self-restraint and conformity to norms still retain the influence of a collectivistic conceptualization of self.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

The present study was an ethnographic attempt at understanding the concept of face and its relation to self and identity in the Iranian culture. While previous research on *āberu* and *shaxsiat* was reaffirmed, the concept of *ru* was introduced as a significant and neglected construct in the formation of Iranian self and face. It was shown that *ru* consists of similar aspects of self as *āberu* but is shrouded in traditional concepts that sanction self-annihilation.

This study contributes to the theoretical debate on the relationship between face and identity. First, it was shown that both identity and face are emotionally charged and a threat to an aspect of identity may result in negative emotions the strength of which will depend on how significant a self-aspect is to the individual and how salient it is in the situation and in the culture in general.

The findings seem to lend support to Garcés-Conejos Blitvich's (2013) idea that facework in its Goffmanian sense is embedded in identity work in terms of SAMI and they co-construct each other. *Āberu* and *ru* are both *shaxsiat*-based resources and are embedded in it. Taking Spencer-Oatey's (2007) conceptualization into account, it can be said that *āberu* is about those aspects of self that are positively evaluated and *ru* concerns those aspects of *shaxsiat* that the person, in conformity to the cultural norms of social interaction, "wants others NOT to ascribe to" them (Spencer-Oatey, 2007, p. 644). *Shaxsiat*, however, concerns the whole identity of the person, both positively evaluated and negatively evaluated attributes. Facework involves primarily situationally and culturally shared aspects of self. Since face is associated with aspects of identity, then any face threat or face enhancement contributes to identity work.

### Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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