BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Alhalwachi, F. and McEntee-Atalianis, Lisa (2024) From offline to online stigma resistance: identity construction in narratives of infertile Muslim women. Narrative Inquiry , ISSN 1387-6740. (In Press)

Downloaded from: https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/53652/

Usage Guidelines:
Please refer to usage guidelines at https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html or alternatively contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

From offline to online stigma resistance: Identity construction in narratives of infertile Muslim women

Fatema Alhalwachi (ORCID: 0000-0002-6932-245X) &
Lisa J. McEntee-Atalianis (ORCID: 0000-0002-0939-4953)

Birkbeck, University of London

Abstract

This paper is the first to address the impact of gendered, cultural and religious discourses on an under-researched subaltern group of infertile Muslim women bloggers. Taking a small story and case study approach, the analysis focuses on interactivity and positioning (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, Georgakopoulou, 2008) in one woman's stories as she works hard to address normative expectations and dominant discourses which abound in Muslim societies. The paper highlights the stigmatisation and isolation women face, not only in the physical world, but sometimes in the online world too. We argue that Weblogs provide a unique and unexplored space where discourses of gender, sexual, and other identities are resisted and challenged. Simultaneously Weblogs can serve as both supportive and exclusionary sites in which bloggers' rights and duties become regulated. The study opens a window into the world of infertile Muslim women and has important implications for relevant healthcare and policy making.

Keywords gender, identity, infertility, Muslim women, narrative, online community, positioning, small stories, social media, Weblogs.

Introduction

Struggling to bear children naturally for those who wish to, can take its toll on most women's sense of self, and particularly so on Muslim women, where understandings of motherhood and femininity conflate with cultural, social, and religious perceptions. In Muslim cultures, where a woman's worth is still arguably measured predominantly by her ability to bear children, the effects of infertility on a woman's identity become paramount (Inhorn, 1996, Tahiri et al., 2015)[1]. This paper points to the significance of powerful discourses[2]/"master narratives"[3] (Bamberg, 2007) on the identity formation and representation of "self" and "others" in Muslim Infertile (MIF) women's stories expressed in Web logs (blogs). The dominant cultural and religious construction of Muslim women's sexual embodiment means that discussions around infertility offline in wider society are considered taboo. First-hand accounts of experiences of infertile Muslim women are limited to private interactions within close medical and social spaces. Yet some Muslim women with fertility problems have resorted to the Internet to share their experiences. The narratives they write on social media websites provide exceptional spaces in which they candidly discuss their experiences of trying

---

[1] Although childbearing is encouraged and emphasised in Islamic teachings, motherhood is a mandatory social expectation in Muslim cultures but not an essential part of womanhood in Islamic theology and law. In fact, "womanhood" in Islamic scholarship is not necessarily compromised by a woman's infertility (Chaudhry, 2010).

[2] *D*iscourses refer to those wider frameworks or dominant discourses, described elsewhere as "cultural models" (Holland & Skinner, 1987); "interpretive repertoires" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987); and "master narratives" (Lyotard, 1984). The term "D-discourses", distinguished with an italicized capital "*D"*, refers to the ways in which people enact and recognize socially and historically significant identities or "kinds of people" through well-integrated combinations of language, actions, interactions, objects, tools, technologies, beliefs, and values (Gee, 2015).

3 The term "Master narratives" although used interchangeably with *D*iscourses in many instances, point specifically to what Tannen defines as the culture-wide ideologies and sociocultural assumptions (culturally recognised discourses or shared repertoires) shaping the big N-narratives and forming "a canopy over the discourse" (Tannen, 2008, p. 210), e.g. pre-existent socio-cultural forms of interpretation such as those of masculinity, procreation after marriage, ideal mothering, etc.

to conceive and undergo fertility treatment, as well as relevant aspects of their personal and social lives.

In this paper we argue that the gender, sexual, and other identities of those experiencing infertility is in dialogue with normative discourses/forces that serve to regulate individual's "sense of self", whilst at the same time, such discourses are open to resistance and challenge. By exploring narratives, this study enhances our understanding of the sociocultural and contextual effects of infertility on an under-researched subaltern group of Muslim women (Becker & Nachigall, 1991, Cousineau & Domar, 2006, Wilson, 2014, Greil et al., 2010).

More specifically, the paper applies the interactivity level of positioning theory and small story analysis (Bamberg, 1997, 2005, 2007, Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, Georgakopoulou, 2008) to a culture-specific linguistic investigation of identity to answer the following questions:

1. How do infertile Muslim bloggers position themselves and their readers in the telling of their stories?

2. What challenges/tensions are involved in the formation of infertile/fertile subjectivities when blogging about infertility and pregnancy to a "trying-to-conceive community" of similar individuals?

The article sheds light on the unique emotional, medical, social and identity-related challenges these women face, and the choices they make to construct and negotiate their subjectivities and sense of self at different stages in their infertility journey, as they navigate their physical and online worlds. The data for this paper is drawn from a much larger study of infertile identities in Weblogs comprising of 10 blogs/bloggers with a total of 411 posts (Alhalwachi, 2021).

The paper begins with a review of pertinent literature on the issues discussed above: infertility and Muslim women's sexual identity; the role of social media as a site of self-expression; and identity and positioning in narrative research. The article then details the study's methodological design and findings, before discussing the implications of the work for healthcare awareness programmes and policy making in relation to infertile Muslim women.

Background: review of the literature

Infertility and Muslim women's sexual identity

In the context of Muslim communities, the study of women's identity(ies) in relation to infertility includes a complicated matrix of cultural narratives, religious epistemologies and gender normativities. Most Muslim communities are rooted in societies and cultures that preserve strong pronatalist norms, where "children are highly desired and parenthood is culturally mandatory" (Culley & Hudson, 2009, p. 24). According to Inhorn and Balen (2002, p. 9), infertile couples face not only emotional difficulties, due to their inability to conceive, but also "severe difficulties in achieving their social security, social power, and social perpetuity desires". Women, in particular, are faced with profound social suffering. Reproduction is seen as a natural and immanent part of marriage, where the success of a marriage becomes almost conditioned upon having children[4]. The central role of marriage and parenthood enables a new bride to establish her position in the marital home. Many studies (e.g. Culley & Hudson, 2009, Shaw, 2000, 2004) have looked at the socially mandatory

[4] Similar observations have been reported by Ellece (2012) in considering the construction of motherhood as a compulsory and indispensable aspect of feminine identity in sub-Saharan African contexts.

nature of parenthood for Muslims and the stigma associated with childlessness. Stigma, an attribute that conveys devalued stereotypes (Clair, 2018) is identified through the co-occurrence of its components, including labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination that conditionally exists when power is exercised (Link & Phelan, 2001). Culley and Hudson have documented how, with time, a bride's lack of pregnancy becomes stigmatised and socially visible. She is often subjected to blame or shame for her presumed reproductive failure (Inhorn, 2003, Obeidat et al., 2014).

The Islamic culture/religion asserts certain socio-religious expectations and socially expected roles regarding motherhood, procreation, and women's positions as wives that influence how identities are performed. Individuals are expected to conform to choices and representations that portray culturally appropriate expectations and experiences. Culley et al. (2006) report on how childless couples from South Asian communities in Leicestershire, UK, become subjected to intense scrutiny and pressure to seek a resolution to infertility, whether through treatment or remarriage. According to Akarsu and Beji (2021), religious and spiritual issues of stigmatisation create an added layer of difficulty for Muslim women experiencing infertility (see Schmid et al., 2004, Van Rooij et al., 2004, 2006, 2009 for similar findings among other minority Muslim populations in Europe). Obeidat et al. (2014) found that bearing and rearing children are central acts to women's power and well-being in Jordan. They also stress that this equates to an equal amount of stigma likely arising when pregnancy is not attainable. Their investigation identified several issues shared amongst infertile women in their sample, including, missing out on motherhood, experiencing marital stressors, feeling social pressure and enduring depression. In the face of such pressures, individuals were observed to consciously and subconsciously perform acts that constitute expected and normalised feminine or masculine roles to obtain their legitimisation[5].

[5] See Bucholtz & Hall (2004), Levon (2011), Levon & Mendez (2016), Cameron (2011), Cameron & Kulick (2005) for discussions of gender and sex normativity.

An intersecting body of research on language and gender and language and sexuality has shown how the abovementioned powerful regulatory structures influence subjectivities, e.g. via the influence of hegemonic masculinity and social heteronormative norms (McEntee-Atalianis, 2019). The significance of these lies in their effect on ideology and linguistic expression. For instance, hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995) acts as a powerful sociocultural and ideological force that is often constructed and maintained by subjects as an indication of status in narratives of ideal gender. Trying to accommodate to this in order to "fit" within this ideal can affect the lifestyle choices of individuals but can also lead to the subordination and marginalisation of some. Hegemonic masculinity can thus become a discursive tool to enact gender differentiation and domination (e.g., see Levon, 2016[6]). Similarly, heteronormativity, defined as a supposition by society/social institutions that heterosexuality is the norm, is seen as a performed process in which the materiality of the body and the performativity of gender become marked and constructed in discursive practices (Butler, 1990, 2003). Through this process, bodily norms such as ovulation, pregnancy and procreation become assumed and appropriated, taken on or contested by the subject through (normative) sexed identifications. Furthermore, masculinity and femininity are constructed and policed within social groups and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998, revealing how the performance of gender highlights how acceptance within the group becomes the main motivation for individuals' performance/adherence to (gender) norms (see Kiesling, 2011 and Cameron, 2014).

Heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity play a significant role in Muslim societies. Moreover, women's reproductive roles are presented as part of their religious identity, shaped by cultural *D*iscourses that project some form of control over their actions and decisions, acting as determiners of positions into which these women are placed, or they

[6] Levon's (2016) study investigates the connection between personal and social experience and the regulatory constraints imposed by hegemonic masculinity discourses.

place themselves. Infertile Muslim women face a unique dilemma that challenges their gender and sexual identities; questioning their femininity and worth as women and wives and influencing their interpersonal relationships. The latter as we shall show is revealed in posts on social media, a topic to which we now turn.

Social media as an outlet for self-expression

Social media, defined broadly by Leppänen et al. (2014) as including any digital environment that involves interaction between participants, allows for the exploration of the way in which identities are discursively and dialogically performed in interactions (Leppänen et al., 2018). Seargeant and Tagg (2014) have argued that social media is based on two fundamental social dynamics: the presentation of self and the building and maintenance of networked relationships or communities, thus bringing to the fore many social constructionist ideas about the nature of identity.

A discursive approach to identity is ideally positioned to interpret the identity work that occurs in online contexts for many reasons. First, the use of text is preferred as a mode of communication, notwithstanding the multimodal opportunities afforded by some online messages/platforms. Text, created by participants, can inscribe or invoke through stylistic, rhetorical and linguistics choices "identity cues" (Goffman, 1959) that offer conscious/deliberate and implied performances that form key resources in the presentation/construction of self. Second, (and very salient to this study), the degree of anonymity that social media users can enjoy is an important factor that impacts on self-formation. Individuals draw on the affordances of the social media platform they are using to foreground certain aspects of their identity and to present themselves in ways that reflect the new online situations in which they find themselves (Duguay, 2016, Hurley, 2023, Jones &

Volpe, 2011, Page, 2012). Anonymity affects agency in self-representation, reporting, and in drawing audience attention (Garcia et al., 2009, Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). Third, "authenticity", which refers to "the extent to which an online persona is seen by interlocutors to relate to the person behind it" is seen as crucial to self-formation online (Seargant & Tagg, 2014, p. 7). It provides an anchor for communication and establishes a level of trust between participants (Kane et al., 2014, Page, 2013), permitting them to engage in personal disclosures. For this reason, users may sometimes need to expend extra effort to be perceived as offering a recognisably authentic and credible identity (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). Fourth, identity performance online is arguably affected by "context collapse" (Wesch, 2009), i.e. the possibility of addressing a variety of potential audiences simultaneously (Jones & Hafner, 2012). As such, users construct and negotiate their positions, whilst taking into consideration the potential audiences for which they are performing, a matter that can prove challenging (see Boyd, 2001).

A final but crucial component of identity construction in digital environments arises from social alignments within online communities. Ongoing interactions with close social networks of familiars marks belonging to a particular community (Thorne & Black, 2011). Whether used as forms of social integration or disintegration (Giddens, 2004), people in online communities define themselves in relation to one another and to the group as a whole (Baym, 2000). As Lee (2014, p. 93) explained, identities in social media are not just about "who we are, but also who we want to be to others and how others see us or expect us to be in our networked lives".

As found in this study, social media platforms are places for "networked individualism" (Darvin, 2016, p. 526), where individuals communicate with others based on shared interests, values, norms, and desirable social identities, forming a community of practice (CofP) which may become tightly knit and cohesive (Lee et al., 2013). For individual

members in these communities, user validation and self-affirmation are dependent on acceptance. As noted above, this places users in a challenging position, working hard to develop identities by enacting authenticating processes via alignment with other members.

Web logs (blogs) have been recognised as a rich resource for online self-presentation (Nartey, 2023, Orgad, 2009). They are often utilised as social spaces for the sharing of experiences, thus providing unabbreviated textual content for researchers interested in the discursive constructions of self in narratives (e.g. Bronstein, 2014, 2015, Cook & Hasmath, 2014). Users write their posts with the expectation of there being a particular audience of readers[7]. This writer–reader association is complex and involves affective sharing and self-disclosure that are often guided by social norms — both “local”, related to the expectations of the blogging community, and “imported”, brought in from the bloggers own social background. Sharing of stories to online familiars has been shown to be soothing and reassuring (Overberg et al., 2010), helping to enhance the quality of relationships and improving the psychological well-being of the support seeker (Bessière et al., 2010).

Blogs have also been found to permit the exploration of often avoided or hidden topics in offline societies without fear of social repercussions online (Ross, 2005, Ross et al., 2005, Aziz, 2022). Deaux's (1993) social identity model posits that members of stigmatised-identity Internet groups, (such as infertile Muslim women in our case), are more likely to discuss difficult issues on-line with a shared community of stigmatised “others” and in turn incorporate their virtual group membership into their self-concepts. They are motivated to do so for two reasons: its importance to them, and the lack of an offline equivalent of the group. In the context of this study, the medium of blogs facilitates the construction of and access to

[7] See Blake’s (2012) examination of personal information sharing via blogs. He proffers a “comprehensive and grounded typology of imagined relationships with audiences” (p. 1), but notes that some bloggers frame their posts as self-directive with audiences playing a negligible role. He found that some bloggers’ practices could be categorised as “self-directed (quasi-therapy, quasi-sociality, and blogging as an end in itself)” (p. 1062), although none of his informants considered their practices to be entirely self-directed.

traditionally private narratives; narratives about pregnancy, fertility, and the female body[8], in which private individual narratives are made public. Consequently, these online spaces are a medium through which women (re)negotiate their sense of self when motherhood is denied or difficult to attain.

Many Muslim women have turned to social media to challenge stereotypes of inadequacy “by constructing their own understanding of religious texts [through which they] recover knowledge of their rights and entitlement” (Piela, 2012, p. 2). Arguably, this has enabled a number of women to dispute the religious status quo, where they often hold an underprivileged status based on current power dynamics (Inhorn, 2006[9]). In an account of online self-representation (newsgroups), Piela (2012, 2013) shows how participants use social media to shape perceptions about gender-based interpretations of Islamic sources and highlight issues on gender justice that are absent from many mainstream interpretations of Islam. Piela argues that in the online context, (as opposed to offline interactions), Muslim women are much more willing to cross boundaries between varying Islamic interpretations of women’s Islamic rights and responsibilities[10] and to develop collaborative (storied) interpretations with supporters of different views (Piela, 2012).

In the following section we elaborate further on narrative identity.

Identity and positioning in narrative research

Contemporary narrative inquiry adopts a social constructionist understanding of narrative as constitutive of “reality”. Identity is understood as a discursive and lived experience (Benwell

[8] See further Harrison’s (2014) study on negotiations of infertility in blogs.
[9] For examples, see studies by Baulch & Pramiyanti (2018) and Kavakci & Kraeplin (2017).
[10] Challenging dominant discourses and a willingness for greater self-disclosure is a phenomenon that has appeared in the examination of many other social media communities and platforms, e.g. see Ahmad & Thorpe (2020), Blake (2012), Knoll & Bronstein (2014), Luo & Hancock (2020), Masur et al. (2023) and Varnali & Toker (2015).

& Stokoe, 2006, Block, 2006, McEntee Atalianis, 2019), conceptualised as a process, a project of "becoming" that is enacted by individuals through a contextually and socially contingent intersection of multiple selves in interaction. Identity is seen as "never unified and […] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiple, constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices, and positions" (Hall, 2000, p. 17).

Recent discourse-based approaches to the study of identity in narratives advocate the focus on micro narratives in order to capture the constantly shifting and performed nature of identity construction (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Narrative theorists argue that we live in a "storytelling society" through which we make sense of our lives and the events that happen in them (Denzin, 2000), and that we construct our identities in narrative tellings, creating coherent and meaningful selves. Theorists in this realm suggest that identity can best be captured through a blend of both micro- (bottom-up) and macro- (top-down) levels of analysis that attend to small segments of speech/writing in addition to the overall structure of a narrative (see, e.g. chapters in De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019).

Small story analysis facilitates an investigation of the connections between macro discourses and micro levels of interaction by examining the relationship between teller and audience and the relevant/available subject positions (Bamberg, 2004, Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, Davies & Harré, 1990, Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, Georgakopoulou, 2007). The focus of this approach is on "small-d" discourse processes (*d*iscourse) or "discursive practices" (Bamberg et al., 2011, p. 180) through which a "bottom-up" detailed turn-by-turn (or sentence by sentence) examination is undertaken of specific instances of language-in-use (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, McEntee-Atalianis, 2019). This approach aims to reveal elements of identity that are informed by *d*iscourses of the "local in-situ contexts within which subjects find themselves speaking" [/writing] (Bamberg et al.,

2011, p. 181). As such, identities are seen as emerging from indexical devices employed by speakers/writers to make sense of the context in which they are placed, and to cue listeners interactively towards the intended communicative goal.

A small-story approach also addresses the agentive and structural forces that operate in situated social and cultural contexts of personal narratives as individuals position themselves and others (McEntee-Atalianis & Litosseliti, 2017). Positioning as defined by Harré and van Langenhove (1999, p. 37) is "the discursive process whereby people are located in conversation as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines". Due to its "here" and "now" qualities, an analysis of positioning is able to locate shifts in the reflective undertaking of telling and can be seen as a conceptualisation of "doing identities" in narratives (Bamberg, 2010, Bamberg, 2011). In small tellings, acts of positioning are read as expressions of social behaviour and interpretations of available normative *D*iscourses. These expressions/interpretations are taken up as "the different subjectivities and subject positions they inhabit or have ascribed to them within particular social, historical, and cultural contexts" (Block, 2013, p. 18). Thus, acts of social positioning in stories are denoted by the ways in which narrators express stances[11] and evaluations with respect to audiences, characters, and master narratives in their stories. These acts can take many forms, each of which contribute to a narrative construction of identity (Andreouli, 2010).

The construct of positioning (Bamberg, 1997, Wortham, 2000) has emerged as one of the most popular tools for studying identity construction in narratives. Bamberg (1997) proposed examining three levels of positioning in "the here and now" of the storytelling in order to account for the ways in which identities are communicated. The first level involves positioning in the "tale-world", examining how the narrator is located as a character in a story

[11] Stance is used here to refer to the way in which individuals "tak[e] up a *position* with respect to the form or the content of one's utterance" (Jaffe, 2009, p. 3). Stance is thus used as synonymous with positions.

world vis-à-vis with other characters; the second level conceives of positioning as an interactional process in which narrators position themselves and are positioned in relation to their audience; and the third level seeks to provide an answer to the question of "who am I?", attempting to define the teller's self as a more or less stable entity, above and beyond the current storytelling situation.

Bamberg's (1997) interactional approach to positioning is grounded in social psychological theories of self-formation which argue that identity construction may not always be harmonious but subject to discursive struggles. Such complexity, as Bamberg explains, arises from three practical challenges or "dilemmatic spaces" that face any self-formation (Bamberg, 2011, p. 178). These include navigating between:

a. Agency and control: Agency as constituted by the self (a self-to-world direction-of-fit) as opposed to a construction of agency by others (a world-to-person direction-of-fit) (Bamberg, 2010, p. 7).

b. Sameness and difference: "how individuals *position* themselves in terms of *membership claims* vis-à-vis others" (Bamberg et al., 2011, p. 184).

c. Constancy and change: "the construction of a diachronic continuity and discontinuity […] [where] subjects position a sense of self that balances the two extreme endpoints of this continuum: no change at all […] and radical change from one moment to the next" (Bamberg, 2011, p. 103).

The positioning framework conceives of identity as operating at and through these dimensions, suggesting that the individual agentively — though constrained by structural forces (Bamberg, 2004) — draws upon and negotiates multiple circulating *D*iscourses that regulate the rights and obligations of individuals/groups. Identities and positions can be constructed or challenged through particular tellings, indexical cues, or linguistic features during a particular situated discursive negotiation (McEntee-Atalianis & Litosseliti, 2017).

Narratives, or story accounts told by individuals, are understood to provide a sense of identity continuity and temporality. They are significantly connected with larger *D*iscourses and/or master narratives that are part of the cultural context of the subject, thus influencing the way in which the subject displays, counters, or assumes positions for themselves or others (Bamberg, 1997, Bamberg, 2011). Individuals construct who they are by using smaller discourses that are often linked to master narratives or cultural scripts. An analysis of the concept of narrative therefore requires taking into account the idea of "what is being said, how it is said, and why it might have been said" — as it is contextually embedded at a particular point in time at a particular location (Bamberg, 2010, p. 180).

This interaction between small stories and master narratives reveals the way in which we, as individuals, claim positions in relation to various components that we define as part of who we are. This includes our gendered and sexual identities, which rely for their composition on the degree of conformity to socially constructed notions of femininities and masculinities. This, in addition to other identifications (e.g. social class, age and ethnic/racial identities), place us within groups based on a sense of a shared history, descent, belief systems, practices, language, and religion etc.

A small but significant number of researchers have turned towards utilising the small story lens to investigate the linguistic and rhetorical practices embedded in online user narratives (e.g. Dayter, 2014, 2015, 2016, Georgakopoulou, 2014, 2015, Jaworska, 2018, Page, 2018, Page et al., 2013, Perrino, 2018 and West, 2013). They have examined distinctive discursive accomplishments in relation to narrative and narrativity. For example, Jaworska's (2018) study looks at narratives of postnatal depression on Mumsnet[12]. Her study shows how online narrative practices by women with a stigmatised condition work to produce

[12] A website that hosts discussion forums for parents in the United Kingdom. It contains a range of topics including shared advice and information on parenting.

transformative effects of trouble-telling and sharing online. Similarly, Perrino (2018) analyses the retellings of traumatic experiences in blogs and shows how bloggers and commentators recontextualise, oppose, and reorient stories about natural disasters and create a virtual sense of a shared community which lead to the construction of collective identities and offer support and consolation to others. She describes this as a "sympathy"-based collective identity that is co-constructed through narrative retellings.

Building on this work, this study examines small stories told in blogs by infertile Muslim women online.

Methodology

Data set

The narratives analysed in this paper stem from a larger study which examined a corpus of 411 archived posts from infertility-related personal blogs (Alhalwachi, 2021). The blogs were not derived from a single forum but resulted from an intensive digital search using a snowballing technique in which blogs were connected informally through online follow features. All bloggers identified themselves and their readers with the label "trying to conceivers", "TTCers", or simply "infertiles". Purposive sampling (Maxwell, 1997) was employed for the identification and selection of information-rich cases as per the objectives of the study (Silverman, 2015). Selection was based on representation or recurrent "topics" that were identified through a close reading and coding of all posts.

Blogs selected for this study take the form of interactive diaries that focus on informing and interacting with others undergoing the same experience. They form informally

connected communities, linked to each other via the ways their participants use the technology to engage in dialogue (see Johnson, 2001 for a similar investigation of a nontypical blogging community). That is to say that although each blog is an independent webpage authored by an individual person, they include hyperlinks placed by their authors to blogs of similar interest/content, and their users follow each other's "feed" and use a shared terminology/linguistic repertoire. IF blog authors address each other as a community, follow a certain protocol, and identify themselves as members.

Most blogs allow readers to leave comments. However, comments in our dataset were limited in number and found in only three out of the 10 selected blogs. Nevertheless, interactivity was evident in the limited comments found and in references to stories by other posters or in documented reactions and commentary on issues that were picked up by bloggers from within the online IF community.

Due to limitations of space, this paper presents two posts by one blogger, Mona (a pseudonym, she can also be identified by the blog name "Infertile Muslim" (location undisclosed)). Mona's posts have been selected as they are representative of other blogs analysed in the larger study.

Analysis

As noted above, the small story framework was appropriated for the analysis of the excerpts. In this paper we discuss Positioning Level 2 which explores: "*How the speaker/narrator positions herself (and is positioned) within the interactive situation"* (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 385). This level of analysis explains why the story was told at that particular point in the narrative, in relation to narrator-audience positions (Deppermann, 2013, p. 6). It investigates agentive positioning, where the local, interactional, fragmentary, (co)-

constructed and self-contradictory positioning of self and other (that is subject to conflicting interpretations), is emphasised (see De Fina & Georgakopoulou (2015) for a discussion).

Analysis focusses predominantly on the blogger's self-positioning and interactional work (including "imagined" audience positioning), although general responses and responses to her final blogs, where given, are provided and briefly discussed. It should be noted that unlike conversational texts, the blog posts were not usually responded to directly/consecutively or individually, but rather certain, often reoccurring issues, arising across blog posts were chosen by other bloggers as a general "issue" or topic to be discussed. Private messages, where made, and where reference is made to them in the blogs, are very briefly discussed.

Results

The two posts presented here (written by Mona six years apart) are chosen as exemplars of how MIFs challenge normative discourses on gender and community roles and expectations, both on- and off-line. The first excerpt is an early posting at the start of her infertility journey. The second is a completion post, written at the end of her infertility journey, following tens of posts about the struggles she encountered trying to conceive. It is intended as a final post in which Mona announces her pregnancy.

Excerpt 1 below presents a recurring example, found in six out of ten Weblogs studied, of how Muslim women define and negotiate their experience of infertility at the early stages of their diagnosis. Mona reports on her reaction to the IF diagnosis after seeking medical help. She constructs her identity in relation to medical *D*iscourses and to other characters in the story world. Interactively, Mona's positioning allows her to seek sympathy

from her readers and to find purpose. No comments were left for this post.

Excerpt 1: *How We've Dealt With Our Infertility,* Mona, Infertile Muslim, Oct 13 2011

1 *Having infertility flung at you can be quite a shock. Even though we were unprepared to get*
2 *the MFI [Male Factor Infertility] diagnosis, I think because of our personalities and faith, we*
3 *weren't going to let our lives be torn apart by it.*
4 *In the initial stages one's first reaction to infertility may possibly be the question "why us?"*
5 *There were moments, when caught up in the emotions of it all, that we asked this but before*
6 *spiraling out of control we learnt to accept the divine qadaa (decree) and qadr (destiny) that*
7 *Allah TA*[13] *[h]as put out for us. Our focus was on the positive and the aspects of our lives that*
8 *we had control of.*
9 *Our greatest therapy thus far has been striving to be the best Muslims we can be. Mostly in*
10 *remembrance of our creator but also in service to our community. Whether it's by assisting*
11 *soup kitchens, teaching little ones how to read Qur'an or generally being there for someone*
12 *else in need. No matter how difficult a situation you think you may be in, there's always*
13 *someone in a position more dire that you can help, regardless of how humble your gesture.*
14 *Everyone's different. The way we've dealt with our situation has worked for us. Our*
15 *relationship becomes better when we work together while aiding others.*
16 *We do still have our own worries and concerns, but our outlook when we started IVF*
17 *[In vitro fertilisation] was a little more relaxed and placing our faith in whatever is in God's*
18 *will. Whatever must be, will be.*

[13] *Ta'ala* (Arabic: The glorified).

In the following we examine how Mona manages "self" and "other" positioning and negotiates desired roles for herself. The analysis shows how, whilst addressing her "imagined community" of readers, she frames herself as a type of advice-giver, and uses her account to provide comfort and support. To achieve this, she calls upon shared experiences to construct events, align with her readers and highlights implied normative *D*iscourses that are relevant to this particular CofP. How this is managed is explored below.

Mona frames her story with the diagnosis of male factor infertility (line 2). This highly stigmatised phenomenon is placed upfront to set the level of disclosure and the depth of the problem, given its taboo nature. She then moves to offer her readers insights into her "therapeutic" approach to infertility. She takes on an affiliative stance constructing her readership on the basis of shared mutual understanding through multiple (complex) constructions. She manages this by indexing her infertile position as she reports on the news of her diagnosis and by using medical and TTC jargon such as *MFI* and *IVF (lines 2, 18).* Jargon is part of a shared repertoire or common language that makes up the CofP's discourse. The use of jargon affords a "presumed" interactive accomplishment (Baumer et al., 2008) whereby Mona establishes her IF position and aligns with other women in the CofP. In addition to the use of jargon, she indexes affiliation in making generalisations about infertility through using the generic pronoun (e.g. *"having infertility flung at **you** can be quite a shock"* line 1). Here she alludes to a common affective reaction of shock that is shared by IF women[14], describing infertility metaphorically as an inanimate heavy object that can "flung"

[14] Reactions of shock towards the diagnosis and of institutional insensitivity were recorded elsewhere in the data (e.g. "*after a week of not hearing from the doctor, I called him. He seemed to forget who I was, and after a few minutes of talking, he told me my results were fine. He appeared to be going through some papers and suddenly said, 'Oh! Please can you ask your husband to call me.' […] My husband called the doctor, who then informed him that he had a condition called Azoospermia, this results in no sperm being ejaculated. We were stunned. Trying to be positive, we went back to Johannesburg and repeated the tests again and the results were the same. I was so angry with the doctor for not calling us to tell us this information. I was also angry with him for telling me over the phone after the second round of tests, 'Now don't be upset, but you will probably not get pregnant ever'."* excerpt *A pregnancy story*, Yasmin, Mum Loves Me, Sep 2014).

suddenly at a couple. Moreover, being "flung at" indexes all those similar clinical instances where diagnostic information was insensitively and mechanically conveyed to patients. Mona's use of "flung" embeds this meaning, pointing to the way in which medical institutions handle such delicate information, whilst simultaneously aligning with others who report in their blogs similar experiences of being subjected to such institutional insensitivity (see footnote 14). This engenders mutuality and understanding in the blogger/reader relationship, further marked by the use of pronouns. Notably, Mona uses pronouns throughout the blog to indicate positioning. She first uses the exclusive first-person pronouns "we, "us" and "our" to present and delimit the couple as unified in the face of the diagnosis, but soon ventures into the story details using "our" and "we" to extend the inclusivity, directly addressing her audience (e.g. "no matter how difficult a situation you think you may be in", line 13). Moreover, by mitigating her participative act with elastic language[15] (Zhang, 2015) in "*I think because…*" (line 2), readers are invited to co-evaluate Mona's position, which implies a collaborative narrative activity. The built symmetrical relationship between the blogger and her readers invites the latter to partake in her world by reflecting on their own stories and experiences of IF medical subjectification. This inclusive positioning places Mona's contribution (and advice) as arising from the epistemic stance of an experienced "insider"/in-group member. Readers are, in turn, constructed as "qualified" to receive the advice proffered.

At a different level, Mona works to establish rapport with her audience by being very open about the couple's response to diagnosis and their current feelings. A stance of openness is constructed to award her credibility and aid her argument about how one should adapt to infertility through different means. Before sharing the details of her story, she reports on her

[15] Elastic language (Zhang, 2015) refers to vague language use, including expressions that display a degree of uncertainty. An example is the use of epistemic stance markers (e.g. I think) and other subjective expressions that perform essential pragmatic functions such as mitigation and self-protection that are much needed in delicate and emotional tellings.

affective reaction to her diagnosis (*"having infertility flung at you..."*, line 1) to invoke sympathy and alignment. Assumed shared IF experiences with the blogging TTC community enable her to disclose intimate details about her life and emotions that would not be easily shared off-line (e.g. discussing male factor diagnosis, lines 1-2). Her sharing of the intimate details of her reaction and raw emotional (couple-related) turmoil to a group of online "friends"[16] (e.g. see lines 3, 5 and 12) display typical but usually untold emotional hardships. As a participant in this online community of IF women, adding her version of what it meant to be facing infertility with a certain level of self-presentational disclosure, works to construct "rapport-enhancement" and "rapport-maintenance" (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 29) and to construct both her contribution and identity as an authentic and familiar IF blogger. This act of voluntarily sharing stories, stories that are not told with this degree of openness with other people outside of the group, invites bloggers to undertake similar disclosures, which in turn consolidates relationships and helps strengthen the community.

Mona's relationship with her audience is strategically negotiated through positions of affiliation and difference. Interactants (readers) are acknowledged as taking distinct stances in relation to their infertility *"everyone's different"* (line 15), thus mitigating the possibility of exclusion of readers who might not align with her views, experience, or religious position. Her sensitivity to individual differences is stressed in "*The way we've dealt with the situation has worked for us*" (line 16), a construction that enables her to pre-empt potential negative uptake, suggesting that her story is only one "example" of how an individual or couple may come to terms with infertility. She therefore acknowledges other narratives of success and invites them to be told.

Excerpt 2: A different perspective, Mona, Infertile Muslim, Nov 11 2014

[16] The expression "online friends" refers to relationships formed on the basis of mutual interest and sustained through the Internet via computer or online services.

1 *I haven't posted in a while and I think I have finally found the words to express why.*

2 *After our FET [Frozen Embryo Transfer] in May earlier this year, I am now 30 weeks*

3 *pregnant. I somehow managed to go through the bigger part of my pregnancy without posting*

4 *anything for two reasons:*

5 *1. I felt guilty*

6 *2. I didn't ever want to be perceived as one of "them".*

7 *Why would I feel guilty? After going through so many emotions in this infertility journey, in*

8 *my darkest days I recall brewing over ugly thoughts that those who fell pregnant effortlessly*

9 *did not deserve it. Or even be disgusted at how happy and excited couples were thinking that*

10 *they shouldn't gloat. I somehow made this rule that if you're not experiencing infertility,*

11 *you're one of "them".*

12 *I felt guilty for ever having those thoughts, because when I saw those 2 lines [positive result*

13 *on the home pregnancy test], I realized that it has nothing to do with who may be deserving*

14 *or not and that the overwhelming joy you feel isn't something that can be contained in any*

15 *way, as with any overwhelming emotion. […]. This leads to my reason for finally writing this*

16 *post.*

17 *I've connected with many people through social networking via my Infertile profiles. One*

18 *such person recently messaged me sharing their news of adoption. I am happy and overjoyed*

19 *for her and immediately congratulated her. In that excitement, I shared my news of being*

20 *pregnant. One of her first responses was that it hurts her to hear such news. I then shared it*

21 *was after 2 failed IVF/ICSI attempts and that is was our FET [Frozen Embryo Transfer] that*

22 *proved successful.*

23 *In trying to console, I sincerely prayed that she gets to experience pregnancy as well, with*

24 *God's will. Shortly afterward, she told me that I shouldn't share such prayers with IF women*

25 *directly and should rather make the prayer privately as it [is] depressing and that women*
26 *who finally become pregnant after years can be very hurtful in the things they say.*
27 *This took [me] by surprise and it offended me. It offended me because it made me seem like*
28 *one of "them". The perception of a "them" that I wielded when I didn't know how else to*
29 *deal. A "them" I believed had no place in sharing their joys with me while I was in my*
30 *deepest turmoil and sadness that accompanies infertility. My intention for sharing my prayer*
31 *with her was never intended to offend, I mean, I know what the pain of infertility feels like. I*
32 *only shared the prayer from a sincere longing for her to experience what I am experiencing*
33 *too. Then I realized something, those who are going through infertility can easily build a*
34 *stigma toward and ostracize those who are fertile and even those who have managed to*
35 *successfully conceive through infertility. I am guilty of that.*
36 *I see this journey of infertility in a different perspective now that I am pregnant. During my*
37 *weakest moments struggling with the challenges of infertility, I felt it my due to express my*
38 *pain through all infertility put me through (sic). I've come to understand and now believe that*
39 *it is equally the due of every fertile or anyone who reaches the milestone of finally conceiving*
40 *through their infertility, to be able to express their joy and share their experience without*
41 *guilt. [...]*

In this post, Mona discusses the difficult position she now occupies within the IF community since she became pregnant, subjected to stigmatising perceptions of being boastful, which are understood to be insensitive or hurtful, and consequently place her as an out-group member. She aligns with group norms and values, whilst presenting herself as a victimised pregnant woman with a shared history of IF struggles. The way she manages this is explained below.

Mona takes on several subject positions, that of: a blogger, an infertile woman and a sister. These identities take precedence when she explains the timing of the post (*"[I] haven't*

posted in a while", line 1). The explanations that follow (lines 3-12) depict her as being sensitive to how her news may cause pain to others and to the possible negativity and rejection she may experience by "friends". This sensitivity signals her appreciation of the group's norms and values. It establishes her as an authentic friend/blogger who is concerned about the well-being of her readers — rather than a boastful pregnant woman whose success in achieving pregnancy has distanced her from the suffering of others. Her discursive acts position her character in a world of shared struggle, enabling her to align with the group's moral code ("a world to subject" direction of fit).

Mona calls upon values of synthetic sisterhood (Talbot, 1995), indexing a world of shared struggles. These values are embedded and alluded to in the way in which she develops a co-constructed and interactive narrative, showcased through a range of interactive meta-discursive markers (Hyland, 2010, 2018)[17]. These include "mitigation, reference to shared knowledge, to persona, status and the manoeuvring of readers to see things in the same way as the writer does" (Hyland, 2001, p. 3). For example, in the construction "*I didn't ever want to be perceived as one of them*" (line 6), she not only places herself in alignment with the group against others, but presupposes common stances, based on shared perceptions and beliefs about others. Her construction signals a sisterly position of support, explaining how the group's core values of solidarity affect her actions. She works to mitigate and fend off accusations of being hurtful or oblivious to the group's suffering and promotes a position of valuing sisterhood through sensitivity and consideration. Such claims are found throughout her narrative, as shown in her supporting stance towards the "adopting woman" *"longing for her to experience what I am experiencing too"* (line 32). In fact, the persona of the adopting

[17] Interactional markers/elements of metadiscourse are rhetorical tools that make a text reader-friendly and enable the writer to get the attention of the audience. These features can allow us to "access the ways that writers and speakers take up positions and align themselves with their readers in a particular context" (Hyland, 2010, p. 127).

woman and Mona's reaction to her, reinforces Mona's image as a supportive TTC-er, further aligning with the community's social and moral expectations. Indeed, displaying a moral stance is a strategy repeatedly employed by IF women in the larger dataset in order to legitimise their authority (e.g. see Alhalwachi, 2021: Appendix I, II). The narrative trajectory of being a good Muslim woman helps these bloggers fight back the stigmatised identity by presenting the self as a good person (Toyoki & Brown, 2014). A further example can be found in the use of the epistemic marker "*I know*" in "*I know how the pain of infertility feels like*" (line 31). Such references to instances of suffering serve to construct a shared-world view with her readership, working to frame a "sisterly" pact of expected solidarity.

In addition, Mona employs her blogger identity to co-construct her story as she positions the audience as an intrinsic part of her narration. Interactionality is evident as she rhetorically probes clarifications and makes justifications and requests – both implicitly and explicitly (e.g. *"Why would I feel guilty?",* line 7). Her narration is cued as a social activity that incorporates collective evaluations, which in turn includes her audience in her act of reasoning. As explained earlier, Mona's post is built on the basis of presupposed aligned stances with her readership, linked to a mutual understanding of solitude and suffering brought about by infertility. This creates a shared platform and marks her telling as authentically guided by her sensitivity towards others and her understanding of the complexities that lie beneath the physical (IF) concerns of this social community.

These discursive and interactional strategies consolidate Mona's role as an advisor. They allow her to discuss the emotional strain of pregnancy after infertility, to claim "rights" of expression and to call for changes of perspective that some hold towards pregnant others (who were once IF-ers) within her community. Mona's expert position corroborates findings in which marginal speakers authenticate and negotiate their identities by establishing themselves as experts with insider knowledge in a marginal social context (Piazza, 2019,

2023). By portraying themselves as experts on the subject of infertility, speakers act as genuine, agentive, self-reflective, critical, and able to offer constructive advice to others (Piazza, 2023).

Following this post, four comments were left on Mona's post by her readers which construct supportive positions towards her story:

(1) Jasmine says: *I'm so so happy for u... I just recently had an FET.. N praying n hoping positive through all my anxiety & negative thoughts shaythan [the devil] puts in me. May be after 2 weeks or so I may no whether it worked or not.... Plz do pray for us....*

(2) Sister says: *Assalamu alaikum! So happy to read that you were expecting! I left you a comment a couple of years ago as I was in a similar situation and Alhumdulillah we were blessed with a baby several months ago after a couple rounds of IVF. Have you had the baby by now? Hope you and baby are doing well Insha'Allah!*

(3) uJ says: *Asalam o alikum wa rehmatullah Alhamdulillah 🙂 congrats to you and your husband. I am very happy for you alhamdullah. Indeed Allah's plan is best. I always wanted to find a Muslim couple, who is also going through the same situation as us and alhamdullah I found your blog. I would take the duas[prayers] any day. Please remember us in your duals as well may Allah make it easy for all of us amen. And May Allah bless us all with pious children amen. Please continue your blog jazakaAllah Khairan for sharing your story. Salam*

(4) Smile says: *It's actually really refreshing to hear that the process has worked. Makes me happy to know that somewhere out there one less couple is out of the sadness of not having a child and into the happiness of parenthood- InshaAllah. Although with hardship comes ease and even without children we have so many things to be grateful for- some we are aware of and numerous we are not.*

Hoping the next round brings you comfort and joy.

In contrast to the response Mona reports in her own post, the comments readers left on Mona's post construct supportive positions towards her story. All posters include some type of "dua" or prayer, taking on a position of alignment with Mona and distancing themselves from the antagonist in her story who criticised her pregnancy announcement and rejected her prayers. Readers' reactions construe positions of sameness formed by presenting a snapshot of their IF journey stories, with the intention of showcasing solidarity and a shared worldview. These stances are an immediate effect of Mona's criticism of bias and stigma

which can be experienced in the IF community and shows how through storytelling, she manages to affectively redefine the rules and norms within the community.

It is worth noting that instances of criticism and stigmatisation of IF women who manage to conceive were commonly found on bloggers' pages or via private messaging. Mona specifies how for her it was a private message, "*I've connected with many people through social networking via my Infertile profiles. One such person recently messaged me sharing their news"* (lines 17-18). However, in another post (see Alhalwachi, 2021, Appendix II), a blogger writing under the pseudonym Suki describes a similar story in which a blogger who managed to conceive was faced with criticism and felt dismay, she writes *"in our world of IF, there's a similar kind of unfair critique that Jay over at The 2 Week Wait*[18] *faced. I had seen this phenomenon elsewhere online and still find it so confusing. I understand the sadness, but not the bitterness. Why would one direct one's anger at someone who's been through the same pain as you?"* (Alhalwachi, 2021, Appendix II, lines 12-14). Pregnancy within the IF community is clearly seen as a threat to the community's core values and role and the rights and duties of bloggers in providing and receiving a supportive and "sisterly" network for IF sufferers. Unsurprisingly, the phenomenon of criticising pregnant IF-ers for insensitivity is thus viewed with scrutiny and moral reasoning by bloggers that witness how others are subjected to it or experience it themselves.[19]

Discussion

---

[18] Hyperlink: http://the2weekwait.blogspot.com/2011/08/pregnant-infertile.html

[19] It is worth mentioning that Mona revisits her blog three years later (after her pregnancy announcement post) to write about going through another cycle of infertility treatment as she is trying for a second child.

Drawing on Mona's posts as a case study, this paper sought to investigate how a self-ascribed infertile Muslim woman positions and constructs herself and her readership in the telling of her infertility journey on social media. The analysis reveals the challenges involved in the formation of infertile/fertile subjectivities when blogging about infertility and pregnancy to a "trying-to-conceive community" of similar individuals. A comparison of the stories told at the beginning and end of Mona's journey uniquely represent reports of stigmatisation. The first post details the stigma experienced when interacting offline, whilst the second reports on the stigma felt once the poster's status had changed within the online group, due to her pregnancy. The analysis revealed how blogs are considered as valuable and valued platforms to discuss a highly taboo topic in Muslim societies – that of infertility, whilst battling infertility. Inclusion and support were found to be offered throughout the stages of the IF journey (from the diagnosis and first reaction – throughout the duration of infertility treatment – and at the end, where pregnancy or adoption is mostly achieved). However, members within these online communities can also "otherize" members whose status changes to that of pregnancy. It is evident that although these blogs are created as a space of support and healing, there are gate-keeping practices at play. We saw that it was only at the last stage of the IF journey that ostracization was felt following out-grouping practices reported by some within the community. Other members, in contrast, worked to retain supportive positions despite changes to member status (from IF to pregnant).

We found within Mona's accounts, and in the analysis of a larger corpus of data (Alhalwachi, 2021), that bloggers work to perform sociality by constructing an insider perspective within the blogging CofP, replicating the group's style, e.g. indexing "friendship talk" through an informal layout and "confessional" narratives, and through setting expectations of an interactional association based on mutual experiences. The rhetorical aim is to construct interactional alignment and to present the blogger as "authentic". This

corroborates findings elsewhere which reveal the pivotal role that authenticity plays in adding social value to the presentation and a perceived level of trust (Herring, 2003, Hew, 2011, Kane et al., 2014, Page, 2013, Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

We also found that narratives in blogs are constructed to fit in a stream of “shared” events, collectively composed by individual bloggers within a recognisable and distinct genre. Storytellers launch their stories and blogs in chronological order with an identifiable beginning (marked by an IF diagnosis) and end, allowing readers to envision a journey with a conclusion (whether that be pregnancy, adoption or acceptance of childlessness). In their initiation, MIF women also proclaim the use of blogs as a form of therapy, a way to connect with similar others and to share stories and experiences in a bid to help others, as well as themselves.

Stories in MIF blogs generally adhere to and/or orient to the norms and stances set by the TTC community — marked by community jargon, linguistic indices and implied “rules” of membership, which work, on the whole, to create a space of support and healing for IF women. Exceptions are found, as noted in Mona’s report in her final blog. The analysis revealed how specific stance acts are performed to index inclusion within or exclusion from the group. These indices, endorsed by the appropriation and contestation of specific *D*iscourses reveal how individuals comply with, reject and/or renegotiate group norms and wider social expectations. The small story framework revealed these tensions, showing how bloggers discursively managed their beliefs, desires, hopes and circumstances in relation to (and sometimes in conflict with) normative, socio-culturally and religiously grounded expectations on- and off-line.

Prominent among the findings is how the performance of identity is motivated by (dis)affiliation with other interactants online and offline, and cultural/religious orientations. Master narratives about infertility and procreation had a profound impact on the lived

experiences of MIF women. Consistent with much of the existing literature on language, identity and gender studies (e.g. Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, Eagly et al., 2000, Heilman, 2012, Talbot, 2019, Weatherall, 2005) especially in relation to the Muslim world (see literature review above), this study shows how participants, and others in the offline world, who are influenced by cultural scripts, exert substantial influence on the perceptions, expectations and behaviours of infertile women. We found MIF women negotiate these perceptions and expectations, often, as illustrated in Mona's posts, by appropriating religious discourses as tools to afford: a sense of meaning; connection to and disassociation from past and present selves; distancing from other individuals; and self-affirmation. Fundamentally, MIF bloggers use online spaces to enact their identity(ies) in relation to sameness or difference with other TTC members, and sameness/difference from the dominant culture, although these positions are never fixed but are largely context dependant and, as shown in Mona's post, can change over time. MIF identities are nevertheless found to always be constructed to fulfil the need for group belonging, self-esteem, and efficacy.

The analysis of Mona's first post (excerpt 1) represents the way in which bloggers negotiate their sense of self vis-à-vis *D*iscourses/master narratives that posit conception and mothering as a preferred status. They work to redefine their positioning as agentless childless women to more agentive individuals (e.g. Mona constructs herself as a social contributor). Similarly, Korolczuk's (2014) observed that online infertile participants produced novel forms of identity to redefine their fragmented "socially legitimized childlessness" (p. 431). The analysis of interactionality in storied accounts revealed that positions of sameness and affiliation were shown to be essential in constructing bloggers' identity within the infertile community. Stances of alignment were achieved by indexing a shared medical and psychological experience and understanding. Bloggers' responses to infertility, as in Mona's example, were framed in relation other women's assumed/shared infertility experiences and

attitudes towards womanhood and femininity. A pattern emerged in which reporting on seeking medical help to achieve pregnancy (i.e. “body failure” as informants referred to it, see below) was used as a tool to establish the self as an eligible member of the blogging group. In most cases, reference to a formal medical diagnosis was often used as a verifier of “infertility” and as a passage to belonging to the TTC community. Following this established state, constructions of sameness in relation to physical and social experiences were evident in every single post. In relation to early narrations of infertility experiences, these were found to achieve a number of realisations, permitting bloggers to take on various identity positions such as: “advice giver”, “friend” and “supporter” as evidenced in the analysis above. They enabled bloggers to share “IF” related experiences: such as their physical and emotional suffering; to rationalise their responses in relation to social and medical subjectification; in addition to creating rapport with readers through orientations to “honesty”, “openness” and “authenticity”. These positions acted as therapeutic strategies, seeking to induce support and sympathy and creating a safe shared space for their stories to be heard.

Analysis shows that whilst bloggers work hard to present a positive spin/acceptance of their condition, they also construct the infertile self as being in a physically and socially disadvantaged state. In Mona's case, she presents her inability to conceive as a biological failure, which in turn positions her as failing to fulfil her role as a wife and a woman. This finding is pervasive in the larger data set, IF bloggers often discuss their failing body in calls for subject alignment and mutuality. These presentations associate women’s desire to become mothers with master narratives of physical femininity, discussing their age and biological timeline as added barriers towards their desired state. Readers empathise with these constructions, making reference to their own “defective” physical states. Their performances align with a hegemonic cultural definition of femininity/infertility that builds itself around pervasive assumptions about gender roles as linked to the body.

In addition to physical barriers, social barriers are also presented to convey the imposed and powerless positions that come with infertility. As with the physical experiences described above, uncomfortable social experiences and encounters are alluded to. By sharing these negative encounters online, bloggers use the anonymous narrative space to seek support and present the self as empathetic to other IF-blog readers.

At the "end" of the IF journey, Mona takes on the position of a woman who is subjected to "stigma" within and outside the online community, in order to imbue empathy from her readers. We witness how the online space can act as a gate-keeper imposing restrictions on its membership. A once "safe space" of inclusion can become exclusionary, demanding interactional management and a renegotiation of status by the blogger. Given her highly stigmatised position as a pregnant woman amongst an infertile group, she tactically projects the identity of an ally. This ally is presented as a member that appreciates the norms and difficulties that other infertile women/subalterns experience. She works hard to adhere to the group's moral codes and values. Such performances are found to be preferred positions for IF bloggers to create when facing stigma and exclusion. Performances of sameness, discursive alliances (including synthetic sisterhood), are used strategically to link them (as members) to the group's core values and to call for acceptance. They construct an identity of a supportive IF member that is rhetorically incorporated to justify bloggers actions, enabling them to assert claims and dispel accusations and to fight against the stigmatised identity.

Conclusion

This paper has shown — as exemplified by Mona's narrative and corroborated by other bloggers' positionality in a larger study (Alhalwachi, 2021) — how dominant IF assumptions

around motherhood, as a marker of social status, stems from the social position that Muslim women occupy, and from prevalent assumptions/master narratives around pregnancy that are shared in the Muslim IF world. A main observation is that pregnancy is viewed as a superior and more "successful" model of womanhood and motherhood than other available choices such as adoption. Bloggers in the larger study, (from which Mona's data was drawn), reflect a view of biological motherhood as a mark of social status, despite their largely mitigated representation. These positions surface in women's constructions of both their pregnancies and their IF-related positioning of self/others, which is reflected, for example, in references to "deserving" and "undeserving" pregnancies: a recurring theme, used as a means of legitimisation in the IF communities. These notions appeared in the way IF women discount pregnancies that happen easily, and value discourses that portray pregnancy as a gift and an achievement.

The notion of a "deserved pregnancy", created by IF members to distinguish their pregnancies from others, places certain pressures on them. Their narrations reveal how they resist and challenge particular aspects of prevailing discourses that circulate in the IF community, which could mark them as inferior. For instance, pregnancy is marked as "deserved" if it comes after suffering and is constructed as "under-appreciated" if it came naturally and easily. Indeed, Mona is at pains to point out that this was not the case for her. This assumption is reflected in the way IF women emphasise their IF experiences, reminding readers of who they are and what they believe in as IF members. It reflects the moral order that IF women use to counter the master narratives of motherhood as a marker of social status (i.e. not every pregnancy is one that deserves celebrating/sharing). It serves to mark an ideological stratification to construct and reinforce a social order and boundaries within and outside of the support group. By discounting the achievements of those who become pregnant naturally, they create a safe and bounded territory. These findings corroborate those of Toyoki

& Brown (2014) who found that "stigmatised identities are best theorized in relation to individuals' repertoires of other (non-stigmatised) identities" [in our case, natural conceivers]. Speakers often draw on these repertoires "to make supportive self-claims" and to exert power (Toyoki & Brown, 2014, p. 715). MIF women often have considerable scope for managing diverse, fragile, perhaps even contradictory, understandings of their "selves" in the face of master narratives of exclusion and stigma. This can be observed further in the way speakers positions the "self" in response to these and other master narratives[20].

In sum, the analysis of bloggers end posts reveals how at the final transitory stage of infertility, MIF women take on a reflective persona, bridging their infertile history with their current state. It shows how they construct a hybrid identity as a person "in-between", performing similarity and holding on to IF identity – indexed via accounts of uncertainty, suffering and tribulation, whilst carefully claiming their new identity as pregnant/adopting women. Bloggers display multiple positions that reflect a state of inbetweenness, between fertility and infertility, which threatens their status of inclusion within the group and forebodes potential loss of friendship. To manage this dilemma, they work, as illustrated in Mona's accounts, on positions of alignment and inclusion, enacting preferred positions that accommodate to the groups' core values, such as trust, solidarity, and recognition of others. At the same time, they disalign with personas that they construct as "insensitive" to pregnant members, revealing stereotypical dispositions of "disloyal" members in which post-IF pregnant women are often placed. TTC bloggers often call upon moral stances of responsibility and sensitivity and endeavour to demonstrate empathy towards each other and construct themselves as considerate "friends of the journey" who possess a shared history. This display permits the presentation of an authentic, experienced/authoritative and dedicated IF member and contributor to the group. Authenticity and experiential knowledge are used to

[20] Positioning in relation to master narratives is usually scrutinised at the third level of analysis in small story framework, which is not the focus of this paper.

legitimize bloggers' emotional judgment and influence IF women's perceptions of pregnant others.

This research has opened a window into an unresearched and previously "voiceless" community of infertile Muslim women. It increases awareness about the unique emotional, medical, social and identity-related challenges infertile Muslim women face, and the choices they make to construct and negotiate their subjectivities and sense of self in between the real and online worlds. The implications of this understanding are numerous - it can inform the work of medics, teachers and policy makers in supporting Muslim women (and of other faiths arguably) undergoing similar experiences. A focus on empowering discourses and finding suitable safe spaces and media of communication in training, teaching and awareness programmes is seen as crucial to help women maintain positive self-esteem (e.g. see Adnan et al., 2019, Esplen et al., 2020, McGannon et al., 2016, Rains, 2018, Zhang et al., 2018 discussion of the empowering effects of illness experience sharing). Additionally, the study's findings can be used to improve communication strategies between religious and cultural institutions and their community members who are undergoing infertility treatment, thus lowering resistance to treatment, anxiety and stigmatisation towards and amongst married couples who might require assistance from health, or social/religious services. At a more general policy/education strategy-making level, greater efforts are needed to bridge the divide between faith-based perceptions and social expectations, and the realities of infertile Muslim women. These should be aimed at raising awareness of infertile Muslim women's experiences, as expressed through the blogs under examination, in order to decrease cases of social isolation, mental strain/illness and to avoid delays in women accessing treatment and support.

To conclude, the case study presented in this paper demonstrates that the relationship between and within communities of IF women and society at large is complex and in flux.

Members are in a constant dialogue (on- and off-line) with hegemonic positions, whether they conform or challenge the discourses of exclusion that they are subjected to. It is hoped that this paper offers a better understanding of Muslim infertile women's subjectivity, instead of a common view of "silence" and/or lack of agency and power. We have shown the sophisticated and complex nature of position management as subjects' attempt to construe positive subjectivities and group affiliations. On the other hand, the study also suggests that online platforms, have the potential to act as gate-keeping spaces, only entertaining the voices of those maintaining a constant IF identity. They can therefore become challenging environments for marginalised entities if they do not conform to the expected narrative(s) that they promote.

References

Adnan, W. N. A. W., Ibrahim, N. A., & Fakhruddin, W. F. W. W. (2019). Illness experience sharing on personal blogs: A case study of Malaysian breast cancer survivors. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, 19(4).

Ahmad, N., & Thorpe, H. (2020). Muslim sportswomen as digital space invaders: Hashtag politics and everyday visibilities. *Communication & Sport*, 8(4-5), 668-691. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519898447

Akarsu, R. H., & Beji, N. K. (2021). Spiritual and religious issues of stigmatisation women with infertility: A qualitative study. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 60(1), 256–267. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-019-00884-w

Alhalwachi, F. (2021). *Narratives of infertile Muslim women: the construction of personal and socio-cultural identities in weblogs* (Doctoral dissertation, Birkbeck, University of London).

Andreouli, E. (2010). Identity, Positioning and Self-Other Relations. *Papers on Social Representations*, 19, 14.11-14.13

Aziz, A. (2022). Rohingya diaspora online: Mapping the spaces of visibility, resistance and transnational identity on social media. *New Media & Society*. https://doi.org/14614448221132241.

Bamberg, M. (1997). Positioning between structure and performance. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7(1-4), 335-342.

Bamberg, M. (2004). Form and functions of 'slut bashing' in male identity constructions in 15-year-olds. *Human Development*, 47(6), 331-353.

Bamberg, M. (2005). Narrative Discourse and Identities. In J. Meister (Ed.), *Narratology beyond literary criticism: Mediality, disciplinarity* (pp. 213-238). De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110201840.213

Bamberg, M. (Ed.). (2007). *Narrative state of the art* (Vol. 6). John Benjamins Publishing.

Bamberg, M. (2008). Twice-told-tales: Small story analysis and the process of identity formation. In *Meaning in action: Constructions, narratives, and representations* (pp. 183-204). Springer.

Bamberg, M. (2010). Blank check for biography? Openness and ingenuity in the management of the "who-am-I-question" and what life stories actually may not be good for. *Telling stories: Language, narrative, and social life*, 109-21.

Bamberg, M. (2011). Who am I? Narration and its contribution to self and identity. *Theory & Psychology*, 21(1), 3-24.

Bamberg, M., De Fina, A., & Schiffrin, D. (2011). Discourse and identity construction. In *Handbook of identity theory and research* (pp. 177-199). Springer.

Bamberg, M., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis. *Text & Talk*, 28(3), 377-396.

Baulch, E., & Pramiyanti, A. (2018). Hijabers on Instagram: Using visual social media to construct the ideal Muslim woman. *Social Media + Society*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118800308

Baumer, E., Sueyoshi, M., & Tomlinson, B. (2008, April). Exploring the role of the 265 reader in the activity of blogging. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems,* 1111-1120.

Baym, N. K. (2000). *Tune in, log on: Soaps, fandom, and online community* (Vol. 3). Sage.

Becker, G., & Nachtigall, R. D. (1991). Ambiguous responsibility in the doctor-patient relationship: the case of infertility. *Social Science & Medicine*, 32(8), 875-885.

Benwell, B., & Stokoe, E. (2006). *Discourse and identity*. Edinburgh University Press.

Bessière, K., Pressman, S., Kiesler, S., & Kraut, R. (2010). Effects of internet use on health and depression: a longitudinal study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 12(1), e6. https://doi.org/10. 2196/jmir.1149.

Blake, D. R. (2012) Who do they think they're talking to? Framings of the audience by social media users. *International Journal of Communication* 6, 1056–1076.

Block, D. (2006). Identity in applied linguistics: Where are we? In T. Omoniyi & G. White (Eds.), *The sociolinguistics of identity* (pp. 34-49). Continuum.

Block, D. (2013). The structure and agency dilemma in identity and intercultural communication research. *Language and Intercultural Communication,* 13(2), 126-147. Doi: 10.1080/14708477.2013.770863

Boyd, D. (2001). *Taken out of context: American teen sociality in networked publics*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley).

Bronstein, J. (2014). Creating possible selves: Information disclosure behaviour on social networks. *Information Research*, 19(1), 609. http:// InformationR.net/ir/19-1/paper609.html

Bronstein, J. (2015). Blogging motivations of women suffering from infertility. *Information Research,* 20(1), 669. http://InformationR.net/ir/20-1/paper669.html

Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2004). Theorizing identity in language and sexuality research. *Language in Society*, 33, 469-515.

Butler, J. (1990). Lana's "Imitation": Melodramatic repetition and the gender performative. *Genders*, 9, 1-18.

Butler, J. (2003). Gender trouble. *Continental feminism reader*, 29-56.

Cameron, D. (2014). Gender and language ideologies. *The handbook of language, gender, and sexuality*, 279-296. Wiley Blackwell.

Chaudhry, A.S. (2010). Unlikely Motherhood in the Qur'ān: oncofertility as devotion. *Cancer Treatment and Research,* 156, 287-94.

Clair, M. (2018). Stigma. *Core concepts in sociology*, 318-321.

Connell, R.W. (1987). *Gender and power*. Polity Press.

Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Polity Press.

Cook, J., & Hasmath, R. (2014). The discursive construction and performance of gendered identity on social media. *Current Sociology*, 62(7), 975-993.

Cousineau, T. M., Green, T. C., Corsini, E. A., Barnard, T., Seibring, A. R., & Domar, A. D. (2006). Development and validation of the Infertility Self-Efficacy scale. *Fertility and Sterility*, 85(6), 1684-1696.

Culley, L. A., Hudson, N., Rapport, F. L., Katbamna, S., & Johnson, M. R. (2006). British South Asian communities and infertility services. *Human Fertility*, 9(1), 37-45.

Culley, L., & Hudson, N. (2009). Constructing relatedness: ethnicity, gender and third party assisted conception in the UK. *Current Sociology*, 57(2), 249-267.

Darvin, R. (2016). Language and identity in the digital age. *Handbook of language and identity*, 523-540. Routledge.

Davies, B., and Harré, R. (1990). "Positioning: The discursive production of selves." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour,* 20(1), 43-63.

Dayter, D. (2014). Self-praise in microblogging. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 61, 91-102.

Dayter, D. (2015). Small stories and extended narratives on Twitter. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 10, 19-26.

Dayter, D. (2016). *Discursive self in microblogging: Speech acts, stories and self- praise* (Vol. 260). John Benjamins.

De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2015). *The handbook of narrative analysis*. John Wiley & Sons.

De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2019) *The handbook of narrative analysis.* Wiley Blackwell.

Deaux, K. (1993). Reconstructing social identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 19(1), 4-12.

Denzin, N. K. (2000). The practices and politics of interpretation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 897-922). Sage.

Deppermann, A. (2013). Multimodal interaction from a conversation analytic perspective. *Journal of Pragmatics: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language Studies*, 46(1), 1-7.

Duguay, S. (2016). "He has a way gayer Facebook than I do": Investigating sexual identity disclosure and context collapse on a social networking site. *New Media & Society*, 18(6), 891-907.

Eagly, A. H., Wood, W., & Diekman, A. B. (2000). Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: A current appraisal. *The Developmental Social Psychology of Gender*, 12, 174.

Ellece, S. E. (2012). The 'placenta' of the nation: Motherhood discourses in Tswana marriage ceremonies. *Gender & Language*, 6(1), 70-104.

Esplen, M. J., Warner, E., Boquiren, V., Wong, J., & Toner, B. (2020). Restoring body image after cancer (ReBIC): A group therapy intervention. *Psycho- Oncology* 29(4), 671–680. https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.5304

Garcia, A. C., Standlee, A. I., Bechkoff, J., & Cui, Y. (2009). Ethnographic approaches to the internet and computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38(1), 52-84.

Gee, J.P. (2015). Discourse, small d, big D. In *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction* (pp. 1–5). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi016

Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). *Small stories, interaction and identities* (Vol. 8). John Benjamins Publishing.

Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Reflection and self-disclosure from the small stories perspective: A study of identity claims in interview and conversational data. *Telling stories: Language, narrative, and social life*, 123-134.

Georgakopoulou, A. (2014). Small stories transposition and social media: A micro-perspective on the 'Greek crisis'. *Discourse & Society*, 25(4), 519-539.

Georgakopoulou, A. (2015). Small stories research: Methods–analysis–outreach. *The handbook of narrative analysis*, 255-271.

Giddens, A. (2004). The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration: Elements of the theory of structuration. In *Practicing History* (pp. 121-142). Routledge.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday.

Greil, A. L., Slauson-Blevins, K., & McQuillan, J. (2010). The experience of infertility: a review of recent literature. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 32(1), 140-162. Doi: 10.1111/j.

Hall, S. (2000) 'Who Needs Identity?' in P. Du Gay, J. Evans and P. Redman (eds) *Identity: A Reader*. Sage.

Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (1999). The dynamics of social episodes. *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*, 1-13.

Harrison, K. (2014). Online negotiations of infertility: Knowledge production in (in) fertility blogs. *Convergence*, 20(3), 337-351.

Heilman, M. E. (2012). Gender stereotypes and workplace bias. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 32, 113-135.

Herring, S. C. (2003). Gender and power in online communication, in J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff (eds.), *The Handbook of Language and Gender* (pp. 202- 228). Blackwell.

Hew, K. F. (2011). Students' and teachers' use of Facebook. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(2), 662-676.

Holland, D., & Skinner, D. (1987). Prestige and intimacy: The cultural models behind Americans' talk about gender types. In D. Holland & N. Quinn (Eds.), *Cultural models in language and thought* (pp. 78–111). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511607660.005

Hurley, Z. (2023). Arab women's veiled affordances on Instagram: A feminist semiotic inquiry. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(3), 783-802.

Hyland, K. (2001). Bringing in the reader: Addressee features in academic articles. *Written Communication*, 18(4), 549-574.

Hyland, K. (2010). Metadiscourse: Mapping interactions in academic writing. *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 9(2), 125-143.

Hyland, K. (2018). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Inhorn, M. C. (1996). *Infertility and patriarchy: The cultural politics of gender and family life in Egypt*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Inhorn, M. C. (2003). "The worms are weak": Male infertility and patriarchal paradoxes in Egypt. *Men and Masculinities*, 5(3), 236-256. Doi: 10.1177/1097184x02238525.

Inhorn, M. C. (2006). Making Muslim babies: IVF and gamete donation in Sunni versus Shi'a Islam. *Cult Med Psychiatry*, 30(4), 427-450. Doi: 10.1007/s11013- 006-9027-x

Inhorn, M. C., & van Balen, F. (Eds.) (2002). *Infertility around the globe: New thinking on childlessness, gender and reproductive technologies*. University of California Press.

Jaffe, A. (2009). *Stance: Sociolinguistic perspectives*. Oxford University Press.

Jaworska, S. (2018). 'Bad' mums tell the 'untellable': narrative practices and agency in online stories about postnatal depression on Mumsnet. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 25, 25-33.

Johnson, C. M. (2001). A survey of current research on online communities of practice. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 4(1), 45-60.

Jones, C., & Volpe, E. H. (2011). Organizational identification: Extending our understanding of social identities through social networks. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 32(3), 413-434.

Jones, R. H., & Hafner, C. A. (2012). *Understanding digital literacies: A practical introduction*. Routledge.

Kane, G. C., Alavi, M., Labianca, G., & Borgatti, S. P. (2014). What's different about social media networks? A framework and research agenda. *MIS Quarterly*, 38(1), 275-304.

Kavakci, E., & Kraeplin, C. R. (2017). Religious beings in fashionable bodies: the online identity construction of hijabi social media personalities. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(6), 850-868.

Kiesling, S. F. (2011). The interactional construction of desire as gender. *Gender and Language*, 5(2), 213-239.

Knoll, M., & Bronstein, J. (2014). An examination of the information disclosure behavior of infertility bloggers: Patterns of self-disclosure and anonymity. *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, 66(2), 175-201.

Korolczuk, E. (2014). Terms of engagement: Re-defining identity and infertility on- line. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, 6(2), 431-449.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Lee, C. (2014). Language choice and self-presentation in social media: the case of university students in Hong Kong. In *The language of social media: Identity and community on the Internet* (pp. 91-111). Palgrave Macmillan.

Lee, F. L., Leung, L., Qiu, J. L., & Chu, D. S. (Eds.). (2013). *Frontiers in new media research*. Routledge.

Leppänen, S., Kytölä, S., Jousmäki, H., Peuronen, S., & Westinen, E. (2014). Entextualization and resemiotization as resources for identification in social media. In *The language of social media* (pp. 112-136). Palgrave Macmillan.

Leppänen, S., Peuronen, S., & Westinen, E. (2018). Superdiversity perspective and the sociolinguistics of social media. In *The Routledge handbook of language and superdiversity* (pp. 30-42). Routledge.

Levon, E. (2016). Gender, interaction and intonational variation: The discourse functions of high rising terminals in London. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 20(2), 133-163.

Levon, E., & Mendes, R. B. (Eds.). (2016). *Language, sexuality, and power: Studies in intersectional sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press.

Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1), 363-385.

Luo, M. & Hancock, J. (2020) Self-disclosure and social media: motivations, mechanisms and psychological well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 31, 110-115.

Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (Vol. 10). University of Minnesota Press.

Masur, P., Bazarova, N & DiFranzo, D. (2023) The impact of what others do, approve of, and expect you to do: An in depth analysis of social norms and self-disclosure on social media. *Social Media + Society* 9(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231156401

Maxwell, J. (1997). Designing a qualitative study. In L. Bickman & D. J. Rog (Eds.) *Handbook of applied social research methods* (pp. 69-100). Sage.

McEntee-Atalianis, L. (2019). *Identity in applied linguistics research*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

McEntee-Atalianis, L., & Litosseliti, L. (2017). Narratives of sex-segregated professional identities. *Narrative Inquiry*, 27(1), 1-23.

McGannon, K. R., Berry, T. R., Rodgers, W. M., & Spence, J. C. (2016). Breast cancer representations in Canadian news media: A critical discourse analysis of meanings and the implications for identity. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 13(2), 188-207.

Nartey, M. (2023). Women's voice, agency and resistance in Nigerian blogs: A feminist critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1-13.

Obeidat, H. M., Hamlan, A. M., & Callister, L. C. (2014). Missing motherhood: Jordanian women's experiences with infertility. *Advances in Psychiatry*. 2014; 241075. http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2014/241075

Orgad, S. (2009). How can researchers make sense of the issues involved in collecting and interpreting online and offline data? In A. Markham & N. Baym (Eds.), *Internet Inquiry* (pp. 33–53). Sage.

Overberg, R., Otten, W., de Man, A., Toussaint, P., Westenbrink, J., & Zwetsloot- Schonk, B. (2010). How breast cancer patients want to search for and retrieve information from stories of other patients on the internet: an online randomized controlled experiment. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 12(1), e7.

Page, R. (2012). The linguistics of self-branding and micro-celebrity in Twitter: The role of hashtags. *Discourse & Communication*, 6(2), 181-201.

Page, R. (2013). *Stories and social media: Identities and interaction*. Routledge.

Page, R. (2018). *Narratives Online: Shared Stories in Social Media*. Cambridge University Press.

Page, R., Harper, R., & Frobenius, M. (2013). From small stories to networked narrative: The evolution of personal narratives in Facebook status updates. *Narrative Inquiry*, 23(1), 192-213.

Perrino, S. (2018). Narrative aftershocks: Digital retellings of an earthquake in Emilia-Romagna, Northern Italy. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 25, 88-97.

Piazza, R. (2019). With and without Zanzibar: Liminal diaspora voices and the memory of the revolution. *Narrative Inquiry*, 29(1), 99-136.

Piazza, R. (2023). Aspirational identities and desire through discourses of productivity in marginal individuals: A case study of three women. *Language in Society*, 1-21.

Piela, A. (2012). *Muslim women online: faith and identity in virtual*. Routledge.

Piela, A. (2013). Claiming religious authority: Muslim women and new media. In *Media, Religion and Gender* (pp. 135-150). Routledge.

Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. Sage.

Rains, S. A. (2018*). Coping with illness digitally*. MIT Press.

Ross, M. W. (2005). Typing, doing, and being: Sexuality and the Internet. *Journal of Sex Research*, 42(4), 342-352.

Ross, M. W., Månsson, S. A., Daneback, K., & Tikkanen, R. (2005). Characteristics of men who have sex with men on the Internet but identify as heterosexual, compared with heterosexually identified men who have sex wih women. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 8(2), 131-139.

Schmid, J., Kirchengast, S., Vytiska-Binstorfer, E., & Huber, J. (2004). Infertility caused by PCOS—health-related quality of life among Austrian and Moslem immigrant women in Austria. *Human Reproduction*, 19(10), 2251-2257.

Seargeant, P., & Tagg, C. (Eds.). (2014). *The language of social media: Identity and community on the internet*. Springer.

Shaw, A. (2000). *Kinship and Continuity: Pakistani Families in Britain*. Harwood Academic Publishers.

Shaw, A. (2004). British Pakistani women without children: an invisible minority. In Kreager, P. and E. Schröder-Butterfill (eds), *Ageing without children: European and Asian Perspectives* (pp: 198-223). Berghahn.

Silverman, D. (2015). *Interpreting qualitative data*. Sage.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (Ed). (2000). *Culturally speaking: Managing rapport through talk across cultures*. Continuum.

Tahiri, F. B., Kalaja, D., & Bimbashi, E. K. (2015). The lived experience of female infertility the case of Muslim rural women leaving in Albania. *European Scientific Journal*, 11(11), 268-277.

Talbot, M. (1995). A synthetic sisterhood: False friends in a teenage magazine. In Hall, K and Bucholtz, M (eds). *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203610664

Talbot, M. (2019). *Language and Gender*. John Wiley & Sons.

Tannen, D. (2008). "We're never been close, we're very different": Three narrative types in sister discourse. *Narrative Inquiry*, 18(2), 206-229.

Thorne, S. L., & Black, R. W. (2011). Identity and interaction in internet-mediated contexts. *Identity formation in globalizing contexts: Language learning in the new millennium*. In C. Higgins (Ed.), *Identity Formation in Globalizing Contexts: Language Learning*

in the New Millenium (pp. 257–278). Mouton de Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110267280.257

Toyoki, S., & Brown, A. D. (2014). Stigma, identity and power: Managing stigmatized identities through discourse. *Human Relations*, 67(6), 715-737.

Van Rooij, F.B., van Balen, F., & Hermanns, J.M. (2004). A review of Islamic Middle Eastern migrants: traditional and religious cultural beliefs about procreation in the context of infertility treatment. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 22(4), 321-331.

Van Rooij, F. B., van Balen, F., & Hermanns, J. M. (2006). Migrants and the meaning of parenthood: involuntary childless Turkish migrants in the Netherlands. *Human Reproduction*, 21(7), 1832-1838.

Van Rooij, F. B., van Balen, F., & Hermanns, J. M. (2009). The experiences of involuntarily childless Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(5), 621-632.

Varnali, K. & Toker, A. (2015) Self disclosure on social networking sites. *Social Behaviour & Personality* 43(1), 1-14.

Weatherall, A. (2005). *Gender, language and discourse*. Routledge.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Wesch, M. (2009). YouTube and you: Experiences of self-awareness in the context collapse of the recording webcam. *Explorations in Media Ecology*, 8(2), 19-34.

West, L. E. (2013). Facebook sharing: A sociolinguistic analysis of computer- mediated storytelling. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 2(1), 1-13.

Wilson, K. J. (2014). *Not trying: Infertility, childlessness, and ambivalence*. Vanderbilt University Press.

Wortham, S. (2000). Interactional positioning and narrative self- construction. *Narrative Inquiry*, 10(1), 157-184.

Zhang, G. Q. (2015). *Elastic language: How and why we stretch our words.* Cambridge University Press.

Zhang, R., Eschler, J., & Reddy, M. (2018). Online support groups for depression in China: Culturally shaped interactions and motivations. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*, 27(3-6), 327-354.

Requests for further information should be directed to the first author:

Fatema Alhalwachi
E-mail - f.alhalwachi@me.com

Lisa McEntee-Atalianis
E-mail: l.mcentee-atalianis@bbk.ac.uk

Address (for both): Birkbeck, University of London. 26, Russell Square. Bloomsbury. London. WC1B 5DT