

## Dissertation abstract

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**Title:** Analiza dyskursywna (re-)konstruowania kobiecości, macierzyństwa i żałoby w wywiadach o doświadczeniu poronienia

**Title in English:** (Re-)Constructing femininity, motherhood and bereavement in miscarriage narratives: A discourse analytic study

### **Abstract:**

This thesis explores the experience of miscarriage as embedded in dominant discourses of motherhood, femininity and bereavement, in the context of in-depth one-to-one semi-structured interviews with women who have suffered an early pregnancy loss. The starting point for my considerations rests on the ideas of the collaborative production of knowledge by members of culture (Burr 1995; Marecek et al. 2004), and in particular, the central role of language in constructing reality and its further maintenance (Leeds-Hurwitz 2009). Recognising the complexity of the miscarriage experience and its individual character in every woman's story of loss, necessitates the use of an integrated qualitative approach to analysing data rather than relying on just a single research perspective. Thus, within the broad framework of discourse analysis, and by employing a blend of micro-analytical approaches that includes conversation analysis (CA), membership categorisation analysis (MCA) and discursive psychology (DP), the discursive and social links between femininity, motherhood, bereavement and miscarriage are identified. Moreover, the ways in which discourses surrounding miscarriage contribute to the silencing and disenfranchisement of this experience are presented, and the discourses surrounding miscarriage are demystified.

In order to best address the complexities of these discourses in women's experiences of miscarriage, the analysis comprises two stages. Firstly, a detailed micro-level analysis with the focus on how women interviewees (re-)construct and negotiate their subjective experience of loss, as it is progressively built in their turns at talk (Stokoe 2012a) is conducted. The ways in which women invoke culturally available categories in their accounts of loss and also how they rely on commonsense knowledge about those categories to accomplish various tasks in a given local interactional context (Jayyusi 1984) are unpacked. Interviews are treated as co-constructed interactional events, in which the interviewee and interviewer negotiate meaning (Angouri et al. 2021). In the second stage, the categories proffered by women as incumbents of the membership categorisation device (MCD) 'miscarriage' - often by means of subtle

interactional achievement - are then identified to better understand this clearly painful life experience. The normative social assumptions about men and women revealed through the micro-level analysis make up what are termed “symbolic constructs of femininity and masculinity” (Pawelczyk 2017: 144) as stored in the discourses of femininity and masculinity.

The introduction presents the rationale for organising women’s stories of loss in the form of case studies and emphasises that interview data is treated as versions or accounts. The aims, research questions and the organisation of the thesis are outlined.

Chapter 1 presents the field of discourse analysis and aims to both introduce the field in general, and describes the methodological tools that are used in the analytical chapter. The usefulness of discourse analysis in researching personal experiences is addressed. Within discussing the discursive construction of identity, the focus is on the micro-level analysis, as well as deployment of identity categorisations.

Chapter 2 presents social and discursive constructions of femininity. It introduces the theory of social constructionism, followed by an overview of the language and gender research from the language-in-use perspective. The historical overview of the field of language and gender is presented. The chapter also explores the social and discursive constructions of gender to show how men and women draw on various linguistic resources to construct their identities and to present themselves as certain kinds of men or women.

Chapter 3 examines social and discursive construction(s) of pregnancy and motherhood to show that these constructions have an actual impact not only on women’s experiences of motherhood itself, but also on both pregnancy, and womanhood. It shows that pregnancy is constructed as an ultimately feminine experience and that discursive constructions of motherhood rely on dominant discourses based on the ideology of motherhood (Knaak 2005).

Chapter 4 discusses theoretical underpinnings of the concept of bereavement. It provides an overview of some early key grief theories, as well as investigates new, emerging theories of loss, in particular, social and discursive constructions of bereavement, including prenatal loss. It shows that grieving is a complex, socially regulated activity that is informed by the social and cultural context.

Chapter 5 provides an in-depth qualitative discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews with women who have suffered miscarriages. The constructions of femininity, motherhood and bereavement are identified and examined using the analytical tools of CA, MCA and DP. The analysis comprises two main stages. The first part of data analysis is based on the women’s accounts of loss recognised as an individual experience and organised as case

studies. The second stage of the analytical section discusses the constructions of categories within the MCD 'miscarriage'.

In the conclusion, the findings from chapter 5 are used to address the aims of the thesis and provide answers to the research questions. This part identifies patterns in the construction of miscarriage accounts to ascertain whether there is any similarity of experience or whether miscarriages are individual experiences that cannot be compared. Limitations and the future directions for this research are proposed including a more varied data set.