# ROMANIAN MOTHERS DISCUSSION BOARDS: A WAY OF CONSTRUCTING DISCURSIVE IDENTITY

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**Abstract**. Apart from the ability of people to use language as an instrument of communication, either to communicate information or for interpersonal relations, language is also an expression of social/group identity, "an emblem of group membership and solidarity" (Grosjean 1982: 117). Online discussion boards have become an important venue for expressing mothering identity and for shaping the society understanding of it. A discursive analysis of Romanian mothering discussion boards yielded interesting information concerning the strategies involved in constructing mothering identity. Therefore, the present study aims to reveal the ways in which mothering discourse serves as an important part of the identity construction process.

**Keywords**: identity, discourse identity, mothering identity, computer mediated communication, discourse strategies.

## 1. CONSTRUCTING MOTHERS' IDENTITY

Identity, as defined by Gee, is "the kind of person one is recognized as being, at a given time and place" (Gee 2001: 99). This idea of identity focuses on how you present yourself to others and how they recognize you and not on the internal psychological structuring of the individual. Identity, like language, is both personal (individual) and social (group). Sometimes, group identity tends to supersede individual identity and may result in suppression of the individual self (Ige 2010: 3050), as in the case of women who are in a constant shift between individual identity and group identity. Mothers find themselves subjected to a multitude of discourses which, when deconstructed, reveal the cultural norms and expectations from mothers, underpinned by the moral orders and values of society. They find themselves in flux, constantly needing to manage and negotiate their own identities by continuously reflecting on the conflicting expectations of what it means to be a mother (Lindley 2013: 2).

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The participation of mothers on discussion boards becomes a means by which they are actively shaping, both personal and social understanding of their identities as mothers. Active or passive participation in this public discussion board gives a *safe* space for negotiation, defining and clarifying their identities to a large number of mothers. Mothering identity emerges in discourse through the temporary roles and orientations they assume, such as: evaluator, joke teller, engaged listener and active participant. Mothers in the online discussion boards are well aware that they will be judged as the persons they appear to be and actively choose what to post.

So, mothering identity can be defined as a fluid, ongoing process, shaped by the interplay between "subjective and constructed experience". The interplay gains complexity due to the intersubjective field that is created as mothers encounter one another and the larger environment. "Subjective" is understood as the embodied and particular aspect of the self, while "constructed" refers to the structuring effect of social, cultural, and material experience (Van Katwyk 2009: 2).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The discourse analysis diagram applied in the present study is as follows:

| **Discoursive strategies used in construction of mother identities** | |
|---|---|
| 1. | *Participants roles assumed in conversation* |
| 2. | *Topic structuring strategies* |
| 3. | *Argumentative, stylistic strategies* |
| 4. | *Pragmatic strategies* |
| 5. | *Interactional strategies* |
| 6. | *Lexical strategies* |

The present diagram is adapted from the structure defined and described by Vasilescu (2012) and, for a better understanding of the strategies mentioned above, we will point out some of the concepts used in the present study with the view of describing and defining the way they will be applied in our analyses.

We define *roles* from the perspective assumed by the participants to the conversation, meaning: **moderator –** the person who moderates the conversation, establishes the rules of communication and determines the participants to stay on topic; **initiator –** the person who posts the opening sequence; **follower –** the person who replies to the opening sequence/post and follows the topic; **intruder –** the person who is not part of the mothers group, and is perceived as an intruder by them; **visitor –** the person who enters the discussion board to post only one comment. We will also analize the way in which ID selection criteria works within the discussion board.

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Basically, our study analyzes the perspective (*accomplishment*/*failure*) from which the *topic*[1] is presented to the target audience, represented by mothers and other categories interested in the topic. By *accomplishment* we mean a positive perspective of the topic presentation, while *failure* represents the negative aspect of the same. We will also focus on *textualization strategies* (i.e. narrative, description, dialogue, demonstration, problem solving, comparison and contrast), and structuring – introduction, continuation or ending of the topic, as well as deviation from the topic. In addition, we intend to depict several instances of *humor* and *irony*, figures of speech and jokes, in order to define their strategic use. Moreover, we will concentrate on the way mothers enrich their instant messages with social meaning through the creation and use of emoticons[2], smiley faces, or relational icons created with typographic symbols that appear sideways to resemble facial expressions. Another major point in our analysis is represented by discourse markers[3], especially for their intersubjective and interactional functions that influence powerfully mothering identity construction. The methodology concerning interactional strategic use of conversation includes several elements: indexing of relations via terms of address and indexing group affiliation/disaffiliation. Some examples of affective forms that we are looking for in our corpus include: diminutives (that indicate sympathy, endearment, emotional closeness, or antipathy, condescension, and emotional distance); ideophones and onomatopoeias; expletives, exclamations, interjections, insults, and imprecations; address terms, kinship terms, and pronouns which often display clear affective dimensions; lexical processes, such as synecdoche and metonymy involved in affect meaning manipulation; certain categories of meaning, like evidentiality; reduplication, quantifiers, and comparative structures. Finally, the lexical strategies used by mothers in their conversation bring about a heavy set of implications that go beyond the dictionary, and beyond *ordinary* pragmatics. We focus on identifying the lexis specific to mothering identity and on depicting the abbreviations occurring in online conversations.

## 3. CORPUS ANALYSIS

### 3.1. Selecting and organizing data

We consider that mothering identity starts with the moment in which a woman becomes pregnant, and this is why we analyzed Romanian discussion boards including conversations between future and actual mothers. There is a large diversity of such discussion boards that implied the following mothering *sub-identities*: baby-girl mothers/baby-boy mothers; beginner /experienced mothers; Romanian mothers located abroad/in Romania (mothers from Braşov/Cluj/Bucharest/Buzău);

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sigle/married mothers; mothers of 2007/2008; mothers of February/March etc. The criteria for selection of mothering sub-identities include: child gender criteria, experience criteria, location criteria, marital status criteria, and birth time criteria.

For the purpose of this research, we collected data through observation from 10 online Romanian mothers' discussion boards developing over a long period of time: 2007–2014. From all data observed, we extracted about 100 threads, relevant for the construction of mothering discourse identity. Considering the structure of the researched online discourse, we discovered that in discussion boards most of the posts are structured as a list of responses that make up the thread. That is why posts feel more like an ongoing dialogue than an asynchronous communication. This type of exchange of experience enables sharing, while also glazing over the distinctions between past, present, and future. For instance, a person can enter in 2014 a thread opened in 2007 and still join an actual and dynamic topic.

### 3.2. Discourse analysis strategies

With an acknowledgement of motherhood as a socially and emotionally charged identity experience, this part of our study analyzes several discourse strategies used by Romanian mothers on discussion boards. We explore ways in which mothers encounter and engage one another, tell their stories and share their mothering experiences on the path of constructing mothering identity.

#### 3.2.1. *Participant roles assumed in conversation*

**The moderator** of the discussion board. This can be either the administrator, or a mother, and the situations in which he/she is envolving are very diverse. The example below presents a moderator that is also a mother who makes an analysis of the current situation of the discussion board.

(1) *Andreuta26: Fetelor, uitați cum stăm la ora asta: CONSTANȚA 295 răspunsuri, 751 vizite; CLUJ 306 răspunsuri, 722 vizite; mai avem un pic...*
'Andreuta26: Girls, here is how we stand at this point: CT 295 answers, 751 visits; CJ 306 answers, 722 visits; we are catching up…'

In the next case, the moderator, also a mother, politely addresses an intruder who posts an advertisement.

(2) *mariana1959: Vând filtru de cafea BOSCH nou, la un preț super avantajos, 60RON. Detalii la adresa mateimariana1959@yahoo.com*
*mari_25ro: Dragă Mariana, nu crezi că postarea ta nu are rost aici? Nu ai găsit alt topic sau alt site să faci asta?'*

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'mariana1959: Buy new Bosh coffee maker, at a great price, 60 RON. For further information, please contact mateimariana1959@yahoo.com
mari_25ro: Dear, Mariana, don't you think your post has no point in being here? Couldn't you find another topic or another site to place it?'

**The initiator** can also be a mother or the administrator and it is the person who posts the opening sequence. In [3] the initiator is also the moderator of the thread.

(3) *Lalira: Şi s-a născut copilul. Viaţa voastră nu va mai fi la fel. Niciodată nu va mai fi aşa cum a fost. Bucuraţi-vă de copiii voştri, iubiţi-i şi cresteţi-i frumos! Sunteţi binevenite să continuaţi aici odiseea începută acum 9 luni.*
'Lalira: And so the baby is born. Our life won't be the same. It will never be the same. Enjoy your children, love them and raise them well! You are welcomed to continue here the odyssey that started 9 months ago.'

This opening sequence [4] is posted by an initiator who is a single mother.

(4) *ANTA_PAU: Dragi mămici singure, aţi fost întrebate de copilaşi despre tătici? Mă refer la acele mămici singure 100%, adică cu tătic absent complet, cum suntem noi. Acum fetiţa mea are 1 an si 8 luni. Încă nu am avut cu ea nicio discutie despre asta. Tatăl ei natural nu a venit niciodată să o vadă, deci nu îl cunoaşte, dar mă gândesc că trebuie să îi spun ceva despre lucrul ăsta încă de pe acum, evident că adevărul, dar adaptat nivelului ei de înţelegere. Voi cum aţi procedat? Adresez întrebarea celor care au trecut prin asta, deci copilul să nu fi avut niciun contact cu drăgălaşul-fugar!*
'ANTA_PAU: Dear single mothers, have you ever been asked by your children about their fathers? I refer to those mothers who are 100% single, with a completely absent father, as we are. Now, my daughter is 20 months old. I haven't had any discussions with her about that until now. Her natural father has never come to see her, so she doesn't know him, but I think that I should soon tell her something, obviously the truth, but adapted to her level of understanding. How did you manage this situation? I am asking this question to those persons who are in the same situation, I mean that the child has never been in contact with the sweet-fugitive!'

**The follower** is a mother who follows the topic, addressing to the initiator or to other followers.

Here we have an example of two followers responding and connecting to the initiator.

(5) *Lalira: S-a născut copilul. Viaţa voastră nu va mai fi la fel. Niciodată nu va mai fi aşa cum a fost. Bucuraţi-vă de copiii voştri, iubiţi-i şi cresteţi-i frumos! Sunteţi binevenite să continuaţi aici odiseea începută acum 9 luni.*

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*Bmp: Mulţumim de căsuţă, Lalira şi bine v-am găsit mămici!*
*alexandrab.: Vaiiii am ajuns să avem căsuţă nouă!!! Ce a trecut timpul! Parcă ieri descopeream căsuţa noastră... câte amintiri frumoase. Acum suntem mămici!!!*
'Lalira: And so the baby is born. Our life won't be the same. It will never be the same. Enjoy your children, love them and raise them well! You are welcomed to continue here the odyssey that started 9 months ago.
Bmp: Lalira, thank you for our new home, and I am pleased to meet you, mommies!
alexandrab: Ah, we have a new home! The time passes so quickly! It was like yesterday that we were discovering our first home… how many beautiful memories! Now we are mommies!!!'

Example [6] represents a very unique case, in which one follower replies to the initiator – a mother in labour. This example underlines the high degree of trust and intimacy mothers build within discussion boards.

(6) *Ariana: No fetelor, am fost la control... mi-a dat o pastilută, să ţin un sfert sub limbă... dacă se porneşte travaliul, ne vedem (sub 7-8 minute intre contractii)... dacă nu, mai iau un sfert peste 3 ore, iar la 5 după-masă ne vedem oricum. Soţul deja ia calmante, dragul de el. Doamne ajută!*
*BBpiticutz: Deci eşti în spital acum? Mare figură soţul tău! Doamne ajută!!! Va fi bine!*
*Ariana: Sunt acasă... Aştept... Încerc să-mi dau seama cum evoluează contracţiile... Ceva contracţii mai deosebite au apărut, dar durerile nu... foarte vagi. E grea aşteptarea!*
*BBpiticutz: Să ne anunţi dacă apar durerile.*
'Ariana: Well, girls, I've been at the doctor… he gave me a pill to keep a quarter of it under my tongue… if the labour begins, we see each other (under 7–8 minutes between the contractions)…if not, I will take another quarter after 3 hours, and at 5 o'clock in the afternoon we will see each other anyway. My husband is already taking pills, poor him! God help us!
Bbpiticutz: So, you are in the hospital right now? Your husband is something! God help! Everything will be fine!
Ariana: I am at home… I'm waiting… I'm trying to see how the contractions progress… Some contractions have appeared, but not the pain… it is still blurred. Waiting is hard!
Bbpiticutz: Let us know if pains appear.'

**The intruder**'s role is undertaken either by a mother, or another person: a lawyer, a promoter, a consultant, women wishing to become mothers, etc. In [7], a

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woman involves in the sigle mothers thread just to offer her compassion and leaves immediately the conversation. These situations are not accepted by the single mothers participating in the thread, they feel the intruder is patronizing them.

(7) *lili5: îmi pare tare rău că există şi asemenea bărbaţi. Vă doresc să găsiţi un om bun, cum am găsit eu. Sigur o să apară el. Până atunci, succes cu foştii!!!!!!*
'lili5: I'm very sorry that there are such men. I wish you to find a good man, as I did. I'm sure he will appear. Until then, good luck with your ex-husbands!!!!!'

In [8] we have a nutrition consultant who offers her services to help mothers.

(8) *lidia.matrici: Salutare... eu nu sunt mămica... dar poate pot ajuta cu un sfat pt alimentatie. Sunt consultant nutriţie aici la Cluj. Consultaţia e gratuită. Lucrez pe programe pt controlul greutăţii. Dacă doriţi, vă aştept. Tel meu este 0741615781. Lidia Matrici mă numesc. Sunaţi şi facem o programare. Vă pupic şi pupici mulţi la toţi bebicii de aici:)*
'lidia.matrici: Hello… I'm not a mommy… but maybe I can help with a piece of advice concerning feeding. I'm a nutritionist from Cluj. I offer free consultations. I work with programs of weight control. If you are interested, I'm waiting for you! My phone number is 0741615781 and my name is Lidia Matrici. Please call and we will establish an appointment. Big kisses to you and to all babies from here!'

**The visitor** is a mother who enters the topic just to say *hello* (9) or to post a single reply (10).

(9) *PatriciaMusat**:** Neaţa!*
'PatriciaMusat: Morning!'
(10) *mary1313: Bună, fetele mele!!! Abia aştept să mă alătur şi eu vouă aici în căsuta, luna viit pe 13 aştept sufleţelul meu!!! Mă rog să fie bn, sănătos!!!! Până atunci, vă urmăresc cu mare drag!!!*
'mary1313: Hello, my girls!!! I can't wait to join you here, in your sweet home! Next month, on 13th, I'm waiting for my little soul to arrive! I pray for him to be healthy!!! Until then, I'm pleased to follow you!'

The analysis of the way in which mothers chose IDs convinced us of the importance of their use in the construction of mothering identity. Therefore, we have identified the following two cases: **covered IDs**, representing 30% of all: *scufiţaroşie, holili4, mamik, mami73, maimuticagogosica, alltimes, dorintza,*

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*mami_alex, Musette, dalicris, nuk*, and **transparent IDs**, representing 70% (mostly including first names, or first and last names): *Ileana, ellaene, imelda, AliadiCristina, lili5, liviutzza24, CrinaAndreea, carissima6, rodikutza, florizarnovean, madallinna, madeea, alina25cj, cryssa, CorinaN, DianaJalba, madalina_eu, dyana25, Cosmina Marina*. Although mothers do not reveal many aspects of their personal identities because they adhere to the group and sub-group identity, some of them offer information regarding the following aspects: first and last name, social status, personal accomplishments or issues, name and experiences of their child, locality of residence, and places they walk their babies.

**3.2.2.** ***Topic structuring strategies***

The topic proposals include two situations: one in which the topic is given and must be followed – *Fertilization; Family; Health and Beauty; Birth; Babies and Children; Pregnancy,* and another in which the topic is free*: Mothers/Bellies Club; Mother Coffee House; Mothers Community; Between us, women.* For the purpose of our analyses we selected those threads that had the largest number of replies and the longest duration. For instance, here is a model of this kind of thread:

**Topic – Family, marriage, couple**
**Thread – Between us, women**
**Sub-thread – What have you done for yourself today?**
**Topics**: one year celebration, manicure and pedicure, hair dressing and cosmetics, dieting and exercises, cosmetic products, gifts, shopping, going out with friends, going out with the husband, concerts, flowers, talents and hobbies – painting, money, job, food and sweets, frustrations, family arguments, problems, ladies driving, health, etc.
**Duration –** Mar 3 2007, 10:12 AM – Feb 13 2014, 12:24 PM
**Number of replies: 2,601**
**Number of participants: 73 persons**

The analysis of topics shows that discussion boards function as a place for mothers to talk about their daily lives and mothering experience. Besides addressing more or less directly the topic of motherhood, they use countless self-presentation strategies to claim their mothering identity.

As far as the topic's **perspective** is concerned, two classes have been revealed: accomplishment – seen as a positive perspective of the topic presentation, and failure – representing the negative aspect of it. In the following, there are examples of such perspectives:

The following two examples (11, 12) present accomplishment on mothering and on personal identity levels.

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(11) *t3odora26: Vai, dragele mele, nu e nimic mai frumos decât să fii MAMĂ!!! Îngeraşii ăştia frumoşi o să vă umple viaţa cu multă bucurie!!!*
't3odora26: Oh, my dears, there is nothing more beautiful than being a MOTHER! These beautiful angels will fill your life with happiness!'
(12) *JulianaP: Ok... fetelor... împart cu voi vestea cea mareeeee... azi am aflat: ne-am luat casă... ne vom muta pe 1 dec!!!... suntem super ameţiţi de eveniment... azi am primit acceptul la offerta noastră!!!!!!!!!!!!*
JulianaP: Ok… girls… I'll share with you the big news… I've got it today: we've got a house… We will move in on December the 1st!!! ... we are extremely happy with the news… today, we've received the acceptance to our offer!!!!!!

The following examples present failures / troubles – divorce (13), single motherhood, illnesses (14), and quarrels.

(13) *Scufiţa Roşie: Una dintre bunele mele prietene trece acum printr-o dramă: divorţează de soţul său. Ar vrea să obţină o pensie alimentară pentru fetiţa lor, de 4 ani, însă nu ştie prea multe detalii. Care dintre voi o poate informa?*
'Red Ridding Hood: One of my best friends is going through a drama: she is divorcing her husband. She would want to receive alimony for her 4 years old daughter, but she doesn't know too many details. Is there anyone who can inform her?'
(14) *Lady: Bine v-am găsit în căsuţa nouă. Lucia, la fel păţesc şi eu cu mâncatul. După ce că sunt leşinată de somn noaptea, trage cu încetinitorul sau deloc... Am o durere groaznică de stomac de ieri, de când m-a apăsat doctora pe burtă.*
'Lady: I'm pleased to meet you in your new sweet home. It happens the same to me with the feeding. Besides the fact that I'm awfully sleepy, she is eating very slowly or not at all… I have an awful stomach pain since yesterday, when the doctor pressed on my stomach.'

Concerning the structuring of the topic, we identified the following constituting elements: opening, continuation, ending of the topic, and deviation from the topic.

The opening sentences show the way in which mothers index to mothering identity from the very first reply in the discussion board.

*Dragele mele, să ne cunoaştem în calitate de mămici; Bună, mămici (sau viitoare mămici); Bine vă găsesc aici mămici cu pitici şi burtici; Mă înscriu şi eu în clubul vostru; Bun venit în gaşca, bebei şi mămici!*
'My dears, let's get to know each other as mothers; Hello, mommies (or future mommies); Pleased to meet you mommies and bellies; I'm also joining your club; Welcome to our group, babies and mommies!'

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As we can see below, ending sentences come in the same register, contributing equally to mothering identity contruction.

*Mult curaj şi credinţă tuturor mămicilor singure… vă pup*; *Să avem pitici sănătoşi, mâncăcioşi şi cuminţi pe cât posibil; Mulţumesc că-mi sunteţi alături! Vă pup pe toate! Îmi doresc să-mi crească baieţelul mare şi să fie sănătos, ceea ce vă doresc şi vouă tuturor mămicilor.*
'Courage and faith to all single mothers… kisses; Healthy and good babies, with a healthy appetite; Thank you for being beside me!; I kiss you all! I wish to have a big and healthy boy, and I wish you the same.'

The continuation replies (15) come to revive and to bring coherence to the conversation, while the return sentences (16) aim to help participants to reconnect to the main topic that has been subject to a deviation.

(15) *cuisor – Mi-am tras freză nouă şi mi-am înnoit pantofii verzi, cu toc de 10 cm... (vai de picioarele mele!)*
*Shama – Să-ţi fie cu folos! Nu te-am mai văzut pe aici, pe la discuţiile noastre. Sunteţi bine, sănătoşi? S-au dus bubiţele lui bebe?*
'cuisor: I had my hair cut and I wore my new green shoes, with 10 inches heels… (my poor feet!)
Shama: Enjoy! I haven't seen you for some time in our thread. Are you well, healthy? Are the baby's puffs gone? '
(16) *Valeria Oana: Păi, să revenim la tema topicului. Eu, ieri, pt că soţul meu a fost liber, aproape toată ziua am fost plecată: am fost la cumpărături (shopping) şi am cheltuit o groază de bani…*
'Valeria Oana: Well, let's come back to our topic. Yesterday, because my husband was free, I was almost all day out: shopping and spending a lot of money…'

Above all textualization strategies (i.e. narrative, description, dialogue, demonstration, problem solving, comparison and contrast) we concentrate our attention on the narrative, which represents another way of reviving the topic. The inserted narratives are the verbal accounts which mothers give about their experiences and actions and, at the same time, they represent a way of reviving the thread. Trying to express empathy towards the other sigle mothers participating to the dialogue, the mother in the next example [17] inserts a narrative coming from her personal life experience, which leads to the animation of the topic, having, at the same time, an intersubjective role.

(17) *Carissima6: Draga mea viitoare mămică, îmi pare enorm pentru ceea ce ţi-a făcut şi prin ce ai trecut… pt că si eu am aceeaşi situaţie, adică nu e*

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*recunoscută fetița acum după 5 luni de la naştere, dar nici nu va mai fi… În fine, povestea mea a început foarte frumos, o dragoste cum nici nu visam, promisiuni peste promisiuni... bla bla, toate numai vrăjeli, ca abia acum să revin la realitate, să-mi dau seama ce mi-a făcut... El e din Vâlcea, eu din Bacău. Am propus să nasc în Bacău pt că e mama să mă ajute… Şi uite aşa, am ajuns acasă, am născut, mă suna la început zilnic, mai apoi la 2–3 zile, motivând că are treabă, şi de la o săptămână încoace deloc... Vă las cu bine, mulțumesc că m-ați ascultat.*

'Carissima6: My dear future mommy, I am awfully sorry for what he has done to you and for what you have been through… because I have been in the same situation, meaning that he did not recognize his baby girl 5 months ago and he is not going to do it… Anyway, my story has begun very beautifully, it has been a love story as I could only dream to have, promises on top of other promises… blah, blah, all mumbo jumbo. Now I can finally come to reality, and understand what he has done to me. He's from Valcea. I am from Bacau. I said that I would prefer to give birth in Bacau as my mother was there and could help me. And just like that, I've got back home, given birth. He used to call me every day, then at 2–3 days, saying he was busy, and after a week, he stopped calling… Be well and thank you for listening.'

### 3.2.3. *Stylistic strategies*

The instances of humor and irony interwine with figures of speech and proverbs in order to serve certain strategic reasons. Humor is used to solve group tensions, to build intimacy and positive relations, to solve embarrassing situations, etc. The use of humor comes together with the use of irony in certain situations when irony is mitigated by use of humor. Irony is not directed to other participants in the discussion board as mothers try to build a safe and positive environment for their identity construction. Though, there are few instances in which mild irony is directed to mothers, more specifically when the moderator tries to revive the thread.

Example [18] represents a case of humor used to bring intimacy. In a very interesting way ladies start joking about sharing the husband of one of them and the joke concludes with 'he is the husband of all of us'.

(18) *VALERIA OANA: Atunci aştept să te mai coci puțin şi după aceea îți spun că mi-am luat un costum super mişto şi super sexi. Iar soțul meu mi-a spus că trebuie să-mi iau o geanta şi pantofi şi... să nu mai cer cadou de ziua mea.*

*maryalicia – Foarte deştept soțul tău... Dacă cheltuieşte toți banii, la mine cu ce vine??? Şi apoi pâna la ziua ta mai este... Lasă-l să nu mai cheltuiască banii…*

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*Danna68 – Dumireşte-mă... Luminează-mă!!!!!!!!!! Ce caută soţul ei în Braşov soro? ... Pe mine m-ați pierdut pe traseu şi blondă am fost cândva.*
*VALERIA OANA: Stai putin, că eu nu înţeleg ceva. Mie mi-a spus că banii... sunt de la... tine... deci... cred că ne înşală pe amândouă... cu Dana.*
*Danna68: Super... Poate mă lamuriți într-un final al cui soț este... că nu mai pricep nimic...*
*VALERIA OANA: AL NOSTRU, AL TUTUROR.*
'VALERIA OANA: Then wait to mature a bit and after that I'll tell you that I've bought a very nice and sexy suit. And my husband said that I should buy a purse and some shoes and... not to ask any other presents for my birthday.
Maryalicia: Your husband is very clever... If he spends all money on you, what will he bring for me??? And your birthday is far away... Stop spending his money…
Danna68: Enlighten me... clarify please!!!!!!!!!! Sister, what is her husband doing in Braşov? ... You've lost me the way and I am not blonde anymore.
VALERIA OANA: Wait, There is something I don't understand. He told me that the money... is from… you… so... I think he is cheating on both of us... with Dana.
Danna68: Super...Maybe you let me know whose husband is he… because I don't get a thing…
VALERIA OANA: HE IS OURS, HUSBAND TO ALL OF US.'

In order to build positive relations, at times, mothers share intimate humorous situations they face in their daily lives.

(19) *adelina munteanu – Se pare că copilaşul meu de la o vreme ocupă tot patul... Îmi lasă şi mie o fâşie de pat cât o dungă şi mă împinge cu picioarele... Îmi face masaj nocturn... De acum până vine frigul aşa va fi... se simte împărat în pat...*
'adelina munteanu: It seems that lately my baby needs all the space in the bed... I get a small strip and he pushes me with his legs... He offers me a night massage... From now on it will be like this... he behaves as a king in our bed.'

We discovered instances [as in 20] of mild irony used for reviving the thread:

(20) *roxana_20: Nu mai avem mămici active prin Brasov?*
'roxana_20: Don't we have active mommies in Brasov anymore?'

Jokes [21] and figures of speech, like metaphorical epithets [22], are used for building positive relations, teasing and euphemistic use.

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(21) *dalicris: Să ştiţi că eu nu am mai avut răbdare şi m-am pus pe alcătuit un capitol nou. Mă plictisisem de cel vechi şi cum am şi scăpat niţel de Andrei, că doarme, am purces la scrierea unei noi pagini din cartea vieţii noastre de mămici. Drept şi prin urmare, APLAUZE!!!!!!!!!!!!*
'dalicris: You should know that I lost my patience and I started a new chapter. I was bored of the old one and as Andrei was sleeping, I started writing a new page in our mommy's life story. So, APPLAUSES for me!!!!!!!!!!!!'
(22) *ANTA_PAU: Dragi mămici singure, aţi fost întrebate de copilaşi despre tătici? (...) Adresez întrebarea celor care au trecut prin asta, deci copilul să nu fi avut niciun contact cu* ***drăgălaşul-fugar****!*
'ANTA_PAU: Dear single mothers, have you ever been asked by your children about their fathers? I am asking this question to those persons who are in the same situation, I mean the child had never been in contact with the sweet-fugitive!'

Proverbs are used to give advice or to disagree to certain aspects in a less face-threatening way. In addition, they are a way of expressing intersubjectivity, more specifically, for sharing common background [as in 23].

(23) *kaliana – Cumpărarea unui pian nu te face întotdeauna un bun pianist, pe când naşterea unui copil te va face întotdeauna un bun părinte.*
'kaliana – Buying a piano will not always make you a good piano player but having a child will always make you a good parent.'

Focusing on the ways mothers enrich their instant messages with social meaning through the creation and use of relational icons, we identified the following types of emoticons: those expressing emotions or states of mind ( – sad, – happy, – smile, – laugh – love, – kiss, – crying, – blinking, – angry, – amazed. – grumpy – thinking), and those displaying babies ( ). Emoticons are used as atenuators when what has been said is face-threatening or as intensifiers of the emotions expressed by words. In [24], emoticons are used to attenuate the face-threatening act:

(24) *alondramona – Păi da, trebuie să fim atente şi la ce anume au nevoie... Ca să fie şi un cadou util! Eu vreau să fiu şi practică!*
*G.Raluca – ... Cam multe vrei tu!*
'alondramona – Well, yes. We have to concentrate also on what they need… I want to be practical!
G.Raluca – ... You want so many things!'

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When used as intensifiers [as in 25], emoticons stress upon the emotions of happiness, closeness, or sadness.

(25) *BIJOUX – Mulţumim bebeilor noştri că au contribuit la întâlnirea noastră şi cu această ocazie oferă mamicilor clipe de răsfăţ* 
'BIJOUX – We thank our babies for offering us the chance to meet and to be caressed '

There are several cases in which the sentence is build up only of emoticons, words not being needed [26].

(26) *paulanicolae78: Oricum, eu vă iubesc, vă respect şi vă ador copiii...* 
*DIANCE:* 
'paulanicolae78: Anyway, I love you, I respect you and I adore your babies... 
DIANCE: '

The excessive use of emoticons proves the fact that instant messages have a more emotional weight than other types of discourse (like descriptive or narrative discourse).

**3.2.4. *Pragmatic strategies***

Our analysis focuses on discourse markers, especially for their intersubjective and interactional functions that powerfully influence mothering identity construction. Discourse markers qualify the interpersonal relation between participants providing an accessible path for the identity construction. Speakers use discourse markers to request attention (*hai/*'allow me'; *ei bine, păi, no/*'well'), to assume shared knowledge (*ştii/*'you know', *ca de obicei/*'as usual'), to request confirmation ('right', 'OK'), or to clarify something (*cred, consider*/'I mean', 'I think'; *de fapt/* 'actually'; *chiar/*'just'; *deci, aşa că/*'so'; *de fapt/*'in fact'; *adevărul este/*'the truth is'), to introduce an elaboration or explanation as apart of an answer to a question (*sincer/*'honestly; *acum*/'now'; *deşi*/'though'; *oricum/*'anyway'; *pe de altă parte/* on the other hand; *din nefericire/*'unfortunately'; *în principiu/*'basically'; *momentan/* 'for the moment'; *şi adverbial/*'also') and to make a suggestion (*poate*/'maybe'). The hearer may respond using discourse markers signaling comprehension/ agreement (*OK; desigur/*'of course'; *întradevăr/* 'indeed'; *absolut, categoric/* 'absolutely'; *cool/*'cool'), a change of knowledge status (*ah, oh*) or to ironise (*sigur/*'sure').

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The strategic use of the above mentioned expressions is part of the wider phenomenon of speakers' attitudes towards the ideas they express or the ideas expressed by others mothers. This actually relates to the interactional function of discourse markers, expressing attitudes, feelings and evaluations. In other words, they are particles with an interpersonal function which are hearer-oriented (*ştii*/ 'you know'). They may express mothers empathy towards the listener, happiness to see one another (*Oh, Stella!*), an attempt to involve the hearer into the conversation (*nu-i aşa*/'right'). We can also underline the ability of discourse markers to signal the degree of shared experience, knowledge and logical relations between speakers communicated assumptions.

**3.2.5.** ***Interactional strategies – Indexicality and non-referential indices***

Some examples of affective forms found in our corpus include:

a. diminutives indicating sympathy [27], endearment [28], and emotional closeness [29]:

(27) *Ce* ***îngeraşi*** *frumoşi avem cu toţii.*

'What beautiful little angles we all have'

(28) *Bună* ***mămicuţelor****... am revenit cu poze noi aşa cum am promis.*

'Hello mommies… I've got back with some pictures as I prommissed'

(29) *In această căsuţă))) sper să ne sfătuim şi susţinem la fel de mult ca la* ***graviduţe****))*

'In this new home) I hope we will support each other as much as when we were pregnant (diminutive)'

b. exclamations functioning as intensifiers of certain emotions (joy, fear, love, or pride) [30] and also serving to express encouragement [31]:

(30) *Vai dragele mele, nu e nimic mai frumos decât să fii* ***MAMĂ****!!!*

'Oh, my dears, there is nothing more beautiful than being a MOTHER!!!'

(31) ***Fiţi puternice!***

'Be strong!'

c. interjections functioning as emotional intensifiers (sadness, fear, joy or excitement) [32, 33] and showing surprise [34] and resignation [35]:

(32) ***Of****, îmi pare atât de rău să aud aşa ceva.*

'Oh, I'm so sorry to hear this.'

(33) *... că ai zis de vaccine, danyelle, mi-am adus aminte că şi noi trebuie să ne ducem maine:((:((* ***vaiii*** *ce greu o să fie...*

'… now that you mentioned about the vaccination, I remembered that we should go tomorrow too :((:(( oh dear, it will be very difficult…'

(34) ***Wowww****, în căsuţa nouă!!!*

'Wowwww, we are in our new home!!!'

(35) ***Pff****, eu astăzi am intrat în săptămâna 36.*

'Pff, today I entered week 36.'

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d. address terms that help construction of mothering identity, showing at the same time the close relations between mothers:

*Să ai spor **iubita**.../ Dragele mele / Scumpele mele / Bună, fetele mele / Dragă Mariana / Bună dimi, mămici, pitici şi burtici / Bună orădencelor / Bună braşovencelor* ('Good luck, **love**…' / 'My dears' / 'My sweethearts' / 'Hello, my girls' / 'Dear Mariana' / 'Good morn', mommies', 'little girls/ boys and bellies'/ 'Hello, girls from Oradea' / 'Hello, girls from Brasov')

e. the frequent use of the 1st person plural of the pronoun – *we (noi), us (noi), our (nostru)* and of the verb, even from the first post in the thread, demonstrates mothers strong affiliation to mothering identity [36]:

(36) *Aşa cum bine bănuiţi sunt o mămica singură. Am 35 ani şi doi pui: Ioana (7 ani) şi Ionuţ (4 ani). Aş dori să cunosc alte mămici singure, să putem sta de vorbă aşa ca între... mămici singure ))) Să vorbim despre copiii nostri, despre noi, despre visele, speranţele şi aşteptările noastre. Aşa ca între prietene. Vă aştept cu drag!*

'As you all might suppose, I am a single mother. I am 35 years old and I have two children: Ioana (7 years old) and Ionut (4 years old). I would like to meet other single mothers in order to talk just between us… single mothers))). To discuss about our children, about us, our dreams, hopes and expectations. To chat as friends. Hope you'll catch up with me soon!'

### 3.2.6. *Lexical strategies*

We focused on identifying terminology specific to mothering identity and on depicting the abbreviations occurring in online conversations. So, terminology specific to mothering identity construction in our corpus includes the following terms: *burtici, graviduţe* ('bellies/pregnant ladies' – two diminutives for pregnant ladies), *pitici* ('smurfs' – diminutive used for little babies), *minuni (cu sensul de copii)* ('miracles' – referring to children), *bebici* ('cubs'), *grădi* ('kindergarten' – diminutive), *buni* ('granny'), *mami* ('mommy'), *tati* ('daddy').

Abbreviations, although are not specific only to mothers' lexis, are important for this type of communication, and, therefore, need to be mentioned.

(37) *Bună dimi (dimineaţa) şi de la noi.*

'Good morn' (morning) from us, too'

(38) *Dida, e rândul tău să vii la gl (Galaţi): P neli o să vin şi la u (you), dar la vara, când e cald: D.*

'Dida, it is your turn to come to Gl (abbreviation for Galati): P neli I will also come to u (you), but in summer time, when it is warm: D.'

We concluded that the lexis used by mothers includes terms specific only to mothering identity, while the abbreviations show intersubjectivity and common knowledge, also important elements for mothering identity construction.

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## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RESULTS

In the present study we argued for a view of identity that is intersubjectively produced, and interactionally emergent. Rather than using the discussion board as a place to incite arguments, this is a place where mothers can learn, discuss and find solidarity with other mothers. At the same time mothers use the board to share their stories and discuss the tensions they face. As they reveal their struggles, mothers begin to recognize the common and shared experience they have with other mothers.

The internet is an important channel allowing computer-mediated-communication, thus representing an important place for the identity construction process. By participating in discussions about what it means to be a mother, women are shaping both personal and social understanding of mothering identity. For some mothers, these discussion boards are ideal in many ways, as they can log on from anywhere, provided they have computer access. Some log on from work, others from home, and some even post once a week from the library. Because the dialogue is ongoing, with posts and responses constantly available, mothers can easily join the conversation at any time. Although they have busy lives that make it difficult to nail down an hour or two each week to meet one another, these discussion boards enable them to exchange stories, advice, or recipes. These women also share stories about the follies of their lives as mothers and convey their self-perceived shortcomings in their other roles. The lexis used by mothers includes terms specific only to mothering identity proving intersubjectivity and common knowledge. The affective forms used by mothers are a means by which they express emotions such as closeness, joy, happiness or sadness and consolidate their group identity.

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[1] The definiton of "the term *topic* implies a double perspective: a segment of a phrase seen in a textual dynamic, meaning that the phrase is not just a syntactic structure, but also an element contributing to the progression of a text by introducing both known and new information, and a feature of the semantic textual cohesion" (Borţun and Săvulescu 2008: 42).

[2] Emoticons were first designed to add humor and to mitigate negative meaning in text messages (Wolf 2000) and we are interested both in the way these may influence the valence of messages to the participants and how they function as signes of mothers' emotions as concerns identity construction.

[3] We consider discourse markers as defined by Schiffrin: "sequentially different units which distribute and separate speech units (sentences, sequences, propositions, tonic units, texts or subtexts)" (Schiffrin 1987: 31), and also as "particles that do not add information to the utterance and that frequently arise in the form of a question, completing the discourse on a cognitive level that originates from its fundamental meaning, after having lost its grammatical function" (Vincent and Sankoff 1992: 205).

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