

Identity Between Materiality and Subjectivity*

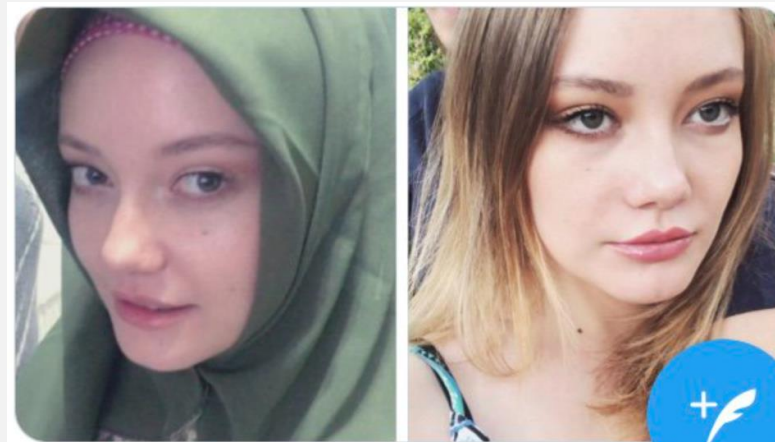
The quest for individuality, autonomy, and agency in Muslim women's narratives of headscarf removal

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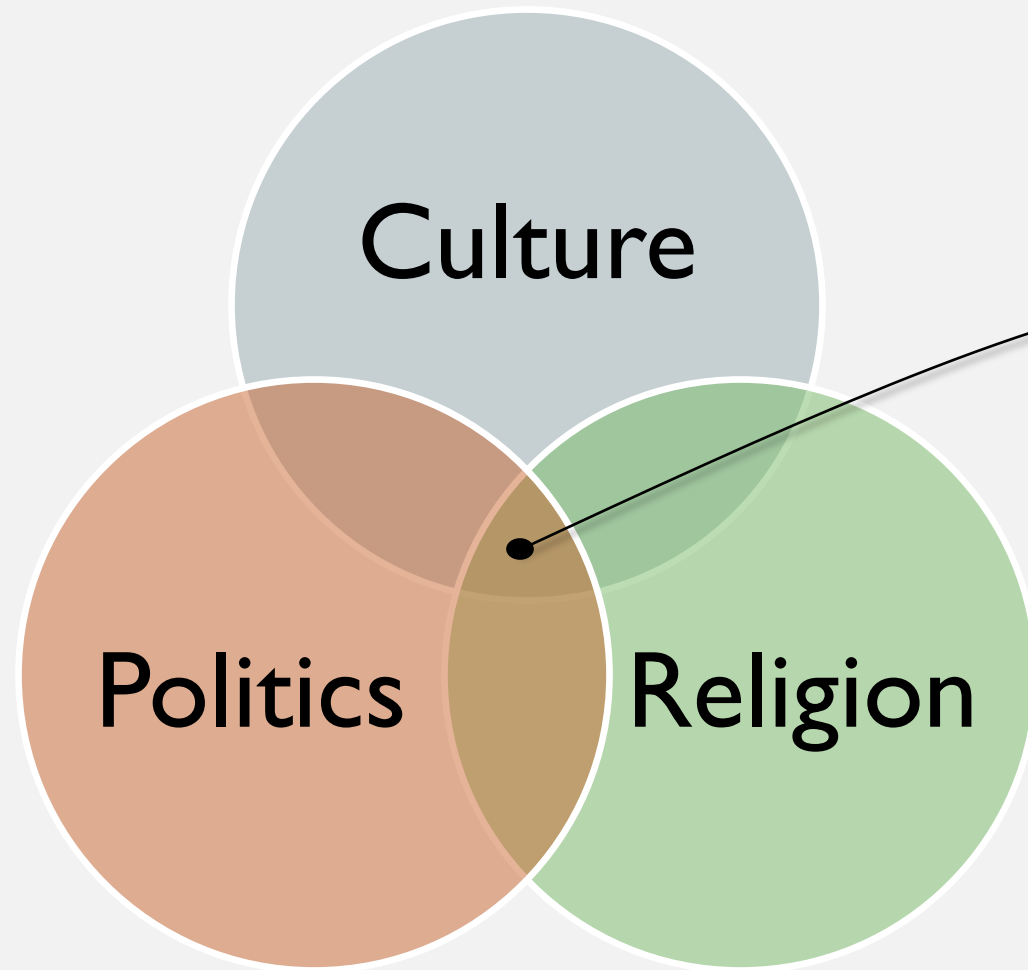
Sociology and Social Data Analytics

The Pennsylvania State University

THE CONTEXT: #10YEARCHALLENGE



BROADER THEORETICAL OBJECTIVE



Materiality & Identity

BROAD PROJECT OVERVIEW

How do Muslim women negotiate their identity?

Hijab Removal

~217 Narratives

Grounded Theory

Interviews

Former 'Hijabis'

Faith Leaders

Lay Folk

Motivation vs.
Justification

Authoritative
Perception

Public
Perception

CULTURE, MATERIALITY, IDENTITY

- **Culture** is our common deposit of knowledge (Sapir, 1993) that sets the normative criteria of actions (Parsons, 1951).
- **Identity** is our sense of who we are as individuals and as members of social groups.
 - Identities are not intentional but **inherited, learnt** and **habitual** (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Taylor, 1871)
 - The **looking-glass self** (Cooley, 1902); we define ourselves with respect of our significant others.
- Culture is embodied in symbolic **forms** (Griswald, 1986); **affordance** is intertwined with **materiality** (McDonnell, 2010; 2023)
 - Culture defines the countours of our identity – how much can our identities *stretch*.

NARRATIVE, AGENCY, AND IDENTITY

- **Narrative Agency:** the ability of an individual or group to construct, modify, or resist dominant narratives about themselves or their experiences.
- **Reflexive selves:** Individuals are not just passive recipients of societal influences but actively construct, maintain, and sometimes revise their identities (Giddens, 1984).
 - They constantly create and recreate their identities through **biographical narratives**.
 - This happens because they regularly examine and modify their beliefs, actions, and identities in light of the ever-changing social world.

Narrative ↔ Agency

DATA

YOU WON'T WALK ALONE

- ~217 anonymous blog posts
 - Turkish, English, Arabic, Spanish
- “... (started) 2018 by a group of women and non-binary adults who value sharing opinions on issues such as women's rights and freedom, freedom of expression, and gender social equality.”
- **Scholarships***



YOU NEVER GET USED TO THE THINGS YOU CANNOT INTERNALIZE.

They rejected “the real me.” I don’t know if you also write about those who lost the struggle, but today I am one of them.



IT WAS AS IF IT WAS PUTTING ME IN A MOLD.

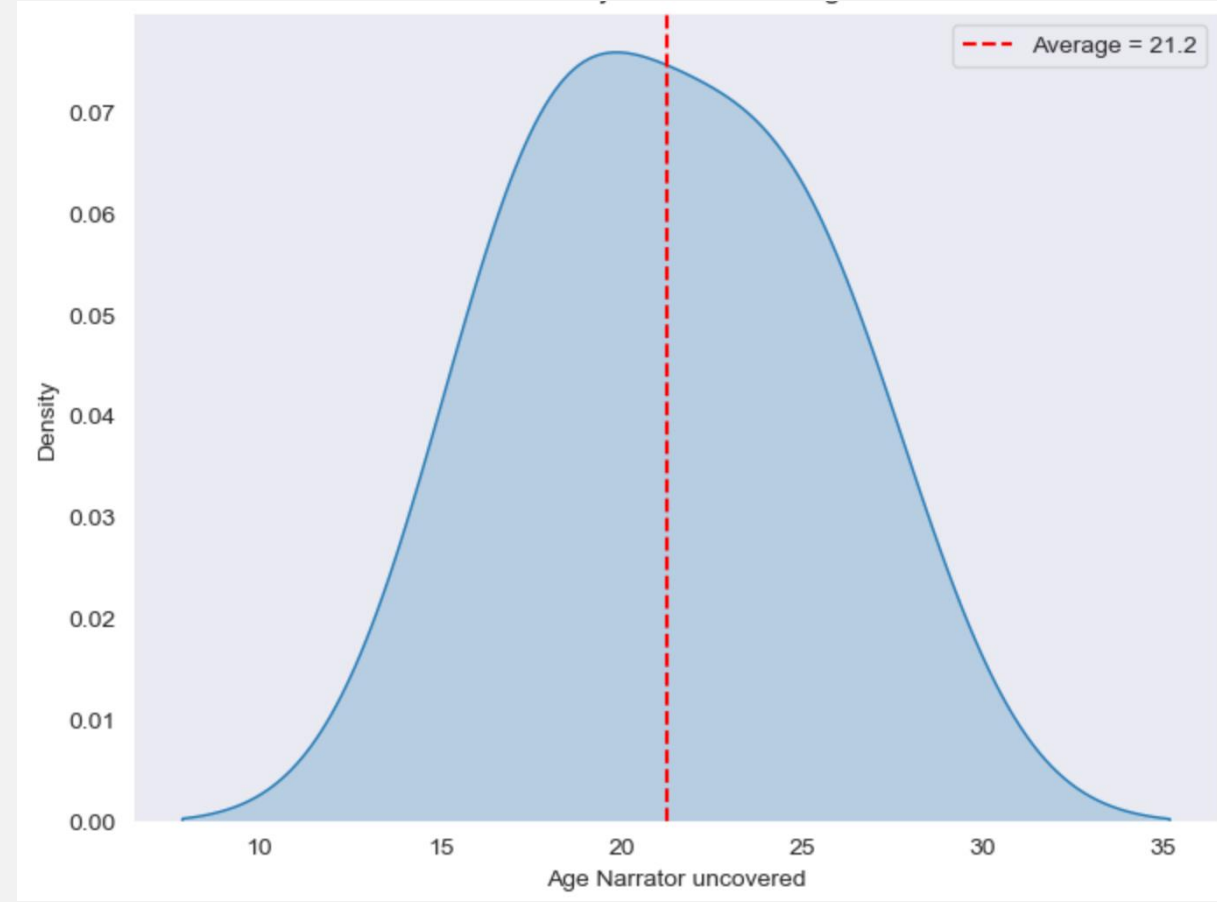
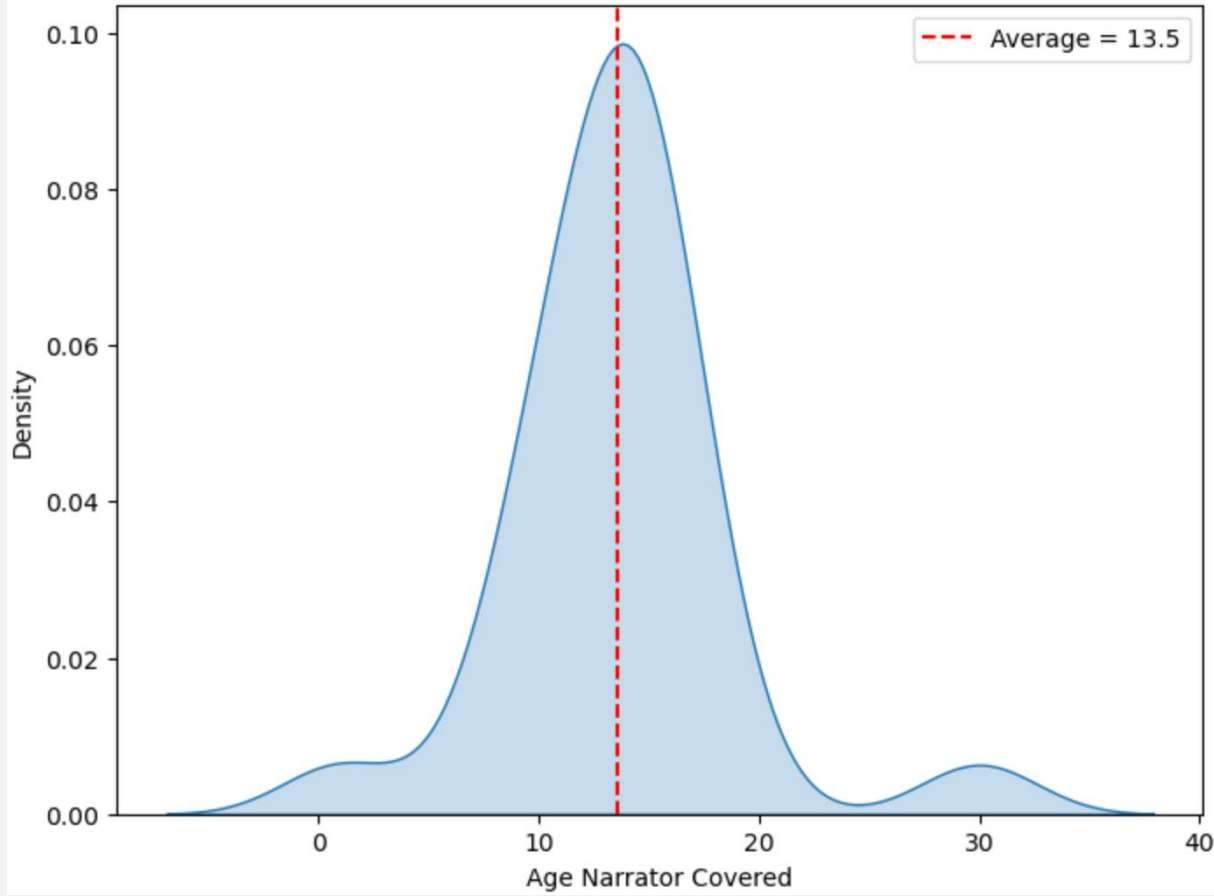
I grew up in a conservative family. On the summer vacation of my 15th year, my father said, “All your friends are veiled, when will



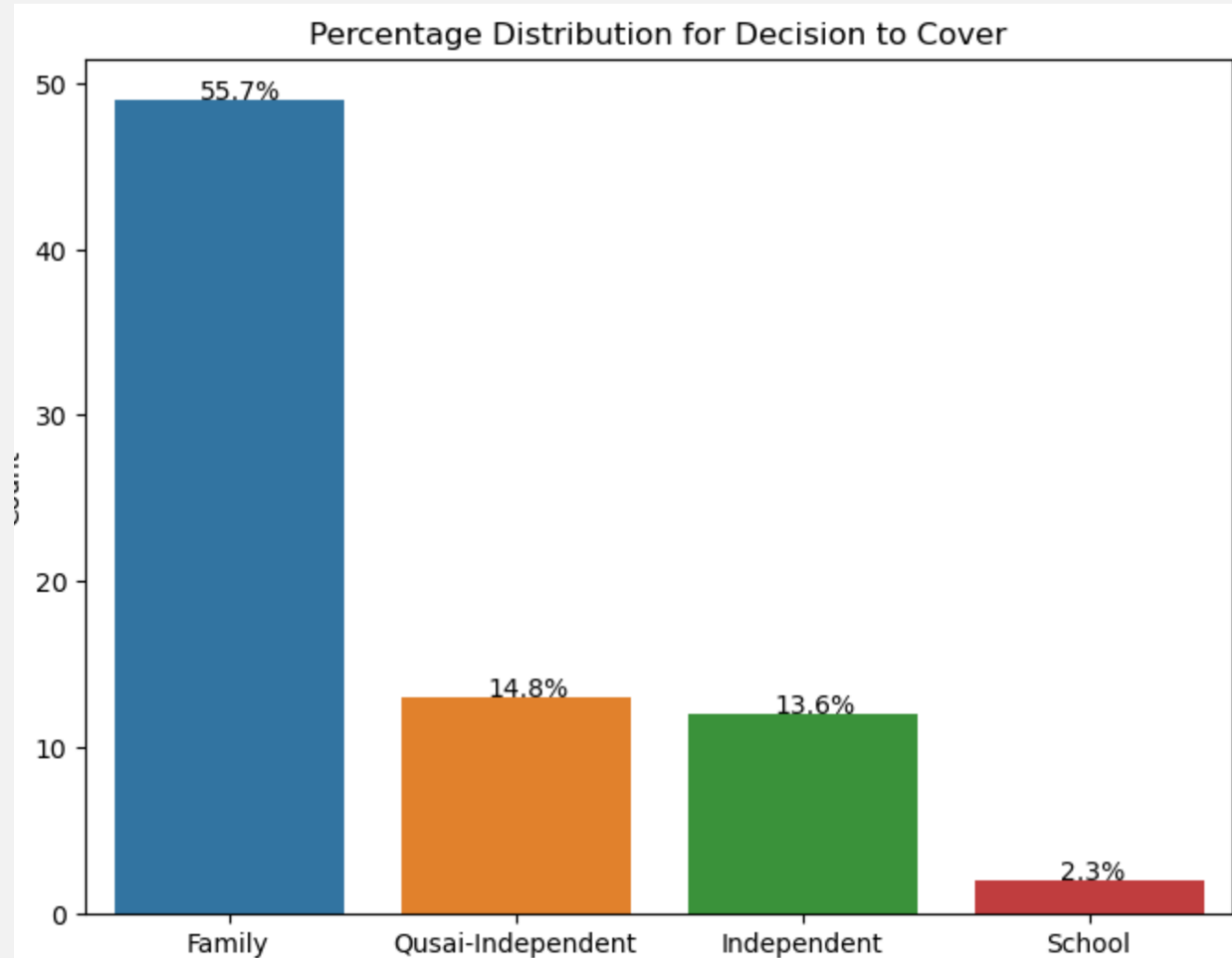
COULD WEARING A BURQA BE A 12-YEAR-OLD CHILD’S OWN WISH?

It was staggering to see that a platform like this exists and how many

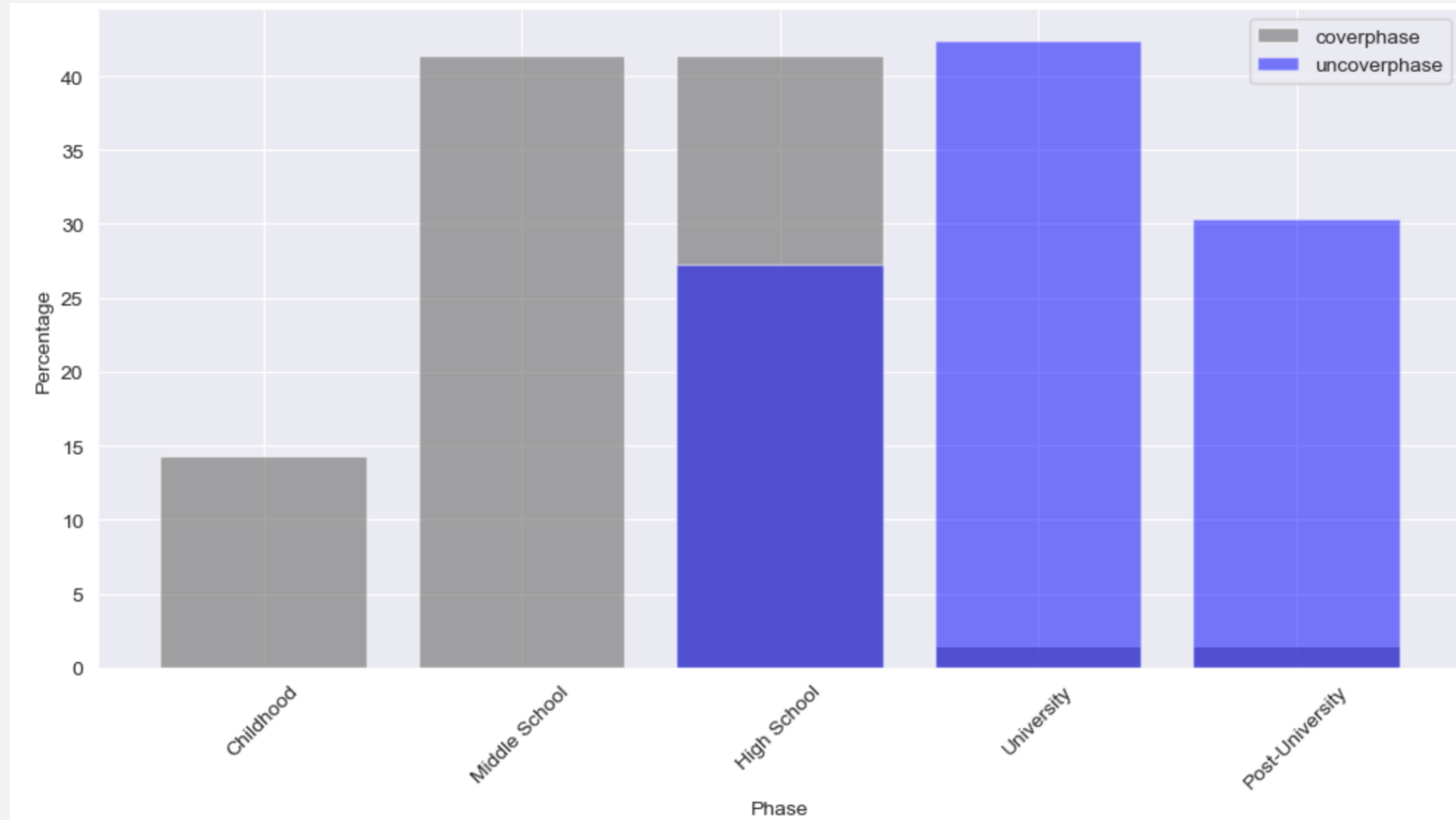
DATA



DATA



DATA



AGENCY

Agency

Narrative

Network

Individuality
Subjectivity

Empowerment
Solidarity

CREATING AGENCY

“Whether you wear hijab or not, male or LGBTI +, whoever and whatever you are, please love yourself.”

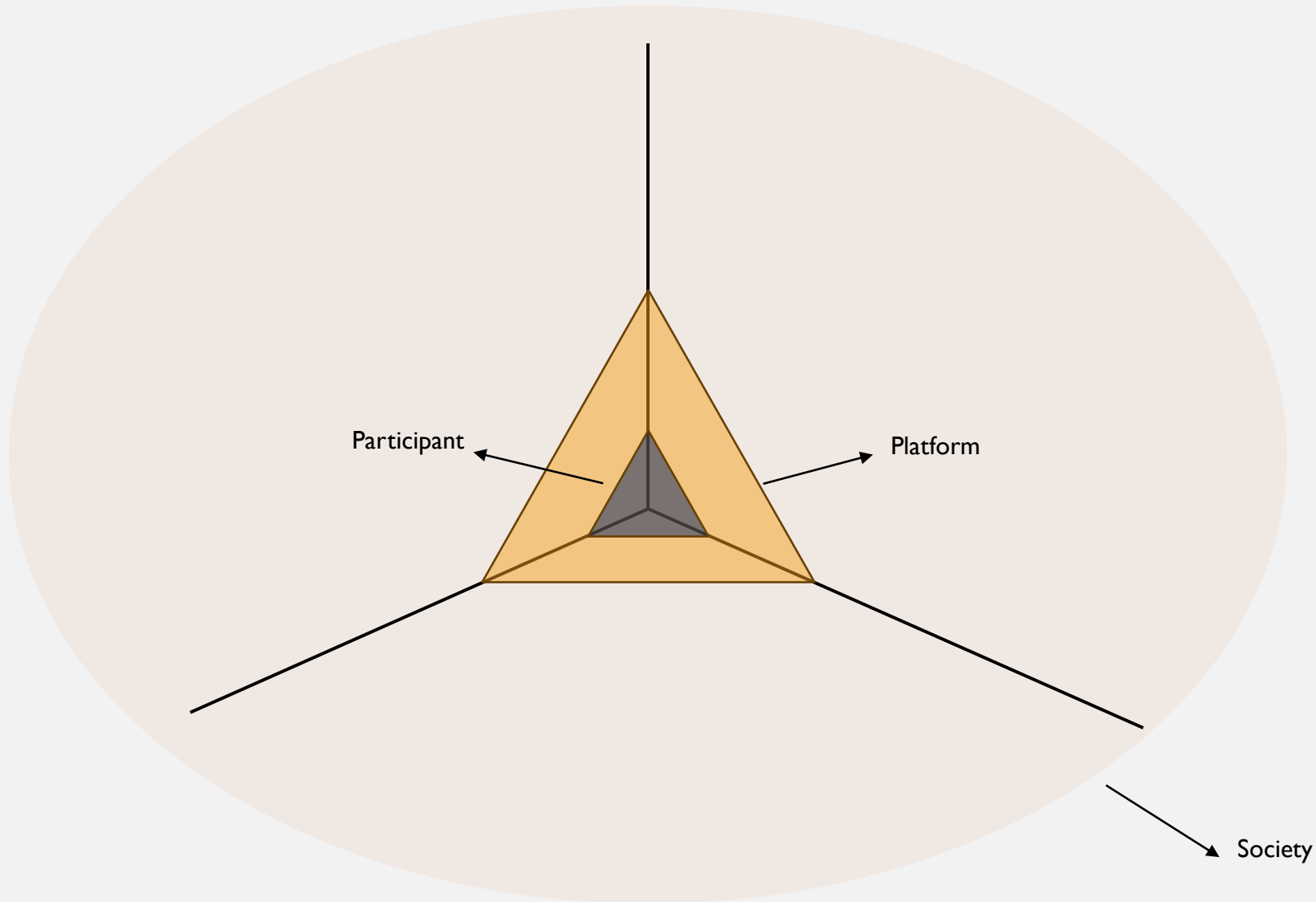
“I can feel that I’m not crying alone.” / “I write to encourage others.”

“Let your hair loose; let them be free. Don’t be afraid of your relatives or others, they will only gossip about you for 10 minutes and after that they can find a new subject.”

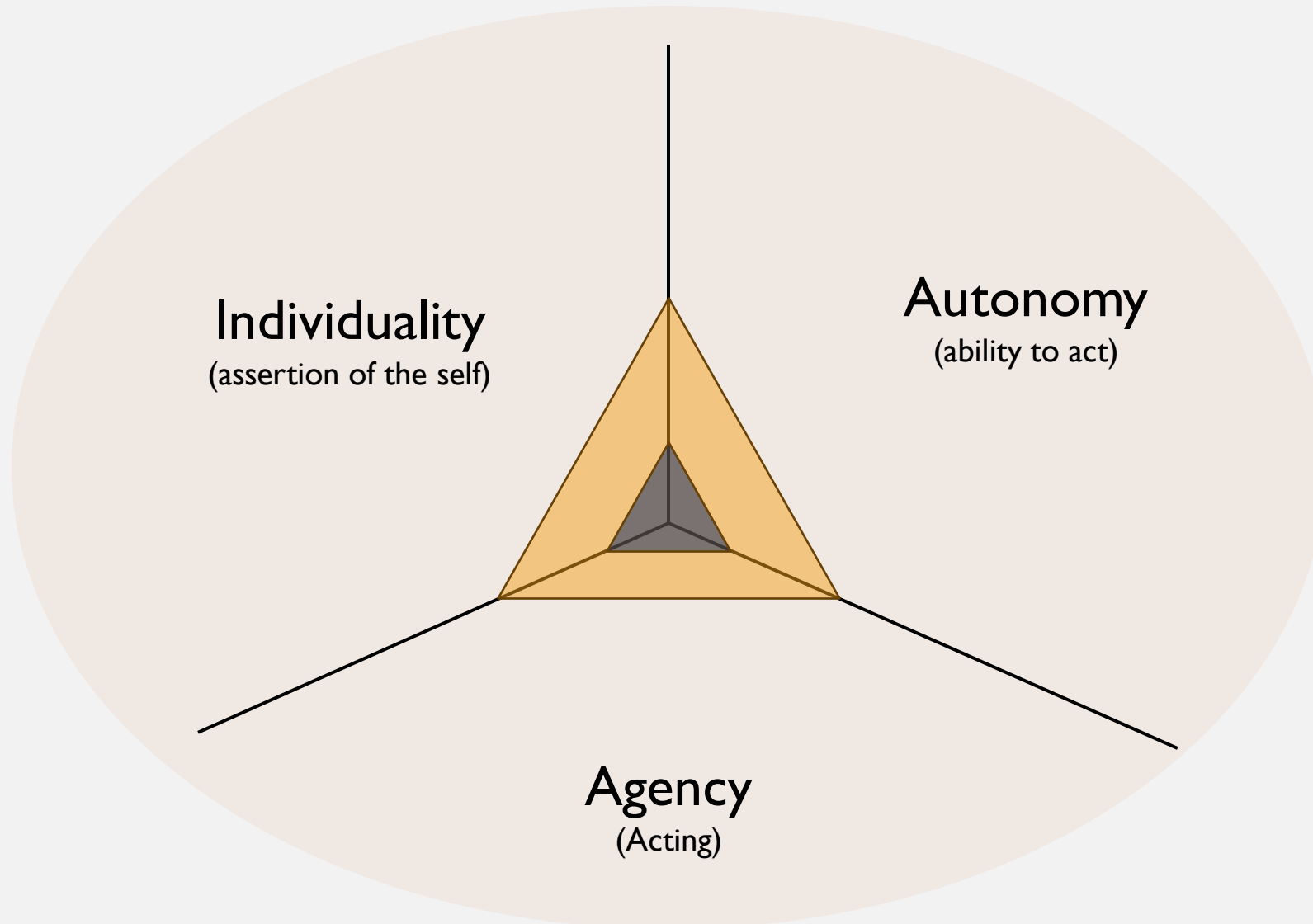
“Writing here was not in my mind, but after I saw the posts, I wanted to write, as well.”

“I’ve been following this site for a long time, but I couldn’t find the strength to write these.”

NARRATIVE AGENCY MODEL



NARRATIVE AGENCY MODEL



THEMES: INDIVIDUALITY

“I should wear my headscarf for God, but I am doing it for my father.”

“Under pressure from my parents, I wore hijab the day I started high school, and I **have lost my own identity** since. I’m not myself anymore.”

“I am **not even a Muslim**, yet I am forced to wear the hijab.”

“I don’t want to live like somebody else anymore. **I want to be myself.** I want my right.”

“They had “grounded” me so that men wouldn’t get electricity from me.”

THEMES: AUTONOMY

“When I start **earning my own living**, I will leave my city or even my country.”

“I wish to be a **good scientist** and prevent my siblings from crushing under this ignorance.”

“Now **I am waiting to find a job**. I will take off my headscarf the day I find a job and start earning money, and that day will be the happiest day of mine.”

“maybe when I get **married**, maybe when I start living and working abroad.”

“If **I go to university**, I will take my headscarf off.”

THEMES: AGENCY

“I prepared every document required to get a **divorce**. My husband got scared and realized that I was serious and then he said “Okay, I will support your decision”.”

“I was unemployed for 1.5 years after college, and **I took off the headscarf as I found my job**. They still don’t know.”

“**I had to get away from my family**. I **studied**, started **working**, and then **unveiled**; my self-confidence came back.”

(after taking off my hijab) ... “**I gave courage to many young women where I live**. That makes me happy.”

GROUNDING HYPOTHESES

- **Motivation vs. Justification** (Vaisey, 2009)
- **H1: Women remove their headscarves when they enter labor force.** (Economic)
- **H2: Women remove their headscarves for being visible.** (Partnership)
- **H3: Women remove their headscarves because they lose their faith.** (Secularization)
- **H4: Women remove their headscarves as a reaction to the AKP rule.** (Political Backlash)

