**Impoliteness, Aggression and the Moral Order**

***Abstract***

While studies devoted to impoliteness have been increasing in number, only scant attention has been paid to how impoliteness can be viewed as a reaction against attributes or other social actions that are deemed to be undesirable. The current study is concerned with the relationship between ‘impoliteness’ and the notion of ‘moral order’. More specifically, this study examines the aggressive comments directed towards the official *Facebook* page of an Iranian actress, living in exile, after posting a nude photograph of herself. In this respect, the study reveals how aggressive and impolite comments invoke, and are invoked by, what can be termed ‘moral order expectancies’. As the study reveals, considerations of impoliteness are heavily dependent upon the development of communities whose members apparently share, and demand, common beliefs and similar social values.

Keywords: Moral order, impoliteness, aggression, Facebook, social action, Persian

**1. Introduction**

Being treated as a thriving line of inquiry, impoliteness has over the years become a topic of extensive research (see, e.g., Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 1996, 2011; Culpeper et al., 2010; Culpeper, Haugh and Kádár, 2017; Haugh, 2010, 2015; Kádár, 2017; Tayebi, 2016, 2018, to mention only a few). Impoliteness, as conceptualised by Culpeper (2011: 23), is “a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts.” Impoliteness is thought to be “sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organisation” (Culpeper, 2011: 23). Negatively viewed (i.e. impolite) behaviour and language are thus in conflict with “with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be” (Culpeper, 2011: 23).

While no doubt notions such as one’s *wants*, *desires*, and *expectations* mentioned above have proved to be imperative in how people evaluate an act or behaviour as impolite, the nature and type of these expectations have not yet been systematically investigated across languages and cultures. One possible way to address this gap would be to treat impoliteness “not simply as arising in social practice” but rather “as a form of social practice” (Haugh, 2013: 54; cf. Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003, 2009; Watts, 2003). On this view, impoliteness is conceptualised as a form of social practice with a view to investigating “what participants are doing through evaluations of [im]politeness, and how such evaluations are interdependently interlinked with the interactional achievement of social actions and meanings” (Haugh, 2013: 56).

The present study is concerned with impolite and aggressive language directed towards the official *Facebook* account of the Iranian actress and public figure, Golshifteh Farahani, after she posted a nude photograph of herself on 18 January 2012, a photograph which allegedly resulted in her being banished from the country[[1]](#footnote-1). The significance of the photograph in question lies in the fact that, as Gibbons (2012: para. 3) notes, it shattered a “taboo of unimaginable proportions.” The study shows how and why evaluations of impoliteness arise and invoke different aspects of the moral order which are socially both “standardized” and “standardizing” (Garfinkel, 1964: 226). We argue that impoliteness is a situated concept evoked by expectations of the moral order (Haugh, 2013, 2015). As the study reveals, impoliteness predominantly depends on the development of communities which both share “a mutual engagement in a common enterprise” and use “a shared repertoire of statements, modes of behaviour, reifications, etc.” (Watts, 2010: 57). Indeed, the impoliteness evaluations under scrutiny seem to inform and influence such social actions as *criticising*, *rebuking*, *shaming* and so on.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In section 2 the notion of moral order is discussed with reference to impoliteness. In section 3, the methodology of the study is explained and some background information to the study is provided. Sections 4 and 5 are devoted to the analysis of the nude photograph as a form of socially significant action which invokes pragmatic inference. Section 6 discusses the social practice in question in light of the expectancies[[2]](#footnote-2) of the moral order. Finally, in section 7, a summary of the findings as well as a discussion are provided.

**2. The moral order and impoliteness**

It has long been argued that the moral order constitutes one of the central features of human societies. By and large, the moral order encompasses “any system of obligations that defines and organises the proper – *good*, *right*, *virtuous* – relations among individuals and groups in a community” (Davis, 2008: 17; italics added; cf. Kádár, 2017). Domenici and Littlejohn (2006, cited in Culpeper, 2011: 38) point out that the moral order is a “socially constructed set of understandings we carry with us from situation to situation.” As such, the moral order is *moral* precisely because “it guides our sense of right and wrong, good and bad”, and it is an *order* precisely because “it is reflected in a patterned set of personal actions” (Domenici and Littlejohn, 2006, cited in Culpeper, 2011: 38).

Garfinkel (1964: 225) views the moral order as consisting of “the rule governed activities of everyday life.” In other words, for us, as members of society, the moral order includes “normal courses of action-familiar scenes of everyday affairs, the world of daily life known in common with others and with others taken for granted” (Garfinkel, 1964: 225). Thus, it would be wise to claim that the systems comprising the moral order have their roots in “religions, traditions (Romantic individualism, natural law theory, etc.), or ideologies” (Davis, 2008: 1). The moral order is expressed both explicitly and implicitly. Examples of the former include “institutional rules, laws, moral codes, and the like”, with examples of the latter being “rites, and rituals of social life” (Davis, 2008: 1). In this respect, it has recently been suggested that priority should be given by researchers to the explanation of the moral grounds on which attributions of (im)polite beliefs and behaviours are made (Haugh, 2015: 158). As Haugh (2015: 158, italics in the original) recommends, “theorising im/politeness-as-evaluation opens up the key question of what is *done* with such evaluations in interaction.”

In this regard, drawing on insight from Culpeper (2011), Kádár and Haugh (2013: 93) explain the various aspects of the moral order and how they are believed to influence how “people know (or at least think they know) something is polite, impolite and so on.” As the authors note, the first aspect is that (im)politeness involves “evaluative beliefs”, which specify what behaviour is expected in particular contexts. The second important aspect of the moral order is that it is socially grounded (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 94). These socially grounded beliefs “are dispersed to varying degrees across various kinds of relational networks, ranging from a group of families and friends, to a localised community of practice, through to a larger, much more diffuse societal or cultural group” (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 94). The last aspect is that beliefs derived from the moral order “have recourse to a set of (im)politeness evaluators: descriptors or metalanguage used by members to conceptualise their social world” (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 94). In this context, it has been argued that interactants are, to a certain extent, bound to both an interactional and behavioural contract (cf. Fraser and Nolen, 1981). Consequently, the ‘right’ and ‘appropriate’ ways of members behaving in a particular manner generally go unnoticed, “until one member does more than is necessary” (Watts, 2010: 57) or infringes such behavioural contracts (Tayebi, 2016). As Haugh (2013: 57) explains, such commonly seen, but often unnoticed, expectations of the moral order are therefore “not something to be simply assumed by the analyst, but rather constitute an important object of study in their own right.”

It goes without saying that modern societies may well involve competing moral orders as people tend to belong to different social networks or communities, each of which representing different values and codes of conduct. This makes the study of the moral order a tremendously onerous task as it would be impossible for analysts to examine the infinite number of real-life situations, their underlying expectancies and the corresponding reactions. Nevertheless, it seems that computer-mediated communication gives researchers an opportunity to uncover a wide range of practices and expectations that are ‘morally organised’ (Jayyusi, 1991, cited in Haugh, 2013: 57) and are in line with “the socially standardized and standardizing, ‘seen but unnoticed,’ expected, background features of everyday scenes” (Garfinkel, 1964: 226).

While there are certainly differences between computer-mediated communication and face-to-face interactions, it has been demonstrated that “emotional and physiological responses to mediated conflict are analogous to those found in real face-to-face situations” (Reeves and Nass, 1996, cited in Blitvich, 2010: 558). As Locher (2010) notes, computer-mediated communication brings a ‘variety of group practices’ (Androutsopoulos, 2006: 421) to be explored to the fore, thus offering a “fertile ground to link theoretical interests with regard to the relational aspect of language with an interest in group practices and how people define their social environments” (Locher, 2010: 2-3).

It should also be noted that the *moral order* is closely related to what is known as *morality*. Morality, conveniently defined as those principles which govern the way we tend to distinguish between what we consider as *right* and *wrong* or *good* and *bad* conduct, has also been a topic of extensive research, especially by scholars working in the field of moral psychology (see, e.g., Greene and Haidt, 2002; Haidt, 2012; Haidt and Kesebir, 2010). In a nutshell, as far as *morality* is concerned, moral psychologists argue that morality is built on five seemingly universal foundations: in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, and purity/sanctity. These foundations are summarised below:

1. In-group/loyalty: Concerns related to obligations of group membership, such as loyalty, self-sacrifice, and vigilance against betrayal.
2. Authority/respect: Concerns related to social order and the obligations of hierarchical relationships, such obedience, respect, and the fulfilment of role-based duties.
3. Harm/care: Concerns for the suffering of others, including virtues of caring and compassion.
4. Fairness/reciprocity: Concerns about unfair treatment, cheating, and more abstract notions of justice and rights.
5. Purity/sanctity: Concerns about physical and spiritual contagion, including virtues of chastity, wholesomeness, and control of desires.

(Haidt and Kesebir, 2010, cited in Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2016: 82)

While the notion of *morality* is a tremendously useful one when investigating the emphasis different social groups tend to put on each of the foundations delineated above, in the current study the term ‘moral order’ is preferred over ‘morality’ for several reasons. First of all, we believe, in line with mainstream impoliteness research, that the term morality is too general to be used as an analytical tool, especially when discussing the ways different sociocultural groups or relational networks interact with each other. As Haidt (2012: 30) acknowledges, it is the moral domain [i.e. the moral order] which ‘varies by culture’:

The moral domain varies by culture. It is unusually narrow in Western, educated, and individualistic cultures. Sociocentric cultures broaden the moral domain to encompass and regulate more aspects of life. (Haidt, 2012: 30)

Analogically speaking, Haidt (2012: 133) continues, “morality is like cuisine”:

[I]t’s a cultural construction, influenced by accidents of environment and history, but it’s not so flexible that anything goes. […] Cuisines vary, but they all must please tongues equipped with the same five taste receptors. (Haidt, 2012: 133)

Secondly, we believe that the data under investigation in this study comprise actual realisations of the underlying moral judgments which are interactionally achieved. As Spencer-Oatey and Kádár (2016: 83) note, it is imperative for researchers working in the field to work out “what underlying values and beliefs influence people’s moral order judgements and thus what similarities and/or differences might there be in the instantiation of the moral order across different contexts and different cultural groups.” Last but not least, while we acknowledge the fact that, as a belief-centered notion influenced by religion and cultural values, morality continues to exert a huge influence on the way people function in society, it is the interactionally constituted moral orders which need to be investigated systematically across languages and cultures (cf. Mills, 2017).

**3. Data and procedure**

Data collected from computer-mediated communication (e.g. *Facebook*) is potentially rewarding for the purpose of the current study in that it comprises “massive amounts of publicly and freely accessible, organically occurring, easily downloaded” material (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016: 81; cf. Herring, Stein and Virtanen, 2013). The significance of the data collected from social media in the investigation of the intersection between the moral order and impolite language lies in the fact that due to the less constrained nature of interactions that take place over the Internet, interactants (i.e. *users*) seem to be less concerned with their reputation, thus enjoying more freedom to “offend, attack, defame, and harass others” whilst at the same time protecting themselves “from easy identification and subsequent social or legal reprisals” (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016: 92).

The photograph under examination, in which “Golshifteh Farahani is pictured covering her breasts with her hands” (Leigh, 2012: para. 2), was posted on 18 January 2012 on the celebrity’s official *Facebook* page[[3]](#footnote-3). The photograph, which originally was part of Golshifteh’s collaboration with France’s *Madame Le Figaro* magazine, “attracted a wave of visitors to her *Facebook* page” (McElroy and Vahdat, 2012) and “caused a furor in her home country, resulting in a ban from her returning to Iran for insulting Islamic cultural sentiments” (Chhabra, 2013: para. 2)[[4]](#footnote-4).

For the purposes of the current study, the photograph in question was considered to be ‘post zero’ (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016: 84), “from the medical parlance of ‘patient zero’- the first individual infected with a contagion that becomes an epidemic” (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016: 84) because the photograph still continues to influence, in one way or another, how people comment on Golshifteh’s other *Facebook* posts. Obviously, the photograph also received praise and applause, as many viewed Golshifteh’s move to be a symbolic act of protest against “restrictive codes of conduct” that women in the Iranian cinema industry have to adhere to (Leigh, 2012: para. 6). The focus of the present study is, however, exclusively on those comments which disparaged the photograph in general, and Golshifteh in particular.

At the time of writing this paper the post/photograph had attracted more than 22,000 comments; the first comment dated 18 January 2012 and the last comment 6 December 2016. All the comments, which clearly fall within the domain of *Facebook*’s ‘public information’[[5]](#footnote-5), were retrieved by the researchers and were analysed for impolite language use. Subsequently, all impolite/rude comments were segregated for further analysis. Next, to explore the underlying expectancies of the moral order, we examined those that involved what can be termed “impoliteness metapragmatic comments” (Culpeper, 2011: 72) defined as “expressions conventionally understood within a speech community to refer to an evaluation of certain behaviour-in-context as impolite” (Culpeper, 2011: 74) and reflect the awareness of “ordinary or lay observers” (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 181). As Cameron (2004: 313) highlights, “[m]etalinguistic resources seem very often to be deployed to connect various aspects of linguistic behaviour to a larger moral order.”

It should also be noted that Iran’s Internet is configured in such a way as to block some popular websites, such as those of the BBC Persian, Facebook and Twitter, as well as social media applications such as Telegram. However, “as [Iranian] authorities have tried to govern the Internet, Iranians have over the years become adept at circumventing online censorship” (Etehad, 2018: para 5). Paradoxically enough, more and more Iranians use the internet to the extent that it “plays a bigger role in an increasingly web-connected society” (Etehad, 2018: para 5). Thus, it could be claimed that the comments under investigation in this study are not necessarily from only elite users but have indeed been made by various groups of individuals.

**4. Posting the nude photograph as social action**

It goes without saying that any *Facebook* post, regardless of its content, and particularly if it belongs to a well-known person, may potentially attract both positive and negative comments. Golshifteh’s *Facebook* posts are no exception. An examination of the posts preceding and following the ‘post zero’ mentioned above confirms this observation. The significance of the post zero, however, lies in the fact that it is from the perspective of at least some users ‘inappropriate’ and stands in contrast to many ‘traditional’ values (associated with women) in Muslim societies. Posting a bare-chested photograph on a personal but public page, as with any other post, is therefore a form of social action (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002), and thus reflects Golshifteh’s individual intention “to participate in the virtual community” (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002: 4). In such a context, a bottom-up ‘pragmatic competence’ would be insufficient to establish what the celebrity means by the social action of posting the photograph in question, because nothing has been said: the photograph has no caption, no description, nothing. In other words, in a context in which there is insufficient linguistic material, users would need a more top-down process of pragmatic inference to establish the social significance of the posting in question. Such top-down pragmatic processes, as conceptualised and elaborated on by Recanati (2010), take place “for purely pragmatic reasons — in order to make sense of what the speaker is saying” (Recanati, 2010: 4)[[6]](#footnote-6). Influenced by Recanati (2010), let us designate what Golshifteh means by the intentional social action of posting the nude photograph as ‘what is doneGOL-int’ and what users take it to mean as ‘what is doneuser-int’. This division is motivated by the fact that the meaning of linguistic (or non-linguistic) material “varies from occurrence to occurrence” but not as a function of some objective feature of the context but as a function of *what the speaker means*” (Recanati, 2012: 136, original italics; cf. Recanati, 2004), or as a function of what the interpreter wants it to mean. Interestingly, however, it appears that users tend to consider their own interpretation (‘what is doneuser-int’) as not being any different from that meant by the original producer (‘what is doneGOL-int’). In other words, given the nature of such comments, and in line with Haugh (2013; cf. Goffman, 1981), it appears that the role of a *Facebook* user is primarily that of an interpreter who can develop his/her own understanding of the talk (Haugh 2013), as opposed to the role of an animator, i.e. Golshifteh, “who engenders the talk [and conduct/action]” (Haugh, 2013). Of course, as analysts we do not have access to ‘what is doneGOL-int’ but we do have access to ‘what is doneuser-int’, via the many comments users post under the photograph, in which they elaborate on why they have posted such comments. The following comment is revealing:

(1)[[7]](#footnote-7)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *bâ* | *in* | *kâresh* | *mikhad* | *chio* | *beresune?!* | *khâk* |
| By | this | act.her | intend.3SG | what | SUBJ.covey.3SG?! | dust(dirt) |
| *tu* | *saresh* | *ke* | *bâ* | *arz-e+* | *kardan-e* | *khodesh* |
| on | head.her  | that | by | present | doing | self.her |
| *donbâl-e* | *shohrat-e* | *az*  | *dast* | *raftash-e!* |  |  |
| seeking | fame | from | hand | gone.PP.her! |  |  |
| [What does she want to prove to us by this [photo]? It is such a shame that by putting herself on (public) display, she is trying to regain her lost fame!] |

Technically speaking, this user’s ‘what is doneuser-int’ can roughly be expressed in the following way: ‘By posting a nude photo, which is a form of putting yourself on (public) display, you seek to regain your lost fame’. However, on a deeper level, the comment draws on a culturally shared assumption held among some religious communities, that as part of the moral order women should not reveal their nude body to strangers. Taking the notion of implication, i.e. what the social action at issue implicates (Grice, 1975), or rather any intended meaning, into account, we could claim that for this user, as for many other users, Golshifteh’s post implicated that she no longer adheres to the principles of the moral order presumably adhered to by this user and those like her. Such an implicature has been derived “in a principled way […] through defeasible inference” (Haugh, 2013: 2659). In this respect, it appears that the rude (impolite) curse embedded in this comment is therefore a reaction occasioned by the implicature[[8]](#footnote-8) in question. The impolite comment seems to be a response to this user’s concern for Golshifteh’s “social persona” (Brown, 2001: p. 11623); this concern is indeed “an ‘implicature’, an inference of polite intentions, not a feature inextricably attached to particular linguistic forms” (Brown, 2001: p. 11623; cf. Haugh, 2015: 149). Arguably, what users take to be implicated “is implicated by virtue of an inference” and of course the inference chain can “in principle be as long and involve as many background assumptions as one wishes” (Recanati, 2004: 6). To clarify further, consider example 2:

(2)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *khodshifteh* | *uni* | *ke* | *dar*  | *dasthât* | *râhat* | *gerefti* | *hame* |
| Self-worshiper | that | which | in  | hands.your | comfortably | holding.2SG | all |
| *zanhâ* | *dârand* | *vali* | *azash* | *mohâfezat+* | *mikonand*  | *va* |
| women | have.3PL | but  | from.it | protection | do.3PL  | and |
| *dar*  | *anzâr* | *gharâr+* | *nemidehand* | *gheyre* | *te’dâd-e*  | *kami* | *az* | *zanhâ* |
| in  | public | put  | NEG.give.3PL | except | number  | few | of | women |
| *ke*  | *be* | *nâm-e* | *fâhesheh* | *ma’rufan.* | *honar* | *ânast*  | *ke* | *az* | *metânat* |
| that  | in | name-of | whore | known.be.3PL. | art | that.be.3SG  | that | from | modesty |
| *biroon*  | *âyad* | *na* | *az*  | *heykal* | *va* | *âlât* | *tanâsuli.* | *bedân* | *ke* | *râh* |
| out  | come.3SG | not  | from | body | and | organ | genitalia. | know.IMP  | that | way |
| *râ* | *eshtebâh rafti.* | *baghiyeye* | *bâzigarhâ* | *ham* | *honarmandand,* | *bâ* |
| OM | wrong go.PP.2SG. | other | actresses | also | artist.be.3PL, | with  |
| *ezzat*  |  *va* |  *ehterâm* | *naghsh* | *bâzi+* | *mikonand.* | *oonâ* | *ham* | *ân* | *chizi*  | ke |
| dignity  | and | respect | role | play | do.3PL. | They | also | that  | thing  | that |
| *to* | *dar+ekhtiyâr-e* | *hame* | *gharâr+ dâdi*  | *dârand.* | *vaghean* | *sharm be* |
| you | at disposal-of | others | place did.2SG | have.3PL. | seriously | shame on |
| *to!* |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| you! |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Those [breasts] that you are comfortably holding with your hands, all women have those! But they protect [i.e. cover] them and do not reveal them. What you have done is done only by a few people whom we call whores. Real art is that derived from tact not from the body and sex organs. Other actresses are also artists but they play the roles they have been asked to with dignity and respect, and they also have what you have [i.e. breasts] but do not reveal them. Shame on you!] |

Arguably, “the object of a social action [i.e. ‘what is doneuser-int’] generally involves meaning representation(s)” whose content is “not only represented as part of what is said” but needs to be “represented as implicatures” (Haugh, 2013: 56). In this respect, it appears that to understand the comment given above, one needs to first understand the “warrants for evaluations of im/politeness” which “requires careful consideration of how the interactional practices […] are open to moral evaluation by participants” (Haugh, 2013: 53), and thus an understanding of the moral order (Garfinkel, 1964). Extrapolating from this, we could claim that the impolite language used in this comment seems to have been occasioned by an implicature [i.e. ‘what is doneuser-int’ = Golshifteh blatantly violates a moral expectancy]. The impolite language directed at Golshifteh is thus a response to what this user takes to be Golshifteh’s impolite social action (cf. Haugh, 2007). The expectation referred to here is arguably an example of one of those ‘seen but unnoticed’ (Garfinkel, 1964) expectancies that are thought to constitute the moral order.

**5. Comments as a window to moral order expectancies**

As Kádár and Haugh (2013: 93-94) note, the moral order consists of a number of expectancies which are themselves “realized through interaction” and any deviation from them results “in social actions or meanings for which persons are held accountable in interaction.” It is exactly against such a backdrop that these norms turn into a “means by which one makes a claim to be a member of society in the first place” (Haugh, 2013: 57) and view what others do/say in the light of these norms. In other words, it seems that the way the above user assigns social significance to Golshifteh’s posting of the nude photograph, thus working out a stigmatizing implicature, depends on expectancies which are “recognisable to members” and are “accessible as interpretative resources” (Haugh 2013: 57). It is through continually engaging in such practices that users, as members of the society, “both sustain the moral order, and over time act to change it” (Haugh, 2013: 57). It should also be mentioned that in this paper the object of analysis is not the nude photograph itself but rather its evaluation by *Facebook* users/commenters.

Although the current study is concerned with impolite comments posted under the photograph at issue, users had also posted positive (i.e. polite) comments, such as the ones detailed below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *oryân+* | *shodan*  | *nemooneye* | *e’terâz-e.* | *golshifteh* | *dooset+* | *dârim!*  |
| Nude  | becoming | sign.of | objection.be.3SG. | Golshifteh | love.you | have.1PL! |
| [Baring it all [as in this photo] is a sign of resistance. Golshifteh, we love you!] |

 (3)

[

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *shâyad* | *no’ei* | *e’terâz-e.* | *âfarin!* |
| Maybe  | kind-of | objection.be.3SG. | Bravo! |
| [Maybe it is a kind of resistance. Bravo!] |

 (4)

The users posting the above positive [i.e. polite] comments, represent a totally different aspect of the context in question, thereby invoking politeness. In this totally different “relational milieu” (Haugh, 2015: 143) the interpreters have taken the act of posting the nude photograph as one which implicates issues of ‘propriety’ rather than ‘impropriety’, thus deserving a positive (i.e. polite) comment. This is indeed indicative of an orientation by users/interpreters to go beyond the photograph in question, to broader issues such as propriety and impropriety. In other words, it appears that, unlike the previous users who are disaffiliating with such a resistance, these two users are clearly affiliating with it[[9]](#footnote-9).

As the above-cited comments clarify, the impoliteness observed and the rudeness found in these comments seem to have been a response to what these users take to be an offensive social action on the part of Golshifteh. In other words, the rude and arguably offensive comments of the sort discussed above seem to be a response to what these groups of users believe to be a violation of a set of expectancies which, at least for these users, form part of the moral order. Arguably these social norms (i.e. the moral order) are generally unnoticed unless they are violated, thus causing ‘emotional arousal’ which may lead to people being emotionally offended, and hence they will react by posting offensive comments. Drawing on Jay (2000), Culpeper (2011: 205-206; cf. Andersson and Pearson, 1999) argues that “[t]here is also the fact that impoliteness produces a state of emotional arousal” which might increase “the likelihood that they will retaliate in kind.” In such a context, we could consider these comments as evidence suggesting that the comments issued by users may be considered as “counter-offensive acts” (Bousfield, 2008; Dobs and Blitvich, 2013; Culpeper, 2011) performed in response to an offensive move. It also appears that the nature of some forms of computer-mediated communication gives users an unprecedented freedom, which enables them to retaliate to what they feel is offensive. As noted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 65), social media applications such as *Facebook* “allow users to post messages without supervision.” Arguably some other social contexts constrain such an ability to reciprocate. For example, wardens do not respond “in kind to irate car owners” as it seems that “part of the role of their job is not to do so” (Culpeper, 2011: 206). Similarly, it seems that “politicians rarely respond in kind to hecklers” as it can potentially “damage their image of being calm and in control” (Culpeper, 2011: 206).

Such “seen but unnoticed” expectations of the moral order should therefore “constitute an important object of study in their own right” (Haugh 2013: 57). In this paper, an attempt is made to discuss some of the most recurring expectations of the moral order found in our data. As Kádár and Haugh (2013) highlight, (metapragmatic) comments in computer-mediated interactions (such as those found on *Facebook*) offer us, as analysts, “considerable promise in expanding our understanding of the moral order” (p. 198). This is arguably due to the fact that such comments “are an increasingly common form of interaction in their own right” (p. 198). As our analyses confirm, the comments under investigation are no doubt a place where interactants negotiated and elaborated on their expectations. These moments are what we, influenced by Kádár and Haugh (2013) and Graham (2007), call ‘evaluative moments’.

As was discussed above, it appears that many of the rude comments directed at Golshifteh are in fact nothing but a response to what has been interpreted as an offensive move, arguably not as a function of what she actually means but rather what users want it to mean (Recanati, 2010). The level and degree of offence found in these comments led us to further investigate how, and why, users think they are ‘entitled’ (Antaki and Kent, 2012) to engage in such offensive language. In other words, as our analyses below show, it seems that these users feel that they are entitled to react, usually in an offensive way, to what they consider an offensive move. Such an entitlement seems to originate from the viewpoint that the behaviour of certain groups of people or individuals (in this case Golshifteh) “is not appropriate for a society”. Such a conclusion (i.e. posting a nude photograph is not appropriate for the society) then forms “a judgment” about Golshifteh in terms of whether she “belongs” to this language group or culture, or whether we [the users] value her values (Mills, 2009: 1055). Let us explore these by focusing on the following comment:

(5)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *vây*  | *bar* | *ân* | *ruz* | *ke* | *berahnegi* | *tamadon* | *va* | *honar* |
| Woe | on | that | day | when | nudity | civilization | and | art |
| *nâmide+she.* | *khânoom* | *farahâni* | *vaghti* | *dar* | *iran* | *budid* |  *bâ* | *film-e* |
| named.become.SUBJ. | *Miss* | Farahani | when | in | Iran | was.2SG | with | film |
| *mim mesl-e* | *mâdar*  |  *ke* | *sad* | *bâr* | *didamesh* | *harbâr* | *âsheghâneh* |
| M | like | mother | that | hundred | times | watched.1SG | every time | lovingly |
| *be.khâter-e* | *bâzitoon* | *ashk+* | *rikhtam* | *pâ* | *be* | *pâye* | *ashkhâ* | *va*  | *bâzitoon,* |
| for.sake-of | act.yours | tears | shed.1SG | foot | after foot | tears | and | act.your, |
| *ammâ* | *miduni* | *navad* | *darsad* | *havâdârhâtoon* | *alân*  | *asl’an be* | *honaretoon* |
| but | know.2SG | ninety | percent | fans.your | now | never at | art.your |
| *negâh+* | *nemikonan.* | *kondjkâvi* | *vâse* | *didan-e* | *yek* | *khod-foroush* | *faghat* |
| watch | NEG.do.3PL. | curiosity | for | watching-of | one | self-seller | just |
| *jazbeshoon+* | *mikone.* | *honar-e* | *shomâ* | *be* | *in* | *chizhâ* | *na.bud.*  |
| attract.them | do.3SG. | art-of | yours | in | such | things | NEG.be.3SG. |
| [We should all be afraid of the day [such as today] when nudity equals civility and art. Ms Farahani when you were working in Iran I cried out of love for your beautiful performance when watching your ‘M for Mother’ which I literally watched 100 times. But do you know that today [i.e. after posting the nude photo] 90% of your fans and followers no longer admire your art but rather are just attracted to you because you’ve become a whore and they’re just curious to watch you. Your art was not like this before.] |

In this comment, the offensive language addressed at Golshifteh (e.g. ‘whore’) has clearly been prefaced against a backdrop of shared cultural values which, according to this user, Golshifteh was once a member of and is presumably expected to abide by. This user, for whom, reading between the lines, nudity conflicts with the expectancies of the moral order, clearly relates to the time when Golshifteh lived in Iran and starred in films such as ‘M for Mother’[[10]](#footnote-10). As the comment implies, Golshifteh was once an active member and proponent of the moral order and cultural values respected by this user, which explains why her posting of the nude photograph has been rebuked so vehemently. In other words, Golshifteh’s act of posting the nude photograph on the Internet is in conflict with the image the user had developed of her. This can clearly be explained by referring to the notion of historicity defined as “the way in which all actions (and things) in the world have their own place and time, and so every action is part of history” (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 267). For this user, as for many other users who have posted similar offensive comments under this photograph, what they see (i.e. Golshifteh posing for a nude photograph) is clearly in conflict with the historically situated image and the corresponding expectations they have of her. This can be called ‘dissonance’ between expectations and actions. Consequently, this user tends to feel that she is entitled to respond to this photograph with such an aggressive tone and language. Such strongly entitled comments clearly strive to “restrict the response options to just compliance” (Antaki and Kent, 2012: 877) and seem to be the motivation underlying such invasive and face threatening comments (i.e. social actions) (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

As the above-mentioned comment clarifies, it would appear that expectancies arising from the moral order are situated in the here-and-now, that is, “the ongoing linking of moments of here-and-now over time” (Haugh, Kádár and Mills, 2013: 6). Relationships on this view, Haugh, Kádár and Mills (2013) note, are understood “through the broader relational network of which they are a part.” More notably, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that approaching the manner in which social actions are viewed “through the concept of historicity” (Haugh, Kádár and Mills, 2013: 6) enables us to tackle the thorny task of analysing the relationship between impoliteness and the social action. The importance and significance of social histories, as well as “the impact of relational histories on perceived interactional or communicative norms” across not only “prior interactions” but also “relational networks” (Haugh, Kádár and Mills, 2013: 6), becomes evident if we consider the following comment in the light of the aforementioned argument:

(6)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *mota’sef.am* | *vâsat!* | *to*  | *irâni* | *hasti* | *vatanforoush?!* | *harchand* | *âdamhâye* |
| Sorry.be.1SG | for.you! | You | Iranian | be.2SG | traitor?! | Although | those |
| *vatanforoush* | *ke* | *âdam* | *nistand* | *heyvân* | *ham* | *nistand,*  | *aslan* |
| traitor | that | human | NEG.be.3PL | animal | also | NEG.be.3PL, | at all |
| *hich’an,* | *faghat* | *yek* | *mojood-e* | *khâr* | *va* | *za’if* | *hasti.* | to |
| nothing.be.3PL, | only | one | creature | petty | and | weak | be.2SG. | You |
| *fekr+mikoni* | *khodâ* | *to* | *râ* | *doost+ dare?!* | *bâz* | *unâi* | *ke az* |
| thought do.2SG | God | you | OM | love do.3SG?! | At least  | those  | that from |
| *badve* | *tavalood* | *bâ* | *hamin* | *farhang* | *tooye* | *keshvare* | *dige* |
| start | birth | with | this | culture | in | country | other |
| *donya+* | *omadan* | *ye* | *chizi!* | *vali to* | *ke to* | *yek* | *keshvare* |
| world | come.PP.they | one | thing! | But you | that in | one | country |
| *eslâmi*  | *be donyâ+* | *omadi* | *chi?*  | *un donyâ* | *montazere* | *azâbe* | *shabe* |
| Islamic | to world | come.3SG | what?! | That world | wait | torture | night |
| *avale*  | *ghabret*  | *bash!* |  |  |  |  |  |
| first | brave.your | be.you.IMP!  |  |  |  |  |  |
| [I pity you! You are no longer an Iranian! You are a traitor to your own country [of birth]! Traitors are not even human…They’re not even animals…They’re nothing…You are just a petty and weak creature. Do you think God loves you?! This behaviour [posing for a nude photo] would be acceptable from someone born in a different country with a different culture. But what about you? You were born in an Islamic country. […] Wait to be tortured on the first night in your grave!] |

The social and relational histories mentioned above seem to be the deriving factors influencing the construction of the above comment. From this user’s viewpoint, Golshifteh is expected to behave according to the expectancies of the Iranian-Islamic moral order because she was not born in another, presumably western, country but in Iran, a country which apparently has different behavioral norms which Golshifteh is expected to be aware of. Being born and raised in this country thus situates social actors and interactants, such as Golshifteh and this user, within another “relational network or societal milieu” (Haugh, Kádár and Mills, 2013: 6; cf. Bourdieu, 1977). Considering herself to be part of this relational network or societal milieu, the user in question feels entitled to not only curse Golshifteh, but to even predict the dreadful fate of torture following her death. This prediction can best be explained by referring to the notion of epistemic order, defined as social interactants’ orientation to knowledge. As Raymond and Heritage (2006: 678) argue, the epistemic gradient encompasses “methods for managing rights to identity-bound knowledge in self-other relations” also termed “the epistemics of social relations”. In this context, it is exactly such ‘identity-bound knowledge’, which Golshifteh is expected to know about, which has apparently given this user the rights and authority to produce and entertain such a comment. As the comment reveals, the user makes an appeal to a shared epistemic gradient (Raymond and Heritage, 2006), thus conveying the message ‘Golshifteh should know better’.

Evidently, non adherence to the values, norms and expectations that are thought to be shared by members of this same society, appears to have prompted these users to react negatively to the nude photograph under examination. As the above typical comments manifest, these values, norms and expectations, which are part of the moral order, are treated by members “as not open to doubt or questioning” (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 201). The epistemic gradient which corresponds to the underlying order attests to this knowledge. As Kádár and Haugh (2013: 85) note, (im)politeness can best be explained by referring to “appeals by members of a relational network to a moral order in the very evaluative moments in which [im]politeness arises”. In this context, a member can be defined as a person, such as any of the above users, “who holds both themselves and others accountable to this moral order” (p. 85). No doubt this insider knowledge is an example of “an emic perspective” (Pike, 1966), and is “contrasted with the understandings of outsiders to a moral order, or what is termed an etic perspective” (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 85).

As was briefly mentioned above, it appears that those who direct such offensive comments at Golshifteh consider themselves to be in possession of what we can call a stance of entitlement (cf. Haugh, 2015). This is arrived at not necessarily through acknowledgement of particular social roles, or physical or virtual engagement in joint activity, but rather by appeal to the ‘rules of the game’ (Dixon, 2015: 41), which are defined with reference to expectancies of the moral order (cf. Heinemann, 2006). In what follows, some of the most recurring expectancies associated with the moral order, as found in our data, will be elaborated on with reference to a number of examples.

**6. Expectancies of the moral order: A case of Persian**

As was previously mentioned, the moral order is arguably one of the most important features of social interaction. The moral order guides the way people consider something to be right or wrong (or *good* or *bad*), the reflection of which is expected to be found in both personal and social actions. The moral order, Garfinkel (1964) notes, encompasses scenes or actions which are familiar and are thus normally taken for granted by members. The expectancies of the moral order are regularly seen, i.e. experienced, by members but are usually unnoticed unless someone violates them or does something that conflicts with them. Golshifteh’s act of posting a nude photograph of herself is a case in point as it seems to be, from the perspective of many users, in conflict with the expectations of what they think is good, right, appropriate, virtuous and so on. This is particularly interesting if we take into account the fact that these users, as members of the society to which some assume Golshifteh still belongs, clearly refer to the breach of these expectations and their corresponding social norms in their metalanguage (i.e. the comments)[[11]](#footnote-11).

In what follows some of the most frequent and recurring expectancies found in our data are discussed. While analysis of these moral-order expectancies is indeed a worthwhile endeavour as it can corroborate the fact that such expectancies do in fact exist and that people deal with these expectancies on a daily basis, we believe that it would be futile, if not impossible, to propose a comprehensive list of moral-order expectancies. Thus, while the ones discussed below are among the most frequent moral-order expectancies, they do not represent the entire range of expectancies based on which such evaluations are made. Therefore, what is discussed below merely serves to explain how users tend to justify the rudeness found in the comments they make. The justification referred to here involves how users make an attempt to see their comments, which is a form of social action, as reasonable. Following (MacDonald 2002, para. 1.2), it is “this sense of justification” that is important for the current study.

6. 1. Having prudency

Prudency is arguably one of the most frequently referred to expectancies of the moral order. While obviously there are many ways in which *prudency* expectancies may be violated, given the context of the photograph in question, for many users posing for a nude photograph constitutes one of those moments in which the moral order has been violated, presumably paving the way for such aggressive comments. Consider the following example:

(7)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *khâk tu* | *sar-e* | *bi-hayât* | *konan.* | *un moghe* | *ke to* | *irân* | *budi* |
| Dust on | *head-of* | without-hayâ | do.3PL. | That time | when you | Iran | be+2SG |
| *âsheghet* | *budam.*  | *khoone* | *irâni* | *to raghât* | *bâshe* | *vali* | *hayâ* |
| love.you | be.1SG. | Blood | Iranian | in veins.your | be.SUB | but | hayâ |
| *nadâshte+* | *bâshi!* | *barât* | *mota’sefam.* |  |  |  |
| NEG.had | be.SUB! | for.you  | sorry.be.1SG. |  |  |  |
| [I curse the day you were born! You are such a *hayâ*-deprived person. When you were in Iran I used to love you a lot. You might have Iranian blood in your veins but you lack *hayâ*. I pity you!] |

In this comment, the user justifies the use of an ill-wish (i.e. ‘I curse the day you were born’), which is one of the conventionalised impoliteness formulae (Culpeper 2010, 2011), by explicitly referring to the notion of ‘*hayâ*’ which is roughly translatable as ‘prudency’. ‘*hayâ*’ can be defined as the state of refraining from doing things that the society considers as either ‘religiously forbidden’ or ‘ordinarily unacceptable’ (Tehrani 1979) According to this user, despite her having Iranian parentage (i.e. ‘having Iranian blood in her veins’), Golshifteh lacks prudency. As the comment clarifies, this user used to admire Golshifteh until she left Iran and posed for the nude photograph in question, an activity which constitutes an example of being imprudent. Needless to say, there is a definite gap between Golshifteh’s departure from Iran and the posting of the nude photograph on the Internet. However, from the perspective of this user these two points seem to converge, because the nude photograph, as a social action, is too significant to ignore. Consequently, Golshifteh’s life trajectory has been divided, by this user, into before and after leaving Iran, with the latter being associated with the period of being *hayâ*-deprived. In general, this comment can therefore be viewed as being informed by the expectations of member participants in relation to a particular domain of knowledge, which this particular user apparently has, or claims to have access to, with respect to the other participant (i.e. Golshifteh) (Haugh 2010).

The following is another example:

(8)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *vâghean* | *ta’asof* | *dâre* | *irân bâ* | *do hezâro*  | *pân-sad*  | *sâl* |
| Really  | sorrow | include.3SG | Iran with | two thousand.and | five-hundred | Year |
| *tamadon* | *dar* | *hich* | *zamâni* | *az* | *târikh* | *mardomânesh*  | *inghadr* | *bi* |
| civilization | at | no | time  | from | history | people.its | this.much | without |
| *hejâb* | *nabudand.* | *hade’aghal* | *bekhâter-e* | *irâni*  | *budanet* | *yek* |
| hijab | NEG.be.3PL. | At least  | for.sake-of | *Iranian* | be.2SG | one |
| *zarre* | *hayâ* | midâshti. |  |  |  |  |  |
| little | hayâ | might.have.2SG. |  |  |  |  |  |
| [I pity you. Iranians, with their 2500 years of civilization, have never been without hijab. I wish you had even the slightest iota of *hayâ* because of your nationality.] |

The pointed criticism (i.e. ‘I pity you’) found in this comment seems to have been based on the same expectancy, i.e. the one associated with *prudency*. The way the comment has been formulated portrays the user to be one who “has primary access to a targeted element of knowledge or information” (Heritage 2012: 3). In other words, in a context in which the user portrays himself as one who has “primary epistemic status” (Heritage 2012: 3), his considerations of the moral order (in this case *hayâ* and the associated claim that Golshifteh’s move is unprecedented in Iranian history), takes precedence over any other (rational) considerations, thus leading to an offensive comment.

6. 2. Demonstrating awareness of, and avoid causing, emotional discomfort

Another expectancy of the moral order, as frequently referred to in the comments under investigation, is that associated with *emotional discomfort*. This is indeed a tremendously complex phenomenon as people are ‘morally’ expected to avoid doing or saying something that would put both themselves and others in any form of emotional discomfort and uneasiness. While the entire range of activities, actions, or even expressions that might cause such discomfort, on the part of both the speaker and hearer, are impossible to specify, obviously as our data demonstrates, Golshifteh’s posing for the photograph at issue constitutes one such occasion. Examples 9 and 10 below are revealing:

(9)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *kamâle* | *bisharmiye* | *barâye* | *bânoye* | *irâni.* | *besiyâr* | *mota’sef.am.* |
| Outright | without.sharm.be.3SG | for | lady | Iranian.  | Really | sorry.be.1SG |
| *kesâfat-e* | *zesht!* |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| dirty | ugly! |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| [What you’ve done [i.e. posing for the nude photo] is outright *sharm*-lessness for an Iranian lady. I pity you! You ugly piece of shit!] |

 (10)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *bi-andâze* | *az* | *in* | *kesâfat-e* | *past* | *bizâram.* | *lotf* | *kon* |
| Without-limit | from | this | dirty | petty | hate.1SG. | Favour | do.2SG |
| *az* *in* | *tasâvir-e* | *sharmâvar* | *na.zâr* | *az* | *khodet,* | *to yek* |
| fromthis | pictures | sharm-inducing | NEG.put.2SG | of | yourself, | you one  |
| *zan-e* | *irâni* | *hasti* | *kheir-e*  | *sar.et!* |  |  |
| women | Iranian | be.2SG | goodness-of | head.your! |  |  |
| [I seriously despise you; you little piece of dirt. Please don’t share such *sharm*-inducing photos of yourself with us. You are an Iranian woman for God’s sake!] |

In the above comments, both users explicitly refer to *sharm,* i.e.“some form of [emotional] discomfort” (Sharifian 2011: 75), which people are expected to (i) be aware of, and (ii) not cause others to feel. Arguably, the above users have viewed the photograph as an instance of ‘outright *sharm*-lessness’ and a ‘*sharm*-inducing’ event. For these users, along with many other users, Golshifteh has violated the expectancies associated with an Iranian lady/woman, by conflicting with these expectancies, in this case *sharm*. It appears that the comments are prefaced on the assumption that as an Iranian lady/woman, Golshifteh should have avoided placing these users and others under undue uneasiness and discomfort. In other words, according to these users, the most noticeable implication of the nude photograph is that Goshifteh did not feel the amount of discomfort or uneasiness expected of her when posing for and posting the nude photograph – otherwise she would have refrained from doing it. Therefore, she no longer belongs to the ad hoc category of ‘Iranian ladies’[[12]](#footnote-12).

6. 3. Upholding one’s honour

The other most frequently referred to expectancy, as discovered in the comments, are those associated with ‘honour/virtue’. This seems to be similar to the respectability and/or the *good name* that a person is ‘morally’ expected to (strive to) achieve (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2005). Viewed in this way, people are generally expected not to do/say something that would ruin their own as well as their community/country’s honour. In this respect, users tend to measure Golshifteh’s social behaviour to a great extent by the degree and amount of damage it has inflicted on herself and the country. The following comments are worth considering:

(11)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *dige* | *oghdei*  | *budan* | *tâ in* | *had?* | *mitunesti* | *unja* | *shâhkâr* |
| But | inferior | being | to this | extent? | Could.you | there | masterpiece |
| *va* | *yek* | *setâreh* | *beshi,* | *na* | *inke* | *bar* | *table*  |
| and | one | star | be.SUBJ.2SG | not | that | on | drum |
| *bi-sharafi* | *va* | *fâheshegit* | *bekubi.* | *mota’sefam* | *barât!*  |  |
| without.sharaf | and | prostitution.your | hit.SUB.2SG. | Sorry.be.1SG | for.you! |
| [What you’ve done shows that you have an inferiority complex. You could have (i.e. have the potential to) become a successful and shining star but instead you’ve chosen to become the symbol of those who lack *sherâfat*; you have become a whore. I pity you, Golshifteh!] |

 (12)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *khâk-e*  | *âlam*  | *tu* | *saret*  | *fâheshey-e*  | *bisharaf!* |
| Dust-of | world | on | head.your.be | bitch-of | without sharaf! |
| [I wish you would be buried soon, you are one who lacks *sherâfat*, you are a bitch!] |

 (13)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *bi-sharaf,* |  *âberuy-e*  | *zanhâye*  | *irâni*  |  *ro*  | *châhr ta* | *mesle*  | *toye* |
| You, without sharaf, | reputation-of | women | Iranian | OM | four people | like | you |
| *harze va* | *harjâi* | *bâyad*  | *zir-e*  | *so’al*  | *bebaran?*  | *be* | *omide* |
| bitch and | hooker | should | under | question  | take.SUBJ.3PL? | In | hope.of |
| *yazdân pâk* | *nafashâye*  | *akharet*  | *ro*  | *khâhi* will.you | *keshid,* | *kheili hâ* |
| God pure | breath | last.your | OM | breathe.2SG, | many people |
| *hastan ke* | *nemizâran* | *angalhâi* | *mesle* | *to* | *hormat-e* | *zanhâye* | *pâk* |
| are | that | NEG.let.3PL | parasites | like  | you  | reverence-of | women | pure |
| *va*  | *ma’soum-e*  | *irân*  | *ro*  | *lakke*  | *dâr*  | *bokonan.* |
| and | innocent-of | Iran | OM | stain | with  | do.SUBJ.3PL |
| [Why do you have to stain the ‘face/reputation’[[13]](#footnote-13) of Iranian women. You are a bitch and lack honour. If God is willing, these are your last days. There are many (good) people out there who won’t let you stain the good image of chaste and innocent women.] |

As these comments clarify, Golshifteh’s posing for the nude photograph has demonstrated to these users that she has not respected the expectancies associated with *sherâfat*, roughly translatable as ‘honour/virtue’, to the extent that they have used such offensive, personalised, negative assertions (e.g. ‘bitch/whore/hooker’), ill-wishes (e.g. ‘I wish you would be buried soon’) or even an (implicit) threat (e.g. ‘these are your last days’) when addressing her. Comments of this sort are based on the assumption that by posing for and posting the nude photograph, Golshifteh has smeared not only her own honour, thus being called a ‘whore’, but also that traditionally associated with Iranian women. Such generalisations attest to the dynamic social nature of the moral order and its corresponding expectancies. As Silvertein (2003: 202) argues, “[m]icro-sociological contexts are in a sense composed of a dynamic structure-inplay of these categorial distinctions.” In this respect, interactional occurrences of the sort discussed here “are social-actional ‘events’ of (to a degree determinately) interpretable cultural meanings only to the degree they instantiate - indexically invoke - such macro-sociological partitions of social space, in terms of which cultural values can thus be said to be indexically articulated” (Silverstein 2003: 202).

6. 4. Having decency

Another moral order expectancy that heavily motivated the impolite comments was *decency*. According to this expectancy, people are expected to refrain from doing or saying anything that would make them appear indecent, i.e. not conforming with socially and societally accepted modes of behaviour, mainly the ones concerning sexual matters. Such an expectation is particularly relevant in situations which present an impending temptation. From a lay person’s perspective, there are many things to say or do that would test one’s *decency*; the most important factor is that one loses their *decency* if they succumb to the temptations of the situation. To clarify this, consider the following comment:

(14)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *cherâ*  | *to* | *nemimiri,*  | *haroomzadeh?* | *indjâ*  | *yek* | *zan*  | *va* |
| Why | you | NEG.die.2SG, | son-of-a-bitch? | Here | one | woman | and |
| *dokhtare*  | *irân* | *ghabl* |  *az harchizi* | *bâyad*  | *nejâbate* | *khodesh*  | *ro*  |
| girl | Iranian | before | from anything | must | nejabat.of | herself | OM |
| *hefz+*  | *kone.* |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| protect  | do.SUBJ.3SG. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Why won’t you die, son of a bitch?! In a situation like this (i.e. now that you live in another country], a girl should before anything else try to protect her *nejâbat*.]  |

For this user, Golshifteh has failed to ‘protect her *nejâbat*’, roughly translatable as ‘decency’, in the new situation she has placed herself in (i.e. outside Iran). The user has used an unpalatable question (i.e. ‘why won’t you die?!’) plus a negative vocative insult (i.e. ‘son of a bitch’) to address her. It is not entirely clear, of course, what the user means by the new situation, but it can be surmised that it refers to the new social and professional context in which Golshifteh lives/works and which, from the perspective of this user, apparently demands a change in one’s lifestyle/values. Another example is provided below:

(15)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *man*  | *monkere* | *khub*  | *budane*  | *zibâei*  | *nistam* | *ammâ* | *nemidunam* |
| I | deny | good | being | beauty | NEG.be.1SG | but  | NEG.know.1SG |
| *in*  | *hichi*  | *barâye*  | *arzeye*  | *zibâie* | *nadâre* | *joz*  | *berahnegi?* |
| this  | nothing  | for | show | beauty | NEG.have.3SG | except | nudity? |
| *heyvânhâ*  | *najibtarand.* | *mota’asef+am!*  |  |  |  |
| Animals | modest.more.be.3PL. | sorry.be.1SG! |  |  |  |
| [I don’t deny the fact that beauty is something desirable but I wonder why your only method to reveal your beauty is by baring it all? Even animals have more *nejâbat* than you do. I pity you!] |

This user has gone so far as to claim that even animals tend to protect their own *nejâbat* more than Golshifteh does as apparently they seem not to succumb to temptations of the situation so easily. Such a personalised negative assertion clearly implies that Golshifteh is regarded as being lower than animals because she has not maintained the society’s expected standards of decency. What one witnesses in this comment is a typical user who, reading between the lines, seems to perceive “a kind of vertical dimension of social space, running from God or moral perfection at the top down through […] animals […]” (Haidt, 2012: 121).

6. 5. Demonstrating positive jealousy

Finally, another common moral order expectancy that we discovered in our data is associated with the positive sense of jealousy one has towards things such as country, religion, and family. The latter category (i.e. family) primarily includes one’s mother, wife, and daughter(s). Consider the following examples:

(16)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *yeki*  | *nist*  | *bege*  | *azizam* | *seksi* | *shodi,*  | *mashhoor* | *shodi,* |
| Someone | NEG.be.3SG | say.SUBJ.3SG | darling | sexy | become.PP.2SG, | famous | become.PP.2SG, |
| *pooldâr*  | *shodi,* | *aslan*  | *pornstâr*  | *shodi-* | *az*  | *in*  | *ham* | *bâlâtar-* |
| rich | become.PP.2SG, | even | porn-star | become.PP.2SG- | from | this | also | higher- |
| *vaghti*  | *dokhtare* | *irâni*  | *bâ-gheirat* | *nabâshi*  | *ye*  | *shâhi* |
| when | girl | Iranian | with-gheirat | NEG.be.SUBJ.2SG | one | penny |
| *ham*  | *nemiyarzi.* |  |
| also | NEG.worth.2SG. |
| [Someone should tell you that now that you’ve become sexy, famous, rich, have even successfully turned into a porn-star – let’s suppose you’ve become someone more important than this– but all this would be useless as you don’t yet have the degree and amount of *gheirat* needed. It is all useless.] |

(17)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *mosta’sef.am* | *barât!* | *mâ*  | *irânihâ* | *gheirat*  |  *dârim,* | *bigheirat!* |
| Sorry.be.1SG | for.you! | We | Iranians | gheirat |  have.1PL, | without-gheirat! |
| [I pity you. We have *gheirat*. You are a person devoid of *gheirat*.] |

 (18)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *mordeshoore*  | *rikhtet* | *râ* | *bebaran*  | *bâ*  | *un*  | *bâbâye* |
| Damn-with | body.your | OM | take.IMP.3PL | with | that | father |
| *bigheiratet.* | *mige* | *honar-e*  | *dokhtaram*  | *mâl-e*  | *‘un* |
| without-gheirat.your. | Say.3SG | art-of | daughter.my | property | other |
| *vare* | *âbe.* | *vaghe’an* | *râste,*  | *un*  | *ye*  | *fâheshast.* |
| side-of | water.be.3SG | really | true.be.3SG, | that | one | whore.be.3SG. |
| *hamoon* | *behtar*  | *ke*  | *‘un* | *var-e*  | *âb* | *bâshe!* |
| Much | better | that | other | side-of | water | be.SUBJ.3SG! |
| [I can’t even tolerate the sight of you. Your dad, who lacks *gheirat*, has recently said that ‘my daughter’s art belongs to the west’ ((cannot be understood in this country)). He really has said the right thing. You are a whore and it would be best if you stay outside the country!] |

As these comments clarify, the users have associated the nude photograph with Golshifteh’s lack of *gheirat,* i.e. a positive sense of jealousy towards her, say, country, religion or family. According to these users, if Golshifteh had any positive sense of *gheirat*, she would not have posted a nude photograph of herself on the Internet. The last comment also incorporates Golshifteh’s father, accusing him of not having enough *gheirat*; otherwise, he would not have permitted his daughter to pose in a nude photograph, or supported or justified her behaviour[[14]](#footnote-14). It is in this sense that *gheirat* can be considered as being closely tied to patriarchal considerations[[15]](#footnote-15).

**7. Discussion**

The current study was concerned with the relationship between impoliteness and the notion of moral order. We focused on comments posted on the official *Facebook* page of the Iranian actress, Golshifteh Farahani. Analysis of the data revealed how and why impoliteness arises and how different aspects of the moral order can and do influence the construction of these comments. As such, we viewed the comments as situationally constructed, yet morally informed. It appears that what these comments have in common is the fact that they originate from a set of similar assumptions and expectations, which we consider to be part of the societal moral order. We considered the impolite language used in the comments under investigation to have been occasioned by an implicature [i.e. ‘what is doneuser-int’ = Golshifteh blatantly violates a moral expectancy] (see Recanati, 2010). The impolite language directed at Golshifteh is thus a response to what users take to be Golshifteh’s violation of the moral order.

It should, however, be stated in passing that the moral order expectancies delineated in this study are not necessarily indicative of how one should behave in Iran as the data under investigation only pertains to social media (i.e. Facebook). Whether this phenomenon can go further than this requires extensive research in different contexts and interactional situations; an endeavour which is certainly beyond the scope of this paper. What the current study shows is that:

people are, first and foremost, members of larger entities such as families, teams, armies, companies, tribes, and nations. These larger entities are more than the sum of the people who compose them; they are real, they matter, and they must be protected. (Haidt, 2012: 116)

The expectancies discussed in this study are socially and societally grounded (Kádár and Haugh, 2013). It is exactly against such a background that one can envisage at least three possibilities. The first possibility is that the socially grounded network from which such expectations arise is confined to the bounds of groups, usually not any larger than families and friends. The ubiquitous and widespread nature of the comments under scrutiny as well as the frequent references the users make in their comments to the shared nature of these beliefs, rule this possibility out. Evidently the positions individual users have taken moves beyond idiosyncratic gradations (cf. Silverstein, 2003). The second possibility is that the comments represent “community of practice”, or any other “group-based” norms. These norms include “sets of expectancies that are shared across identifiable communities of practice, organisational cultures or indeed any social group recognised as such by members” (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 95). As was noted above, what the comments analysed have in common is a noticeably frequent reference to what can be called the notion of ‘us’ by making our own attributes desirable, and “heighten a sense of membership in the in-group” (Blitvich, 2010: 541). Of course it is not entirely clear what the category of ‘us’ includes; what is clearly evident, however, is that users who post comments of the sort discussed in this paper tend to underscore and explicitly refer to their own expectations as socially salient. Viewing these expectations as part of the “community of practice”, or any other “group-based” norms is advantageous in that it allows us to consider those comments that support what Golshifteh has done, as belonging to a different “community of practice” or different “group-based” norms. On this account, Golshifteh represents the views, norms, and expectations of the latter community of practice – whom we can arbitrarily call ‘intellectuals/progressives’ – which is evidently in conflict with those respected by the other group(s).

A question that arises at this juncture – whose answer lies at the heart of the third possibility – is: whose evaluations should be considered as part of a more abstract, i.e. third, layer in which one would expect to see more general “expectancies as they are represented in supra-local (i.e. societal) conventions for evaluating social actions and meanings” (Kádár and Haugh, 2013: 95)? In other words, we need to provide an explanation as to why, how and whose moral evaluations, and their corresponding expectancies, are indeed part of the society’s ‘supra-local’ conventions, particularly in contexts in which, as Potter argues, “evaluations are flexibly constructed to mesh with specific ongoing practices” (Potter, 1998, cited in Haugh, 2013: 56). One tentative answer would be that while interactants might at times want to perform different socially meaningful actions via their comments, they seem to be able to stipulate the moral order with which they align themselves with the country’s moral order, thus constructing socially meaningful and societally coherent “versions of the social and moral world” to which they claim to belong (Potter, 1998, cited in Haugh, 2013: 56). The tendency to view this group of social interactants as representing a third (i.e. supra-local) layer of the moral order makes more sense if we take account of the fact that those who oppose such impolite comments, thus supporting Golshifteh, tend not to express their objection by referring to the fact that the expectations referred to in the impolite and offensive comments need to change, but rather that they have been misinterpreted. It is exactly in such a context that one would expect to see, not necessarily a clash of expectations, but a clash of interpretations. In this context, whoever claims to be more knowledgeable about the moral order or, more technically, whoever thinks he/she has more epistemic status, feels entitled to be offended by the behaviour of others (e.g. Golshifteh) and to respond offensively to that particular behaviour.

While the findings of the present study are based on Persian data (cf. Parvaresh & Tayebi, 2014; Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014), similarities can be found with Anglo-World expectancies, especially if one takes into account a broader concept such as morality. In this respect, it can be argued that, at a more abstract level, the expectancies found in the current study can also be found in other cultures, especially when it comes to such universal moral foundations as ‘in-group/loyalty’ and ‘purity/sanctity’ discussed in Section 2 above. What the findings of this study suggest is that, while there certainly are similarities between cultures as far as morality is concerned, moral considerations seem to influence different ‘domains of life’ in different cultures (cf. Haidt, 2012). In other words, while there might be similarities across cultures as far as morality is concerned, cultures are different from each other in terms of what they consider to be the ‘normal state [i.e. the moral order] of things’ (Kádár, 2017: 2). It is exactly these differences that cause social and ritualistic events to be performed differently across different cultures (cf. Parvaresh and Capone, 2017).

As Spencer-Oatey and Kádár (2016) argue, impoliteness evaluations are related to our ‘implicit’ standards of behaviour, also known as our moral order. While we identified a number of recurring expectancies that appear to be part of the moral order, we have only scratched the surface because each of these expectancies need to be explored in greater detail and with reference to different data-sets. The expectancies that we found are too complex and intertwined with other social considerations to be fully explored in one single study. Future research is therefore needed to examine each of these expectancies, by drawing on different methodologies, including not only those found in linguistics but also those evident in, amongst others, anthropology and moral psychology. Last but not least, as a corollary of the rapid growth of computer-mediated communication, defined as “human interactions occurring through the use of devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones” (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016: 81), people tend to spend a significant amount of time virtually interacting with others (Page et al., 2014) using such social networking services such as *Facebook* and *Instagram*, to name only two. In this context, as Locher (2010: 1) points out, more attention needs to be paid to investigating the various ways interactants “negotiate” different aspects of language including the rather frequent and ubiquitous use of rude/impolite language (cf. Bedijs, Held and Maaß, 2014).

**Acknowledgments**

We are immensely grateful to Prof. Michael Haugh and two anonymous referees from the Journal of Pragmatics for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper. We also wish to express our gratitude to Prof. Manoochehr Tavangar for his helpful advice on the use of glossing conventions in Persian. The usual disclaimers apply.

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1. The photograph and the corresponding comments can be found at: http://goo.gl/BD2KYA (last accessed 08/May/2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. While we prefer to use the term ‘expectancy’ rather than ‘expectation’, throughout the paper the two might be used interchangeably. Technically speaking, ‘expectancy’ can be defined as a state of expectation. An ‘expectation’, however, is something which is likely to happen. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is also worthwhile noting that the page under investigation has a blue badge which, as per *Facebook* policy, means that it has been confirmed by *Facebook* as being an authentic page or profile. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We are aware of the fact that in Iranian culture the act of baring one’s body has not been done by Golshifteh alone and that some other popular figures, celebrities and socialites have over the years done similar things. While each of these public taboo violations can be investigated from different perspectives, we believe that what they have done is not at all comparable to what Golshifteh did in terms of social and political effects as she was one of the first celebrities who bared herself. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Facebook*’s Data Policy states that “[p]ublic information is any information you share with a public audience, as well as information in your Public Profile, or content you share on a *Facebook* page or another public forum.” Public information, *Facebook* stipulates, “is available to anyone on or off our Services and can be seen or accessed through online search engines.” Consequently, “[w]hen you comment on another person’s post or like their content on *Facebook*, that person decides the audience who can see your comment or like. If their audience is public, your comment will also be public” (*Facebook* Data Policy, accessible via the following address: https://en-gb.facebook.com/full\_data\_use\_policy). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It should be noted that by the word ‘top-down’ we do not mean that our approach to data is top-down. Indeed, we have drawn on, for example, Recanati (2010) - a philosopher whose approach to pragmatics is notably top-down – in order to explain how, in the absence of any explanation (i.e. linguistic data) on the part of Golshifteh, users tend to interpret the very act of ‘baring herself’ differently accordingly to the moral order expectancies they invoke. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Abbreviations* are as follows: IMP, imperative; NEG, negative; OM, object marker; PL, plural; PP, past participle; SG, singular; SUBJ, subjunctive. Additionally, the plus sign ‘+’ separates the two parts of a compound verb (Tavangar & Amoozadeh, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Following Recanati (2010: 143), we consider implicatures as being “species of pragmatic implication”, i.e. the implication of an action. We are cognizant of the fact that implicatures are generated via an inference “*whose input is the fact* *that the speaker has said that* p.” (p. 144, original italics). What we have in the case of the nude photograph in question is not words, but action. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. It is worthwhile to note that Iran’s compulsory hijab policy was brought to force after the 1979’s revolution and consequently women were required to wear headscarf in public. Indeed, since 1979, “the Iranian government has made hijab an emblem of its religious and political identity” (Mouri, n.d., para 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Mim Mesle Mâdar* (M for Mother) is an Iranian film directed by Rasoul Mollaqolipour, starring Golshifteh Farahani. The film was a great box-office success. In M for Mother, Golshifteh “seared herself into the national consciousness playing a pregnant woman gassed during the Iran-Iraq war, abandoned by her husband and now carrying ‘a gift from God’ in her womb” (Gibbons, 2012: para. 4). Indeed, both rural and urban people in Iran “embraced her as their down-to-earth hero […]” to the extent that “Marjane Satrapi, author of Persepolis […] says: ‘She was not just Iran, she was the mother of Iran’” (Gibbons, 2012: para. 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Some of the expectancies discussed in this paper have previously been referred to as ‘cultural schemas’ (e.g. Sharifian, 2011, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. What is interesting about *sharm* is that it is usually expected more from women than men (cf. Moallem 2005). This seems to be an example of the dominance of patriarchy in Iranian society (cf. Price 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The expectancies discussed in this paper seem to be is closely associated with another expectancy known as âberu-dari (saving the ‘face’ of others). As Tayebi (2016: 8) notes, âberu can be, understood in association with the notion of ‘face’ (cf. Koutlaki, 2002, 2009; Sharifian, 2007, 2011; Sharifian and Tayebi, 2017):

In Persian, âberu “embodies the image of a person, a family, or a group, particularly as viewed by others in the society’’ (Sharifian, 2007:36). Because âberu is closely associated with people’s sense of public worth and prestige, it creates an expectation in Persian culture that one’s âberu should always be maintained(âberu-dari) and that one is always advised and expected to do everything at his/her disposal not to damage one’s own or another’s âberu. (Tayebi 2016: 8) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The extent to which Golshifteh’s father could have prevented his daughter from posing for, and posting, the nude photograph is entirely unclear, particularly nowadays with the dramatic changes in modern society. This has changed the status of women, at least in some parts of society, from being dependent on their parents, to having a much more independent social role. This is indeed a paradox which needs to be addressed in future papers. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. According to this expectancy of the moral order, people, particularly women, are expected to protect their own body, and thus refrain from revealing it in front of others (Naraqi, 1963). Patriarchally, men are also expected to prevent their own mother, sister, daughter, and wife from revealing their bodies. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)