Hashtag blessed: Negotiating Online Identity Positions

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ABSTRACT

Social media offers mechanisms that "facilitate self-presentation." These mechanisms include the profile, likes, hashtags, retweets, and other multimedia capabilities (Papacharissi Through these mechanisms individual and collective identities may be simultaneously presented and promoted (304-305).

In this paper, I look into the possible role/s that #blessed play/s in identity construction and self presentation. I examine different contexts in which #blessed is used in order to explain the complex interplay among the hashtag, the context, and the identity construction at play. I locate #blessed in the conversation that hashtag discourse on social media has become a linguistic marker that can be used in different communicative functions such as establishing solidarity and online fellowship (Zappavigna 276), a strategy that negotiates between self-praise and positive self presentation (Matley 30), and as a semiotic resource of meaning-making practices (Zappavigna 285).

I employ Bucholtz and Hall's approach to sociocultural linguistics specifically in highlighting the multi-faceted and dynamic nature of identity. By examining ten Facebook posts (caption, photo, and the function of #blessed and other hashtags used), I argue that online identity construction in light of new meaning making practices on social media further re/define identity as dynamic and fragmented entities that continuously acquire and deploy new social meanings as they shape and are re/shaped by different social realities.

KEYWORDS

self-presentation, identity construction, hashtag, #blessed, sociocultural linguistics, social media

Introduction

A hashtag (#) is a symbol that is used to mark and group a conversation on social media. It allows the "ordering and quick retrieval of information" within this platform. Hashtags are relevant when you want to follow a conversation about a certain topic (Scott 58). One of the most popular hashtags in recent years is #blessed. Its exact origin is unknown, but sources point to 2011 when the music blog, Pigeons and Planes, featured a documentary about Lil B the rapper, and used #blessed in expressing gratitude for the rapper's work (#Blessed: A Series on Hashtags). To this day, #blessed remains widely used. Considering that the shelf life of hashtags and other social media trends is fairly short, it is a great feat that #blessed has been able to maintain its currency on social media with 4.5 million posts on Facebook as of December 2020.

My interest in #blessed started sometime in 2015 when it was at its peak in the Philippines. My Facebook feed would be full of gratitude posts using #blessed. On the surface, the posts can be taken as they are: people are grateful for the blessings they receive. However, the range of what it means to be "blessed" (i.e. receiving an iPhone as a gift from the husband, being too tired from a taping but grateful for work, or spending time with a good friend who is a celebrity) is obviously very wide. It is this layered multiplicity of meanings that I find worth studying. Sarah Bennett also points out how #blessed has been overused on social media. She satirizes how God has recently "blessed [her] network with dazzling job promotions, coveted speaking gigs, the most wonderful fiancés ever, front row seats at Fashion Week, and nominations for many a '30 under 30' list" (The New York Times). According to Bennett, "blessed" has become the "go-to term for those who

want to boast about an accomplishment while pretending to be humble, fish for a compliment, acknowledge a success (without sounding too conceited), or purposely elicit envy."

While Bennett's claims may be too sweeping, it cannot be denied that there is something peculiar in the juxtaposition of #blessed and the status updates that were given as examples. The word "blessed," as defined in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, has the following denotative senses: holy; lucky; enjoyable in a way that gives one a sense of freedom from anxiety or pain; and an expression of mild anger (in its informal sense). As an idiomatic expression, to be blessed with something/somebody means to have something good such as ability, great happiness, etc. (Hornby 144). Blessed also has a religious sense: to be blessed means "to ask God to protect somebody/something holy by saying a prayer over it" (Keyes). There are instances, however, in which it is difficult to reconcile the religious association of the word "blessed" and the textual evidence that can be seen in social media posts. The use of #blessed has, in a way, been trivialized that one does know anymore when someone is or feels blessed (Bennett). It seems that through the use of the hashtag, a self-image that is beyond the denotative meaning of the word "blessed" is constructed.

In this paper, I look into the possible role/s that #blessed play/s in identity construction and self presentation. I examine different contexts in which #blessed is used in order to explain the complex interplay among the hashtag, the context, and the identity construction at play. I locate #blessed in the conversation that hashtag discourse on social media has become a linguistic marker that can be used in different communicative functions such as establishing solidarity and online fellowship (Zappavigna 276), a strategy that negotiates between self-praise and positive self presentation (Matley 30), and as a semiotic resource of meaning-making practices (Zappavigna 285). I employ Bucholtz and Hall's approach to sociocultural linguistics specifically in highlighting the multi-faceted and dynamic nature of identity. By studying the textual evidence (caption, photo, and other hashtags used), I argue that online identity construction in light of new meaning making practices on social media further re/define identity as dynamic and fragmented entities that continuously acquire and deploy new social meanings as they shape and are re/shaped by different social realities.

Identity Construction and Self Presentation on Social Media

According to Papacharissi, social media offers mechanisms that "facilitate self-presentation." These mechanisms include the profile, likes, hashtags, retweets, and other multimedia capabilities like photos, videos, and memes. These mechanisms enable social media users to present themselves online by creating a member profile that may lead them to reconnect with friends and connect to potential friends/acquantainces. Individual and collective identities are simultaneously presented and promoted (304-305).

This is highly possible given that in recent years, social media has become the "central organ of contemporary life" (Tolentino 11). Because of its "increased visibility and reach, it has created multiple virtual spaces that allowed anyone to create content that can be delivered simultaneously via a network of participants" (Page et al. 5). Aside from these, social media also offers mechanisms that "facilitate self-presentation, including text, photographs, and other multimedia capabilities" (Papacharissi 304). These multimedia capabilities can become "inextricably tangled up with visibility, identity, and self-promotion" (Tolentino 29) and social media becomes "sites of self presentation and identity negotiation" (Papacharissi 304).

The computer-mediated communication (CMC) platform itself encourages online users to "take advantage of the interface and channel characteristics that CMC offers in a dynamic fashion in order to enhance their relational outcomes" (Walther 2540). Walther's hypersonalization model discusses how CMC allows the self access to self presentation:

> First, CMC is editable. Second, the amount of time one can spend constructing and
> refining a message prior to its utterance, with less social awkwardness also differs
> from [face-to-face] conversation, allowing "the user almost unlimited time for editing

(and) composing,'' according to Hesse, Werner, and Altman (1988, p. 151). A third affordance of CMC is that a writer composes and exchanges messages in physical isolation from receiver, masking involuntary cues. A fourth factor suggested to operate in CMC is the reallocation of cognitive resources from environmental scanning and nonverbal management toward message composition. Energies normally devoted to their operation FtF may be reallocated to the single expressive vehicle in CMC, message production and reception. When CMC users are motivated to do so, these processes allow them to manage impressions and ultimately exceed parallel FtF partnerships in social orientation or intimacy, according to the hyperpersonal perspective. (2540).

It is important to understand then that social network platforms function by combining different available social resources and that these social resources may shape the self as it navigates these online platforms.

Self-presentation on social media is not new. In fact, there are already a number of studies that looked into how the self behaves on online platforms. First, Ellison, et al. explored how online dating participants manage their online images in order to accomplish the goal of finding a romantic partner and found out that the participants "attended to small cues online, mediated the tension between impression management pressures and the desire to present an authentic sense of self through tactics such as creating a profile that reflected their 'ideal self,' and attempted to establish the veracity of their identity claims" (415). Second, Zarghooni examined self-presentational theories in the light of self-presentation management on Facebook and found out that while the self-presentational theories explain behavior of the participants, there is a lack in studies that consider the cognitive division of the online and offline selves. Third, Bullingham and Vasconcelos analyzed the online identity practices of ten online bloggers and found out that participants recreate their offline self online but they edit some facets of that offline self. Fourth, Samonte et al. explored self-presentation among Tinder users and found out that there is a significant difference between male and female self-presentation, deception presentation, and behaviors, but they are used by Tinder users in order for them to be liked and positively swiped.

The studies mentioned above employed Goffman's theory on participation, specifically the approaches on dramaturgy and impression management, as the main framework. Although Bullingham and Vasconcelos questioned the relevance of Goffman's participation theory in self-presentation in blogs, they still concluded that Goffman's framework is very useful because it offers an explanatory framework for understanding the online behavior of the self. Famous for his theory on dramaturgy and impression management, Goffman claims that people have a clear understanding that first impressions are important so each individual performs a role that is in accordance with social norms (5). He likens this notion of self-presentation to a theater production, where participants have a role to play on stage and have to make sure that they perform well and project an image that will be desirable to the audience. Goffman's assumption is that "when an individual appears before others, he [or she] will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation" (8). He further states that the moment an individual plays a part, he/she performs that part and asks the audience to "believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he [or she] possesses…" (10). This "stage" is a metaphor for life, in which a person can choose what to show in the "front stage" and what to withhold in the "back stage": which stories to tell, which stories to withhold; how to dress up for a particular setting; how to control the voice and facial expressions to show politeness and tact. Because of this desire to be put in a good light, people tend to construct a version of themselves that, according to Goffman (qtd. in Hogan), is "idealized rather than authentic" (378).

While his assumption that individuals have different motives when dealing with other people in different situations and that they will perform a role in order to manage the impression of other people (Goffman, "The Presentation…") and his claim that because of an individual's desire to be put in a good light, they tend to construct a version of themselves that is "idealized rather than authentic" (qtd.

in Hogan 378) are relevant in the context of social media, Goffman's theory of the self does not necessarily account for the different facets of identities that are portrayed and/or constructed online. This is because Goffman seems to locate the self as a sole agent that is independent in deciding what to show in the front stage and what to withhold in the backstage and is removed from a specific setting and context.

This is not the case for Bucholtz and Hall. According to them, identity construction is more complex than knowing what and how to present one's self because identity is never "autonomous or independent;" it is a multi-faceted entity that "always acquire[s] social meaning in relation to other available identity positions and other social factors" (598). It is the "social positioning of self and other" (596). Thus, they argue that studies on identity should be approached from a relational and sociocultural point of view. This approach focuses on the different kinds of identity that "emerge and circulate in local discourse contexts of interaction rather than as a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories" (585-586). Moreover, they highlighted the dynamicity of identity ("identities may shift and recombine to meet new circumstances") as opposed to the "traditional view of identities as unitary and enduring psychological states or social categories" (376). Bucholtz and Hall proposed five principles that are fundamental to the study of identity: emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality, and partialness. These principles highlight that "identity is a discursive construct that emerges in interaction" (587). The five principles are defined as follows:

> *1. The emergence principle.* Identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon (588).
> *2. The positionality principle.* Identities encompass (a) macro-level demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles. They are not simply a collection of broad social categories (591).
> *3. The principle of indexicality.* Identity relations emerge in interaction through several related indexical processes, including: (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels; (b) implicatures and presuppositions regarding one's own or others' identity position; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles; and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups (595).
> *4. The principle of relationality*. Identities are intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy (598).
> *5. The principle of partialness.* Any given construction of identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part habitual and hence often less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation and contestation, in part an outcome of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an effect of larger ideological processes and material structures that may become relevant to interaction. It is therefore constantly shifting both as interaction unfolds and across discourse contexts (605).

These five fundamental principles stress the importance of language and linguistic interaction in the study of identity, and locate the self as dynamic and multi-faceted. Although Bucholtz and Hall define identity as an "outcome of cultural semiotics" that is constituted by interlocking sociocultural and socio-political factors (Language and Identity 381), they also maintain that language is the "most flexible and persuasive" among all the symbolic resources available to the self (Language and Identity 369). Thus, I will ground my analysis on the linguistic interaction in the posts as I interrogate identity construction and self-presentation through the linguistic and semiotic capabilities of #blessed.

Methodology
Research design

This paper used the interpretive-qualitative approach in describing the captions in the posts. My interpretation of the caption is primarily based on the data gathered, but the social contexts that influenced the data were also taken into account (Cresswell).

Data Collection

Data gathering was done twice: one in October 2015, the other in November 2015. The topic of the paper was conceptualized in October and the initial data gathering started. The sample was randomly collected. The tag #blessed was keyed into the search function of Facebook in order to retrieve posts that use #blessed. The first ten posts were then selected; the assumption here being these posts were the most recent posts at the time of data gathering. All posts were chosen at random without considering the identity of the user, which is one of the limitations of this paper. In addition, I was not able to follow the development of #blessed from the time I gathered my data in 2015. Bonilla and Rosa claim that this kind of analysis "requires us to stay with those who tweet and follow them after hashtags have fallen out of 'trend'. Only then can we better understand what brings them to this virtual place and what they take away from their engagement" (7).

Another limitation is the sampling method which relied mainly on the algorithm of Facebook. This algorithm is critical in influencing users' experiences on the site, but because the algorithm determining what contents are displayed in the search function is "relatively opaque," researchers can only make educated guesses about users' experiences (Vitak 633). Nevertheless, however limited, they give us a glimpse into how an aspect of social media is out to work by some users towards selective self-presentation: self-presentations that seem to have generated greater social engagement among others.

The posts used in this study are all public posts that are available to all social media users on Facebook, thus not violating the rights to privacy and security of the users. However, studies on data privacy and ethical access to materials to be used for research have noted that policies are not consistent regarding the users' right to privacy. In the case of Facebook, it offers the online users privacy options: public, semi-public, and private, and so it is understood that when a post is public, it is open to all members of Facebook (Page et al. 65). However, even if the posts are public and the online users are aware that everyone may have access to their posts, some might object to the reuse of the material (Marwick, qtd in Page et al. 67). Hence, as part of the ethical responsibility of the researcher, the actual posts are not included in the paper and the identities of the users are not disclosed. Any reference used that might give away the identity of the user has also been removed.

Data analysis

After the posts were downloaded, each was described in terms of their linguistic and visual content (if a photo was made available) since the photo is considered part of the whole text. After describing the text, they were analyzed using Bucholtz and Hall's five principles that are fundamental to the study of identity: emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality, and partialness. The principles of positionality and indexicality are the main principles used in linguistic interactions in the post. Both principles emphasize how language use indexes a particular identity. The three other principles are employed when they are salient in the posts.

Data Presentation and Analysis: Negotiating Identities through #blessed

It was established in the earlier sections that social media has become "sites of self presentation and identity negotiation" (Papacharissi 304). It was also discussed that hashtags are one of social media's mechanisms which act not only as topic markers but also as linguistic and semiotic markers (Zappavigna 283). Both social media and the hashtag act as social resources that can "actively combine aspects of [one's] social identity"; for this paper, that is #blessed.

In this section, the data for the discussion of the roles that #blessed play in identity construction and self presentation is presented. The general patterns and themes that are dominant in the posts will be discussed first; after which there will be a focus on the actual posts.

There seems to be three dominant patterns that the self utilizes in expressing gratitude for a blessing (refer to the Appendix for the complete data set). In the first three posts being blessed is equated to a successful career – showbiz projects, business opportunities, and tenure at work. #blessed could be a symbol either of modesty, pride, or arrogance. Matley points out that some hashtags

(#blessed, #brag, #humblebrag) act as part of a strategy in order to "negotiate an appropriate level of self-praise and positive self-presentation through the reflexive transgression of interactional norms" (30). This is the self's way of making sure that he/she is merely sharing information (positive self-disclosure) which is positively connoted in a particular community as opposed to bragging, which features an element of judgement and competitiveness (31).

> Facebook Status 1: Finished 24 hours of taping/BTS for [name of show].
> Role as brother of [famous actress]. I'm so Thankful to be Part of it.
> #Taping #BTS #24hours #[name of show] #NewFriends #[name of famous actress]
> **#blessed**
>
> Facebook Status 2: Woah! Thank you Lord for this Blessing! After 6 months sa work, I am now
> a regular employee of [name of a big electronics company]. Wow Fantastic Baby **#Blessed**
> #Thankful #Grateful #HappyKiddo #HappyMe
>
> Facebook Status 3: Another day of blessing and client. "Proof of Payment from a Client in
> Davao City" Legit and Trusted Seller here! [name of product] are always available on hand.
> PM me for orders or call/Message [cell phone number] **#blessed** #legit #ThankYou #yes

In Facebook Status 1, what can be interpreted at first as a complaint from someone who had a really long day at work (given that in the Philippine context, the regular working hours is eight to nine hours, working 24 hours is not a joke) may mean something else if the other textual evidence is factored in the analysis. The next two lines in the caption alert the reader that there is something more to the post. The overt mention of the name of the show, name of the actress, name of the network, and the juxtaposition of the hashtags that pertain to the show are indexes of the resources available to the self; this way the self can construct an identity of someone who has a fulfilling career. The use of other hashtags together with #blessed and the emphasis on the words *Thankful* and *Part* also gives off the impression that the self is grateful and proud. The self in this caption seems to take on three roles: one who is tired after a 24-hour taping, one who is grateful because of work, one who is proud to be working with a famous actress in a big network.

Just like the first post, the second post looks at work (specifically tenure at work) as a blessing. In the Philippine context, new employees are placed on a six-month probation, after which they are regularized or asked to resign. Given this context, one can understand where the grateful self is coming from. This kind of positioning seems to follow French and French's claim that being blessed is equated to something that the self thinks she/he deserves. The expression of extreme joy (*Woah*), the emphasis on the words *Lord* and *Blessing*, as well as the hashtags used show the overwhelming joy of the self for being regularized in a big electronics company. Both the caption and the accompanying hashtags complement the portrayal of the grateful self. The photo, (a document labelled "Status Change," which contains details of job regularization – designation, job description, effectivity of the regulation), however, indexes something else – someone who is proud of the job.

In the third post, the main role taken on by the self is a legitimate seller who is grateful for another blessing, which is in the form of a payment. The seller's grateful self is combined with other "overlapping and complementary" identity positions and there are negotiations that the self has to navigate in this situation (Bucholtz and Hall 598). Because the self is a legitimate seller, as indexed by the photo (a receipt from ML Kwarta Padala as proof of payment of a client) s/he can take on another position, someone who advertises her products to prospective clients. There is also a possibility that this post is a response to a lot of fake sellers and scams online. These are common scenarios in the Philippines since the influx of online businesses.

The next four posts equate being blessed to successful interpersonal relationships – forging friendships, spending quality time with family or with people that the self considers special:

Facebook Status 4: Reunited with Philippine Pride and multi-awarded international actress, [name of the actress] in New York! Thank you for the laughter my dear, to be continued in Vegas!
#crazy #friends #reunited #newyork **#blessed** #bestactress #film #icon

Facebook Status 5: [name] travelling to Los Angeles, California from Philippine Airlines-NAIA with [name of the partner] May God bless our first family trip.
#team(family name) #LA #blessed

Facebook Status 6: Breakfast with beautiful people.
#blessed #grateful #breakfast #americanslam #biggsdiner #food #foodie #foodpic #foodstagram #foodporn #foodgasm #instafood #instagood #picoftheday

Facebook Status 7: Coz we are nocturnal creatures, just got home from my "mornight" date with the master chef [name of the sister]! She picked me up from work, then we had a sumptuous meal, & a good massage afterwards – yes my late birthday treat for her! Thank you, Lord, for your continuous provisions! Will be shutting these eyes in a little while! Hello, rest day Thursday! **#blessed**

In the case of the fourth post, #blessed is about celebrating friendship, a valid reason to feel blessed. However, while the self is showing gratitude, there is also a possibility that she is positioning herself as someone who is rubbing elbows with a celebrity, a "Philippine pride" at that. The presence of other hashtags like *#crazy #bestactress #icon,* the emphasis on words like *pride*, *multi-awarded* and the photo (showing the person with the actress – directly facing the camera, all smiles, and half-embracing each other), all index adequation. In Bucholtz and Hall's principle of relationality, adequation is defined as a socially recognized sameness as opposed to distinction that emphasizes differences. Additionally, the photo also indexes a certain degree of closeness between the two, thus placing the self in the position of a good friend and not just a fan who has taken a photo with her/his idol.

The words "bless" and "blessed" in the fifth post may have different meanings; the former is an act of prayer, the latter acknowledging the blessing that was given to the family. The "travelling to" tag, which was used instead of a photo, may still be a deliberate decision to let the readers know how blessed they are because they can afford a trip to LA. The fifth post does not have a photo; it is just a post with a tag "travelling to…"

The sixth post is different from all the other posts because of the short caption that is not directly related to the photo (a plate with one cup of rice, a piece of hash brown, a hotdog, and three strips of bacon); even more interesting is the use of a lot of hashtags. The self here could be following a trend on social media by using a lot of hashtags so that more participants in the online network can see the post when they search for the hashtags present in the post. Moreover, the photo and the hashtags that mostly pertain to food index what the self may consider a blessing – food and sharing it with "beautiful people" who could be friends and family.

Just like the sixth post, the seventh post has a caption that is not directly related to the photo (a white Monobloc table – on it are a plate of tocilog and a plate of hotsilog, two cups of iced tea, a cup of coffee, and bottles of condiments. Along with the food are a car key placed at the center, in between the two plates; two wallets; a cell phone two; and a pouch for shades). The self is grateful for "continuous provisions" but there seems to be a disjunction among the different elements in the post that index gratitude. For instance, the strategic positions of the car keys, the wallets and the mobile phones, as well as the elaborate caption (carefully chosen words to create an image of a "good" life like *master chef, sumptuous meal, good massage*) would make one question whether the self is really grateful for God's provisions or is plainly showing off. The post is too well-curated that anyone who sees it may have different interpretations on the identity positions that the self is constructing. However, these well-curated elements are placed against the backdrop of the photo, which is most probably set in a tapsilogan. Tapsilogan is an eatery that specializes in *silog* (sinangag and itlog). The name is a blend of

tapa (beef), sinangag (fried rice) and itlog (egg). Just like in earlier posts, it seems that this is the self's way of making sure that he/she is merely sharing information (positive self-disclosure) which is positively connoted in a particular community as opposed to bragging, which features an element of judgement and competitiveness (Matley 31).

The last three posts consider luxury as a blessing – travel, expensive hobbies, vacation, and fancy gadget.

> Facebook Status 8: Great day great viz for diving
> #anilao #brightsun #sunny #photographer #amateur #clearsky, #clear #philippines #diving #scuba #critters #diver #hunter #divergoal #goodviz #blueskies #holiday #vacation #anilaophotohotel #anilaobackpacker #ilovemylife **#blessed** #kisses #surfaceinterval #dive

> Facebook Status 9: So if you guys didn't know I left my iPhone 6 in the Philippines and my sister sent it from Germany and they are saying it'll take 45 days to get here. But my husband loves me sooooo much he bought me an iPhone 6s. #blessed to the fullest #besthusbandintheworld I love you baby!
> **#blessed** #besthusbandintheworld

> Facebook Status 10: Good morning Malaysia! Last day! Can't wait to go back home!
> #wokeuplikethis #asianhottie #asiangirl, #natural #pinay, #filipina #curvy #thickwoman #cozIcan **#blessed** #thankful #thisisme #goinghome #excited #kualalumpur #malaysia #philippines #kapampangan #proud

In the eight post, the focus seems to be on the location, not on the self, because the image occupies most of the space in the photo (the shoreline and mountain view of a beach in Anilao, a well-known diving area in the Philippines. At the rightmost corner of the photo, stands a woman in diving gear and carrying a camera). #blessed is also accompanied by other hashtags that may lead the audience to interpret that the self is blessed because he/she can afford expensive hobbies like diving and photography. The #ilovemylife placed side by side with #blessed may reinforce the idea discussed earlier that being blessed is a reward that the self deserves to enjoy.

The ninth post is interesting because it indexes not only the good life that the self constructs but also positions the husband as the #besthusbandever. The juxtaposition of #blessed, #besthusbandever, and iPhone 6 seems to index two things: the self thinks that the partner looks after his/her needs or that the self is trying to create the idea that the partner is "rich" and he/she is blessed to have him/her. It may be possible that the self equates the "love" of the partner to material things.

In the tenth and last post, the caption and the hashtags do not seem to align. The last sentence in the caption seems to portray someone who is simply excited to go back home. However, the hashtags and the photo (a woman in her bath robe sitting on a large bed in a nice hotel while taking a selfie) show that being blessed is equated to having material things – enjoying the luxury of travel and a nice hotel. The photo also highlights physical appearance (#wokeuplikethis) and exudes a sensual undertone (#asianhottie, #curvy). While some hashtags (#cozIcan #thisisme) and the photo are empowering, there seems to be a tacky self that somehow surfaces in the post.

The last two posts are rather remarkable as far as identity construction is concerned. This kind of image is in contrast to the idea of being modest and grateful for the blessings received. The self is most probably showing off in these posts, and it seems that #blessed acts accessory to mitigate the brag. By invoking a word that is associated with religion, the self probably thinks that he/she can still present an ideal version of the self. Since bragging and showing off are not ideal traits for the self to possess, the self has to find ways to mitigate the brag and #blessed has become the accessory that is available in his/her need and/or want to curate and engineer an ideal version of himself/herself.

Discussion and Conclusions: #blessed as a Semiotic Resource for Identity Construction

There is no question that gratitude was expressed in the ten posts that were analyzed. However, the addition of #blessed and other hashtags in the post poses questions on the intention of

the self. As shown in the earlier analysis using positionality and indexicality, the lexical choices in the caption, the hashtags, the context and presuppositions in the captions, suggest that there are different selves that are also at play aside from the supposedly grateful self. Hashtags have that "interdiscursive capacity to lasso accompanying texts and their indexical meanings as part of a frame" (Bonilla and Rosa 6). For example all the other hashtags that are used alongside #blessed are rich resources that enable me to establish connections among the hashtag, the caption, and the context. This also reinforces earlier claims that hashtags as discourse on social media have become linguistic and semiotic markers that can be used in different communicative functions (Zappavigna 276, 285).

Based on the posts analyzed, it seems that #blessed has become a new semiotic resource that could mean the following: (1) a symbol of modesty or pride, as seen in the first three posts; (2) a status symbol, as seen in the fourth to seventh; and (3) a symbol of privilege and/or social distance (having something that others may not), as seen in the last three posts.

This classification, of course, is from an outsider's perspective looking into the textual evidence in the posts. I am an outsider observer who may tend to reduce the identities constructed in the posts through my own lens. Bucholtz and Hall warned against this "externally imposed identity categories" that are mostly based on "the observer's own identity position and power stakes." They emphasize the need to look into social situations that demand identities to "shift and recombine to meet new circumstances." This dynamic perspective, according to them, contrasts with the traditional view of identities as "unitary and enduring psychological states or social categories" (376). While I was not able to delve into the selves' social situations because of the linguistic and discourse analytic nature of this paper, I hope that this analysis offers additional information on how #blessed, as a semiotic resource, empower the self to explore different possibilities of identity construction. Knowing these resources also equip the self with accessories for negotiating the shifting identities in social media.

Whether deliberate or not, it seems that when people post online, they tend to think not only of themselves but of an audience that can see their post. Tolentino, however, claims that "social media was constructed around the idea that a thing is important insofar as it is important to you" (29). There seems to be a tension among the many selves (grateful, prudent, modest, naïve, etc.) who want to do a lot of things with the use of #blessed (coy, arrogant, sarcastic, playful etc.) because the platform allows her/him to do so. And while it is possible that there is tension among the different identity positions, it is also possible that there is none at all.

As suggested by the principle of partialness,

> any given construction of identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part
> habitual and hence often less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of
> interactional negotiation and contestation, in part an outcome of others' perceptions
> and representations, and in part an effect of larger ideological processes and material
> structures that may become relevant to interaction. (Bucholtz and Hall 605)

It is therefore constantly shifting both as interaction unfolds and across discourse contexts. This is especially true on social media in which trends come and go but the resources that the self utilizes to keep up with the trend is anchored on habitual and semi-fixed practices and discourses. The self, in constructing her/his identity, is in constant negotiation with her/his state of mind at the moment of posting, feelings and emotions, values, affiliations, social and cultural constraints, gender expectations (for some who are still trapped in that binary), and other factors. #blessed may not only be an accessory to mitigate the brag, it is a semiotic resource that comes in handy in articulating something that the self cannot fully capture on a Facebook post. As mentioned earlier it has become probable symbols of modesty, pride, or arrogance; a status symbol; a symbol of privilege and/or social distance (having something that others may not). It has also become a marker of the multiple selves that surface based on the context of situation; an exclamation point to talk about strong emotions; anything that the self probably needs at that time but could not put into words.

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Appendix
Description of Sample Data

Description of the photos	Caption	Other Hashtags Used
1) The photo shows the person who posted posing with a famous actress against a backdrop of the set of the taping. Both are smiling and are directly looking at the camera.	Finished 24 hours of taping/BTS for [name of show]. Role as brother of [famous actress]. I'm so Thankful to be Part of it.	#Taping #BTS #24hours #[name of show] #NewFriends #[name of famous actress] **#blessed**
2) The photo shows a document labelled "Status Change," which contains details of job regularization. All details – designation, job description, effectivity of the regulation – are in the photo.	Woah! Thank you Lord for this Blessing! After 6 months sa work, I am now a regular employee of [name of a big electronics company]. Wow Fantastic Baby	**#Blessed** #Thankful #Grateful #HappyKiddo #HappyMe
3) The photo shows a receipt from ML Kwarta Padala as proof of payment of a client. The entire document is posted but sensitive details such as name, address, and contact number are blurred or covered with emojis.	Another day of blessing and client. "Proof of Payment from a Client in Davao City" Legit and Trusted Seller here! [name of product] are always available on hand. PM me for orders or call/Message [cell phone number]	**#blessed** #legit #ThankYou #yes
4) The photo shows the person with the actress – directly facing the camera, all smiles, and half-embracing each other.	Reunited with Philippine Pride and multi-awarded international actress, [name of the actress] in New York! Thank you for the laughter my dear, to be continued in Vegas!	#crazy #friends #reunited #newyork **#blessed** #bestactress #film #icon
5) The fifth post does not have a photo; it is just a post with a tag "travelling to…"	[name] travelling to Los Angeles, California from Philippine Airlines-NAIA with [name of the partner] May God bless our first family trip.	#team(family name) #LA #blessed
6) The photo shows a plate with one cup of rice, a piece of hash brown, a hotdog, and three strips of bacon.	Breakfast with beautiful people.	**#blessed** #grateful #breakfast #americanslam #Biggsdiner #food #foodie #foodpic #foodstagram #foodporn #foodgasm #instafood #instagood #picoftheday
7) The photo is most probably set in a tapsilogan place. There is a white Monobloc table – on it are a plate of tocilog and a plate of hotsilog, two cups of iced tea, a cup of coffee, and bottles for condiments. Along with the food are a car key placed at the center, in between the two plates; two wallets; a cell phone two; and a pouch for shades.	Coz we are nocturnal creatures, just got home from my "mornight" date with the master chef [name of the sister]! She picked me up from work, then we had a sumptuous meal, & a good massage afterwards – yes my late birthday treat for her! Thank you, Lord, for your continuous provisions! Will be shutting these eyes in a little while! Hello, rest day Thursday!	**#blessed**
8) The photo highlights the location – the shoreline and mountain view of a beach in Anilao, a well-known diving area in the Philippines. At the rightmost corner of the photo, stands a woman in diving gear and carrying a camera.	Great day great viz for diving	#anilao #brightsun #sunny #photographer #amateur #clearsky, #clear #philippines #diving #scuba #critters #diver #hunter #divergoal #goodviz #blueskies #holiday #vacation #anilaophotohotel #anilaobackpackers #ilovemylife **#blessed** #kisses #surfaceinterval

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