



A Discursive Psychology Study of Burnout in Quiet-Quitting Confession Posts

Qasim Abbas Dhayef ¹, Hassan Abdul-Hussain Awa'ad ^{2*}

¹⁻² College of Education for Humanities, University of Babylon, Iraq

* Corresponding Author: Hassan Abdul-Hussain Awa'ad

Article Info

ISSN (Online): 2582-7138

Impact Factor (RSIF): 8.04

Volume: 07

Issue: 02

Received: 18-01-2026

Accepted: 14-02-2026

Published: 10-03-2026

Page No: 115-123

Abstract

“Quiet quitting” is often seen as a poor attitude to work, or simply a lack of enthusiasm; but in anonymous online posts about work, people present it differently. They see it as a justified reaction to being consistently overworked and suffering burnout, and they employ talk of burnout to excuse lessened effort, avoid being labelled ‘lazy’, and place the blame for the pressure they’re under on their managers, their companies, and the way work generally is organised. The study uses Discursive Psychology – an approach which regards psychological terms as public tools for doing things in interactions, especially in situations where how believable someone seems and their moral standing matter a lot. The research is based on a qualitative collection of fifty posts, in the style of confessions, from public internet discussion boards. The analysis employs a coding system influenced by DP, which looks at the actions people are performing, how they manage what’s at stake for them, how they present evidence, and the moral reasoning they base on categories. The posts reveal repeated patterns of behaviour: writers use disclaimers and try to lessen the risk to their self-image; they list symptoms and how much they’re overloaded; they work to make their statements factual by using numbers and ‘receipts’ – documentary proof; and they morally represent the situation, through talk of boundaries and fairness. These ways of acting make burnout seem real. They allow “doing less” to be understood as sensible self-care, and not as personal fault. So, quiet quitting becomes a way of being accountable, of trying to agree what counts as proper behaviour at work, given the increasing demands now made.

Keywords: confession posts, Burnout, Discursive Psychology, workplace, Quiet-Quitting

Introduction

“Burnout” and “quiet quitting” are now commonly used in online discussion of work – not as neutral descriptions, but as important terms (Harter, 2023; Maslach & Leiter, 2016) ^[2, 6]. People use them to divide behaviour into moral categories: responsible versus irresponsible, dedicated versus disloyal, strong versus weak. This sorting is apparent in the accounts themselves. Writers assign responsibility, show their behaviour is reasonable, and protect their reputation, all while describing their performance and wellbeing to people they don’t know.

“Quiet quitting” is usually described as “doing the very least” or “just doing what your job description says”, and not doing anything extra. In discussion of work, it is often taken as a problem of engagement – or a problem in relations with management. The term does evaluative work even before any evidence is offered. It makes “lazy”, “disloyal”, “not dedicated” immediately available as the usual ways of understanding the behaviour, even when the writers themselves present the same behaviour as setting limits. The term has a moral weight to it. To call something “quiet quitting” is already to make a judgement about the person’s character.

“Burnout” comes with different official support. The World Health Organization defines burn-out in ICD-11 as being the result of long-lasting workplace stress which hasn’t been dealt with successfully, shown by exhaustion, emotional detachment or cynicism, a fall in professional effectiveness, and being limited to situations at work rather than to life in general (World Health

Organization, 2019). The definition readily gives people writing the chance to demonstrate that their trouble is from work, and also shifts blame from personal shortcoming. It supplies a typical set of signs which can act as evidence.

The research considers both of those ideas to be ways of using language – to do social and conversational work. It employs the method of Discursive Psychology. Seen in that light, words such as ‘stress’, ‘burnout’, and ‘motivation’ aren’t simple reports of what someone is thinking; rather, they are statements people make in public that do things - give reason, accuse, reduce the impact of being told off, demonstrate something. The study is concerned with how explanations are constructed; and the subject is how authors deal with what matters to them, set up the truth of what they say, and put together their ethical standing, in situations where people might not accept what is said.

Public online forums, where people write in a confession style, provide a good place to track this accountability work, because the writers are addressing an unknown and mixed audience. The post has to be able to withstand doubt. “Context collapse” describes the pressure: many different audiences come together, and the writer can’t adjust the account to the norms of one particular person – so self-presentation and framing become strategic (Marwick & boyd, 2011) [5]. A single post must expect a sympathetic reader, a hostile reader, and a reader looking for policy or management advice.

When that happens, saying you put less work in than you might have does seem to really put the author’s character on the line. People are inclined to think of someone who does this as not a good person – as indolent, feeling they deserve something for nothing, and not thankful. So authors get around this possible trouble by employing ways that are known to work. To fend off what they think people will judge them on, they use disclaimers. Additionally, if they think people won’t be understanding, they’ll use very obvious examples to make their argument appear more solid; Hewitt & Stokes, 1975 [3], and Pomerantz, 1986 [8], have both shown this. These aren’t simply a matter of how something is written. They are tools for building an account which can be defended in an environment where judgement is important.

Given this background, the paper examines how narratives of burnout re-classify quiet quitting as a morally acceptable response to conditions at work. The questions which are asked remain interactional: (1) how writers make burnout seem believable and relevant to reducing effort, (2) what linguistic resources they use to prevent or neutralise blame, and (3) how the posts re-present “doing less” as responsible boundary-setting instead of as unacceptable behaviour (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996) [1, 9].

Literature Review

Discursive Psychology: language as action

Discursive Psychology – DP – is the central technique for analysing the data in this research; DP sees speaking and writing as doing things, not as revealing what someone thinks. Therefore, words like “stress”, “burnout”, and

“motivation” are important because of what they accomplish when they are used – for example, excusing a person, implying they deserve thought, or getting approval, particularly if they may be called to account and argued with (Potter, 1996) [9].

Stake, interest and credibility as interactional problems

A core idea in DP is that people adjust what they say, depending on who they’re speaking to, and what they stand to gain or lose will affect what they say right from the start. If a person telling a story would profit from a particular account of what happened – for example, seeming sensible while also admitting they didn’t really try – they’ll shape their story to prevent doubt. So, writers employ techniques to appear credible, to show “common sense”, and to avoid negative judgements.

DP analysis looks at how someone’s stake in a matter is managed within the story. It asks what details the person chooses to put in or leave out, where they make allowances, and how the story balances what is said and what isn’t. The story isn’t a simple record, but practical communication in the face of possible disagreement (Edwards & Potter, 1992) [1, 9].

Disclaimers as pre-emptive defence

‘Confession’ type posts will almost always prompt judgements of what someone has done, and they frequently contain things people say which could damage their public standing – or, at least, mean they aren’t seen as a ‘good worker’ any more. As a result, disclaimers are generally used by authors to protect themselves; they place them at the start of a post to prevent a negative reading (“I’m not workshy”, “I did put a lot of effort in”) and to establish a positive image before any admission which is likely to attract censure.

Research considers disclaimers to be instruments of accountability, and not merely a matter of taste. They alter the fundamental perception of things. They help determine whether ‘quiet quitting’ comes across as a failure of responsibility, or as a sensible response to workload.

Extreme case formulations and the production of factuality

Extreme case formulations are yet another important mechanism in DP. Words and phrases like ‘always’, ‘never’, ‘each day’, ‘absolutely nothing altered’ strengthen assertions when scepticism is anticipated – particularly if the author fears unpopularity. The intention is to present the situation as gravely, or as long-lasting as possible, and this underpins the legitimacy of grievances, excuses for behaviour, and moral appraisals (Pomerantz, 1986) [8]. Within the texts in this study, writers frequently employ extreme case formulations to show that workload and issues within the company are so bad as to excuse a reduced level of commitment.

Categorisation and moral order in work identities

Quiet-quitting stories also do ‘category work’. Authors use well-known social categories – “good employee”, “toxic boss”, “exploited worker” – and use the moral

expectations attached to them. This is vital, because categories provide the standards for judgement. The same behaviour – “doing the least possible” – can be understood as irresponsibility or as a sensible agreement with a contract, depending on which categories are used and what standards are applied.

The analysis, therefore, sees ethical judgement as something made through communication, using categories, and not as an inherent quality of the behaviour itself (Jayyusi, 1984) [4].

Audience design and “context collapse” in online confession posts

Because the people reading confessions on the internet have all sorts of – and changeable – standards and will react in ways you can’t guess, it’s harder and more dangerous to show who you are, and to protect yourself ahead of time. ‘Context collapse’ is the name for what’s going on in these cases: many different people who would usually be separate audiences are all in the same conversation, so the person writing can’t write for a particular audience, and has to assume they’ll not be understood, or will upset somebody, or come across badly (Marwick & boyd, 2011) [5].

This makes a difference to how people write, in every sentence. People make what they think is the best case for themselves. They deal with issues people might bring up, before anyone has actually brought them up. And they show they are alright to trust while they are telling their story. These aren’t just things the genre needs; they are ways of being responsible when everyone can look at what you’ve done, which is just what DP was interested in – how stories are put together to avoid being disproved.

Burnout: institutional definition and discursive warrant

This paper looks at burnout in two ways: as a category used by institutions, and as a resource for language.

At the institutional level, the World Health Organization defines burn-out in ICD-11 as a syndrome from long-term workplace stress which hasn’t been dealt with successfully, and characterised by exhaustion, emotional distance or cynicism, a fall in professional performance, and being limited to the workplace. This definition is important as it sets the category’s limits. It links burnout to work, and also identifies a recognised set of symptoms. At the level of language, using the word “burnout” can act as a warrant. It moves reduced effort away from a judgement of character (“moral failing”) and into an explanation based on conditions. Authors present reduced effort as a response to ongoing stress with known symptoms, and not as voluntary withdrawal (Maslach & Leiter, 2016) [6].

Quiet quitting as an evaluative label and accountability trigger

Within this data, “quiet quitting” isn’t really a simple, value-free term.

It goes around as a judgemental name in what people say publicly, and is generally connected with how much people are involved in their jobs and what bosses think about employees pulling back.

The phrase has weight to it because of the contradiction at its heart: it says “quitting”, but means people are still employed. The way it’s put – that holding back on effort is seen as a flaw in someone’s personality – things like not being interested, acting dishonestly, or not being truly dedicated – happens before anything about how much work there is, or what the work is like, is even thought of. This study thinks that this moral judgement is key, and isn’t just something that happens on the side. People who post about it make their stories in response to this judgement. They’ve got to push back against, or change how people see, the term; then make a case for setting limits as okay, and not as strange or wrong.

Data and Methods

Research design and analytic stance

The research employs a qualitative design – a discourse analysis – and is based in Discursive Psychology, or DP. It considers psychological ideas as openly available, ways people act, and not as honest showings of what’s going on inside. The job of the analysis is very specific: to demonstrate the ways in which posters fashion explanations which deal with being responsible, prove they can be trusted, and gain a good reputation when they’re talking about not giving their all at work. The research is deliberately limited in what it covers. The analysis isn’t trying to work out who has burnout, or to work out how common ‘quiet quitting’ is among any group of people. Instead, it looks at how speech – or writing – makes ‘burnout’ something people recognise and something that matters, and how the authors of the posts cope with ‘quiet quitting’ as a judgemental term, by either going against it, changing how it’s seen, or accepting it, using the way they tell their stories and the techniques they use to get their message across in posts which are like confessions.

Data sources and corpus construction

The dataset comprises 50 publicly accessible confession-style posts in which writers (a) describe restricting effort to core duties—“doing the minimum”, “only what I’m paid for”, refusing unpaid overtime—and (b) explicitly invoke burnout or exhaustion as the warrant for that restriction. The posts come from public online forums where work experiences are routinely narrated and judged by unknown readers, including large-scale discussion communities on Reddit and comparable public confession or discussion boards.

The sampling was purposive. Posts were selected because they were information-rich for the analytic problem—accountability work and moral defence—not because they approximate a statistically generalisable distribution. This aligns with established guidance on qualitative purposive sampling when the aim is interpretive depth rather than representativeness (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015) [7].

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Posts entered the corpus only when they met all four criteria.

1. The post used a first-person perspective, or centred the narrative on the writer’s own work conduct.

2. The writer described a shift towards effort restriction while still employed (for example, stopping discretionary labour or avoiding after-hours availability).
3. The writer linked that shift to burnout or exhaustion (for example, “burnt out”, “can’t cope”, “mentally done”, or chronic stress with functional impairment).
4. The post showed accountability orientation, such as disclaimers, anticipation of judgement, justificatory reasoning, or moral reframing.

Posts were excluded when they worked mainly as humour or memes without narrative accounting, when they offered third-person commentary without a self-account, or when they discussed quitting or resignation without the “still employed but doing less” configuration.

Ethical handling of public online posts

Because the data come from public online spaces, the ethical problem is not formal consent extraction. It is harm reduction. The main risks are traceability and context collapse. Material can be publicly accessible yet still carry a reasonable expectation of contextual privacy. Direct quotation can also make a post searchable and attributable. The handling strategy therefore targets three variables: which identifying details remain, how easily an excerpt can be reverse-searched, whether verbatim quotation is necessary for the analytic claim.

In practice, usernames, employer names, locations, other unique identifiers were removed or generalised. Where verbatim quotation would raise searchability without adding analytic value, extracts were paraphrased while preserving the discursive features under analysis (e.g., disclaimers, quantification, category work). The aim is precise: preserve the interactional design of the account, reduce the chance that a reader can locate the original author through traceable phrasing. This follows established ethical concerns in qualitative internet research on privacy expectations, consent in public-but-personal settings, and the intrusion created by searchable quotation.

Unit of analysis and transcription conventions

The unit of study is the ‘account episode’ in each post – a passage of writing where the person does one or more of these things: puts themselves in relation to what’s thought of as right and wrong, describes being burned out or very tired, gives detailed proof – things like figures, dates, or ‘receipts’ – or presents limiting their effort as acceptable. Episodes are determined by changes in the work the writing is doing, and not by paragraph divisions.

Posts were saved as simple text files, broken down into these analytical episodes, and then given line numbers so that during the analysis, the researcher could accurately point to where things were. This method of handling the data suits DP’s – Discursive Psychology’s – preference for detailed, close analysis of naturally occurring talk, where statements about how people take responsibility for their actions must be tied to exactly how specific bits of text are put together.

Analytical framework: ASCE–DP coding model

In order to keep the analysis repeatable, the research employs a precise coding scheme, taken from ideas in Discursive Psychology – ASCE–DP; that is, Accountability orientation, Symptom/overload construction, Credibility/Evidence display, and Ethical defence pattern. The model isn’t putting forward any new theory, but acts as a methodical tool for analysis. It’s meant to be useful, so it ensures the coding always concentrates on things important to DP – particularly handling of what’s at stake, ways of dealing with what is factual, and people’s moral positions.

A –Accountability orientation

These codes show how people writing try to get ahead of being criticised, and make sure they look good – for example, by saying “I’m not lazy” or “I did more than was asked”. This relates to the idea of disclaimers as things people do in conversation to defend who they are (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975) [3].

S – Symptom/overload construction

The codes record how people writing make being burnt out seem real and important: through lists of being tired, feeling awful, problems thinking, stress in the body. They also record how people writing blame work for it: too much work, not enough staff, bosses putting people under pressure. The analysis views these descriptions as ways of making a case for action, not as medical proof.

C/E – Credibility and evidence display

Codes record how people show things are factual: by using numbers – hours worked, deadlines – or timescales (“for months”) and referring to documents – “emails”, “performance...”

D/P – Ethical defence pattern

The coding records how writers present limiting their effort as setting ethical limits – protecting their health, being fair, fulfilling their contract – and how they put the responsibility onto what the organisation expects. It also records devices that make things stronger, including using extreme words (“always”, “never”, “every day”) when writers use them to make their claims seem better, and to prevent other interpretations.

Coding procedure and credibility checks

Coding took place in three stages. Each stage had a different purpose in controlling the process. The first stage coded each post for whether or not ASCE–DP elements were present. This stage acted as a coverage check; it made sure the scheme was used consistently across the data, and prevented detailed coding later on from being limited to only the most obvious posts.

The second stage broke posts down into episodes within the posts, and coded those episodes in detail for the language used in them. The coding looked for specific things: disclaimers, amounts, contrasting structures, words to do with limits, category terms. The aim wasn't to summarise themes, but to identify the things writers regularly use to make their claims convincing and to manage responsibility.

The third stage produced analytical notes that explained the function of the language that had been coded. These notes made the steps in reasoning clear: which interest the writer was managing, which moral judgement the post was expecting, how the episode cancelled out or changed that judgement.

The reliability of the analysis is based on three checks standard in DP-style work. First, constant comparison across posts, so any link proposed between a device and a function must be shown in several instances, not just one striking example. Second, the analysis actively looks for unusual cases, including posts where burnout appears but doesn't justify quiet quitting, and posts where quiet quitting is admitted without a burnout justification. These cases test the scheme by showing its limits. Third, the pieces of text that are kept are long enough for readers to check the reasons for the interpretation themselves, rather than accept summary statements on trust – this matches the DP and qualitative discourse-analysis requirement: to tie statements to the visible design of the text, and not to paraphrase.

Findings and Analysis

Overview and analytic logic

The study finds repeated ways in which people posting online make use of “burnout” to justify lessening their work, and present “quiet quitting” as acceptable. It's done using Discursive Psychology; the posts are taken to be stories made for whoever is reading, which deal with what is at risk, create a sense of truth, and arrange moral views when disagreement is likely.

Each part of the study looks at a group of tactics, not just one. For each group, the study points out two things: (i) what specific work the group does in the post, and (ii) how that work deals with the main moral issue – admitting to doing less, without seeming to give up being seen as a good, hard worker.

Quiet quitting as a moral problem (the accountability dilemma)

Not putting effort in seems like something people should answer for, and in a lot of posts, is clearly and immediately seen as wrong. People writing the posts make a difficult situation for themselves, over and over. If they say they are doing less, readers may think they are lazy or feel they deserve things. If they don't say they are doing less, they lose the most direct way to explain why they are stepping back because of burnout. This problem shows up straight away in many posts, as moral ideas come before any description of what happened. Starting with saying sorry (“I have to admit...”) or showing they are thinking about how they seem (“I feel guilty...”) are the first things writers do to direct how people read.

These aren't just adding to the story; they set the way things will be judged very early, so the later admission will be seen as something that needs explaining, and not as a bad part of their character which should be criticised.

In Discursive Psychology, these beginnings show how the writer thinks about who will be reading. Writers create the story for a readership they imagine might question their reasons, not believe them, or see the admission as a moral fault. The pressure is greater in public online confession types of posts, where posts ask for judgement and advice, but only give some of the background. With “context collapse”, writers can't expect one set of rules for the audience, so whether people will believe them becomes important from the very first line. Putting signs of being okay to be judged – displays of guilt, unwilling admissions, moral questioning of themselves – works as defence before the post gets to the thing most likely to be criticised. It offers a clearly “reasonable” position before the post gets to the behaviour that will most likely get a bad reaction.

Stake inoculation and disclaimers (protecting the “good worker” identity)

A common group of tactics is based on statements that protect writers from negative judgements they expect, especially being thought of as “lazy”. These statements often show up as “I'm not lazy” or “I used to work hard”, and usually come before the admission of doing less. Where they are put is important. Writers stop the bad reading before they tell about the behaviour that could cause it. In the usual terms of sociology, these statements work as early fixing: they get rid of a judgement that makes someone seem bad, before the claim that could cause that judgement appears (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975) [3].

Extract 1

“I'm not lazy. I've always been the one who stays late and says yes to everything. But I'm done.”

This works because it solves the moral problem early. It puts a moral good point at the front (“I've always...”) and then treats the change in behaviour as something unusual which needs explanation. The writer creates a firm, normally “good” past identity. What they are doing now then looks like being made to move away, not a statement about their character. The story follows a clear idea: this is not who I am; this is what the situation has caused.

Statements often come with giving-in turns that briefly admit a different moral idea – “I know people have it worse”, “I'm grateful to have a job” – then go back to the main point. The giving-in does two things. It shows moral understanding of other views. It also makes the writer seem reasonable, not only thinking of themselves. In DP, this is managing what is at risk. The complaint seems less selfish, while the reason for doing less stays safe, because the writer has already dealt with the obvious opposite reading.

Extract 2

I'm aware I ought to feel thankful, yet I am constantly drained.

In this case, the “ought to” shows what's thought to be

expected – but the “yet” indicates the person posting will go against that expectation using a more powerful reason: being burned out. What happens, rhetorically, is that the writer seems to be morally correct, even when they’re making a complaint.

Symptom and overload listing (making burnout recognisable and consequential)

Another technique people use to show burnout is to list symptoms and what’s too much to deal with. People posting don’t usually mention burnout only once. They make it something that can be proved. They put symptoms – trouble sleeping, feeling awful, problems thinking, physical tension – with things at work, like dates for things to be finished, not enough staff, and when your job description gets bigger and bigger.

The list does the job; it makes things build up. Every point adds to the effect. It isn’t just description. It makes the state seem more serious and makes “less ability” appear to be a sensible conclusion, not something the person wants to say for themselves.

Extract 3

“I get up already tired. I hate the thought of turning on my computer. I feel ill on weekends. My heart races when I get alerts.”

This order of statements makes burnout something felt in the body and everywhere, not just a feeling. Also, the symptoms are the sort of stress signs people generally know, which helps people understand: readers can ‘understand’ what burnout looks like.

Extract 4

“I’m performing the work of three people. My boss goes on putting on more work. I’ve not had a proper rest for ages.”

Listing excess does more than show pressure. It makes a reason-and-result structure. The order that’s suggested is obvious: the organisation demanding more → ongoing stress → less ability → reducing effort. That order is important. It changes reducing effort into a result, not a decision. Responsibility is reduced.

This is the main idea in Discursive Psychology. Descriptions of symptoms and excess are not simply facts. Writers employ them as ways of making things certain. They allow the next position: “I cannot go on doing more.” This is a key idea in Discursive Psychology. Descriptions of symptoms and overload aren’t neutral; people use them to prove something, and to give a reason for the next thing they say: “I can’t keep doing extra.”

Showing Factuality practices and evidence display (producing “objective” credibility)

A third thing people do is show they’re being factual, and present evidence to show a “sensible” person would come to the same conclusion. In Discursive Psychology, being factual isn’t a natural thing in what someone says; people make it happen, by using ways of speaking that make an event reportable, measurable, and, in theory, able to be checked (Potter, 1996) ^[9].

This is especially important in places online where people talk about personal things. Readers can’t see the workplace, and may think someone is exaggerating, or trying to excuse themselves.

Ways of showing evidence include:

- a) Numbers (hours worked, deadlines per week, months without a break)
- b) Timeframes (“for the last six months...”)
- c) Comparisons (how things are now versus how they were; “used to be the best worker”)
- d) Proof (“emails”, “performance reviews”, “screenshots”)

Extract 5

“I’m working 55–60 hours a week and still being told it’s not enough.”

Using numbers changes a complaint into something that can be measured. It also suggests what’s normal: the numbers are meant to be heard as “too much”.

Extract 6

I’ve got emails to show I did voice my worries – but nothing was done.

That sort of thing – using proof like that – is to head off disbelief and make people really answerable.

The “proof” is really about being seen to have done what was expected before giving up on it. “Nothing changed” isn’t just saying what happened; it’s like stating a really clear, bad instance, and makes the organisation’s let-down seem like complete abandonment.

Statements which use ‘all’, ‘none’, ‘each day’, ‘nothing’, and so on, usually have the same aim of guarding against having the matter dismissed. The point isn’t to be precise, but to make the complaint seem important when it’s likely to be argued against.

Moral Moral reframing: boundaries, fairness, and contractual sufficiency

A fourth set of approaches is around moral re-thinking. People who are ‘quiet quitting’ deal with the bad things implied by that term, by presenting it as setting limits and being fair. This changes where judgement falls: from ‘how much effort’ to ‘what someone should do’; from ‘being devoted’ to ‘what the contract says’.

Extract 7

“I’m not leaving, I’m just doing the job I get money for. I’m looking after my wellbeing.”

This is re-naming. ‘Leaving’ is said to be wrong and to have a bad moral sense; “doing the job I get money for” is shown as what anyone should do under a contract, and “looking after my wellbeing” gives a bigger, moral reason.

Extract 8

“If they want any more, they’ll have to pay more for it.”

This uses a sense of justice. It turns extra work into something you can buy and sell, and not a moral thing to do. The argument changes quickly and cleanly: being taken advantage of is the issue, not setting limits.

The way people think about things drives this change. People use terms like “good worker”, “someone who’s keen”, “boss from hell”, and “company which takes advantage”, and then link what’s right and wrong to each. This matches the main idea about how we put things into groups and how we see what’s morally right: groups come with what people are allowed and need to do, and people use them to make what someone does make sense.

Audience design: pre-emptive rebuttals, alignment invitations, and humour

Because confession-style posts assume people will judge them, those who write them often include ways to handle criticism in the post itself. There are two things people do a lot. They’ll use preemptive counter-arguments – things like “Before anyone says...” – and requests for agreement, such as “Has anyone else felt this?”

The counter-argument shows what someone is likely to object to, and then deals with it beforehand, so a negative interpretation is less able to develop. The request for agreement does something else: it asks for connection, makes the position seem normal, and presents the experience as something people have in common, not something strange. Both of these things clearly show the writer is thinking about their audience, and both are appropriate in the sort of ‘context collapse’ that happens with online media – where writers don’t know what rules of behaviour any particular reader will use (Marwick & boyd, 2011) [5].

Extract9

“Before anyone says ‘just quit’, I can’t. I have bills. I’m just trying to survive.”

Here the counter-argument predicts, and then prevents, a typical, judgemental response, using a justification based

on necessity. “I can’t” presents the situation as something the writer is forced to do, not something they want to do. “Bills” indicates a pressure that everyone understands. So, the defence moves from being about what sort of person the writer is, to the conditions they’re in.

Using humour and putting themselves down also act as ways of showing where the writer stands, and invite sympathy. They also reduce the chance of a bad reaction. Even a small thing – “lol” – can make people want to connect with the poster, rather than condemn them; this is important, as the writer’s moral character is at risk.

A recurrent narrative template: from moral credential to warranted boundary

A typical story pattern appears again and again:

1. Proof of good character (I’m responsible / not lazy / used to work really hard)
2. Being given too much to do (they kept adding tasks / I was doing several jobs)
3. Building an account of burnout (symptoms, being exhausted, being unable to manage)
4. Showing evidence (hours, dates, records)
5. Deciding to set limits (I stopped doing extra; I only did what my contract said)
6. Re-presenting the situation as morally acceptable (fairness, health, being enough within the contract)
7. Managing the audience (pre-empting criticism; asking for agreement)

This pattern is important analytically because it shows ‘quiet quitting’ as something that happens in a social interaction: the writer builds a sequence of points that makes their decision to set limits seem unavoidable, sensible, and morally right.

Table 1: Discursive strategy bundles used to warrant effort restriction

Strategy bundle	Interactional function	Typical linguistic resources
Stake inoculation & disclaimers	Protect moral identity; pre-empt “lazy” inference	“I’m not lazy”; prior diligence; concessions
Symptom & overload listing	Construct burnout as consequential; build causal warrant	symptom lists; role creep; chronicity markers
Evidence display & factuality work	Increase credibility; resist scepticism	numbers; timelines; “emails/screenshots”; extreme case formulations
Moral reframing	Redefine “quiet quitting” as ethical	boundaries; health protection; contractual sufficiency; fairness logic
Audience design	Neutralise backlash; recruit solidarity	“before anyone says...”; questions; humour markers

Discussion

The results back up a Discursive Psychology understanding of “quiet quitting” – seeing it as something people do in conversation, and make seem right, instead of just a simple thing people behave. In the posts, people who write about doing less at work present limiting their effort as something they’re able to explain. They expect people to react badly; and they construct stories which allow them to appear as a fairly respectable “good employee” while also justifying the reduction in work they do for enjoyment.

This matches the main idea in DP: people use psychological ideas and descriptions as things the public can use to act – to give reasons, make excuses, accuse, show is reasonable – when it is challenged or could be, and not as simple reports of what’s in their minds.

The main idea we’re interpreting is fairly limited and clear. “Burnout” functions as a justification here. It changes limiting effort from something that could be seen as bad to a necessary reaction to ongoing stress. This idea has power because “burnout” is already widely understood – both in

organisations and in culture – as a work-related problem, including the areas of the condition and symptoms described by the World Health Organization in ICD-11. The posts don't often depend on the word by itself; writers usually show burnout through lists of symptoms and lists of too much work. They build a sense of being recognisable, serious and relevant in a type of writing where readers could simply dismiss someone saying they were burned out.

The idea gains strength from this dual status – being recognised by organisations, and being explained in detail in conversation – and not just from the word being used.

The methods people use work as combined ways of appearing trustworthy and responsible, not as separate stylistic choices. Statements that reduce blame (“I'm not lazy”, “I used to do more than was expected”) work as pre-emptive defences. They remove a negative image that could be created before the writer describes the behaviour which is being challenged – as John P. Hewitt and Randall Stokes have described. Work to show something is factual – using numbers, times, ‘proof’ in the form of documents – builds a basis for the explanation that can be checked, fitting with the DP interest in how writers put “facts” together in conversation so they don't seem unbelievable and are reasonable. Using extreme descriptions (“always”, “never”, “every day”, “nothing changed”) makes the persistence and seriousness of the situation more obvious in a way which suits people who won't be sympathetic, in line with Anita Pomerantz's study of this method.

What things happen together is important. Each method on its own fails in predictable ways. Statements that reduce blame alone can seem like someone is defending themselves. Lists of symptoms alone can seem to be based on nothing real. Numbers alone can seem to be without context. Combining them spreads the need to prove things across the methods. The writer then makes a critic attack someone's reasons, evidence, and moral understanding all at once, without appearing to be uncaring or not understanding how organisations work.

The study also shows that people talk about quiet quitting through using categories and moral ideas, and not just describing how much work they do. They use categories such as “good worker”, “team player”, “toxic manager”, “exploited employee”. These categories bring with them duties, rights, and ideas of what is fair. The very act of putting someone in a category does the work of judging them; it decides who owes what to whom, and what is considered to be behaviour which deserves blame, and what is behaviour which is justified. Under this way of thinking, the argument doesn't stop at “how much work is too much”. The deeper argument is about what is a reasonable duty. Writers suggest that only doing what is in a contract is enough, and place the idea of going ‘the extra mile’ within organisations which exploit people.

The conditions of the platforms people use make the problem of needing to be responsible worse, because posts which admit things are targeting a readership which is unknown and has a variety of views. Writers expect counter-arguments (“just quit”). They answer them in advance with explanations of why they can't – such as financial duties and family duties.

This design fits the idea of designing for an audience, even when writers are imagining who will read it rather than talking to people who are there with them. Research into social media audiences makes clear why writers make this work obvious: “context collapse” stops any stable idea about shared standards, so people posting make their position clear, show fairness, and keep the work of appearing trustworthy visible. The usual problem in conversation remains the same – how to admit limiting effort without being seen as a “bad employee”. The usual set of solutions also remains stable: showing proof, protecting one's position, and using health as a justification.

These results also make clear why “quiet quitting” remains a public idea which people argue about. Whether people accept it depends on whether they accept the story which is used to justify it. Criticism which sees quiet quitting as a lack of engagement usually uses the point of view of managers, in which doing more than is necessary is a sign of good character. The posts in this study reject that point of view. Writers change the idea of doing more than is necessary into optional work which needs a two-way relationship and sustainable conditions. This position matches discussion in the workplace which sees quiet quitting as a label for a broad middle category – not “actively disengaged” and not “engaged”. The word therefore works partly as a conversation event: a way of understanding which changes what is seen as normal work behaviour.

The result for methods is a limit to what can be said, and not a weakness to hide. Public online stories are performances designed for an audience. Therefore the thing to be studied remains how accounts are constructed – work to appear trustworthy, managing one's position, moral understanding – and not the posts as direct evidence of conditions in the workplace. The same logic shapes ethics. Searchable text plus sensitive disclosure raises traceability risk and harm risk even in public settings. That risk supports case-sensitive, harm-reduction approaches in internet research ethics, especially when quoting.

Conclusion

The research demonstrates that workplace posts about burnout actually present “quiet quitting” as something you can have a good reason for, and not just idleness. Employing Discursive Psychology, the study views ‘burnout’ and ‘quiet quitting’ as ways people do the work of holding themselves – and others – to account; they aren't simply what things are. People posting are constantly with a problem: saying they're doing less risks being seen as a bad sort, yet not saying it undermines the point of the confession itself. They deal with this, though, by a fairly regular pattern of giving reasons – they show they're a good worker (having “good worker” history), construct burnout by listing symptoms and too much work, prove what they say through dates, numbers and evidence, and finally, change the morality of it all using ideas of health, what's fair, and what their contract actually says they must do. These things all add up, and each one helps out where the others are weak. The study also shows why

“quiet quitting” is still argued about: the phrase itself implies blame, but posters are putting forward a different idea of what’s right, based on being able to keep going, a give-and-take, and what they’re properly expected to do. In terms of how it was done, the study proves how useful it is to look at work-related speech by thinking about people being held to account, who they’re talking to, and the idea of confession when people are openly being judged on what’s morally good.

References

1. Edwards D, Potter J. Discursive psychology. London: SAGE; 1992.
2. Harter J. Is quiet quitting real? Gallup. 2023 May 17.
3. Hewitt JP, Stokes R. Disclaimers. *Am Sociol Rev*. 1975;40(1):1–11. doi:10.2307/2094442.
4. Jayyusi L. Categorization and the moral order. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; 1984.
5. Marwick AE, Boyd D. I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media Soc*. 2011;13(1):114–133. doi:10.1177/1461444810365313.
6. Maslach C, Leiter MP. Burnout. In: Fink G, editor. *Stress: Concepts, cognition, emotion, and behavior*. Handbook of Stress series. Vol. 1. San Diego: Academic Press; 2016. p. 351–357. doi:10.1016/B978-0-12-800951-2.00044-3.
7. Palinkas LA, Horwitz SM, Green CA, Wisdom JP, Duan N, Hoagwood K. Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Adm Policy Ment Health Ment Health Serv Res*. 2015;42(5):533–544. doi:10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y.
8. Pomerantz A. Extreme case formulations: A way of legitimizing claims. *Hum Stud*. 1986;9(2–3):219–229.
9. Potter J. Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction. London: SAGE; 1996.

How to Cite This Article

Dhayef QA, Awa’ad HAH. A discursive psychology study of burnout in quiet-quitting confession posts. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation*. 2026;7(2):115-122.

Creative Commons (CC) License

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.