

## Critical-Metaphorical Analysis of Women's Agency in Sexual Harassment Discourses: The #MeToo Movement in Iran

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**Abstract:** Using linguistic methods to assess the women's discourse is one of the powerful means of demonstrating the diverse identities and perspectives of women across their lifetimes. Metaphor plays a significant role in human communication and its impact is obvious in different discourses. The #MeToo movement on social media provides a dedicated condition for women to voice their experiences of social injustice and sexual harassment. Thus, the current study aims to examine the use of metaphor in the speeches of women who were victims of sexual harassments. Drawing from *Jonatan Charteris-Black's* book, '*Corpus Approaches To Critical Metaphor Analysis*', our approach involves analysis of conceptual metaphor and keys. The main data consists of 20 interviews with women who have suffered sexual violence from men, shared on the official #MeToo movement Instagram account in Iran. From these findings, it can be concluded that frequency of the patient conceptual keys is higher than that of agent ones. Surprisingly, these findings reveal the agency of Iranian women during sexualharassment is in the lowest stage.

**Keywords:** Corpus Linguistic, Metaphor Analysis, Violence, MeToo movement, Iranian Women.

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### Introduction

In the modern era, social media plays a significant role in the success of social movements and raising awareness of their messages. It plays a pivotal role in mobilizing and spreading messages effectively. Social media has a deep impact on society, enabling greater effectiveness in shaping social and political policies for the betterment of communities and nations. It is reasonable to assume that the way we think, the way experience our environment, and what we do in our everyday life is a matter of metaphor, given that our thinking process plays such an important role in defining ourselves and our social realities (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Little attention has been paid to how the Iranian women who were victims of different kinds of violence describe their emotions and thoughts after these traumatic circumstances through the metaphors in such social media platforms. The links between metaphor and gender are multi-faceted, involving how speakers of different genders use metaphor, how metaphor is applied to describe men and women, and how metaphors can serve in masculine or feminine terms. Thus, it may be useful to define the social sphere (Manzano, 2012). Besides the Metaphor's existence in every aspect of human life, human experience is never empty of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1987).

Over the past decades, there has been a significant increase in new research which are related to gender. People have become more interested in how gender is expressed through the language, some questions have been presented in this issue, whether there are specific words to define a woman or a man, and why such words are preferred to define a person based on their gender. The reorientation of these topics has been discussed worldwide because it demonstrates how the social world is structured(Charteris-Black, 2004).

Metaphor is a communicative system in which language users will enhance their expression through the messages that are conveyed during the interaction by which the most economical means are available to them. Conceptual metaphors and conceptual keys can explain the motivation of particular surface-level metaphors. These two phenomena are the valuable factors of describing and classifying figurative language (Charteris-Black, 2004). Metaphor is a communicative tool influenced by specific contexts within the sociopolitical environments. In

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addition, metaphors serve as persuasive devices that carry ideological weight, rather than being purely conceptual and arbitrary (Huspek, 1991).

Cultural metaphors manifest sociopolitical values that may vary across the various cultures. Culture encompasses not only expressions of human intellectual activities such as arts and philosophy but also comprises the belief and the ways of life. These are collectively from cultural models, as described by Holland and Quinn, which are assumed and widely shared worldviews within a society that significantly influence people's understanding and behaviors within their environment. Since metaphors establish connections between cognitive models and cultures. Therefore, we can define cultural practices rooted in gender stereotypes. These metaphors can lead to discriminatory treatment against men and women (Velasco-Sacristán & Fuertes-Olivera, 2006).

With these brief explanations, it is now possible to examine in more detail the fundamental issues that gave rise to this research. In a study of metaphors related to women in the narratives of women who experience social violence, it is observed what individual-social factors have led to the choosing of specific concept as the source of domain, and how these choices have a convincing effect on the audience. The relationship between metaphor and gender is multifaceted, including how speakers of different genders use metaphors, how metaphor is used to define women and men, and how metaphors can be useful in describing a social sphere in male and female terms. The specific focus here has been on how metaphor is connected to gendered realities, that is, the global representation in discourse that focuses on concepts and ideologies of masculinity and femininity (Hyland et al., 2021) (Veronika Koller, 2011).

(Ahmed, 2018) analyzed metaphors in gender construction in media discourse by analyzing metaphors used to describe women in Nigerian newspapers. 399 metaphors have been analyzed from 100 articles published in five Nigerian newspapers by female authors between 1999 and 2014. The analysis revealed nine frequently used conceptual metaphors: women as commodities, women as a force, women as household managers, women as the weaker sex, women as animals, women as plants, women as machines, women as building materials, and women as farmland. The analysis suggests that the underlying cognitive basis for representing women and femininity through metaphors in newspapers remains largely controlled by the dominant gender ideology in Nigerian society, which favors maintaining male dominance and superiority. Even when authors who were women seem to intend to negate, challenge, or simply reject specific stereotypes or ideas about women or femininity, these stereotypes may persist, and unconsciously.

### **Violence against women**

The concept of violence against women covers a wide range of abuses aimed at women throughout their lives. According to the UN, violence against women is described as any form of gender-based violence that leads to physical, sexual, or psychological harm to women. This includes the threats of such acts, coercion, or unjust deprivation of freedom, in case it occurs in public or private life. Sexual coercion was characterized by Heise et al as "the act of forcing or attempting to force another person through violence, threats, verbal request, deception, cultural expectations or financial circumstance to engage in sexual behavior against her/his (Krantz, 2005). Gender-based violence refers to the power inequality between men and women which exists more or less in all societies (Tavara, 2006).

### **Me TOO MOVEMENT**

#MeToo is one of the movements that happened on social networks that deal with violence against women. It has also increased debate and critical discussion about gender discrimination and crimes against women on social media. This trend initiated critical and political discussions about the relationship between power and gender (Jaffe, 2018). Sexual harassment is gender-based discrimination that generally targets the women in society. It comprises various acts such as sexual comments and unsuitable or unwanted promises of rewards interchange for sexual favors. Some activities such as staring, shrieking, or unasked physical conduct with the offensive dialect are regarded as sexual harassment. In addition, the request for sexual favor in exchange for promotion or employment is also viewed as an act of sexual harassment in the workplace (Jacobson & Eaton, 2018).

### **Me Too movement in Iran**

The #MeToo movement was initiated in the summer of 2020 in Iran, in particular on Twitter. Following in time, *Aydin Aghdashloo*, a famous Iranian painter, was condemned for his inappropriate behavior in his painting classes. The New York Times published a general report about sexual accusations of this painter that pointed to around 13 women being his victims for nearly 30 years in October 2020. Later, Iranian women shared their painful stories on various platforms through the #MeToo movement.

## AGENCY IN MIDDLE EAST WOMEN

Limited prior research on Muslim women in most Middle Eastern countries where are traditional has indicated the amount of the neglect of social science experts toward the issue of agency in Middle Eastern females, in particular Iranian women. Moreover, examining women's agency without considering their interpretation of circumstances and daily lives has led dominant perspective that all women are homogeneous.

Women's agency comprises the ability to pursue their goals, indeed in troublesome circumstances. Women with the agency are more enabled and pursue greater agency against the violence (Kabeer, 1999). Women's empowerment is to increase their agency or ability to explain their choices, and to have an effect on them even in difficult situations (Giddens 1984, kabbeer 1999, 2001). Thus, women's agency is a tool of social change (Yount et al., 2016). Evidence from Pakistan that women who experience domestic violence stay silent and do not seek any help from their environment (Madhani et al., 2017). Most scholars believe women's agency is a multifaceted definition. According to research, Qatari young women's agency was measured by three factors, such as decision-making, freedom of movement and gender attitudes. The majority of women reported that they made their own decisions. However, two other items were generally reflective of border local societal norms that can be seen in Middle Eastern women more than other regions in the world (Qutteina et al., 2019)

From a methodological viewpoint, in my opinion, Charteris black method can serve the metaphor as a tool that presents the ideological, historical, religious, political, and economic aspects of the speeches.

According to Lakoff and Johnson's ground-breaking article, the metaphorical logic of rape, about how metaphor can create the perception of rape in the culture of America. They assert the realm of the research of metaphor is able in different contexts but in the safe areas of research that are too close to reality. It is a factor that we can understand and discuss about our experience. In another word, metaphor plays as a principle in our reasoning which has a role in the shaping reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 1987).

Charteris black aims to enhance comprehension of metaphor's nature and function in language through an analysis of its usage in different areas from politics to press reporting and religion. He accuses metaphor to serve as a key illustration of how pragmatics, which involves context-specific linguistic choices by the speaker, influences semantics, the linguistics system for conveying meaning. Metaphor exemplifies the human brain's capacity to distinguish similarities, highlighting our innate ability to identify a similarity within dissimilar concepts.

Richards notes (1936: 108-9):

*The process of metaphor in language, the exchange between the meanings of words which we study in explicit verbal metaphors, are super-imposed upon a perceived world which is itself a product of earlier or unwitting metaphor, and we shall not deal with them justly if we forget that this is so.*

Richards suggests that metaphor acts as an engine for language evolution, incorporating both implicit and explicit dimensions.

We aim to show a better understanding of metaphor in women interviewed who were victims of sexual harassment who narrate their circumstances in official account of #Me too movement in Iran on Instagram.

## Methodology

The nature of the research is both qualitative and quantitative. The type of discourse is the interviews of women who were the victims and published their narratives on the official Instagram account of the #MeToo movement in Iran. To structure the data, considering the widespread of the study corpus, we have employed selective sampling. This study aims to investigate the metaphor usage between these women. The model chosen is that of Charteris black and his view of metaphor. This paper is focused on a specific source domain, words that women use to describe themselves such as *I, me, girl, woman, and some Persian identifiers which are accompanied by verbs*. We utilize the framework of critical metaphor analysis as the theoretical framework for our research. Accordingly, this study operates on three levels of analyzing the metaphors and interpreting individual and social factors (Charteris-Black, 2004). A shared history and experience are common characteristics of the participants in this study, which are important for the co-construction of narratives. This systematic socialization over an extended period has created a reservoir of long-standing assumptions and shared interactions that can be used for a variety of purposes. This,

in turn, helps to ensure that the context of future narrative works, others can draw on the shared narrative world of the past to support and justify their version of events (Hyland et al., 2021)

### Identifying metaphor in discourse

It is necessary to work backward for the analysis of metaphors. To begin, the entire interviews were read to establish a general understanding of the texts, and second lexical units were determined in the texts. After this process, in the third stage of identifying, for each lexical unit in the interview, the meaning of the text was assessed by how it applies to an entity and relation in the situation evoked by text. Next, for each lexical unit has been established a more basic contemporary meaning which was in contrast with the contextual meaning but can be understood in comparison.

For example, a sentence such as ‘I was sure that I wasn’t the only victim of him, and that other women had also been victims of him’ can be analyzed by first paraphrasing the meaning as ‘women are the victims of this men’. In other words women are recognized as victims. After identifying conceptual metaphors of victims in these interviews, all such metaphors are categorized under the “patient” key conceptual category.

**Table 1 shows the frequency of individual linguistic metaphors for twenty women**

The narrators	Frequency	The narrators	frequency
1	12	11	5
2	8	12	5
3	6	13	5
4	1	14	7
5	1	15	3
6	10	16	8
7	5	17	4
8	1	18	5
9	1	19	2
10	1	20	2

Table 1 indicates that the ‘first’ and ‘sixth’ narrators used conceptual metaphors more frequency during their interviews compared the ‘eighth’, ‘ninth’ and ‘tenth’ narrators, who employed conceptual metaphors the least.

**Table 2 shows the distribution of each metaphor in the interviews of these twenty women:**

NO	KEY WORDS	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	Guilt	5	7.3
2	Death	3	4.4
3	Trust worthy	2	2.9
4	Powerful	1	1.4
5	Unaware	1	1.4
6	Protester	1	1.4
7	Free	1	1.4
8	Willing	1	1.4
9	Incapable	14	20
10	Victim	6	8.8
11	Culpable	1	1.4
12	Child	4	5.8
13	Needy	2	2.9
14	Shame	1	1.4
15	Fearful	17	25

16	Insecure	2	2.9
17	Angry	4	5.8
18	Gullible	2	2.9

To reduce the entire manageable size, only the content words that have the possibility to be a metaphorical are kept. From 30 words with highest frequency, 18 content words were selected for further analysis. From the table, it is evident the word "fearful" is considered as the most notable keyword (25%) and the "incapable" as the former contributes the second height percentage with 20% in these 20 corpuses, while some keywords like 'free', 'willing', 'protester', 'unaware', 'powerful' and 'culpable' each with about one percent frequency have the lowest proportion at these corpuses.

### The table 3 shows the distribution of two conceptual keys

No	Conceptual keys	frequency	Percent
1	Woman is patient	58	85%
2	Woman is agent	10	15%

Based on table3, it is clear that there is a huge difference between the two conceptual keys, 'women is patient' with approximately 85% frequency is in the first, and 'women is agent' with 15% is in the second level.

### Finding and discussion

To sum up, the present research aims to: (i) identify the what kinds of metaphors are used by these women who are the victims of sexual abuses, and (ii) whether there is more frequency in the metaphors which are representative of low agency in women. Hence, the issue of this section is devoted to report the results and discuss them based on the Charteris-black method.

### Women are patients

Regarding women as a patient, agency is extremely significant here, since the women in the most parts of their stories speak about their incapability throughout the abuses. This supports the theory of low agency in Middle Eastern women, especially regarding the harassment they face from men in positions of power or influence.

The textual evidence discussed below how the women's experiences of violence partially structure and influences the language of agency, activating the conceptual metaphors *patient*. To analyze the association further, the lines below are chosen to examine how words are used in these women's stories:

...I had no power and remained motionless liked a statue.....  
 .....I hadn't ability to take any action against him, I was afraid of  
 upsetting him.....  
 .....I had no willpower to make a decision or change that grimness  
 Situation .....

.....After that, I was so powerless that I could only  
 Pray for things to change so that I could be free...

In all the sentences above, which have been briefly selected from four narrators who experienced sexual abuses during the process or its aftermath, keywords such as powerless, motionless, inability and fearful were repeated. The repetition of these words signifies the inability and the lack of action. As a result, in the metaphorical linguistics expressions that can be related to the lacing the agency of Iranian women.

### Women are actants

..... I was feeling very unwell, but I managed to gather my  
 Strength and escape under his grasp in the end.....

.....One time, I told him don't touch me please again.....

There are a few sentences which had included the women's agency and two sentences above have been selected to declare the low rate of agency in these women. Moreover, we highlight some words that can show decisiveness have been used in some cases.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the finding of current study has answered the two questions are presented earlier. From the text studied, it can be concluded that conceptual metaphors *women are patient*, *women are agent* are activated metaphorical expression with terms such as through *Needy, shame, fearful, insecure, angry, gullible, culpable, victim, child, guilt, death, trust worthy, powerful, unaware, protester, free, willing, incapable*. These findings indicate that the agency of these women has significantly diminished during the sexual abuses, and a sense of helplessness has hindered their ability to engage effectively in their stories. Due to greater awareness in the *#MeToo Movement* era, the interviews can be utilized as a rich resources to investigate about the ideological, religious and cultural frameworks of each country. Regarding the findings made in this article, it has been figured out the literature about the agency of Iranian women is too limited in order to insufficient freedom to conduct research activities on women's agency and *#MeToo* movement in Iran, the ability to carry out such studies has been restricted.

About violence against women, we need some information from different studies that can be compared, and generate a knowledge base that will allow us to identify the various forms of this occurrence.

Iranian women were not only seeking to expand opportunities for empowering themselves through religion; rather, they challenged the traditional Islamic interpretations with patriarchy, providing a space for suppressing women. They have incorporated religiously thoughts, willingly or unwillingly, into their lives and internalize them. This indirect opposition to the Islamic foundation laws has pushed women beyond more resistance to their protests more explicit.

There is a lack of extensive research on the agency of Iranian women. Iranian middle-class women with the high resources such as public and university education, and better access to financial resources have made it impossible for their husbands to realize the potential for overt and direct violence, in the meantime there is a kind of feminine management and agency in women, which is cleverly designed to eliminate or at last alleviate the symbolic violence

Colonial narratives are deeply ingrained within the epistemology frameworks of area studies. This implies the historical colonial perspires continues to influence academic approaches and viewpoints(Duncan, 2008). the importance of feminist scholarships in addressing agency among women, particularly within the context of the middle east is undeniable as well as the acknowledging agency is both challenging and politically necessary, given the contemporary power dynamics thorough these countries. The discussion of Muslim women's agency as an epistemological question underscores the deeper intellectual and philosophical inquires surrounding knowledge production and representation(Sehlikoglu, 2018). In summary, utilizing the corpus-based approach proves highly effective for metaphor detection. The case study shows metaphor and gender are also connected with each other in women discourses in Islamic countries, particularly in Iran.

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