

# Framing Gender, Power, and Justice: A Feminist Multimodal Analysis of Magazine Covers on Sexual Harassment Dispute Hearings

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## Abstract

This study critically examines how magazine covers frame gendered power dynamics and issues of credibility in the context of Brett Kavanaugh's alleged sexual harassment hearings. Through the application of a feminist lens and the Visual Grammar framework, the study uncovers how media representations often depict powerful men as victims, while simultaneously holding women to unattainably high standards of credibility. By analyzing how these portrayals influence public perception, the paper emphasizes the ways in which gender inequality and sexual violence are framed in the media. The study introduces two innovative models: the Four-Quadrant Impact Model, which examines media representations across temporal and spatial axes, and the Interconnected Model of Multimodal Argument Construction, which positions magazine covers as ideological artifacts. These frameworks provide a deeper understanding of how visual and textual elements in media work together to shape societal attitudes toward gendered violence and institutional accountability. The study contributes to feminist media studies by offering a nuanced analysis of how visual arguments in popular media both reflect and perpetuate existing power structures, providing critical insights into the role of media in public discourse on gender, justice, and sexual violence.

**Keywords:** visual grammar, magazine cover, gendered power dynamics, sexual violence discourse

## 1. Introduction

Magazine covers are powerful visual tools that not only attract attention but also reflect editorial perspectives and societal concerns (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Through design choices and recurring visual themes, these covers create an ideological framework that influences how issues are presented to the public (Hollow, 2012). More than just promotional material, magazine covers use striking designs to engage audiences and position publications within specific social contexts. They act as both historical records and catalysts for societal change (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2002). Their impact extends beyond their immediate visual appeal, shaping public discourse and influencing how we understand key societal issues.

Magazine covers have been widely studied for their role in framing controversial issues and contributing to public debates (Gill, 2007). In particular, media representations of gendered issues like sexual harassment often reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics (Meyers, 1997). As Kitzinger (2004) noted, media coverage of sexual violence often reflects gendered power structures, positioning women as either to blame or silent. The strong visual impact and symbolic power of magazine covers make them especially effective at amplifying or contesting these gendered narratives (Martikainen, 2023). For example, the TIME cover featuring Christine Blasey Ford during the Kavanaugh hearings helped influence movements like Believe Survivors and framed the public conversation around victimhood and justice (Zarkov & Davis, 2018). These representations mirror societal attitudes and shape how the public responds to sexual violence. Media coverage of movements like MeToo highlights how magazines can influence public opinion and contribute to social change (Viswanath & Demers, 1999).

Although there has been growing research on media framing of sexual harassment, less attention has been paid to how these discourses are visually constructed on magazine covers. These visual artifacts, combining text, images, and design, carry ideological weight and reflect societal biases about gender and power (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). To fully understand how gender and sexuality are represented in magazines, it is important to consider both the historical context and the current social dynamics (Attwood, 2005). These contexts interact, helping us gain a deeper understanding of how gender is portrayed in media and society. In the case of sexual harassment and assault, magazine covers simplify complex narratives into symbolic images that shape

public perceptions of victimhood, credibility, and justice (Jewitt, 2014). These representations play a crucial role in shaping how society understands and responds to sexual violence (Butler, 1990).

The MeToo movement, which gained momentum in 2017, reshaped conversations about sexual harassment, pushing media outlets to address these issues in new ways. Media coverage, including magazine covers, has become a key space for negotiating and contesting the power dynamics central to sexual violence (Gill, 2016). The 2018 Brett Kavanaugh hearings, which focused on Christine Blasey Ford's allegations of sexual assault, exemplify how media, politics, and gender intersect in the U.S. This high-profile case, occurring against the backdrop of MeToo, sparked intense media scrutiny and public debate about gender inequality, victimhood, and institutional accountability. Against this backdrop, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature by analyzing the visual strategies used by magazine covers to shape public discourse on sexual harassment, with a focus on the Brett Kavanaugh case. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar framework (2006), this research looks at both verbal and non-verbal elements to uncover the strategies used by magazine covers to represent gender and power dynamics in high-profile sexual harassment cases. By analyzing the multimodal arguments conveyed through these elements, the paper provides insights into how media representations contribute to public discourse on gender and justice.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do magazine covers visually and textually represent gendered power dynamics, credibility, and victimhood in the Brett Kavanaugh hearings?
- 2) How do magazine covers influence cultural narratives about sexual violence, gender inequality, and institutional accountability in the MeToo era?

## **2. Theoretical Underpinnings**

The representation of sexual violence in the media has become a central focus in communication and cultural studies, especially in terms of how these portrayals influence public perceptions and societal attitudes (Gill, 2007). Media plays a significant role in shaping gender and power dynamics, often framing these issues in ways that reflect and reinforce societal norms. Multimodal communication—where images, text, and layout work together—plays a critical role in constructing these frames and shaping our understanding of complex social issues like sexual harassment (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). While much of the literature has focused on traditional media, such as news outlets and television, less attention has been paid to the multimodal nature of magazine covers (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Moreover, studies on visual media have primarily concentrated on lifestyle magazines, leaving news magazines largely unexplored (Tseronis, 2015). This gap highlights the importance of examining how the combination of images, typography, and layout on magazine covers contributes to the framing of key issues like victimhood, credibility, and justice, particularly in high-profile cases. The intersection of cultural context and visual communication is also crucial for understanding how gendered narratives are constructed. Studies by Zhang (2011) and Chen (2018) suggest that cultural contexts shape these narratives, underscoring the importance of a cross-cultural perspective when analyzing visual texts. This study addresses that gap by exploring how magazine covers frame sexual violence, particularly during specific events, such as the Kavanaugh hearings, where visual and textual elements combine to represent complex social issues.

To fill this gap, the study employs Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), which goes beyond traditional Critical Discourse Analysis by focusing on how different semiotic resources—such as images, text, and layout—work together to convey underlying ideological messages (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This approach provides a deeper understanding of how magazine covers are not just promotional tools, but key media artifacts that shape public perceptions of gender, victimhood, and justice (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Previous research has focused primarily on the textual content of media, shedding light on issues like victim-blaming and gendered narratives (Kitzinger, 2004; Meyers, 1997). However, the role of visual communication in shaping these narratives, especially on magazine covers, remains underexplored.

While existing studies have documented how the media often reinforces harmful societal narratives—such as blaming victims—less empirical work has focused on how visual media, particularly magazine covers, either perpetuate or challenge these narratives (Stabile & Kumar, 2005). In the context of the MeToo movement, media representations have shifted to focus more on survivors' voices, but the ways in which these shifts are visually represented across different media formats have received limited attention (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). This study contributes to this underexplored area by analyzing how magazine covers during the Kavanaugh hearings reflect and shape public perceptions of sexual violence.

The MeToo movement has dramatically shifted the discourse around sexual harassment, bringing greater visibility to survivor experiences (O'Keefe, 2022). Despite this cultural shift, many survivors still face significant challenges in being believed. The issue of "believability" has shown that survivors are often subjected to unrealistic expectations about their credibility (Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023). Media representations frequently reinforce these expectations by portraying survivors who fit the "perfect victim" stereotype while marginalizing those who do not conform. Although this dynamic has been discussed in previous literature, there is still a need for further exploration of how these portrayals operate in visual media, such as magazines, which often use powerful images to communicate social narratives.

In addition to traditional media, the rise of hashtag activism associated with MeToo provides another critical area for investigation. Social media has played a major role in amplifying survivor voices, yet traditional media—particularly magazines—still holds significant power in shaping public discourse (Jackson et al., 2020). While much of the research has focused on social media's role in promoting survivor narratives, there remains insufficient analysis of how traditional media, especially in visual formats like magazines, influences public perceptions of survivors. For example, the media's representation of Christine Blasey Ford during the Kavanaugh hearings illustrates how media plays a crucial role in framing societal narratives about credibility and victimhood. Media coverage scrutinized Ford's emotional responses and highlighted perceived inconsistencies, reflecting broader societal challenges in believing survivors (Jaffe et al., 2022). This study seeks to address this gap by focusing on the multimodal strategies used by magazine covers, which distill complex narratives of justice and institutional accountability into powerful visual formats.

By combining insights from MCDA and social semiotics, this study builds on previous research while addressing key areas that have been underexplored. Previous studies have contributed valuable insights into the textual representation of sexual violence, but often overlooked the combined dimensions of visual and textual narratives. This research provides a more comprehensive approach to understanding how sexual harassment and assault are represented in both visual and textual formats, offering deeper insights into the media's role in shaping public discourse on gender, power, and sexual violence.

### **3. Methods**

#### *3.1 Context*

In 2018, Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court sparked intense national debate, especially when Christine Blasey Ford, a university professor, accused him of sexually assaulting her during their teenage years in the early 1980s. This accusation came just days before the Senate Judiciary Committee was scheduled to vote on Kavanaugh's confirmation.

Ford's testimony became a central part of the public debate. She alleged that, while intoxicated, Kavanaugh pinned her down, covered her mouth to prevent her from screaming, and attempted to remove her clothes at a party in Maryland. Ford's emotional account was presented during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on September 27, 2018. The hearing was broadcast live and captured the attention of millions. Ford's courage in coming forward amidst intense public scrutiny earned both support and criticism. Kavanaugh, in turn, denied the accusations vehemently, expressing frustration and anger at what he called a character assassination.

This event occurred amid the broader MeToo movement, which aimed to raise awareness of sexual harassment and assault, particularly in powerful institutions. Ford's testimony became symbolic of broader issues related to gender inequality, power imbalances, and the treatment of sexual assault survivors. Despite the controversy, Kavanaugh was confirmed as a Supreme Court Justice by a narrow vote in the Senate. The hearings and the surrounding debate sparked lasting discussions about gender, power, and accountability.

#### *3.2 Data Collection*

The study used purposive sampling to select five magazine covers (see Appendices for images and examples) that featured the Kavanaugh hearings and Ford's allegations. These covers were chosen because they all focused on the same key event, allowing for a comprehensive representation across different magazines and highlighting how media outlets framed the event in the context of broader social movements. Each cover provides a unique perspective on the Kavanaugh-Ford hearings, offering insight into how various publications presented the event to their readers. The chosen covers include examples from *Time* (Examples 1 and 4), *The New Yorker* (Example 2), *The Week* (Example 3), and *Commonweal* (Example 5). These covers were selected for their broad exposure and typical representation of media discourse. Notably, the *Time* magazine cover featuring Dr. Ford gained significant attention and sparked the hashtag #BelieveSurvivors, demonstrating its impact.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The study uses a qualitative, interpretative approach, combining content analysis, comparative analysis, and critical multimodal discourse analysis (CMDA).

The first step is a content analysis of the selected magazine covers. This analysis focuses on both visual and textual elements. Visual components such as color schemes, images, typography, and layout are analyzed for their symbolic meanings and emotional effects. These visual elements are examined alongside the textual content, including headlines, captions, and the overall themes presented. The aim is to understand the semantic content, rhetorical strategies, and power dynamics conveyed through both visual and verbal messages. According to Krippendorff (2019), content analysis offers a systematic way to interpret media texts, revealing underlying meanings and political discourses.

Next, thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns and themes within the magazine covers. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize that thematic analysis helps uncover how media texts frame social issues, particularly in terms of power dynamics and justice. This method helps identify how gender roles, power relations, and justice are framed in relation to the sexual harassment discussion.

Finally, CMDA is applied to examine how visual and verbal elements work together to construct meaning. This approach investigates how these elements complement, contradict, or reinforce each other in presenting narratives (Naples, 2003). Hall (1980) argues that comparing these elements can uncover cultural and ideological differences in media representations. The goal of this study is to explore how magazine covers use visual and textual resources to construct socio-political narratives, particularly around issues of gender, power, and justice.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Analysis of Nonverbal Modes

This section explores how color, facial expressions, gestures, and typography are used on magazine covers to convey meaning and shape the reader's understanding of gender, power, and societal issues.

#### 4.1.1 Color Symbolism in Visual Representations

Color is an important tool in conveying emotions, symbolism, and cultural meanings. It helps to emphasize key themes and engage the viewer emotionally.

Dark colors, especially black, are used to draw attention to central figures and intensify emotional expressions. Black, in particular, symbolizes suppression and silence, especially in the context of sexual violence. In Examples 1, 2, and 5, black highlights isolation, haunting memories, and societal hostility, creating empathy for the figures depicted. Gray is another dark color used to suggest despair and inner turmoil. Example 2 uses gray to highlight the eyes of a figure, symbolizing emotional distress related to sexual harassment. In Example 4, gray evokes a sense of faded memories and historical context, implying the ongoing impact of past events. Brown, seen in Example 3, represents a tarnished reputation, connecting to the cultural expression "one's name is mud," which further enriches the narrative. Example 3 combines gray, blue, and black in a symbolic backdrop of the Supreme Court, suggesting the ideological divide in American politics. These colors represent uncertainty and conflict, with the dark clouds looming over judicial symbols indicating potential turbulence in the political and judicial system. This design critiques Kavanaugh's credibility and the integrity of the institution amidst political tensions.

Light colors, particularly red, carry different meanings depending on the context. Example 2 uses scarlet red to symbolize shame and societal stigma, echoing *The Scarlet Letter*, where red marks the character's sin and silence. In Example 4, red is used to represent anger and societal condemnation, aligning with the calls for change in the MeToo movement. White, used unconventionally in Example 2, is placed on the face of a figure instead of the usual skin tones. This choice emphasizes vulnerability and fear, similar to traditional Japanese theater, where pale skin symbolizes fragility and subjugation, reflecting the power dynamics in society.

In summary, the use of dark and light colors, as well as the combination of hues, helps communicate powerful themes of silencing, suppression, and societal critique, inviting the viewer to engage critically with the visual narratives.

#### 4.1.2 Facial and Gestural Designs

Facial expressions, gestures, and body language are essential for conveying emotions and social dynamics. This section looks at how these visual elements reflect editorial attitudes and gender dynamics.

In Examples 1 and 2, the female figures are depicted abstractly. This abstraction emphasizes the universality of their experiences as survivors of sexual violence, protecting their identities while symbolizing the emotional

weight of their stories. This approach aligns with societal norms that prioritize victim anonymity to avoid further harm. In contrast, Examples 3, 4, and 5 depict Kavanaugh realistically. His facial expressions and body language are used to critique his credibility and examine his role in the discourse event. Realism is employed to directly address the controversy surrounding Kavanaugh, showcasing his emotions and actions in the public eye.

The mouth and hands hold significant symbolic meaning in these images. In Example 1, the phrase "I tried to yell for help" across the figure's mouth symbolizes the struggle of victims to be heard in the face of societal silencing. The use of red hands in Example 2 references *The Scarlet Letter*, emphasizing the stigma and suppression faced by women who speak out. These visual elements evoke empathy and challenge viewers to reflect on power dynamics and the silencing of marginalized voices. In Examples 3, 4, and 5, Kavanaugh's facial expressions and hand gestures convey his emotional state and the credibility of his testimony. These gestures either validate or undermine his defense, reinforcing the magazine's editorial stance on his fitness for the Supreme Court.

Eye contact is a powerful tool for engaging viewers and conveying the emotional weight of a situation. In Example 3, Kavanaugh's direct eye contact projects assertiveness and defiance, aligning with the narrative of his confidence in facing public scrutiny. On the other hand, Example 1 avoids eye contact by depicting closed eyes, symbolizing introspection, vulnerability, and inner strength. This artistic choice reflects the emotional complexity of the survivor's experience and highlights their resilience in the face of trauma.

In summary, facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact play significant roles in communicating the emotional depth and societal dynamics of the figures depicted.

#### 4.1.3 Structural Meanings in Typography

Typography plays an important role in conveying gendered perspectives and power dynamics. The way text is arranged and styled can reveal hierarchical relationships and social commentary.

Typography in Examples 3 and 4 helps frame the relationships between figures and institutions. Example 3 places Kavanaugh against the backdrop of the Supreme Court, positioning him as a figure of power while questioning his influence on the judicial system. The spatial relationship between Kavanaugh and the court symbolizes the critique of political influence over judicial independence, reflecting concerns about accountability and credibility in leadership. Example 4 uses recontextualization by placing Kavanaugh next to an image of a historical judge. This visual strategy emphasizes the cyclical nature of societal attitudes towards sexual harassment and accountability. It invites the viewer to reflect on the persistence of gender inequality and the ongoing struggle for justice across generations.

The arrangement of visual and textual elements on the cover also shapes the message. Example 5 uses a layout that divides the verbal and nonverbal elements, reinforcing the magazine's argument about societal change. This separation helps emphasize the cover's call for action, encouraging viewers to become part of the conversation. In Example 2, the centralized image draws immediate attention to the figure, intensifying the emotional impact and urgency of the message. This strategic placement ensures that the figure's significance is not overlooked, reinforcing the cover's communicative power.

The positioning of figures within the layout also conveys meaning. Example 1 uses a bottom-up perspective to elevate the female figure, symbolizing empowerment and resilience. Example 4, in contrast, minimizes Kavanaugh's image by placing him in a corner, which reduces his stature and reinforces the magazine's critical stance on his credibility.

In conclusion, typography and spatial arrangements contribute significantly to the cover's overall message. The way text and images are placed within the layout helps frame power dynamics, historical reflection, and the rhetorical impact of the cover, encouraging the viewer to reflect on broader themes of justice, gender, and societal change.

#### 4.2 Analysis of Verbal Modes

The verbal elements on magazine covers play a crucial role in shaping the story and guiding the reader's interpretation. By analyzing the language used—its content, style, and form—we can better understand how these covers contribute to the broader message, especially in relation to the visual elements.

##### 4.2.1 Strategic Absence and Symbolic Representation

One key feature of Example 2 is the complete absence of verbal content, aside from the title. This is unusual for magazine covers, where text usually accompanies the image. The decision to leave out captions and extra text allows the image to speak for itself, creating a strong visual impact.

The figure in the image has their mouth covered, symbolizing silencing and the denial of voice. By not adding any text, the magazine emphasizes this theme of suppression. The image's colors, the facial expression, and the figure's central placement all reinforce the idea of power dynamics and societal silencing. This absence of text is not a flaw but a deliberate choice that adds depth to the message, allowing the image to take on a symbolic meaning. The lack of verbal elements directs the viewer to reflect on the inequalities and power struggles at play.

#### 4.2.2 Textual Precision and Potency

In Example 1, the caption "HER LASTING IMPACT" carries a strong message. The word "lasting" is important because it suggests that the effects of the event are not temporary; they will continue into the future, signaling ongoing change. This choice makes it clear that the story is part of a larger, evolving social movement, rather than a single isolated event.

The use of "impact" instead of "influence" is a powerful choice. "Impact" evokes a strong, physical force, making the message feel more urgent and significant. It suggests a forceful change, one that resonates deeply with the events depicted. Additionally, the use of "HER" puts the focus on gender, highlighting the role of women and calling attention to issues of gender inequality. This choice underscores the broader societal context in which women's voices have often been ignored, while also elevating the figure's courage and importance.

By not naming the female figure, the magazine adds an element of universality. The decision to keep her identity private not only enhances her symbolic significance but also underscores the idea that her story represents many others. This aligns with the magazine's goal of shedding light on underrepresented voices and reinforcing the importance of these overlooked narratives.

#### 4.2.3 Direct Address and Rhetorical Stances

Direct address is a common technique used in magazines to engage readers and provoke emotional responses. Examples 3, 4, and 5 all use direct address in different ways to shape the reader's engagement with the story.

In Example 3, the question "credibly accused?" invites the reader to critically consider the allegations against Kavanaugh. This question may seem neutral, but it subtly casts doubt on the credibility of the accusations, which aligns with Kavanaugh's defense. The phrasing encourages the reader to question Ford's story, making them reflect on the issue of credibility from a specific perspective.

Example 4 uses the present perfect tense, saying "has made an impact." This wording emphasizes that the event's effects are ongoing, connecting it to broader social movements like MeToo. The use of this tense suggests that the implications of the hearings continue to influence the conversation around sexual violence, showing that the story is part of a larger, lasting societal change.

In Example 5, the statement "WE CAN DO BETTER" serves as a call to action. The use of "WE" brings the reader into the message, encouraging them to take ownership of the responsibility for societal change. The inclusivity of "WE" invites the audience to join in the effort for improvement, making the call for action feel personal and urgent.

#### 4.2.4 Stylistic Considerations and Visual Cohesion

The style of text, including font color and typography, plays an important role in how the message is communicated visually. For example, bold white fonts on dark backgrounds create strong contrast, making the text stand out and catch the reader's attention. The boldness of the font complements the assertiveness of the message, reinforcing the urgency and importance of the statement. In addition, the color of the text is often aligned with the colors in the image, creating a sense of visual harmony between the words and the pictures. The font choices, typically square and direct, suggest clarity and strength, reinforcing the overall message of the cover.

Interestingly, the lack of punctuation in Examples 1, 4, and 5 adds to the straightforward nature of the message. The absence of punctuation reflects the simplicity and assertiveness of the statements, making them feel direct and impactful. This is in line with typical magazine cover conventions, where short, powerful messages are prioritized over lengthy, complex sentences. These stylistic elements, combined with the visual content, create a cohesive, compelling argument. The design choices work together to ensure that the cover not only grabs attention but also delivers its message in a clear and forceful way.

The analysis of verbal modes on magazine covers reveals the sophisticated strategies used to convey messages about gender, power, and justice. Through careful language choices, rhetorical strategies, and stylistic elements, these covers shape public discourse. The interaction between visual and verbal semiotics creates a powerful and coherent narrative that influences how readers perceive and understand key socio-cultural issues. This analysis highlights how both text and image work together to communicate complex messages and provoke thoughtful reflection on important societal issues.

### 4.3 Discussion

This study introduces two conceptual models that help explain how magazine covers, as multimodal texts, influence public perceptions and contribute to long-term societal change. These models—The Interconnected Model of Multimodal Argument Construction and The Four-Quadrant Impact Model—offer frameworks for analyzing how visual and textual elements interact to shape narratives and societal understanding.

The Interconnected Model of Multimodal Argument Construction (Figure 1) explores how different modes—such as images, text, and color—work together to create meaning. This model focuses on the interplay between visual and textual elements, showing how their combination shapes societal perceptions. For example, consider a magazine cover of Christine Blasey Ford, where her calm, composed posture and muted colors are accompanied by a headline that emphasizes her credibility as a survivor. This combination of visual and textual cues constructs a narrative that aligns with societal expectations of survivors being both vulnerable and credible. In contrast, Brett Kavanaugh was often depicted in bold colors and aggressive postures, with text framing him as a victim of political attack. This visual contrast between Ford and Kavanaugh illustrates how magazine covers use multimodal elements to construct opposing narratives of victimhood and credibility. The model emphasizes how these elements interact to reinforce or challenge societal norms about gender, power, and victimhood. By analyzing these combinations, the model provides insight into how magazine covers shape public understanding of gendered power dynamics.

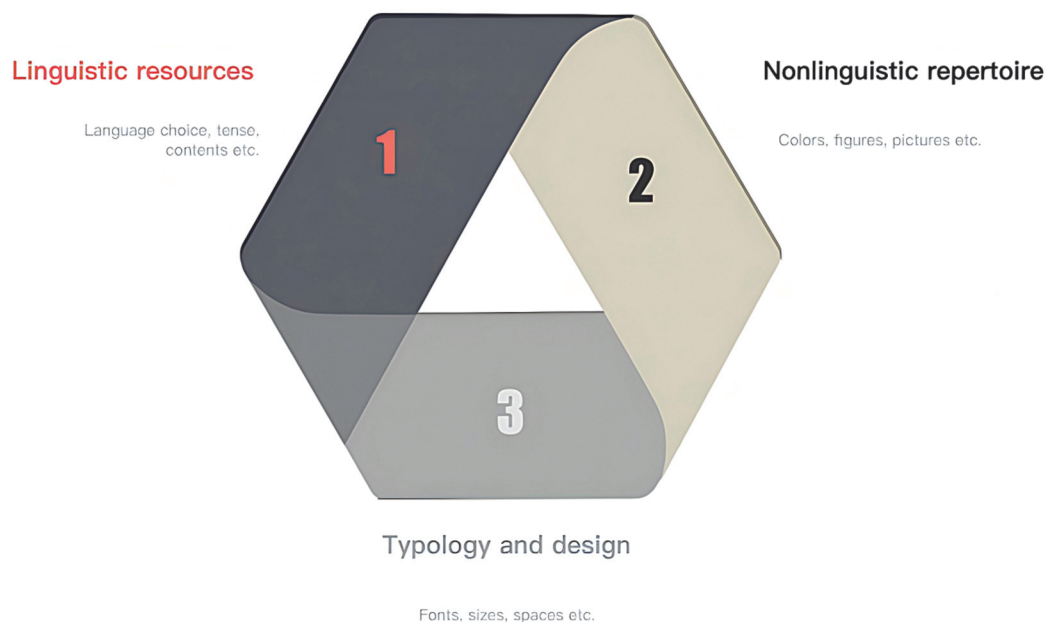


Figure 1. Interconnected Model of Multimodal Argument Construction on Magazine Covers

The Four-Quadrant Impact Model (Figure 2) builds on the first model by introducing temporal and spatial dimensions to media analysis. This model categorizes the influence of media into four areas: short-term versus long-term impacts and local versus global contexts. It helps us understand that media representations, while shaping public opinion in the short term, also contribute to long-term shifts in societal norms.

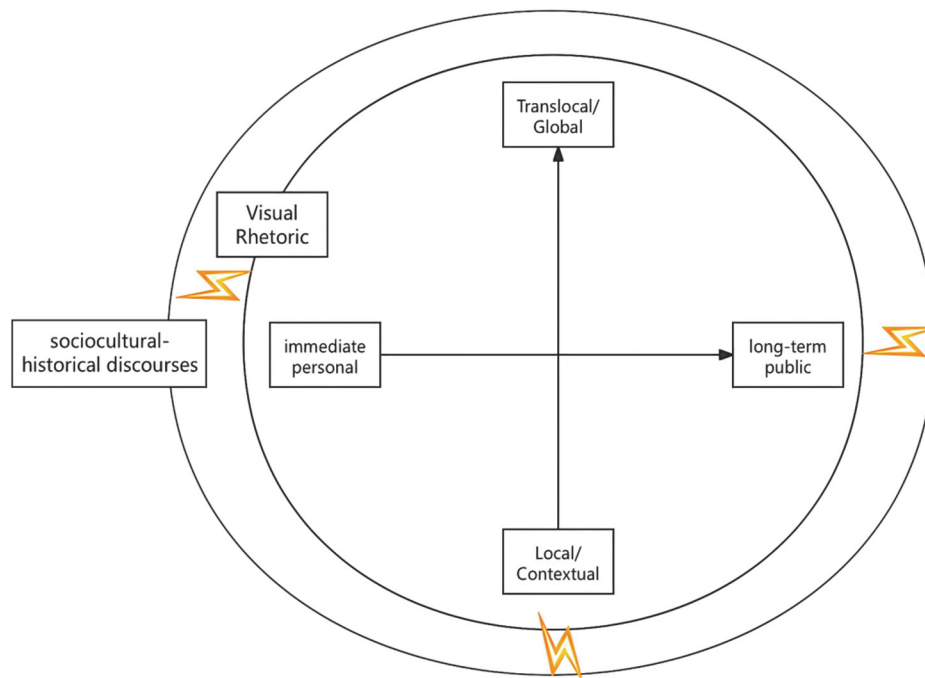


Figure 2. Four-quadrant Impact Model of Magazine Cover's Visual Argument

In the case of the Kavanaugh hearings, magazine covers had an immediate impact on public opinion. Kavanaugh's emotional testimony was often portrayed as authentic and justified, influencing how people viewed him at the time. However, the longer-term impact of these representations contributed to a broader cultural shift, reinforcing skepticism about sexual violence accusations. By framing Kavanaugh as a victim of political persecution, the media inadvertently challenged the legitimacy of sexual violence claims, which could shape how similar cases are viewed in the future (Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023).

The Four-Quadrant Impact Model also highlights the intersection and interdependence of local and global contexts. While the Kavanaugh hearings were a specific U.S. political event, the narratives constructed through the media have global implications. For example, Ford's portrayal as a victim confronting institutional barriers mirrors the experiences of survivors worldwide, linking local events to the global #MeToo movement. This model shows how media representations can simultaneously influence local perceptions and resonate on a global scale, shaping the broader conversation around gender inequality and sexual violence (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019; Jackson et al., 2020).

Together, these two models provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how magazine covers, as multimodal texts, reflect and influence public understanding of gender, power, and justice. The Interconnected Model reveals how visual and textual elements work together to create narratives that shape societal perceptions, while the Four-Quadrant Impact Model emphasizes the long-term effects and global reach of these representations. Both models demonstrate that media representations not only affect immediate public opinion but also contribute to ongoing cultural shifts and global movements.

## 5. Implication and Conclusion

This study significantly advances the fields of media, communication, and multimodal analysis by investigating how magazine covers construct gendered power dynamics, credibility, and victimhood, particularly in the context of the Brett Kavanaugh hearings and the broader MeToo movement. Through the application of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis and social semiotics, this research reveals how visual and textual elements interact to shape public perceptions of gender inequality, sexual violence, and institutional accountability. By examining these elements, the study underscores that media representations are not neutral but actively construct and reinforce societal narratives that either challenge or uphold existing power structures.



One of the key contributions of this research is its shift from simply identifying the meanings conveyed through media representations to analyzing why specific semiotic choices are made. The study highlights how magazine covers function as ideological texts that do more than report events—they shape cultural understandings and reinforce or question dominant social norms. For instance, by portraying Christine Blasey Ford in a vulnerable yet composed manner and Brett Kavanaugh in an aggressive, defiant posture, the media reinforced culturally ingrained assumptions about credibility, victimhood, and power. These visual choices contribute to broader societal conversations about how survivors of sexual violence are perceived, and whether institutions are held accountable for perpetuating such inequalities. This nuanced approach deepens our understanding of how media representations reflect and shape the ongoing discourse surrounding gender and power, particularly in the MeToo era.

The practical implications of this study are also significant. Given the power of media to shape public opinion, editors, journalists, and designers hold a social responsibility to consider the impact of their portrayals on societal attitudes. This research calls for a shift toward more socially conscious storytelling, urging media professionals to prioritize marginalized voices and advocate for systemic change. In light of ongoing global issues like gender inequality and sexual violence, media practitioners must be mindful of how their portrayals either challenge or perpetuate harmful gendered narratives. A critical approach to media representation can encourage accountability and support a more just, equitable societal dialogue. To this end, media professionals can adopt specific editorial practices to combat gender bias. For instance, they should ensure diverse and realistic portrayals of both victims and perpetrators, avoiding stereotypes that sensationalize or trivialize issues of gendered violence. Visual rhetoric, too, can be re-evaluated to prevent victim-blaming or passive representations of survivors. By actively choosing to empower survivors in their portrayals, media outlets can help reshape the narrative surrounding gender and power. Additionally, providing context to high-profile events, rather than oversimplifying or sensationalizing them, can help foster a more nuanced public understanding. These editorial practices not only combat bias but also contribute to the ongoing transformation of media's role in shaping societal narratives.

While this study makes important contributions, it also has notable limitations that warrant further exploration. Its focus on U.S.-based magazine covers could be critiqued for lacking a global perspective. A broader, cross-cultural analysis could reveal how different regions construct gendered power dynamics, offering insights into both shared and divergent media trends. Furthermore, feminist multimodal analysis, while valuable, may overlook other intersecting factors such as race, class, and nationality, which also shape media representations of gendered violence. Future research could incorporate intersectional frameworks to explore how gendered power dynamics are portrayed across various social identities. The selection of mainstream U.S. magazines for analysis may also introduce biases, as these outlets often reflect dominant cultural narratives, potentially excluding alternative or marginalized perspectives. Expanding the sample to include independent or global media could provide a fuller picture of how gendered narratives are constructed. Additionally, with the growing influence of digital platforms and social media in shaping public discourse, future studies should explore how online multimodal practices—such as memes, hashtags, and viral content—reinforce or challenge gendered power structures. These digital spaces offer new opportunities for understanding the evolution of gendered media representations and their impact on public opinion. Addressing these limitations and expanding the scope of analysis will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how media narratives both reflect and shape global gender dynamics.

In conclusion, this research enriches the theoretical landscape of media and communication studies by revealing how media representations not only reflect but actively shape cultural narratives surrounding power, gender, and justice. The study underscores the importance of linking these findings to broader societal movements, including global struggles for gender justice, intersectional feminism, and anti-patriarchal activism. Beyond MeToo, these insights resonate with wider efforts to dismantle oppressive structures across diverse contexts, such as the global fight against gender-based violence, racial inequality, and economic injustice. The media's role in shaping these narratives cannot be overstated; it actively influences public perceptions and societal attitudes towards marginalized groups, both in local and global contexts.

By refining multimodal methodologies and expanding the scope of analysis, future research can continue to explore the complex dynamics of visual argumentation and semiotic practices. This broader scope will not only deepen our understanding of the media's role in reinforcing or challenging patriarchal structures but also contribute to ongoing global movements for justice and equality. Through these efforts, we can foster a more inclusive, critical media environment that promotes accountability, amplifies marginalized voices, and supports systemic change in the fight for gender equality and justice worldwide.

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## Appendices

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### Example 1

(Source: <https://time.com/5521722/time-christine-blasey-ford-cover-of-the-year/>)



Example 2

(Source: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cover-story/cover-story-2018-10-08>)



Example 3

(Source:[https://www.amazon.com/Week-Magazine-September-Credible-Accused/dp/B07HLFCNN7detailBullets\\_feature\\_div](https://www.amazon.com/Week-Magazine-September-Credible-Accused/dp/B07HLFCNN7detailBullets_feature_div))





Example 4

(Source: <https://www.mollyball.com/molly-ball>; <https://time.com/magazine/us/5401619/october-1st-2018-vol-192-no-13-u-s/>)



Example 5

(Source: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/issues/2018-10-19>;  
<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/injudicious>)

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