# Means of representing a male assaulter and a female victim in media texts

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The article deals with lexical means of representation of male assaulter and female victim images in English-language media texts covering sexual scandals. The sexual scandal stems from gender conflict, which is based on relations of power and subordination, and on the violation of social norms. A man is the subject of power, while a woman is the object of power. To create a vivid contrast between these roles, journalists use a certain set of lexical, grammatical and word-formation models, constructing two basic gender roles: "male rapist" and "female victim". The analysis of the used lexical means and word-formation models makes it possible not only to identify the nature of the evaluation attributed to these gender roles but also to trace their development and further breaking, which suggests the implementation of a pragmatic setting of texts about sexual scandals—breaking down outdated ideas about gender roles.

**Keywords**: sexual scandal; mass media; category of evaluation; lexical means; word-formation models; gender roles; stereotypes.

# Средства репрезентации образа мужчины-насильника и женщины-жертвы в медийных текстах

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В статье рассматриваются лексические средства репрезентации образа мужчины-насильника и женщины-жертвы в англоязычных медийных текстах, освещающих сексуальный скандал. В основе сексуального скандала лежит гендерный конфликт, который строится на отношениях власти и подчинения, и на нарушении социальных норм. В роли субъекта власти выступает мужчина, а объектом власти — женщина. Для того, чтобы создать яркий контраст между данными ролями, журналисты используют определённый набор лексических, грамматических и словообразовательных моделей, конструируя две базовые гендерные роли: «мужчина-насильник» и «женщина-жертва». Анализ используемых лексических средств и словообразовательных моделей даёт возможность не только выявить характер оценки, приписываемой данным гендерным ролям, но и проследить их развитие и дальнейший слом, что позволяет говорить о реализации прагматической установки текстов о сексуальных скандалах — слом изживших себя представлений о гендерных ролях.

**Keywords**: сексуальный скандал; СМИ; категория оценки; лексические приёмы; словообразовательные модели; гендерные роли; стереотипы.

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## INTRODUCTION

Today, numerous sexual scandals are widely covered in the world press. There are always two sides: the male offender and the female victim. The purpose of texts about sexual harassment is not only to tell about the event, but also to break outdated traditional values.


## LITERATURE REVIEW

Evaluation is the most important aspect of human communication and cognitive activity. Russian and foreign scholars (Arutiunova, Vol'f, Teliia, Kozhin, Matveev, Bondarenko, Wierzbicka) studied the notion of evaluation. Many of them explored ways of forming the evaluative meaning on different language levels and the functioning of such meaning.

It should be noted that despite the sufficient research in this field, there is no generally accepted understanding of the term "category of evaluation" in linguistics. Thus, for example, Elena Cherkas understands it as a socially fixed, socially established attitude of native speakers to some extra-linguistic object, understood in the broad sense as a person, subject, phenomenon of reality (Cherkas 1999). Veronika Teliia notes that evaluation is based on unwritten but ulterior norms of the value world view established in a given language group and on this group's life philosophy (Teliia 1992, 167). Under the linguistic category of evaluation, Elena Bazhenova understands a set of multilevel linguistic units united by evaluative semantics and expressing a positive or negative attitude of the author to the content of speech (Bazhenova 2003, 139). Nelli Il'ina, in turn, refers the category of evaluation to the mental act, which is the result of human interaction with the surrounding reality. The subject of evaluation assesses the ability of an object to satisfy their needs, desires, interests or goals. Having found an object useful, the subject makes an assessment (Il'ina 1984, 16).

It should also be mentioned that the analysis of the works of foreign linguists causes some difficulties as there are differences in terminology. Thus, a variety of terms are used to name one phenomenon, namely "evaluation", "tenor", "attitude", "metadiscourse", "stance", "appraisal" (Martin, White 2005).

English linguists Susan Hunston and Geoff Thompson define evaluation as an expression of the text sender's attitude or as a feeling caused by the content or message of the text's author (Hunston and Thompson 2000). For J. Martin and P. White, evaluation is not only a means of transmitting the speaker's attitude to what is happening but also a means of indirectly influencing the evaluation and the position of the recipient of the text to confirm the speaker's evaluation (Martin, White 2005).

It is worth noting that all of the above definitions of the category of evaluation have a number of similar components, suggesting that there is a clear structure for this category. According to Elena Vol'f, the structure of the category of evaluation is an evaluation framework that includes three basic elements: the subject of evaluation, the object of evaluation, and the evaluative statement (Vol'f 1985, 6).

Since evaluation is a multifaceted phenomenon involving many different aspects, there are different approaches to its classification. The classification proposed by Nina Arutiunova is the most widespread. Its essence is in the differentiation between general and private evaluative meanings (Arutiunova 1988).

Nevertheless, most often the evaluation is analyzed from the qualitative point of view, i.e. the ways of its implementation on all language levels (Bolotnova, Babenko, Valgina, Galperin) or a complex linguistic analysis on all levels is proposed (Sergeeva 2003). However, it should be remembered that it is the lexical layer that is the core of the semantic evaluation category, because on the lexical level the evaluative component is expressed not only through the denotative and connotative meanings of the

word, but also through the occasional meaning. It is also important to point out that under the influence of context the same objective characteristics can give grounds for a variety of evaluations up to the opposite ones (Khoroshilova 2010). Only the complex analysis of the evaluative language means helps understand the meaning of the text, its main ideas, highlight the system of images and ideostyle features (Stepanova, Kuryanovich 2017, 21). Such analysis was used in this study of articles on sexual harassment.

Thus, the category of evaluation is a universal category that expresses the speaker/writer's attitude towards the object of reality.

## MATERIAL

We examined articles about sexual harassment published in the authoritative American publications such as *Time*, *New Yorker*, *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*. When selecting material for the study, three criteria were of paramount importance to us: the novelty of sexual harassment (recent cases), the uniqueness of the consequences (Harvey Weinstein is the only one whose career and personal life were destroyed after allegations of sexual harassment) and the close attention of the media. Thus, the case of sexual harassment perpetrated by Harvey Weinstein was perfectly in line with the stated requirements. We chose publications whose journalists conducted their thorough investigation of allegations against Harvey Weinstein.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Capturing the image of a male assaulter

The sexual scandal is based on power relations. The German sociologist M. Weber interprets power as the ability of one individual, under certain social conditions, to carry out his own will against the resistance of another individual (Weber 2018). In all texts, Weinstein is presented as one of the most powerful people both in Hollywood and outside of it. In texts, this is conveyed through the use of vocabulary that means power:

> Hollywood's <u>most influential producer;</u>
> <u>powerful bully;</u>
> the <u>most powerful</u> figure in media.

It is noteworthy that the image of a male rapist is built on the contraposition. On the one hand, he is an overbearing male philanthropist, and on the other — a predator. To create this contrast, all texts about this sexual scandal begin with a list of Weinstein's numerous achievements in various areas of life:

> He co-founded the production-and-distribution companies Miramax and the Weinstein Company, helping to reinvent the model for independent films;
> a longtime Democratic donor;
> hosted a fund-raiser for Hillary Clinton;
> was made a Commander of the British Empire;
> won six Oscars;

*organizing a foundation for women directors at the University of Southern California*.

The word-formation and lexical level in the texts are closely related, as they complement and reinforce each other. The authors emphasize the negative meaning of the word *power*, adding to it the suffix *-ful*, which in English means "the presence of some quality," in this case, power:

*at the hands of a <u>powerful bully</u>;*
*grow <u>more powerful</u>;*
*<u>powerful</u> offenders.*

On the grammatical level, we notice the frequent use of the active voice. A man dominates, he actively interacts with the world, has a direct influence on it. This is why all his actions are described exclusively with the active voice. In the texts, we find the following examples:

*<u>he co-founded</u> the production and distribution companies Miramax and the Weinstein Company;*
*<u>he has exercised</u> his influence as a prolific fund-raiser for Democratic Party;*
*<u>he won</u> six Oscars.*

Moreover, as mentioned above, the authors of texts on sexual scandals seek to emphasize that all the guilt for harassment falls on the man because he is the abuser. At the syntactic level, this idea is transmitted through the use of the active voice when describing the illegal actions of a sexual nature that a man commits to a woman. Here are some examples:

*<u>He pulled</u> her skirt up, <u>forced</u> her legs apart, and <u>performed</u> oral sex on her.*
*<u>He started</u> massaging my shoulders and then <u>tried</u> to get more physical.*
*<u>He began</u> staring at her breasts.*

Speaking specifically about the language means that the author uses to create the image of a powerful man, the most frequent is hyperbole. This stylistic device makes it possible to build up a stronger impression than it is in reality. Anything related in any way to Harvey Weinstein is used with *very* and *most*. Let's consider a few examples:

*Weinstein enjoyed a position as one of <u>the most powerful figures in media</u>, a skilled operator whose <u>connections stretched from Capitol Hill to Wall Street</u> and whose <u>sense of entitlement knew no bounds</u>.*

In this passage, Harvey Weinstein appears before us practically as God himself. He is the most powerful man in the media industry. His authority is unlimited, and he has no intention of reckoning with anyone.
Let's cite one more typical example:

*...he has been thanked more than almost anyone else in movie history, ranking just after Steven Spielberg and right before God.*

The authors emphasize Weinstein's omnipotence, putting his name on par with Stephen Spielberg and God.

Let us also consider how the negative image of a male rapist is created. Here we see the use of an evaluative metaphor. It helps create a bright, visible image that influences the reader's imagination, subconscious and emotions in a way that is beneficial to the journalist or the publication.

One of the most vivid evaluative metaphors, which is present in all the texts we have examined, is the word *predator*. It is used to name men accused of sexual harassment. Here are some examples of the use of this word:

*successive <u>predator</u>;*
*the only sexual <u>predator;</u>*
*what Weinstein's downfall means for other <u>predators</u>.*

In this way, the authors endow Weinstein with all the qualities of predatory animals who hunt their victims and then "kill" them.

Epithets, which are used by the authors to create a negative image of a male rapist, act as a frequent feature in media texts. They can be conventionally divided into two groups.

The first group aims to create an image of an unpleasant producer. The texts always emphasize the producer's large physique, which again works to create the image of a strong and powerful man against a weak woman. He is strong not only because he has great power, but also physically. The following expressions are used to describe Weinstein's physique: *a <u>heavyset</u> producer*; *a <u>big fat</u> man*; *a <u>big</u> guy*.

The second group concerns the evaluation of his actions:

*began to speak out about the <u>inappropriate</u>, <u>abusive</u> and in some cases <u>illegal</u> behavior they've faced.*

In this example, the author uses adjectives such as *inappropriate* and *abusive* to evaluate Harvey Weinstein's behavior. In this way, the reader understands that a well-known Hollywood producer had committed inappropriate actions against women, actions that did not meet the standards of that society.

In the above examples, such epithets implement a certain pragmatic arrangement. The author tries to show that Weinstein's actions were indecent, affecting the reader emotionally. This technique also works best to create a negative image of a male rapist and allows the reader to form a strong sense of disgust with the producer.

However, it should be stressed that although sex has been a taboo topic for centuries, it is generally not discussed out loud, let alone described in newspapers and magazines, the authors of the discussed articles on sexual harassment always directly mention all the actions that Weinstein had committed against women, and rarely use euphemisms:

*Weinstein took his penis out of his pants and pulled her head down onto it, performed oral sex on her, groped her breasts, he pulled her skirt up, forced her legs apart, and performed oral sex.*

Because authors take a direct approach and call things by their real names, readers have a strong aversion to the man who commits such acts against women. Moreover, in order to not only increase the feeling of disgust but also to further emphasize the image of a monster and a predator who uses his privileged position to satisfy his selfish desires, journalists always emphasize that the women clearly and repeatedly said "no":

*<u>said no</u>, a lot of ways, <u>a lot of times</u>;*

*I must have <u>said no a thousand times</u>;*
*she <u>said no</u>;*
*Gutierrez <u>says no repeatedly</u>.*

Thus, all active actions are attributed to the aggressor and not to the victimized woman. This allows highlighting the fact that the blame for this kind of illegal action lies only with the man.

## Capturing the image of a female victim

The gender image of a "female prey" is built with the help of vocabulary, the semantics of which conveys submissiveness to the will of another person, offering oneself. And first of all, the image of a woman comes close to the image of a prostitute, easily accessible woman. In other words, we are talking about a stereotype that the only value of a woman is her external features, which become the object of consumption. Here are some examples:

*women have been nominated for playing a <u>prostitute</u>;*
*playing an old <u>prostitute</u>;*
*endless <u>obsession with hookers</u>;*
*I am not a <u>whore</u>;*
*he acted as if I was a <u>prostitute</u>.*

Further, it is important to stress that unlike other texts on various types of violence against women, texts on sexual harassment include specific names of victims, ranging from world-famous stars (*Gwyneth Paltrow*, *Alyssa Milano*, *Rose McGowan*) to ordinary employees (*Emily Nestor*). Thus, they cease to be "one of many." The focus is not on the male rapist, but on the victims of his crimes. The reader understands that the victim is not an abstract woman, but a real person.

Moreover, in the examined texts related to Harvey Weinstein, we always find a brief "biography" of the victim: age, profession, achievements, relation to Weinstein. All of which allows us to get a general picture of the victim. Let's look at how readers are introduced to one of Weinstein's victims, Lucia Stoller:

*was approached by Weinstein at Cipriani Upstairs, in 2004, the summer before her senior year at Middlebury College. Now is marketing consultant, wanted to be an actress.*

From these two lines, the reader gets a portrait of a young girl who is about to graduate from college and dreams of becoming an actress. However, the fatal meeting with a Hollywood producer in a club in New York City broke her dream, and now she works in marketing.

This makes it possible to bring the reader and the victim closer together, to make the reader not only empathize and sympathize with the "young innocent victim", but also to show that the victims are ordinary women from various social backgrounds, nationalities, ages and educational levels. They live, make plans, cherish their dreams for the future, but at some point in their lives, there appears a man who ruins everything.

One of the most striking methods of creating the image of a female victim is a hyperbolic metaphor. The hyperbolic metaphor is one of the most significant and impressive ways to express implicit information in texts about sexual scandals. For example:

*"If Harvey were to discover my identity, I'm worried that he could <u>ruin my life</u>," one former employee told me.*

In this example, the author quotes a victim of sexual harassment explaining the reason for her silence by using the hyperbolic metaphor *ruin one's life*. This metaphor allows creating bright images in the mind of the recipient: a weak and dependent woman and a strong and powerful man, who can destroy his victim with one motion.

The next technique is to use phraseological expressions as an inexhaustible source of expressive means.

*I remember <u>getting chills down my spine</u> just looking at him.*

In the above example, the author uses an expression *to get chills down somebody's spine*. With this phrase, the author conveys the feelings of horror and fear that shackled the girl when she once again saw the man who had raped her.

*But, looking back, I am a fucking fool. And I am still trying <u>to come to grips with</u> what happened.*

In this example, the woman talks about an act of violence that took place many years ago. And by using the phrase *to come to grips with something*, the author stresses that the violence has no time limit and the abused person has to live with it all their life and is trying to cope with the trauma. This phraseology gives the phrase a very vivid emotional coloring and certainly makes the reader feel sympathy for the woman who has been abused.

It should also be noted that euphemisms (e.g.: *incident*, *experience*) are quite common in the analyzed texts. But euphemisms (instead of *rape*) are used only in relation to the experience of women. It is important to stress, however, that Weinstein's actions are not euphemized. When his actions are described, everything is reported as it was, the specifics of what he did are listed to show why he is such a monster and how disgusting it is. This contrast is very important, because euphemisms have a hidden value — they name an emotional phenomenon, but hide it. In an attempt to hide things, there is an assessment of the phenomenon as negative, taboo. '*Rape'* names an emotional phenomenon, but without evaluation. '*Incident'* in the context softens the emotion, but contains evaluation: *and that the <u>incidents</u> had a significant impact on her*; *a shared <u>experience</u>*. The use of euphemisms helps reduce the aggressive orientation of the text, while maintaining a negative assessment.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that the subordinate position of a woman in relation to a man is transmitted not only through vocabulary, but also through word formation. When describing a man the lexemes *power*, *powerful* are used in texts, and the suffix *-ful* in English means presence of some quality, in this case 'power', while in relation to women we note the use of the lexemes *powerless* (the suffix *-less* in English, on the contrary, means 'absence of any quality') and *overpowered* (*over-* means 'excess'), i.e. a woman is put in a dependent position through the excess of power of a man.

We see a similar contrast between gender roles at syntax level. In the description of a man's actions the actual voice dominates, whereas in the description of a woman's actions, on the contrary, the passive voice is prevalent. A woman experiences the pressure of a man:

*she <u>was invited</u> to a meeting with <u>Harvey Weinstein</u>;*
*actresses <u>have been propositioned</u> by <u>moguls</u>;*
*she <u>was harassed</u> by <u>him</u>;*
*Lucia Evans <u>was approached</u> by <u>Weinstein</u> at Cipriani Upstairs;*
*women <u>are told</u> that the playing field is fair.*

This includes using the structure *make somebody do something* about a woman, which also emphasizes her victimized status, because she is not able to account for her actions, but is influenced by a stronger personality: *made her feel overpowered*; *made her write down her telephone number*; *made me feel incredibly discouraged*; *made her hesitate*.

Using this structure shifts the focus from victim to rapist: he made me give him my phone number, he made me feel defeated, etc. In doing so, the authors stress that violence is the fault of the perpetrator and not of the victim.


## Change of gender roles

As mentioned above, there are always two main characters in the narratives about sexual harassment — a powerful male rapist and a weak female victim. They are based on contrast, on the basic historical concepts of gender roles. A man is strong and powerful, and a woman is weak and obedient. In our case, an interesting fact is that Harvey Weinstein embodies not a specific person, but the entire modern world that lives by men's laws:

> *degradation, marginalization of women, the men who make up all-male boards and executive leadership, who don't want to create discomfort by challenging sexism from friends or co-workers, who hire and mentor and promote younger men, who go silent on "women's issues".*

As for a woman, only her appearance and youth are still valued: *actress must be hot and fuckable, wear a bikini to work.*

The sexual scandal narrative shows us how these stereotypes break down. The texts about Harvey Weinstein's numerous exposés have given rise to the transformation of the gender image of a "female prey" into a "feminist woman" who fights all sorts of abuse: sexual harassment, discrimination in the workplace, misogyny, sexist images in the media. Next, we consider the "new" gender image in more detail and identify its characteristics.

First of all, we see vocabulary with the meaning of struggle. Women fight against the world's established order and ideas about what is good and what is bad. They declare war, and war is always a redistribution of spheres of influence:

> *battle against*;
> *fighting to be heard*;
> *combating sexual harassment and assault*;
> *revolution*;
> *wrestling with sense of shame*;
> *fight*;
> *fight-or-flight moment*;
> *growing fire*;
> *retaliation*;
> *time to be brave.*

The next most important component of the new gender role is sisterhood. Women join together in groups and speak with one voice. First of all, this is evidenced by the frequency of the pronoun *we* and the possessive pronoun *our*:

> <u>*we*</u> *can and should police criminal acts*;

*we all know the past can't be changed;*
*all we can do is change the future;*
*spoke our truth in our strongest voices.*

Women are joining forces around the world: *gathering strength*; *movement*; *Women's March*; *show unity*; *growing cacophony of female voices.*

When constructing the image of a "feminist woman" it is important to pay attention to such specific hypertext sign as the hashtag. Hashtags also act as a unifying component. And this is not accidental, because in the age of modern technology and media feminists are expanding their horizons of activity through hashtags: *#Metoo*; *#BalanceTonPorc*; *#YoTambien*; *#Ana_kaman*; *#askhermore.*

In the analyzed texts, hashtags perform a predicative classification function. Hashtags combine the stories of victims to help women speak out and find the support and assistance they need. Hashtags form a huge hypertext in social networks but also mark the scandal in the traditional media.

Thus, the above techniques are crucial, as they help women understand that they are not alone in their experiences, there are millions of similar stories, and a group of "sisters" around the world, ready to listen and support at any time.  The woman is no longer alone in a dark room with a producer, but hundreds of thousands of people like her are out there, ready to come to the rescue and punish the abuser.

Women become active figures, which is also reflected on the syntactic level:

*we are demanding our right;*
*we believe;*
*feminists have succeeded;*
*we find.*

On the word-formation level, the suffix of absence *-less* is replaced by the prefix *em-*, which gives women the desired power:

*look at how empowered women are now;*
*today's woman lives in a state of near-constant empowerment;*
*shares a similar vision for women's empowerment with #MeToo;*
*we don't lose out because more women are empowered.*

As a result, we see the destruction of the old world, its foundations, and perceptions. Men are deprived of their power, and their empires are nothing but ruins. A powerful male rapist becomes a victim. Here, the authors use vocabulary that means destruction and fall:

*rubble of Weinstein's empire;*
*downfall;*
*go down;*
*Weinstein's precipitous fall;*
*fallout;*
*be sidelined;*
*stunning ouster.*

In order to describe all the consequences of the "war" faced by Weinstein, the authors again resort to such a lexical means as a hyperbolic metaphor. This technique is also used to create contrast. First, with the help of hyperbolic metaphor the authors describe all the suffering that a man inflicts on

a woman, and then with the help of the same technique the authors describe the consequences that a man suffers from his illegal actions towards a woman — a boomerang effect:

> *Even before Weinstein's <u>season in purgatory</u> there have been other examples of power of tweets and Facebook shares.*

Here all the humiliation, layoffs and other things that Weinstein encountered after the accusations of harassment are compared with purgatory. That is, on the one hand, it is emphasized that he, as a man endowed with great power and influence, had to face serious trials. On the other hand, the indecent nature of his actions is reiterated, because all sinners go to purgatory.

Allusions to biblical texts are also widely used:

> *It felt like <u>David versus Goliath</u>.*

This example references the book of the Old Testament, where the battle of David against Goliath is described. The Philistines once attacked the Israeli lands. One of the Philistines proposed to the Jews that they should decide the outcome of the battle with combat. This Philistine was Goliath, a strong and fearful giant. No one dared to fight him. But one day a brave young man named David appeared, who dared to fight the insolent giant and eventually won. Obviously, the role of the fearsome self-confident giant is played by Harvey Weinstein, and the brave David is a woman who dares to report sexual harassment.

> *<u>Judgment Day</u>: Harvey Weinstein Scandal Could Finally Change Hollywood's Culture of Secrecy.*

Here we notice the reference to the Last Judgment, which God will hold over people at the end of time, where everyone will get what they deserve. All good and evil deeds will be weighed on the scales of public morality, and Harvey Weinstein should receive the deserved punishment for his actions.

## CONCLUSIONS

Texts about sexual scandals are built on the "*us* vs *them*" and "*power* vs *submission*" oppositions. A man acts as "*them in power*", while a woman acts as "*us in submission*". The female's subordination is of a forced nature, usually due to historical reasons.

It should also be stressed that the object of the evaluation and the language means used to describe it are inextricably linked. Thanks to this, the author manages to create a coherent image and show its development.

Moreover, texts on sexual scandals are aimed at breaking historical gender stereotypes about a man of power and a woman in submission. In the text, we see how the author gradually strips a man of his power, and weak women get a voice, thus changing places. Hence, a break in the gender paradigm occurs.

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