

## **Introduction**

On 5 October 2017, *The New York Times* (NYT) published the article *Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades*, in which the film producer was accused of sexual harassment by five women. The scandal grew to enormous proportions and at least another 150 women publicly accused him of sexual offences. Provoked by the Hollywood SH scandal, on 15 October 2017 the actress Alyssa Milano asked her Twitter followers to share personal stories of workplace abuse by using the hashtag #MeToo. #MeToo went viral and in the year following Milano's initial tweet the hashtag was used more than 19 million times (Pew Research Center, 2018). On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018, Hollywood celebrities announced the TIME'S UP movement - an initiative specifically dedicated to fight sexual assault, harassment, gender inequality and injustice in workplaces in the USA. A turning point in the two movements was the announcement of rape charges against Weinstein on 25 May 2018.

Sexual harassment is one of the many insulting workplace behaviors that may emerge out of hierarchical power relations and in most cases lead to sexual violence that results in the exclusion, humiliation and oppression of victims (Maclaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone, 2012). Compared to other types of abuse, sexual harassment has an explicitly sexual nature. It can be understood as unwelcome sexual verbal, non-verbal and physical conducts that make a person feel intimidated and perceive work environment as hostile (Cheung, Baum, & Hsueh, 2018). The phenomenon is widespread and persistent in many workplaces where women constitute the majority of victims and men a significant minority (Quick and McFadyen, 2017). The tolerance for sexual harassment increases significantly in male-dominated workplaces, particularly in those where precarity, competition and lack of clear workplace sexual harassment

policies exist, therefore providing the fertile ground for power abuse by authority figures through sexual coercion (Hennekam and Bennett, 2017).

News discourse can have can huge impact on public opinions, norms and understandings, and even policy setting (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016; Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1991). Journalists, or else ‘power elites’ who have both the freedom and the power to decide the agendas of public discussion, can determine not only the topical relevance and the amount of information but also “who is being publicly portrayed and in what way” (van Dijk, 1989: 26).

The way social problems are portrayed, as Berns (2004: 155) points out, shapes not only the collective understanding but also the “individual understandings [which] are (...) used in making laws, developing policy, and creating prevention programs”. Given that discourse shapes and is shaped by social and cultural settings (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258), a linguistic empirical approach to the representation of sexual harassment in the media, will shed light on both the kinds of meanings that get systematically and regularly constructed around sexual harassment (Hall, 2005) and how the micro level representation relates to a macro social level (Koller, 2008, p. 11).

In light of the above, this study seeks to address the press representation of sexual harassment by focusing on the Weinstein scandal, which by being a high-profile sexual harassment scandal attracted public interest worldwide. Adopting a Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) perspective and drawing from the systemic functional linguistics and the discourse-historical approach, it explores how power and gender inequality are sustained, (re)shaped and/or challenged in five key articles published in the online edition of the *NYT*.

Thus, this study focuses on the following research questions: (1) How is Weinstein represented? (2) How are accusers of sexual harassment represented? and (3) How is sexual harassment discursively constructed?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: After contextualising sexual harassment in relation to its media representation, the theoretical framework on which this study is positioned is provided (i.e. CDS, analyses of transitivity patterns and discursive strategies used, and how they relate to the press representation of sexual harassment). Then, the data collection, method of analysis and the analysis procedure are explained. Next, the findings are presented and discussed in relation to the research questions. Finally, concluding remarks are drawn and directions for future research are suggested.

## **Literature review**

### ***Previous studies on the representation of sexual violence against women and SH***

Numerous studies have documented the phenomenon of sexual harassment mainly focusing on its worldwide prevalence, consequences, critiques of legislation systems, and the relatively low reporting rates (see Quick and McFadyen, 2017; and Schultz, 2018 for recent reviews). However, the representation of sexual harassment in the media has received much less scholarly attention (for a notable exception see, McDonald and Charlesworth, 2013). Nevertheless, there has been a growing interest, for instance, in the representation of sexual violence against women in general with regards to how it is reported and discussed in the media, since there is a wide agreement that media coverage has an impact on the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of the public regarding these phenomena (Boyle, 2019).

Studies on the representation of sexual violence against women to date indicate that a) the responsibility for the violence is either presented as mutual or shifted from male perpetrators to women (Anastasio and Costa, 2004; Dwyer et al., 2012), b) the voices of the women who are the victims of the violence are not represented (Halim and Meyers, 2010; Oxman-Martinez et al. 2009), c) the social context of the violent act is largely ignored (McDonald and Charlesworth, 2013), d) rape myths and stereotypes are prevalent (Franiuk et al., 2008; O'Hara, 2012; Toffoletti, 2007) in sensationalised stories (Breen et al., 2017; Jackson, 2013).

Many studies suggest that media construct stories that favour descriptions of sexual violence against women implying mutuality of responsibility or even victim blaming. For instance, Dwyer and colleagues (2012) suggest that media representations of sexual assaults involving alcohol often create a link between female drinking and vulnerability to rape. This theme of responsabilising women victims is also prevalent in stories about violence that does not involve alcohol. Halim and Meyers (2010), who investigated the press representation of violence against Muslim women in 169 articles, argue that victim blaming was prevalent in reporting of crimes (e.g., through excuses on behalf of male perpetrators).

Exclusion of women's feelings and views on violence they have experienced is another common theme in the representation of sexual violence against women. Studies suggest that quotes from women victims (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2009) and/or personal information about them (e.g. names, age) (Anastasio & Costa, 2004) are rarely part of newspaper reports. The absence of such information has been found to play a key role in how readers view victims. For instance, Anastasio & Costa (2004) found that readers tend to show empathy to women victims only when articles contain personal information about them.

Another common finding of the studies analysing media representations of sexual violence against women is that the social context in which violence and harassment occur is largely disregarded. For instance, McDonald and Charlesworth (2013) who examined 311 newspaper reports on a sexual harassment case, found that the social problem was deprived of its significance as neither the broader workplace context of harassment nor its trends and patterns were discussed.

Scholars also highlight the frequency of rape myths and stereotypes about female victims and male perpetrators. Male perpetrators, for example, are often represented as ‘sexcrased psychopaths’ which trivializes sexual assaults in that it presents rape as “a random act of violence rather than a societal problem” (O’Hara, 2012: 256). Similarly, women are largely portrayed as sexually available, passive and predatory (Toffoletti, 2007). The presence of rape myths may have an immense impact on how readers perceive, think of or judge perpetrators and victims. Franiuk et al. (2008), for example, who administered articles endorsing or challenging rape myths about the Kobe Bryant case to 62 participants, found that those who read the former were likely to believe that he was not guilty as opposed to the latter who were more likely to believe the opposite.

Sensationalism, which is another common theme found in coverage about sexual violence against women, functions to magnify the crime while taking the focus away from addressing the actual issue. For instance, news on rape cases include sensationalistic elements such as extensive description of the locations where events happened, “delayed lead to create drama” and graphic details of rapes (Breen et al., 2017: 253; Jackson, 2013).

Overall, the studies conducted to date show that the media portrayal of sexual violence against women and sexual harassment is very problematic in that it presents

women as responsible for their own victimization and limits opportunities for them to express their point of view, ignores the social context and its link to sexual violence, includes myths and stereotypes that legitimize sexual violence and focuses on unnecessary, sensational descriptions of the violent acts undermining their importance.

All of the above-described studies employed content and/or discourse analysis. However, there was a clear shortage of studies exploring sexual violence against women from a CDS perspective, which focuses on the role of discourse in maintaining and/or challenging the existing unequal power relations in a society (Wodak, 2001). Against this backdrop, the following section proceeds with a description of how a CDS-informed analytical framework with a focus on transitivity patterns and discursive strategies can complement understandings of media coverage of sexual harassment.

### **Theoretical framework**

CDS is an interdisciplinary problem-oriented field of research that studies linguistic and other meaning making systems (e.g., visual, audio) in use (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 3) by subsuming a variety of theories, methods, and approaches (Wodak, 2001, p. 3). It is primarily interested in analysing how “social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk” (van Dijk, 2001, p. 353). Its objective is to examine the relations between discourse, power, and ideology across micro, meso and macro dimensions of context (Fairclough, 2010). ‘Critical’ denotes an enquiry into “making transparent taken-for-granted assumptions” about how discourse participants reinforce and/or subvert power relations that may lead to the marginalisation of some groups (Koller, 2014, p. 49). Critical discourse analysts want to better understand how power and ideology determine the way language is used, whose interests it may serve and the effects it might have (Catalano & Waugh, 2020, p. 1). Through discourse analysis they get an insight into how inequality, domination and

exploitation are (re)produced in discourse and they hope to expose, and ultimately resist such social patterns (van Dijk, 2001, p. 353).

To examine the linguistic representation of sexual harassment and of perpetrators and accusers, I draw on transitivity analysis (Fowler, 1991) and the discourse-historical approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). More specifically, in terms of transitivity I examine in what processes participants are involved (i.e., material, mental, verbal) and what their role is (e.g. agent, force, object, patient). I also examine the use of discursive strategies that are typically examined in discourse-historical approach: 1) nomination: how is Weinstein, women accusers and sexual harassment named and referred to linguistically in the *NYT*?, 2) predication: what characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to Weinstein, women accusers and sexual harassment?, 3) argumentation: what arguments are employed by newspaper journalists in the *NYT*?, 4) perspectivisation: from what perspective are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?, and 5) mitigation/intensification: are the respective utterances articulated overtly, intensified or mitigated?

Adopting a CDS-informed approach with a focus on transitivity patterns and discursive strategies, I examine how “symbolic elites” such as journalists (van Dijk, 1989: 26) and more generally the *NYT* represented the Weinstein scandal and whether the lexicogrammatical choices used in the reports legitimised and/or delegitimised sexual harassment, gender inequality and power abuse.

## **Methodology**

### ***The newspaper***

*The NYT* was selected for several reasons including its potential ideological implications on the readership. It published the first article in which Weinstein was

accused of sexual harassment, setting the agenda of other newspapers. Additionally, *NYT*, being a well-established newspaper, is the primary source of information with large readership worldwide, therefore also functioning as a model for other media outlets. It is categorized as one of the three highest in circulation daily papers in the U.S., which may suggest that many readers learnt about the scandal and the following events from the *NYT*.

### **Data**

The data was collated from five articles published in the online edition of *NYT* (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Selected articles for analysis

<b>Article</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Length</b>
<b>1</b>	05.10.2017	Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades	3,349
<b>2</b>	16.10.2017	#MeToo Floods Social Media with Stories of Harassment and Assault	395
<b>3</b>	31.10.2017	How We Describe Sexual Assault: Times Journalists and Lawyers Respond	1,492
<b>4</b>	01.01.2018	Powerful Hollywood Women Unveil Anti-Harassment Action Plan	1,329
<b>5</b>	25.05.2018	Arrested on Rape Charges, Weinstein Posts \$1 Million Bail	1,411

The rationale for selecting these articles could be summarized as follows: the article published on 05.10.2017 was chosen as the sexual harassment scandal broke after its publication. Those published on 16.10.2017, 01.01.2018 and 25.05.2018 were selected for covering very critical moments of the scandal such as the beginning of the #MeToo movement, the announcement of the TIME'S UP movement and the rape charges



against Weinstein. Finally, the article published on 31.10.2017 was written with the aim of addressing readers' comments and feedback in relation to the language used in articles about the sexual harassment scandal. Given that RQ3 seeks to answer how sexual harassment was discursively constructed in the *NYT*, this article is of interest as *NYT* journalists themselves explain how they define sexual harassment and why.

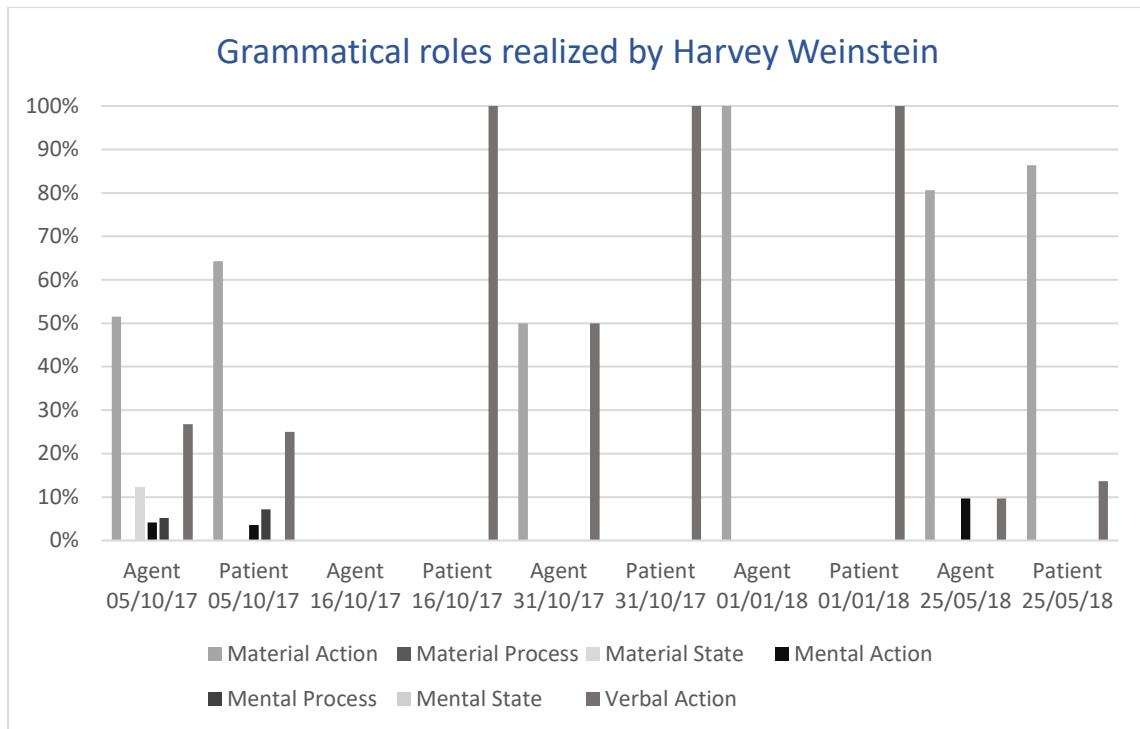
### ***Data analysis procedure: Coding***

The data analysis procedure can be summarized as follows: 1) all instances in which a) Weinstein and b) women accusers of sexual violence were mentioned were coded for transitivity patterns and nomination and predication strategies (addressing RQ1 and RQ2), 2) the parts in which sexual harassment was explicitly stated followed by the instances in which it was more indirectly referred i.e., in references relating to the perpetrator or the accusers were identified (addressing RQ3).

### **Results**

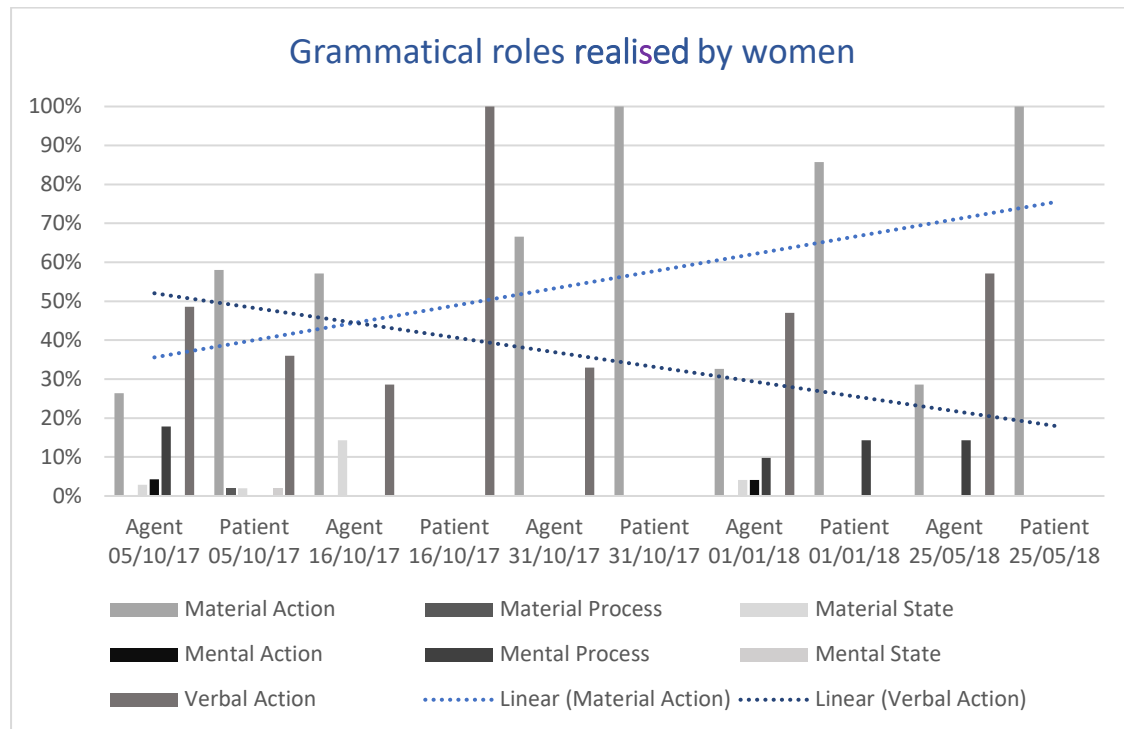
Coding revealed that Weinstein featured 131 times as an *Agent* in *material*, *mental* and *verbal processes* and 53 times as a *Patient* (see Table 2). The percentages for the *Agent* and the *Patient* roles he occupied show that he was grammatically active in the majority of cases (71, 20% and 28, 80% respectively). Besides, over half of the processes in which he was the *Agent* were *material* (57%), which indicates that he has been portrayed as doing and therefore affecting other entities more than, for instance, engaging in *cognitive processes*.

**Table 2.** Grammatical roles realized by Harvey Weinstein



As regards women, they featured as *Agents* for a total of 204 cases and as *Patients* for 74 respectively (see Table 3). Explicit references to them in the articles correspond to 60% as opposed to 40% for Weinstein. The most frequent process type in which they appear as *Agents* is the *verbal* (48%), followed by the *material* (32%) and the *mental* (20%). However, while the sexual harassment scandal was developing, there was an increase in the *material actions* and a decrease in the *verbal actions*. More specifically, in Article 1, where women feature as the accusers and Weinstein as the alleged perpetrator, women mostly appear as the *Patients* in *material processes* while Weinstein as the *Agent*. As the scandal unfolds, however, women start occupying the role of *Agents* in *material processes*.

**Table 3.** Grammatical roles realized by women



## Discussion

In the following sections, I focus on transitivity patterns and discursive strategies used in the *NYT* for the representation of Weinstein, his accusers and sexual harassment in general. I first discuss Weinstein, who was mainly portrayed in terms of his power, which is construed as leading to him being admired by people working within the film industry (including his accusers), perceived as someone determining the professional life of his colleagues and feared. His abuse of power in the macro context has been reflected in the micro textual level and especially in processes showing his agency in harassing women and then reaching non-disclosure agreements functioning to silence them as well as in processes showing his maximal access to scarce social resources. Subsequently, I move to the representation of women who were initially constructed as victims of sexual harassment that could not neither resist the abuse due to their lack of power nor share their experiences with others. As the scandal develops however, and the articles are about women’s initiatives to end sexual harassment (e.g.

TIME’S UP), they start being portrayed as more powerful, dynamic and determined to fight for their rights. In the final section, I elaborate on the way sexual harassment was framed as being shaped and reinforced by patriarchal values and gender inequalities.

It is worth mentioning here that although I try to follow a coherent structure in the analysis of the data, the discursive strategies used for the representation of social actors and the phenomenon of sexual harassment are largely interlinked.

### ***Representing the perpetrator: Weinstein***

Weinstein was discursively constructed as one of the most powerful and extremely successful figures in both the UK and the US entertainment industry. This was linguistically realised through various predication strategies attributing positive characteristics to him (see Table 3, and specifically Authority/Appraisal) as well as processes and nouns denoting his achievements (e.g. *‘he helped define popular culture’, ‘femininity, sex and romance, won “10 awards”, he was a ‘Commander of the British Empire’ whose ‘former assistants have risen high in Hollywood’*. Although research suggests that inclusion of bibliographical information for the perpetrator increases readers’ empathy (Anastasio & Costa, 2004), in such high-profile sexual scandals such as this one where both the perpetrator and most of the accusers are famous, such information may function to legitimise accusers’ initial desire to work for Weinstein and their subsequent fear of stepping forward.

**Table 3. Selected nominations and predications: Weinstein**

Formalization (surname only, with or without honorifics)	<b>Weinstein</b> <b>Mr. Weinstein</b>
Semiformalization (given name and surname)	Harvey Weinstein

Informalization (given name only)	Harvey
Categorization/Functionalization (in terms of occupation)	producer, male producer, Hollywood producer, film producer, former movie producer, film industry titan
Authority/Appraisalment	powerful, powerful man, disgraced movie mogul, an old dinosaur, a liberal lion, a champion of women, a winner of artistic and humanitarian awards, a mentor, an advocate, charming and generous, a commander of the British empire

For instance in this excerpt ‘*A job with Mr. Weinstein was a privileged perch at the nexus of money, fame and art, and plenty of his former assistants have risen high in Hollywood*’ working for Weinstein has been described as the key to succeeding in Hollywood. Here, his former assistants’ success (‘*have risen high in Hollywood*’) has been represented as a result of their collaboration with him.

Importantly, however, Weinstein has been framed as using his authority and power to exploit and mistreat young actresses wishing to work for him. The articles under analysis refer to instances constituting examples of sexual coercion, as this one here ‘*Mr. Weinstein invited Emily Nestor, who had worked just one day as a temporary employee, to the same hotel and made another offer: If she accepted his sexual advances, he would boost her career*’. In terms of transitivity, Weinstein is the *Agent* of a *verbal process* (‘*invited*’, ‘*made offer*’) promising a *material action* (‘*he would boost her career*’), the actualisation of which is totally dependent on the employee’s acceptance of ‘*his sexual advances*’. According to his accusers, who ‘*described varying behavior by Mr. Weinstein*’, he did not limit himself to *verbal actions* and persisted in his sexual advances even after women had indicated that they were not interested. He appears to transition from *verbal* to *material actions*, as in this excerpt ‘*he was appearing nearly or fully naked in front of [women], requiring them to be present while he bathed or repeatedly asking for a massage or initiating one himself*’. Notably, the above example highlights that what Weinstein initiated was done without the women’s consent. His blameworthiness is also prevalent in processes illustrating that when he received negative responses to *verbal actions*, he proceeded to *material ones* and disregarded his accusers’ free will (‘*he was very persistent and focused though*

*she kept saying no for over an hour*’, ‘*Weinstein had grabbed her breasts (...) and put his hands up her skirt*’). His persistence is framed above as signifying interactions in the realm of violence, especially given the woman’s verbal refusal to engage in certain sexual practices with him.

His abuse of power has also been represented in the micro level through 1) perspectivisation strategies constructing women as having had limited possibilities for action, 2) processes in which his economic wealth is construed as silencing women, and helping him avoid any consequences.

More specifically, his accusers are often quoted with regards to their fear, as, for example, in this *mental process* ‘*how do I get out of the room as fast as possible without alienating Weinstein?*’. Although the use of the phrase ‘*as fast as possible*’ intensifies the sense of urgency in getting out of the room, the actress Mr. Judd appears to be very worried about doing it in a way that would not alienate Weinstein. Such quotes function to construct Weinstein’s behaviour as not wanted (and sometimes as criminal), foregrounding his accusers’ fear and justifying their ‘silence’. In the example above, for instance, alienating him, it is implied, could have affected his accuser’s professional life and career.

Avoiding the consequences of his criminal acts has also been directly associated with his economic wealth. For instance, in various processes, Weinstein’s economic power (e.g. the \$100,000 settlement) features as the *Force* that insured ‘*peace*’ and the silence of accusers (i.e., to ‘*avoid litigation and buy peace*’, he ‘*reached at least eight settlements with women*’). In addition, he is constructed as being able to hire and be represented in court by ‘*one of the New York City’s top defense lawyers*’, maximizing the chances of his acquittal.

Notwithstanding these representations, instances that challenge the validity of the allegations against Weinstein can also be traced in the data. For instance, his lawyers are quoted referring to him as an ‘*old dinosaur*’, who ‘*denies many of the accusations*’.

By calling him a dinosaur, which constitutes a *material state*, Ms. Bloom makes Weinstein seem ignorant of the harm he caused. Additionally, Mr. Brafman states that his client may have had '*bad behaviour*' but not criminal behaviour justifying Weinstein's intention '*to plead not guilty*'.

Sensational elements such as the extensive descriptions of Weinstein's attire, a common finding in past research about sexual violence against women, were also found in the data. For instance, in the article about him being arrested on rape charges, there are detailed descriptions of what he was wearing (e.g. '*in a dark blazer, a light-blue sweater and an untucked button-down shirt*'). Tabloid journalism emphasizing sensational elements like the above-quoted may have enhanced readers' sympathy, decreased victim blaming towards him, and diverted readers' attention from the more serious issue, which in this case is the phenomenon of sexual harassment (Anastasio & Costa, 2004).

### ***Representing accusers of sexual harassment: Women***

Although previous research on sexual violence against women identifies victim blaming as one of the key themes in women's representation, an examination of transitivity patterns and discursive strategies in the articles under analysis suggests that women were construed as victims of sexual harassment and Weinstein as the only initiator of sexual advances. Additionally, accusers realised more grammatical roles than the perpetrator and unlike previous research has shown, their views and feelings on the violent acts were expressed both through *verbal* and *mental processes*. More specifically, they were mainly portrayed in terms of their initial shock to Weinstein's actions, followed by fear, and vulnerability, which are some of the core experiences among most sexually harassed women. It is worth mentioning that in the high-profile sexual scandals analysed to date the male perpetrators were famous while women

victims were not (e.g. Breen et al., 2017; Toffoletti, 2007) and to the best of my knowledge, this is the first linguistic study that focuses on a sexual harassment scandal where both the perpetrator and the accusers are known worldwide (see literature review section). It can be therefore assumed that the celebrity status of the accusers played a role in the reporting (e.g. at least with regards to how much women victims were quoted). One more factor that should be considered is that sexual harassment impacts many people every day, and in recent years there has been much more conversation around its underlying societal causes including gender equality.

In light of the above, it comes as no surprise that women accusers in the Weinstein scandal were mainly construed as victims of sexual harassment at the workplace. This has been achieved through nomination and predication strategies that categorised them in terms of their occupation and age (e.g. ‘young’, ‘23-year-old-actress’) (see Table 4), and through *processes* a) describing business meetings during which Weinstein harassed them (e.g. he ‘badger her into giving him a massage’ and ‘grabbed her breasts’) and b) denoting their feelings and attitudes towards their perpetrator.

**Table. 4 Selected nominations and predications: Women**

Formalization (surname only, with or without honorifics)	<b>Ms. Judd, Ms. O’Connor, Ms. Nestor Ms. Madden, Ms. McGowan</b>
Semiformalization (given name and surname)	Ashley Judd, Emily Nestor, Lauren O’Connor Laura Madden, Sallie Hodge, Zelda Perkins Rose McGowan, Lucia Evans
Informalization (given name only)	X
Categorization (Functionalization, Identification)	<b>Weinstein’s accusers:</b> victims, accusers, vulnerable women  young actress, a temporary employee,



	<p>a female assistant, current and former employees, film industry workers, young assistant, an actress, an Italian model, an employee, aspiring actresses, female Weinstein employees, employees of the Weinstein Company, a law and business school student, a 23-year-old-actress, typically in their early or middle 20s</p> <p><b>Women involved in #MeToo and TIME’S UP:</b>  women, powerful women, celebrities, 300, prominent actresses and female agents, writers, directors, producers and entertainment executives, less privileged women — like janitors, nurses and workers at farms, factories, restaurants and hotels, working-class women, 700,000 female farmworkers, a group of female talent agents</p>
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For instance, in this excerpt ‘*Ms. Nestor, a law and business school student, accepted Mr. Weinstein’s breakfast invitation (...) because she did not want to miss an opportunity*’, Ms. Nestor is linguistically referred to as a student, which connotes her young age. Her acceptance of the invitation is a result of a *mental process* in that she saw the business meeting with Weinstein as a great chance, ‘*an opportunity*’ for her career development. She is also represented as being ‘*surprised to learn that they would be talking in his suite*’. The use of the verb ‘*expected*’ shows that she had assumed that the meeting point would not be in ‘*his suite*’. ‘*Expected*’ in other words functions as a comparison between what she thought would happen and what actually happened. The representation of emotion inherent in this example -with her being the *Agent* of a *mental process* (‘*surprised*’)- also constructs the place of the meeting as an unexpected one since business meetings are generally conducted in person in an office, or in hotels where dedicated spaces are set aside for them and not in suites.

Weinstein’s coercive actions are described as provoking several negative emotions to aspiring actresses and/or his employees (e.g. anxiety, fear). For instance, a

*'temporary employee'* who *'had worked just one day'* for him is discursively represented as *'crying and very distraught'* since *'Mr. Weinstein badgered her into giving him a massage while he was naked'*. In this example, the actions of the *Agent* (Weinstein) who is verbally insisting for a massage, resulted in the *Patient's* (the woman) crying (*mental process*) and feeling distraught (*mental state*).

In addition to emotional distraught, accusers are largely presented in terms of their fear of speaking up. This has been realised through various mental processes (e.g. women *'feared retaliation by Mr. Weinstein'*). Their fear has also been explicitly linked to their 'silence'. One of Weinstein's accusers, for example, is quoted saying *'I am just starting out in my career, and have been and remain fearful about speaking up'*.

Another reason presented as preventing accusers from reporting sexual harassment is the settlement agreements they had made with Weinstein. Consider, for instance, an excerpt comparing the Weinstein scandal with another high-profile scandal: *'At Fox News, where (...) Roger E. Ailes and Bill O'Reilly were accused of harassment, women have received payouts well into the millions of dollars. But most of the women involved in the Weinstein agreements collected between roughly \$80,000 and \$150,000'*. Although the focus here is clearly put on money and not on the consequences that these settlements had (i.e., sexual harassment was perpetuated, and more women experienced sexual violence), it functions to intensify women's perceived fear and implies that they agreed to make settlements with Weinstein even with little money believing that the consequences of not doing so would have been immense.

So far, I have demonstrated that Weinstein's accusers were constructed as *'victims'*. Yet, in articles 2, 4 and 5 (see data section) women start being represented as *'powerful'*, dynamic and determined to fight for their rights (see table 4, and specifically women involved in #MeToo and TIME'S UP, and table 3). These can be observed in

their role as *Agents* in various material actions (e.g. in fights against exploitation and oppression). More specifically, they are portrayed as ‘*posting*’ and sharing their personal experiences of harassment and assault publicly for the first time. Their agency is also emphasised in *material actions* such as the formation of an ‘*initiative to fight systemic sexual harassment*’. In so doing, they ‘come together’ (*material action*) determined to change the situation, which is expressed through the *mental action* (‘*intended to act*’). In other words, as women start sharing their experiences with others and decide to change the situation they have been experiencing (e.g. ‘300’, ‘*come together*’) they stop being construed as ‘*vulnerable*’ and start being represented as powerful and determined to fight against sexual harassment.

### ***Constructing sexual harassment***

Research on the media representation of sexual violence against women to date suggests that the social context in which sexual harassment occurs is largely disregarded. In the articles about the 2017-2018 Hollywood sexual harassment scandal analysed here, sexual harassment is represented in relation to a macro context where patriarchy and gender inequality prevail with power imbalance, male domination and nondisclosure settlements being construed as both forming and sustaining it.<sup>1</sup> The responsibility for sexual harassment was directly attributed to the perpetrator without, however, presenting this kind of violence as an individual problem, but rather illustrating its link to societal factors such as gender inequality. Additionally, the wide prevalence of sexual harassment was also mirrored in the articles.

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<sup>1</sup> This section does not include quantitative (statistical) data for several reasons. First, a wide range of linguistics forms have been used throughout the articles to refer to sexual harassment either explicitly or implicitly. Moreover, the way sexual harassment has been constructed results also from references relating to the perpetrator and the accusers. Therefore, inclusion of the quantitative representativeness was deemed problematic.

More specifically, sexual harassment as portrayed in the data has been associated with hierarchical power relations resulting in male dominated industries and power imbalance with women emerging as subordinate. Gender inequalities manifesting in society through discriminatory socio-cultural practices (e.g. unequal access to resources), were construed as being inherent in the Hollywood film industry; in an industry that is '*overwhelmingly dominated by men*' where the '*power imbalance*' leads to the '*gender parity*' gap, women have to struggle to '*break in*', '*rise up the ranks*' or even to be '*simply heard and acknowledged*'. In the extracts above, men feature as *Agents* in a *material action*, they appear as having control over the industry and by extension over the women who work in the industry. The *material action* in which men are the *Agents* clearly prevents the realization of other *material actions* in which women could hypothetically be *Agents* (e.g. '*break in*', '*rise up the ranks*'). In other words, sexual harassment has been linked to patriarchy, directly influencing the private sector and workplace opportunities for women, who are presented as being subordinate, earning less than men and having limited access to certain positions.

The perpetuation of sexual harassment in the film industry was also associated with nondisclosure settlements, which have largely been used to conceal improper behaviours and impede the reporting of sexual harassment (i.e., they '*silence victims*'). Nondisclosure agreements are the *Force* causing an effect on women, the semantic objects of the clause; they are presented as a factor that if not maximising the occurrence of sexual harassment they definitely slow down its prevention.

Besides the reasons forming and sustaining the phenomenon, the articles under analysis also discussed sexual harassment in terms of prevalence and types. Regarding prevalence, the contextualised setting and the link between the intersection of gender, the workplace context, and professional identities were highlighted. Sexual harassment

was framed as ‘commonplace’ with ‘*the prevalence of sexual predation (...) yielded[ing] the minimizing cliché of the “casting couch”*’. The prevalence of sexual predation is the *Force* that brings to light the workplace environment in which sexual harassment occurs. The ‘*casting couch*’ refers to the nature of a business sustaining an environment where the exchanges of sexual favours especially between an authority figure and a woman who has not established herself in the industry is normalised.

As regards the types of sexual harassment, *NYT* focused almost exclusively on physical violence. Referring to the allegations against Weinstein, both ‘*aggravated sexual assault*’ and ‘*rape*’ were used to linguistically label what he did but no direct labelling of incidents constituting verbal harassment was made. Importantly, however, as Schultz (2018: 31) has also observed, while the women involved in the Weinstein scandal have also talked about the verbal harassment they experienced, the media focused ‘almost exclusively on the sexualized form of harassment’. The emphasis on the physical harassment may classify the reports as (at least partially) sensational, which has been identified as a common theme in coverage about sexual violence against women in general. This was partly expected, especially taking into account that infotainment (i.e., the combination of information and entertainment) is a characteristic of modern genres (Fairclough, 1992: 221). Considering, however, that the biggest myth about sexual harassment is that it exclusively pertains to physical violence (McDonald and Charlesworth, 2013; Schultz, 2018). In other words, the representation of sexual harassment in the articles offers a realistic, but still somehow restricted view of the kind of conduct that constitutes sexual harassment (McDonald and Charlesworth, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the press representation of sexual harassment, perpetrators and accusers by taking as a case study Hollywood's 2017-2018 biggest sexual harassment scandal. It makes a novel and important contribution to our understanding the social problem by means of both its data selection (the reporting of the Harvey Weinstein case has not been analysed before - to the author's best knowledge) and analysis (there is a lack of CDS-informed research of media representations of sexual harassment cases). In contrast to existing research, which has relied exclusively on content and discourse analysis, the present study adopted a CDS perspective and drew from the systemic functional linguistics and the discourse-historical approach, which allowed for a thorough examination of the way power and gender inequality were sustained, shaped, reflected and challenged in the texts. It additionally showed how a transitivity analysis and an analysis of the discursive strategies typically examined in the discourse-historical approach can shed light on the construction of sexual harassment in the media (i.e., helped locate different types of processes associated with accusers, perpetrators and the phenomenon, as well as how they were referred to linguistically and what characteristics were attributed to them). The close documentation of the analytical process can therefore be used as a guidance in other studies.

Literature on media portrayal of sexual violence against women and sexual harassment in particular suggests that their representation is very problematic in that it limits opportunities for women to express their feelings, presents them as responsible, includes myths and stereotypes that legitimise sexual violence, focuses on sensational descriptions of violent acts and disregards the social context in which they occur. However, the findings of the present study differ in a major way from the reviewed research in that a) the male perpetrator, in this case Weinstein, was depicted as the only

initiator of sexual violence with clear ascription of agency, b) women victims' voices and feelings were given much prominence in the articles, c) the link between sexual harassment and the social context in which it occurs was emphasised.

More specifically, Weinstein was portrayed as a very powerful figure (e.g., through nomination and predication strategies highlighting his achievements) who targeted young actresses and used a range of pressure tactics (both verbal and physical) to convince them submit to sexual activity even when they had already refused. In the micro textual level this was realised through various material processes in which he was the *Agent* who manipulated or persuaded his victims to engage in sexual behavior. In addition, he has been represented as abusing his power silencing his victims (e.g. through settlement agreements).

His accusers were construed as victims of harassment (e.g. through processes about sexual violence in which they were the *Patients* and Weinstein the *Agent*) who were not blamed for their own victimisation. They were described as young actresses and employees (e.g. through predication and nomination strategies), whose interest in meeting Weinstein was linked to achieving professional success. They were portrayed in terms of their initial shock to Weinstein's actions, followed by fear of speaking up because of potential negative consequences to their career.

As regards the discursive representation of sexual harassment, *NYT* discussed the scandal in relation to the macro context of the Hollywood movie industry emphasising its underlying social factors including male domination, gender inequality and nondisclosure agreements.

Given these findings, which differ from what has been found in previous studies, it seems even more important to understand how exactly journalists represent the perpetrators and victims and define sexual harassment in high-profile celebrity

cases, which many people will read and are likely to especially impact their understanding of what sexual harassment is. It should be acknowledged, however,<sup>0742</sup> that journalists' representation is only a small part of the entire edifice of sexual violence against women and sexual harassment – as ideological constructs.



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