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Feminism: “WAR” and “JOURNEY” Metaphors in *Ms.* and *Bust* Magazines

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ABSTRACT

As an important medium to spread feminist ideas, magazines have attracted attention in their presentation of feminism. Metaphor analysis helps to understand the public’s cognition and attitude towards social issues, and reveals the role of metaphor in influencing thinking and decision-making. Based on conceptual metaphor theory and using corpus analysis, this paper focuses on feminism-related metaphors in the American magazines *Ms.* and *Bust*. Metaphor analysis was conducted for 1,098 articles with 1,664,733 words published from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. Quantitative and qualitative analyses reveal that the “WAR” metaphor and “JOURNEY” metaphor were the top two metaphors related to feminism, yet they encode distinct ideological priorities. The “WAR” metaphor emphasized the plight and struggle women face in opposing gender discrimination and fighting for equal pay and other equal rights, lexicalized through terms like “campaign,” “fight,” and “attacks.” The metaphor of “JOURNEY” highlighted the continuity and development of the feminist movement in the pursuit of political participation and educational equality, lexicalized through terms like “progress,” “ways,” and “course.” This study contributes to existing literature by uncovering the metaphorical patterns of feminism in the American women’s magazines and providing novel perspectives on the understanding of American feminist movement, as well as a useful reference for related research and gender equality practice.

Keywords: Feminism; American Women’s Magazines; Metaphorical Representation; “WAR” Metaphor; “JOURNEY” Metaphor

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1. Introduction

In today's society, feminism plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality and social justice. Since its birth, the feminist movement has faced complex attitudes and reactions from all walks of life^[1]. On the one hand, it has inspired countless women to fight for equal rights. On the other hand, the feminist movement is beset by doubts and objections from conservative forces.

Metaphor, as an attractive phenomenon in the field of language, plays an important role in the process of human communication and cognition. It is defined as “a word or expression used to refer to an entity or quality that is not referred to in the core or basic meaning of the word or expression^[2].”

In the vast realm of human communication, metaphors are everywhere. Metaphors can be found in the moments of everyday spoken communication, in the orderly arrangement of words in a written text, or in the unique charm of sign language^[3]. Metaphors have been regarded as an effective tool for people to interpret experience in the abstract domain and are widely used by people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds^[4-6]. About 10% to 20% of the content of daily discourse belongs to figurative language, which fully demonstrates the indispensable status of metaphor in daily communication and its wide range of applications^[7].

Conceptual metaphor, on the other hand, is a thought pattern or a construct. It is used to frame concepts that are abstract and difficult to comprehend in terms of another which is concrete in nature and is easier to explore^[8]. The conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson^[9] emphasized that metaphor was the key to human cognitive processes and had a profound impact on thinking patterns, life experiences and daily behavior. Conceptual metaphor is the mapping between source domain and target domain. CMT broke through the traditional perception of metaphor as linguistic decoration and regarded it as a cognitive structure for exploring potential conceptual representations and understanding complex abstract phenomena^[4]. For example, Musolff^[10] found that in public discourse on issues, such as the global health crisis and migration, the “WAR” metaphor was more than literal in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and related discussions, profoundly influencing social perceptions and responses.

With the increasing influence of media in social and

cultural life, magazines have become an important platform for spreading and shaping ideas, directly affecting the public's understanding and cognition of feminism in the way they present feminist issues^[11]. In feminist discourse, the use of metaphor not only enriches the form of expression but also influences people's understanding and attitude towards feminism^[12].

Thus far, previous studies have explored the use of metaphor on feminism in newspapers published in Spain^[13, 14], China^[15], the United States, and the United Kingdom^[16]. Using standard metaphor recognition methods, Reali^[14] found that “WAR” metaphors were the most common in popular Spanish online media in 1999–2014, and often used to emphasize the power and strength of the feminists, but women were also depicted as being victimized and objectified. Carnero^[13] specifically analyzed the use of “WAR” metaphors in opinion columns in Spain in 2004–2023 using the Sketch Engine tool. Carnero^[13] found the frequent use of the words “struggle” and “battle” to describe the feminists' fight against social inequality. The male columnists used “WAR” metaphors to downplay women's struggles, while female columnists used them to emphasize their importance. Rub^[16] found an influence of cultural context on metaphor use in feminist representations in that newspapers in the United States tended to use the “war” metaphor, while those in the United Kingdom used the “JOURNEY” metaphor. Bao^[15] analyzed 206,089 posts about feminism on Weibo in 2022 and used the Metaphor Recognition program (MIP) method to identify six categories of metaphors: “war,” “business,” “disease,” “animal,” “religion,” and other metaphors. “WAR” metaphors were found to be the most prevalent, often portraying feminism as a destructive force against social norms. The “business” metaphor saw feminism as a business venture. The “sickness” metaphor compared feminism to a social disease, such as cancer. “Animal” metaphors often compared feminists to dogs or parasites. “Religion” metaphors treated feminism as a belief system. Other metaphors included “flood,” “chains,” etc. These metaphors revealed an ambivalent attitude toward feminism in Chinese society, with both positive and negative portrayals. Reali and Avellaneda^[17] analyzed the metaphorical framing of feminism and women in feminism-related news in online media in Spanish, using an experimental approach in which Spanish-speaking participants read abortion

rights-related texts that contained either “WAR” metaphors or gender-neutral frameworks. The results showed that the “WAR” metaphor increased support for women’s autonomy while decreasing approval of their partner’s involvement in decision-making. Reali and Avellaneda^[17] reported that gender-inclusive language has little effect on perception whereas sociodemographic factors, such as gender, religion, and political ideology significantly influenced participants’ perceptions.

The use of the “WAR” metaphor in feminist discourse was also found in literary writing. Janusz’s^[18] analysis showed that Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde used metaphors in poems to represent the oppression of patriarchy and to promote self-reconstruction and social change in the context of women empowerment. In another study, Nicholson^[19] discussed the history and theory of feminism, especially the criticism of “wave” metaphor. She analyzed the achievements and limitations of second- and third-wave feminism, noting that despite advances in legal rights and social perceptions, gender inequalities persist, especially in the distribution of family labor and social standards. The results suggested that the “wave” metaphor failed to adequately reflect the complexity of feminism, highlighting the importance of diversity and intersectionality and calling attention to ongoing challenges.

Thus far, analysis of metaphors in newspapers^[13, 14, 16] and literary works^[18, 19] shows the use of “WAR” metaphors to represent the struggles and fight of feminists against social inequality and oppression of patriarchy. Newspaper articles prioritize objectivity and brevity, and tend to avoid metaphorical language as they are targeted at a general audience. In comparison, magazines cater to a specific readership, and women’s magazines may offer more in-depth coverage of gender issues. A comprehensive search of the literature

shows that metaphorical language on feminism in magazines is not well understood due to the lack of studies. Analyzing metaphors in magazines can reveal underlying gender biases, power dynamics, and cultural norms. It highlights how language shapes perceptions of women, reinforces stereotypes, or challenges them, offering insights into feminist discourse. The study examines metaphors used to construct feminist discourse in two American magazines, *Ms.* and *Bust*, using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Corpus Source

The data analysed were 1,098 articles with 1,664,733 words from two American female magazines *Ms.* and *Bust*, published from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. The selection criteria are: (1) feminist magazines that have articles promoting women’s rights, and (2) magazines published in the United States. *Ms.* magazine has promoted women’s rights and interests, gender equality, and social justice since its inception in 1972 (<https://msmagazine.com/about/>). *Bust* magazine is known for its unique female perspective and avant-garde cultural attitude, focusing on modern women’s lifestyles, fashion trends, and mental health. The disparity in article counts between *Ms.* (1,041 articles) and *Bust* (57 articles) reflects differences in publication frequency and editorial scope. *Ms.*, as a long-standing feminist institution, publishes daily online content alongside its print editions, while *Bust*, a niche quarterly publication, prioritizes curated, theme-driven essays. Consequently, the authors’ article selections naturally align with these established editorial practices. Articles in these two magazines reflect the thinking and expression of American women in different life scenarios. **Table 1** shows the corpus details.

Table 1. Self-compiled corpus for *Ms.* and *Bust*.

Data Category	<i>Ms.</i>	<i>Bust</i>	Total
Number of Articles	1,041	57	1,098
Total Number of Words	1,613,274	51,459	1,664,733

2.2. Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved the following procedures. Firstly, the original corpus was constructed by

copying and pasting magazine articles as txt format, with the non-text content, such as advertisements and pictures removed. Secondly, the frequency list by the word function

of AntConc 4.2.3 was checked; then the “MI-Score” ranking list in the “Collocate” function was used to check the collocates with metaphorical meanings. Collocates with MI-Score greater than or equal to 3.0 were selected. MI-Score is a statistical index to measure the correlation between words^[20]. When MI-Score is equal to or greater than 3.0, it is generally considered that there is a strong correlation between the two words^[21]. Next, the analysis focused on whether these expressions had metaphorical meanings in combination with the corresponding “KWIC (Keyword in the Context)” function, and whether they were used in a non-literal way to convey more complex or abstract concepts. Then, the metaphor recognition program (MIP)^[22] was used to identify metaphors. As a widely recognized method, MIP is effective in detecting lexical units used metaphorically in discourse and has been widely used in many language studies, including those related to feminism and women^[14, 15]. MIP consists of four main steps^[22]:

First, study the text carefully to fully comprehend its overall meaning.

Second, accurately identify the collocate in the text.

Third, the collocate is evaluated to determine whether it has a more fundamental meaning outside the context of the text, defined by factors, such as its concreteness, its ability to evoke perceptual imagery, its association with physical movement, its precision, or its historical precedent. If there is a basic meaning, it is further considered whether the contextual meaning in the text is in sharp contrast to the basic meaning, and at the same time, whether the association with the basic meaning is still understandable.

Fourth, if there is a significant difference between the two meanings and there is an understandable correlation, then the collocate is marked as metaphorical.

The above MIP steps were followed when analyzing the texts in *Ms.* and *Bust* magazines. For example, through the “Collocate” function in AntConc 4.2.3, “’fight’+ ’for’” with the MI-Score 5.291 was found. In the “KWIC” function, one of the examples is “Reckitt’s passion and dedication will continue to fuel our efforts to honor her memory by pressing on in the fight for equality, justice, and women’s rights.” The discourse discussed women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, and the right to be free from violence and discrimination, including

domestic abuse and sex trafficking. From this context, where the word “fight,” which has its inherent meaning in the everyday context, is combined with feminist actions in the context of the text, it forms a contrast with the inherent meaning and there is an understandable relationship, so it is identified as a metaphorical word, highlighting the metaphorical concept of “FEMINISM IS A WAR.” The occurrence frequency, collocation pattern and the relationship with the context of these metaphorical words in different articles were analyzed to reveal the underlying sociocultural motivation. At the same time, a conceptual analysis of metaphorical expressions was conducted, and how they construct feminist discourse, reflect gender role cognition, and social values were explored. Similarly, for expressions, such as “path to equality,” “path” is also identified as a metaphorical word through a similar analysis process, reflecting the metaphorical connotation of “FEMINISM IS A JOURNEY.” Through this systematic data analysis method, it effectively ensures the accurate identification and in-depth analysis of metaphors in the magazine, and lays a solid data foundation and analysis basis for the subsequent research on feminist metaphors.

3. Results

The results presented nine dominant conceptual metaphors, which are FEMINISM IS A WAR, FEMINISM IS A JOURNEY, FEMINISM IS ARCHITECTURE, FEMINISM IS FORCE, FEMINISM IS A CONTAINER, FEMINISM IS VOICE, FEMINISM IS AN OBSTACLE, FEMINISM IS ECONOMY, and FEMINISM IS LIGHT SOURCE. In this paper, only the top two conceptual metaphors (FEMINISM IS A WAR and FEMINISM IS A JOURNEY) are examined. **Table 2** shows the two conceptual metaphors that topped feminism-related conceptual metaphors in the two American magazines.

According to **Table 2**, the conceptual metaphor FEMINISM IS A WAR appeared 3,020 times, with high-collocated words, such as “campaign” (721 times), “fight” (639 times), “attacks” (403 times), “fighting” (282 times), and “attack” (235 times). The “WAR” metaphor compared the struggle of feminism to war and emphasized the hardships and struggles of women in the process of fighting for equal rights.

Table 2. Total frequency of the top two conceptual metaphors in *Ms.* and *Bust.*

Number	Conceptual Metaphors	Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Total
1	FEMINISM IS A WAR	campaign	721	3,020
		fight	639	
		attacks	403	
		fighting	282	
		attack	235	
		solidarity	161	
		victory	148	
		struggle	141	
		campaigns	121	
		battle	102	
2	FEMINISM IS A JOURNEY	progress	422	2,300
		“ways	“422	
		“course	“316	
		“forward	“307	
		“step	“256	
		“path	“166	
		“advance	“157	
		“track	“142	
		“steps	“112	

Specifically, “campaign” was a linguistic construal of the “WAR” metaphor, appearing 721 times. The feminist movement was often described as an organized, planned campaign, akin to a political or military operation. This description not only enhanced the movement’s sense of urgency and importance but also gave it a sense of strategy and purpose. The word “fight” also appeared frequently (639 times), further highlighting the ongoing struggles and confrontations women faced to fight for their rights. Other words, such as “attacks” (403 times) and “fighting” (282 times), highlight the attacks and counterattacks women experienced in the process. This description revealed the hostile and oppressive nature of the external environment against the feminist movement. The words “solidarity” (161 times) and “victory” (148 times) also complement the “WAR” metaphor, with the former emphasizing solidarity among women and the latter expressing expectation and belief in eventual victory.

In contrast, “JOURNEY” metaphors were used 2,300 times, mainly including “progress” (422 times), “ways” (422 times), “course” (316 times), “forward” (307 times) and other words. Such metaphors compared the feminist struggle to a journey, emphasizing progress, paths, and directions, and highlighting the progressive and ongoing efforts of women in their quest for equality. The most common metaphors for travel were “progress” and “ways” appearing 422 times each. This showed that the feminist movement was often portrayed as a process of continuous progress and pursuit of progress,

emphasizing gradualism and goal orientation in the process.

The words “course” (316 times) and “forward” (307 times) further highlight this gradual progress, suggesting that although the road might be tortuous, the final goal was always clear and the direction was always forward. In addition, “step” (256 times) and “path” (166 times) were often used to describe the incremental gains in the journey. The words “advance” (157 times) and “track” (142 times) further highlighted the gains and continuity of the fight for gender equality respectively.

The “WAR” metaphor and “JOURNEY” metaphor have different emphasis in feminist discourse. The “WAR” metaphor emphasises the struggle, confrontation and victory, and highlights the resilience of women in the process of striving for equality in hostile environments^[16, 17]. On the other hand, the “JOURNEY” metaphor focuses more on progress, path and direction, emphasizing the continuous efforts and progressiveness of women in the process of pursuing equality^[23]. Along the journey, there are many wars and battles.

3.1. Metaphorical Representations of WAR on Feminism in the Two Magazines

Table 3 shows the example of the “WAR” metaphor with the lexical realizations “campaign(s)” in *Ms.* and *Bust.* The word “campaign(s)” appears 842 times in the corpus

(721 times in the singular form and 121 in the plural form). The mapping “ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMINISM ARE WAR” implicates that women’s actions for their rights to self-defense and exposing and challenging systemic racism and sexism in the criminal justice system are a fight.

Table 3. Feminist “WAR” metaphor with the lexical realization “campaign(s)”.

Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score	Example
campaign(s)	721 (121)	militant	8.533	1. Over the last few years, widespread concern about the increasing incidence of sexual assaults on women has crystallized into a militant campaign against rape.

In the corpus, “campaign(s)” is often paired with “militant,” with a collocation strength MI-Score of 8.533. Example 1 highlights the determination and militancy of the feminist movement by comparing women’s efforts to prevent sexual violence to a radical battle. The mapping “ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMINISM ARE WAR” emphasized the organized and strategic actions taken by women to campaign against sexual assaults. The word “campaign” referred not only to specific protests, but also to advocating for legislation and policy changes.

Table 4 shows the example of the “WAR” metaphor with the lexical realizations “fighting (fight)” in *Ms.* and *Bust.* The word “fight” appeared 639 times in the corpus, while “fighting” appeared 282 times. The mapping “ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMINISM ARE WAR” implicates that women’s efforts are a battle, opposing inequality and safeguarding their own rights from a strategy. This metaphor emphasizes the firm and unyielding actions taken by women to fight for their rights.

Table 4. Feminist “WAR” metaphor with the lexical realizations “fighting (fight)”.

Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score	Example
fighting (fight)	282 (639)	career	7.269	2. Background on Nasrin Sotoudeh Sotoudeh has spent her career fighting for the rights of women and minorities in the Middle East.
		keep	6.558	3. We must keep fighting for our right to be mothers.
		against	5.668	4. “If equality and the Equal Rights Amendment, in particular, weren’t so important, they wouldn’t be fighting so hard to keep it from us,” said Thomas—referencing that the forces fighting against reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights, transgender rights in particular, are the same and see liberation as a threat.

In the corpus, “fighting” is often paired with “career,” “keep” and “against,” and the collocation intensity is 7.269, 6.558 and 5.668, respectively. Example 2 highlights Nasrin Sotoudeh’s tenacity and persistence in fighting for freedom from mandatory hijab laws and broader human rights in Iran in the face of oppression. Liberal feminist conceptions of empowerment in Iran can alienate marginalized women, while local actors debate and contest global women’s rights packages based on local norms and lived experiences^[24]. Iran’s “Women, Life, Freedom” movement is a reclaim life movement, focusing on women’s struggles for free and dignified existence, potentially setting the Islamic Republic on

a revolutionary course^[25]. This metaphor showed Nasrin Sotoudeh’s courage and determination in the struggle for broader human rights in Iran by mapping the source domain of “feminism” to the target domain.

In addition, the discourse showed that women were fighting for the right to control their own bodies and access to safe, legal abortions without fear of criminalization or danger from miscarriage complications. Example 3 and the mapping of “fighting” onto the target domain of the feminist movement highlight the ongoing struggle of women for the rights of motherhood. The abortion debate can be viewed as a question of body theory, revealing diverse *conceptualiza-*

tions of pregnant embodiment that underpin (anti-)abortion ideologies and offering new perspectives for embodied pregnant subjects^[26].

Moreover, the metaphor of “fighting” also presents the women fighting for equal protection under the law, including reproductive rights. Example 3 illustrates the tenacious struggle in advocating for the recognition and ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) has a long and volatile history, with support for the amendment reviving in the 2010s and a “de facto ERA” in place by the 1990s^[27]. By mapping the metaphor of

“fighting” to the target domain of the feminist movement, this expression highlights the fighting spirit and determination of women in the process of fighting for rights and reflects their firm stand and indomitable spirit in the face of oppression.

Table 5 shows the example of the “WAR” metaphor with the lexical realizations “attacks (attack)” in *Ms.* and *Bust.* The word “attack” appeared 235 times in the corpus, while “attacks” appeared 403 times. The mapping “ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMINISM ARE WAR” implicates that women’s efforts to control their bodies are a fight.

Table 5. Feminist “WAR” metaphor with the lexical realization “attacks (attack)”.

Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score	Example
attacks (attack)	403 (235)	on	5.658	5. The dissenting opinion on Dobbs has opened the door to further attacks on reproductive rights—making protections like the Right to Contraception Act increasingly crucial.
		against	6.011	6. In response, many progressives have loudly denounced or quietly downplayed claims of rape and brutal attacks against women, children, and families as Israeli propaganda meant to justify genocide.
		perpetrated	8.372	7. Political violence against women, or attacks perpetrated against women as part of a political agenda, has also significantly increased in the U.S. since 2017.

In the corpus, “attacks” is often paired with words, such as “on,” “against” and “perpetrated,” with collocation intensities of 5.658, 6.011, and 8.372, respectively. The women were fighting for the right to access contraception without government interference, ensuring that it is protected under federal law. By comparing attacks on reproductive rights to an act of warfare, Example 5 highlights the fragility and importance of these rights in the face of legal challenges. Feminists have long supported the moral imperative for contraception, believing it is crucial for women to achieve equality and realize their full social, economic, and intellectual potential^[28]. The metaphor underscores the enormity and urgency of the struggle against the various legal and social attacks that the feminist movement had to contend with in its struggle for contraceptive rights.

Besides, the discourse showed that the women were fighting for justice and accountability for sexual violence committed by Hamas, advocating for international recognition and intervention to address and prevent future war crimes. Example 6 highlights the seriousness of attacks on women and children by comparing them to a propaganda tool. Feminist

activism against sexual violence in war must address the gendered processes of victimization, addressing both perpetrators and victims, to effectively combat gender-based violence^[29].

In addition, the discourse involved the rights for improvements in women’s health and safety, particularly to address rising maternal mortality rates and political violence against women. Example 7 highlights the victimization of women in the political environment by comparing political violence against women to an organized political agenda. Four waves of feminism have led to the advancement of women’s rights and the establishment of laws supporting their participation in society^[30]. The mapping “ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMINISM ARE WAR” highlights the vulnerable position of women.

Table 6 shows the example of the “WAR” metaphor with the lexical realization “solidarity” in *Ms.* and *Bust.* The word “solidarity” appears 161 times in the corpus. The mapping “ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMINISM ARE WAR” implicates that women’s actions for their rights to political representation and leadership, coping with legislative and social obstacles, form a strategy.

Table 6. Feminist “WAR” metaphor with the lexical realization “solidarity”.

Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score	Example
solidarity	161	cohesive	11.959	8. Fallon-Goodwin explains the ongoing struggle against legislative and societal challenges, emphasizing the need for cohesive solidarity among feminists and disenfranchised groups to achieve constitutional gender equality and to confront the evolving threats to women’s rights and representation.

In the corpus, the word “solidarity” is often used together with the word “cohesive,” with a collocation strength MI-Score of 11.959. Example 8 shows that the mapping “ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMINISM ARE WAR” highlighted the cooperation of women in fighting for constitutional gender equality and responding to threats. In addition, the “solidarity” metaphor also reflected the collectivity and mutual assistance of the feminist movement. For example, women gain more support and resources in their struggle for gender equality in political representation and leadership by working with other disenfranchised groups to form strong coalitions. By mapping “solidarity” to the target domain of the feminist movement, this metaphor highlighted the spirit of mutual aid and collective power of women in the process of fighting for rights. Feminist democratic representation in electoral politics promotes inclusiveness, responsiveness, and egalitarianism, enhancing women’s political representation by fostering connections with diverse women and promoting accountability in elected officials^[31].

Table 7 shows the example of “WAR” metaphor with the lexical realization “victory” in *Ms.* and *Bust.* The word “victory” was used 148 times in the metaphorical source domain, and the common collocation words include “decisive” (MI-Score: 10.233) and “vindicates” (MI-Score: 13.403). The mapping “ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMINISM ARE WAR” implicates that women’s right to access contraception without control by the state is under attack. Through the metaphor of “victory” feminists compare their achievements to victories in war, thus elevating the symbolism of these achievements and giving them higher value and importance. For example, the “decisive victory” mentioned in Example 9 metaphorically represents an important victory in the struggle for gender equality, which was not only an affirmation of the movement itself but also a push for social change. Feminism has evolved through four distinct waves to achieve equal rights for women, despite challenges and obstacles, and the future of feminism remains bright with a focus on workplace equality, reproductive rights, education, and global solidarity^[32].

Table 7. Feminist “WAR” metaphor with the lexical realization “victory”.

Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score	Example
victory	148	decisive	10.233	9. In February 2022, the Federation pledged to compensate male and female players equally for all scrimmages, games and tournaments, including the World Cup—a decisive victory in the gender equality fight.
		vindicates	13.403	10. “This important victory vindicates the rights of women, patients and abortion providers across the country,” said duVergne Gaines, director of the Feminist Majority Foundation’s National Clinic Access Project.

The rights involved in the discourse include the constitutional rights to reproductive health services, protected by the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, and the civil rights guaranteed against injury, oppression, or intimidation in the exercise of these rights. The word “victory” in Example 10 emphasizes the legitimacy of women’s

and patients’ rights through the word “vindicates”. In this expression, “confirmation” is not only a description of victory but also a confirmation of the legitimacy of the process of fighting for rights. The Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act is no longer a valid exercise of federal jurisdiction under the Fourteenth Amendment or the Commerce

Clause, following *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*^[33]. Through this metaphorical mapping, feminist discourse likens the struggle for legal and social rights to a successful battle that was won not just by individuals or small groups but by the full recognition and protection of the rights of all victims.

In the mapping relationship between the “victory” of the source domain and the target domain, the characteristics of the source domain, such as determinism and validation, help to shape the narrative framework of feminism in the target domain. Specifically, “victory” is not only a victorious description of a certain event but also a comprehensive affirmation of the process of women’s struggle for equal rights. By comparing feminist achievements to victories in war, the metaphor reinforces the salience and importance of those achievements. In this way, feminists can effectively use metaphors to enhance the transmission of their messages and make the public more concerned about and supportive of gender equality and social justice.

3.2. The Metaphorical Representations of JOURNEY on Feminism in the Two Magazines

Table 8 shows the example of “JOURNEY” metaphor with the lexical realization “progress” in *Ms.* and *Bust*. As can be seen in Table 9, the source domain “progress” is used 422 times, with common collocation words including “hindering (hinder)” (MI-Score = 11.891 (8.891)) and “accelerate (impede, speed, lost)” (MI-Score = 11.269 (9.228,

8.984, 6.751)). For example, the reference to “hindering progress” in Example 11 metaphorically shows that despite the growth of women’s political power, systemic barriers still exist. The mapping “THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IS A JOURNEY” implicates that feminist rights activists are travelers. This metaphor likens the achievement of feminist goals to a blocked path forward, highlighting the difficulties and challenges faced in achieving the goal of equality. Third-wave feminism respects women’s right to negotiate their desires for gender equality and sexual freedom, not uncritically endorsing every choice they make as feminists^[34].

On the other hand, the rights involved in the discourse were women’s political representation and gender equality in government through systems-level reforms like gender quotas and proportional voting systems. In the mapping relationship between the source domain “progress” and the target domain, the characteristics of the source domain, such as hindrance and acceleration, help to construct the narrative framework about women’s rights and representation in the target domain. The words “accelerate progress” in Example 12 shows that policy changes and institutional reforms to address gender quotas in women’s political representation should be accelerated. Gender quota systems, applied under dominance theory, are key in achieving true gender equality in American government by raising women to the same level of representation as men in historically male-dominated governments^[35]. This expression shows the positive attitude of feminists toward change, and conveys the optimistic prospect of achieving the goal.

Table 8. Feminist “JOURNEY” metaphor with the lexical realization “progress”.

Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score	Example
progress	422	Hindering (hinder)	11.891 (8.891)	11. While women’s political power has grown, systemic barriers persist, hindering progress on feminist goals.
		accelerate (impede, speed, lost)	11.269 (9.228, 8.984, 6.751)	12. While well-designed and enforced gender quotas tend to have the most immediate impact on women’s political representation, other systems-level reforms also have the potential to accelerate progress toward gender balance.

Table 9 shows the example of “JOURNEY” metaphor with the lexical realization “ways” in *Ms.* and *Bust*. The source domain “path” is used 422 times, with common collocations including “real” (MI-Score: 4.861) and “other” (MI-Score: 4.453). For example, the reference to “real path-

ways” in Example 13, through the word “real,” metaphorically expresses that “gender-critical” extremism ignores the real ways in which women’s rights and safety are threatened. The mapping “THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IS A JOURNEY” implicates that difficulties are impediments to motion.

The article goes on to talk about domestic violence, where the perpetrators of sexual violence and rape are people the

girls know, and the murder of women due to easy access to guns.

Table 9. Feminist “JOURNEY” metaphor with the lexical realization “ways”.

Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score	Example
ways	422	real	4.861	13. Ironically, “gender critical” extremism ignores the real ways women’s rights and safety are imperiled.
		other	4.453	14. During this time, they may find other ways to feel affirmed in their gender identity, such as changing their name or pronouns to improve their mental health.

The word “other” in Example 14 highlights other ways to confirm their gender identity, such as changing names or pronouns to improve mental health. In the mapping relationship between the source domain “way” and the target domain, the characteristics of the source domain, such as “real” and “other” help to shape the narrative framework about gender identity and rights struggles in the target domain. For instance, “he,” “she,” “we,” and “shim” are now used to describe an individual. These days, “shim” can refer to a person who identifies as bisexual, transgender, gender fluid, or genderqueer. The object pronoun “us” is now also used to describe one person with multiple identities.

Table 10 shows the example of the “JOURNEY” metaphor with the lexical realization “course” in *Ms. and Bust*. The frequency of use of the source domain “course” is 316 times, among which the common collocational word is “reverse”. The mapping “THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IS A JOURNEY” implicates that feminists’ success brings travelers a long way ahead. For example, the “reverse process” mentioned in Example 15 metaphorically expresses dissatisfaction with the current direction of development. The metaphor emphasizes the need to reassess and adjust strategies in the face of challenges. This mapping relationship highlights the sensitivity and adaptability to process in feminist discourse.

Table 10. Feminist “JOURNEY” metaphor with the lexical realization “course”.

Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score	Example
course	316	reverse	7.893	15. I strongly urge FIDE to reverse course on this and start from scratch with better consultants.

Specifically, the “course” metaphor likens the challenges and adjustments in the struggle for rights to a process of constant change, especially when it comes to reproductive rights, environmental protection rights, and voting rights. For example, fighting for the right to medical abortion and coping with difficulties in environmental protection is a metaphor for an evolving process that reflects dynamic adjustments in the face of various variables and obstacles.

Table 11 shows the example of the “JOURNEY” metaphor with the lexical realization “forward” in *Ms. and Bust*. The frequency of the source domain “forward” is 307 times. Common collocations include “inched forward,” “leap forward,” “moving forward,” “step forward” and “go forward.” These collocations describe the various advances and strategies of feminists. The mapping “THE FEMINIST

MOVEMENT IS A JOURNEY” implicates that along the journey even small steps matter.

In metaphor, the mapping relationship between the source domain “forward” and the target domain reflects the progress and breakthroughs in the process of rights and interests. For example, the reference to “inched forward” in Example 16 maps slow progress to the target domain by the word “inched”. This mapping underscores the need for continued efforts to overcome slow progress even after certain gains have been made.

In Example 17, the term “leap forward” maps to desired achievements in the target domain by describing possible significant future progress. This mapping emphasizes the confidence of feminists in making significant progress in the future set against the context of past achievements.

Table 11. Feminist “JOURNEY” metaphor with the lexical realization “forward”.

Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score	Example
forward	307	inched	12.350	16. Yet while Congress and many states have seen steady growth in the numbers of female lawmakers over the years since then, much of the Southeast has stagnated or barely inched forward.
		leap	10.765	17. The main goal of the evening was clear: In the next 50 years, feminist activists, writers, organizers, and leaders will look back and be able to recognize the giant leap forward it was from the 50 previous years.
		Moving (move)	9.958 (9.165)	18. “The school would need to take prompt and effective steps to ensure nondiscrimination for the students on the basis of sex moving forward,” she said.
		step	8.350	19. “At the moment, one-sixth of the FIFA Council is female, and that’s seen as a step forward, and that’s embarrassing for the game.”—Craig Foster
		go	4.607	20. When women go forward, put themselves forward for election, and get elected, they take it seriously.

The “moving forward” metaphor in Example 18 maps to continuous improvement in the target domain by describing future actions. This mapping demonstrates positive attitudes and strategies for future improvement, highlighting women’s coping strategies in the face of challenges.

The “step forward” in Example 19 maps progress to phased achievements in the target domain by depicting progress as a step. It notes that “one in six FIFA committee members is a woman, which is seen as a progressive step.” This metaphor breaks down progress into steps, reflecting the incremental gains made in the struggle for gender equality. This mapping highlights the continued efforts and progress towards achieving equal opportunities.

In Example 20, the “go forward” metaphor maps to actual progress in the target domain by describing women’s active participation in the election. This metaphor compares women’s electoral participation to a process of moving forward, emphasizing women’s positive progress in the political sphere and their seriousness about the future. Feminist policy advocates’ success in achieving gender equality policies depends on their strategic capacity in framing demands, forming civic alliances, and engaging with state entities without compromising organizational autonomy^[36]. This mapping demonstrates women’s confidence and determination in political participation and highlights what they can achieve in future politics.

4. Discussion

This study has yielded the following findings. American women have been fighting not only against gender binaries for individual rights, such as political, economic and

reproductive autonomy but also acknowledging the existence of other genders through both the “WAR” metaphor and “JOURNEY” metaphor. In the American magazines *Ms.* and *Bust*, the “WAR” metaphor is often used to emphasize the tenacious spirit of the feminist movement. “Keep fighting for our right to be mothers” in Example 3 reflects the fighting spirit of women in the process of fighting for their rights. The metaphor is intended to convey an image of women united in the fight against gender inequality. Rub’s^[16] research into British and US newspapers during Women’s History Month 2022 found that “WAR” metaphors are often used to present women’s struggles against social inequality. The word “fight” in Example 1 “It is a fight to guarantee women’s rights” reflects women’s efforts in the process of fighting for equal rights and highlights women’s determination and courage in the face of injustice. Meanwhile, the metaphor of “solidarity” in Example 8 “Feminism is about solidarity, but this solidarity can only work if all women are visible” emphasizes the importance of solidarity in advancing the women’s movement. This kind of unity metaphor further highlights the function of “WAR” metaphors in positively shaping women’s struggle image. Similarly, Chen’s^[37] analysis of articles in *Women of China* magazine from 1956 to 1998 showed that “WAR” metaphors were more often used to highlight the heroic images of women. For example, “Mu Guiying took on the fight for her family and the nation” (Mu Guiying fought on behalf of the family and the Nation) shows the prominent role of women in family and state affairs through the classic metaphor of war figures. These studies consistently show that “WAR” metaphors can positively shape women’s resilience and solidarity in social

and historical contexts.

Meanwhile, Reali and Avellaneda^[17] conducted a study on the perceived impact of “WAR” metaphors and gender-inclusive language on feminist issues in Spanish-language media, further revealing the unique role of “WAR” metaphors as framing tools. For example, “Feminists are warriors” compares feminists to warriors. This metaphor not only symbolizes the necessity of struggle, but also shapes public cognition, thus strengthening the influence of feminism in social discourse. In contrast, Bao’s^[15] study revealed the negative construction of feminism by “WAR” metaphors in certain contexts. For example, “Female fist is the bear hand of social stability” describes feminists as a “violent and destructive” force through the metaphor of “female fist (女权, a homonym for women’s rights)”. This metaphor builds an aggressive image through a homonym, which further strengthens the negative emotions of the society towards feminism.

In addition, Janusz^[18] studied the use of metaphor in feminist discourse in American history, especially through the analysis of Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde’s poetry, and explored the multiple functions of the “WAR” metaphor and its potential contradiction. From the example “Metaphor has often been used as a weapon to disparage women, but it also exerts a force that empowers feminists,” the “WAR” metaphor can either be used to demean women or as a tool for feminists to empower them, demonstrating its duality in different contexts. This perspective further illustrates that “WAR” metaphors not only have a positive function of expressing struggle and unity in feminist discourse, but also may be given a negative or subversive meaning due to different contexts.

In addition to the “WAR” metaphor, the “JOURNEY” metaphor, such as “a giant leap forward” (Example 17) shows the positive role played by the feminist movement in social progress. This metaphor is often used to describe the positive changes and future directions brought about by the feminist movement. However, Rub^[16] pointed out that the journey metaphor is mostly used to express obstacles. “There are still barriers to progress” (Example 5) uses “barriers” as a metaphor for the obstacles women face in their progress.

Finally, American women’s practice of fighting for gender diversity showed a higher level of individual autonomy, while the May Fourth Movement in China was mainly driven

by male intellectuals’ attempts to modernize the country by transforming the family structure. Welland^[38] mentioned that Chinese female artist Lei Yan expressed similar issues through visual art. For example, her work “If Women Ruled the World” explored the reorientation of women in gender roles and proposed the potential of gender diversity in society through a gendered reconstruction of the history of the Long March. Li^[39] explored the tension between women’s collective mobilization and individual liberation in the context of socialist reform. Although the goal of such collective mobilization expands the social role of women, it often ignores the autonomy and diversity of individuals in their gender identity^[39]. This is in contrast to the way American women, such as “changing their name or pronouns to improve their mental health.” (Example 14) affirm their gender identity through name changes and pronoun choices.

5. Conclusions

Using conceptual metaphor theory, this study analyzed the metaphors used to construct feminist discourse through the analysis of 1,098 articles in two American women’s magazines, *Ms.* and *Bust*, focusing on the two dominant metaphors of “WAR” and “JOURNEY”.

In both magazines, the “WAR” metaphor appeared frequently, totaling 3,020 times, comparing the feminist movement to a raging war through high collocates, such as “campaign,” “fight,” and “attacks.” This metaphor emphasizes the hardships and tenacious struggles women have encountered in the process of fighting for equal rights, and highlights the hostility and oppression of the external environment to the feminist movement. For example, describing women’s campaigns to prevent sexual violence as a radical battle shows the strong resolve of the feminist movement. When referring to women’s continuous struggle for reproductive rights and against inequality, it reflects their unyielding spirit in the face of oppression. At the same time, in exploring women’s efforts to obtain equal protection under the law, including reproductive rights, it also reveals the enormous challenges faced by the feminist movement in responding to various legal and social attacks.

The “JOURNEY” metaphor is also widely used, appearing 2,300 times, mainly containing collocates, such as “progress,” “ways” and “course.” This metaphor refers to the

feminist struggle as a long journey, emphasizing its progress, direction, and continuity, indicating that women are always firmly moving forward despite twists and turns on the road to equality. For example, when explaining that women's political power growth faces systemic obstacles, but still strive to pursue the goal of women's rights, it reflects the difficulties and challenges in the pursuit of equality. When discussing the ways of women confirming their gender identity by changing their names or pronouns, it shows the active exploration of the feminist movement in gender identity and other aspects. When it comes to women's struggles and adjustments in political representation, environmental protection, voting rights, etc., it reflects feminists' sensitivity and adaptability to process changes, as well as their attitude of actively adjusting strategies and constantly making progress in the face of challenges.

Through the analysis of these two metaphors, it can be seen that they play a unique and key role in women's magazines and jointly build a rich and diverse feminist discourse system, reflecting American women's perseverance, positive progress and unremitting pursuit of their own rights in the process of pursuing gender equality. These metaphors show the current situation and development trend of the feminist movement, as well as provide a new perspective and cognitive path for the public to understand feminism, help further promote the widespread dissemination and practice of the concept of gender equality, and have important inspiration and reference significance for the future feminist research and the development of the social gender equality cause. This study focused on the textual content of the two magazines and may have overlooked metaphorical expressions in other media forms or broader social contexts. Future research may try to expand to other forms of media (such as social media or news reports), or combine interviews and questionnaires to further explore the role of metaphor in broader social contexts. In addition, cross-cultural comparative research can also provide a new perspective for understanding the metaphorical construction of feminism in different cultures.

Author Contributions

S.-F.C. was involved in the conception and design, analysis and interpretation of the data; the drafting of the paper; and revising it critically for intellectual content. S.-H.T. was

involved in the conception and design of the study; verifying the analysis and interpretation of the data; and revising it critically for intellectual content. K.-M.C. was involved in the conception and design of the study and checking the analysis and interpretation of the data. All authors gave approval for the version to be published and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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