FLORENCIA REALI[1]
Universidad Católica del Uruguay, Montevideo, Uruguay
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3524-3873
LUCIEN AVELLANEDA
Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia
https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9294-4846

Feminists are warriors: Framing effects of war metaphors

Abstract. Metaphors influence general attitudes towards political and social ideas (Otieno et al. 2016). In particular, war metaphors are very common in political discourse. Their framing effects, however, depend on the context in which war metaphors are used, rendering positive or negative outcomes (Flusberg et al. 2018; Thibodeau 2018). Reali (2021) explored metaphorical framing of feminism and women in feminism-related news in online media in Spanish, finding that war metaphors depicting women as warriors fighting for their rights were the most prevalent ones. Here, we use an experimental paradigm to explore whether the use of war metaphors affects the perception of issues defended by the feminist movements. Spanish-speaking participants were exposed to a vignette describing a hypothetical case of elective abortion. Two variables were manipulated in a 2X2 between-subjects design: 1.the use of warfare framing (war metaphors/neutral frames), and 2.the use of inclusive language in Spanish (gender inclusive/ gender neutral language). Additionally, participants' sociodemographic data were collected. A series of regression analyses showed an effect of metaphorical framing on the perception of the right to decide, perception of the partner's right to opine, and the perception of the main character's coldness when controlling for sociodemographic variables. The use of inclusive language had little effect on perception. Consistent with previous findings, sociodemographic factors strongly affected perception: men, and conservative and religious participants rated the right to decide lower, and character's coldness as higher.
Keywords: feminism, metaphorical framing, Spanish media, conceptual metaphor theory.

---

1   Address for correspondence: Department of Neuroscience and Learning, Universidad Católica del Uruguay, Comandante Braga 2715 - CP 11600, Montevideo, Uruguay. E-mail: florencia.reali@ucu.edu.uy

1. Introduction

While the visibility of feminist movements has increased in the last few decades, the nature of the perception of feminism is heterogeneous (Gill 2012). Online media has enabled the representation of important feminist ideas. However, a tendency towards a negative and sexualized construction of feminism in popular culture has been documented. For instance, feminism is often represented as an outdated theme or treated with irony, and most scholars agree that the prevalent image of the movement in the media is negative (Dean 2010; Jaworska 2012; Lind & Salo 2002; McRobbie 2009). Also, over recent decades, scholars have studied the kinds of stereotypes that shape the perceptions of feminist women. Haddock and Zanna (1994) documented that feminists were evaluated less favourably than housewives, and that the most negative attitudes toward feminists were from conservative males. Ramsey et al. (2007) argue that there is a widespread belief among women about the negative perception others have of feminists. Bashir et al. (2013) identified a series of stereotypes related to feminism and feminist women, including men-haters, cold, lesbian, unhygienic, angry, unattractive, liberal, ambitious, loud or mean. Similarly, Meijs et al. (2019) documented that women who label themselves as feminists are seen by others as less warm and more competent than women who express gender equality beliefs but do not identify as feminists.

Perceptions and opinions related to feminist causes and women's rights have been investigated mostly in Western media coverage. For example, in the specific case of abortion rights, research on media coverage has been predominantly conducted in the USA with a major emphasis on adult women (Feltham-King et al. 2015). Some attention has been directed at the framing of abortion messages aimed at younger demographics. Patel and Johns (2009) documented marked gender differences in the perception of abortion. Females showed more liberal attitudes towards abortion, and generally, attitudes were mediated by religiosity. In the specific case of Colombia, where the data for the current study have been collected, Dalén (2011) showed that opinions and perceptions of abortion are inconsistent and polarized in the media.

2. Metaphorical framing

One way to examine opinions and attitudes towards social matters is to explore linguistic framing, and specifically the type of metaphors used in the media to depict an issue. Metaphors are ubiquitous in everyday communication. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) has grounded the theoretical basis for the fundamental link between metaphors and cognitive processes. In relation to public opinion, CMT proposes that metaphors shape attitudes, opinions and reasoning because they highlight some aspects of concepts and shadow others (Thibodeau et al. 2019). Because of this, metaphors are used in political discourse as a rhetorical strategy. A growing bulk of evidence in cognitive linguistics and corpus linguistics has established that metaphors

in political and social discourse influence reasoning and decision-making (e.g., Semino 2017). Otieno, Owino and Attyang (2016) reviewed data from all over the world, showing that metaphors have been utilized to facilitate the understanding of political issues, influencing general attitudes towards them. In addition, the use of certain metaphors over others reveals the speakers´ ideological views (Otieno et al. 2016).

Metaphors of women

Outside of feminist discourse, women have been depicted through metaphors in the most varied of ways across different cultures, text genres and time periods. Metaphorical representations of women often have negative connotations (e.g., Yu 2021). Common metaphors compare women to animals or plants, body parts, commodities and objects. For example, corpus analysis results show that the metaphor WOMEN ARE ANIMALS (including depictions of women as pets or wild animals) is quite prevalent across different languages, especially English and Spanish, throughout history (Ho 2022; López 2009; Turpin-Moreno 2014). In the specific case of Spanish, López (2009) concludes that figurative usages of labels such as "vaca" (cow) or "zorra" (vixen) to describe women contribute to normalized social degradation, while Turpin-Moreno (2014) emphasizes that animal imagery conveys negative ideological values in reference to representations of women and their behaviour. In addition to animal imagery, studies on other languages have shown that common frames for women in the news media include objectivizing metaphors such as WOMEN AS BODY PARTS (Chin 2009) or WOMEN ARE COMMODITIES, WOMEN ARE PLANTS, WOMEN ARE A FARMLAND (Ahmed 2018). Some studies focused on the representation of women in academia, showing that the most common metaphors involve the framing of women as strangers/outsiders or mothers/housekeepers (Amery et al. 2015).

Metaphors of feminists and feminism

Some recent studies have looked at metaphors used to describe women in feminism-related discourse, as well as the figurative construal of feminism itself. Recently, Reali (2021) explored the metaphorical construal of feminism and women in feminism-related news in online media in Spanish, using the News on the Web corpus (from Corpus del Español). The results showed that, in this context, the most common metaphors used to describe feminism and women are warfare ones, presumably associated with the intention of empowering the feminist movement. In many of the examples provided by Reali, feminist women were depicted as warriors fighting for women's rights against patriarchy (1a). In some other cases, feminism itself was described as a nation/state/territory or battlefield undergoing a war (1b). The following are examples extracted from Reali (2021):

> 1a. Quizás por ello, el feminismo de clase comience a ser una verdadera amenaza para el sistema que combate, atacando todos los privilegios.' (Diario de Cádiz, Spain, 2019) (tr.

Maybe because of that, class feminism starts to be a real threat to the system it fights, attacking all its privileges)

1b. [..] participó en un debate sobre las victorias y derrotas que ha vivido el campo de batalla del feminismo, en el que su propia experiencia es protagonista.' (La prensa grá-fica, El Salvador, 2019). (tr. [..] participated in a debate on the victories and defeats that the feminist battlefield has gone through, in which her own experience is a protagonist.)

The question remains, however, as to whether war framings elicit positive or negative reactions in the eyes of public opinion. Previous work on war metaphors in political discourse—not specifically in reference to women or feminism—has suggested that war metaphors may convey negative connotations such as an increase in fear emotions and political polarization. The use of war metaphors activates conceptual structures related to the representation of "wars", and the schematic knowledge we have of them is used to understand abstract issues. Along these lines, Flusberg et al. (2018) argue that when we use war metaphors to talk about political matters, we understand the phenomena in terms of opposing forces, with an implicit distinction between good and evil sides at play. Also, they note that war frames may convey a sense of fear and urgency as the schema of wars is related to anxiety in the face of risks, and feelings of despair and death. Consistent with these ideas, political discourse studies propose that war metaphors are used as a discourse resource in political rhetoric to bring up a sense of fear (Alexandres-cu 2014; George et al. 2016). Additionally, studies on war metaphors for climate change or illness have found that this framing magnifies a sense of threat, possibly triggering negative reactions. In one of these studies, Alexandrescu (2014) analyzed the 'war on drugs' frame, concluding that it can be counterproductive, as it highlights the dangers of drug use. Semino and collaborators conducted studies on the framing of illness such as cancer, suggesting that warfare metaphors (i.e., "the battle against cancer") may trig-ger fear or threat in reaction to illnesses, resulting in demotivation (Degner et al. 2003; Semino et al. 2018). On the one hand, they have argued that war metaphors can also be empowering for some cancer patients, especially when they are undergoing treatments that are curative (Semino et al. 2018).

Along similar lines, this paper explores the influence of war metaphors used to frame feminist causes. The schema of a warrior brings on an active position and the perception of control over events that counteracts the vulnerable position traditionally associated with women in relation to their rights. Then, feminism, construed as a movement at war against oppressive principles, may encourage empowering positions. On the other hand, however, war metaphors may also bring forward the aggressive side of the movement and its defenders, resulting in antagonistic reactions that are counterproductive to the cause. For example, some feminism scholars have expressed concerns in relation to the

foregrounding of feminist empowerment in the media. Rosalind Gill (2012), for example, argues that the notion of empowerment is often cast as an individualized phenomenon, unrelated to the relevant issues of power and oppression. As empowerment might motivate and inspire young feminist audiences, it may, at the same time, 'threaten to reinstate the terms of the "sex wars" of the 1980s, with their familiar polarization and discomfiting' (2012: 741). The revised findings motivate the empirical question of whether the use of war metaphors to frame feminist ideas influences positively or negatively the perception of these ideas. The first goal of this study is to address this question, exploring the influence of warfare framing on the perception of certain feminist causes. To achieve this goal, we use an experimental paradigm to manipulate linguistic framings before measuring opinions. We focus on the effect of framing on the perception of a controversial issue (abortion) as it constitutes a cause defended by feminist movements. We hypothesize that framing feminists as warriors fighting a battle against patriarchy may have empowering effects.

3. Gender-inclusive language

The use of metaphor is one among many possible linguistic frames that could potentially influence the perception of feminism-related issues. In the case of Spanish, among other languages, in recent years gender-inclusive forms of language have emerged (see Papadopoulus 2022 for a recent review). Some manifestations of these forms include the use of neutral markers in nouns to replace traditional gender-marked nouns and verbs (i.e., *latinx*, *todes* "everybody") or the use of neutral pronouns (e.g., *elle* "they"). These forms allow for the expression of nonbinary gender identities in the language and for a systematic replacing of the masculine form of pronouns and conjugation to refer to men and women. That is, the inclusive grammatical genders (e.g., *the* x *gender*, *the* e *gender*) are used in place of the canonically masculine gender to refer to groups of people integrated by more than one gender.

Gender-inclusive language is a form of linguistic framing that operates in discourse. Being a quite recent phenomenon, there is a lack of empirical studies looking at the influence of the use of gender-inclusive language in sensitive feminism-related issues. The second goal of this paper is to explore whether the use of gender-inclusive language exerts a measurable influence on the perception of feminist causes. To achieve this goal, we add gender-inclusive language to our empirical design to explore whether using gender-neutral forms has a measurable influence on perception.

4. Survey experiment

The aim of this study is to explore whether the instantiation of certain linguistic frames produces measurable effects on the perceptions of feminist causes in a hypothetical case study. In particular, we are interested in evaluating the effects of using war metaphors,

being a common metaphor in feminism-related popular media in Spanish (Reali 2021). Additionally, we want to explore the effect of using gender-inclusive language vs canonical language.

The experimental paradigm used here was inspired by the one used by Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011), where experimental conditions were determined by differences in metaphorical framing in vignette descriptions of social issues. In the current study, participants were exposed to a description of a hypothetical case of elective abortion followed by a number of questions designed to assess their initial perception of the information they had read. The description in the vignette varied across conditions according to two framing factors. The first one was metaphorical framing vs neutral: war metaphors were used (or not) to describe the main character (Andrea) and feminism as a concept in the story narrated. The second factor was the presence or absence of gender-inclusive language in Spanish. As a result, the experiment was a two-factorial fully crossed 2x2 between participants design. Four types of questionnaires were created, each corresponding to one of the following conditions: 1. *War-metaphor frame* X *gender-inclusive language*; 2. Neutral frame X *gender-inclusive language*; 3. *War-metaphor frame* X non-gender-inclusive language; 2. Neutral frame X non-gender-inclusive language. The response questions were followed by a questionnaire to gather participants´ sociodemographic data, which has long been shown to be important in the perception of feminist causes (Haddock & Zanna 1994).

⬚The experiment was done in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and it followed the ethical requirements of the Universidad de los Andes institutional ethical review board. Participants were informed that their data would be treated anonymously and that they could terminate the experiment at any time without providing any reason. We received written informed consent from all participants before they participated in the experiment.

5. Participants

A total of 284 undergraduate students from Universidad de Andes in Bogotá, Colombia, volunteered to participate in the study. All participants were 18 or older and declared their native language was Spanish. From the initial sample, 20 participants were excluded because they did not complete the survey. Participants' sociodemographic characteristics (gender of identification, level of religiosity, political ideology, socioeconomic status, and level of identification as feminists) are described below in the Results section.

6. Materials and procedure

Each participant was presented with one of four versions of a description of a hypothetical case of elective abortion. Each version of the vignette differed in the choice of metaphor frame (war vs neutral) and the presence or absence of gender-inclusive

language. Linguistic frames then varied across conditions according to the 2 X 2 design as described above. The vignette is presented below (Spanish original version and English translation). Lexical items in underlined bold correspond to the **war metaphor frame** and those in italics correspond to the *neutral frame* condition. Lexical items in brackets underlined correspond to the gender-inclusive condition in Spanish.

En la comunidad, el movimiento feminista hacía un tiempo que (**guerreaba por**/*perseguía*) la causa del derecho al aborto. El feminismo (**luchaba**/*exigía*) en las calles (**por**) la despenalización del aborto, alegando que ninguna persona debe ser juzgada por decidir si traer un (hijo/<u>hije</u>) al mundo o no. Durante el mes de marzo (todos los/<u>todes les</u>) integrantes del movimiento salieron a (**pelear por**/*reclamar*) sus peticiones. Sin embargo, no habían podido (**declarar victoria**/*lograrlo*), debido a que había mucha resistencia desde (los delegados/ <u>les delegades</u>) en el congreso.

Andrea fue una de las personas que se vieron (**forzadas**/*obligadas*) a abortar de forma clandestina ese año a escondidas de sus (conocidos/<u>conocides</u>) por no haber una ley que garantizara su posibilidad de hacerlo legalmente con doctores mejor (preparados/<u>preparades</u>). Cuando supo que estaba embarazada se (**resistió**/*opuso*) fuertemente a la idea de ser madre. Lo consultó con sus (amigos/<u>amigues</u>) y se alegró de contar con (allegados/<u>allegades</u>) para tomar su decisión. Andrea estaba segura de que tendría (**que defender a capa y espada**/ *argumentar profundamente*) su decisión frente a su pareja y decidió no consultarlo con él. La experiencia de Andrea fue difícil, debido a las condiciones precarias de la clínica a la que pudo acceder. Desde entonces, Andrea ha (**combatido por**/*intercedido por*) las personas que son denunciadas por abortar de forma ilegal y (aquellos/<u>aquelles</u>) que las respaldan.

Translation:

In the community, the feminist movement had been (**warring**/*pursuing*) the cause of abortion rights for some time. Feminism (**fough**t/*demanded*) in the streets (for) the decriminalization of abortion, claiming that no person should be judged for deciding whether to bring a (nGI-child*/<u>GI-child</u>) into the world or not. During the month of March (nGI-all/ <u>GI-all</u>) members of the movement went out to (**battle for**/*claim*) their petitions. However, they had not been able to (**declare victory**/*achieve it*) because there was a lot of resistance from the (nGI-delegates/GI-delegates) at the congress.

Andrea was one of the people who were (**forced**/*obliged*) to have a clandestine abortion that year, hidden from their (nGI-acquaintances/<u>GI-acquaintances</u>) because there was no law that guaranteed their possibility of doing it legally with better (nGI-prepared doctors/ <u>GI- prepared doctors</u>). When she found out that she was pregnant, she strongly (**resisted**/ *disagreed with*) the idea of becoming a mother. She consulted with her (nGI-friends/GI-friends) and felt glad to have (nGI-relatives/<u>GI-relatives</u>) to help her make the decision.

Andrea was sure that she would have (**to defend tooth and nail**/*argue deeply*) the decision with her partner and decided not to consult him. Andrea's experience was difficult due to the precarious conditions of the clinic that she was able to access. Since then, Andrea has (**combated**/*interceded*) for the rights of people who are denounced for illegal abortion and those who support them[2].

Each participant was presented with the information on an individual computer through the Qualtrics software interface. Participants were instructed to carefully read the paragraphs and answer a subsequent set of questions that appeared on the screen. Response items were listed on a second page consisting of the following Likert-like questions designed to assess participants' perceptions of the information they had just read:

En una escala de 1 a 7, ¿Qué tan de acuerdo está con las siguientes afirmaciones?, siendo 1 "muy en desacuerdo" y 7 "muy de acuerdo". (tr. On a scale of 1 to 7, how much do you agree with the following statements, with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 7 being "strongly agree")

1. "Andrea tiene derecho a decidir sobre el aborto de manera autónoma" (tr. Andrea has the right to decide on abortion autonomously)
2. "La pareja de Andrea debería opinar en la decisión sobre el aborto" (tr. Andrea's partner should have a say in the abortion decision)
3. "Andrea es una mujer fuerte" (tr. Andrea is a strong woman)
4. "Andrea es una mujer fría" (tr. Andrea is a cold woman)

Statements 1 and 2 were designed to measure level of empowerment in relation to the choice, and statements 3 and 4 were designed to measure stereotyping perceptions that have been shown to be associated with feminist women perceived as aggressive or cold (Bashir et al. 2013).

After answering the response items, participants were asked to respond a series of sociodemographic questions, including: 1. Gender of identification (Female, Male, Non-binary, Other); 2. Religiosity (Non-religious, Mildly religious, Moderately religious, Very religious); 3. Political ideology (Very conservative, Moderately conservative, Slightly conservative, Neutral, Slightly liberal, Moderately liberal, Very liberal); 4. Self-identified SES (Low, Low-medium; Medium, Medium-high, High); 5. Level of identification as a feminist person.

---

2   *nGI stands for "non-gender inclusive form" and GI stands for "gender inclusive form". As gender inclusive forms are variations of specific Spanish conjugation forms (the use of an "e" instead or the canonical masculine marker "o") these forms are untranslatable straightforwardly to English).

7. Results

In this section, we present the results of the study in a more descriptive manner. In the following section, these results are interpreted and discussed more profoundly in the light of relevant theoretical issues.

From a total of 264 analyzed subjects, 59% self-identified as female, 37% as male, 2% as non-binary and 2% as other. In terms of religiosity, 48% declared themselves to be non-religious, 26% mildly religious, 22% moderately religious and 4% very religious. In terms of political ideology, 18% declared themselves to be "very liberal", 29% "moderately liberal", 17% "mildly liberal", 22% "neutral", 5% "mildly conservative", 6% "moderately conservative" and 2% "very conservative". In terms of self-identification as feminists, 17% declared themselves to be non-feminists, 34% declared themselves to be "non-feminists but sympathizers of the feminist causes", and 49% self-identified as "feminists". In terms of SES, 1% self-identified as "low" SES, 8% as "middle-low", 26% as "middle", 42% as "high-middle" and 24% as "high" SES. As sociodemographic variables were ordinal variables, they were transformed to numerical covariates in the analyses described below.

Table 1 shows the mean and SE values of the response measures, that is, the 1–7 scale agreement with the statements "Andrea has the right to decide on abortion autonomously" (henceforth, Right-to-Decide), "Andrea's partner should have a say in the abortion decision" (henceforth Partner's-Say), "Andrea is a cold woman" (henceforth Coldness) and "Andrea is a strong woman" (henceforth "Strength"). Mean responses are presented grouped by framing condition (war-metaphor frame (henceforth WM frame) and neutral (henceforth N frame), and by type of gender-inclusive language (gender-inclusive language (henceforth GI language) and non-gender-inclusive language (nGI language)).

Table 1. Mean and SE values of the response measures grouped by conditions

	WM frame mean(SD)	N frame mean(SD)	GI language mean(SD)	nGI language mean(SD)
Right-to-Decide	5.97 (1.73)	5.6 (2.01)	5.82 (1.94)	5.81 (1.83)
Partner's-Say	3.41 (2.11)	3.83 (2.24)	3.49 (2.22)	3.74 (2.15)
Coldness	2.11 (1.68)	2.48 (1.70)	2.24 (1.59)	2.35 (1.79)
Strength	5.95 (1.67)	5.89 (1.68)	5.84 (1.68)	5.99 (1.67)

Note: WM = war metaphor; N= neutral; GI= gender-inclusive; nGI= non-gender-inclusive

Sociodemographic factors are known to play a role in perception of feminism and feminist ideas (e.g., Haddock & Zanna 1994). Table 2 shows the mean and SE values of the response measures grouped by sociodemographic factors.

Table 2. Mean and SE values of the response measures grouped by sociodemographic factors

	Right-to-decide mean (SD)	Partner's-Say mean(SD)	Coldness mean(SD)	Strength mean(SD)
Gender				
Male	4.98(2.17)	4.67(2.11)	3.34(1.78)	5.04(1.88)
Female	6.32(1.45)	3.04(1.96)	1.66(1.26)	6.45(1.25)
Other/ nonBinary	6.08(1.93)	2.62(236)	1.92(1.80)	6.15(1.82))
Political ideology				
Liberal	6.29(1.41)	3.09(1.96)	1.90(1.36)	6.40(1.17)
Neutral	5.43(2.21)	4.28(2.36)	2.71(1.81)	5.37(1.97)
Conservative	4.20(2.23)	5.03(2.01)	3.49(2.21)	4.54(2.13)
Religiosity				
Non-religious	6.20(1.63)	3.34(2.18)	2.17(1.51)	6.02(1.56)
Mildly religious	5.90(1.76)	3.43(2.06)	2.13(1.56)	6.10(1.37)
Religious	5.01(2.15)	4.34(2.17)	2.69(2.07)	5.54(2.08)

8. Framing effects

We measured the level of correlation between the 1 to 7 scale rating of the four perception measures, Right-to-Decide, Partner's say, Coldness and Strength, and the sociodemographic co-variables. A series of Spearman's rank correlations revealed that political ideology was associated significantly with Right-to-Decide (more conservative participants produced lower rates, Spearman rho (ρ)=-.38, p<.001), Partner's-Say (more conservative participants produced higher rates, ρ =.36, p<.001), Coldness (more conservative participants produced higher rates, ρ =.30, p<.001) and Strength (more consevative participants produced lower rates, ρ =-42., p<.001). Participants' religiosity correlated with Right-to-Decide (more religious participants produced lower rates, ρ =-.28, p<.001) and Partner's-Say (more religious participants produced higher rates, ρ =.174, p=.005).

We found that the level of feminist identification correlates with Right-to-Decide (more feminist participants produced higher rates, ρ =.35, p<.001), Partner's-Say (more feminist participants produced lower rates, ρ =-.30, p<.001), Coldness (more feminist participants produced lower rates, ρ =-.23, p<.001) and Strength (more feminist participants produced higher rates, ρ =.27, p<.001). Participants' gender correlated strongly

with Right-to-Decide (male-identified participants produced lower rates, **ρ** =-.38, p<.001), Partner's-Say (male-identified participants produced higher rates, **ρ** =.38, p<.001), Cold-ness (male-identifed participants produced higher rates, **ρ** =.5, p<.001) and Strength (male-identified participants produced lower rates, **ρ** =-.46, p<.001). Finally, participants' socioeconomic status (SES) did not correlate with any of the perception measures.

To explore whether Framing and Type of Language had any effect on perception, a series or linear regression analyses were conducted for each of the predicted variables, including Framing and Type of Language as categorical factors and sociodemographic factors as covariates. Only sociodemographic factors that showed some significant cor-relation with any of the response variables were included as predictors, and therefore participants' SES was excluded from the analyses. Gender was included as a dummy covariate where 0 corresponded to "Male" and 1 to "Female/Non-binary/Other". Results are shown below for each of the perception variables.

Right-to-Decide

In order to explore the relative importance of each factor in predicting Right-to-Decide scores we ran a regression model (explained variable: Right-to-Decide, predictor cate-gorical factors Framing (WM vs N) and Type of Language (GI vs nGI), and covariables political ideology, religiosity, feminist identification and gender. The model was highly significant ($F_{(6,257)}$ = 18.8 ; p <.001), accounting for 30.1% of the variance (R^2).

Metaphorical framing significantly predicted Right-to-Decide (standardized esti-mate=-.23, t=-2.15; p=.032) when controlling for all sociodemographic factors and type of language. As shown in Figure 1, participants exposed to war-metaphors rated Right-to-Decide higher. On the other hand, as shown in Table 3, Type-of-Language (gender inclusive vs non-gender inclusive) had no effect on Right-to-Decide ratings (t<1; p>.4). Also, participants' gender, political ideology and religiosity had significant effects on Right-to-Decide (all p's <.001), such that men, more conservative and more religious participants rated lower on this measure.

Table 3. Right-to-Decide results

Model Coefficients – Right-to-Decide

Predictor	Estimate	SE	T	P	Stand. Estimate
Intercept [a]	8.721	0.5412	16.114	<.001	
Participants' Political Ideology	-0.313	0.0731	-4.278	<.001	-0.2529
Participants' Religiosity	-0.420	0.1179	-3.560	<.001	-0.2039
Identification as Feminist	0.219	0.1190	1.839	0.067	0.1046
Participants' Gender	-1.127	0.2071	-5.443	<.001	-0.3048
Framing:					
Neutral framing – War metaphors	-0.424	0.1969	-2.154	0.032	-0.2254
Type of Language:					
nGI – GI	0.151	0.1971	0.766	0.444	0.0803

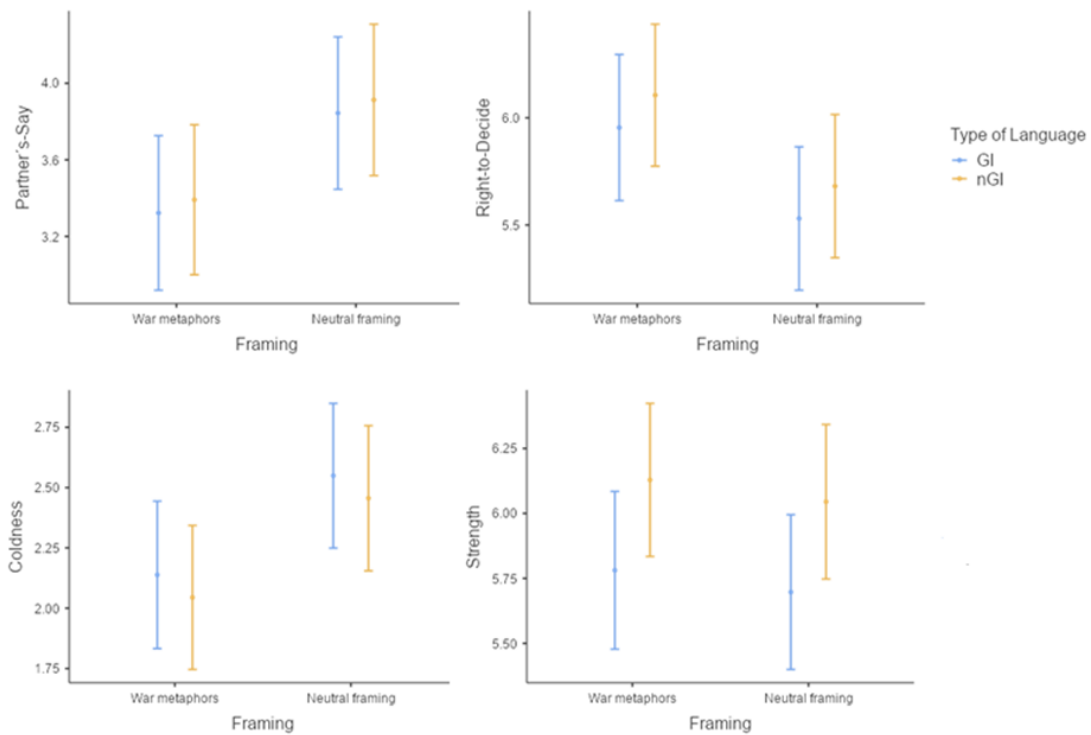[a] Represents reference level

Figure 1. Mean comparison grouped by Framing condition and Type-of-Language condition

Partner's-Say

The relative importance of each factor in predicting Right-to-Decide scores was assessed by a regression model (explained variable: Partner's-Say, predictor categorical factors Framing (WM vs N) and Type of Language (GI vs nGI), and covariables political ideology, religiosity, feminist identification and gender. The model was highly significant $(F_{(6,257)} = 16.4$; p <.001), accounting for 27.7% of the variance (R^2). Metaphorical framing significantly predicted Partner's-Say (standardized estimate=.24, t=-2.23; p=.026) when controlling for sociodemographic factors. As shown in Table 4 and Figure 1, participants exposed to war-metaphors rated Partner's-Say lower. Type-of-Language had no effect on Partner's-Say ratings (t<1; p>.7). Participants' gender, political ideology and religiosity had significant effects on Partner's-Say (all p's <.05) such that men, more conservative and more religious participants rated higher on this measure.

Table 4. Partner's-Say results

Model Coefficients – Partner's-Say

Predictor	Estimate	SE	T	P	Stand. Estimate
Intercept [a]	0.4632	0.6405	0.723	0.470	
Participants' Political Ideology	0.3449	0.0866	3.981	<.001	0.2406
Participants' Religiosity	0.2903	0.1402	2.070	0.039	0.1215
Identification as Feminist	-0.2672	0.1409	-1.895	0.059	-0.1101
Participants' Gender	1.3693	0.2450	5.589	<.001	0.3196
Framing:					
Neutral framing – War metaphors	0.5217	0.2335	2.235	0.026	0.2390
Type of Language:					
nGI – GI	0.0690	0.2336	0.295	0.768	0.0316

[a] Represents reference level

Coldness

Similarly, a regression model was used to explore the relative importance of each factor in predicting the mean character's Coldness (explained variable: Coldness, predictor categorical factors Framing (WM vs N) and Type-of-Language (GI vs nGI), and covariables

political ideology, religiosity, feminist identification and gender. The model was highly significant $(F_{(6,255)} = 19.5 ; p < .001)$, accounting for 31% of the variance (R^2).

Metaphorical framing significantly predicted Coldness (standardized estimate=.24, t=2.32; p=.021) when controlling for sociodemographic factors. As shown in Fig. 1, participants exposed to war-metaphors rated Coldness lower. On the other hand, as shown in Table 5, Type of Language (gender inclusive vs non-gender inclusive) had no effect on Coldness ratings (t<1; p>.5). Participants' gender and political ideology had significant effects on Coldness (all p's <.001) such that men and more conservative participants rated higher on this measure.

Table 5. Coldness predictive results

Model Coefficients – Coldness

Predictor	Estimate	SE	T	P	Stand. Estimate
Intercept [a]	-1.0576	0.4881	-2.167	0.031	
Participants' Political Ideology	0.2686	0.0656	4.097	<.001	0.2414
Participants' Religiosity	0.1734	0.1062	1.633	0.104	0.0935
Identification as Feminist	0.0201	0.1071	0.188	0.851	0.0106
Participants' Gender	1.4795	0.1865	7.934	<.001	0.4447
Framing:					
Neutral framing – War metaphors	0.4112	0.1769	2.325	0.021	0.2424
Type of Language:					
nGI – GI	-0.0935	0.1772	-0.527	0.598	-0.0551

[a] Represents reference level

⊠The model included the main character's Strength ratings as the explained variable: Strength, with predictor categorical factors Framing (WM vs N) and Type-of-Language (GI vs nGI), and covariables political ideology, religiosity, feminist identification and gender. The model was significant $(F_{(6,257)} = 18.8; p < .001)$, accounting for 30% of the variance (R^2). As shown in Table 6, metaphorical framing did not predict Strength (t<1; p>.6) when controlling for type of language and sociodemographic variables. On the other hand, Type of Language (gender inclusive vs non-gender inclusive) predicted Strength ratings (standardized estimate=.21, t=1.98; p=.048) in that non-gender-inclusive language resulted in higher ratings of strength (see Fig. 1). Participants' gender and political ideology

had significant effects (both p's <.001) as men and more conservative participants rated lower on this measure.

Table 6. Strength predictive results

Model Coefficients – Strength

Predictor	Estimate	SE	T	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept [a]	8.8618	0.4815	18.405	<.001	
Participants' Political Ideology	-0.3962	0.0651	-6.090	<.001	-0.3602
Participants' Religiosity	-0.0667	0.1049	-0.636	0.526	-0.0364
Identification as Feminist	-0.0570	0.1059	-0.538	0.591	-0.0306
Participants' Gender	-1.2097	0.1842	-6.566	<.001	-0.3680
Framing:					
Neutral framing – War metaphors	-0.0839	0.1752	-0.479	0.633	-0.0501
Type of Language:					
nGI – GI	0.3476	0.1753	1.983	0.048	0.2078

[a] Represents reference level

9. Discussion of results

Sociodemographic factors had a significant effect on perception: men, and conservative and religious participants rated Andrea's Right-to-Decide lower, her partner's right to have a say in the decision as higher, and Andrea's Coldness as higher (see Table 2). This pattern is consistent with previous finding reported in the literature (Bashir et al. 2013; Patel & Johns 2009).

However, the main goal of this study was to explore the linguistic framing effects on perception. We found that framing feminist ideas using war metaphors may increase the perception of the ability to control or react to events. The use of war metaphors is ubiquitous in political discourse, and is frequently used to frame feminist movements. The use of these metaphors could be either a source of empowerment or a polarizing tool. Flusberg et al. (2018) compared the potential benefits and disadvantages of using war metaphors to frame social and political matters, concluding that the meaning of war metaphors is intimately tied to the context in which they are used, which may result in either positive or negative outcomes.

Consistent with our hypothesis, frames had a small but significant effect. The use of war metaphors to describe a situation of elective abortion produced a higher perception of the main character's right to decide and a lower perception of her partner's right to have a say in the decision, even when controlling for sociodemographic factors (see Fig 1). This pattern is consistent with the hypothesis that war metaphors may have an empowering effect. Also, the perception of the character's coldness was lower in the war metaphor condition. On the other hand, the use of inclusive language had much less of an effect on perception.

War metaphors used to frame women are ubiquitous in feminism-related articles which are presumably targeted at a feminism-sympathizing audience (Reali 2021). Here we have shown that, even in a randomly selected group of participants, the use of war metaphors may have empowering effects. A possible caveat of this study, however, is that our sample is composed of students only. Therefore, a reasonable follow up to this work would be to use a sample that is more representative of the general population.

How do metaphors work? War metaphors tend to highlight the structural similarities between warfare and abstract events, engaging the mind in representations of two opposing forces undergoing combat. Moreover, they convey a sense of "danger" since wars are phenomena that naturally bring on fear and anxiety (Flusberg et al. 2018). For example, a recent study by Martynyuk (2021) examined 16 TED talks given by transgender individuals, finding the presence of TRANSITION IS CONTEST metaphors, which were interpreted as indicative of the struggle between transgender individuals and a disapproving society.

Furthermore, war metaphors serve as political rhetorical tools, as they evoke fear and shape discourse (Alexandrescu 2014). As discussed in the Introduction, feminists are frequently subjected to negative portrayals that cast them in an unfavourable light in popular media. Framing feminists as "warriors" depicts them as actively aiming to establish their fighting stance within those realms. While the construal of women as warriors can be inspiring and empowering for some, it may also encourage the depiction of feminism as an "evil enemy" that needs to be defeated—a connotation suggested by the unfortunate term 'feminazi'—fueling polarization in political discourse and contributing to the demonization of the movement as one fed by hostility towards men (McRobbie 2009). For example, Edley and Wetherell (2001) conducted an analysis showing that some men understand "gender equality" in terms of women taking their place in the context of a battle, and feminists are often conceptualized as women who hate men, and whose goal is to destroy traditions. On the other hand, some evidence suggests that frames of empowering women may be beneficial. For example, Naruddin (2018) found positive representations of feminism in the context of the raising of the recent #Metoo movement. She argues that, far from working against the cause, the visibility of this movement provides an ideological platform that motivates many women around the globe

in positive ways. Similarly, Kay and Banet-Weiser (2019) have recently argued that the visibility that women´s anger has gained in popular media in recent years contributes to inspire young women against oppression in constructive ways.

In addition to the effects on the perception of the main character´s right to decide, we found that she was perceived as "less cold" when war metaphors were used (see Figure 1). This was surprising, as previous work has shown that women who label themselves as "feminists" are seen by others as "less warm" (Bashir et al. 2013; Meijs et al. 2019). A possible explanation for this could be related to the embodied representation of warriors and particularly "anger" in terms of heat (e.g., Wilkowski et al. 2009). Heat-related metaphors are commonly used in reference to angry subjects (e.g., "hot-headed" in English, or the Spanish "calentarse" (tr. to become hot-headed). From an embodied cognition perspective, Wilkowski et al. (2009) argue that "the metaphoric representation perspective contends that such metaphors [heat-related ones] are not simply a poetic means of expressing anger but actually reflect the manner in which the concept of anger is cognitively represented" (2009: 464). Drawing upon this perspective, as war framings could elicit anger-related thoughts, using these metaphors may activate "heat" schemas that explain the reduced perception of "coldness" of the fictional character that undergoes an elective abortion, at odds with documented stereotypical representations.

Perceptions of women-rights and feminism have been investigated mostly in Western media coverage. Most corpus studies on feminism construal have focused on Anglo-American and European media (Feltham-King et al. 2015). As noted by Gill (2012), to fully understand the nature of the discourse in a broader sense, it is important to study how feminism and women are construed transculturally and across different cultures and languages. Then, a further contribution of this work is that it sheds some light on the ways in which feminism (and women) are linguistically construed in the context of Colombia and Spanish-speaking participants.

Finally, new forms of expressing nonbinary alternatives to gender marked language in Spanish (i.e., *niñxs, niñes*) have been increasingly used in Latin America in recent years, as an attempt to legitimize the use of gender-neutral forms and make them linguistically valid (Nausa 2020). The use of gender-inclusive forms responds in many ways to the legacy of feminist movements since the 1970s, which have denounced the systematic dominance of masculine linguistic gender across different languages (Papalopoulus 2022). Feminist linguists have long denounced the use of the masculine gender as the default linguistic gender prescribed for use in mixed-gender or supposedly generic personal reference, as in the canonical case of Spanish. In recent years, new forms of expressing nonbinary alternatives have been invented (e.g., *niñxs, nines*). According to Popalopoulus, "While gender-inclusive Spanish faces ongoing institutional rejection from language academies like the Real Academia Española [RAE] "Royal Spanish Academy", many more universities and other institutions now legitimize its usage as linguistically

valid, and the adoption of gender-inclusive Spanish by queer community members and allies continues to increase" (2022: 41).

In Latin America, the use of gender-inclusive language began to be considerably popular at the beginning of 2018, and it has become more frequent in the countries of the southern cone: Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, a tendency probably related to the incidence of feminist movements in those countries (Nausa 2020).

The current study is one of the first empirical works looking at the influence of the use of gender-inclusive language on sensitive feminism-related issues. In relation to our second main objective—to explore the effects of this framing in the context of feminist causes—the results suggest that incorporating gender-inclusive language has little measurable effect on perception, at least in the context of the specific example studied here. Therefore, such a gap in the literature points towards the need to conduct broader empirical designs and corpus analysis studies aimed at exploring whether using gender-neutral forms has a measurable effect on perception.

10. Conclusion

Previous work posits the question of whether using war metaphors in political discourse may increase fear emotions that fuel political polarization (Flusberg et al. 2018). On the other hand, some have suggested that the use of war metaphors to talk about the fight against disease may have empowering effects, especially when patients are traversing potentially curative treatments (Semino et al. 2018). In the context of feminism-related discourse, previous studies have revealed a high prevalence of war metaphors to describe women and feminist activists (Reali 2021). The current study adds a unique contribution to this literature in that it implements empirical methods to explore the possible influence of warfare and language-inclusive framing on the perception of certain political matters. Our results suggest that framing feminist ideas using war metaphors may have empowering effects that may increase the degree of agency of a vulnerable group, involving a greater perception of the ability to control or react to events. From a more general perspective, these results add additional evidence that supports the importance of metaphorical framing on perception.

References

Alexandrescu, L. 2014. Mephedrone, assassin of youth: The rhetoric of fear in contemporary drug scares. *Crime Media Culture* 10: 23–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659013511975

Ahmed, U. 2018. Metaphor in the construction of gender in media discourse: Analysis of metaphors used to describe Omen in Nigerian newspapers. *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies* 6 (1): 88–89. doi:10.15640/ijgws.v6n1p8.

Amery, F., Bates, S., Jenkins, L. & Savigny, H. 2015. Metaphors on women in academia: A review of the literature, 2004–2013. *Advances in Gender Research* 20: 247–267. `https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-212620150000020022`

Banet-Weiser, S., & L. Portwood-Stacer. 2017. The traffic in feminism: An introduction to the commentary and criticism on popular feminism. *Feminist Media Studies* 17 (5): 884–888. doi:10.1080/14680777.2017.1350517.

Bashir, N. Y., Lockwood, P., Chasteen, A. L., Nadolny, D., & Noyes, I. 2013. The ironic impact of activists: Negative stereotypes reduce social change influence. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 43(7): 614–626.

Chin, J. 2009. Are women nothing more than their body parts? Obscene and indecent metaphors used to describe women in a Hong Kong magazine. *LCOM Papers* 2: 17–30.

Dalén, A. 2011. *El aborto en Colombia: cambios legales y transformaciones sociales.* Disponible en: `https://repositorio.unal.edu.co/handle/unal/8294`

Dean, J. 2010. Feminism in the papers: Contested feminisms in the British quality press. *Feminist Media Studies* 10(4): 391–407. `https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2010.514112`

Degner, L.F., Hack , O'Neil, T, & Kristjanson, L.J. 2003. A new approach to eliciting meaning in the context of breast cancer. *Cancer Nursing* 26(3): 169–178. `https://doi.org/10.1097/00002820-200306000-00001`

Edley, N., & Wetherell, M. 2001. Jekyll and Hyde: Men's constructions of feminism and feminists. *Feminism & Psychology* 11(4): 439–457.

Feltham-King, T. & Macleod, C. 2015. Gender, abortion and substantive representation in the South African newsprint media. *Women Studies International Forum* 51: 10–8. `https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2015.04.001`

Flusberg, S., Matlock, T., & Thibodeau, P. 2018. War metaphors in public discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol* 33(1): 1–18. `https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2018.1407992`

George, D.R., Whitehouse, E.R., & Whitehouse, P.J. 2016. Asking more of our metaphors: Narrative strategies to end the "War on Alzheimer's" and humanize cognitive aging. *The American Journal of Bioethics* 16: 22–24. `https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2016.1214307`

Gill, R. 2012. Media, empowerment and the 'sexualization of culture' debates. *Sex Roles* 66: 736–745. doi:10.1007/s11199-011-0107.

Haddock, G., & Zanna, M. P. 1994. Preferring "housewives" to "feminists": Categorization and the favorability of attitudes toward women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 18(1): 25–52.

Ho, J. 2022. Evading the lockdown: Animal metaphors and dehumanization in virtual space. *Metaphor and Symbol* 37(1): 21–38. `https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2021.1941972`

Jaworska, S. 2012. On the F word: A corpus-based analysis of the media representation of feminism in British and German press discourse, 1990–2009. *Discourse and Society* 23(4): 401–431. `https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926512441113`

Kafu, C., Ligaga, D., & Wachira, J. 2021. Exploring media framing of abortion content on Kenyan television: a qualitative study protocol. *Reproductive Health* 18: 12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-021-01071-5

Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. 1980. *Metaphors we Live By.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Lind, R.A. & C. Salo. 2002. The framing of feminists and feminism in news and public affairs programs in US electronic media. *Journal of Communication* 52(1): 211–228

López, I. 2009. Of women, bitches, chickens and vixens: Animal metaphors for women in English and Spanish. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación/Culture, Language and Representation* 7(7): 77–100.

Martynyuk, A. 2021. Transition trauma metaphor in transgender narrative. *East European Journal of Psycholinguistics* 8(1): 70–82. https://doi.org/10.29038/eejpl.2021.8.1.mar

McRobbie, A. 2009. *The aftermath of feminism: Gender, culture and social change.* London: Sage Publishing.

Meijs, M., Ratliff, K. A., & Lammers, J. 2019. Perceptions of feminist beliefs influence ratings of warmth and competence. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 22(2): 253–270.

Naruddin, N. 2018. *The representation of the #Metoo movement in mainstream international media.* Master Thesis, Jonkoping University, Sweden.

Nausa, R. 2020. *"Todes": lenguaje incluyente (parte 1) | Uniandes.* Departamento de Lenguas y Cultura, Universidad de los Andes. https://cienciassociales.uniandes.edu.co/lenguas-cultura/blog/todes-lenguaje-incluyente-parte-1/

Otieno, R.F., Owino, F.R., & Attyang, J.M. 2016. Metaphors in political discourse: A review of selected studies. *International Journal of English and Literature* 7(2): 21–26. doi:10.5897/IJEL2015.0856

Papalopoupus, B. 2022. A brief history of gender-inclusive Spanish. *Deportate, esuli, profughe* 48(1): 31–48.

Patel, C.J., Johns, L. 2016. Gender role attitudes and attitudes to abortion: Are there gender differences? *Social Science Journal* 46: 493–505. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2009.02.006

Ramsey, L.R., Haines, M.E., Hurt, M.M., Nelson, J.A., Turner, D.L., Liss, M., & Erchull, M. J. 2007. Thinking of others: Feminist identification and the perception of others' beliefs. *Sex Roles* 56(9): 611–616.

Reali, F. 2021. Metaphorical framing of feminism and women in Spanish online media. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*: 1–15.

Reali, F., Soriano, T., & Rodríguez, D. 2016. How we think about depression: The role of linguistic framing. *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicología* 48(2): 127–136.

Semino, E. 2017. Corpus linguistics and metaphor. In B. Dancygier (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 463–76.

Semino, E., Demjén, Z., & Demmen, J. 2018. An integrated approach to metaphor and framing in cognition, discourse, and practice, with an application to metaphors for cancer. *Applied Linguistics* 39 (5): 625–645. `https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amw028`

Thibodeau, P.H., Boroditsky, L. 2011. Metaphors we think with: The role of metaphor in Reasoning. *PLoS ONE* 6(2): e16782. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0016782.

Thibodeau, P.H., Matlock, T. & Flusberg, S.J. 2019. The role of metaphor in communication and thought. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 13 (5): e12327

Turpin-Moreno, D.E. 2014. A critical study of the women are animals metaphor. Bachelor Thesis, Universidad de le Murcia, Spain.

Wilkowski, B., Meier, B., Robinson, M.D., Carter, M. & Feltman, R. 2009. "Hot-Headed" is more than an expression: The embodied representation of anger in terms of heat. *Emotion* 9(4): 464–77. `https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015764`.

Yu, Y. 2021. Metaphorical representations of "leftover women": Between traditional patriarchy and modern egalitarianism. *Social Semiotics* 31(2): 248–265. `https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2019.1625515`

***

Florencia Reali is an Associate Professor at Universidad Católica del Uruguay (Montevideo, Uruguay), where she teaches courses in Psychology and Psycholinguistics. She obtained her PhD in Psychology (in the area Psycholinguistics) from Cornell University in 2007. Her multidisciplinary research traverses the areas of psychology of language, language evolution, literary theory, linguistics and education.

Lucien Dominic Van Avellaneda is a non-binary trans psychologist from Universidad de los Andes, where they currently study for a master's degree in Clinical and Health Psychology. They are interested in clinical and social psychology, and in research on issues related to psychology of language, mental health, violence, well-being and quality of life in people with sexual, gender and relationship diversity.