

Feminist Stylistics in *Boston Strangler* (2023): Women's Struggle for Equality in Media Representation

Elizabeth Rusida^{a,1,*}, Friska Tambunan^{b,2}, Thesia Aprianti^{c,3}, Rahmadsyah Rangkuti^{d,4}

^{1,2,3,4} Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan and 20155 Indonesia

¹ Elizabethrusida@gmail.com*; ² friskatambunan6451@gmail.com; ³ Thesiaafriyanti@gmail.com; ⁴ rangkuti@usu.ac.id

* corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the gender dynamics reflected in the film *Boston Strangler* (2023) using a qualitative by feminist stylistics approach. The research examines how the film's linguistic representation reflects the challenges and progress of women in investigative journalism. By employing linguistic and stylistic analysis, the study identifies language choices, sentence structures, and discourse patterns that either reinforce or challenge traditional gender constructs in the media. The findings reveal that at the lexical level, the film often depicts men as authoritative figures, while women are portrayed as emotional or excessive in asserting their professionalism. Sentence structures further emphasize gender inequalities, with female characters frequently having to justify their abilities in the workplace. On a broader discourse level, while the film highlights the structural barriers faced by women in male-dominated fields, it also showcases their resilience in challenging societal expectations. This study underscores the significance of language in shaping gender perceptions and provides deeper insights into the representation of women in the media. It also contributes to broader discussions on the portrayal of women on screen and the role of media in shaping social norms. Future research could explore similar linguistic patterns in other films within the same genre to observe the evolving portrayal of gender in cinema.

I. Introduction

Films serve as a powerful medium for storytelling, shaping cultural perceptions and reinforcing societal norms [1]. Beyond entertainment, films influence gender discourse, often reflecting or challenging stereotypes [2]. *Boston Strangler* (2023) revisits the 1960s serial murders through the lens of investigative journalism, focusing on female reporters' struggles within a male-dominated profession [3]. Examining this film through feminist stylistics provides insight into how language constructs and reinforces gender roles [4]. Feminist stylistics critically evaluates linguistic patterns to uncover gender biases embedded in discourse, exposing how women are often positioned as secondary characters in narratives [5]. This study explores the portrayal of women in *Boston Strangler* using Sara Mills' framework, assessing how lexical and structural elements either sustain or challenge gendered power hierarchies.

Media representation plays a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes towards gender roles. The portrayal of women in investigative journalism within film often mirrors real-world struggles, where female professionals must continuously prove their competence in male-dominated spaces [6]. Language in film dialogues contributes to these perceptions by reinforcing traditional stereotypes or subverting them through progressive character development [7]. By analyzing how *Boston Strangler* frames female journalists linguistically, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the intersection between gender and media discourse. Gender roles and power dynamics have been

examined in linguistic analyses, with emphasis placed on how language reinforces traditional gender hierarchies.

In recent years, several scholars have also explored feminist representations and stylistic features in contemporary visual media. For instance, The characterization of female journalists was analyzed through a feminist lens, focusing on empowerment and the suppression experienced in professional settings. Similarly, A feminist stylistic framework was employed to uncover language-based power imbalances related to gender and sexual violence. Moreover, expressions and language roles were analyzed to determine how they reflect liberal feminist ideologies. However, there is limited research applying feminist stylistics specifically to contemporary crime films, particularly those that center on female journalists in male-dominated spaces. Most prior analyses have focused on literature and print media, leaving a gap in understanding how cinematic language constructs gender identities [12]. This study fills this gap by analyzing *Boston Strangler* (2023) through a feminist stylistic lens, identifying how language choices both reinforce and challenge gendered power structures in media representation [3].

This research contributes to feminist stylistics by extending its application beyond traditional literary analysis to visual media. By examining gendered language at multiple linguistic levels word and phrase, sentence, and discourse. This study provides a comprehensive view of how language functions in shaping gender narratives in investigative journalism films. The findings not only enhance feminist linguistic studies but also offer insights for future media discourse analysis, encouraging further research on the evolving portrayal of female professionals in cinema.

II. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach by applying Sara Mills' feminist stylistic framework to analysing gender representation in the film *Boston Strangler* (2023), which has a total duration of 1 hour, 34 minutes, and 59 seconds [3]. This study employs a qualitative approach by applying Sara Mills' feminist stylistic framework to analyze gender representation in *Boston Strangler* (2023). The film was viewed multiple times, and key dialogues were transcribed to identify linguistic patterns that shape gender roles [3]. The analysis was conducted at three levels: At the **word and phrase level**, lexical choices were examined to identify whether male and female characters were described differently, particularly in terms of authority, rationality, and emotionality [13]. At the **sentence level**, interactions between characters were analyzed to identify power asymmetries, including interruptions, passive constructions, and rhetorical strategies [7]. At the **discourse level**, the study examined whether women were positioned as central figures in the narrative or relegated to supporting roles [14], [15].

The researchers watched the film repeatedly, transcribed key dialogues, and analysed linguistic choices that shape gender roles in the narrative. The analysis was conducted at several levels. At the word and phrase level, this study identified lexical choices that associated men with authority and action, while women were associated with passivity and emotion. At the sentence level, this study examined the use of active and passive sentences and interruption patterns that reveal power dynamics in interactions between characters. At the discourse level, this study explored how minor female characters whether they were positioned as victims, assistants, or active investigators. By applying Sara Mills' feminist stylistic approach, this study aims to reveal how language in the film shapes the construction of gender identity and the social roles of characters. In addition, this analysis looks at the broader implications of gender representation in the media, particularly in the crime thriller genre, and how female characters are given space within the storyline to carry it out.

III. Results and Discussion

2.1. Word and Phrase Level Analysis

The film frequently employs gendered language that reinforces traditional stereotypes. Male characters are described as "hard-hitting journalists" or "smart decision-makers," while female characters are labeled as "lady reporters" or "too ambitious" [13]. These linguistic choices subtly delegitimize women's authority while reinforcing male dominance [16]. For instance, when Loretta McLaughlin presents new findings, her work is dismissed as a "lucky guess," whereas her male counterparts are credited as "experienced professionals" [17]. Similar findings were highlighted by Hasanah, who noted that lexical choices in media often frame women's achievements as accidental rather than earned through expertise [18]. The female gaze in film is argued to remain overshadowed by dominant male perspectives, which affects how female characters are linguistically framed. It is also emphasized that the language used in media not only reflects gender bias but also reinforces existing social norms. In *Boston Strangler*, the use of diminishing terms or labels distinguishing women from men in journalism highlights how women are still positioned as outsiders in a male-dominated field [3].

At the word and phrase level, the film exhibits gendered language that reinforces traditional stereotypes. The table below categorizes words and phrases used to describe male and female characters in different scenes.

Table 1. Editorial Office Scene

Scene	Speaker	Word/Phrase (Male)	Word/Phrase (Female)
Editor Scene	Editor (Male)	Hard-hitting journalist	Lady reporter

In this scene, the editor refers to Loretta as a *lady reporter* instead of simply calling her a *reporter*. According to Sara Mills' feminist stylistics framework, such lexical choices reflect gender bias embedded in language. The term *hard-hitting journalist*, used for male reporters, carries a connotation of professionalism and authority, whereas *lady reporter* marks gender unnecessarily, subtly implying that being a female journalist is an anomaly. This linguistic choice reinforces the perception that journalism is a male-dominated field where men are the standard and women are the deviation. By labeling Loretta with *lady*, the editor frames her presence in the profession as something unusual rather than normalizing women's roles in investigative reporting. This reflects how language can sustain patriarchal ideologies by marking women as the "other" in professional settings.

Table 2. Loretta's Conversation with Her Husband

Scene	Speaker	Word/Phrase (Male)	Word/Phrase (Female)
Loretta speaks with her husband	Husband (Male)	Supportive spouse	Neglecting family

During this conversation, Loretta's husband is portrayed as a *supportive spouse*, whereas Loretta is accused of *neglecting family* due to her professional aspirations. This linguistic contrast reflects a deep-rooted societal expectation that women must prioritize domestic responsibilities over their careers, while men are not subjected to the same scrutiny. Mills' framework highlights how such lexical choices reinforce patriarchal ideologies by portraying female ambition as problematic. The phrase *neglecting family* suggests that a woman's worth is tied to her role as a caregiver, while men can engage in their careers without facing the same judgment. This asymmetry in language subtly

discourages women from fully participating in the workforce, as their success is often framed as coming at the expense of their families.

Table 3. Loretta's Attempt to Convince the Police

Scene	Speaker	Word/Phrase (Male)	Word/Phrase (Female)
Loretta attempts to convince the police	Detective (Male)	Smart decision-maker	Too ambitious

When Loretta tries to persuade the police to take her findings seriously, she is described as *too ambitious*, whereas the detective is framed as a *smart decision-maker*. This contrast exemplifies how language is used to maintain gendered power dynamics in professional environments. Mills' theory suggests that the way individuals are labeled in discourse directly affects their perceived credibility and authority. Ambition is generally seen as a positive trait, but when applied to women, it often carries negative connotations, implying that they are pushy, aggressive, or stepping beyond their "proper" role. Meanwhile, men in similar positions are credited for their intelligence and leadership. This reflects the linguistic double standard that continues to marginalize women in male-dominated fields.

Table 4. Loretta's Discussion with Jack

Scene	Speaker	Word/Phrase (Male)	Word/Phrase (Female)
Discussion between Loretta and Jack	Jack (Male)	Risk-taker	Reckless

In this scene, Jack is described as a *risk-taker*, a term that conveys bravery and strategic thinking. In contrast, Loretta, who exhibits similar behavior, is labeled *reckless*, implying a lack of control or judgment. This linguistic disparity reveals a gendered bias in how assertive actions are framed depending on the speaker's gender. According to Mills' feminist stylistics approach, the language used here reinforces gender stereotypes that validate male authority while questioning female competence. By portraying men as bold and decisive and women as impulsive or irresponsible, the dialogue upholds traditional patriarchal norms, where men are expected to lead and take risks while women are expected to remain cautious and submissive.

Table 5. Confrontation with the Editor

Scene	Speaker	Word/Phrase (Male)	Word/Phrase (Female)
Confrontation with the editor	Editor (Male)	Brave investigator	Too emotional

During Loretta's confrontation with her editor, the choice of words again highlights gender bias in language. The editor describes male reporters as *brave investigators*, emphasizing their courage and professionalism. However, Loretta's persistence is framed as *too emotional*, a phrase that diminishes her credibility by suggesting that her judgment is clouded by feelings rather than rational thought. Mills' framework identifies this as a common linguistic strategy used to undermine women's authority in professional spaces. The term *too emotional* carries an implicit assumption that women are incapable of maintaining objectivity, reinforcing the stereotype that they are irrational and unfit for

high-pressure roles. This usage delegitimizes female journalists' work, positioning them as emotional rather than competent professionals.

Table 6. Loretta Presents New Evidence

Scene	Speaker	Word/Phrase (Male)	Word/Phrase (Female)
Loretta presents new evidence	Police Officer (Male)	Experienced professional	Lucky guess

In this scene, the police officer dismisses Loretta's investigative work as a *lucky guess*, while male officers are framed as *experienced professionals*. This lexical choice reinforces a common linguistic bias where women's successes are downplayed and attributed to chance rather than skill. According to Mills' feminist stylistics framework, such language undermines women's credibility by implying that their achievements lack intentionality or expertise. By contrast, men in similar positions are validated through descriptors that highlight their competence. This pattern perpetuates the idea that women in male-dominated fields must work harder to be taken seriously.

Table 7. Final Confrontation with the Suspect

Scene	Speaker	Word/Phrase (Male)	Word/Phrase (Female)
Final confrontation with the suspect	Suspect (Male)	Calculated	Hysterical

During the final confrontation, the male suspect is labeled as *calculated*, which implies control and intelligence. Meanwhile, a female character reacting under stress is described as *hysterical*, reinforcing the stereotype that women are irrational and unable to maintain composure in high-pressure situations. Mills' framework identifies this linguistic contrast as a way of sustaining gendered power hierarchies. By portraying men as logical and composed while framing women as emotionally unstable, the film subtly reinforces the notion that men are naturally suited for leadership and decision-making, whereas women are prone to emotional volatility.

Table 8. Police Dismissing Loretta's Report

Scene	Speaker	Word/Phrase (Male)	Word/Phrase (Female)
Police dismisses Loretta's report	Detective (Male)	Solid case	Wild speculation

When Loretta presents her findings, the police detective refers to the men's reports as a *solid case*, reinforcing the idea that their analysis is grounded in objectivity and authority. However, Loretta's theory is labeled as *wild speculation*, implying that her investigative efforts are based on emotion rather than logic. From a feminist stylistics perspective, this lexical distinction marginalizes women's contributions by portraying them as irrational and lacking credibility. Mills' framework argues that such language choices uphold patriarchal power structures, where men's words carry inherent weight while women must constantly defend their expertise.

Table 9. Male vs. Female Journalists

Scene	Speaker	Word/Phrase (Male)	Word/Phrase (Female)
Newsroom discussion	Male Journalist	Investigative reporter	Gossip writer

In this newsroom conversation, male reporters are referred to as *investigative reporters*, emphasizing their role in uncovering hard-hitting news. Meanwhile, female reporters are subtly undermined by being labeled *gossip writers*, suggesting that their work is superficial and unimportant. Mills' theory highlights how lexical choices like these create a linguistic hierarchy that positions men in authoritative roles while delegitimizing women's contributions. By framing female journalists as mere gossipmongers, the discourse sustains the idea that serious journalism is a male domain, making it harder for women to be recognized for their investigative work.

Table 10. Women's Safety in Investigative Journalism

Scene	Speaker	Word/Phrase (Male)	Word/Phrase (Female)
Conversation with police	Detective (Male)	Dangerous assignment	Unsafe for a woman

When Loretta insists on continuing her investigation, the detective refers to her work as *unsafe for a woman*, reinforcing the belief that women are inherently vulnerable and should be protected rather than actively engaged in dangerous situations. Meanwhile, male reporters handling similar cases are said to take on *dangerous assignments*, which carries connotations of bravery and professional dedication. Mills' feminist stylistics approach highlights how such language reinforces traditional gender roles by associating men with action and resilience while depicting women as fragile and in need of protection. This linguistic framing subtly discourages women from pursuing investigative journalism by portraying it as a field incompatible with femininity.

2.2. Sentence Level Analysis

Sentence structures in the film reflect power imbalances between male and female characters. Male characters frequently interrupt female reporters, questioning their competence. For example, in one scene, Loretta is asked, "Are you sure you can handle this?" a phrase that positions her as uncertain and in need of validation [7]. Additionally, passive voice constructions are often used to minimize female agency in the story. Phrases like "*Mistakes were made*" are more commonly used instead of "*The police made mistakes*", Demonstrating that accountability is often removed from male figures in powerful institutions [20]. Kaplan also found that in media, such linguistic structures are frequently used to obscure institutional failures led by men [21].

Doane observed that cinematic language also often frames women as recipients of action rather than as active subjects [22]. In *Boston Strangler*, sentence structures in dialogues between female journalists and male figures frequently diminish their authority, even when they possess stronger evidence and data.

The *Boston Strangler* (2023) film presents sentence-level dialogue rich with gender representations that reflect power dynamics in public spaces [3]. In the film transcript, male characters consistently use language that shows dominance, authority, and control in every conversation. According to Sarah Mills' theory, the language used by men tends to be more direct, aggressive, and explicitly asserts a hierarchy of power, thereby reinforcing

their position as authoritative figures in public discourse. In contrast, the representation of women's language in the film often contains elements of objectification and traditional role expectations, where women are positioned in more passive roles or confined to the domestic sphere. This analysis will examine in depth the differences in language at the sentence level, both in male and female characters, to highlight how the text reflects and reinforces gender stereotypes that exist in society.

2.2.1. Sentence-Level Analysis: Male Representation

In the *Boston Strangler* (2023) transcript, male characters are frequently portrayed using language that reinforces their dominance, authority, and control within the dialogue [3]. According to Sarah Mills' theoretical framework, men often employ direct, aggressive speech that upholds hierarchical power relations in public discourse. Below are key sentences:

1. "Fuck 'em. Send him in." This sentence, imperative statement illustrates aggressive language that is typically associated with masculinity. Mills argues that such direct, unfiltered expressions of command are indicative of male authority, where men are afforded the freedom to use coarse language without significant social repercussions. The terse structure underscores a command-like tone, reinforcing the speaker's control over the situations. [13] discusses how men's language in the workplace often reflects their positions of power, where the use of harsh or authoritative language is less likely to be questioned or criticized. [23] also supports this notion, noting that in male-dominated contexts, the use of aggressive and dominant language is often perceived as a sign of leadership rather than misconduct. Furthermore, the linguistic choices in this sentence suggest that the speaker, likely a man, is able to exert authority without facing backlash an example of the broader social sanctioning of male behavior in these contexts.

2. "What, so that's it? I-I don't think you understand what I'm dealing with here. I'm gettin' a hundred tips a day, I got thousands of sex offenders to screen, and now the commissioner just ordered a raid on every gay bar in the city." In this sentence, the male speaker asserts his overwhelming professional responsibilities and expertise. The language is forceful and self-assured, emphasizing his command over complex tasks and his pivotal role in the organization. This aligns with Mills' observation that male language often projects competence and authority, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies in professional contexts. According to Holmes, professional male language often underscores authority, control, and responsibility. The speaker's insistence on his heavy workload and the urgency of his tasks reflects a broader cultural expectation that men's roles are defined by their ability to handle challenging situations with strength and leadership [6]. The forceful language here is an example of how men's contributions are often framed in terms of their competence and authority, a theme widely recognized in the study of gender and discourse [23].

3. "Was it your idea to send some skirt down to the station house?" In the sentence, the term "skirt" is employed as a derogatory reference to a woman, reducing her identity to a mere physical attribute rather than acknowledging her professional capabilities. Mills' framework views such usage as a clear instance of sexist language—one that objectifies women and marginalizes their contributions. The sentence also implies that the female is out of place in a predominantly male work environment, thereby reinforcing male dominance. Holmes and Coates both discuss how sexist language in professional settings serves to diminish the authority and legitimacy of women in male-dominated spaces [6], [7]. The term "skirt" highlights how women are often reduced to their physical

characteristics, which undermines their professional roles and presence. This type of derogatory language reflects the broader societal tendency to see women as less competent or valuable in professional domains, a point that [13] extensively addresses in her work on language and sexism.

2.2.2. Sentence-Level Analysis: Female Representation

Conversely, female characters in the transcript are often depicted through language that either objectifies them or confines them to traditional, domestic roles. According to Mills, such representations are symptomatic of a broader societal bias where women are expected to conform to more passive, service-oriented roles. Consider these sentences:

1. "She shouldn't be working like this. Oh, come on, Kelly. She should be home taking care of her own husband." This sentence explicitly reinforces gender stereotypes by suggesting that a woman's proper place is in the domestic sphere, caring for her family rather than engaging in professional work. This has been identified as a form of institutional sexism in language, in which women's professional ambitions are undermined by expectations to conform to traditional domestic roles [13]. The idea that a woman should prioritize her husband over her own career reflects the long-standing societal expectation that women's roles are primarily domestic, a concept that is culturally ingrained. Such language is seen to perpetuate the idea that women's place is in the home, thereby diminishing their ability to pursue professional aspirations and reinforcing traditional gender norms [6]. Furthermore, studies show that such statements align with a broader cultural tendency to limit women's independence and professional growth based on gendered expectations of caregiving [23].

2. "You'd drive us all mad if you were sittin' around here all day." Although this statement implies that being active is preferable, it simultaneously sets up a double standard. It suggests that if a woman is not contributing within a prescribed manner, her presence is problematic. Mills explains that such language reflects the double bind imposed on women: they must be productive and engaged yet always within socially acceptable boundaries, never deviating too far from traditional roles. This reflects the cultural pressure for women to balance multiple responsibilities and engage in productive activities, all while maintaining their roles as caregivers and nurturers. The implication here is that a woman is not fulfilling her societal obligation unless she is actively contributing in a prescribed manner, reinforcing traditional expectations about women's roles within family and work. Criticism is often directed at women for deviating from expected roles, which contributes to their marginalization in both domestic and public spheres [23].

3. "He offer you anything? Coffee? Tea?" this sentence situates the female character in a subordinate, service-providing role. The expectation that she should offer coffee or tea exemplifies how female identity is tied to nurturing and caregiving, rather than asserting independent agency. According to Mills, such language reinforces the notion that women exist to support and facilitate the work of others rather than being autonomous subjects in their own right. This type of language reflects the historical and ongoing expectation that women perform domestic tasks as part of their identity, reducing them to caregivers or helpers rather than recognizing their full capacity for independent thought and action. Studies by Holmes and Coates reinforce this analysis, showing that women are often assigned subordinate roles in both personal and professional settings, which limits their ability to fully express their autonomy and capabilities [6], [7]. This reinforces the broader societal view that women's worth is connected to their ability to nurture and serve others.

2.3. Women in *The Boston Strangler* (2023): Categories, Scenes, and Analysis

The film presents female journalists in both traditional and subversive roles. While Loretta McLaughlin and Jean Cole challenge institutional bias, other female characters are positioned as passive figures, reinforcing gendered expectations in investigative journalism [24]. One of the most striking moments occurs when Loretta confronts a police official, questioning inconsistencies in the investigation: "If you already caught him, why are the murders still happening?" The official's hesitation before responding underscores the power of female agency in challenging authoritative narratives [25]. Mulvey argues that such moments challenge the traditional *male gaze*, which often portrays women as passive objects rather than as active disruptors of institutional power [26].

In the context of modern media, Lazar highlights that the representation of women in investigative journalism films is shifting from weak stereotypes to more active roles [12]. However, these changes remain limited as overarching narratives continue to prioritize patriarchal structures in characterization and dialogue. The portrayal of women in investigative journalism films often reflects larger societal attitudes toward gender roles in professional spaces. Research suggests that media representations can either reinforce or challenge dominant patriarchal ideologies by shaping how audiences perceive female agency [27]. In *Boston Strangler* (2023), women's roles range from passive victims to active challengers of institutional authority, highlighting the complex dynamics of gender representation in crime journalism films. This section categorizes female portrayals in the film based on their roles and interactions, illustrating how language and narrative choices impact perceptions of gendered power structures [28].

This analysis examines the differing and similar politeness strategies employed by Tom Cotton during his questioning of Chew Shou Zi in the US Senate Hearing and his interaction with the Secretary of the Army.

2.3.1. Women in Media Representation

This category examines how women are portrayed in journalism, focusing on the obstacles they face in a male-dominated field and how their persistence brings about change.

a. The Rational Investigator

Scene: Loretta McLaughlin starts connecting the murders while working at the Boston Record American.

Dialogue:

Loretta McLaughlin: "Why is no one connecting these murders? It's the same pattern."

Editor (Jack MacLaine): "Because it's not our job to go after the police."

Explanation:

Loretta's methodical approach in analyzing the murders contrasts with the dismissive attitude of her male colleagues. The editor's response shows the institutional reluctance to challenge authority, a common barrier for women in investigative journalism. Persistent gender biases have been observed in the newsroom, where resistance is often encountered by women when pursuing investigative or high-stakes stories traditionally regarded as male domains [29]. Loretta's persistence in the face of these barriers proves that women can succeed in hard-hitting journalism, reshaping the role of women in the media. Furthermore, her commitment to breaking stories traditionally dominated by men signals a shift toward greater inclusivity and equality in the journalism profession, where women's

contributions are recognized not just in "soft news" but also in the most critical and impactful areas of reporting.

b. The Determined Journalist

Scene: Loretta insists on covering the case, despite her editor's hesitation.

Dialogue:

Loretta McLaughlin: "If we don't write about this, who will? Women are dying."

Jack MacLaine: "Leave it to the crime reporters."

Explanation:

This moment highlights how gendered job expectations in journalism often prevent women from reporting on crime or politics. Women journalists are frequently steered toward "softer" topics such as lifestyle or fashion reporting, while investigative and hard news areas continue to be dominated by men. This gendered division of labor is shaped by deep-seated biases, with male reporters often perceived as more authoritative or capable when covering serious topics like crime, politics, or investigative reporting. [30]. Loretta's unwavering determination in this scene symbolizes not only the personal resilience of women journalists but also the historical struggle for women's right to engage in hard news reporting. She challenges the gendered norms that have long confined women to less prestigious or impactful roles within the newsroom, proving that women can just as effectively as their male counterparts pursue and report on critical, high-stakes stories. This is in line with [29], which argues that the persistence of these gendered expectations continues to restrict the full potential of women in journalism, often keeping them on the sidelines of investigative work. Loretta's actions are a direct challenge to this exclusion and a statement of women's capacity and right to contribute meaningfully to hard news reporting.

c. The Vulnerable Victim

Scene: A woman (one of the victims) is alone in her apartment before being attacked.

Dialogue: (No dialogue—focus on visual storytelling.)

Explanation:

The silence in this scene is deliberate, emphasizing the profound sense of isolation and vulnerability experienced by the victim. The camera's prolonged focus on the woman's fearful expression before the attack intensifies the emotional gravity of the moment, effectively capturing the paralyzing fear that mirrors the real-world anxieties many women harbor regarding personal safety in private and public spaces. The absence of dialogue serves not only as a cinematic technique to heighten suspense but also as a metaphorical representation of how women's fears and experiences are often rendered invisible or dismissed in broader societal conversations about violence and security. This visual silence reinforces the systemic issue of women's marginalization in narratives of victimhood and protection.

[31] describes this phenomenon as the symbolic silencing of women in media portrayals, where female characters are denied verbal and narrative power, thereby reinforcing patriarchal structures that prioritize male voices and perspectives. Furthermore, [32] argues that such portrayals contribute to a media environment in which female victimhood is

sensationalized but stripped of agency presenting women as objects of violence rather than as subjects with autonomy, resistance, or survival strategies. The scene, therefore, not only reflects a stylistic choice but also critiques a larger cultural script that renders women voiceless in the face of danger. In doing so, it challenges audiences to recognize and question the normalized invisibility of women's lived experiences in both media and real-life institutions tasked with ensuring safety and justice.

2.3.2. *Women Who Challenge the System*

Women in this category actively fight against institutional oppression and systemic failures.

a. The Fearless Investigator

Scene: Loretta and Jean Cole (another journalist) secretly gather information from police officers who refuse to go on record.

Dialogue:

Jean Cole: "You think they'll ever tell us the truth?"

Loretta McLaughlin: "Not unless we force them."

Explanation:

Loretta and Jean's undercover work represents women using their intelligence and persistence to expose corruption. The phrase "force them" implies women must actively push back against a system designed to exclude them. This aligns with [33], which highlights that female investigative journalists often resort to alternative strategies such as cultivating informal networks, leveraging behind-the-scenes relationships, or relying on anonymous sources to circumvent institutional gatekeeping and access critical information. These adaptive tactics are not simply professional choices but forms of strategic resistance in environments where formal channels are often monopolized by men. Their covert approach underscores the persistence and ingenuity required of women to navigate and challenge systemic barriers in both law enforcement and the newsroom. Such acts of subversion are regarded as more than mere workarounds; they are seen as critical interventions within male-dominated information ecosystems [34].

These subversive practices disrupt traditional power dynamics and create space for alternative narratives ones that prioritize truth-seeking and inclusivity over deference to authority or institutional silence. By engaging in these resistant behaviors, female journalists like Loretta and Jean redefine journalistic integrity through a feminist lens, asserting not only their professional legitimacy but also advocating for broader structural change toward gender equity in news reporting and public accountability.

b. The Independent Thinker

Scene: Loretta argues with the police about their reluctance to admit the killer might not be acting alone.

Dialogue:

Loretta McLaughlin: "You're ignoring the inconsistencies. What if there's more than one killer?"

Detective: "We're handling it."

Explanation:

Loretta questions the official narrative, which law enforcement finds inconvenient. The dismissal of her theory reflects how women's expertise is often overlooked in male dominated fields. [35] discusses how female journalists' analytical insights are frequently disregarded due to implicit biases that favor male voices in decision-making roles. This scene exemplifies what is referred to as the "epistemic injustice" experienced by women in professional spaces, where their knowledge is undervalued, ignored, or deemed less credible simply because of their gender [36].

Loretta's confrontation with the police, where her observations are dismissed despite being well founded, underscores the systemic tendency to silence or overlook women's contributions in high stakes environment. This dynamic not only reflects broader gender inequalities in journalism but also highlights the additional intellectual and emotional labor women must exert to have their voices heard and respected. Her resilience in questioning official narratives symbolizes a broader fight against the patriarchal structures that continue to marginalize women's expertise and authority in public discourse.

c. The Subversive Expert

Scene: Loretta confronts a police official at a press conference.

Dialogue:

Loretta McLaughlin: "If you already caught him, why are the murders still happening?"

Police Official: [pauses] "We have the situation under control."

Explanation:

The official's hesitation shows institutional incompetence, while Loretta's questioning exposes contradictions in law enforcement's approach. Her presence disrupts the usual male-dominated press briefings. In press conferences, women are often marginalized or discouraged from asking confrontational questions, as such behavior is frequently perceived as inappropriate or overly aggressive when exhibited by female journalists [37]. Loretta's assertiveness in directly challenging the police narrative reflects a disruption of traditional journalistic gender norms, where women were historically expected to remain passive or focus on less controversial topics. Her boldness not only confronts institutional power but also redefines professional expectations for women in media. Such challenges to institutional narratives are emphasized as critical moments in which authority in public discourse is reclaimed by women [38]. These moments are not just about individual defiance, but signal a broader shift toward inclusivity and gender parity in investigative journalism. Loretta's actions, therefore, serve as a representation of how female journalists can reshape the boundaries of their profession and assert their rightful place in confronting power and shaping public accountability.

IV. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that *Boston Strangler* (2023) presents a nuanced portrayal of gender dynamics in investigative journalism. Through linguistic and stylistic analysis, it becomes evident that the film reflects both the challenges and progress of women in media. At the lexical level, language choices often reinforce traditional gender roles, positioning men as authoritative figures while framing women's determination as excessive or emotional. Sentence structures further emphasize these imbalances, with

female characters frequently placed in positions where they must justify their professional abilities. On a broader discourse level, the film highlights the systemic barriers faced by women in male-dominated fields, yet also showcases their resilience in challenging societal expectations. While *Boston Strangler* acknowledges the structural oppression embedded in media representation, it also serves as a counter-narrative by depicting women who defy conventional limitations. By employing feminist stylistics as an analytical framework, this study underscores the importance of language in shaping gender perceptions and contributes to broader discussions on the representation of women in media. Future research could explore similar linguistic patterns in other investigative journalism films to further examine the evolving portrayal of gender roles in cinema.

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