



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Media representations of sexual violence by perpetrators with disabilities: a Sara Mills analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of sexual violence involving a perpetrator with a physical disability (locomotor disability) in the online media portal *Tribunnews.com*. The case presents a unique discursive phenomenon in which the perpetrator's physical condition generates a narrative contestation between criminal accountability, vulnerability, and public sympathy. This study employed qualitative critical discourse analysis using Sara Mills' framework to examine how linguistic structures shape subject-object positioning and reproduce unequal power relations in news discourse. Data were collected from seven news articles and analyzed through a three-stage procedure: identifying the subject position (agency and narrative control), examining the object position (passive representation), and interpreting the power relations embedded within the textual structure. The results reveal an asymmetrical pattern of representation between the perpetrator and the victim. The perpetrator is consistently constructed as a dominant subject through discursive strategies emphasizing emotional narratives and disability accommodations, thereby shifting the news focus from the criminal act to demands for public sympathy. Conversely, the female victim is marginalized as a passive object whose perspective is filtered through third-party advocates or completely omitted from the narrative. This structural imbalance positions the perpetrator as the focal point of legal and social empathy while subordinating the victim's trauma. The findings highlight the importance of gender-sensitive and ethically balanced journalism in reporting sexual violence involving vulnerable groups.

Keywords: gender; Sara Mills; subject-objects; sexual violence; disability.

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INTRODUCTION

As a sociological perspective, sexual violence is analyzed as a manifestation of power imbalances and structural inequalities in society. The issue received widespread global attention in the wake of the #MeToo movement in 2017. In the Indonesian context, academic literature has consistently verified the multidimensionality of this phenomenon. Sexual violence often stems from asymmetrical power relations, where perpetrators leverage their dominant social, institutional, or gender status to exercise dominance over the victims (Sumintak & Idi, 2022). The victims, predominantly women and children, are placed in a vulnerable position due to the constraints of structural power in seeking justice. Thus, sexual violence should not be perceived simply as an isolated criminal act, but as a structural issue deeply embedded in asymmetrical social constructions.

In mapping the discourse surrounding sexual violence, mass media serves a critical role as a reproductive agent. Media representation of sexual violence is inherently non-neutral; rather, it is heavily laden with conflicting interests, value systems, and particular ideological perspectives (Chen, 2025). Previous studies show that contemporary journalism tends to place the perpetrator at the center of the narrative, while the victim is reduced to mere background (Muchlis, 2024). This practice is exacerbated by a tendency toward sensationalized narratives, specific biases, and a lack of space for the survivors' perspectives (Karuniawa, 2025). Online media reporting frequently reinforces patriarchal culture through the dominance of citations from official institutions rather than the victim's testimony (Aristi et al., 2021). This indicates that the unequal distribution of this speaking space results in a symbolic annihilation that systematically marginalizes the legal and psychological positions of victims within the text.

As a controller of narrative, the media possesses hegemonic authority to determine which facts are emphasized and what lexical structures are used to frame reality. Referring to Fowler (1991), every journalistic text transmits a hidden ideology that can either reinforce or weaken the position of a subject within the discourse. When the media provides an extensive platform for the articulation of the perpetrator's defense while reducing the victim's right of reply, such journalism mechanically shifts the direction of public empathy (Curran, 2002). International comparative studies reinforce this pattern of bias. Chen's (2025) study on Chinese journalists found that case framing is heavily influenced by journalists' cognitive biases regarding the standards of an 'ideal' victim. Meanwhile, a longitudinal study by Aroustamian (2018) in the United States on *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* demonstrates that the dominance of euphemism and the dramatization

of perpetrators have a destructive impact at the socio-political level, as they hinder policy reform by distorting public opinion. Although these studies are global in scope, a similar pattern of narrative marginalization also occurs massively within Indonesia's domestic media landscape.

Although studies on journalism bias regarding gender issues have been widely conducted, there remains a research gap that previous researchers have not yet addressed. The majority of gender-focused CDA research positions perpetrators in a state of absolute dominance (such as officials, religious leaders, or public figures). To date, no study has specifically dissected the contestation of discourse when the perpetrator of sexual violence occupies a physically marginalized position, namely as a person with a disability. The sexual violence case involving I Wayan Agus Suartama (AB) in the online media *Tribunnews.com* presents a unique complexity that distinguishes it from general sexual violence cases. In AB's case, the perpetrator's physical condition (a physical disability) is exploited by the news text to construct a narrative of human vulnerability (*human interest*). This discursive paradox triggers a new narrative contestation: the media potentially shifts the focus of the legal offense into the realm of moral sentiment to mobilize public sympathy in the name of disability rights, while simultaneously burying the agency of the female victim.

This study offers theoretical novelty by dismantling how disability discourse, which ideally functions as an instrument for the inclusion of marginalized groups, is instead commodified by the media as a textual defense strategy to delegitimize the victim's trauma. To dissect this phenomenon, the study specifically limits its data sources to seven news articles from *Tribunnews.com*. The selection of *Tribunnews.com* is based on its position as one of the online media portals with the largest daily readership volume in Indonesia, which frequently adopts click-based journalism (clickbait). The corpus is restricted to seven articles because these seven reports cover the entire chronological sequence of the case, from the initial arrest to the perpetrator's emotional defense in court. Consequently, this data volume has reached a point of data saturation, allowing for an in-depth mapping of actor positioning patterns without falling into macro-generalizations of the media industry as a whole.

Methodologically, this study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) using Sara Mills' model. Sara Mills' (1995, 1997, 2004) framework is highly relevant because it focuses on textual dynamics in reproducing gender representation disparities through internal textual structures. Mills' central focus lies in conditioning the subject position and the object position. The subject position is identified as the party holding agency and narrative

authority, whereas the object position is placed as a passive entity that is merely spoken about. In contrast to pure structural analysis, Mills (2008) emphasizes that subject-object positions in discourse are dynamic and dependent on socio-cultural contexts. Through this analytical lens, this research not only identifies sentence structures but also uncovers how hidden power relations operate behind the framing of news texts.

Based on this structural background, this article formulates one primary research question: How are the relations between the subject position and the object position constructed in the news framing of AB's sexual violence case on the Tribunnews.com portal? Linearly, this study aims to deconstruct, map, and critically analyze these subject-object relations in order to identify biased representation patterns, examine shifts in linguistic agency, and provide a theoretical contribution to the development of gender-sensitive and ethical journalistic practices when handling violence issues involving vulnerable group.

METHOD

The method applied in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach that focuses on textual analysis to dissect structural constructions and the meaning of news reporting. To achieve this objective, this study specifically utilizes critical discourse analysis (CDA) using Sara Mills' model as the primary methodological framework (Mills, 1997, 2004). The primary data sources for this study are specifically restricted to seven news articles (See Table 1) concerning the sexual violence case involving I Wayan Agus Suartama (AB) published by the online media portal Tribunnews.com. Data collection was conducted using the observation-note-taking technique during the period when the case emerged, spanning from December 2024 to January 2025. Given that the data corpus is limited to a single cyber media portal, the conclusions in this research are focused on mapping the micro-textual characteristics of the specific case rather than generalizing the macro behavior of the mass media industry. Data analysis techniques were performed systematically through three main stages: (1) data reduction through a coding process, (2) data display in thematic categories, and (3) conclusion drawing based on the social context of the reporting, oriented toward internal textual structures to deconstruct how the positions of the perpetrator and victim are constructed.

Operationally, the analysis procedure of Sara Mills' model is applied through three structured stages: (1) Subject position analysis, which aims to identify the parties granted agency, speaking space, or narrative control through direct quotation mechanisms or active

grammatical placement (such as the perpetrator, victim, law enforcement agencies, or support institutions). (2) Object position analysis, which focuses on identifying the parties who are merely spoken about, evaluated, or passively represented within the structure of the news discourse. (3) Power relations implication analysis, which serves as a critical interpretation stage of the subject-object position asymmetry in the text to uncover how such representational imbalances reinforce the dominance of a specific ideology.

To minimize researcher subjectivity and ensure the validity of the critical interpretations within this CDA corpus, the study employs data source triangulation and theory triangulation strategies. The validity of the textual analysis is enhanced by cross-referencing the primary news data findings with secondary documents containing ideal journalistic regulations, such as the Cyber Media News Guidelines and the Guidelines for Reporting Sexual Violence Cases issued by the Press Council. Additionally, the results of the thematic coding and ideological readings were reconfirmed through critical discussions with fellow discourse analysts (*peer debriefing*) to ensure conceptual consistency and academic objectivity

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes seven news articles (see Table 1) from the online media *Tribunnews.com* regarding the sexual violence case of I Wayan Agus Suartama (AB).

Data Code	Publication Date	Article Title
B-01	10/12/24	Alibi Agus Buntung Tutupi Aksinya Lecehkan Perempuan, Sempat Ngaku Dijebak, Kini Kebenaran Terungkap.
B-02	10/12/24	Bantah Tuduhan Pelecehan, Agus Buntung Mengaku Diperdaya Korban, Ini Cerita Versinya.
B-03	13/12/24	18 Pengacara 'Turun Gunung' Bela Agus Buntung, Penjaga Homestay: Tak Ada Yang Aneh Saat Bawa Wanita.
B-04	20/12/24	Kejaksaan Tinggi Ntb: Ancaman Hukuman Berat Untuk Agus Buntung.
B-05	9/01/25	Kena Mental, Agus Buntung Tantrum Saat Akan Ditahan Di Lapas, Pengacara: Itu Dampak Psikologis.
B-06	16/01/25	Agus Buntung Langsung Protes Soal Fasilitas Lapas Saat Jalani Sidang Perdana: Bohong!
B-07	16/01/25	Ibu Agus Buntung Jatuh Pingsan Usai Ikuti Sidang, Sang Putra Teriak Histeris Dari Mobil Tahanan.

Table 1. Article Data

According to Mills (1997), the power structures underlying discourse are often implicit, yet they exert a profound influence on the construction of meaning. Generally, Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis reveals an unequal and problematic pattern of

representation characterized by two primary tendencies. First, there is a dominance of the perpetrator's (AB) subject position, who is consistently placed as the main narrative agent. The textual structure focuses heavily on his disability status, emotional drama (such as tantrums or suicide threats), and his legal rights, which serves to divert focus from the criminal act of sexual violence. Second, there is an objectification and marginalization of the female victim, who is represented as a passive object whose voice is either suppressed, represented by a third party, or completely erased. The victim's narrative is frequently relegated to mere background context for discussing the perpetrator's humanity.

Asymmetry of Subject-Object Construction in News Framing

The analysis demonstrates that the perpetrator (AB) secures his position as the dominant subject through two primary discursive strategies: emotional narrative and disability narrative. The perpetrator successfully positions himself as the focal point of the story, demanding public sympathy through media coverage that highlights his psychological distress and suicide threats. Theoretically, this strategy serves as a powerful discursive mechanism to reduce the dimension of the crime and shift the focus from the criminal act to personal drama. Conversely, the victim is placed in a passive and objectified object position. The victim's traumatic experiences and voice tend to be subordinated by the narrative centered around the perpetrator.

The Construction of the Perpetrator as Subject

Within discourse, the subject is defined as a central entity positioned as the holder of narrative authority, both due to the ability to articulate statements (speaking agency) and its role as the primary focal point of the entire storytelling. By holding full control over the production and dissemination of discourse (discursive hegemony), this subject inherently possesses significant power to determine the boundaries of expression deemed important and relevant within that discourse (Mills, 2004).

Dominant Subject via Emotional Narratives

Based on Sara Mills' (2004) analytical framework, this textual strategy places the perpetrator in the position of a dominant Subject, as identified in data (B-01): "*Agus bahkan berteriak hingga mengancam akan bunuh diri*" (Agus even screamed and threatened to commit suicide). This reporting pattern reveals a framing tendency that positions the perpetrator's emotional narrative as a discursive instrument to mobilize the readers' collective empathy. By highlighting aspects of psychological vulnerability which

subsequently functions as social capital the news text constructs a discursive space that steers readers toward a personal identification with the perpetrator. Through this narrative structure, the perpetrator is positioned as both a fragile subject and a psychological victim of the detention process. Manifestations of tantrums, hysteria, and suicide threats are adopted as core elements of the narrative architecture, which is consistently reinforced by claims from mother:

Pengakuan ibu: *"Tidak bisa sendiri, mau cebok mau apa, kalau dia normal saya lepas."*
B-05/Tribunnews.com.

The presence of a secondary actor, in this case, the perpetrator's mother, plays a strategic role in discursively rationalizing the perpetrator's emotional reactions. Through statements such as those in data (B-05): *"Tidak bisa sendiri, mau cebok mau apa, kalau dia normal saya lepas"* (He cannot be left alone; whether using the restroom or anything else, if he were normal, I would let him go), a shift in the discursive frame occurs. This linguistic structure shifts the focus of the discourse from the realm of criminal sexual violence law toward a domestic-humanitarian realm rooted in the issues of physical dependency and disability. Personal characteristics, namely the perpetrator's physical impairment and psychological fragility, are constructed in the text not as neutral medical facts, but are instead adapted as rhetorical tools to influence public perception and mitigate the legitimacy of social sanctions.

The mechanism of utilizing the perpetrator's personal characteristics for textual framing purposes aligns with the findings of Lavie-Dinur et al. (2021), who argue that actors' physical conditions in news reporting are frequently commodified by the media as rhetorical instruments that dictate the direction of discursive alignment. Furthermore, the disability discourse within this data corpus (B-05) reveals a linguistic functional anomaly. Instead of operating as a cyber-inclusion instrument to amplify the voices of marginalized groups—as idealized by Kamperman (2024) and Samuels and Morwane (2023), the rhetoric of disability in *Tribunnews.com's* coverage of this case is conversely adopted as a textual defense mechanism (*discursive alibi*). Through the integration of the perpetrator's mother's voice (B-05), the media indirectly legitimizes a dominant subject position that weaponizes narratives of physical fragility to degrade his legal accountability, while simultaneously obscuring the human rights and textual agency of the female victim.

Structurally, this shifts public attention and discursive analysis toward the perpetrator's agency, such as motives, psychological background, or the surrounding legal context. When a narrative persistently returns to this dominant subject, it indirectly

reinforces the notion that the source of authority, action, and the event's causal trajectory originates from them. This construction is explicitly visible through the perpetrator's direct statement:

"Saya dituduh melakukan kekerasan seksual, coba dipikirkan bagaimana saya melakukan kekerasan seksual? Sedangkan Bapak, Ibuk lihat sendiri (saya disabilitas)." "Saya merasa ini jebakan, karena saya dituduh," dan "Saya tahu kasus ini jebakan pas dia nelepon seseorang."
B-01/Tribunnews.com.

The quote demonstrates that the perpetrator is transformed into the focal point, explicitly endowed with the power to speak by the media (Mills, 2004). This granting of voice enables the perpetrator to rationalize his actions, counter the existing accusations, and even shift the blame onto the victim by claiming the existence of a 'trap'. This strategy functions not only as a defense mechanism but also as a structural means to delegitimize the victim's narrative.

When the texts within the investigated news corpus allocate a dominant space to narratives that construct disability status as a defense, such a structure potentially forces the victim into a dual subordinate position. The victim is not only positioned passively within the event of sexual violence but is also vulnerable to becoming a target of delegitimization due to the 'trap' claims manufactured by the perpetrator's side. Based on the data boundaries of the seven *Tribunnews.com* articles in this case, this framing tendency points toward what is termed a reduction of the victim's agency to accommodate the dramatization of the perpetrator's figure. This specific reporting practice demonstrates a misalignment with the ideal spirit of ethical guidelines for reporting sexual violence. This exclusion of the victim's voice, when read through Mills' (2004), framework, aligns linearly with syntactic positioning strategies where the perpetrator is consistently placed as the active grammatical subject at the beginning of the clause, while the victim is constructed as the object at the end of the sentence. It is this structural linearity that textually reinforces narrative control in favor of the perpetrator within the boundaries of this case's coverage.

This aligns with the findings of Fathony (2025), who reveals that mass media is identified as having a significant tendency to adopt sensationalistic narrative modes, which are simultaneously exacerbated by the limited representation of the victim's perspective, thereby resulting in asymmetrical and ethically unbalanced reporting. Furthermore, Linke and Brune (2025) state in their research that the true crime genre, highly popular on streaming platforms and social media, frequently exploits real-world events for

entertainment, employing a sensational tone that can oversimplify the complexities of the involvements.

The perpetrator is constructed as a dominant subject who is both defended and persecuted, leveraging legal power to shift the narrative, while the victim remains in a marginalized and scrutinized object position. For instance, in Danish press coverage of digital sexual violence, victims are framed within stereotypical positions such as the 'innocent girl' or the 'forever broken victim,' which marginalizes their experiences and depicts them as passive entities (Uldbjerg, 2025).

Dominant Subject via Disability Narratives

The construction of the perpetrator (male) as a dominant figure within the news narrative is further reinforced by the media's consistent and repetitive focus on his disability rights issues (Mills, 1995). Through this narrative repetition, the perpetrator is effectively positioned as a disabled subject whose needs must be accommodated by law enforcement institutions (such as penitentiaries and the prosecutor's office). This strategy creates a diversion of discursive focus, shifting away from the criminal act of sexual violence he committed toward the state's responsibility to guarantee the fulfillment of his comfort and necessities as a person with a disability. Within the Critical Discourse Analysis framework, this successfully transforms the perpetrator's ethical and legal obligations into a demand for his rights from the state, ultimately justifying and obscuring the essence of justice for the victim. The media reports in detail the accommodations being prepared:

"Ada dua kamar khusus di Lapas Kelas IIA Lombok Barat yang bisa diakses oleh penyandang disabilitas. Agus akan ditempatkan di salah satu kamar tersebut",
KDD,B-04/Tribunnews.com.

This focus on accommodation, while critical from a human rights perspective, rhetorically functions to reinforce the narrative that the perpetrator is a subject too vulnerable to be detained. The perpetrator's complaints, which initially manifested as the emotional reaction of 'screaming and suicide threats' in data (B-01), are cleverly transformed by legal counsel into a dominant procedural-legal demand. The defense attorney weaponizes disability rights as a discursive tool to contest the detention with an urgent tone. As cited from the perpetrator's (AB) legal counsel, Ainuddin stated that his client felt uncomfortable inside the penitentiary; therefore, his team would file for a suspension of detention.

"Bisa tahanan rumah atau tahanan kota, supaya hak-haknya bisa terpenuhi seperti biasa,"
jelasnya. B-06/Tribunnews.com.

The perpetrator (the male subject) in this case, represented by his legal counsel, effectively uses the power of disability rights as a primary alibi to oppose detention. This is reflected in the emotional narrative found in data (B-06): *'Satu di antara 19 kuasa hukum Agus, Ainuddin mengatakan, kliennya merasa tidak nyaman di dalam Lapas. Oleh karena itu, pihaknya akan mengajukan penangguhan penahanan'* (One of Agus's 19 defense attorneys, Ainuddin, stated that his client felt uncomfortable inside the prison. Therefore, his team will apply for a suspension of detention). The discomfort experienced by the perpetrator within the penitentiary is converted into a procedural agency by the attorney, transforming him into a party entitled to demand and criticize the performance of state institutions. Consequently, the issues of accommodation and disability rights become the central topics dominating the coverage, while the suffering and rights of the victim (the Object) are pushed further to the margins of the discourse.

These findings explicitly corroborate the study by Kurniawati and Parman (2022), which notes that law enforcement officers are reported to still face significant challenges in resolving cases involving persons with disabilities, particularly regarding communication during interrogations and the collection of valid evidence. Nonetheless, as an effort to guarantee fair and non-discriminatory treatment, statutory regulations have explicitly mandated special protection procedures to ensure that the constitutional rights of persons with disabilities remain protected throughout the entire judicial process.

The Construction of the Object

Moving forward from the findings regarding the dominance of the perpetrator as subject, the focus of the subsequent discussion is directed toward the fundamental narrative problem of the object position experienced by the female victim within media discourse. The primary finding explored critically is how the party who normatively and legally should receive protection is instead structurally placed in a subordinate and passive position by the news narrative (Mills, 2004). This placement of the victim in the object position demonstrates a systematic objectification, where their voice, trauma, and demands for justice are narratively deemed insignificant compared to the drama and rights claims manipulated by the perpetrator as subject. This confirms how the media fails to grant agency to the victim, instead reinforcing the pre-existing power imbalances within society, even though in some reports, the victim's position occupies the object or narrator, thus presenting varying and diverse data.

The Passivized Object Bereft of Direct Voice

Analysis of the news coverage demonstrates a consistency in positioning the victim as a passive object who has lost the right to voice her trauma and demands directly (Mills, 1995). This passive positioning is reinforced through the use of authoritative intermediaries to narrate the victim's experience—an editorial strategy that effectively filters and diminishes the personal impact of the narrative. This passive construction is clearly visible when the victim only appears as an easily manipulated party, while her story is conveyed exclusively through representatives of the Anti-Sexual Violence Coalition:

"Pelaku terus menunjukkan bahwa ia tidak bisa apa-apa, beraktivitas susah, banyak direndahkan.

Akhirnya korban merasa iba dan korban menaruh kepercayaan pada si Agus," cerita Joko.
B-03/Tribunnews.com.

According to Mills (2004) framework, the placement of the victim's narrative through this third-party intermediary (the Anti-Sexual Violence Coalition) is operationally identified as a mechanism of redirecting discursive agency via proxies. Textually, this phenomenon is characterized by the dominance of indirect speech (*reported speech*) and the objectification (*nominalization*) of the victim's traumatic experiences. This configuration creates an emotional distance between the readers and the lived experience of the victim.

In line with Mills, Fatmawati et al. (2025) argue that media representations frequently fail to provide an autonomous voice to victims, tending to position them as passive subjects by highlighting legal procedures rather than their personal trauma. Their study also highlights that advocacy efforts, despite their good intentions, can exacerbate systemic inequalities if they take over the victim's narrative instead of elevating the victim's direct, lived experiences.

The researcher observes that relegating the victim's experience to a secondary position is not merely a technical layout issue in journalism, but rather a textual strategy designed to maintain power asymmetries. Contextually, the victim-centered narrative is configured as a comparative account, explicitly positioned after the chronological sequence of events has been detailed from the perpetrator's (AB) point of view. This sequential structure ideologically implies that the victim's testimony is not viewed as an independent truth with equal weight. Instead, the researcher identifies a pattern of textual subordination, in which the function of the victim's narrative is reduced merely to a reactive instrument meant to correct the perpetrator's self-defense claims (such as the 'trap claim'). Through this textual logic, the researcher argues that the media establishes the perpetrator's narrative as the

primary 'anchor point' of truth, while the victim's voice is confined within a defensive position.

The media's tendency to confine the victim's voice within this reactive space corroborates Aroustamian's (2018) findings regarding structural media bias that prioritizes the dramatization of the perpetrator's figure. When the media amplifies the perpetrator's defense, it constructs a stage for empathy. Consequently, as asserted in the thesis of Liu & Fang (2024), the victim's narrative undergoes structural passivation. Beyond mere passivation, however, the researcher analyzes that in this case, the commodification of the perpetrator's disability identity serves as the primary catalyst that accelerates the marginalization of the victim's voice. Thus, the researcher's interpretation indicates that *Tribunnews.com* is not practicing balanced journalism, but is instead reproducing a patriarchal hierarchy that subordinates female trauma to the exculpation of male physical conditions.

The Excluded Object: Omission Within the Narrative

The object within discourse is utilized to define individuals or groups whose representation is systematically shaped by dominant discourses or narrative structures. This narrative construction relegates them to a position or status that is inherently lower (subordinate) and inferior compared to the powerful subject (Mills, 2004). This positioning is not merely descriptive but substantive, as it establishes the individual as an intrinsically passive entity, meaning they lack agency, initiative, or the capacity to act within the context of the presented narrative.

The most extreme pattern of victim marginalization is the construction of the 'Erased Object,' where the victim is physically and narratively wiped out from the news coverage. In several *Tribunnews.com* reports, particularly those focusing on family drama, the victim's existence appears merely as the crime's context or the basis of the indictment, and nothing more. The victim is not mentioned at all in these reports, except as a contextual backdrop to the crime, as seen in news data (B-02, B-06, and B-07) under the titles: 'Denying Harassment Allegations, Agus Buntung Claims to be Duped by the Victim, Here is His Version of the Story,' (Bantah Tuduhan Pelecehan, Agus Buntung Mengaku Diperdaya Korban, Ini Cerita Versinya), 'Agus Buntung Instantly Protests Prison Facilities During Initial Hearing: Lies!', (Agus Buntung Langsung Protes Soal Fasilitas Lapas Saat Jalani Sidang Perdana: Bohong!) and 'Agus Buntung's Mother Faints After Attending the Hearing, the Son Screams

Hysterically from the Detention Van. (Ibu Agus Buntung Jatuh Pingsan Usai Ikuti Sidang, Sang Putra Teriak Histeris dari Mobil Tahanan).

The absence of any citations or descriptions of the victim in news coverage that centers on the perpetrator creates a narrative vacuum where the perpetrator's drama can develop without interruption. This phenomenon of total object (victim) erasure within the reporting is an ideological manifestation of a discourse dominance that tends to be patriarchal. When the victim is completely erased and functions merely as a vague context, the main plotline is essentially controlled by the interests and perspectives of the perpetrator. This rhetorically reinforces social hierarchies, where the voices and experiences of women or victims are placed in a marginalized position, even to the point of total omission. This total omission serves a significant narrative function: it implicitly grants permission to the perpetrator to monopolize public sympathy, or at the very least, to shift the discursive focus toward their legalistic and personal grievances (such as protests or prison conditions). Without the presence of the victim's voice, descriptions of suffering, or even physical representation, the perpetrator can dominate the public sphere without having to confront the real humanitarian consequences of his actions.

Although the pattern of perpetrator dominance is highly pronounced in most of the data in this study, there is a significant exception in one article, data (B-01), titled 'Agus Buntung's Alibi to Cover Up His Actions of Harassing Women: Once Claimed to be Framed, Now the Truth is Revealed.' (Alibi Agus Buntung Tutupi Aksinya Lecehkan Perempuan, Sempat Ngaku Dijebak, Kini Kebenaran Terungkap). This article stands out because it provides the only discursive space that accommodates the victim's perspective as a counter-narrative. Through the representation of the advocacy coalition's voice, the text successfully articulates the chronological details regarding the patterns of violence and intimidation perpetrated by the suspect. This sharp analysis deconstructs the 'consensual' or 'mutual consent' claims that were previously dominated by the perpetrator's subjectivity in other reports. This is demonstrated in the data below:

"Berkali-kali korban menolak, namun Agus terus mengancam kalau korban tidak patuh, maka hidupnya bakal hancur dan seluruh keburukan korban akan dibongkar ke orang tua," kata Rusdin dalam keterangannya, Selasa (3/12/2024). B-01Tribunnews.com.

The explicit details regarding this violence and coercion, including the methods of intimidation, become elements that effectively delegitimize the perpetrator's claims, validate the victim's position, and shift the focus back to the core offense. This identified shift in agency within data (B-01) is not merely a technical alteration in news reporting, but rather a manifestation of discursive resistance that aligns with broader critiques in global studies

on the representation of gender-based violence. In previous reporting frameworks, the victim was often positioned within a narrative vacuum—a condition that scholars in South Africa conceptualize as the process of diminishing women's agency. Traditional media practices tend to trap themselves in patterns of sensationalism that prioritize the perpetrator's personal drama, thereby systematically marginalizing the lived realities and suffering of the victim (Ndlovu & Mandiyanike, 2025).

Furthermore, the perpetrator's specific threat stating that 'the victim's life would be ruined' if she did not comply provides a vivid illustration of the intimidation mechanisms aimed at creating self-censorship. This phenomenon mirrors empirical findings from a study in Namibia, which highlights how public space intimidation both physical and digital is intentionally designed to silence women's voices and force them to retreat from public participation (Zviyita & Mare, 2024). Theoretically, according to Sara Mills' framework, when the media focuses exclusively on the perpetrator's suffering, they are facilitating the erasure of the victim as subject. However, the presence of data (B-01), facilitated by the advocacy coalition, successfully breaks through this communication deadlock. The presence of this third party acts as a bridge that shifts the focalization toward the victim's experience, thereby forcing the readers to acknowledge the existence of an exploitative power relation.

According to Mutiah (2019), structural patriarchy functions as a dominant framework that systematically prioritizes, reinforces, and legitimizes male-oriented narratives. This hegemonic construction simultaneously produces marginalization and subordination effects on the narratives and perspectives voiced by women. This phenomenon aligns with the findings on the 'extreme erasure of female narratives,' a process in which women's voices, experiences, and agency are significantly suppressed or eliminated from the dominant discourse. Representation practices within news texts reveal a pattern of positive personification (humanization) toward the perpetrator, operating simultaneously and inversely with the structural marginalization (dehumanization) of the victim. Operationally, the positive personification of the perpetrator is realized through a macro-structural strategy that provides deep narrative space. The media consistently positions the perpetrator as the controlling subject of the discourse, given a platform to produce micro-textual structures such as the lexicalization of emotion, personal background framing, and the exploitation of the perpetrator's physical condition. This linguistic structure functions to construct an affective proximity between the text and the readers.

Conversely, the structural marginalization of the victim is operationalized through the mechanism of social actor exclusion (*spatial exclusion* or *suppression*). This is identified by the absence of the victim's voice as an active subject within the syntactic structure of the news. When victims are presented, their position is reduced to a passive object lacking textual agency, or their perspective is subordinated beneath the perpetrator's defense clauses. It is this structural inequality in the distribution of linguistic agency that mechanically shifts the discourse focus from the criminality aspect to the realm of perpetrator victimization. This process involves understanding the perpetrators' actions within a broader context, which can sometimes lead to empathy or, at the very least, a more nuanced view of their behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the online media discourse construction of *Tribunnews.com* in reporting the sexual violence case involving I Wayan Agus Suartama (AB) shapes the position of the perpetrator as subject and the victim as object through unbalanced textual mechanisms. Based on the analysis of Sara Mills' model, this positioning is consistently produced through two primary linguistic structures. The Construction of the Perpetrator's Position as Subject: The perpetrator is constructed as a dominant subject who holds control over the discursive agency and the narrative's focal point. Syntactically, the media repeatedly places the perpetrator's actions and arguments at the beginning of clauses as the active grammatical subject. Through the integration of secondary actors' voices (the perpetrator's mother) and legal counsel, the perpetrator's personal characteristics specifically his physical disability and emotional vulnerability are adapted into a modality of textual defense. The sequential structure of the news coverage directs readers to focus on the fulfillment of the perpetrator's disability facility rights within the judicial system, effectively diverting attention from the legal substance of the criminal offense of sexual violence.

The Construction of the Victim's Position as Object: Female victims are systematically placed in a passive object position through two textual patterns: third-party mediation and the exclusion of social actors. The victim's traumatic experiences are constructed through indirect speech (*reported speech*) and nominalization conveyed by the advocacy institution, thereby creating an affective distance between the readers and the survivor. In its more extreme form (*the erased object*), the victim's existence is completely eliminated from the textual structure of articles that exploit the perpetrator's domestic melodrama. Although a

counter-narrative is found in data (B-01) that explicitly articulates the perpetrator's intimidation methods, the macro-representation of this data corpus consistently reveals an asymmetrical reporting pattern that heavily favors the perspective of the male subject.

The implication of this research lies in the expansion of the application of Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis by introducing the intersectionality perspective, which proves that non-gender characteristics such as the disability and physical vulnerability of male perpetrators can be commodified by the media as rhetorical instruments to dominate narratives and delegitimize victim testimony. However, this study has limitations because the data corpus only includes seven articles from *Tribunnews.com* related to the case of I Wayan Agus Suartama, so the results cannot be generalized to the Indonesian media industry as a whole. Therefore, future research is expected to expand coverage through comparative analysis on various other media platforms as well as combine discourse analysis with audience reception analysis or in-depth interviews with journalists to map text production and reader perceptions more empirically.

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Ethical considerations

"Not applicable"

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

"The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool Grammarly was used exclusively for language editing and/or grammatical improvement. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors."

Conflict of Interest

The authors declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. This research was conducted independently without any financial or personal relationship with the media organizations analyzed, and no funding was received that could influence the outcome of interpretation of the discourse analysis presented.

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