

Framing criminality in Philippine digital news: A corpus-assisted gendered analysis of crime reporting

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ABSTRACT

Crime reporting plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of criminality, justice, and gendered social identities. This study examines how Philippine digital news constructs male and female criminality through lexical choices, syntactic structures, and narrative framing. Using a corpus-assisted descriptive design, the study analyzed six crime reports published by INQUIRER.NET between 2010 and 2024, comprising three reports on male offenders and three on female offenders. The corpus consisted of 4,180 words and was examined using Voyant Tools for lexical frequency and collocation patterns, AntConc for syntactic and phraseological structures, and ChatGPT-assisted qualitative coding for thematic synthesis and framing analysis. Findings reveal systematic gendered differences in crime reporting. Reports on male offenders foreground institutional processes, legal actions, and procedural outcomes, often emphasizing agency through references to courts, financial schemes, and judicial decisions. In contrast, reports on female offenders show stronger personalization, greater emphasis on named individuals, and more frequent associations with moral evaluation, emotional connotations, and reputational framing. These patterns suggest that male criminality is more frequently framed through institutional accountability, whereas female criminality is more often interpreted through moralized and gendered discourse. The study contributes to applied linguistics and media discourse studies by demonstrating how narrative framing and gendered language shape representations of crime in Philippine digital journalism, with implications for media ethics, public perception, and discourse-based gender studies.

Keywords: Corpus linguistics, crime reporting, framing theory, gendered discourse, Philippine digital news

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INTRODUCTION

Crime news remains one of the most persistent and socially influential genres in both print and digital journalism. Beyond informing the public, crime reporting actively shapes perceptions of deviance, justice, morality, and social identity (Frederick, 2024; Myers, 2024). In particular, the language used in news discourse influences how readers interpret criminal acts, evaluate offenders, and assign accountability. Within this context, lexical choices, syntactic structures, and narrative framing become central mechanisms through which media discourse

constructs public meaning (Alarcon & Lintao, 2023; Maulin, 2021; Paglinawan, 2021; Sagheer et al., 2024).

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that crime reporting is rarely linguistically neutral (Elan & Adriano, 2023; Sagheer, 2024; Szczepan, 2024). Studies in discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, and media framing have shown that journalistic language often reflects ideological positions and sociocultural assumptions, particularly regarding gender (Paglinawan, 2021; Yasmin, 2021; Noviasari & Annisa, 2024). Gendered media discourse may

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foreground some actors while backgrounding others, assign different degrees of agency and blame, and reinforce stereotypes about masculinity and femininity in criminal narratives.

Although international studies have extensively examined gendered crime reporting (Alarcon & Lintao, 2023; Fasnidge, 2024; Shah et al., 2019; Martins, 2021; Naureen et al., 2024; Noviasari & Annisa, 2024; Sagheer et al., 2024; Syed et al., 2024; Tiwari, 2022; Valcea, 2020; Yasmin, 2021), there remains a limited corpus-assisted research situated in the Philippine digital news context (Noviasari and Annisa, 2024; Paglinawan, 2021). Existing local studies have largely relied on qualitative discourse approaches and have not sufficiently integrated computational linguistic tools to examine lexical density, collocational patterns, syntactic framing, and agency structures. According to Lisboa & Fromm (2025), the use of a linguistic analysis tool is a useful resource for multidimensional analysis, enabling the collection of multiple pieces of information and data necessary for lexical and structural analysis. More importantly, previous studies have rarely compared the linguistic representation of male and female offenders within the same media environment. According to many (Ahmed, 2020; Akinmusuyi, 2023; Stotzer, 2020), a comparative analysis of gender representation is necessary because language is never neutral, as it serves as a primary tool for transmitting, representing, and producing ideology. Therefore, examining the linguistic representations of male and female perpetrators can unveil hidden power relations and assumptions that sustain hierarchical gendered social arrangements.

This study addresses this gap by offering a corpus-assisted gendered analysis of Philippine digital crime news, focusing on how male and female criminality is discursively framed through language (Fasnidge, 2024). The novelty of the study lies in its integration of corpus tools and discourse analysis (Alarcon & Linatao, 2023; Syed et al., 2024) to examine how gendered representation operates at the level of lexical choice, syntax (Maulin, 2021; Paglinawan, 2021; Alarcon &

Lintao, 2023; Sagheer, 2024), and narrative framing (Valcea, 2020; Tiwari, 2022; Noviasari & Annisa, 2024). Grounded in the Framing Theory of Bateson (1979) and the Gender Theory of Lacan (1998) perspectives, the study specifically asks:

1. What lexical choices and syntactic structures are used in Philippine digital news to portray male and female criminality?
2. How do these linguistic patterns differ across gendered representations?
3. How do these linguistic features contribute to broader narrative framing and accountability structures?

The study contributes to broader global discussions on media discourse, gender representation, and digital journalism by situating Philippine crime reporting within contemporary debates in applied linguistics and framing studies.

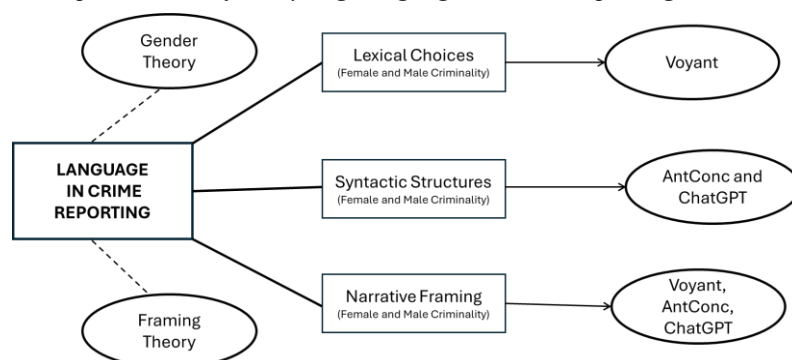
Gender and Framing Theory

Lacan's gender theory (1998) posits that language is a crucial influence in providing structures of identity and the medium through which identity is spoken. This is based on the idea that gender identity is not biologically determined but is shaped by a linguistic system. Lacan (1998) believes that gender is an arbitrary construct that hypothesizes a mechanism by which the status quo, once in place, maintains its position. Meanwhile, Bateson's (1979) Framing Theory describes the practice of presenting news items and story content within familiar contexts. This theory suggests that media create 'frames,' spatial and temporal boundaries for a set of interactive messages, by introducing news items with predefined, narrow contextualization. Figure 1 presents a conceptual model for analyzing language in crime reporting.

These theories are fundamental because they focus on understanding how language constructs and perpetuates gender roles and stereotypes, thereby shaping identity, since identity is constructed primarily through differentiation.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Analyzing Language in Crime Reporting



The conceptual model shows how the two theories (Gender and Framing Theories) inform the analysis of language in crime reporting. The Gender theory provides a meaningful understanding of how language in crime reporting of male and female criminals uses gendered word usage, descriptors, and syntactic structure that highlight stereotypes and portrayals of female and male criminality. Meanwhile, Framing Theory is crucial for analyzing the narrative framing of female and male criminals to determine whether these portrayals reinforce or challenge stereotypes. Further, these theories relate to the study's key components, including lexical choices, syntactic structures, and narrative framing in crime reporting. To further analyze the language in crime reporting, computerized text analysis tools played a critical role: Voyant was used to examine lexical choices, AntConc and ChatGPT to examine syntactic structure, and Voyant, AntConc, and ChatGPT to identify narrative framing.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design. According to Manjunatha (2019) and Shinija (2024), this design was used to examine the identification of a particular phenomenon. This type of research was used to describe and interpret the language in crime reporting, supported by Gender and Framing Theories. This design helped the researchers identify problems with current practices by using reliable measurement tools.

Sampling

The study employed criterion sampling. According to Nyimbili and Nyimbili (2024), this is a type of purposive sampling that enables researchers to search for specific materials or individuals that meet a criterion related to the study. This helped the researchers gather data on language in crime reporting and analyze lexical choices, syntactic structure, and narrative framing in Philippine Digital News. To ensure that the final dataset strictly adhered to the established criteria, the researchers conducted a step-by-step screening of each digital news article, verifying the source's credibility, publication date, word count, and relevance to Philippine crime reporting. The selected articles were then closely reviewed for lexical and syntactic variation, narrative framing, and representation of gender and class, and only those that met all criteria were included in the final dataset. Thus, the researchers used the following criteria to select the study population.

- a) **Focus on Digital News.** Digital news articles must come from credible online media websites. Using this platform enabled the researchers to gather

comprehensive and up-to-date data for the study.

- b) **Publication Date.** Digital news articles must be published within the past fifteen years (2010-2024) to allow a wide array of data, including both historical and recent issues in Philippine crime.
- c) **Word Frequency.** Digital news articles must have a word count between 300 and 2,500 words to maintain consistency in textual scope and analytical depth.
- d) **Relevance to Crime Reporting.** Digital news articles must be directly related to crime reporting in the Philippines (e.g., convicted criminals—graft, corruption, murder, schemes, etc.). Likewise, the articles should provide substantial coverage or discussion of the criminal figure to ensure the material is focused on criminality.
- e) **Lexical and Syntactic Variation.** Digital news articles must feature a variety of lexical choices, including strong descriptors (e.g., graft, corruption, schemes), and must use a range of syntactic constructions. This was ensured through close reading and the identification of the lexicon and sentence structure of each crime news story.
- f) **Lexical and Syntactic Variation.** Digital news articles must feature a variety of lexical choices. These were verified through preliminary corpus screening using Voyant Tools and AntConc. Articles were selected only if they contained diverse lexical items and a range of sentence structures that could support meaningful linguistic analysis.
- g) **Narrative Framing.** Digital news articles must include a portrait of criminals. They were assessed through an initial qualitative review of each article. Only reports containing identifiable framing devices, such as emphasis on criminal identity, moral evaluation, institutional accountability, or victim representation, were included in the corpus.
- h) **Representation of Gender and Class.** Digital news articles must reflect a variety of convicted criminals across genders and social classes. This helped the researchers better analyze how the articles manipulate language to perpetuate stereotypes.

Data Collection

The data of the present study were collected from the official website of INQUIRER.NET (see Table 1). The researchers typed keywords such as “convicted male criminals,” “convicted female

criminals,” and others into the news website’s search bar. A criterion sampling approach was used to select digital news reports on convicted female and male criminals. That is, the data collection and sampling were based on the researchers’ judgment, the news’s popularity and influence, and the study’s purpose. First, convicted criminals, male and female, are among the most controversial figures. To represent male criminality, the researchers selected a convicted murderer and rapist, an operator of a large Ponzi scheme, and a convicted

operator of a large Ponzi scheme, convicted of graft and misuse of funds. Meanwhile, to represent female criminality, the researchers selected a convicted criminal of 8 counts of graft and malversation, convicted of graft in amassing ill-gotten wealth, and plunder and misuse of funds. News reports about convicted criminals published within the past 15 years (2010-2024) are sought to provide a wide array of data and must have a word count of 300-2,500 words.

Table 1

News Website, Convicted Criminals, Description, News Title, Year of Publication, and Source

Name of Convicted Criminal	Description of Criminals	News Title	Year of Publication	URL
Antonio Sanchez (Male)	Former Mayor of Calauan Laguna convicted of the 1983 rape and murder of two college students	Antonio Sanchez was convicted of 2 other murders	August 22, 2019	https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1156174/antonio-sanchez-was-convicted-of-2-other-murders
Joel Apolinario (Male)	Leader of the Kapa-Community Ministry convicted of orchestrating a large Ponzi scheme that defrauded millions of investors	Kapa execs get life in prison for duping millions in Ponzi scheme	December 22, 2023	https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1878217/kapa-execs-get-life-in-prison-for-duping-millions-in-ponzi-scheme
Emilio Ramon “ER” Ejercito III (Male)	Former Governor of Laguna convicted of graft and misuse of public funds	Ex-governor Ejercito convicted of graft	April 6, 2019	https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1103767/ex-governor-ejercito-convicted-of-graft
Janet Lim Napoles (Female)	Businesswoman known as the “pork barrel queen” convicted of 8 counts of graft and malversation in a large-scale corruption scheme	Napoles found guilty of 8 graft, malversation raps; given 64 yrs in jail	October 20, 2023	https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1848964/sandiganbayan-declares-napoles-guilty-of-9-graft-raps-64-year-jail-term-ordered
Imelda Marcos (Female)	Former First Lady of the Philippines convicted of graft for using her influence in to amass ill-gotten wealth	Imelda Marcos guilty of graft, ordered arrested	November 9, 2018	https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1052073/sandigan-finds-imelda-marcos-guilty-of-7-graft-counts
Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (Female)	Former President of the Philippines convicted of charges of plunder and misuse of public funds during her presidency	Gloria Arroyo now under arrest	November 19, 2011	https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/96621/gloria-arroyo-now-under-arrest

Presented in Table 1 are the digital news reports on convicted female and male criminals. This includes details of convicted criminals, including their names, brief background, descriptions of their crime, the news title reporting their convictions, the year of publication, and the source and website of the digital articles.

Data Analysis

Data from this research were analyzed using direct content analysis within a descriptive research design. The overall method of data analysis of language in crime reporting in the Philippine Digital News involves collecting six (6) crime news reports from the INQUIRER.NET website. The six (6) articles are composed of three (3) articles on female convicted criminals and three (3) on male convicted criminals. The researchers employed computerized

text analysis tools, including Voyant, AntConc, and ChatGPT. Hence, the researchers underwent several steps in analyzing these articles.

In step 1, Voyant was used to identify specific lexical choices (vocabulary density, readability index, average words per sentence, terms, and collocations) evident in the articles that portray female and male criminality. This tool is particularly helpful for text analysis, visualizing frequently used words and phrases, and identifying gender-specific lexical patterns. Meanwhile, AntConc and ChatGPT were used to analyze the syntactic structure of male and female crime reporting. According to Biswas (2023) and Cabuquin et al. (2024), ChatGPT could be useful for summarizing and brainstorming ideas, which the authors applied in studying syntactic structure alongside AntConc. In Step 2, the researchers used Voyant and AntConc to analyze

differences in crime reporting between males and females. Then, in Step 3, the combination of all computerized linguistic analysis tools and thematic coding, in consideration of framing and gendered theory, was used to determine the narrative framing in the crime reports. Hence, the amalgamation of these tools and approaches is particularly helpful for generating structured comparisons and providing visual linguistic patterns and differences. Finally, in step 4, the researchers deeply analyzed the results of research questions 1 and 2 to understand how lexical choices and syntactic structures contribute to the narrative framing of female and male criminality in the Philippines.

The data analysis provided valuable insights into lexical choices, syntactic structures, and narrative framing in Philippine Digital News, which are among the underlying causes of language in crime reporting.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers considered various ethical issues in their study. First, they guaranteed that the data used is factual and authentic, despite the use of computerized text analysis tools, namely Voyant and Antconc. These tools were used to analyze the data objectively. Meanwhile, ChatGPT was only applied alongside cross-referencing and self-checking to verify the accuracy and correctness of the syntactic structures found in the articles. Second, they ensured that the data came from a credible

official news website available to the public. Third, the analysis was grounded in an objective and respectful perspective, using linguistic analysis tools to examine the language used in crime reporting for male and female criminals. Thus, the researchers provided an informative and balanced view, grounded in an in-depth analysis of the content using computerized linguistic analysis tools.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

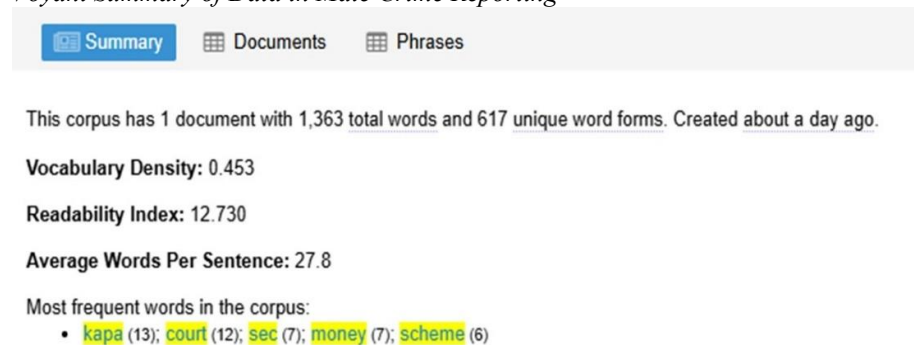
Lexical and Syntactic Choices in Criminality Portrayals

Lexical Choices in Male Crime Reporting

For analyses of male crime reporting lexical choices using Voyant, the researchers used the summary, terms, and collocates. As shown in Figure 2, the summary of data in male crime reporting provided the corpus' total number of words (1,363) with 617 unique words, vocabulary density, readability index, average per words per sentence (27.8), and the most frequent words in the corpus which include KAPA (13), court (12), SEC (7), money (7) and, scheme (6). The vocabulary density and readability index suggest that the corpus contains a relatively diverse lexical repertoire and moderately complex sentence structures. Higher vocabulary density indicates greater lexical variation, while the readability score reflects the level of reading proficiency required to process the text.

Figure 2

Voyant Summary of Data in Male Crime Reporting



Moreover, Table 2 shows the most frequent terms, along with their positive and negative collocations. Further, the researchers considered collocates, which are used to identify words and phrases that appear in proximity to the most frequently used words. The Table 3 shows the collocations in male crime reporting which include *KAPA* which appeared in thirteen (13) contexts with collocates led, enticing, consistent, scam, and prison; *court* which appeared in twelve (12) contexts with collocates led, good, credence, transgression, freeze, and bad; *SEC* which appeared in seven (7) contexts with collocates led and complaint; money which appeared in seven (7) contexts with collocates suffered, freeze, and fake; and *scheme* which

appeared in six (6) contexts with collocates promises, credence, consistent, scam, and illegal.

The results imply that the vocabulary density and readability index of the corpus indicate a more varied vocabulary that reflects a broader narrative scope while maintaining accessibility to readers with advanced knowledge. These are evident in the most frequently used lexical terms: “KAPA,” a short form for Kapa Community Ministry International Incorporated, a religious corporation; “court,” a place where legal trials happen; and SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission). These terms emphasize the institutional and organizational aspects of the crime.

Table 2

Voyant Terms used in Male Crime Reporting

Positive Terms (17)	Negative Terms (37)
supreme, reasonable, led, worth, supporter, protection, promising, promises, promised, liberty, good, faith, enticing, credence, consistent, clear, awarded	scam, graft, rape, prison, murder, imprisonment, guilty, death, illegal, doubt, crime, complaint, vice, unlawful, transgression, tortured, suffered, suffer, raped, pretense, penalty, outrage, opponent, killed, impossibly, impossible, guilt, freeze, fraud, false, fake, failure, damages, damage, criminal, corrupt, bad

Table 3

Voyant Collocates in Male Crime Reporting

	KAPA (13)	Court (12)	SEC (7)	Money (7)	Scheme (6)
Collocate positive words	led, enticing, consistent	led, good, credence	Led		promises, credence, consistent
Collocate Negative words	scam, prison	transgression, freeze, bad	Complaint	suffered, freeze, fake	scam, illegal,

The positive collocates of KAPA “led, enticing, consistent” such as in the lines “Kapa officials led by its founder Apolinario. Estafa under the law” (Article M2: *Kapa Execs Get Life in Prison for Duping Millions in Ponzi Scheme*), “KAPA was enticing the public to invest at least P10,000 in exchange for a 30-percent monthly return for life” and “KAPA were *consistent* with a Ponzi scheme” irrespectively suggests additional information about the convicted criminal and the crime committed. The verb *led* may serve to humanize the perpetrator; the adjective *enticing* could frame the schemes as appealing to the victims while reflecting the perpetrators’ deceptive tactics; and the adjective *consistent* could highlight the constant intensity of the perpetrator’s intention to commit the crime. While the frequently use lexical terms “*money*” and “*scheme*” in the sentences “for life, without having to do anything other than putting *money* in and waiting for the payout...” and “carrying out the unlawful or illegal act, transaction, enterprise or *scheme* and the defraudation results in the misappropriation of *money*” with negative collocates “*suffered, freeze, fake, scam, and illegal*” (M2) suggest framing of financial misconduct or crime. Hence, these terms create a narrative of wrongdoing and emphasize the severity and impact of the crimes unequivocally as fraudulent or criminal. Revealed, the corpus relies heavily on words related to crime (money and scheme) and their legal aftermath (court).

In summary, male crime reports are dominated by institutional and procedural terms. These lexical patterns foreground legal mechanisms and financial wrongdoings, emphasizing crime as an institutional and judicial process. Such framing directs the reader’s attention toward legal accountability rather than personal moral judgment. Lexical choices are essential for expressing ideological positions within the discourse of criminality, significantly affecting how audiences perceive the events (Shah et al.,

2019; Paglinawan, 2021; Martins, 2021; Alarcon & Lintao, 2023; Sagheer et al., 2024; Syed et al., 2024). Evidently, the use of positive and negative collocates balances the audience’s perception of deception, legal action, and consequences. In contrast, the nuanced use of language, particularly in framing financial crimes, demonstrates how the media influence the public’s understanding and attitudes toward the case and the convicted criminal. The results support the findings of many (Shah et al., 2019; Paglinawan, 2021; Martins, 2021; Alarcon & Lintao, 2023; Sagheer et al., 2024; Syed, et al. 2024) that practitioners are trained to recognize and alleviate biases trough their reporting, however an irrefutable fact remains that lexical choices convey a particular meaning and connotations that reflect distinct ideological perspectives inherent in each context.

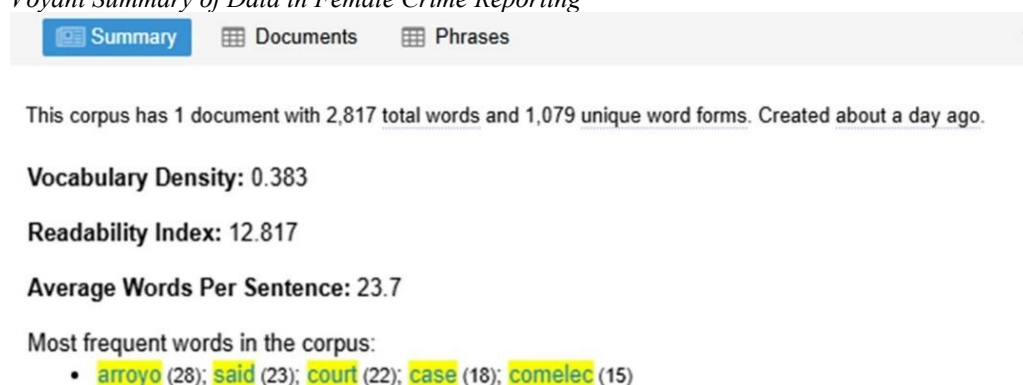
Lexical Choices in Female Crime Reporting

For analyses of female crime reporting lexical choices using Voyant, the researchers used the summary, terms, and collocates. As shown in Figure 3, the summary of data in female crime reporting revealed the number of total words in the corpus (2,817) with 1,079 unique words, vocabulary density, readability index, average words per sentence (23.7), and the most frequent words in the corpus which include Arroyo (28), said (23), court (22), case (18), and Comelec (15). The vocabulary density and readability index indicate that female crime reports employ relatively specialized vocabulary and syntactic complexity, suggesting that the articles target readers with higher levels of literacy and familiarity with legal discourse.

Table 4 shows the most frequent terms; note that the researchers included the words highlighted by the tool in green (positive terms) and red (negative terms) for both terms and their collocates. Further, the researchers considered the collocates, as they are used to identify words and phrases

Figure 3

Voyant Summary of Data in Female Crime Reporting



that appear in proximity to the most used words. The Table 5 shows the collocations in female crime reporting which include *Arroyo* which appeared in twenty-eight (28) contexts with collocates favor, calm, and sabotage; *said* which appeared in twenty-three (23) contexts with collocates right, calm, and complaint; *court* which appeared in twenty-two (22)

contexts with collocates criminal, guilty, and complaint; *case* which appeared in eighteen (18) contexts with collocates supreme, speedy, approve, sabotage, insufficiency, graft, and complaint; and *Comelec* which appeared in fifteen (15) contexts with collocates approve, urgent, sabotage, criminal, and allegations.

Table 4

Voyant Terms used in Female Crime Reporting

Positive Terms (24)	Negative Terms (46)
supreme, right, like, unity, led, victory, swift, speedy, smiling, smile, recover, reasonable, proven, optimistic, liberty, intelligence, important, good, favor, enhanced, calm, available, approve, affirmative	graft, sabotage, guilty, criminal, urgent, imprisonment, complaint, suffer, penalty, fraud, corruption, violation, unlawfully, unexpected, threatening, tamper, suicidal, slow, sick, scarce, scam, sad, risk, refuting, refused, protest, prosecute, prejudice, painfully, nag, lack, insufficiency, inhibit, indeterminate, frustrate, frail, flee, fake, failure, emergency, doubt, defunct, defiant, danger, damages, damage

Table 5

Voyant Collocates in Female Crime Reporting

	Arroyo (28)	Said (23)	Court (22)	Case (18)	COMELEC (15)
Collocate positive words	favor, calm	right, calm		supreme, speedy, approve	approve
Collocate Negative words	sabotage	Complaint	criminal, guilty, complaint	sabotage, insufficiency, graft, complaint	urgent, sabotage, criminal, allegations

The results revealed in the readability index suggest that the content is tailored to readers with higher literacy. This means the words are for readers who possess the critical knowledge and capabilities to understand the terms used in the articles. Revealed in the highest frequency terms used—which include the proper noun “*Arroyo*”, and “*court*” and “*COMELEC*” (Commission on Elections)—is the focus on authority and figures together with legal and institutional references; while the term “*said*” may indicate emphasis on reported speech which limit alternative perspective that helps hinder confusion and repetition for instance, “... issuance of a hold-departure order on Arroyo, the COMELEC *said* the former President was “insisting to leave the country¹” and “In an urgent manifestation, Solicitor General Jose

Anselmo Cadiz *said* the Pasig City RTC now had jurisdiction ...²”. Explicating, *said* in sentence 1 is used as a reporting verb that introduces an indirect speech. It indicates that “insisting to leave the country” is spoken by the former President and was attributed to the *COMELEC* as the source of the statement or claim. Hence, this subtly distances the writer from taking full responsibility for the statement. Further, the positive collocates “favor, speedy, and approve” among others in the lines “Those who voted in *favor* of charging Arroyo with electoral sabotage were Comelec Chair”, “frustrate the government’s right to prosecute and to obtain *speedy* disposition of the present case pending before [it]”, and “the Comelec voted 5-2 to *approve* the filing of a case of electoral sabotage against” irrespectively reflects justice, efficiency and

resolution. painting a positive image of legal processes and outcomes. However, the positive collocates “favor” and “approve” may also indicate bias toward the criminal. Further, the negative collocates “graft, sabotage, criminal, complaint, fraud, and violation” in the statements “Following the filing of the case of electoral *sabotage* against Arroyo...” and “filing of a complaint or information in court initiates a *criminal* action” indicate criminality of wrongdoing, trapping the event in accusatory and sensationalized light.

In contrast to male crime reports, female crime reports show a higher frequency of personal identifiers and institutional references tied to public identity. The repeated use of proper nouns foregrounds the individual as the central narrative anchor, suggesting a more personalized framing of criminality.

Overall, the frequently used terms and collocates revealed narratives centered on criminals and crimes committed (Arroyo, case) and on legal proceedings (court, COMELEC, said) that may influence public perception. The choice of words reflects the findings of Shah et al. (2019), Paglinawan

(2021), Martins (2021), Yasmin (2021), Alarcon and Lintao (2023), Sagheer et al. (2024), and Syed et al. (2024) that language bias is pervasive in media discourse. Word choices encode ideologies, indicating that reports are influenced rather than purely objective. Thus, it could be stated that the terminology used indicates an underlying concept within the sphere of the criminal’s cultural, societal, and political background.

Syntactic Structure in Male Crime Reporting

The researchers employed AntConc and ChatGPT to gather data on the syntactic structure of *male crime reporting*. First, they used Antconc N-Gram to analyze words and count the instances of the most common expressions in the corpus. Next, they considered the following in analyzing the syntactic structure: (1) the number of words per sentence revealed in Voyant is 27.8, in N-Gram, the maximum size is 25, hence they employed it to gather data, and (2) there are 47 number of sentences from the articles analyzed by ChatGPT, considering this, they limit the page size to 50 hits out of 1,320 hits.

Table 6

Antconc N-Gram and ChatGPT Syntactic Structures in Male Crime Reporting

Syntactic Structure	Source Code	Examples
Passive Voice	M1	(1) “Antonio Sanchez, then mayor of Calauan town in Laguna, <i>was already being tried</i> for two counts of murder.”
Active Voice	M2	(2) “The leaders of a religious-themed investment scam that promised its victims a lifetime of profits <i>will spend a lifetime behind bars</i> instead.”
	M3	(3) “The Sandiganbayan <i>has convicted</i> former Laguna Gov. Emilio Ramon ‘ER’ Ejercito III of graft.”
Complex Sentences with Multiple Clauses	M1	(4) “On April 13, 1991, father and son Nelson and Rickson Peñalosa were shot to death by the mayor’s henchmen, with Nelson being a political leader and supporter of Sanchez’s political opponent.”
	M2	(5) “The SEC, through the Anti-Money Laundering Council, obtained a freeze order from the Court of Appeals on June 4, 2019, to preserve assets linked to KAPA.”
	M3	(6) “In 2008, Ejercito and his co-accused brokered and approved an insurance deal that the Pagsanjan municipal government entered into with a private company, First Rapids Care Ventures (FRCV).”
Legalistic Phrasing	M3	(7) “The court’s decision is not yet final and can be appealed.” (M3)
	M2	(8) “The SEC had led the crackdown against KAPA, a religious corporation accused of perpetrating a Ponzi scheme.”
	M2	(9) “Under Presidential Decree No. 1689, estafa and other forms of swindling shall be punished by life imprisonment or death.”
Direct and Indirect Quotations	M2	(10) “The Court takes credence on the testimony of the witness from SEC, who testified that the means employed by KAPA is akin to a Ponzi scheme,’ read the decision.”
	M3	(11) “There was a clear and conscious transgression of procurement laws,’ the court said.”
	M2	(12) “As a result, they suffered damage since nothing was returned from their investments,’ according to the court.”
Enumeration and Parallel Structures	M2	(13) “All three were sentenced to suffer the penalty of life imprisonment, and to pay eight actual damages amounting to P195,000 to complainants.”
	M1	(14) “During another raid inside the Maximum Security Compound, authorities seized from the former mayor’s cell a flat-screen television, an air conditioner, and a refrigerator.”
	M2	(15) “The solicitation activities of KAPA were consistent with a Ponzi scheme, offering impossible high returns and paying early investors using money collected from newer investors.”

Source code: M1: Antonio Sanchez was convicted of 2 muders (2019); M2: Ka[a execs get life in prison for duping millions in Ponzi scheme (2023); M3: Ex-governor Ejercito convicted of graft (2019)

Doing this helped generate a general overview of the words in the text. After generating the 50 hits with a 25-N-Gram size, ChatGPT was prompted to analyze the syntactic structure of both the 47 sentences (generated by ChatGPT) and the 50 hits (generated by AntConc).

Table 6 shows a summary of the syntactic structure results, with examples. As indicated, five distinct syntactic structures were found, including passive voice, complex sentences with multiple clauses, legalistic phrasing, direct and indirect quotations, and enumeration and parallel structures. Explicating, firstly, the passive voice in sentence 1 and the active voice in sentences 2 and 3 foregrounds the action/events while backgrounding the doer of the actions. For instance, in sentence 1, “Antonio Sanchez” receives the action of being tried, while the “Sandiganbayan” acts with “has convicted,” indicating an active construction. The passive structure obscures who is responsible for the action, potentially shifting the blame to the victims, whereas the active construction clarifies who acted. For instance, in the phrase “*was already being tried*,” the doer of the action is not clearly stated; thus, the evidence suggests a typical crime report, emphasizing legal actions and processes rather than the consequences of criminal acts. Secondly, the use of complex sentences and multiple clauses, evident in sentences 4, 5, and 6, presents detailed narratives and longer reasoning. In this way, a thorough recounting of events heightened the gravity and consequences of the crimes. Thirdly, the legalistic

phrasing evident in sentences 7, 8, and 9 adds an authoritative and critical tone, reinforcing the formal nature of the processing evident in the jargon and registers used (court, sec, kapa et al.). Fourthly, the use of direct and indirect quotations in sentences 10, 11, and 12 revealed the voices of authorities and contextual details that enhanced the text’s credibility, lending it authenticity and depth. Lastly, the enumeration and parallel structures in sentences 13, 14, and 15 highlighted the elements of the cases in a digestible way, ensuring clarity in complex scenarios.

Based on the results, syntactic structure plays a crucial role in shaping narratives within the articles. The arrangement of words and phrases in the well-formed sentences is crucial for conveying meaning and attracting readers for attention (Zedelius et al., 2019; Maulidan, 2021; Tiwari, 2022; Naureen, 2024; Myers, 2024; Silva & Guedes, 2024) Through this, the syntactic structures successfully emphasized institutional justice by providing detailed and structured accounts ensuring neutrality through focusing on consequences and accountability of the criminals.

Syntactic Structure in Female Crime Reporting

The researchers employed AntConc and ChatGPT to gather data on the syntactic structure of female crime reporting. First, Antconc N-Gram was used to analyze words and count the instances of the most common expressions in the corpus. The analysis is shown in Table 7.

Table 7
Antconc N-Gram and ChatGPT Syntactic Structures in Female Crime Reporting

Syntactic Structure	Source Code	Examples
Passive Voice	F3	(16) “Janet Napoles, the alleged mastermind behind the pork barrel scam, <i>is found guilty of</i> eight charges of graft and malversation.”
	F2	(17) “Imelda Marcos <i>has been found guilty of</i> seven counts of graft by the Sandiganbayan’s Fifth Division.”
	F1	(18) “Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo <i>was served an arrest warrant</i> for alleged electoral sabotage.”
Complex Sentences	F3	(19) “The court finds accused Rhodora B. Mendoza, Maria Ninez P. Guanizo, Victor Roman C. Cacal, and Janet L. Napoles guilty beyond reasonable doubt of violation of Section 3(e) of RA 3019...”
	F2	(20) “If the Sandiganbayan’s decision is ruled with finality, she will be perpetually disqualified...”
	F1	(21) “The Comelec claimed that the order to commit fraud was carried out by Bedol...”
Nominalizations	F1	(22) “The <i>serving of the warrant</i> capped a day of swift and unexpected developments.”
	F2	(23) “The <i>filing of a complaint or</i> information in court initiates a criminal action.”
	F1	(24) “The <i>insistence of the accused</i> ... to leave the country is being done for the purpose of absconding.”
Direct Quotations	F3	(25) “Pwede niyang iakyat sa Supreme Court kung may nakita siyang grave abuse of discretion sa desisyon ng Sandiganbayan,” Assistant Special Prosecutor Ryan Quilala told reporters.”
	F1	(26) “Under the direction of Police Director Alan Purisima, we have served the arrest warrant on former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo,” Bucayu said.”
	F1	(27) “It’s a matter of exercising their constitutional right to travel,” he said.”

Source Code: F1: *Gloria Arroyo Now Under Arrest* (2011); F2: *Imelda Marcos Guilty of Graft, Ordered Arrested* (2018); F3: *Napoles Found Guilty of 8 Graft, Malversation Raps; Given 64 yrs in Jail* (2023)

Next, they considered the following in analyzing the syntactic structure (1) the number of words per sentence revealed in Voyant is 23.7, while in N-Gram the maximum size is 25 hence they employed it to gather data, and (2) there are 104 number of sentences from the articles analyzed by ChatGPT, considering this, they limit the page size to 100 hits out of 2,765 hits. Doing this helps generate a general overview of the words in the text. After generating the 100 hits with a 25-N-gram size, they prompted ChatGPT to analyze the syntactic structure of both the 104 sentences (generated by ChatGPT) and the 100 hits (generated by AntConc).

Table 7 shows a summary of the syntactic structure results, with examples. As indicated, seven distinct syntactic structures were found, which include passive voice, complex sentences, nominalizations, and direct quotations. First, the use of the passive voice in sentences 16, 17, and 18 highlights the action or outcome rather than the authorities involved in issuing charges or judicial verdicts. Evidently, Janet Napoles, Imelda Marcos, and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo are the subjects of the sentence; for instance, in the phrase “is found guilty of eight charges of graft and malversation,” this is a common legal and crime reporting practice, as it maximizes narrative of accountability while minimizing potential agency. This posits focusing more on the verdict rather than who is making the judgment, making the structure less biased and more formal. However, the consistent mention of the criminal’s name as the subject of the sentence, preceded by the verdict, painted a direct and undesirable description of the criminals. Second, the complex sentences in sentences 19, 20, and 21 provided detailed and complex explications of the context, reflecting the gravity and complexity of legal proceedings. Third, nominalizations (turning verbs or adjectives into nouns to create an objective tone) in sentences 21, 22, and 23 convey formality and authority—a characteristic of legal reporting—that abstract actions into concepts. Lastly, direct quotations in sentences 23, 24, and 25 provided credibility and immediacy by embedding authoritative voices within the narratives.

In general, the syntactic structures of female crime reporting emphasized the charges faced by women in high-profile cases, using passive voices and nominalizations while maintaining complexity and authority, shaping narratives to be formal, fact-based, and authentic in their in-depth reporting. The use of effective sentence construction relies on a clear syntactic structure that facilitates readers’ understanding. However, media reports follow unique constructions for specific communicative purposes. This may posit clarity but also plays a vital role in engaging readers while shaping public discourse (Zedelius et al., 2019; Maulidan, 2021; Tiwari, 2022; Collins, 2022; Noviasari & Annisa,

2024; Naureen, 2024; Myers, 2024; Silva & Guedes, 2024).

Gender-Based Linguistic Differences in Crime Reporting

Lexical Choices in Male Vs Female Crime Reporting

Based on the results of specific lexical choices used in male and female crime reporting, the following differences were found.

In male crime reporting, the high density and readability index (Figure 2) indicate a more varied vocabulary, though the complexity may mean that average readers could read the articles. While female crime reporting results indicate a much lower vocabulary but a higher readability index (Figure 3) compared to male crime reporting. This could mean there is less lexical variation in frequently used terms intended for proficient readers.

It is revealed that male crime reporting focuses on crimes and financial schemes, as evidenced by the terms used (Table 2), including KAPA (13), court (12), SEC (7), money (7), and scheme (6). This result emphasizes fraudulent activities and their implications for criminals. While female crime reporting focuses more on political figures and institutions, as revealed in the most frequently used terms (Table 3), which include Arroyo (28), said (23), court (22), case (18), and COMELEC (15). This implies that the emphasis is centered on high-profile figures and institutional processes.

It was found that positive collocates (Table 2) in male crime reporting highlight the appeal of fraudulent schemes to victims by emphasizing outcomes and fairness in legal proceedings. The negative collocates (Table 2) centered on violence and severity narratives, which emphasize the illegitimacy of financial crimes. On the one hand, positive collocates in female crime reporting (Table 4) created a humanizing narrative by stating resolutions and legal processes. Moreover, negative collocates (Table 4) suggest institutional wrongdoing and societal consequences, evident in the terms used, which indicate emotional depth and human impact. The results imply that male crime reporting highlights the deceptive nature of crimes by stressing harm and systemic failure, while in female reporting frames institutional competence by focusing on legal processes.

Apparently, the lexical choices in female crime reporting revealed a balanced procedural description, with humanizing language that frames women as central figures in high-profile cases. On the one hand, male crime reporting focused on procedural and economic impacts, framing men as perpetrators of financial schemes with little personal details. This result suggests that lexical choices are never neutral; they carry ideological weight that can shape public perception and understanding of stereotypes. These findings align with the articles by

Shah et al. (2019), Paglinawan (2021), Martins (2021), Alarcon and Lintao (2023), Sagheer et al. (2024), and Syed et al. (2024), which show that media language often reflects societal biases, impacting how readers interpret events. Relatively, journalists were trained to recognize and mitigate their own biases in lexical choices to promote more balanced reporting (Shah et al., 2019; Paglinawan, 2021; Martins, 2021; Alarcon & Lintao, 2023; Sagheer et al., 2024; Syed et al., 2024). However, as noted, language biases are preserved in media discourse, leading to the typecasting of criminals that incontestably influence readers' acuties.

Syntactic Structure in Male Vs Female Crime Reporting

As for syntactic structure, more differences are found in crime reporting between males and females. Both male and female crime reporting uses passive voice; however, in male crime reporting, the use of passive voice (Table 6, sentence 1) and active voice (Table 2, sentences 2 and 3) emphasizes legal outcomes while backgrounding the criminals. While female crime reporting (Table 7, sentences 16, 17, 18) emphasizes legal outcomes and charges, it accentuates criminals. Hence, it focuses more on judicial decisions regarding criminals, with less emphasis on institutional authority than in male crime reporting.

It could be gleaned from Tables 6 and 7 that both use complex sentences; however, male crime reporting provided detailed narratives of events, often emphasizing the gravity and complexity of the case. Meanwhile, female crime reporting tends to include more direct references and legal processes, such as court rulings (Table 7, sentences 19, 20, and 21), making the legal proceedings the focal point.

Based on the results in Table 6, male crime reporting did not use nominalizations explicitly, but the language is formal and focuses on events and actions in general. On the other hand, female crime reporting used more explicit nominalizations, which create an objective and formal tone. The turning of verbs into nouns abstractly represented legal proceedings and consequences.

As evident in Table 6, sentences 10, 11, and 12 are the results of male crime reporting. It can be inferred that the quotations extensively incorporate legal voices, lending credibility to the reporting. On the other hand, female crime reporting relied on direct quotations from officials, highlighting the procedural aspects of the crime.

Gleaned from Table 6, sentences 7, 8, and 9: male crime reporting uses legalistic phrasing that frequently emphasizes ongoing legal processes. Though female crime reporting used similar patterns, it includes more definitive statements about outcomes. For instance, Table 7, sentence 22, suggests a sense of urgency or finality in legal actions taken against women.

Based on Table 6, sentences 13, 14, and 15, male crime reporting used parallel structure to list events, charges, and outcomes, among others, for clarity. There was no direct reference to enumeration; however, the structure tends to present legal actions, such as criminal charges or proceedings, in a clear, factual style.

Overall, both male and female crime reporting uses similar structures, such as the passive voice and complex sentences, while they differ significantly in emphasis and focus. Male crime reporting syntactic structure emphasizes institutional justice, focusing on actions and consequences while maintaining neutrality and authority. Relatively, female crime reporting focuses on legal outcomes but leans toward presenting the crimes formally and objectively with a stronger emphasis on depersonalization of the accused through nominalizations and passive constructions. Thus, male crime reports emphasize contextual narratives surrounding criminal actions, while female reports often focus on legal outcomes and implications. The results support the findings of many (Zedelius et al., 2019; Maulidan, 2021; Tiwari, 2022; Collins, 2022; Noviasari & Annisa, 2024; Naureen, 2024; Myers, 2024; Silva & Guedes, 2024) that syntactic structure in crime reporting used by the journalists may describe criminal events, perpetrators, and victims, which can significantly reinforce or alleviate public perception about crimes and criminals.

Narrative Framing through Linguistic Choices

To generate results in narrative framing, the researcher considered the results from Voyant and Antconc and prompted ChatGPT to synthesize the narrative framing of texts. The researchers consolidated the results by fact-checking the findings in Tables 2-7 and Figures 2 and 3. Based on the synthesized results of the computerized text analysis tools, the narrative framing of male and female criminality falls under the following circumstances:

Lexical Choices and Gendered Framing

As shown in Figure 2 and Tables 2 and 3, the use of positive terms (led, liberty, consistent, etc.) in male criminal reporting frames men as rational actors within a systemic process, whereas negative terms soften the portrayal of male offenses. Likewise, terms (e.g., supreme, reasonable) create an emphasis on justice, while the heavy presence of terms (e.g., murder, rape) underscores the seriousness of crime. Hence, the deliberate use of positive and negative terms and collocates balances narratives of deception, legal action, and societal consequences. On the one hand, Figure 3 and Tables 4 and 5 of female crime reporting indicate the use of positive terms (calm, proven, etc.) while there were a greater number of negative terms (sad, threatening, etc.) than male portrayals of women as either vulnerable

and fragile deviants or victims of circumstance. The differential use of positive and negative terms in both crime reporting posits a socially constructed view of criminals through its linguistic patterns. Likewise, the deliberate use of language that frames the narrative around the crime and legal proceedings could shape public perception. The framing of male and female criminals varies significantly by gender. Arguably, the lexical choices perpetuate men as rational and systemic criminals, while women are emotional and morally deviant. These portrayals reinforce the patriarchal view of men as public agents and of women as morally evaluated in the private sphere (Sandman, 2021; Fassnidge, 2024; Frederick, 2024). Thus, by emphasizing male rationality and female emotionality, these perpetuate gender ideologies that influence audience interpretations of male and female criminality.

Agency and Accountability in Syntactic Structures

A central finding of the study concerns differences in the linguistic distribution of agency. Male crime reports frequently use passive constructions and legalistic phrasing that foregrounds institutional action. These structures often background the reporting agent while emphasizing judicial procedure.

This can be seen in the analysis in Table 6, which shows that male crime reporting syntactic structure obscures who is responsible for the action, potentially shifting the blame to the victims of crime, while the active construction helps clarify who performed the action (e.g., was already being tried).

On the one hand, female crime reports also use the passive voice; however, the grammatical subject is consistently the named female offender. This syntactic pattern intensifies personal accountability and makes the accused more visible within the narrative frame. Table 7 shows that the syntactic structure of female crime reporting emphasized actions or outcomes rather than the subjects (criminals), suggesting an emphasis on charges or judicial verdicts.

This distinction is significant from a framing perspective: male reports distribute agency across systems and institutions, while female reports more directly attach accountability to the individual. Further, this disparity reflects societal norms that position men as less accountable for their actions, attributing blame to external systems, while female reporting heightens personal culpability, reflecting gendered biases about accountability and moral responsibility. The result supports the findings of Martins (2021) that claimed male crime reports reinforce traditional masculine stereotypes, which contribute to the societal understanding of masculinity, often normalizing less accountability of men for their actions. On the one side, the findings of Collins (2022), Shah et al. (2021), and Fassnidge

(2024) support the study by stating that women who commit crimes are framed through the lens of gender stereotypes that downplay their agency and responsibility, failing to capture the complexities of the crimes, portraying them as moral failures. The results suggest that there is no slight difference in the portrayal of criminals compared to Western studies. Hence, male crime reports create a systematic lens that minimizes individual blame, which is in contrast with female crime reports that adopt a moral and emotional frame, which intensifies the criminal liability.

Narrative Framing and Gendered Discourse

The evidence suggests two dominant narrative frames: (1) an institutional-legal frame for male offenders; and (2) a moralized-personal frame for female offenders. The first emphasizes judicial resolution: legal process, and procedural legitimacy. The second emphasizes culpability, personal identity, and moral evaluation.

This finding aligns with prior studies on gendered crime reporting, where women in crime narratives are more likely to be evaluated through moral and social expectations. The syntactic structures identified in female crime reporting shape how female offenders are presented in news narratives. Passive voice constructions foreground legal outcomes while reducing emphasis on the authorities performing the action. Nominalizations create a formal and objective tone by presenting legal actions as institutional processes. Meanwhile, direct quotations strengthen credibility by incorporating authoritative voices from legal officials. These patterns suggest that female crime reporting combines authority with personalized framing, making female offenders more visible and morally scrutinized in news discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Philippine digital crime news employs distinct linguistic strategies in framing male and female criminality. Male offenders are more frequently represented through institutional and legal discourse that foregrounds systems, judicial processes, and procedural accountability. Female offenders, by contrast, are more often framed through individualized, moralized, and identity-centered discourse. Theoretically, the study contributes to applied linguistics, framing theory, and gendered discourse studies by showing how lexical and syntactic choices shape public understandings of crime and accountability. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of combining corpus-assisted tools with qualitative discourse interpretation.

Empirically, the findings highlight how media language may reproduce gendered expectations and influence public perception of criminality in both

Philippine and global contexts. However, the study is limited by its small dataset (six articles from a single news outlet) and by the high-profile status of several cases included in the corpus. Future studies should expand the corpus across multiple news organizations, broader timeframes, and more varied offender profiles to strengthen generalizability. The findings also carry implications for media practitioners, particularly in promoting more balanced and linguistically self-aware crime reporting practices.

This study has several limitations. First, the corpus consisted of only six crime news articles from a single news outlet, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study focused on high-profile criminal cases, which may not represent ordinary crime reporting practices. Third, the research examined only lexical choices, syntactic structures, and narrative framing, excluding other linguistic and multimodal features. Lastly, although Voyant, AntConc, and ChatGPT supported the analysis, AI-assisted interpretations still required human validation and may involve subjective interpretation. Based on the foregoing finding and conclusion, the researchers recommends to (1) incorporate other gender theories to navigate on how narrative framing shapes public perception of male and female criminality (2) expand balanced data collection of crime reporting with a larger number of male and female criminals as subjects of the study (3) utilize more advanced and specialized text analysis tools that offer robust capabilities to analyze linguistic differences in crime reporting, (4) future researchers may also explore other linguistic features and the potential of mixed method combining quantitative with qualitative data for broader insights.

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