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Voice Metaphors in Female Magazines in The United States and China

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ABSTRACT

Feminism plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality and social justice. Among others, magazines are critical in shaping public understanding of feminism. Metaphors in feminist discourse enrich expressions and shape societal attitudes. Existing studies focus on newspapers, literary works, and social media, while magazines remain underexplored. This study investigates how voice metaphors in women's magazines from the United States and China reflect feminist ideologies utilizing Kövecses' (2017) Multilevel View of Conceptual Metaphors. A comparative analysis of 5,280 articles (5.3 million words) from *Ms.* and *Bust*, 中国妇女 (*Women of China*), and 婚姻与家庭 (*Marriage and Family*) published between July 1st, 2023 and June 30th, 2024 was conducted. Findings reveal that voice metaphors portray protest in American magazines, framing vocal expression as individual empowerment and resistance against systemic silencing. On the other hand, voice metaphors portray harmony in Chinese magazines, prioritizing state-mediated dialogues, which symbolically link feminist discourse to nationalist projects. These divergences underscore the contrast between neoliberal individualism in American society and postfeminist discourses that stigmatize feminism as radical or self-serving in Chinese society. The findings show that metaphors in feminist discourse constructed by media practitioners are moulded by prevailing cultural and political ideologies. The findings from the cross-cultural analysis of metaphorical mappings on feminism enriches global feminist scholarship, by revealing the paradoxical role of metaphors in perpetuating and challenging patriarchal structures.

Keywords: Voice Metaphors; Feminism; Female Magazines; Sociopolitical Ideologies; The United States and China

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1. Introduction

Feminism has long served as a vital force in advancing gender equality and social justice, yet its trajectory has been marked by both empowerment and resistance. Since its emergence, the feminist movement has navigated a complex landscape of societal reactions, inspiring women to demand equal rights while facing skepticism and opposition from conservative factions [1]. Within this dynamic, metaphor, a linguistic phenomenon that transcends literal meaning to shape cognition and communication, has played a pivotal role. Metaphors allow individuals to interpret abstract experiences by mapping them onto familiar domains, making them indispensable in articulating feminist struggles and ideologies [2].

Metaphors permeate human communication, appearing in everyday speech, written texts, and even nonverbal systems like sign language [3]. Their universality lies in their ability to bridge cultural and linguistic divides, offering frameworks to conceptualize complex ideas [4–6]. Metaphors constitute 10–20% of daily discourse, underscoring their ubiquity and cognitive significance [7]. The Multilevel View of Conceptual Metaphors further refines this understanding by positing a hierarchical structure of metaphors, that reveals how abstract concepts like gender inequality are cognitively organized [4]. This framework operates across four interconnected levels: image schemas (e.g., containment, path, which represent foundational embodied experiences; conceptual domains (e.g., war, journey), which map source-to-target relationships to structure complex ideas; frames (e.g., activism, resilience), which contextualize metaphors within sociocultural narratives; and mental spaces (e.g., magazine articles), which capture real-world instantiations of these mappings. Cross-linguistic studies, such as the comparison of anger metaphors in English and Chinese, demonstrate how cultural contexts shape metaphorical expressions, with Chinese emphasizing restraint through traditional medical concepts like "qi", while English often links anger to "dangerous animals" [8].

Media, particularly magazines, have emerged as influential platforms for disseminating and contesting gender ideologies. Their portrayal of feminist issues directly shapes public perceptions of gender roles and equality [9]. Metaphors in feminist discourse not only enrich expression but also influence audience attitudes, often reinforcing or subverting societal norms [10]. Previous studies have explored metaphorical representations of feminism in newspapers [11–13], literary works [14,15], and magazines [16,17]. The prevalence of "war" metaphors in feminist discourse, framing activism as a struggle against patriarchal oppression, has been widely documented. For example, Spanish online media frequently employed "war" metaphors to depict feminists as both powerful actors and victims [12]. Spanish opinion columns show gender differences, with male writers minimizing feminist struggles and female columnists emphasizing their urgency [11]. American newspapers favored conflict-oriented metaphors like "battles for reproductive rights," whereas British media favored "journey" metaphors to frame progress [13]. Janusz [14] demonstrated how poets like Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde repurposed metaphors to dismantle phallocentric epistemologies, while war metaphors in abortion narratives heightened perceptions of women's autonomy in Colombia [18]. However, such metaphors risk polarizing audiences or reducing feminism to a binary conflict [12]. Scholars have also critiqued historical metaphors like the "wave" model for oversimplifying feminist history into discrete, linear phases, erasing intersectional and ongoing struggles [15,19]. Hewitt [19] proposed the "radio wave" metaphor to capture the simultaneity and diversity of feminist movements, while Alexander et al. [20] reimagined solidarity through the lens of feminist critiques of marriage, revealing tensions in leftist alliances.

Feminist philosophy and literature further illustrate metaphors' dual capacity to oppress and liberate. Metaphors historically used to demean women, such as associating femininity with irrationality, were reclaimed by feminist writers to challenge patriarchal hierarchies [14]. Similarly, Yang [21] analyzed Susan Glaspell's Trifles, where domestic objects like a quilt and a dead canary became metaphors for silenced female agency. Mishra [22] extended this analysis to philosophical texts, showing how Iris Marion Young's "menstrual closet" and Luce Irigaray's "envelope" metaphors exposed systemic oppression while fostering new epistemologies. These metaphors inadvertently marginalize women.

In China, analysis of Weibo posts uncovered six dominant metaphorical categories, including "war", "busi-

ness", and "disease," which collectively stigmatized feminism as a destabilizing force [23]. Similarly, Chen [16] traced shifts in metaphors in *Women of China* magazine, noting how socialist-era portrayals of women as "war characters" evolved into market-reform-era depictions of femininity as "flowers", reflecting changing sociopolitical ideologies. These studies highlight how metaphors both mirror and mould societal gender norms, often unconsciously perpetuating patriarchal biases even when authors aim to critique inequality [24].

Despite extensive research on metaphors in newspapers and literature, magazine discourse remains underexplored. Magazines, with their blend of depth and accessibility, offer unique insights into how gender ideologies are constructed for mass audiences [25]. Chen's [16] study of *Women of China* revealed how metaphors evolved alongside China's sociopolitical shifts, yet comparative cross-cultural analyses remain scarce. This gap limits our understanding of how metaphors function in distinct cultural contexts, particularly in non-Western settings where feminist discourse intersects with state ideologies and digital censorship [18,26].

This study examines metaphorical representations of feminism in two American magazines, *Ms.* and *Bust*, and two Chinese magazines, 中国妇女 (*Women of China*) and 婚姻与家庭 (*Marriage and Family*), applying Multilevel View of Conceptual Metaphors [4]. By integrating Collostructional Analysis [27] and the Metaphor Identification Procedure [28], the comparative analysis explores how hierarchical conceptual structures, image schemas, domains, frames, and mental spaces, shape feminist discourse across sociolinguistic contexts. By examining how this conceptual metaphor is linguistically realized, contextually framed, and ideologically embedded, the study seeks to uncover cross-cultural parallels and divergences in the representation of feminist agency, marginalization, and resistance.

2. Literature Review

The study of metaphors has revealed their profound role in shaping gender ideologies across linguistic and cultural contexts. Research demonstrates that metaphors serve as cognitive tools, bridging abstract concepts with embodied experiences while reflecting sociocultural values [29]. In feminist discourse, metaphors like war, nature, and disease exhibit cross-cultural universality but diverge in semantic networks and ideological implications [15,19]. For instance, war metaphors in American media frame gender struggle as individual empowerment through confrontation-victory narratives, whereas Chinese media associate war with collective mobilization and societal responsibility [16,18]. This dichotomy underscores the differences between Western individualism and Eastern collectivism in use of metaphor.

Media platforms amplify the ideological power of metaphors. Nigerian newspapers unconsciously reinforce patriarchal norms through commodity metaphors despite the intention of the articles to critique gender inequality [19]. Similarly, Chinese Weibo discourse stigmatizes feminism through war metaphors that frame it as a national security threat and disease metaphors that frame it as social pathology [14]. These patterns reveal metaphors' dual role as tools for subversion and vehicles of cultural hegemony. War metaphors in COVID-19 reporting, for example, heightened public urgency but also triggered anxiety, illustrating their double-edged impact [19,21].

Feminist scholarship has innovatively employed metaphors to deconstruct patriarchal narratives. The kaleidoscope metaphor challenges linear historical periodization by emphasizing multithreaded, nonlinear gender movements [15]. Similarly, poets like Adrienne Rich dismantle Aristotelian binaries through metaphorical chains that forge empathic networks of collective suffering [19]. Such creative reconceptualizations show that metaphors can be used to challenge dominant ideologies. However, mainstream media often co-opts feminist metaphors into neoliberal frameworks, as seen in American magazines reducing feminism to commodified symbols of consumption [19].

Cross-cultural metaphor studies emphasize the interplay between universal cognitive mechanisms and localized cultural scripts. While body metaphors demonstrate pan-human experiential grounding [30], their manifestations vary significantly. Animal metaphors also diverge. Chinese snake metaphors disparage male cunning, while English ones feminize snakes as deceptive [30]. Wu's [31] analysis of heart metaphors across Chinese and English corpora revealed culture-specific emotional and cognitive mappings, while Cai's [32] comparative study of face metaphors highlighted Chinese emphasis on physical condition versus English focus on social encounters. However, most studies

prioritize synchronic analyses of news or social media, and neglect longitudinal examinations of magazine discourse [16]. Magazines, as hybrid spaces of public discourse and cultural symbolism, likely generate unique metaphorical models shaped by audience demographics and editorial strategies. For instance, American fashion magazines may reduce feminism to consumerist metaphors, whereas Chinese publications might employ family metaphors to obscure gender conflict. These variations underscore how historical, ecological, and philosophical contexts mould metaphorical associations.

Theoretical frameworks like Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) have proven instrumental in unpacking power dynamics. CMA reveals how war metaphors in diplomatic discourse position China as a victim of U.S. hegemony while asserting strategic resilience [33]. Similarly, CMA exposes how commodity metaphors in Nigerian media naturalize female objectification through verbs like "acquire" [19]. Nevertheless, few studies apply CMA to magazine content, particularly in cross-cultural comparisons of gendered voice construction.

3. Research Design

3.1. Corpus Source

The data for this study were drawn from four prominent online women's magazines, two based in U.S. and two in China. The American corpus comprises articles from *Ms.* (https://msmagazine.com/) and *Bust* (https://bust.com/), while the Chinese corpus includes articles from 中国妇女 (*Women of China*, http://www.womenofchina.com/) and 婚姻与家庭 (*Marriage and Family*, http://mf.womenofchina.com/). These sources were selected for their historical significance, thematic focus on gender issues, and influence within their respective sociocultural contexts.

In the U.S. context, both *Ms.* and *Bust* are leading women's magazines. *Ms.*, established in 1972 by Gloria Steinem and other activists, is a cornerstone of feminist journalism in the U.S.. Renowned for its advocacy of women's rights and gender equality, the magazine addresses political, economic, and cultural challenges faced by women through investigative reporting and critical commentary. *Bust*, launched in 1993, adopts a rebellious,

non-commercial editorial stance, celebrating women's creativity and achievements in arts, culture, and society. Its focus on contemporary feminist issues has solidified its reputation among younger audiences.

For the Chinese context, 中国妇女 (*Women of China*), founded in 1939 and operated by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), is the nation's longest-running women's magazine. It covers topics such as women's health, education, and rights, reflecting state-aligned discourses on gender roles [21]. 婚姻与家庭 (*Marriage and Family*), published in 1985 by the China Marriage and Family Research Association, explores familial dynamics and gender relations through rigorous academic and journalistic lenses.

Articles were selected based on three criteria. First, source authenticity was prioritized by including only original contributions by the magazines' editors or contributors, thereby excluding third-party reprints and advertisements, and non-editorial content. Second, thematic relevance guided inclusion. Articles included are those that explicitly deal with feminist themes such as structural gender equality, women's socio-economic empowerment, or feminist movements. The search term used was "feminism". Third, to ensure contemporary relevance, the analysis focused on articles published between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024. Ethical considerations were addressed by using publicly accessible data; all identifying details, such as author names, were anonymized to align with established research standards (The British Psychological Society, 2021).

The prioritization of themes like gender equality and empowerment (e.g., "gender parity," "agency," and "activism") reflects the study's focus on institutional and grassroots feminist discourses. For instance, *Ms.*'s emphasis on political advocacy and *Bust*'s coverage of cultural resistance align with their editorial histories, while *Women of China* and *Marriage and Family* prioritize state-sanctioned narratives on familial and societal harmony. By anchoring theme selection to these contextualized editorial profiles, the analysis captures both divergent and convergent representations of feminist agency across sociopolitical contexts.

Table 1 summarizes the corpus composition. The American dataset contains 1,098 articles (1,664,733 words), while the Chinese corpus comprises 4,182 articles

(3,631,345 words). This disparity reflects differences in publication frequency and editorial scope, with Chinese magazines prioritizing broader societal issues and American sources emphasizing targeted feminist critique [14].

Table 1. Comparative Table of American and Chinese Corpus.

Data Category	Number of Articles	Number of Words
Articles in the American magazine *Ms.*	1041	1,613,274
Articles in the American magazine *Bust*	57	51,459
Total American articles	**1098**	**1,664,733**
Articles in Chinese magazine 中国妇女 (*Women of China*)	3837	3,159,025
Articles in Chinese magazine 婚姻与家庭 (*Marriage and Family*)	345	472,320
Total Chinese articles	**4182**	**3,631,345**

3.2. Data Analysis

The analysis of metaphorical expressions related to feminist discourse in American and Chinese magazines followed a structured, corpus-driven approach. For the American corpus, texts from *Ms.* and *Bust* were uploaded to AntConc 4.2.4 [34] for word frequency and collocates analysis. High-frequency words (occurring ≥100 times) were extracted after excluding function words, yielding 62 content-rich nouns and verbs. These terms formed the basis for identifying feminism-related keywords, such as campaign, fight, and progress. Collocates of these keywords were analyzed using the Mutual Information (MI) score threshold of ≥3.0 to ensure statistical significance, following established practices in corpus linguistics. The Keyword in Context (KWIC) function was then applied to contextualize metaphorical uses, revealing cultural and historical underpinnings of feminist discourse.

For the Chinese corpus, texts from 中国妇女 (Women of China) and 婚姻与家庭 (Marriage and Family) were segmented using SegmentAnt 1.0.0 [35] to address linguistic specificities. The segmented data was analyzed in AntConc 4.2.3, extracting 77 high-frequency nouns and verbs (≥100 occurrences). Collocates of 32 keywords, such as 建设 (build) and 力量 (power), were identified using the same MI-score threshold. The KWIC analysis further contextualized metaphorical expressions, such as 一批高素质女农民和乡村振兴女致富带头人 (... **cultivated** a batch

of high-quality female farmers and female leaders in rural revitalization who can lead the way in becoming prosperous.), which aligns with the conceptual metaphor "Feminism is a plant", reflecting the transformation of women from potential to empowered leaders.

Metaphor identification adhered to the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) [28]. Two coders, fluent in English and Mandarin, independently annotated metaphorical expressions. Discrepancies were resolved through iterative discussions, ensuring consistency. For instance, the phrase building a cohesive movement for gender-balanced democracy was classified under Feminism is a war, emphasizing strategic activism in American discourse.

A comparative framework grounded in Multilevel View of Conceptual Metaphors [4] was employed to analyze cross-cultural variations. Metaphors were categorized by type, frequency, and semantic functions. The American corpus emphasized conflict-oriented metaphors (e.g., battle, struggle), whereas the Chinese corpus prioritized resilience metaphors (e.g., journey, construction), reflecting divergent socio-political narratives. Ethical guidelines were observed by anonymizing author details and using publicly accessible data (The British Psychological Society, 2021). This dual-corpus methodology enabled a nuanced exploration of how metaphorical language shapes feminist ideologies across cultural contexts.

4. Results

The analysis showed that the voice metaphor was used 1,151 times in the corpus of American magazines and 1,013 times in the Chinese magazines. This section describes the voice metaphor across the two corpora in the context of the Multilevel View of Conceptual Metaphor Theory [4].

4.1. Voice Metaphors in the Corpus of American Magazines

The analysis of the feminist-related texts in the American corpus revealed the voice metaphor was lexically realized as "voice", "voices", "heard", and "speak", each carrying distinct collocational patterns and ideological implications. **Table 2** shows the frequency of conceptual metaphors counted from which the collocates

(MI-Score>=3.0) that are metaphorically constructed in the corpus of American magazines *Ms.* and *Bust*. The frequency and distribution of these terms, along with their associated collocates and Mutual Information score (MI-Score), shows the centrality of vocal agency in articulating feminist struggles for equality and recognition.

Table 2. Frequency of Feminism-related Conceptual Metaphors in the Corpus of American magazines *Ms.* and *Bust*.

Number	Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score
1	voices	372	whose	6.514
			leading	5.439
			their	5.134
			our	4.955
			voters	4.142
2	heard	327	seldom	9.558
			voices	8.305
			voice	6.615
			feel	5.464
			be	5.294
			being	4.288
3	speak	252	out	7.305
4	voice	200	silenced	9.325
			influential	8.424
			prominent	7.798
			gave	7.376
			gives	7.073
			giving	6.876
			leading	5.749
			equal	5.238
			your	5.213
			their	3.922
			my	3.895
			one	3.784
			her	3.754
			a	3.007

4.1.1. Voice as Empowerment and Collective Agency

The term "voice" (Frequency: 200) frequently collocated with "silenced" (MI-Score: 9.325), "equal" (MI-Score: 5.238), and "influential" (MI-Score: 8.424), framing vocal expression as a conduit for gender parity.

Extract 1: Every <u>silenced</u> **voice** due to lack of support hinders social progress and undermines gender equality.

In Extract 1, "silenced voice" shows vocal suppres-sion and structural inequities, framing feminist advocacy as a struggle against institutional erasure. The discourse advocates for civic engagement as a crucial means to restore and protect reproductive rights, particularly the right to abortion, in the wake of restrictive legislation and the overturning of Roe v. Wade. The collocate "silenced" (MI-Score: 9.325) indicates systemic barriers that render women's narratives invisible. Similar findings were obtained by Ahmed's [19] in the analysis of Nigerian media, where metaphors like "women are commodities" shows that women are excluded from public discourse. In the American context, this metaphor critiques patriarchal systems that delegitimize women's testimonies, particularly in legal and political arenas. Janusz [14] asserted that metaphors can destabilize oppressive epistemologies by exposing their constructed hierarchies.

Extract 2 explores the systemic barriers that hinder women's, especially Black women's, political representation and participation, emphasizing rights related to gender and racial equality, political inclusion, and access to fair electoral and justice systems. The phrase "influential voice" (MI-Score: 8.424) describes Tarana Burke's advocacy for victims of sexual assault and harassment, and symbolizes a broader cultural shift toward recognizing women's leadership in social justice movements. In Batterson's [36] analysis of Emma Watson's HeForShe rhetoric, feminism is reframed as a collective endeavor to transcend adversarial stereotypes. However, unlike Watson's strategic avoidance of the term "feminism", the American corpus explicitly ties voice to feminist goals, reflecting a direct engagement with gendered inequities.

Extract 2: Tarana Burke, an <u>influential</u> **voice** for victims and survivors of sexual assault and harassment, made it known that rulings like this showcase the need for the movement.

Extract 3 criticizes institutional inaction and complicity pertaining to violence against women, highlighting cases like Harvey Weinstein. The magazine article called for courage to uphold ethics and hold abusers accountable, as part of the fight for women's rights to safety, justice, and accountability for sexual and physical violence. The phrase "prominent voice" (MI-Score: 7.798) positions Marissa Hoechstetter's advocacy as a symbol of resistance against systemic silence. "Voice" operates as a conceptual

metaphor, conflating vocal expression with moral authority and institutional accountability. By framing Marissa Hoechstetter as a prominent voice, the discourse elevates her activism beyond individual testimony to a collective demand for justice. Feminist metaphors often frame struggles as societal battles against entrenched inequities [13].

Extract 3: Marissa Hoechstetter—a prominent **voice** against misconduct by former Columbia University OB-GYN and convicted sexual predator, Robert Hadden—made her thoughts unequivocally clear.

The collocate "prominent" underscores the visibility and legitimacy of Marissa Hoechstetter's advocacy, contrasting with institutional inaction, a term that metaphorically casts organizations as passive enablers of violence. This duality reflects Batterson's [36] analysis of Emma Watson's rhetoric, which juxtaposed feminist agency against systemic apathy. However, unlike Emma Watson's focus on healing, this example emphasizes confrontation, concurring with Reali and Avellaneda's [18] finding that war metaphors enhance perceptions of feminist agency in non-Western contexts. Janusz [14] argued that metaphors like voice can subvert patriarchal epistemologies by exposing hidden power structures.

Extract 4 highlights the exclusion of women experts from global peace talks, underlining the need for their inclusion in peace-making processes and the ongoing efforts for gender equality in peace initiatives. The modifier "equal" critiques the systemic exclusion of women from decision-making processes, while "working together" extends the metaphor beyond individual advocacy to collective action. This spirit of cooperation transcends solidarity among women; it also encompasses dialogue and understanding between women and men and across different social groups. The expression "equal voice" portrays women's desire for equal rights and an opportunity to participate in social and political conversations. Through this metaphor, women's struggles for equality and their efforts to have their voices heard are emphasized, reflecting the injustices they encounter. The emphasis on collaboration mirrors third-wave feminist principles that prioritize intersectional solidarity over isolated struggles [20]. Interestingly, Hewitt's [19] "radio wave" model illustrates that feminist frequencies overlap across time and space, and does not progress in a linear manner.

Extract 4: What I wish is that women could have a more equal **voice** and we could work together.

Throughout history, the feminist movement has aimed for both formal and substantial social changes, as seen in struggles for voting rights, education, and employment. Despite advancements, women still face significant challenges and continue to experience gender discrimination, while legal progress has not fully eradicated inequality. Women endure negative emotions and unfair treatment in the workplace, which is likened to a "battle". The use of the "voice" metaphor helps feminists expose these injustices and urge society to address them. The fourth wave of feminism, emerging in 2012, focuses on issues such as sexual harassment and body shaming, emphasizing digital activism and global solidarity. This wave underscores the importance of continued attention to issues like gender pay gaps and workplace discrimination [36]. Through the metaphor of "voice", feminists effectively communicate their struggles and desires, pushing for social change and greater equality.

4.1.2. Systemic Silencing and Epistemic Injustice

While the voice metaphor often signifies empowerment, its lexical realization "voices" collocates with "whose" (MI-Score: 6.514) and "seldom" (MI-Score: 9.558). This section explains how the collocations reflect systemic silencing and epistemic injustice towards women.

Extract 5 shows that the fight for women journalists' rights to free expression is making headway but still facing resistance. It is set against the backdrop of how online abuse, including rape threats, misogynist slurs, sexual harassment, and doxing, is weaponized to intimidate, discredit, and silence women and nonbinary individuals. The relative clause "whose voices" (MI-Score: 6.514) signals possession and agency, carrying the meaning that women are marginalized and excluded from mainstream feminist narratives. Based on Chen's [16] analysis of articles published in *Women of China*, post-reform metaphors fragmented women's identities into public and private roles. Similarly, the American corpus also shows online harassment targeting Black women, and their voicelessness. Rub [13] noted that intersectionality remains a contested theme in feminist media.

Extract 5: Women journalists, whose **voices** have historically been marginalized and are now gaining ground, have become a target for anti-democratic movements.

In American feminist discourse, the conceptual metaphor "heard" (Frequency: 327) is used to explore issues related to the recognition of women's voices in society. In Extract 6, the Southern Baptist Convention's misogynistic practices are critiqued, with a focus on the exclusion of women from pastoral roles and the broader consequences of patriarchal theology on issues like sexual abuse and reproductive rights. The collocates "heard" and "seldom" (MI-Score: 9.558) emphasize epistemic injustice, the failure to recognize women's knowledge as valid. The mapping between the source domain "heard" and the target domain "the extent to which women's voices are heard" is evident, with "seldom" reinforcing this connection. This highlights how women's voices are often ignored or dismissed when it comes to reporting crucial matters such as abuse. The "heard" metaphor reflects the ongoing struggle women face in fighting for equal rights to be heard, and urges society to pay more attention to and truly listen to their voices. This aligns with Mishra's [22] analysis of Irigaray's "envelope" metaphor, which critiques the patriarchal containment of women's agency. Moratti [37] points out that some metaphors romanticize feminism without addressing systemic risks, such as the dismissal of abuse survivors' testimonies.

Extract 6: And with men always in charge, women's **voices** remain always lesser, so that when they seek to report abuse, they are seldom heard.

4.1.3. Voice as Resistance and Ethical Listening

Extract 7 highlights the need to consistently "speak out" for women, a call made through the voice of Hafza Girdap. The verb "speak" (Frequency: 252) collocates with "out" (MI-Score: 7.305). In feminist discourse, the word "speak" is frequently used as a conceptual metaphor to emphasize the importance of expressing one's voice in the fight for gender equality. The metaphor here uses the verb "speak" to symbolize the act of giving women a platform and amplifying their voices in the fight for equal rights. The collocate "out" strengthens the image of making one's voice heard beyond personal spaces, pushing it into the public domain. The phrasal verb "speak out" links

the concept of speaking with actions that demand societal change and justice, and bridges private suffering and public activism. In the Multilevel View of Conceptual Metaphors [4], linguistic choices activate schemas of action and societal transformation. This highlights the broader context of women's struggles to demand structural change and the ongoing need for vocal advocacy in the public sphere. The imperative tone aligns with Reali and Avellaneda's [18] findings that war metaphors enhance perceptions of agency.

Extract 7: Hafza Girdap: We must relentlessly and consistently **speak** out for women.

Extract 8 is about how the holiday season heightens the risk of child sexual abuse (due to various factors like parental distraction and more social interactions) and offers seven tips to prevent it, involving children's rights to safety, bodily autonomy, and the right to be protected from sexual harm. The phrase "feel heard" (MI-Score: 5.464) positions listening as an ethical act. In Yang's [21] analysis of Trifles, female characters reconstruct silenced narratives through empathy. However, this collocation risks individualizing systemic issues, reducing structural inequities to interpersonal dynamics. The "healing" metaphor prioritizes affective resolution over institutional accountability [36].

Extract 8: When they come to you, validate their feelings and help them feel **heard**.

4.1.4. Transnational Resonance and Contested Narratives

Extract 9 falsely claims that journalist Sophia Huang Xueqin, who reported on sexual harassment in China, was arrested by an "aggressively anti-feminist government" for speaking out. The magazine article wrongly alleged violations of freedom of speech and press freedom, when in fact China's actions are based on law, and the narrative is full of misinformation. The term leading voice (MI-Score: 5.439) underscores a transnational feminist emphasis on visibility and leadership. The contentious portrayal of Huang's arrest as "anti-feminist" highlights the precariousness of vocal activism in repressive regimes. The scenario is different in the British media, as reported by Rub [13], which framed feminists as agentive participants in a progressive society.

Extract 9: These moments catapulted Huang into her work as one of the leading **voices** in the Chinese #MeToo

movement.

Extract 10 highlights the violence and threats faced by sexual and reproductive healthcare providers globally. The magazine article on women's rights to sexual and reproductive health and justice calls for them to be recognized as human rights defenders, and collective action to protect their rights and ensure the safe provision of essential healthcare. The phrase "voices" and "experiences" operate as conceptual metaphors, positioning personal testimonies and lived realities as foundational to systemic understanding. "Voices" symbolize advocacy and agency, while "experiences" metaphorize qualitative narratives as empirical data. This is an attempt to pander to the value placed on quantitative metrics. The collocate "robust evidence-base" further frames activism as a scholarly endeavor, echoing Rub's [13] observation that feminist metaphors often conflate advocacy with intellectual rigor to legitimize gendered struggles.

Extract 10: Their **voices** and experiences are essential in building a more robust evidence-base on the nature and consequences of this hostility.

4.1.5. Theoretical and Cultural Implications

The dominance of the "voice" metaphor in American feminist discourse contrasts with global patterns. While Rub [13] observed "war" metaphors as central to British and American media, the current corpus prioritizes vocal agency over conflict, suggesting cultural specificities in framing feminist struggles. Similarly, Ahmed's [19] findings on Nigerian media's objectification metaphors differ, underscoring how linguistic choices reflect localized gender ideologies.

The metaphor's dual role as a tool of empowerment and a marker of exclusion aligns with Janusz's [14] argument that metaphors can subvert patriarchal systems by "breaking old categorizations" (p. 612). However, the persistence of "silenced" narratives critiques the limitations of neoliberal feminist frameworks [15], which warned against conflating institutional progress with substantive equality.

4.2. Voice Metaphors in the Corpus of Chinese Magazines

The analysis of the Chinese corpus revealed the conceptual metaphor Feminism is Voice as a dominant framework, with 1,028 instances identified across feminist-related texts in Chinese women's magazines. This metaphor is manifested through lexical realizations such as " 听 (listened to)", " 倾听 (listened attentively)", and " 声音 (voices)", each carrying distinct collocational patterns and ideological implications. The frequency and distribution of these terms, alongside their associated collocates and Mutual Information (MI) scores, underscored the centrality of auditory engagement and vocal agency in articulating feminist struggles for equality and recognition. This section examines the thematic realizations of the voice metaphor, situating findings within broader feminist theoretical debates and cross-cultural discourses. **Table 3** shows the frequency of conceptual metaphors and the collocates (MI-Score ≥ 3.0) in the corpus of two Chinese Magazines, which are 中国妇女 (*Women of China*) and 婚姻与家庭 (*Marriage and Family*).

Table 3. Frequency of Feminism-related Conceptual Metaphors in the Corpus of Chinese Magazines 中国妇女 (*Women of China*) and 婚姻与家庭 (*Marriage and Family*).

Number	Lexical Realizations	Frequency	Collocates	MI-Score
1	听 (listened to)	325	心声 (the inner voices)	7.472
2	声音 (voices)	243	好 (good)	7.450
			她 (her)	5.609
3	聆听 (listened to)	182	她 (her)	4.348
4	倾听 (listened to)	134	心声 (their inner voices)	9.728
			她们 (their)	6.680
			妇女 (women's)	5.273
5	听取 (listened to)	129	妇女 (women's)	3.435

4.2.1. Institutional Empathy and Performative Dialogue

The term " 听 (listened to)" appeared 325 times, frequently collocating with " 心 声 (the inner voices)" (MI-Score) = 7.472), " 她 们 (they)" (MI-Score = 6.680), and " 妇女 (women)" (MI-Score = 5.273), reflecting a dual focus on institutionalized empathy and grassroots advocacy.

Extract 11 describes Huang Xiaowei's emphasis on enhancing leadership and organizational capacity during her visit to Jilin Province. " 听 (listened to)" metaphorically maps auditory attention to the target domain of institutional responsiveness, framing feminist advocacy as a state-sanctioned dialogue between authorities and women. The image schema like containment (hearing something as contained in sound) and motion (listening as an active, directed action) frame the mental space of social engagement with women. The frequent co-occurrence of " 听 (listened to)" and " 心声 (the inner voices)" (MI-Score = 7.472) emphasizes the social significance of women's voices in shaping the future. This metaphor not only conveys a physical act of listening but symbolizes empowerment, where the inner voices represent women's needs and demands within society. This illustrates the growing respect for and attention to women's voices, emphasizing the importance of their social participation and feminist empowerment. The collocate " 心声 (inner voices)" amplifies this metaphor by symbolizing suppressed desires and unarticulated needs, resonating with Janusz's [14] assertion that metaphors serve as subversive tools to critique systemic exclusion. The phrase " 听心声 (listen to the inner voices)" not only conveys performative empathy but also reflects the tension between top-down governance and grassroots agency. Chen's [16] analysis revealed that Chinese media articles on feminism shifted from a focus on public activism to domesticated roles over time. The high MI-Score (7.472) between " 听 (listened to)" and " 心声 (inner voices)" underscores their semantic interdependence, reinforcing the narrative that "listening" is a precondition for legitimizing women's demands within patriarchal structures.

Extract 11: 指导落实中国妇女十三大目标任务，与妇女群众面对面　心声问需求，强调妇联组织要不断提高引领力组织力服务力，为强国建设、民族复兴贡献巾帼力量。(...guided the implementation of the goals and tasks of the 13th National Women's Congress of China, **listened to** the inner voices and inquired about the needs of women face-to-face, and emphasized that women's federations should continuously improve their leading, organizing, and service capabilities, and contribute women's strength to the building of a strong country and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.)

Similarly, " 倾听 (listened attentively)" appeared 134 times, collocating strongly with " 妇　女 (women)" (MI-Score = 5.273) and " 她们 (they)" (MI-Score = 6.680), as seen in Extract 12:

Extract 12: 李晶主席一行走访慰问溪边村困难家庭妇女，　心声，为她们带去党和政府的温暖与关怀。(Chairwoman Li Jing's delegation visited and comforted disadvantaged women in Xibian Village, **listened** attentively **to** their inner voices, and brought them the warmth and care of the Party and government.)

The collocate " 妇　女 (women)" situates the act of listening within a paternalistic framework, where state-led initiatives position women as beneficiaries rather than agents. Ahmed's [19] found that metaphors like "women are home managers" naturalize domestic roles. The phrase " 倾 听 心 声 (listened attentively to their inner voices" here frames women's needs as localized and apolitical. However, the verb " 倾　听 (listened attentively to)" also carries connotations of earnest engagement. There is a co-existence of state-led and grassroot activism, as explained by Hewitt's [19] "radio wave" model.

The noun " 声音 (voices)" appeared 243 times, collocating with " 好 (good)" (MI-Score = 7.450) and " 她 (she)" (MI-Score = 5.609), as exemplified in Extract 13:

Extract 13: 陇原巾帼宣讲团面向各行业、各领域妇女群众开展理论宣讲，巾帼好　广泛传播。(The Longyuan Women's Propaganda Team conducts theoretical presentations to women from various industries and fields, spreading the "good **voices**" of women widely.)

Extract 13 focuses on the Gansu Women's Federation's women's grand lecture relay activity, which emphasizes learning, propagating, and implementing President Xi's important speech spirit, particularly highlighting the role of women in contributing to national development. The source domain " 声音 (voices)" is mapped to the target domain of "expression of opinion and social impact in feminism". The image schema of sound (voices) conveys

the frame of communication, representing how women's voices contribute to their identity and social influence. The verb " 声音 (voices)" (Frequency: 243) co-occurs with the adjective " 好 (good)" reinforces the idea of the social impact and power of feminist voices in shaping public discourse. " 声音 (voices)" is not just a physical sound but symbolizes the social expression and empowerment of women. " 声 音 (voices)" metaphorically equates vocal expression with ideological dissemination, framing feminist discourse as a state-sanctioned tool for national rejuvenation. The collocate " 好 (good)" (MI-Score = 7.450) imbues the metaphor with normative judgment, positioning "good" voices as those aligned with socialist feminist ideals, such as contributing to "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" [26]. Naturalized femininity is portrayed using metaphors like "women are flowers", where vocal agency is aestheticized rather than politicized [16]. The phrase " 好声音 (good voices)" thus reflects a state-mediated narrative that celebrates women's participation and downplays structural inequality.

4.2.2. State-Led Activism and Grassroots Resilience

The Voice metaphor in the Chinese corpus operates through two interrelated dimensions: institutional mediation and affective solidarity. Institutional mediation is evident in examples where listening is framed as a bureaucratic act.

Extract 14 focuses on services for the development of female tech talents in Wujiang District, aiming to support women's rights to equal opportunities, career development, and capital and professional resources in science and technology fields. The phrase " 聆听 ' 她声音 ' (listen to 'her voice')" employs the voice metaphor to symbolize women's agency and participation in the tech sector. "Voice" transcends individual expression, metaphorizing collective demands for systemic equity. The collocate " 发 展 服 务 " (development services) further frames institutional support as an enabler of vocal empowerment. Feminist metaphors often conflate advocacy with structural reform [13]. The term " 她声音 (her voice)" linguistically genders the metaphor. However, the Wujiang initiative diverges by prioritizing career development over familial duties, signalling a shift toward neoliberal feminist ideals

that equate economic participation with empowerment [21]. In China of today, women carry dual roles as professionals and caregivers [16].

Extract 14 聚焦女性科技人才发展服务，聆听 " 她声音 "。(Focus on the development of female science and technology talents and listen to 'her voice' ".)

In Excerpt 15, the collocate " 听 取 (listened to)" (MI-Score = 3.435) underscores the formalized nature of these interactions, where listening becomes a ritualized performance of state benevolence. Moratti's [37] writes about the "myth and tale" metaphors in academia, where institutional gestures of inclusion often mask entrenched power imbalances.

Extract 15: 近日，全国妇联主席在新疆深入城乡社区， 妇女心声心愿、家庭所需所盼，把《关于妇女儿童和妇联工作论述摘编》送到大家手中，与各族妇女和基层妇联干部一起学习座谈交流。(Recently, the President of the All-China Women's Federation visited urban and rural communities in Xinjiang, **listened to** women's inner voices and families' needs, distributed the Excerpts on Women's and Children's Work and the Women's Federation to everyone, and engaged in study sessions and exchanges with women of all ethnic groups and grassroots Women's Federation cadres.)

In contrast, affective solidarity emerges in grassroots contexts, where listening fosters communal resilience. In Extract 16, " 倾听诉求 (listened to appeals)" transcends bureaucratic formalism, framing listening as an act of collective care. The phrase " 积极开展自救 (actively engage in self-rescue)" evokes resilience against adversity. However, the absence of systemic critiques in such narratives, emphasizing self-reliance over structural accountability, reflects the neoliberal undertones identified in Bao's [26] study of Chinese social media, where feminist activism is often depoliticized as "self-help."

Extract 16: 各级妇联整合爱心力量和资源，对辖区内受灾困难妇女儿童和家庭进行走访慰问，为她们送去慰问物资， 她们的诉求，鼓励她们坚定信心、不等不靠，积极开展灾后自救、互助。(Women's federations at all levels integrated caring forces and resources, visited and comforted disaster-affected women, children, and families in their jurisdictions, delivered relief supplies, **listened to** their appeals, and encouraged them to remain confident, not wait passively, and actively engage in post-

disaster self-rescue and mutual aid.)

4.3. Comparative Analysis of Voice Metaphors in American and Chinese corpora

The voice metaphor in the Chinese and American corpora is used differently. While the American corpus emphasizes vocal agency as a tool for confronting systemic inequities (e.g., "speak out," "influential voice"), the Chinese corpus frames voice through state-mediated dialogues and affective solidarity. This contrast reflects deeper sociopolitical divergences: the liberal feminist orientation in the U.S. prioritizes individual empowerment, whereas China's socialist feminist framework integrates gender equality into nationalist projects [16,27]. **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** present the frequency dominance of voice metaphors in American and Chinese magazines respectively.
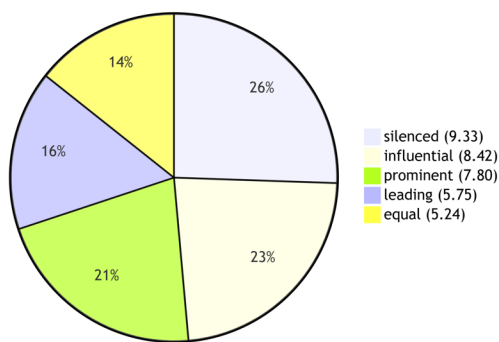
Figure 1. Distribution for Collocates (American Corpus).
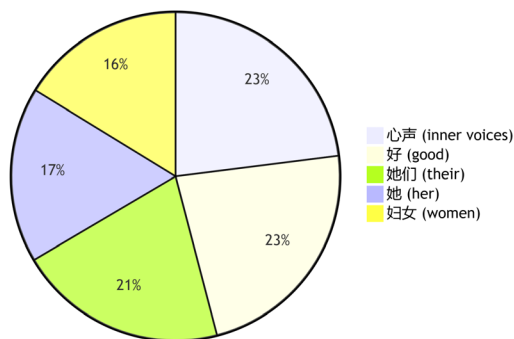
Figure 2. Distribution for Collocates (Chinese Corpus).

As can be seen from **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**, the voice metaphors from the American and Chinese corpora overlap ideological functions and distinct cultural nuances shaped by sociopolitical contexts. In both corpora, the voice metaphor serves as a mechanism for articulating feminist agency and resistance. However, the frameworks through which these metaphors operate diverge.

4.3.1. Cultural Context and Communicative Priorities

In the American corpus, the voice metaphor aligns with low-context communication norms, prioritizing directness and individual agency. Lexical realizations like "speak out" and "heard" emphasize confrontational activism, reflecting a tradition of adversarial feminist discourse rooted in liberal individualism. This is evident in *Ms.*'s focus on political advocacy, where vocal resistance is framed as a battle against systemic silencing, as seen in phrases like "silenced voices". By contrast, the Chinese corpus operates within high-context cultural paradigms, where metaphors like " 倾听 " (listen attentively) and " 心声 " (inner voices) foreground relational harmony and state-mediated dialogues. For example, Women of China articles often depict listening as a performative act of institutional empathy, where " 听取妇女心声 " (listening to women's inner voices) reinforces state-led narratives of collective welfare over individual dissent.

4.3.2. Thematic Focus and Ideological Divergence

The American corpus emphasizes radical activism, with metaphors like "voice as a weapon" framing vocal expression as a tool to dismantle patriarchal structures. This aligns with the fourth-wave feminist emphasis on personal testimony and public protest. Conversely, the Chinese corpus integrates feminist discourse into state-sanctioned frameworks. Terms like " 理论宣讲 (theoretical propaganda)" and " 家风建设 (family ethos construction)" juxtapose feminist appeals with nationalist agendas, reflecting a pragmatic alignment with socialist feminist principles. For instance, campaigns like " 看见女性劳动者 (See Female Laborers)" during the COVID-19 pandemic strategically blended feminist demands with state narratives of social stability, achieving mainstream recognition while diluting radical edges.

4.3.3. Collocational Patterns and Power Dynamics

The collocational analysis further highlights the contrast in power dynamics in the American and Chinese mag-

azines. In the American corpus, "voice" frequently pairs with adversarial terms like "fight" (MI-Score = 5.238) and "radical" (MI-Score = 7.798), underscoring a discourse of conflict and systemic critique. The Chinese corpus, however, associates " 声 音 (voices)" with harmonizing terms like " 好 (good)" (MI-Score = 7.450) and " 妇女 (women)" (MI-Score = 5.273), emphasizing consensus-building and state-approved progress. This reflects divergent power dynamics. American metaphors often position individuals against oppressive systems, whereas Chinese metaphors situate feminist agency within broader sociopolitical hierarchies. Extract 17 highlights the state's role in amplifying "good" voices:

Extract 17: 理论宣讲＋业务指导让"她 "更有深度 (Theoretical propaganda + professional guidance make "her **voice**" more profound.)

The metaphor " 她声音 (her voice)" exemplifies the state's co-optation of feminist discourse, where the vocal agency is channeled into ideological education. This contrasts with Rub's [13] analysis of American media, where "voice" symbolizes grassroots resistance. The collocate " 理论宣讲 (theoretical propaganda)" further underscores the didactic function of voice in China, aligning with Yang's [21] analysis of spatial metaphors in Trifles, where women's narratives are confined to sanctioned domains.

The corpus also engages with postfeminist discourses, particularly in its tension between celebrating women's participation and obscuring structural barriers. In Extract 18, " 倾 听 呼 声 (listen to appeals)" is juxtaposed with " 家 风 建 设 (family ethos construction)", a term that reinforces traditional gender roles. This duality is described in Nicholson's [15] "kaleidoscope" model, where feminist progress coexists with regressive norms. The emphasis on "family ethos" is also found in the Nigerian media, as shown by Ahmed's [19] conclusion that women's agency is framed through domesticity, with women portrayed as caregivers and community members.

Extract 18: 万山区妇联主席柯大芳表示，将深入一线 妇女群众呼声，反映妇女心愿诉求，解决妇女燃眉之急，在促进妇女发展上下足功夫，创新举措着力推动家庭家教家风建设。(Ke Dafang, Chairwoman of the Wanshan Women's Federation, stated that she would go to the front lines to **listen to** women's appeals, reflect their wishes and demands, solve their urgent difficulties, make efforts to promote women's development, and innovate measures to advance family education and family ethos construction.)

In the American context, *Ms.*'s use of adversarial metaphors like "voice as a weapon" may appeal to politically engaged, urban feminists who prioritize systemic critique, while *Bust*'s focus on cultural resistance through terms like "speak out" might resonate more with younger, artistically inclined audiences seeking grassroots empowerment. In China, *Women of China*'s state-aligned metaphors such as " 倾听心声 (listened to inner voices)" could be perceived by educated urban readers as performative gestures of institutional empathy.

5. Conclusion

The cross-cultural comparative analysis of the voice metaphor in feminist discourse in American and Chinese women's magazines was guided by the Multilevel View of Conceptual Metaphors [4]. Using corpus-driven methodology, the analysis uncovered how the metaphor "voice as a weapon" is a tool that empowers women and contests patriarchal norms, but still reflects and reinforces gendered power dynamics. The study produces new findings on how metaphors shape ideological interpretations of feminist agency across distinct sociopolitical contexts.

The comparative analysis revealed that while both contexts employ the voice metaphor to negotiate gendered agency, their ideological underpinnings diverge. In the American magazines, the prevalence of "speak out" metaphors underscores the need to amplify marginalized voices without reducing structural inequities to individual resilience. American magazines prioritize vocal agency and resistance and democratic participation is central to feminist struggles. The emphasis is on individual empowerment and collective resistance against systemic silencing, reflective of liberal feminism. While the voice metaphors celebrate leadership, they risk homogenizing diverse experiences. On the other hand, in the Chinese magazines, the tension between " 倾听 (listening attentively)" and " 家 风 建 设 (family ethos construction)" highlights the importance of decoupling state narratives from feminist praxis to foster grassroots autonomy. Chinese magazines integrate feminist goals into collective, state-sanctioned projects, showing institutional recognition of the role of women in society. The

contrast in the use of the voice metaphor reflects broader sociopolitical tensions: the U.S. emphasis on individualism versus China's socialist feminist framework, which subordinates gender equality to nationalist objectives [16]. These differences are further complicated by postfeminist discourses, which in both contexts frame feminism as a "dirty word", perpetuating stereotypes of radicalism and privilege-seeking.

The findings have implications on media practitioners in constructing feminist discourse that are appropriate to the prevailing ideologies and sociocultural and political contexts. Activists in individualistic contexts like the U.S. might adopt adversarial metaphors (e.g., "voice as a weapon") to mobilize grassroots campaigns, using metaphors like "silenced voices" in petitions or social media hashtags to highlight systemic oppression. However, in collectivist settings like China, it is more appropriate to use metaphors emphasizing communal harmony (e.g., "voices as bridges"). This makes framing of gender equality more acceptable, and portrays feminism as integral to national progress. As an example, media practitioners can pair "raising voices" in visual storytelling in U.S. digital campaigns with " 倾听心声 (listened to inner voices)" in Chinese public service announcements to evoke empathy without provoking censorship. Using metaphors suited to the context will increase receptivity towards the media articles, and allow magazines to play the role of shaping societal thinking and attitudes on feminism.

However, the study has its limitations. The corpus focused solely on magazines, which, while rich in cultural symbolism, represent a fraction of feminist discourse. These magazines, while emblematic of mainstream or institutional perspectives, risk marginalizing grassroots, intersectional, or dissenting feminist voices, particularly in China, where state-affiliated platforms like *Women of China* prioritize narratives aligned with socialist feminist agendas, potentially obscuring underground or digitally mobilized movements. Similarly, the American magazine *Ms.* has a progressive audience and the study did not analyze conservative women's magazines. As such the findings need to be interpreted in the context of the audience and editorial focus of the four magazines analyzed in the present study. The present study did not investigate audience reactions to find out if they were perceptive of the feminist messages conveyed by the magazine articles. Future research should combine corpus linguistics with audience reception studies and digital ethnography, to map how metaphors morph in response to algorithmic amplification, policy shifts, or intersectional movements. Longitudinal studies in contexts like China where feminism is growing are also needed to trace how feminist voice metaphors dynamically adapt to shifting sociopolitical landscapes, as well as other movements like digital activism. Such insights would shed light on gender narratives in various political climates.

Author Contributions

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

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

Information about data and materials used in the study is available.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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