| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Gendered Hate: How Affective Language Shapes Hate Speech Against Women

Windy Harsiwi[1], Rezki Fatimah[2]✉ and Fitri Alfarisy[3]

[123]Information and Culture Department, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: **Rezki Fatimah**, E-mail: rezkifatimah@lecturer.undip.ac.id

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| **ABSTRACT**

The intersection of affective language and gendered hate speech presents a significant challenge in today's digital environment, particularly for women. This article explores how emotionally charged language not only intensifies the harm of hate speech but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes, normalizes misogyny, and causes profound emotional distress to victims. The method employed is the Preferred Reporting Item for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The data analysis focused on exploring any links between the Internet, Social Networking Sites (SNS), online hate speech, and gendered hate. The findings emphasize the urgent need for a multifaceted approach to combat gendered hate speech, which includes raising awareness, fostering critical media literacy, and advocating for policy reforms. By promoting emotional intelligence and media literacy, individuals can be empowered to recognize and challenge harmful speech, while social media platforms must take greater responsibility for moderating harmful content and preventing the algorithmic amplification of hate. The creation of a culture that respects and uplifts women demands collective action, including the promotion of positive, empowering language. Through education, advocacy, and community engagement, it is possible to build a more inclusive and respectful digital space, free from the pervasive effects of gendered hate speech, and pave the way for a future in which all individuals are treated with dignity and respect.

| **KEYWORDS**

affective language; gendered hate; hate speech; mitigating hate; women hate

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1. Introduction

Hate speech refers to a discourse that demeans, intimidates, or incites violence against individuals or groups based on attributes such as race, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, or gender, as proposed by Fonseca, et al. (2024). Hate speech has become a prominent issue in today's digital and social landscape, affecting countless individuals worldwide. Women, in particular, are frequent targets of hate speech, often receiving gender-specific abuse that reinforces traditional stereotypes and societal power imbalances. Affective (emotionally charged) language plays a key role in intensifying this gendered hate speech, as it is used to provoke fear, shame, or anger. By framing words in ways that evoke strong emotions, hate speech against women can be more impactful and harmful, contributing to an environment where women feel unsafe, targeted, or silenced. United Nations, et al. (2021) define hate speech as "any kind of communication that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language" targeting specific identities, especially if it promotes violence or exclusion.

Nascimento (2022) argues that hate speech on online social media platforms is now at a level that has been considered a serious concern by governments, media outlets, and scientists, especially because it is easily spread, promoting harm to individuals and society, and made it virtually impossible to tackle with using just human analysis. The digital age has amplified the reach and frequency of gendered hate speech, with online platforms providing a space where anonymity and rapid sharing can escalate abusive language. Social media, forums, and comment sections often become hotbeds for hate speech, where affective language, through insults, threats, and degrading comments, creates an atmosphere of hostility. This environment affects women not only individually but also collectively by shaping societal norms and perceptions around gender. The normalization of such language

online allows hate speech to permeate mainstream discourse, fostering a culture in which derogatory treatment of women is tolerated, if not encouraged. Consequently, this type of speech has real-world consequences, influencing the ways women are viewed, treated, and able to participate in public and professional spheres.

UN Women (2022) reveals that online gender-based violence is a serious obstacle to women's active participation in public life. Whether in politics, journalism, or activism, women face disproportionate harassment, including sexualized violence, threats, and personal attacks, which undermine their ability to engage in public discourse and contribute to society. The findings underscore the urgent need for more robust protections for women online, including stronger regulations, better platform responses, and comprehensive support systems for women who face digital violence. According to the report in UN Women in 2022, there are 37% of women globally have experienced some form of online harassment, and a significant portion of this abuse is rooted in gender. Women in public life, especially those speaking out on social or political issues, face even higher levels of online violence. The abuse often includes threats of physical harm, sexual violence, and humiliation—most of which are explicitly linked to their gender.

The problem lies in how affective language amplifies the impact of hate speech directed toward women, leading to emotional, psychological, and social harm. This type of language is not only personally damaging but also discourages women's participation in public and online spaces. As a result, gendered hate speech limits freedom of expression, reinforces misogynistic beliefs, and perpetuates gender inequality. Existing responses, from policy to social advocacy, often fail to fully address the unique challenges posed by the emotional intensity of this language, leaving many women vulnerable to its effects.

The issues outlined above raise several important questions. This article seeks to examine how affective language influences hate speech targeting women, focusing on its specific effects and implications. The objectives are as follows:
   a. To understand how affective language enhances the potency and harm of hate speech;
   b. To identify gendered language and stereotypes;
   c. To highlight the role of digital platforms in amplifying affective hate speech;
   d. To identify the psychological impact of gendered hate speech on women;
   e. To propose strategies for reducing the impact of affective language in hate speech through policy and awareness initiatives

2. Methodology

The method employed is the Preferred Reporting Item for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The data analysis focused on exploring any links between the Internet, social networking sites (SNS), online hate speech, and gendered hate.

The search strategy was developed using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) to combine keywords like "online hate," "cyber hate," "hate speech," and "gender hate." Although this strategy summary is concise, a complete version can be requested from the authors. We conducted searches in the Scopus, SpringerLink, SagePub, and Science Direct databases in October and November 2024. Additionally, gray literature was included by reviewing references from selected papers to reduce publication bias.

3. Results and Discussion

Affective language refers to words or expressions that convey emotions, attitudes, or feelings, rather than purely factual information. Experts in psychology, linguistics, and communication studies describe affective language as a way of expressing emotions like happiness, anger, fear, or sadness, often with the intent to evoke a similar emotional response in the listener or reader. It includes emotional vocabulary, tone, and style choices that influence how messages are perceived on an emotional level. Research on hate speech and its effects on women spans multiple fields, including psychology, sociology, linguistics, and digital media studies. Several studies have explored the impact of hate speech on women, especially within online spaces, focusing on how gendered language reinforces societal biases and restricts women's participation.

3.1 Affective Language in Hate Speech

Linguistic studies have shown that affective language—particularly words loaded with emotion—has a powerful impact in the context of hate speech. Affective language in hate speech refers to the emotional and psychological elements embedded in hateful communication, aiming to provoke strong feelings, reinforce stereotypes, and incite hostility toward specific individuals or groups. Unlike neutral or factual language, affective language intensifies the emotional tone of a message, often stirring anger, resentment, or fear.

Affective language plays a central role in hate speech, as it intensifies the emotional impact and often serves to incite hostility, fear, or aggression toward targeted individuals or groups. Nikunen (2023) and Demszky et al. (2020) highlight how hate speech leverages emotional content, such as anger or disgust, to increase its persuasive and aggressive power, making it more harmful and impactful on individuals' mental health. The addition of affective language, particularly words that convey intense emotions, has been shown to amplify the potential for harm in online spaces, contributing to hostility and aggression on social media platforms.

Dr. Miriam Meckel. (2021) explains the harmful role of affective language in silencing women and stifling their participation in public life. By exploring how emotionally charged language is used to control, intimidate, and disempower women, particularly in politics and media, Dr. Meckel contributed to a critical understanding of the emotional and psychological toll of online harassment. Her advocacy for stronger legal protections, content moderation, and support for women aims to create a safer and more equitable digital environment where women can engage freely without the threat of harassment or violence.

3.2 Gendered Language and Stereotypes
Studies in gender linguistics and feminist theory highlight how language reinforces gender stereotypes, often through subtle (and sometimes overt) emotionally charged language. Terms like "hysterical," "overly emotional," or "bossy" target women specifically, intending to belittle and stereotype. Michela Menegatti and Monica Rubini (2021) examine how language can reinforce gender roles and perpetuate gender-based discrimination. For instance, they found that language often reflects and supports societal stereotypes, such as associating "warmth" and "communality" with women and "competence" and "agency" with men. This association occurs not only through explicit word choices but also through the structural features of language, such as the use of masculine generics and the derivation of feminine terms from masculine ones, which can render women less visible in linguistic representation. These structural biases in language contribute to subtle but impactful discrimination that can influence perceptions and maintain gender disparities.

3.3 Online Hate Speech and Harassment
Research in media studies has extensively covered online hate speech, particularly on social media platforms where women are disproportionately targeted. Dreißigacker argues that compared to non-victims and victims of offline hate speech, victims of online hate speech exhibit a more pronounced feeling of insecurity outside the Internet. Moreover, Dr. Emma L. Briant, et al. (2021) emphasizes that online hate speech and harassment are often gendered, with women experiencing more personal and sexually violent threats compared to men. Women, particularly women of color and LGBTQ+ women, face harassment that targets their gender, appearance, and sexuality in ways that are distinct from the general patterns of online abuse. The study found that platforms often take a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to dealing with online harassment. Content moderation tools tend to focus on "the worst" content rather than addressing the more subtle and pervasive forms of abuse that women face online.
Citron and Jane (2021) emphasize that women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and other marginalized groups face not only gendered harassment but also forms of racialized abuse and intersectional discrimination. This harassment is often more severe and includes both personal attacks on identity and broader social and political targeting. Citron and Jane argue that digital platforms (like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) often fail to effectively moderate and address hate speech, harassment, and abuse. Their weak response to these issues contributes to the amplification of harmful behaviors, making it harder for marginalized groups to participate in digital spaces safely.

The Guardian (2022) underscores the urgent need to address the high levels of online abuse targeted at women, particularly those in politics, journalism, and activism. The prevalence of gendered hate speech, including rape threats and violent sexualization, acts as a significant barrier to women's active participation in public life. This online violence not only affects women's mental health but also leads to self-censorship and withdrawal from important public discourse. Addressing this issue requires stronger policy enforcement, better support systems, and a more robust framework to protect women from digital violence and ensure they can engage freely in social, political, and professional spaces.
UN Women Social Media and Online Harassment Study (2022) paints a stark picture of the gendered nature of online violence and its negative impact on women's ability to engage in public life, particularly in politics. The report highlights how misogynistic hate speech and sexualized threats act as barriers to women's participation in democracy, political discourse, and journalism, silencing important voices and limiting the diversity of viewpoints in public conversations. The findings call for stronger action from social media companies, governments, and civil society organizations to combat online abuse, support victims, and ensure that women can engage freely and safely in public life without fear of harassment or violence.
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3.4 Psychological Effects of Gendered Hate Speech
Psychological studies on gendered hate speech provide insight into the emotional and mental toll on women. Karen Dill-Shackleford (2021) highlights that hate speech with affective language triggers strong emotional responses, including fear, shame, and anger, contributing to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD in targeted individuals. Dill-Shackleford examines how hate speech, particularly when it uses language designed to provoke strong emotional reactions, can have long-lasting effects on the mental well-being of those targeted. The study underscores the intersection of media, psychology, and sociology in understanding how online harassment and verbal abuse in digital spaces can lead to significant psychological trauma, especially for marginalized communities. Additionally, Dill-Shackleford's research emphasizes that the emotional toll of such hate speech is not only damaging at the moment but can contribute to long-term mental health challenges for the victims.

3.5 Mitigating Hate Speech Through Policy and Awareness

Work in policy studies and advocacy emphasizes the importance of legal and educational measures to combat gendered hate speech. Catharine MacKinnon and Susan Benesch (2021) highlight the need for policies that not only prevent hate speech but also provide recourse for those who experience emotional and psychological trauma as a result of online harassment. They argue that gendered hate speech is unique in its effects and requires a nuanced approach that takes into account both free speech concerns and the mental health impacts on women and minorities. They have advocated for stronger policies to address the unique nature of gendered hate speech, including recognizing the emotional and psychological damage it causes. Awareness campaigns, community guidelines, and educational initiatives are suggested to raise public understanding of how affective language in hate speech can harm women and to create safer spaces online and offline.

Nowadays, Hate Speech and Abusive Language (HSAL) have spread extensively over social media. The easy use of social media allows people to abuse the media to spread HSAL. Ibrohim (2023) emphasized that there are several reasons why this happened massively in recent times. The rise of Hate Speech and Abusive Language (HSAL) on social media is driven by a combination of factors, including ease of access, anonymity, the amplification by algorithms, societal polarization, and inadequate moderation. The spread of HSAL not only damages individuals' mental health but also undermines social cohesion and creates toxic online environments. Addressing these issues requires better platform accountability, stronger regulations, and more effective enforcement of anti-abuse policies to create safer online spaces for everyone.

Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses awareness, education, and policy change. By fostering critical media literacy and emotional intelligence, individuals can learn to recognize and challenge hate speech, empowering them to combat gendered hate effectively. Furthermore, social media platforms must take responsibility for moderating harmful content, ensuring that their algorithms do not inadvertently promote hate speech.

Ultimately, creating a culture that respects and uplifts women necessitates collective action. By promoting positive and empowering language, we can counteract the detrimental effects of hate speech and work towards a more inclusive society. The journey towards eliminating gendered hate speech is ongoing, but through education, advocacy, and community engagement, we can pave the way for a future where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, free from the constraints of hate.

5. Conclusion

The intersection of affective language and hate speech against women presents a critical area of concern in today's digital landscape. This article has highlighted the pervasive nature of gendered hate speech and the significant role that emotionally charged language plays in shaping its impact. The findings illustrate how affective language not only amplifies the severity of hate speech but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes, normalizes misogyny, and inflicts profound emotional harm on victims.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of educational programs in shaping responsible online behavior and reducing hate speech. Studies could focus on how different policy frameworks and content moderation strategies affect the effectiveness of online platforms in curbing hate speech. Next research should also examine the effectiveness of public awareness campaigns in changing societal attitudes toward hate speech across various demographic groups. Further exploration is needed on how digital literacy programs can be optimized to prevent hate speech by fostering critical thinking and empathy. Lastly, investigating how collaborations between governments, tech companies, and educational institutions can strengthen policy and awareness efforts in mitigating hate speech would provide valuable insights.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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