

Chapter 11

Semiotic Violence and Gender in Digital Spaces

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ABSTRACT

Various definitions of violence exist, ranging from those that only consider physical assaults to those that also take into account sexual assault, psychological abuse, and economic exploitation. Both genders are discursively represented in their heterogeneity. (The feminine is frequently portrayed as a commodity, while the masculine is frequently portrayed as weak and pathological.) What is more important, though, is the understanding that there are specific types of gender violence that target women and utilize sexist language and images to harm and oppress them. This incident is categorized in the study as semiotic violence. Women are not the only ones who may experience this type of assault; anybody can. Even though it is the most pervasive, covert, and despised kind of violence committed against a person, it is generally ignored. The main goal of this study on semiotic violence is to improve understanding of this kind of violence.

1. INTRODUCTION

On May 18, 2016, Maneka Gandhi, the Minister for Women and Child Development in India, expressed her opinion that the issue of online harassment and abuse of Indian citizens ought to be addressed with the same level of gravity as physical violence. The rationale behind the Indian Government's resolute decision to undertake such severe measures is easily conceivable. As per a report by India Today, which references Amnesty International, from March to May in the year 2019, nearly one million abusive mentions were directed towards 95 female politicians on Twitter. Of these mentions, one in every five was found to be misogynistic in nature. According to Adrian Lovett, the executive director of the World Wide Web Foundation, there has been a global increase in gender-based online violence in both developed and developing nations. This report corroborates his claims. The author proceeds to assert that digital violence based on gender has a significant impact on the political engagement of women, as young women, in particular, are deterred by the prevalence of online harassment. The assertion made by

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Adrian is reinforced by the findings of Amnesty International's 2018 report, which revealed that 7% of the tweets directed towards 323 female politicians from the United States and Britain were characterized by unpleasant or abusive language. Several female politicians in the United Kingdom have opted out of participating in the upcoming 2019 general elections as a result of the online harassment they have received. Currently, it would be fallacious to hold the belief that cyber violence is exclusively confined to the realm of politics. Pasricha's (2021) study highlights eight notable cases that occurred since 2012, where Indian women from diverse professions faced harassment for expressing their views on social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. The recent incident in West Bengal, wherein a university professor was dismissed from her position based on an Instagram post, has the potential to bring about a significant revision to the existing list. The truth is, the list never finishes.

Pasricha's research highlights the challenge faced by women in comprehending the violent nature of the attacks they encounter on social media platforms. Women tend to block or dismiss such attacks rather than reporting them, which forms the basis of the current study. The current article aligns with Pasricha's assertion that the absence of action by women against digital abuse can be attributed to factors such as lack of knowledge, inadequate education, and limited comprehension of their legal entitlements. However, the research suggests that there may be certain linguistic factors influencing the situation. The paper categorizes this as an instance of semiotic violence. The utilization of semiotic instruments is employed to inflict harm, humiliation, and subjugation upon individuals. This form of violence is not limited to women, as individuals of all genders can be subjected to it. Semiotic violence is a form of violence that is frequently overlooked, yet it is the most widespread, concealed, and disparaged type of violence directed towards an individual. Moreover, it is a constituent of a broader spectrum of violent behaviours. The employment of a mechanism within social processes that curtails the complete and equitable involvement of women and transgender individuals is a practice that undermines both gender parity and democratic principles. The primary objective of this study, which focuses on semiotic violence, is to enhance comprehension of this type of violence. It is more widespread and fluid in nature, as it subtly infiltrates our socio-cultural milieu and is often disregarded as a form of gender-based violence due to our lack of knowledge. The following illustration from a grammar textbook for a second grade can provide greater clarity (Sameeran 2016):

Upon initial observation, the depicted figure exhibits a seemingly simplistic nature. However, after further scrutiny, certain intricacies become apparent, necessitating our careful consideration. Upon careful examination of the occupational distribution between genders, it becomes evident that the female gender has been predominantly associated with only one profession, namely, teaching. However, men have been afforded the advantage of pursuing careers in domains such as medicine, engineering, and science. Historically, teaching has been perceived as a profession that aligns with the feminine gender role, as women have been socialized to assume the primary responsibility for managing domestic affairs. In contemporary times, female educators are consistently preferred over their counterparts in the private industry. The aforementioned figure serves as a replication of this social concept. If we follow this line of reasoning, we will see that the image is also seeking to create some traditions surrounding women's clothing; a teacher will wear a saree, a mischievous child's clothes are a t-shirt and pants, etc.

The present study adopts a perspective that regards signs as products of social construction, rather than as authentic and unmediated reflections of the external reality. The aforementioned constructions often accentuate the perspectives and encounters of advantaged factions owing to power dynamics, in which dominant factions perceive themselves as the norm and classify others as the exception (Barthes 1957). Fig. 1 accurately depicts the information being conveyed. The utilization of words and images is

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