

Gender Bias and Cyber Violence: Spotlighting the Pink-Haired Girl Incident by a Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: The Internet serves as a communication medium that facilitates interaction among individuals, thereby overcoming the constraints imposed by temporal and spatial boundaries. Nonetheless, the internet also poses some risks, such as instances of online violence. For example, a few months ago, a young woman pursuing her postgraduate studies became the target of numerous netizens who subjected her to verbal and emotional abuse. This onslaught was triggered by a photograph in which she had dyed pink hair while visiting her grandfather. Tragically, the relentless harassment she endured ultimately led her to end her own life. Subsequently, following this occurrence, there has been a growing consolidation among women's organizations. This study employs qualitative analysis and literature review to examine the Pink Hair Girl incident as a case study, aiming to gain insights into its societal ramifications. The findings of this study indicate that the controversies surrounding the girl's hair coloring can be attributed to the influence of patriarchal norms and masculinist ideologies, among other factors. Furthermore, it is argued that this incidence serves to foster a sense of unity among women.

Keywords: cyber-violence, Pink-hair girl, patriarchal, masculinist

1. Introduction

The pervasive utilization of the Internet as a medium for interpersonal contact has engendered considerable convenience, yet it has also precipitated the emergence of online linguistic aggression, exerting a profound influence on several individuals. Three traditional sources of cyber violence can be identified based on this societal issue. To begin with, it is important to acknowledge that gender-based violence refers to acts of violence that specifically target persons based on their biological sex and/or the socially constructed gender roles assigned to them. This type of violence tends to disproportionately impact women [1]. The phenomenon of cyber violence in the virtual realm exhibits similarities to real-world violence in that it is not impartial or equitable with respect to gender, but rather disproportionately affects women [2]. Furthermore, the existence of gender bias may be traced back to the patriarchal structure of society, wherein the collective mindset adheres to a system of male superiority over females. Consequently, women are consistently perceived through the lens of being subordinate to men [3]. Finally, it is important to consider the concept of socially constructed masculinity, which may be understood as a disciplinary mechanism that aligns with femininity and reinforces the binary nature of gender. This perpetuation of gender dichotomies contributes to the

perpetuation of detrimental stereotypes, such as the belief that males are inherently stronger than women [4].

Existing research on cyber violence has primarily utilized quantitative methods, such as big data screening and sampling surveys, to examine social issues related to online violence. In contrast, this research will adopt a qualitative approach, focusing on the in-depth analysis of the Pink Hair Girl incident to reflect and understand its social implications. By bridging this gap, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the specific case of gender-based cyber-violence.

This study seeks to explore the impact of gender bias and cyber violence by analyzing the comment sections related to the Pink Hair Girl incident. Utilizing theories of gender-based cyber violence, discipline and violence within a patriarchal framework, the project aims to pave the way for women to speak up against such violence and regain their legitimate power and status in the society.

2. The Existence and Impact of Gender Bias

2.1. The Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Society

Firstly, it has an impact on individual growth. Gender stereotypes have the potential to negatively impact an individual's self-esteem and restrict their personal growth and development. Women may encounter the stigmatization of being characterized as “feeble” or “inappropriate” within specific domains, and are frequently perceived as having the ability to perform only rudimentary tasks, while being deemed incapable of achieving more complex or challenging endeavors [5].

Furthermore, it restricts potential employment prospects. The presence of gender bias is anticipated to have an impact on the availability of jobs and prospects for career progression. Women frequently encounter limitations in their access to various leadership positions and professions. This disparity arises due to societal adherence to gender stereotypes, which results in diminished opportunities for women to compete for higher-level leadership roles. Furthermore, even when women do participate in such competitions, prevailing biases often favor male candidates over their female counterparts. Moreover, there exist certain occupations that are infrequently accessible or entirely inaccessible to women, such as computer science and aviation, while men may have limitations in certain professions, such as nursing, due to prevailing prejudices that cast doubt upon the capacity of a specific gender to excel in particular roles.

Ultimately, it consolidates individuals' cognitive processes. Due to their pervasive presence in society, stereotypes have become ingrained within the cultural fabric, leading to widespread adoption and adherence among individuals [6]. Simultaneously, the media, advertising, and education can potentially amplify the dissemination of gender bias. In contemporary times, the Internet has attained a high level of advancement, leading to a significant number of individuals lacking a firm and accurate cognitive framework. Consequently, they become susceptible to biases and even fall victim to a state of being “brainwashed” by the proliferation of stereotypical narratives disseminated online. Moreover, the influence of marketing exacerbates this phenomenon, further amplifying its impact. Advertisements are notably more conspicuous. The portrayal of women's clothing consistently features individuals with aesthetically pleasing physiques, accompanied by language that extols the physical attributes of these people. This perpetuates the notion that women should conform to a standard of whiteness and thinness, while males are expected to possess muscular builds.

2.2. The Existence and Impact of Online Gender Bias

The rise of the Internet age and the popularization of social media have brought about the emergence of online gender bias, which includes discrimination against specific genders, stereotyping of women and men, and verbal attacks on genders. These issues not only affect the mental health and development of individuals, but also pose a certain threat to the equality and progress of society as a

whole. Gender bias on the Internet exists in a number of ways, the first and most common being verbal attacks, which include insults, threats, and harassment against a particular gender. Secondly, sexism is just as prevalent online as it is in reality, manifesting itself through the unfair treatment and evaluation of women and men. In addition, stereotyping is a form of online gender bias that exists in the form of oversimplified and fixed perceptions of gender characteristics. The phenomenon of online gender bias has significant implications for both individuals and society. Primarily, persons who are targeted by online gender bias may experience adverse mental health consequences, such as anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem, among other related effects. Furthermore, the pervasive impact of the Internet on society has the potential to amplify online gender bias, so intensifying social disparities and inciting frustration among individuals on opposing ends of the spectrum. This phenomenon poses a significant obstacle to the achievement of gender parity and overall societal advancement.

3. The Definition and Performance of Cyber Violence

3.1. The Definition of Cyber Violence

Cyber violence is a series of violent acts committed by Internet users in the virtual online world, which is the result of the continuation of violence in the real world on the Internet, and mainly refers to malicious attacks, threats, insults, defamation and harassment of others on the Internet [7]. This type of behavior diverges from physical violence that inflicts direct harm on an individual's body. It typically manifests in the form of verbal or written expression disseminated through online platforms, resulting in psychological, emotional, or social distress for the targeted individual. Cyber violence, while transgressing moral boundaries, can manifest across a range of online platforms, including social media, forums, and blogs. Cyber violence is a significant societal issue necessitating collective endeavors from the entirety of society to effectively tackle and mitigate.

3.2. The Performance and Forms of Cyber Violence

In terms of manifestations, the main ones are aggressive human flesh searches and the growing number of Internet rumors. Human flesh search is a common manifestation of cyber violence, and this behavior has set off a "craze" in the current Internet era. Internet users derive satisfaction from uncovering the private information of the individual in question, often perceiving themselves as morally superior. Simultaneously, the disclosure of the individual's past prompts netizens to scrutinize and morally evaluate them, resulting in subsequent harm and the amplification of public sentiment. Consequently, this inflicts further harm upon the individual in question, potentially disrupting the ordinary lives of their family and friends. Rumors are prevalent in instances of cyber violence, and even a seemingly insignificant case of cyber violence can contribute to the escalating dissemination of rumors, resulting in a convoluted truth that ultimately diminishes public concern for factual accuracy.

In terms of form, it can be categorized into cyber violence in the form of text and cyber violence in the form of pictorial information. Cyber violence in the form of text, as a basic form, exists in every cyber violence incident. Internet users express their discontent by engaging in the use of vulgar and aggressive language to attack the individual in question. Some of these users believe that they are morally superior as they accuse and judge others, even if the person in question may be innocent. Very few individuals will come forward to support or advocate for the person in question, or to seek the truth in order to rectify their grievances. The majority of internet users simply conform to the prevailing opinions and behaviors due to the influence of the "herd effect." The phenomenon known as the "herd effect" can be characterized as a tendency for individuals to engage in gossip or find amusement in certain situations. However, when these waves of gossip or amusement collect over a

significant period of time, they can coalesce into a formidable force that can result in the propagation of network violence, leading to highly undesirable outcomes. The manifestation of graphic content in instances of online violence includes the dissemination of malevolent images and the utilization of emoticons with offensive connotations, among other forms.

3.3. The Harm and Influences of Cyber Violence

The harm and impact of cyber violence is extensive and far-reaching, and it not only has a negative impact on the person concerned, but may also affect the whole society and cultural atmosphere. For the person concerned, the first is mental health problems. As a result of being attacked by cyber violence, the person concerned may be psychologically traumatized, leading to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, a sense of inferiority and impaired self-esteem, and some of the persons concerned may even choose to end their lives by self-termination because they are unable to withstand the pain caused by cyber violence. Secondly, there is social isolation and withdrawal. Victims may opt to limit their engagement on social media and the Internet, or potentially disengage from the online community entirely, due to apprehension of experiencing further attacks. This response may result in their social isolation and reluctance to publicly present themselves, potentially leading to a prolonged state of seclusion within their residences. Lastly, it should be noted that there exists a scarcity of employment and educational prospects, and the occurrence of cyber violence has the potential to detrimentally impact an individual's professional standing and future options. The phenomenon of human flesh search conducted by internet users can have a significant impact on the reputation and relationships of the individuals involved. This may result in cyber violence towards the targeted individuals, potentially affecting their associations with companies, educational institutions, and partners. Consequently, in order to preserve societal order, it is highly probable that these entities will opt to restrict the progress and accomplishments of the individuals in question, or even compel them to depart. As a consequence, this can also lead to the dissolution of certain social connections for the individuals involved.

For the society as a whole, first of all, the freedom of expression is restricted. Due to the frequent occurrence of cyber violence, the government may think about the issues related to the freedom of expression on the Internet, and may impose certain restrictions. At the same time, cyber violence may also lead to the fact that other people are unwilling or afraid to express their opinions freely on the Internet for fear of being attacked and abused. This can limit freedom of expression and diversity, causing some voices to be silenced. Secondly, there is social disharmony. cyber violence may lead to social division, tension and disharmony. Hate speech and attacks of all kinds can trigger social conflict and exacerbate social tensions. Lastly, social progress is hindered, and cyber violence may impede social progress and innovation. Because cyber violence can bring about conflicts between various groups, it prevents society from presenting a picture of equality and beauty, which is detrimental to the progress of society as a whole.

4. The Method and Application of Critical Discourse Analysis

4.1. The Definition of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is a new method of discourse analysis formed after absorbing Foucault's rebellious and subversive view of discourse [8]. Compared with the original discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis is more critical; scholars not only want to analyze how the legitimacy of power behind various social problems is constructed, but also want to expose and criticize the hidden ideology and power factors behind them. Scholars engage in the examination of power legitimacy in relation to many social issues, while also uncovering and critiquing the concealed ideology and power dynamics that underlie these issues. This endeavor aims to advocate for the principles of equity and

justice. The primary focus of this inquiry lies in the examination of the interplay between power dynamics and textual production, specifically exploring the mechanisms through which a text attains its establishment. Who are the beneficiaries of the existing text? Whose interests are being deprived? What are the implications of the established text? The analytical approach employed to examine the mechanisms of power within discourse is sometimes referred to as critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) holds significant value as a study methodology within the realm of international communication studies. Through the examination of media discourse and the interpretation of textual materials, one can gain insights into the dynamics of power, including its fluctuations and transitions. There has been a notable shift in the study perspective within the domain of international relations, signifying significant advancements in research methodologies. The incorporation of Foucault's conceptualization of discourse has significantly redirected the study trajectory.

4.2. The Process of Critical Discourse Analysis

The typical framework of critical discourse analysis encompasses the subsequent stages. The initial step involves the careful selection of the subject of investigation, wherein a specific discourse object is chosen. This is followed by a comprehensive historical analysis, which delves into the historical backdrop of the discourse object, encompassing its social and cultural milieu throughout its inception. This aids in comprehending the genesis and development of the debate. Next, we proceed to examine the dynamics of power relations and the generation of knowledge. Examine the power dynamics inherent in the discourse and evaluate the structures of power, control, and dominance present within it, as well as the ways in which these power relations are expressed across the discourse. This paper aims to investigate the processes of knowledge generation inherent in discourse, with a focus on assessing the criteria used to determine the legitimacy and authority of knowledge. Additionally, it seeks to examine how certain knowledge views are built and conveyed through discourse. Subsequently, this analysis examines the influence of discourse on individuals' cognitive processes and actions, delving into the manner in which discourse molds the cognitive frameworks of both individuals and collectives, while also exerting an impact on societal frameworks and power relations. The text culminates in a contemplative and evaluative examination of discourse, encompassing its constraints, underlying assumptions, and its impact on upholding or transforming prevailing power dynamics. This inquiry aims to examine the role of speech in shaping social meaning and to study the ways in which discourse actively engages in the formation of social perceptions, cultural norms, and societal values.

Michener's critical discourse analysis primarily emphasizes a sensitive analysis of power, knowledge, and social relations in discourse in order to reveal the hidden dynamics and implications behind the discourse.

4.3. The Application of Critical Discourse Analysis in the Pink-hair Girl Incident

This paper collects and analyzes comments from Chinese social media platforms like Weibo and Xiaohongshu related to the incident of the pink-haired girl. Employing Michel Foucault's discourse analysis [7], specifically Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research explores the power dynamics inherent in discourse, which believes that there exists a certain relationship between discourse and power, and the structure of discourse power weaves a huge network and thus permeates our lives. Therefore, the study of the pink-haired girl incident is in fact an examination of a certain kind of power, and CDA allows for the identification and critique of hidden ideologies and power structures, providing a more comprehensive and humanized examination of the incident and its societal implications.

5. The Research Results and Analysis

5.1. The Results of Critical Discourse Analysis of Cyber Violence in the Pink-hair Girl Incident

The pink-haired girl incident exhibits a clear manifestation of gender bias and cyber harassment. The analysis of critical discourse reveals that the girl's experience of cyber violence can be attributed to the presence of gender bias, which is deeply ingrained within the patriarchal framework that has long been prevalent in society. It is evident that the offensive discourses directed towards her, predominantly originating from male netizens, are closely linked to the exertion of masculinist power. The prevailing societal perception posits that men hold dominion over women, perpetuating the notion that women are consistently influenced and directed by men [3]. Therefore, many male netizens will put themselves in a higher position to scrutinize women's behaviors, criticize women's behaviors, and use insulting and abusive offensive words to "exercise" their so-called "dominant power". As in the case of the girl with pink hair, many male netizens believe that dyeing women's hair is a very lowly act, and that any woman who dyes her hair in such bright colors has done a lot of unseemly things, which has had a very bad impact on that girl. In addition, socially constructed masculinity is also an important reason for the pink-haired girl incident, which is a form of discipline that corresponds to femininity and reinforces the gender dichotomy, including being the helmsman of society, being aggressive, and having the ability to control everything, as opposed to women who are controlled by them. The pink-haired girl in this incident was reviled by many male netizens because they wanted to control women by controlling their thinking and making them doubt their behavior.

5.2. The Performance and Influence of Gender Bias in the Incident

The incident involving the pink-haired girl pertains to a young woman who visited her grandfather while sporting a vibrant pink hair color following her successful completion of a postgraduate examination. This incident initially garnered significant negative attention, primarily from male internet users, who expressed derogatory remarks, insults, verbal abuse, and engaged in malicious speculation. The comments primarily comprised derogatory statements such as "individuals who engage in hair dyeing possess undesirable moral qualities," "this particular hairstyle resembles that of a nightclub attendee; only black hair is deemed superior," and "she lacks the qualifications to be an educator as her influence on children will be detrimental." These comments persisted in targeting the individual with pink hair, and escalated to the extent of inflicting emotional harm upon her family. Some commenters even attributed the unfortunate demise of her grandfather to her actions. Consequently, the girl succumbed to the weight of public scrutiny, experienced depression, and ultimately met a tragic fate.

5.3. The Social Background and Influence of the Incident

The occurrence at hand can be attributed to the prevailing social conditions characterized by the presence of patriarchal and masculine standards. This suggests that society remains in a state where male dominance is acknowledged, rather than acknowledging the equal rights of both men and women. Simultaneously, the patriarchal structure plays a role in perpetuating gender inequity, leading to the allocation of gender-biased roles for women. This occurs not just in physical contexts, where injury to the body is at stake, but also in virtual environments, where verbal abuse is prevalent.

Following the aforementioned incident, wherein the pink-haired individual made the decision to end her own life, the online commentary predominantly exhibited solidarity towards the

aforementioned individual. Commentators condemned those who had spoken inappropriately and employed offensive language, while also resisting the actions of malicious internet users who had subjected the girl to cyber victimization. The considerable backing received by the girl serves as evidence of society's inclination to confront gender bias and promote gender equality, potentially fostering more unity and assistance among women's organizations.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that the presence of patriarchal structures and adherence to male norms has resulted in gender bias against women. Additionally, the widespread use of the Internet has given rise to cyber violence, leading to the victimization of women both offline and online. Ultimately, these factors contribute to tragic outcomes for women.

One limitation of this study is that a significant number of harmful comments from the specified time period were eliminated as a result of platform management. Consequently, only a partial dataset could be derived from the available reports, rendering this study insufficiently complete in its analysis of the comment section. There is an expectation that future research endeavors will encompass a more comprehensive examination of the detrimental effects experienced by women in the context of cyber violence. This is not only intended to foster solidarity among women's groups, but also to safeguard women's rights and advance the cause of gender equality. Such endeavors are anticipated to contribute to the overall progress of society towards a more equitable and improved state.

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