

Hate speech from women is judged harsher than that from men

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Women who make hateful remarks on social media are likely to be judged more severely than men who make the same comments. This is also true for reactions to hate speech (counter speech) which when made by women are less accepted than counter speech from men. This is according to a study published in Springer's journal *Sex Roles* by Claudia Wilhelm and Sven Joeckel of the University of Erfurt in Germany.

If a person using [social media](#) thinks that a comment made by somebody else is inappropriate or offensive, they may report or "flag" it to the platform provider. For this study, Wilhelm and Joeckel conducted an [online survey](#) that was distributed via political interest groups and a German news magazine site on Facebook.

Participants read through [online comments](#) directed against [women](#) and [sexual minorities](#), and indicated whether they would flag these comments as inappropriate. Another group of participants evaluated the reactions that followed hate comments. Some of the comments were presented as being made by men, while others were said to have been written by women. Participants also completed questionnaires asking them about their moral foundations and moral identity, their political affiliation, and about their age and sex.

The study did not find a direct effect of gender on the flagging of hate comments but the results showed that women are morally more concerned about fairness than men. Women also invest greater efforts to avoid harm to others which increases the likeliness that they flag hate

comments. Wilhelm and Joeckel further found that online hate comments made by women were judged more strictly than similar statements made by men.

"These findings support the idea that women are more concerned about fairness and avoiding harm to others than men," explains Wilhelm. "In the specific case of comments directed against women and sexual minorities, hate comments by female authors are perceived as an act of double deviance and are therefore sanctioned more strictly than such hate comments by men."

Joeckel warns that moderators of online discussions and platform providers should be sensitive to the way in which gender influences online discussions and the likelihood of these comments being flagged.

"Online moderators should acknowledge that users might judge counter-speech made by women differently to counter comments by men," Joeckel explains.

More information: Claudia Wilhelm et al, Gendered Morality and Backlash Effects in Online Discussions: An Experimental Study on How Users Respond to Hate Speech Comments Against Women and Sexual Minorities, *Sex Roles* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s11199-018-0941-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0941-5)

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