A study on the phenomenon of male couples' intimacy performance in short videos

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Abstract: Nowadays, short videos have become a platform for many people to show their bodies and express their emotions, so that male couples can also take advantage of the short video platform to be more bold in publicizing their sexual orientation, and even to put their intimate relationships on display. And the gay community's activism in public space facilitates their access to more media discourse and promotes the realization of their identity. However, such face value-based performances of intimacy may be nothing more than fantasies of romantic love woven by people.

Keywords: Male couples; Short videos; Homosexual intimacy; Male consumption

With the increasing development of short videos, the gay community in short videos has also become more and more visible. They post photos, shoot short videos, open live broadcasts to communicate with other users, and even making their intimate relationships public and sharing their lives with others. In heterosexual orthodox society, the behavior of gay and lesbian groups as a minority group to show their intimate relationships in a public space has gained a lot of respect and blessings, and some couples have even accumulated a large number of fans, but there is no doubt that gay couples moving from private to public also need to bear a certain amount of risk and controversy.

1. Catalysts for coming out: the gaze on the male body

Baudrillard said, "In the full kit of consumption, there is one object that is more beautiful, more precious, more glorious than all the rest, and that is the body."[1] The abundance of material conditions makes people no longer satisfied with the consumption of things, the consumption of symbols has become the pursuit of people's fervor, in this process, the body has gradually been included in the symbolic system, and has become the object of people's consumption and aesthetics. The development of network technology has created a visual feast for people, in which the body is transformed into a symbol of visual culture, which is regulated into various forms under the construction of mass media, and then acts on the real body.

With the awakening of women's consciousness, the public's attention has gradually shifted from "looking at women" to "looking at men", and the male body has become an object of consumption, with various male figures such as warm men, strong men, fresh men, and beautiful men appearing on the screen. The public can obtain a sense of possession by consuming others, while screen men hope to obtain a sense of happiness by consuming themselves, which has further led to the emergence of short videos with low production thresholds that show their excellent body and appearance, and gradually accumulate fans and grow into netroots on short video platforms, such as "Wang BuRan" on the TikTok, which has 1.02 million fans.

The general state of existence of homosexuals in China at this stage is that they identify themselves as homosexuals but do not come out of the closet, probably because they have acquired the homophobia of the heterosexual society and formed a kind of internal self-sanctioning mechanism[2], for which "coming out" is a kind of social death.[3]However, with the continuous development of Internet technology and the arrival of the era of male consumption, the gay community is more and more willing to put themselves in front of the public, acting out their intimate relationships and sharing the sweet details of their love affairs on the Internet, just like ordinary heterosexual couples.

The popularity and consumption of the male body on short video platforms has led to less public pressure on homosexuals to come out publicly, and the development of slash culture has made many people, especially women, more tolerant of intimate relationships between same-sexual. In the eyes of women who are passionate about slash culture, same-sex relationships are less burdened by responsibility, and the conclusion of such a relationship is not based on reproduction as the destination, but is more concerned about the feelings of the heart, which in itself represents a kind of cynicism and deviation from the norm.[4]This more "pure" emotion makes many people addicted, and real

gay couples have a more realistic context, not only in people's imagination, which makes more people willing to pay attention to and support them.

2. From exclusive to public space: the self-presentation of gay couples in videos

Homosexuality and its concepts are different in different media eras. In the paper media era, homosexuality was stigmatized as both sin and disease. In the radio and television era, more images of homosexuals on the screen gradually dispelled the concerns of sin and disease; since entering the network era, network technology has created an "exclusive space" for homosexual groups, and to defend themselves from the offensive from outside world. The Internet technology has changed the way people socialize, with offline interactions gradually moving online, the socialization of strangers on the Internet is not as easy for gay men to coalesce.

However, while the development of cyber technology may seem to weaken "the sense of community cohesion that has been built up in gay-exclusive spaces and places, such as gay bars"[5], the new cyberspace has also given gay the possibility to build new social interactions and community connections between the real and the virtual.[6]In the public cyberspace, some "heterogeneous spaces" have been established, like "Sunny Zone" and "Blue", which is a new form of socialization for the gay community to create an exclusive space for themselves in the open cyberspace. Communication technology has changed the establishment and maintenance of intimate relationships. People can talk to any stranger in cyberspace through social media, and lead to a new relationship. For example, the gay couple "Jielin CP" on the TikTok began their acquaintance with each other's self-presentation on social media.

Social media has an impact on the day-to-day presentation of intimate relationships. For example, the openness dimension of romantic relationships between the sexes is greatly enhanced by social media.[7]Some gay and lesbian couples, like most ordinary heterosexual couples, share their sweet romantic details in video, such as "JieLin" "HaoHao NieNie" and "HeKai". Among them, the topic "#JielinCP" has 210 million fans, "#HeKai" has 270 million fans, and "#HaoHaoQuiQiuQiu" has 240 million plays in TikTok. Their popularity is evident. As a marginalized group in society, coming out from the "darkness" to stand in the sunlight is a kind of courage to throw oneself into the fray, and making the more private love routine public is more of a heroic romance, which may also be the reason why it impresses so many fans.

3. Access to media discourse is proving the identity and cultural identity of homosexual

There is always a tension between sympathy, tolerance and recognition of homosexuality and the perception of it as pathological and perverse.[8]More and more homosexuals have accumulated a large number of followers through their practices on short video platforms, which also means that they have kinds of media discourse power, and they are able to counter stigmatization, and at the same time push gay and lesbian issues into the realm of public discourse, and promote gay and lesbian groups' own identities as well as society's recognition of gay and lesbian subcultures.

The performance of homosexual in short video platforms puts them at the center of public opinion. On the one hand, due to stigmatization and marginalization in the cyberspace dominated by heterosexual groups, and this kind of public "coming out" implies confrontation and conflict with the mainstream discourse, and it is inevitable that they will be obscured, rejected and even abused, they may be more silenced. On the other hand, there are also someone support the gay community, and related topics will lead to common discussions between homosexuals and others communities. In the course of continuous discussion, negotiation and reflection, the gay community may gain more understanding and become more resolute about their identity, alleviating the binary opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality and expanding the inclusiveness of mainstream social space.

At the same time, more homosexual couples have shown homosexuals their true situation, which also helps those homosexuals who are still hiding in the dark to identify themselves, break free from confusion and guilt, and alleviate the long-standing marginalization and stigmatization of the individual, and inspires more homosexuals to dare to express their sexual orientation in open online platforms, and to challenge and even structure the hegemony of heteronormative discourse.

4. Reflection: a romance against the world or a fantasy of love utopia

Gay have provided Chinese women with a discursive space in which they can freely talk about and gaze at the male body and sexuality in an uninvolved manner.[9] The paradigm of heterosexual love between a man and a woman is fundamentally incapable of carrying women's

beautiful expectations of utopian love, and so the slash text opens the floodgates for such fantasized sleepwalking.[10] But, the gay who exist in slash texts are virtual characters that can be compiled, and their love stories are also works that have been created, in which the author's writing can almost perfectly match people's imaginations of romantic love, and can defy the world to fight against the ostracization of the heterosexual orthodox society. If placing this romantic fantasy in a realistic context, are the romantic routines of gay couples fighting the world in short videos actually fantasies wrapped in a beautiful package?

If we look at the gay men in short videos, it is not difficult to find out, that the gay couples who dare to come out in public, and are willing to show their private relationships in public, are all men who have excellent physical appearance. "Beauty is governed by the culture of a society. It is a symbol, a vehicle, and a metaphor for the culture of a society".[11] So to what extent is the respect and support for the gay male community presented in short videos today based on face value, and is the more average-looking gay community receiving more ill-will as they emulate them in exhibiting their own lives? These are questions for further study.

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