

The "Female-to-Male" Phenomenon in Short Videos: A Feminist Media Analysis

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Abstract: Feminist media analysis is a set of critical analytical tools used to understand how different kinds of media contribute to the molding of gender and identity, which has played a crucial part in the development of feminism and the media-driven society. This paper conducts a feminist media analysis to investigate the phenomenon of "female-to-male" presentations in TikTok short videos. This paper aims to challenge some traditional notions of "performing gender," as conceptualized by digital media theories, which disrupt established performance standards and promote broader acceptance of diverse practices. Focusing on TikTok users Dayao Tongxue, Chen Lijun, Lapmoby, and Northeast Rain Sister, this research analyzes the content and influence of those influencers to understand how their performances challenge conventional norms and cultivate inclusiveness. The research concludes by examining the impact of social media on the formation of gender identity, specifically in the transition from language-sex to the identification as male or female.

Keywords: TikTok, gender performativity, feminist media analysis, gender diversity.

1. Introduction

In recent years, short video platforms such as TikTok have made self-presentation freer and flatter, providing users with a dynamic space for gender expression. A significant trend is that women playing guys or 'female-to-male' (FTM) performances, which disrupt previous gender-rigid norms and offer additional pathways for gender representation. This phenomenon serves as a very interesting mirror to what is happening with gender representation in the media and thus becomes an academic field worth exploring for several areas linked to the Media Studies area or the Feminist Theory interface.

The analysis of gender representation in modern media has been covered a great deal by existing research. Wu explores young women's self-expression on TikTok, illustrating how the platform provides users with agency to traverse and resist normative conceptions around gender and identity [1]. Additionally, Loke and other researchers remain deeply entrenched in media representations and constrain engagement with more inclusive narratives. They bring to light the social backdrop against which gender representation happens in short videos and underscore that media platforms are key frames through which a public can come to an understanding of what constitutes masculine or feminine [2].

Drawing on both mainstream and feminist literature, this paper utilizes a literature review method on the subjects of female-to-male presentations from a short video perspective. This study considers

how these performances affect gender identity and assumed sociocultural roles, utilizing Butler's theory of gender performativity in conjunction with Elfros' Spiral of Silence model. One reason why people might have a hard time extracting this history is because Butler challenges the idea of strong gender essentialism and offers instead, through her theory of performativity, the possibility to claim diverse acts performing gender identity. This is where the spiral of silence theory contrasts: the media can help to break us from an existing dangerous phenomenon and thus threaten traditional gender roles in society [3]. This research is important for media studies and feminist theory.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Spiral of Silence Theory

The spiral of silence theory explains how public opinion is formed and maintained in societies [4]. Experts often refer to crowd control as a means to manage people's fear of rejection from the social group, as discussed in this valid theory. People are afraid of speaking their own thoughts out because they believe that expressing a contrary opinion to the dominant perspective will inevitably result in social exclusion. This phenomenon often leads to the marginalization of minority opinions, as they get increasingly overshadowed by the mainstream viewpoint in a cascading manner, ultimately suppressing their influence.

Noelle-Neumann argued that the media exerts significant influence on the public opinion formation by disseminating cumulative messages. That information can be amplified but if it lacks coherence, it may also minimize other viewpoints [4]. This is an example of how media coverage, or in this particular case, the absence of it except where it favors one side of an issue by constant repetition, may generate a broad belief in something that may not necessarily be true, while the majority of people struggle against this prevailing opinion. This is particularly relevant in situations involving strong emotions and deeply held beliefs, as there is a heightened concern about being rejected or excluded by society.

Social media has brought in new elements to interpersonal communication. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter serve as forums where different voices effectively break the historic silence. Social media can be an alternative public sphere where individuals with opinions that are not covered by traditional mass communication articles and have no ownership connection can express themselves, allowing previously marginalized viewpoints to be acknowledged and accepted. In particular, it has been noted that social media users converse about contentious issues long before they are covered by traditional news outlets, highlighting the ability of digital platforms to guarantee that issues that were previously marginalized will not be ignored [5].

2.2. Gender Performativity Theory

In Judith Butler's influential book *Gender Trouble*, her theory of Gender Performativity has had a great impact on the way of understanding gender in feminist discourse [6]. Butler asserts that gender is not a stable identity but an act performed by habit and is limited to the function of social norms. If men and women are not fundamentally different from each other, this has implications for the theory of gender essentialism, which is based on the claim that those aspects of masculinity or femininity are inborn. Gender, Butler continues, is not about what sex one has performs. It depends on a person's repetition of cultural norms appropriate to their sex. As for how it functions, gender operates and consolidates power precisely through the performance that people do all day.

The concept from Butler is fundamental one when interrogating the experiences of "female-to-male" presentations in short videos. These videos are quintessential examples of gender as performance, showing the ways in which people perform different genders by embodying and acting out certain gendered roles. This is in line with Butler's view that gender identity is not something one

merely possesses, but rather, it is created and maintained through performance. Since such performances are staged in short video format, they challenge the normative binary of gender and reveal to attention this process by which one becomes a man or woman, thus suggesting other possibilities for expressing oneself as men or women.

In addition, she also lays the groundwork for how Butler argues that there is a subversive element in these genders' acts. On short video platforms, women dressed up as men are subverted implicit and explicit social norms or gender stereotypes of the expected behaviors from a man-and-woman perspective. This subversion enables greater acceptance of gender and diverse genders in society by ushering in a new era where alternate femininity is normalized.

2.3. Integration of Theories

In conclusion, the Spiral of Silence theory and Gender Performativity complement each other in explaining the short video's "female-to-male" phenomenon. The Spiral of Silence theory aids in understanding how gender-expressive diversity can be amplified via social media and is used to chip away at the wall of silence surrounding alternative expressions of femininity. People are making society more hospitable to greater diversity of gender expression and identity by sharing and consuming radical images all over the internet without fear of social isolation.

However, Butler also sheds light on the quality of gender performances and how they are truly able to disarticulate conventional forms of sex and push for male or female flexibility. Both of these theories combine to give people a powerful lens that allows them to look at how short video platforms may contribute appendage to gendered norms and ideologies and call for more equitable models.

In summary, the dual application of the Spiral of Silence and Gender Performativity theories reveals significant insights into the behavior of gender in digital media. With the help of short-video platforms, an enabling environment for acceptance and expression is being created. On these apps, gender identity forms a spectrum on both ends rather than as binaries, leading to questioning traditional roles in society [6].

3. Case Study

This case study investigates the emerging trend of "female-to-male" transitions, which refers to the practice of creating short video presentations on platforms such as TikTok. This paper looks at three separate types of users, including those who present as female in real life yet perform masculinity in their videos, whose gender presentation is considered neutral and "straight-acting" but engage in the performance or expression of their own unique forms sexualized virility, and for whom both presenting masculinely online closely meet what they act like in their real life. igwigs of TikTok such as Dayao Tongxue, Chen Lijun, Lapmoby, and Northeast Rain Sister lead the accepted cases. These cases demonstrate how gender is performed in different ways, as well as highlight the influence performances of this kind have on a wider perspective regarding gender.

3.1. Female Presenting in Real Life, Performing Male Figures: Dayao Tongxue and Chen Lijun

While their daily attire is feminine, their videos frequently feature masculine personas. This metamorphosis is usually accompanied by a big change in the way they look and act. They frequently participate in comedic skits, lip-syncing male voices, and engage in numerous trends that reinforce stereotypical masculine behaviors. They were characterized by over-the-top male qualities, including dominance and slapstick physicality, that contrasted with the traditional femininity of the performers. Some of the humorous videos by Dayao Tongxue and Chen Lijun serve as satires on gender norms. In doing so, they emphasize a specific exaggerated form of masculinity, drawing attention to the

performative nature of gender. This reinforces Judith Butler's theory that gender is inherent to one's being, but rather a compilation of actions and behaviors, rather than a fixed identity. Their channel has a habit of breaking down conventional attitudes towards gender and pushing for less closely defined ideas around what it means to be male or female.

Their videos have generated a lot of likes, comments, and shares indicating that their audience has appreciated what they put out. Both acts are hilarious and hugely relatable, making them largely accessible to an equally broad audience. Viewers praise these creators for subverting traditional gender norms and presenting an alternative understanding of masculinity. This is a significant step in breaking the "spiral of silence" surrounding non-traditional gender performances in China, as videos showcasing their genders become more affordable and accessible on TikTok. In allowing such performances on the app, creators are actively encouraged to be themselves, in all ways that may differ from one another but are equally valid. The visibility of gender-diverse individuals and their growing acceptance lead to a more inclusive society in which traditional norms are constantly questioned, context-shifted and redefined [7].

3.2. Gender Neutral Presenting, Performing Male Figures: Lapmoby

Lapmoby, the obverse, is a content faker who presents ambiguously in real life but adopts an all-male gym-shorts demeanor on TikTok. This duality also makes a strong statement against the gender binaries that have somehow always been under their rigid influence. On Lapmoby's channel, reaction videos are the norm, with challenges and male role-playing slice-of-life littered across her content, both authentic and performative.

Lapmoby's works show that gender is subjective and performable. Indeed, this ties to Butler's explanation of gender performativity, where she suggests that every day we act out and perform our genders according to societal norms. Dressing and acting as male characters, Lapmoby forces the audience to question their ideas of gender by putting them face-to-face with his approach to it.

The supportive Tiktok community elevates Lapmoby's quirky content above simplistic or side-character-only representations in mass-media gender constructs, making it better suited than traditional media. Good comments and fan art from their audience are a testament to the power of their gender performances in raising awareness and acceptance for people within or outside of the binary. Lapmoby, with her audiences, creates interactions that promote a community based on diversity and inclusion. This kind of interaction is vital to eroding gender stereotypes and normalizing non-binary and androgynous characteristics. Additionally, Lapmoby's performances offer a tangible form of representation that serves to both bring visibility and normalization to nonbinary gender expressions and acts as support for those who are beginning their journey toward discovering what applies best to them.

3.3. Masculine Presenting in Real Life and Videos: Northeast Rain Sister

The Northeast Rain Sister always presents herself masculinely, both in real life and on her videos. Much of her content revolves around building new things, like doing construction work or weightlifting, as an example of conventional male activity. Widely established stereotypes, which tie strict gender roles to one's assigned sex at birth, compete with this unchanging masculine aesthetic. In Northeast Rain Sister's videos, there is a direct and proud representation of masculinity. When she consistently presents as masculine, regardless of the context involved, subconsciously she also legitimizes and bolsters non-binary or transgender identities. Her work is a potent example of gender non-conformity, expanding how audiences see aesthetics around maleness and femaleness and allowing viewers to revise their assumptions about what it means for something to be claimed by one gender or another in the broad spectrum human beings express.

Her films resonate with a wide audience, partly because of their sincerity and also because they challenge and break down prejudices related to gender roles and talents. The engagement with her content is high, which shows an increasing openness in support of different ways to express your gender. Northeast Rain Sister normalizes the idea that gender identity has nothing to do with biological sex, presenting consistently as masculine, which will help go towards garnering greater societal acceptance for non-binary genders.

In addition, the prominent visibility of Northeast Rain Sister on TikTok is important for opening up a broader conversation about gender identity by representing an identifiable and relatable figure who challenges binary norms. She creates content emphasizing the value of genuineness and self-approval, telling her own story in a way that reminds you to accept your genuine nature over societal standards.

3.4. Comprehensive analysis

Taken together, this rich body of case studies highlights the enduring significance of shaping gendered popular lore using short video platforms like TikTok. They help break the spiral of silence that enforces normative gender identities by providing a space where diverse gender performances can be executed. Such performances are exemplified by artists such as Dayao Tongxue, Chen Lijun, Lapmoby, and Northeast Rain Sister. People can see gender's performance as fluid and expressive rather than constraining identities, which defy societal expectations to be more inclusive.

A synthesis of Butler's gender performativity theory and Noelle-Neumann's "Spiral of Silence" offers an explanation to how these occurrences are related. As the number of individuals expressing their gender in various ways increases, it appears that society is starting to adopt a more flexible approach to foster progress among individuals and on their platform.

Collectively, these case studies offer potential pathways for the transformative power of social media toward a more gender-equal and inclusive society. TikTok and platforms like it are vital in creating acceptance of diversified gender presentations among the public by encouraging a safe community that can alter society's perception of how people should act according to their gender expression [8].

4. Discussion

The internet-driven phenomenon of so-called "female-to-male" transitions in TikTok short videos illustrate the role new virtual platforms play in shaping gender presentation, according to advocates and scholars. Alongside the shows described above, there are performances of gender expression that range from nonconforming to subverting an existing norm, illuminating what it is that makes us feel so strongly about our genders. Social media platforms, as they support these different performances of gender, are important pieces in the fabric that form and represent society's changing attitudes towards a well-performative or under-performing kind of manhood [9].

Social media offers a platform where, according to Findling, it empowers people to be their authentic selves, leading to more acceptance of gender identities [10]. Social media platforms such as TikTok allow users to experiment with and perform aspects of their gender, both reinforcing some tropes while also bucking the rigid binary norms of a societal deep freeze that hardly accommodates nuance. This is a key tenet of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, which sees gender as nothing more than repetitive acts or performances rather than an innate quality, which performative expressions are actions rather than identities [6].

First and foremost, the visibility of such gender performances can help to break a "spiral of silence" surrounding non-conventional gender identities. It achieves this by providing a space where various voices can come to the forefront, thus normalizing gender fluidity and making more people feel

comfortable opening up about their identity without fear of being socially exiled. This is very important to build a more inclusive and accepting society.

But importantly, such progressive narratives have experienced a backlash as well. However, social media is a double-edged sword, and with these platforms also comes the proliferation of hateful transphobic, homophobic, and misogynist thinking. The work of advocacy and education to resist these backlashes and promote continuous progress toward more inclusive gender norms will continue [11].

5. Conclusion

The recent study of "female-to-male" short videos underscores the well-known trend on social media in loosening gender and sexuality boundaries rather than actively questioning performance. These performances serve to increase awareness and promote acceptance of the concept of gender fluidity, conveying the fact that media is an important tool in shaping cultural perceptions. However, this study is preliminary and relies on qualitative rather than quantitative analysis through observing 21 TikTok users in China, instead of providing a comprehensive understand of the situation. One limitation of this paper is that it does not fully represent the diverse range of content found on social media sites worldwide. Furthermore, the absence of quantitative data hinders the ability to make wider generalisations about the long-term impact of various gender performances. Future researches could examine the broader social implications and personal experiences of individuals who engage in gender performances on social networking sites. By grounding these practices in empirical studies, researchers will gain a fuller picture of how individual identity construction and emerging cultural norms are being shaped. This will provide support to the theoretical frameworks proposed in this study and enhance the understanding of the concept of gender inclusiveness in digital environment.

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