An Analysis of the Alienation of Women's Selfhood by Gender Culture Communication in the New Media Era

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Abstract: With the rapid development of new media, the ways in which gender culture is disseminated have undergone significant changes. This transformation impacts women's selfhood and social roles in the digital age. This paper explores the influence of new media gender culture dissemination on women's self-awareness and the phenomenon of alienation. In the digital era, new media platforms play a crucial role in the dissemination of gender culture, providing women with more diverse opportunities for self-expression. However, these platforms also reinforce idealized standards of appearance and lifestyle, which may lead women away from their authentic selves, increasing psychological pressure and affecting their self-worth. By analyzing the causes and mechanisms of these alienation phenomena, this study emphasizes the necessity of cultivating an inclusive and diverse media environment. Understanding these dynamics is essential for promoting gender equality, supporting women in developing healthy self-awareness, and creating a more balanced media ecosystem.

Keywords: New Media, Gender Culture, Selfhood, Alienation.

1. Introduction

In the era of rapid development of new media technology, the ways and means of dissemination of gender culture have undergone profound changes. Various types of social media, short-video platforms and online communities have not only changed the way of displaying gender culture, but also had a broad and profound impact on women's selfhood. In comparison to the traditional media communication, the new forms of media are no more restricted to fixed platform, the with more fragmented and the communication of gender culture has become more fragmented, diverse, and accelerated. In this communication context, women's selfhood has become more and more complex. On the one hand, new media promotes the spread of gender equality awareness, on the other hand, many women become "alienated" in a way that they struggle in perceiving the "real self" under the context of new media, or become unable to accept themselves as they really, and even generating negative self-evaluations and psychological pressure. This alienation phenomenon not only affects the mental health of individuals, but also poses a potential challenge to the concept of gender and women's values in society as a whole. This paper will discuss the effect of gender culture communication in the new media era on women's perception of selfhood, in terms of reforming and challenging gender stereotypes, and how this new form of communication reinforces the alienation of women's perception.

2.   Overview of the Selfhood and Alienation of Women

The theme of the self has long been an important topic in feminist philosophy that contains dimensions of personal identity, the body, sociality, and agency of a woman. A person's selfhood varies through factors of class, race, ethnicity, and sex. In the factor of sex, the selfhood of a woman can be significantly different from the selfhood of a man. Under the influence of a patriarchal society, this cultural context has inevitably permeated or shaped the selfhood of women in terms of how women see themselves, resulting in a separation of their individuality and subjectivity, and this phenomenon is referred as alienation. In *The Second Sex,* Simone de Beauvoir points out that men are seen as the subject and the absolute, while women are regarded as the other, which suggests that women's identities are often defined as non-subjects or non-agents, preventing them from achieving independence [1]. Laws, customs, and cultural stereotypes systematically undermine women's selfhood, often denying their subjectivity entirely. Throughout history, women have been viewed either as inferior versions of men or as the opposite of men, characterized by their marked difference from men; in both cases, women have been devalued by these views. Since women are viewed as inferior forms of the male individual, the paradigm of the self that women are often seen as subservient to men and deprived of their subjectivity and individuality as a person has prevailed in society. Moreover, she argues that women's identities are not innate but are formed through social processes, which emphasizes that female identity is a social construct rather than an inherent trait. In other words, when women effectively exhibit socially recognized feminine images and fulfill appropriate gender roles, they attain the female identity recognized by society [1,2]. In modern society, identity is heavily influenced by the images provided by popular culture, which offers ideals for shaping one's identity, and this popular culture is shaped and reinforced by the new media. The media is an effective means of transmitting the dominant discourse of power and disguising it as "common sense", so that artificially created needs, norms, and standards about women's bodies are seen as natural and normal. For instance, notions of being a good housewife, having a skinny body, and dressing up sexy are all socially-constructed ideologies or principles for being a woman, disseminated through the media. Women are alienated for not being themselves but being a figure constructed and demanded by the society, with their individuality and subjectivity as a person being denied.

3.   The impact of New Media on the Dissemination of Gender Culture

3.1.   New Media in Shaping Women's Gender Roles

In addition to the changing views on gender roles in contrast to the past, another significant change in modern society is the media, as a new form of communication. The advent of new media has revolutionized communication practices across the globe, fundamentally altering how individuals interact, share information, and form communities. In comparison to traditional forms of communication such as face-to-face interaction, print media (newspapers, books, magazines), and broadcast media (television and radio), the new media encompasses a range of digital platforms including social media, blogs, podcasts, and video sharing sites. According to Manovich, new media are characterized by interactivity, user-generated content, and the ability to disseminate information quickly [3]. This interactivity fosters a participatory culture in which viewers are not just passive consumers but active participants in the creation and distribution of content. Moreover, Castells describes new media as a central component of the "network society," where communication transcends geographical boundaries [4]. This shift allows for real-time interactions and the formation of global communities, enhancing the interconnectedness of individuals. This new form of communication has significant impacts on how information is shared and received, and its broader

societal implications, including the ability to shape the mass understanding of femineity and gender roles.

The emergence of new media has significantly transformed how womanhood is represented, understood, and discussed in contemporary society. Through platforms like social media, blogs, podcasts, and video-sharing sites, the concept of womanhood has been reshaped in various ways. Firstly, new media platforms, such as social media, blogs, and video-sharing sites, provide women around the world a space to share their experiences and perspectives. It enables women of different races, classes, and cultures to express their voices and communicate with each other. For example, platforms like Instagram and TikTok have become spaces where women can share their stories, make a change, and combat the existing gender inequality in society. This massive increase in the quantity of communication has significantly influenced the changing views of womanhood.

New media enables individuals and groups to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and norms. Activists and influencers use these platforms to raise awareness about issues of gender inequality such as female stereotypes, body shame, and the objectification of women. Campaigns like #Girls Help Girls and #Black Girl Magic have gained traction through social media, fostering discussions about gender role reformation and empowerment. These movements challenge existing patriarchal norms, encourage more progressive views on gender, and bring forth the solidarity of women groups. Moreover, New media fosters online communities that provide support and solidarity among individuals with shared gender experiences. These communities, often organized around hashtags or specific topics, enable users to connect with others, share resources, and offer emotional support. This sense of belonging can be particularly crucial for individuals exploring their gender identity or facing gender discrimination.

3.2. Alienation of Gender Culture Communication in New Media

Although new media has positive effects on bringing the idea of womanhood into a more advanced stage, it can also create negative effects on bringing reformation of this womanhood to people, such as the spread of misinformation about women's issues and identities. Misrepresentation and stereotypes can persist, creating a backlash against female groups. New media offers the opportunity for people from different beliefs to create and view comments on the same topic. Due to this flexibility, a user is able to view opinions from different perspectives and groups. For example, on a woman's post about her view of womanhood, a user may see comments from feminists, misogynists, patriarchists, and neutralists. To people who are confused about the idea being posted, they may be overwhelmed by opinions from distinct schools. Furthermore, new media offers people with easy access to express themselves on the internet, which could be really problematic. In comparison to traditional communications such as books and newspapers that require people only with qualifications (trained people such as registered editors) or people with degrees (educated people such as professors) to report information to the public, now the free platform enables everyone to leave their comments on the internet published to the public. Information being reported in this case is neither filtered nor vetted and thus the appropriateness and the preciseness of information shared through new media is never guaranteed. Femininity is once again defined as the dichotomy described above. The second word associated with femininity appears inferior, even in opposition to the first. Men appear rational, active, and independent, while women appear passive, dependent, and subject to passions. Thus, tasks that require responsibility, competitiveness, ambition, initiative, intelligence, and strength (e.g., earning an income, making a political decision, leading an organization) have traditionally been attributed to men, whereas tasks that require caring, empathy, nurturing, obedience, and submissiveness have been attributed to women [2,5].

4.   The Phenomenon of Alienation in Selfhood

4.1.   self-Alienation and Social Alienation

As mentioned above, the massive quantity and unguaranteed quality of information published through new media could lead to serious issues for women from the perspective of exacerbating the alienation of women's selfhood. The concept of alienation was first introduced by Hegel and can be classified into different categories. This paper will focus on the two of these categories: self-alienation and alienation of the society. According to Hegel, self-consciousness undergoes a state of alienation as it realizes itself. Individuals often feel alienated from their own essence in their pursuit of self-realization. This alienation is part of the development of the individual's consciousness, and by reflecting on the state of alienation, the individual is eventually able to return to a higher level of self-consciousness [6].

What seems to be happening in contemporary society is that society imposes expectations and norms on women and makes them serve the needs of patriarchal capitalism [7]. They set up a template of perfection for women, and if a woman fulfills the above requirements, then she is seen as a good woman, and vice versa, if she falls out of this template of perfection then she is seen as unsuccessful in being a woman. While her womanhood is not denied by society and she fails to gain the acceptance of the community, then she is alienated from the group or society. A woman is also alienated from her selfhood if she solely follows the requirement of patriarchy on how to behave as a woman since she loses her individuality and subjectivity as a unique human being. For example, when a woman goes to the gym and works out not for her own health and aesthetics but to please others, to live up to the patriarchal society's definition of female beauty, which is being "sexy" or "slim", self-alienation takes place in such type of behavior.

4.2.   The Mechanism by which new media exacerbate alienation

With the emergence and popularization of new media, women's self-awareness and related feminism have been widely popularized and discussed by the public. As a rebel against the traditional patriarchal expectations of women, a vast number of people are engaged in a new form of womanhood portrayed by the new media, which is called the "emancipated women" [2]. In order to be distinguished from "traditional women" figures, emancipated women" invest their time and energy in personal development and careers. For them, marriage and motherhood are choices they may decide not to make. In public, these women appear as professionally successful, rational, ambitious, talented and hardworking. They have so-called "masculine" characteristics. Yet, the new trend of social expectations toward women is still problematic, in fact, it even makes the principles of being a woman way more difficult and extreme by portraying women as "perfect figures that they are capable of dealing jobs from both traditional women and men". In research conducted by Xie, it is found that young feminists in the 20-30 age group, who are active users of new media, mostly have good expectations of social pluralism and de-labeling, but unconsciously differentiate themselves from traditional images of women and resent them [8]. Under the influence of social media's trend of provoking "woman awareness", the respondents see themselves as a new image of independent, progressive, and egalitarian women, with expectations similar to those of being 'conservative', which cuts them off completely from the traditional image of women. And in the process of achieving this goal, it has a distasteful attitude towards traditional images of women. Their denial of the traditional features of women that they have has created disacceptance of the self, which contributes to a degree of self-alienation. Moreover, the public attitude of distaste toward "traditional women" also leads to alienation so these "traditional women", that they are not accept by the society and are thus alienated from the society [9].

5.   Conclusion

This paper discusses the effect of gender culture communication in the new media era on women's perception of selfhood, in terms of reforming and challenging gender stereotypes, and how this new form of communication reinforces the alienation of women's perception. Understanding the causes and mechanisms behind this alienation is essential for promoting gender equality and helping women build a healthier, more authentic selfhood. Future research and practices should focus on how to optimize new media content, shape inclusive and diverse gender representations, and reduce society's narrow standards for women. Doing so can provide stronger support and positive guidance for women's self-awareness. This effort is not only beneficial for women's personal development but is also critical for fostering gender equality and cultivating a healthy media system.

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