

The Anti-male Gaze Attempt under Digital Media: Culture Consumption Featured with Female Dominance and the Possibility of Female Gaze

Yingman Tang^{1,a,*}

¹*Jinan University Translation, Guang Dong, Zhu Hai, 51900, China*
a. JoTheFreeBird@163.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Male gaze has had far-reaching effects on people in all aspects. With the rapid development of digital media, women have created their own female-centered aesthetics. Thus, the reversed definition of male gaze — female gaze — occurs in the discourse for the first time. Women single out their desirable images of men by creating idols, culture, romantic games for women, and so on. Aiming to seek the potentials and precise impacts of this noted women participation in consumption, the paper would resort to affect theory, a method of case study. The results showed that the anti-male gaze attempt managed to diminish the perception of women as monolithic state. It disintegrated the traditional one-dimensional characters to a certain extent. These emerging multiple standards are set conversely to toxic masculinity. However, the concept of female gaze, on the other hand, could be another thought trap created by patriarchy. Women participation here has non-negligible drawbacks in that women do not equip the same physical and social power to demand men. Therefore, people should view it dialectically so as to fight back the male gaze with other more judicious approaches.

Keywords: Male Gaze, Affect Theory, Women Economy, Female Gaze

1. Introduction

Male gaze has always been at the heart of the debate over gender equity. It is the force resource of patriarchy, which outstandingly contributed to the high tolerance for sexualization and objectification of women[1]. Under such a narrative form, male should be tough, dominate, and emotionless. Females should be affiliated, soft, and obedient. In a nutshell, it shapes our norm. How did it come into power as a social constructive power triggered heated research while the practice of anti-male gaze is in demand for more academic attention. Fandom becomes increasingly embedded in the structures and processes of our global, net-worked media environment. Above all, women participation here is emotionally involved in media consumption and female-centered aesthetics. There is research focusing on these topics. Previous academic research focused on the definition and function of male gaze, the possibility of female gaze, and the advancement of women in economic and cultural participation. Prior research has shown that the male gaze plays an essential role in the patriarchy, and women are more able to build their own culture or discourse. However, the possibility of defining female gaze precisely has remained contentious. There are few points of view that point

to differences in constructive inequality between genders. Another limitation is the lack of actual circumstances and their combinations with other theories. So, this paper will be based on the former research towards women's participation and aim further at more specific practices and performances during the process. So, this paper will be based on the former research towards women participation and aim further at more specific practices and performances during the process. This paper would set fandom and other derived culture products as study object. Is there any possibility in fandom consumption to unravel female participation in discourse and revolt towards monolithic treatments? Where are the connections between anti-male gaze practice and idol culture? How should we perceive the female gaze correctly? To illustrate all these topics above, this paper would combine the study of theory and cases in digital media. Especially in allusion to Boy's love literature, Otome games, idol talent show, this paper would interpret the fact with the help of affect theory. With the booming vibe of digital media, women's voices and choices could bring differences to an unprecedented level. In that case, to holistically comprehend the cultures featured with female dominance would be the paramount goal for us to demolish the patriarchy step by step. There is an urge for us to reckon with the female perspective as an essential approach to defining the social norm. With such acknowledgement, the manipulated state of women could be truly replaced by equity between all genders.

2. Basic Information of 3 Types of Culture Consumption Featured with Female Dominance

2.1. Otome Games and Virtual Boyfriend

An Otome game is a story-based video game that is targeted towards women. Generally, the main goal of the game is to develop a romantic relationship between the female player and one of the second-lead male characters. First released in 1994, Otome game has gained massive numbers of female users. The gender ratio of game players all around the world does not reach a complete equilibrium where male game players take up the majority. Female gamers account for approximately 45% of the total in China and 40% in Japan, Korea, and other Southeast Asian countries[2]. It demonstrates the great vitality of female gamers nowadays in Asian countries. Mr. Love: Queen's Choice, a Chinese-original otome game, has been greatly welcomed by female gamers and ranked second on the female gamers' preference list. These Otome games are warmly welcomed by the female game customers. Otome game sets women as the main character to decide how the story should unravel. It placed men in the position of being looked at. Not women, but men are required to act on certain principles to meet female gamers' needs. It gives women mental comfort, emotional resonance, and social satisfaction by creating images of virtual boyfriends. The experience must be immersive. Meanwhile, the second-lead male characters are portrayed by female aesthetics so no matter what uniqueness they own as a role in the game, they should all be considerate, handsome, and accountable at least.

2.2. Idol Talent Show and Fandom Economy

Idol talent show is another booming cultural product that went viral, especially in Korea, China, and some southeastern Asian countries. According to official statistics about the economic benefits the idol talent show has brought to China, the accumulated view counts of Produce 101(China) reached 4.8 billion. What's more, the funds raised by fans were up to 30 million CNY[3]. Like in other women-dominated cultures, men are in the position of being looked at. The idol talent show exaggerates the almightiness of the audiences. Instead of professional judges, it's the audience with the right to vote that determines which participant stays in the competition. In other words, participants should attract the audience, which overwhelmingly are women, with the aim of realizing their dreams of being an idol. Thus, the idol talent show has introduced a very new type of men image.

These idol boys are cute and good-looking which might be more precisely perceived as more girly. The fandom here is more particularly referred to as a society consisting of fans that are stars-trucked by idols. With the drastic development of media platform, the representations of fans have shifted at times[4]. They are groups with huge zealotry. Identified by their joint admiration of idols, they are united to protect and assist their idols. Raising funds to prove the economic values of an idol is the most prominent characteristic.

2.3. Boy's Love Literacy and the Aesthetics of Male's Body

Boy's love literacy, originating in emotions that see boy's love as the purest love, is a type of literacy creation about romantic relationships between man and man only. It has gained wide popularity, attributed to the novelty, safety, and appreciable images of men. It contains many rich types of stories and provides a place that is safe for women to have sexual fantasies. Disguised as a boy's love, it fulfills women's admiration for love that might be toxic, horny, or even taboo. Contrary to its lead roles being male, the originators and readers are female. Compared to other female-dominated cultures mentioned above, it's more controversial in that it promotes the dominance of women by creating literature that is completely not about women, which makes it more ambiguous to define. For the beneficial part, it, for the first time, sexualizes men. Men are considered in an aesthetic way, and this breakthrough of aesthetics is initial as a result of that women used to be not accustomed to treat their sexual fantasy toward men properly. Otherization comes along with sexualization, and the mutual otherization between binary genders is imbalanced. To some degree, as this paper tries to pinpoint, boys' love literacy is a cultural phenomenon that women consume for the sexual appeal of men, so that it to some degree builds weapons for a female anti-male gaze. However, it has negative impacts as well. Women are disappeared in the literacy creation. Women roles in such stories are very likely to be marginalized. Without enough consideration and guidance, it could be highly involved with misogyny.

3. Affect Theory

Baruch Spinoza is acknowledged to be the one who put forward the affect theory. Gilles Deleuze and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick are the two contributory learners. They enriched affect theory to be profound and fascinating. Spinoza explained affect as sense from the body. They questioned whether affect is created and controlled by mentality or rationality. They assumed that affect is associated with both mentality and physicality and that there is no direct control between any two of them. They further distinguished between affect and affection, between emotion and feeling. The former is an itinerant concept with changes and motivated trends. The latter is more fixed and negative passiveness[5].

In a nutshell, the affect theory is about the senses of personal identification. Freud regarded libido as the ultimate cause to reach the identification while Sedgwick regarded affect as the cause. Affect is vital and should not just be easily classified as affiliation. Through it, we acquire a brand new perspective on life. People could generate unique affect because of their unique notions. Certain affective labor determines certain types of personality. The labor in affect is also the labor in self-identification. Female-dominated cultures, this paper has demonstrated, Otome games bring terrific satisfactions and women's affects toward Otome games are of practical significance. The affective labor and economic consumption of fans are not sacrificed in vain. Through the sense of being able to protect and control, women realized their self-identification. Boys' love literacy contains aesthetic portraiture of men. The empowerment from gazing at men is associated with the sense of controlling their own desires. These female-dominated cultures are essential just because they seize the hook of itinerancy and affect as identity construction. Based on affect theory, women free themselves from deprivation and regain subjectivity.

4. Explanations about the Central Concept and Protest in This Emerging Women-Centered Phenomena

4.1. The Reason of How It Came into Being

These phenomena could occur on account of the rapid growth and expansion of new media. Up to 2019, the internet penetration rate in China has reached 61.2% [6]. In other developing countries, the internet penetration rate for adult women is 41%, compared to 53% for men [7]. The burgeoning development of technology firmly constructed the objective platform for women to regain their rights and so on. Boredom and rebellion at the immovable narrative form may be the driving force behind the initial desire to emerge into a culture like Otome games. The traditional narrative form is old-fashioned in that it is the derivation of patriarchy. Under its misogynistic tone, there are fixed norms and expectations for people to obey, binary concept of genders, and the absolute rule of heterosexuality. Men can only be appreciated when they are cruel, emotionless, and methodical in everything they do. In the case of women, they are supposed to be flurried in the face of sexual desire. Sex is dangerous and the otherization to men is impossible. All these have constrained people for a long time, hence generating changes. Women have enough of that style of thing and decide to pursue their own preferences. The development of economic solidified the foundation of such cultures.

4.2. The Core of How It Worked as Destructor to Male Gaze

Female dominated culture diminished the traditional norms of what men should be. Images of men in women -dominated cultures are all contrary to convention. The men in Otome games, idol talent shows, or boy's love literacy are extremely beautiful. These women-like features make them so badly treated in groups that consist of only men. Men feel offended and challenged in that they are not accustomed to these revolts of patriarchy, which is where the rebellious core lies in. The criticism it has drawn coincidentally illustrates its significance in working as a destructor of toxic social norms. Vulnerability and pretty faces are never a woman's privilege and men could feel at ease for not being in a dominant position in any relationship in that they are not born to be the ruler of the world. These cultures deconstruct the male gaze and the old binary fashion for gender boundaries.

It is of women empowerment in that it makes women feel dominant and safe. Women resort to these cultures for the sexual appeal of men and for the first time men are being consumed. That is impossible and insufferable in the patriarchal world with the consensus that only women or people with color could be objectified. Women had borne such oppression for most of history, but these cultures fought back. Whether these were new portraiture of ideal boyfriends, commands for male trainers to pursue their dreams, or aesthetic perceptions of the male body, all of these empowered women to dominate themselves and their relationships with men. Women could foster their own own criteria for what personalities of men are appreciable. Women could regain their subjectivity in relationships and cope with their sexual desire with no shame. The right to choose their ideas or beliefs now goes back to women. These cultures break the male gaze on females. It lays emphasis on women's potential in lots of areas and will ultimately bring benefits to women's lives. Women created their own cultures and this demonstrates their significance in being highly involved in the economy. Traditional consumption has changed, and it is no longer a monolithic media information. The medium of female consumption itself brings sense of identity and self-value realization, which demand in cultural "empathy" and "cultural identity" requirements. It is well worth game developers in the later in the process of practice to explore and attention[8]. In other words, it creates a virtuous market cycle to support women fight against with male gaze.

5. Drawbacks of Such Means to Anti-male Gaze

Creating a female-gaze-like culture is beneficial, but it also has drawbacks. To simply put it, it is a double-edged sword. It supports women to create their own cultures out of misogynistic narrative form, while it could also give women delusions that they can achieve ultimate success without any other effort. It brought enormous amounts of economic value, indeed, but those values did not all flow to women. For instance, the bosses behind those hot Otome games in China are all men. Because men are more likely to be exalted that high in their careers. The real beneficiaries behind those idol talent shows are male managers and male trainees. It did create huge economic effectiveness. But due to the inequality that was born in the social structure, women are still in a passive position at a macro level. In the end, it still benefits men more than women. Even worse, women could be easily degraded as controllable consumers. By propaganda and temptations, they could induce great consumption that is totally driven by irrationality. In the moral sense, it is precarious in that it could set traps for women to satisfy superficial delusions. In such women dominated cultures, women maintain an affective labor which is actually demanding. Women maintain an affective labor that is actually demanding in such women-dominated cultures. Women could never reach the goal of gender equity solely through women-dominated cultures. That is not enough in that sexism is pervasive to every area. Inequality anywhere is a threat to equality everywhere. From the theory of tittytainment, people could be easily blinded to this chill utopia[9]. Patriarchy lets women believe they are independent and dominant to persuade men to fit into their new norms, while in fact they are more like inventing a god. Men with toxic masculinity are ruler of women. Now men with pretty face are ruler of women. Idol fan groups could generate extreme zealotries and their sacrifices are suicidal. They, as consumers, treat their idols like gods which is a pathetic truth a lot of the time. To fully regain the subjectivity, women should firstly be exposed to enlightenment of feminism and gender equity issues.

6. Discussion

To put it bluntly, it could never occur in a society underlain by patriarchy. The clarifications are as follows: For starters, men do not respond to female gaze in the same way that women do to male gaze, which is crucial in distinguishing male and female gaze. Male gaze works so well because it is so consistent with patriarchy. Everyone, including women, is misogynistic to some extent. Male gaze narrowed the norms for women to follow, and women had no other option but to rely on this one-dimensional dogma. Because women are inferior, women must accept male gaze and behave accordingly. Women are only now being liberated from this male gaze demand, realizing that it is to expand their possibilities, tell their stories from a female perspective, and break the boundaries that male gaze imposes on them. Men would not surrender, because there are always multiple choices waiting for them. They would reject women's requirements of what an ideal man is because of their greater power in discourse. Men felt threatened, but that is totally in their control if they are still historically superior to women. Women could never harm men with their female gaze, and female gaze could never work in a patriarchal society. Secondly, the value of men would not be narrowed in patriarchy. Based on the male gaze, women's values are decided by men's needs. The criteria for women are simple: nurturance and sexual appeal. The female gaze, on the other hand, is characterized by its inability to restrain men. Women are struggling to widen their own values. How could they reject men's values? To say that the female gaze is possible is a new type of discourse trap. Men build their confidence and self-recognition through enormous aspects. career, intelligence, personality, appearance, and so on. There are so many possibilities in a man. Women are not so fortunate. Their sexual appeal to men and their ability to be pregnant are everything. Lastly, it should never be created for bring the real gender equity. Female gaze could not be constructed not only from the perspectives of logics, but also from the perspectives of morality. To break male gaze and build a world with

gender equity require us to embrace with each other peacefully rather than pointing fingers out towards people. The belief of feminism is about the liberation of all genders. Gender is not border that keeps us separately, therefore female gaze should never occur in that it reinforces our stereotypes of gender boundaries.

7. Conclusion

After the elaborative analysis in this paper, it is possible to draw a moderately comprehensive conclusion. Female-dominant cultures have a significant positive impact on anti-male gaze. They greatly satisfy women's needs for consumption and spiritual sustenance with the characteristics of emotional recognition, identity construction, and a safe place to show their desires. On the one hand, it destroys the single male narrative, and on the other hand, it empowers women and makes remarkable contributions to countering patriarchy and male-dominated culture to a certain extent. Otome games, idol talent shows, and boys' love literacy, together with other cultures, invite women to make their own preferences out of the male gaze. Women learn to create their own cultures, rule their sexual desires, and see men in aesthetic ways. But male gaze would not vanish for these therefore we should always bear our rationality in mind. These women dominated-cultures do not have the same power of male gaze and female gaze should not be constructed for both realistic and moral reasons. With an eye on our nature to entertain, we could diminish the male gaze and patriarchy by these viable cultures. There are still deficiencies in this paper. Affect theory is profound, but this paper only selects a particular angle of it. As for the fandom economy, consumerism plays a vital role and has essential connections to feminism. However, considering the coherence and consistency of topics, this paper did not elaborate on the consumption culture in the aspects. The analysis of it could be more comprehensive.

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