

Construction of Mutual Gaze

A Review of Studies on Male Gaze, Female Gaze, and Mutual Gaze

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ABSTRACT

This paper mainly combs the relevant research results of the male gaze, female gaze, and mutual gaze. Through the comprehensive analysis of the above-related achievements, we can see that with the progress of society and the prosperity of feminism, the female gaze has increasingly become a social phenomenon. However, this female gaze is just the transformation of the gaze object and the rebellion against the male gaze. In essence, it is still the reversal and strengthening of the patriarchal logical framework and the profound return to the power oppression implied in the male gaze. Although the female gaze has no derogatory and prescriptive power, it is more generally appreciated. This paper hopes to advocate mutual gaze. Women should play an important role in mutual gaze, deconstruct male power from the perspective of women's unique life experience, construct women's pluralistic, mobile and inclusive way of thinking and social outlook, and create a world of women's power. This review will help to expand and deepen the study of mutual gaze.

Keywords: *Mutual gaze, Male gaze, Female gaze, Feminism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Gaze is a kind of focused viewing, which reflects social rights and identity. The tradition of "see" and "seen" in western philosophy has attracted the attention of many scholars. Lacan, Foucault, and Giddens have discussed "gaze" from different angles, especially Foucault, a famous French thinker and philosopher, observed the social monitoring and discipline of madmen, patients, prisoners, and other "rational others", developed a very important concept - "gaze".

When gaze theory is used to explain social rights and gender identity, the male gaze is first concerned due to the rise of feminism. On the other hand, the emergence of the female gaze, as resistance to the male gaze, makes society more diverse. However, we need to stare at each other to seek gender freedom and female independence.

Based on this, this paper mainly collected and arranged the relevant research on the male gaze, female gaze, and mutual gaze to provide a basis for further research on mutual gaze in the future.

2. WOMEN IN THE CENTER OF THE MALE GAZE

The male gaze is evoked in gender and feminist studies in relation to patriarchal surveillance of women's bodies. Ewa Glapka offers a discursive approach to beauty, which it demonstrates by a detailed statistical analysis of women's experiences with the male gaze [1]. The essay studies that treat surveillance as a socio-cultural phenomenon by studying surveillance as a discursive achievement of social relation and identity. This essay focuses on the complexity and ambiguities of people's individualized methods of dealing with being looked at, using a Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis methodology and combining it with a discursive psychology viewpoint. Women's posture to the male gaze through culturally accessible discourses reveals equivocal places of agency and subordination within its breadth. The necessity of integrating a feminist poststructuralist viewpoint on gender relations with women's lived understandings of being entangled in them is discussed in this article.

The gaze is more than just looking, and it implies a psychological relationship of power in which the gazer is superior to the object being gazed at. Laura L.

Sullivan describes a sequence of meetings that occurred due to a World Wide Web hypertext project she completed in a graduate course on electronic culture [2]. She discusses the consequences of the male gaze's functioning in the Web context, focusing on instances of "cyberbabe" Web sites, using these interactions as a framing. She compares and contrasts how women are objectified on the Web to how they are objectified in other media such as cinema, and she criticizes the sexism of male cyberspace media theorists. She also investigates how The Long Hair Site, a Web site related to her tale, demonstrates the complexity of gendered interactions on the Web, recounting her own attempts to intervene in her specific example of cyber sexism and speculating on what constitutes resistance to such dynamics. She concludes that eradicating cyber sexism would need not just structural but also psychological changes. Both men and women must analyze how we are pushed to engage in sexism and learn to make other choices. She intersperses personal reflections and e-mails from men responding to her work on the Web with her theoretical investigation of the virtual male gaze throughout her analysis.

Li Yunchao uses the theory of male gaze in gender criticism to analyze the image of women in China's advertising works and the reasons behind this phenomenon and discusses how the image of women in advertising reflects the current social life and how it affects the subject construction of the audience [3]. Even if the audiences of certain products are female consumers, the images of women appearing in advertisements are mostly for women to self-examine. Through the female audiences' learning and imitation of the female images in advertisements, they experience the power pressure brought by the male viewers' gaze, which impacts the construction of the subject. If we look carefully, we can easily find that the images of women that often appear in contemporary advertising are housewives, young students, urban white-collar workers, socialites, and elderly women. The "ideal" viewer is always male, and the image of women always seems to be created to please or cater to men. Thus, the male gaze controls women and projects his own desires on them. At the same time, Li also argues that cosmetic advertising offers women the promise of "beauty." Still, this "beauty" must be displayed for men to "see. If their "beauty" is not "consumed" in the male gaze, the value of this "beauty" will be greatly diminished, or even worthless [3].

Wu Ying argues that in film and television productions dominated by male authority, where the male writer-director controls the camera, women become the objects of this gaze violence, the targets of men's gaze, fantasy, and discipline [4]. In recent years, we can always see that in male film and television productions, the female characters' costumes are light, thin, transparent, and revealing under the desire of male

eyes. Some works do not have obvious nudity and sexually explicit scenes, but the women basically have pretty faces and attractive bodies. As a result, women's bodies, which are visually striking and erotically infectious, become the objects of male viewing and consumption and the source of male voyeuristic pleasure. Under such a male perspective, the image of women is inevitably distorted, imagined, or demonized as "demoness" or sanctified as "angel". Women in the world of male images are never independent and creative subjects, and they are only objects to be gazed at, consumed, forbidden, and disciplined. Male images often obscure and dissolve women's real physical and psychological desires and their complex and unique life and emotional experiences, with their specific male vision and male power discourse.

In addition to the male gaze on the Internet and images, the male gaze in life will also impact women's behavior. Rachel M. Calogero investigated the effect of expecting a male or female gaze on appearance-related worries in 105 female students, which adds to the body of knowledge on objectification theory [5]. Before completing numerous self-report measures, participants were led to assume they would be conversing with a male or woman, which altered gaze expectation. The results showed that anticipating a male look caused substantially more body shame and social physique anxiety than anticipating a female gaze, but there were no changes in dietary intent. The discussion focuses on the pervasiveness of the self-objectification experience and the consequences of these results for future study.

The male gaze in the context of patriarchy also exists in the process of tourism. Annette Pritchard and Nigel J. Morgan give a critique of gender relations in the production and consumption of tourism experiences and images [6]. It starts with discussing society's gendered character before moving on to work on tourism and gender. Next, it expands on the notion of gendered tourist landscapes and considers the interplay between patriarchy and (hetero)sexuality and the language of tourism promotion. The article concludes that marketing language and imagery favor the masculine, heterosexual gaze.

3. MEN IN THE CENTER OF THE FEMALE GAZE

With society becoming more and more equal and open, especially the relative weakening of the influence of patriarchy, the female gaze began to appear. It began to have an important impact on masculinity and gender construction. Kevin Goddard explores the impact of the "female gaze" on masculinity formation. The paper tries to demonstrate that male identity is inextricably linked to the image of men portrayed by, or believed to be projected by, women. The study argues that men's identities are inextricably linked to their ideas of what

women demand of them, using examples from literature, popular culture, and gender theory. One method to overcome the power struggle inherent in gender stereotyping, according to the study, is to reconsider the gender-based role of language itself [7].

Kathryn Hemmann argues that while larger cooperations often control entertainment franchises, their fans contribute significantly to the mix [8]. In *dōjinshi*, or fan comics, female fans often present their own interpretation of characters and stories; In BL (Boy's love) fan comics, which presents the relationship between males, the female gaze has developed its own explicitly homoerotic readings and interpretations that contradict the underlying phallocentrism in many popular tales. In the context of active fan cultures, the interactions between texts and their readers seen in *dōjinshi* show how narrative production and consumption cycles have altered [8]. Because the components of increasingly globalized media mixes are so tightly linked, fan groups have the ability to make effective and constructive contributions to the media mix ecosystem.

With the globalization of capitalism and marketing, consumer identity has gradually replaced gender identity, and gender has been transformed into an object of consumption. Masculinity and femininity are no longer distinct. Wang Zhekai examines the use of the gaze mechanism on Li Jiaqi, one of the most popular webcasters in China, from a critical perspective of gender power structures [9]. Reviewing the existing research on the male gaze and its counterpart, the female gaze, this paper focuses on dismantling traditional gender perspectives by contemporary consumer culture. When masculinity tends to be fluid, the relationship between seeing and being seen that emerges from Li Jiaqi's transgender practice is evidence of gender fluid, consumer-oriented, interactive viewing mechanism that replaces the male-dominated, objectified voyeuristic traditional gaze.

Male celebrities serving as brand ambassadors or spokesmen for female cosmetics are becoming increasingly popular in East Asian nations such as Japan, South Korea, and, more recently, China. Li Xiaomeng conducted a study in the contemporary Chinese celebrity market and explored the present phenomenon of "Nanse Xiaofei", which refers to "the consumption of sexualized men" [10]. According to post-feminism, the change from "man gaze" to "female gaze," and the consumption of sexualized males, appear to be revolutionary in evaluating gender power. However, Li also argues that the conditioned neoliberal consumerist society still limits the autonomy and self-empowerment of Chinese female consumers. The research also claims that China's contentious "Nan Se consuming" culture represents the complexity and flexibility of contemporary postfeminist theory.

Roald Maliangkay looks at the reasons behind the new ideals of man and applies the theory of Baudrillard's object value system to this emerging phenomenon [11]. Korean male celebrities' fashion has evolved drastically over the last two decades. While the popular hero in movies and plays might still be described as a rough no-nonsense guy who talked with his fists and enjoyed the basic things in life until the early 1990s, his look has grown far more polished and stylish, his words more eloquent, and his hobbies far more sophisticated since then. This seemingly more feminine sort of male is commonly seen in advertisements, particularly for cosmetics. The fact that many Korean males have begun to adopt the new look might signal a shift in gender norms. However, despite the rise of a new type that contrasts with the old masculine one, women are nonetheless under pressure to adhere to an increasingly unnatural ideal of beauty. Women and men are still assessed, but the standards used to assess them are different.

In the new media era of the consumer society, women, who have gradually increased their economic status and sense of subjectivity, have begun to "consume male sex" and engage in female counter-gaze, openly releasing their hormones under the impetus of consumerism. Guo Yifan and Yan Jingjuan attempt to explore how patriarchal society has constructed women's gender under the gaze and analyze the resistance and problems of women's gaze in today's new media society [12]. Women's gender results from socio-cultural institutions, ideological constructs, and discipline under the male gaze. Based on the reality of the social division of labor and private ownership, patriarchal traditions create socio-cultural institutions and ideologies that rationalize the inequality between men and women through the hierarchical philosophy of binary oppositions and the power of the gaze from the patriarchal society to discipline and internalize femininity, so that the construction of gender is completed and sustained. However, the female gaze is subject to the collusion of capital and mass media and can only revel in the pseudo-real world. In reality, outside the pseudo-real world, women are still in a lost state surrounded by various kinds of hidden discrimination. Suppose we want to move towards the true gaze. In that case, we need to go beyond the framework of patriarchal logic and completely deconstruct and subvert the desire factor and unequal gender power relations in the male gaze. Women need to look at themselves and respect differences while building their own subjective identity.

4. THE EMERGENCE OF MUTUAL GAZE

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre proposes the proposition of "the gaze of the other" [13], arguing that one is caught up in being when one is in the world. The

gaze of the other is inevitable. "The gaze of others gives life to me through and to myself at the end of this gaze." [13] Supposes the existence of the phenomenon of the gaze is inevitable. In that case, the mutual gaze between the different genders at least brings men within the dominant gaze system to a certain degree of affirmation. In fact, men also gazed at others in the past: luxury cars, watches, and suits, the symbols of successful men, often appear in advertisements, and the masculinity of men was also caught in the construction of the gender binary. Therefore, looking at men through the lens of the male gaze may be necessary to break the construction of the gender binary and promote gender equality.

However, one may argue that to gaze at each other is to draw each other into the surveillance of Foucault's prison. Previously, only women were in the male gaze, and to draw men in as well merely changes the inequality of power between the sexes. Gazing each other does not destroy the system that regulates society but expands the influence of this system. For example, the thriving male consumer culture seems to break the reality that only women were gazed at, consumed, and commodified in the past, including men in the category of consumers, but does not break the objectification of people in consumer society.

In *On the Construction and Confrontation of Female Gender in Gaze Perspective*, Guo Yifan claims that in a consumer society, everything can become a commodity, and not only women but also men are objects to be consumed, objectified, and gazed at [12]. When the market wants to meet the needs of women, who are the dominant consumers, male celebrities are also the objects of gaze on the screen. In contrast, women have started to express their feelings openly and boldly from the silenced and suppressed position. In contrast to the traditional media's overemphasis on "muscularity," "manliness," and other masculine qualities expected by a patriarchal society and its domination of power suppression, "businesses are using fresh meat" and other white and tender male celebrities in accordance with the needs of female fans [13]. The male celebrities are made according to the precise demands of female fans, resulting from the commodification of women's needs. The female gaze has, to some extent, feminized and diversified some masculinity, which has contributed to breaking the gender essentialism and "liberated" some male groups that do not conform to the mainstream norms of patriarchal society so that they do not necessarily have to be "manly". The female gaze has been undermined by capital. The female gaze has been manipulated by capital. Capital aims to stimulate women's consumption, turning men into objects produced in the consumer society, symbolic commodities that cater to women's consumption aesthetics.

At the same time, Feminist film and television are often trapped in another puzzle: the skewed gender relationship goes from one extreme to the other. The female gaze replaces the traditional male gaze, and the traditional pattern of "strong male and weak female" is transformed into "strong female and weak male" [4]. For instance, in Ying Ning's film *Infinite Motion*, women are the absolute subject, men have become the passive "other" for women's needs, the flirtations deprive even their human rights of women such as "have you used my husband recently?" and "have I already used your husband?" [4]

While this approach of confronting men's power with women's power can completely subvert male centrism, it can also lead to another imbalance in gender relations. To subvert the traditional image of women, which has been "demonized" by the male culture, the director even goes to the extent of scandalizing and masculinizing women, but that's just another kind of "demonization" of women's reality. At the end of the film, the director lets the women out of the closed courtyard, but we don't know where they are going, or even they don't know where they are going, which is undoubtedly a blind march that loses its direction. Therefore, Wu Ying believes that feminist directors, who are deeply suppressed by the patriarchal culture, should also be wary of the tendency to overdo it. The radical confrontation between the two sexes will only re-oppose them. It is not the ideal state of existence, just like traditional gender relations, which do not collide with the original meta-opposition. Only when men and women reconcile, respect each other, recognize each other, and love each other equally can we build a harmonious and beautiful world of both sexes.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, this paper combs the relevant research results of the shift from the male gaze to the female gaze and the current more concerning research on mutual gaze. It can be seen that women cannot remain in this state, merely transforming from the object of the gaze to the subject, mimicking the way the male gaze operates to measure men. Because such a female gaze is apparently a rebellion against the male gaze, it is still, in essence, a reversal of the framework of patriarchal logic, a reinforcement, and a profound return to the oppression of power implicit in the male gaze. Unlike the internal logic of the male gaze, the female gaze does not actually have a demeaning, prescriptive power overtone but is more of a general appreciation. After resisting the male gaze, women should deconstruct male power from the perspective of women's unique life experiences, construct a pluralistic, fluid, and inclusive way of thinking and social outlook that belongs to women, and create a world with female power. This paper will be beneficial to the study of feminism and

mutual gaze theory. In the future, it will further discuss the responsibilities and roles of women in mutual gaze.

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