



# A Multidimensional Perspective on Cross-gender Videos in TikTok: Performance Strategies, Content Production, and Social Impacts

Jinlei Xing

School of Journalism & Communication, Zhengzhou University, Zhengzhou, China

2603007217@qq.com

**Abstract.** In recent years, cross-gender performances have realized a resurgence of popularity in short video platforms represented by TikTok, which has become a spectacle of gender performances in short video platforms. According to Butler's theory of gender manipulation to analyze the counter-performance, it can be found that the cross-gender actually serves as a kind of gender performance and identity shaping, which is a kind of alternative gender practice behavior. This paper explores the changing situation of cross-gender performance in short videos in terms of its content production influenced by the characteristics of the medium of short videos and the cultural dynamics of mass consumption represented by the CP culture. In addition, while providing a feast of audio-visual entertainment and breaking through the existing gender image, the cross-gender performance also presents the connotation of gender mobility and gender ambiguity, and provides us with new perspectives and ways to discuss and think about gender and social issues.

**Keywords:** cross-gender performance; content production; CP culture; gender issues.

## 1 Introduction

Cross-gender performance usually refers to the expression of another gender identity by wearing the costume of the opposite gender, imitating the speech and behavior of the opposite gender, and so on. The phenomenon of cross-gender has a long history and can be found in traditional performances in many countries, such as traditional Chinese opera art, Japanese theater, Kabuki, and Korean women's national drama, Western theater<sup>[1]</sup>, etc. Since then, cross-gender behavior has entered the film and television industry from theatrical performances, and has appeared in variety shows one after another. With the arrival of the short video era, cross-gender behavior has become popular again due to the characteristics of fitting into the funny, playful and reversed features of short videos, and has shown explosive growth, becoming one of the landscapes of short video platforms.

© The Author(s) 2024

Z. Zhan et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2024 10th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2024)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 858, [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-277-4\\_194](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-277-4_194)

The gender performances on short video platforms were initially similar to those in the past, mainly "men pretending to be women", and academics have also conducted a lot of research on male cross-gender behavior. Some studies have examined the typical male-female blogger "Xijing Mudan" and analyzed the mechanism of his gender image-making in terms of body imagery, discourse behavior, and scene plot. [2]Some studies note that gender reversal in TV talent shows may lead to confusion in viewers' perception of gender roles, and may even cause ethical dilemmas such as imitation; [3] Some find that cross-gender image-making is jointly accomplished by both performers and viewers. [4]In addition, based on the perspective of commercial marketing, some researchers believe that gender reversal is a hyper-sexualized gender performance that shapes one's social identity, and that the gender performance of male bloggers is a special kind of cultural production. [5]

However, looking at the short video platforms represented by TikTok, we can see that in recent years gender performances are no longer just "men pretending to be women" (men reconstructing women based on their own experiences), but also the phenomenon of "women pretending to be men", which has been neglected historically for political and cultural reasons, is also gradually increasing. The phenomenon of "women pretending to be men", historically neglected for political and cultural reasons, is also gradually increasing. In addition, with the rise in attention to gender issues and gender emotions, there has been an emergence of a category of short-video bloggers who parody the roles of men and women (i.e., a single person playing both genders), and whose main content is to show the romantic relationships between the two genders. In this paper, we selected the bisexual video bloggers with a high number of followers on the TikTok platform, who mainly focus on gender relations and emotional issues, as the research object, and used other single "men pretending to be women" and "men pretending to be women" short video bloggers as auxiliary references to analyze and analyze the content of short video blogs using textual analysis and participatory observation methods. Using textual analysis and participatory observation, we study and explore their gender performance strategies and video content production mechanisms, reflect on how this kind of cross-gender behavior performs bisexual gender manipulation, and try to explore the deeper social background and social impact of this kind of cross-gender performance videos.

## 2 Cross-gender Performances and Image-making in TikTok

According to social constructionism, gender can be described as a social and symbolic creation in which people grow into men and women after being socially constructed. Feminist theorist Judith Butler proposes the theory of gender manipulation (narrated behavior), which argues that gender identity is a gender manipulation of meaning practices about repetition and quotation. Gender is an interpreted object, there is no real gender, and bloggers perform through parodic behaviors and mimetic constructions, shaping identities through language. [6]

The cross-gender performance bloggers in TikTok perform gender performances through "men pretending to be women" "men pretending to be women" and even

"same-sex imitation" "by commandeering specific social and cultural resources, as well as gender-tinged body imagery, discursive resources, and ritualized landscape resources for image-making. "by appropriating specific social and cultural resources, as well as gender-tinged body imagery, gender-meaning discursive resources, and ritualized landscape resources for image building"<sup>[7]</sup>. By watching and analyzing the short videos on TikTok, it can be found that the bisexual playback bloggers follow other bloggers in their performance strategies, using clothing and accessories as the performance markers of gender, and realizing the performance and parody of gender through clothing, language, demeanor, makeup, and gestures.

Referring to TV drama plots and real-life situations, bisexual performance bloggers in TikTok have one person play both the subject with active/rational masculinity and the subject with dependent/emotional femininity, and by playing the socially recognized and established image in the performance style and performance field and repeating it cyclically, they portray the gender game relationship in emotional interactions. <sup>[8]</sup>However, unlike traditional gender performances, which tend to be ugly and curiosity-seeking, bloggers who focus on gender emotions are more likely to pursue the economy of face value, with face value and beauty becoming important concerns in filming, and the performance of dashing men and beautiful women becoming a major pursuit. Most cross-gender performance bloggers no longer draw attention to their images by playing ugly and strange exaggerated images, but focus on the atmosphere of the narrative content and the beauty of the image, to satisfy the users' pursuit of audio-visual pleasure.

### **3 Mechanisms of Content Production for Cross-gender Performance**

As a resource carrier with multiple styles, short video accommodates multiple groups and subcultural circles, providing full inclusiveness and possibilities for users' content production and content consumption. As social topics and popular cultural consumption dynamics change, the content production and expression of gender-reversal performances are also changing. As a result of people's attention to emotion and life records toward videos, and the intense competition within short video platforms leading to the content segmentation of short video categories, the topic of gender emotion has evolved from occasional mentions of counter-performances by counter-performances bloggers to the subject of videos featuring some counter-performances by some counter-performances bloggers.

In addition, "the pursuit of CP" (expressing support for one's favorite or supportive on-screen couple or cp) has become a typical phenomenon in the current society, and the pursuit of CP and explosion of CP culture consumption has made the CP culture logic penetrate into the production of short-video content, and the creation of CP topics has become one of the ways of short-video attracting traffic. After collecting and analyzing the comments with the highest number of likes in the gender emotion-themed videos released by Caro Lailai, Lord Jiugui, and Lian Jiazi<sup>[9]</sup>, it was found that, in addition to the adverb of "really", which is the most frequent adverb used to express

exclamations and strengthen the tone of voice, the top three words of the three bloggers' hot comments were, in order, boys, girls, boyfriends, girls, boys, sisters, boys, boys, boyfriends, boys, sisters, and boys, boys, sisters, and boys, sisters, and boys, sisters. The main categories of hot comments in the comment section are: discussions about the content of the video (e.g. misunderstandings, dates, acquaintances, quarrels between couples); users' sharing of their own emotional stories; playing with stems, such as the recently popular Wang Baochuan digging for wild vegetables stunt; praising the blogger's face, "Lai is getting more and more beautiful as a pretty girl! "; pursuit of CP, "I can't believe I love the CP between you and yourself" "I love all of your CP". The content and popular comments of cross-gender blogger videos reflect users' discussion of gender performances and the influence of social topics, popular "terrier" culture, and CP culture on the production of gender performance content.

#### **4 The Social Impact of Cross-Gender Performance**

Contemporary critical theory suggests that we experience the world with the help of a representational system, and that this representational system, even at a minimum, affects our perception of the world. As a cultural product, cross-gender performance videos containing perceptions and interpretations of emotional marriages, social and cultural perceptions and interpretations inevitably bring about certain impacts on the gender perceptions, cultural beliefs and social concerns of short video users.

##### **(i) A joyous feast of audiovisual culture**

Short video platforms create a landscape world full of images and symbols, and short video users gain pleasure and information through watching and consuming the imagery constructed by the media. Short videos mimic and exaggerate real-life emotional "mother nature", creating a CP atmosphere with handsome men and beautiful women falling in love, which makes users deeply involved and unable to get out of the entertainment field. Cross-gender videos provide viewers with "other people's lives" or the so-called "other me" (the other me in the world) through the interpretation of important themes in life: dating, meeting, games, traveling, dinners and other scenes of joys and sorrows in life. as a sample of fun. In the audio-visual feast and fictional narrative created by short videos, users can temporarily forget the tediousness and pressure of real life and enjoy the aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction brought by short videos.

##### **(ii) The breakthrough of Gender image**

Although the current gender role-playing performances encompass both the family and social arenas, and have created a relatively diverse range of role-playing images, most of these images are female images played by "men dressed as women". However, most of these performances are female figures portrayed by "men pretending to be women", which is actually a kind of male-oriented gender manipulation from a male point of view. Behind the entertainment performance of "men dressed as women" is the consumption and cultural suppression of women, although it also affirms women, but more often than not, it shows the negative emotional side of women. The gender performances of gender-reversed female bloggers provide a new performance and dis-

course space for the portrayal of female characters, and the image of women is no longer simply used as a tool for male bloggers to attract attention by playing up to the public's expectations. The gender manipulation of female bloggers and male bloggers enriches and complements each other. In addition to helping to break down and enrich the female gender image portrayed by male bloggers, the gender-reversal performance also enriches the mediated image of men, providing richer samples and possibilities for the image of men, and collectively contributing to the breaking down of the traditional stereotypical image of women and men.

### **(iii) The deconstruction of dichotomies**

Masculinity itself is a product of gender binary oppositions. Masculinity expressed through women, as well as gender fluidity and ambiguity brought about by male imitation of women, helps to deconstruct gender temperament and break the binary oppositions of gender temperament. Both men and women are in fact victims of patriarchy, and while traditional gender culture oppresses women, it also imprisons men, with gender temperament and gender norms binding both men and women.<sup>[10]</sup> Through the unity of bisexual play, the short video blogger's body is recognized as a field with both subject and object bisexuality, and the bisexuality blends into one, weakening the absolute distinction between women and men. Although the short-video blogger's bisexuality is helpful in breaking away from the original gender temperament, the use of social and discursive resources has not been able to transgress the social framework, the old gender order is still binding, and the effort to transgress the gender has not exceeded the existing discursive order and power, and the framework has always existed.

### **(IV) New perspectives on gender and social issues**

Gender issues have gained great attention in the Internet era, and social issues such as gender emotions, gender harmony and gender equality are constantly discussed in cyberspace, and gender differences and gender-related issues have become the main themes of the gender counter-acting performances. Short video platforms provide us with a new space and perspective to explore gender issues and related social issues. For example, Lian Jiazi's "Girlfriend's Freedom about Dress" discusses women's dress and the social objections it triggers, as well as women's stigmatized and objectified bodies. In this video, Lian plays the role of a female figure who suffers from dissent because of her dress and a boyfriend figure who understands, supports, and protects the woman. The comment section of this video has also seen some netizens discussing issues such as girls' dress discrimination and sexism, "Girls really have too much discrimination, I feel it deeply," "It's so hard to be a girl"<sup>[11]</sup> and so on, as well as a large number of female users who have aired their own boyfriends. Gender counter bloggers promote understanding between the two sexes by showing women's journey as well as men's protection and support, which offers the possibility of fun and softening the handling of acute gender conflicts and gender issues, providing a new way and path to deal with problems.

## 5 Conclusion

By observing the bloggers who perform bisexual performances in the TikTok platform, it can be found that such videos, compared to traditional gender performances, further reflect the socially constructed character of gender through same-sex resemblance. Overall, with the addition of female bloggers' gender performances, more discursive space for female characters has been established, and the female figure is no longer simply used as a tool person for male bloggers to clamor for attention, but provides a richer image of gender reversal. The combination of cross-gender performances and short videos creates a gender spectacle of social concern, and provides us with new ways and perspectives to discuss gender issues and social issues. However, the premise of many users' viewing of gender reversal performances is based on the recognition of the blogger's real gender, and only after that do they identify with the gender roles they portray. Thus, although cross-gender performances break the fixed perception of gender in traditional contexts and provide more possibilities for gender, it is still difficult for people's understanding of gender to be subverted through cross-gender videos. The excessive prevalence and proliferation of short-video entertainment spectacles has increasingly marginalized serious programs and issues, and the solution of various gender issues and social problems still requires the joint efforts of the state, platforms, producers and users.

## Bibliography

1. Benedicty Kokken Alessandra, Almudéver Chanzà Josep, Isaka Maki. Masculinized femininity of women characters on the Kabuki stage: Female Onnagata's "cross-gender" performance in the "all-male" theatre[J]. *Journal of Material Culture*, 2023, 28(4): 539-558.
2. Cai Hongquan. Gender Transgression and Reinvention: The Description and Reconstruction of Gender Image in the Self-media "XiJing MuDan"[J]. *Radio & TV Journal*, 2020(01): 167-168.
3. Wu Shiwen. Alert to the "Gender Reversal Style" in TV Talent Show--Analyzing the Bottom Line of TV Entertainment[J]. *Today's Mass Media*, 2010, (08): 179-181.
4. Wang Lei, Zhu Wenwen, Chang Bo. A study on the shaping and social tension of gender-reversed images in the media[J]. *Contemporary Communication*, 2018(01): 37-40.
5. Wang Tianle. Gender Performance, Cultural Production and Consumption--The Phenomenon of Men Pretending to be Women in Short Videos[J]. *Journalism and Mass Communication*, 2020(07): 88-95.
6. Judith Butler, translated by Song Su-feng. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [M]. Shanghai SanLian Bookstore, 2009.
7. Wang Lei, Zhu Wenwen, Chang Bo. A study on the shaping and social tension of gender-reversed images in the media[J]. *Contemporary Communication*, 2018, (01): 37-40.
8. Jacqueline Taylor. Encoding and Decoding Nonverbal Gender Display in Cross-Gender Performances[J]. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 2015, 9(2): 76-88.
9. The representative cross-gender performance bloggers, up to January 1, 2024, a total of 424 videos on gender emotions were collected (excluding invalid samples).

10. Liu Na, Ding Yixuan. Male Representation and Identity from the Perspective of Gender Theory: An Investigation of Gender Discourse Based on the TV Series Nothing but Thirty[J]. Journalism & Communication Review, 2022, 75(05):61-71.
11. From the Lian Jiazi Video Comments.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

