

The Sexualization of Men in Mass Media: A Case Study of the Series Films Tiny Times

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Abstract: A content analysis examined the sexualization of men in mass media. In china, this phenomenon is called “male sex consumption”, which literally means consumption of the male’s beauty. This study analyzed lots of advertising, TV reality shows, TV dramas and films especially the series films Tiny Times to explore the sexualization of men. The motivation of it include female gaze, capital gaze and interaction of the double gaze through observation. What’s more, we can find this phenomenon has triggered people's thinking about the return of women’s status. However, the patriarchal system is hard to shake through mass media.

1. Introduction

In recent years, we see more and more TV shows, films and commercials featuring good looking guys and targeting female consumers. In china, we call the phenomenon of sexualization of men “male sex consumption”, which literally means consumption of the male’s beauty.

The sexualization of men in the context of consumer society does not point to the act of selling the body and dignity to obtain economic benefits. First of all, it means that beautiful face, body shape, muscles, etc. Secondly, from the perspective of consumer culture, it means that the male image with superior appearance attracts attention and enthusiasm in mass communication, and then given the meaning of goods. The resulting fan economy directly stimulates social reproduction and capital appreciation.

We can find the trace of the sexualization of men easily in recent culture market because they are a guarantee of good ratings and beautiful box office. In this environment, the Chinese male image is divided into the following types. Firstly, “little fresh meat”, refers to young and handsome man between the ages of 14-25 and usually looks delicate and pretty with slim body. Secondly, “little puppy” have a clean cut appearance and always thoughtful, considerate and sweet. Besides, “little wolf” tends to be more masculine, usually showing a strong, muscular body, handsome and a little bit arrogant. What’s more, some male actors are called “old cadre” who have been struggling for many years, can't keep up with fashion trends, and the lack of lace news and they are usually stoic, integrity, stern and forbidden.

2. History of the sexualization of men and the series films *Tiny Times*

2.1 History of the sexualization of men

The pursuit of sexualization of men has a long history in China, but it is based on the different social forms of each historical period and the gender-dominant state at that time.

During the Western Jin Dynasty, there was a famous beautiful man named Jie Wei. People have already heard his reputation. The people who came out to see him were like a wall. Such an environment makes his weak body difficult to support, and eventually died. Another man, An Pan, a pretty man noted in the Western Jin Dynasty has a beautiful appearance and elegant demeanor. When he was young, he drove down the street. Even the old woman was fascinated by him, throwing fruits into his car and filling the car. In the 1930s, China had the first voted "Most Popular Movie Star". At the time, Yan Jin, who was so brilliant in his early 20s, eclipse the most famous actress Lingyu Ruan. In 1980s to 1990s, some male artists received fan letters to count in sacks. Like Leslie Cheung, Alan Tam, etc. In 2000, F4, in Meteor Garden, was a frenzy for the "male beauty" in the country and even in Asia.

The act of daring to enable male celebrities to endorse female products was originally developed by Japan and South Korea. In 1995, Japanese makeup brand Kanebo invited the popular male star Kimura Takuya to shoot advertisements for the new lipstick. The whole advertisement was filled with Kimura's sexy eyes and movements. The advertisement immediately caused a huge reaction from the society, and eventually the lipstick sold 3 million in two months, three times higher than expected. Since then, the selection of male stars for transgender marketing has become a popular trend in advertising development. Besides, in China "the sexualization of men" can be seen everywhere in TV reality shows such as *Go Fighting*, *Idol Producer* and *Super Boy*, TV dramas like *Legend of Fuyao*, *Nirvana in Fire* and *Guardian*, and movies such as *Hidden Man*, *Time Raiders* and *Never Gone*, especially the series films *Tiny Times*.

2.2 The series films *Tiny Times*

The series films *Tiny Times* tell the story of four girls who have deep feelings, different values and outlook on life, and experienced a great transformation in friendship, love and affection. Although the film continues to be criticized, but from its own production process and marketing methods, the use of "the sexualization of men" in this movie is at its peak.^[1]

Tiny Times 1: Reasonable use of the sexualization of men

In *Tiny Times 1*, we can see Reasonable use of male beauty in some scenes. For example, President, Ming Gong, cold and proud, the film continuously used three angles of the positive, side, and vertical to continuously switch the lens to show his first appearance. Secondly, Chongguang Zhou, who played by Xuedong Chen, sometimes pouts, sometimes closes his eyes, sometimes pokes his face, and sometimes spits his tongue, earning the favor of countless female fans. What's more, Yuan Gu bares his strong body in the bathroom, and the light pours down from the top of his head, which makes women's blood boil.

Tiny Times 2: Noting the market of the sexualization of men.

In *Tiny Times 2*, the director has realized that the male body can also be used as one of the selling points of the film, so the film shows the scene of Ming Gong's bare upper body, the super large close-up and the streamlined shooting of the male muscle curve, making the male body like a sculpture, it is very charming.

Tiny Times 3: the sexualization of men as a movie selling point

In *Tiny Times 3*, there are also some impressive scenes. During the trip to Rome, four sisters accidentally met Li Gu's cousin Neil. As a model, he also appeared in a naked upper body. Besides,

Shao Lu, who was transformed into a model for ME (a magazine company), was also naked when shooting a photo. The sound of the shutter was constantly fixed, and his body stayed on the screen for 15 seconds.

Tiny Times 4: using the sexualization of men perfectly

In the movie poster of Tiny Times 4, the five male actor are naked, and the dark light creates a delicate and gorgeous atmosphere, which hangs the appetite of the audience. And this scene may catch many women's eyes. When everyone gathered, Neil, Zhun Gu, and Ming Gong lost the game and were punished by Wanru Tang. So three beautiful men showed strong abdominal muscles and slender legs. The camera for taking off the clothes took 38 seconds.

3. Motivation of the sexualization of men

“Female gaze and Capital gaze has given birth to the object symbole of the sexualization of men respectively.”^[2] However, there is a huge interaction between capital gaze and female gaze, and this interaction between capital gaze and female gaze is the most point to analyze the motivation of this phenomenon.

3.1 Female gaze

In the traditional media age, women are affiliated with men and the content of media is also served for male audiences. With the change of the gender power structure, women began to rely on political and economic resources to stare at men and capital (the “agent” is a film and television culture industry), resisting male visual hegemony, and demanding that the cultural industry meet the demands of women's consumption.^[3]

From the perspective of female gaze, the series films Tiny Times can be seen everywhere in the detailed depiction of the men's naked body. We can see the description of various male color types such as “little fresh meat”, “little puppy”, and “little wolf”, etc. What's more, we can also see the homosexual elements and strong sexual cues such as the super large close-up shooting of Ming Gong's bare upper body in tiny times 2.

3.2 Capital gaze

“Gaze” as a power mechanism, the actor can be both human and non-human. Capital takes self-proliferation as the first priority, making "all elements subordinate to oneself, or creating organs that they still lack from society"^[4].

In Tiny Times, the role of capital gaze is fully exerted. The source of it which was adapted from a series of novels is an IP resource with great commercial value. Not to mention the starring of the film are either idol stars with high popularity in Mainland, Taiwan and Hongkong, or actors who are handsome and beautiful. In addition, there are also commercial selling points such as “men's appearance” and “homosexuality” in the movie. For example, in Tiny Times 2, the director focused on depicting the scene that Yuan Gu bares his strong body in the bathroom. In the end, the series films Tiny Times won a super-high box office of over RMB 2 billion. Even though the word-of-mouth continued to be criticized, it has to be denied that it uses the sexualization of men to the fullest, and perfectly reflects the capital gaze.

3.3 Interaction of the double gaze

Capital attracts female audiences by the sexualization of men and practices feminist consciousness through means of consumption (rather than anti-discrimination lawsuits, sexual

freedom movements, etc.). Female gaze refers to women's increasing social status and gradually become a powerful audience. The content of the mass media has changed from serving men to cater to the female market. At the same time, due to the abstract nature of capital gaze, female gaze becomes the agent and carrier of capital gaze, thus giving female gaze the dual identity of gazing.

The preference of women in "visual politics" is catered by capital, and the object of "the sexualization of men" is derived: the symbols of men's appearance. These symbols are produced by capital to serve for female audience, which meet the need of both capital gaze and female gaze.

4. Reflection: the impact of the sexualization of men

Is "the sexualization of men" a return to female subject status? Is "the sexualization of men" an improvement in women's voice?

4.1 A prosperity of culture market in objective terms

As a social phenomenon, the sexualization of men in mass media objectively gave birth to the formation of a variety of artistic themes. In the past, the main themes of art were to serve the male audience, or taking the male actors as the absolute center. But now there are a large number of literary works that serve the female audience, or taking the female role as a dominant position unconventionally. For example, in *Yanxi Palace*, the most popular Chinese TV drama in 2018, the heroine Yingluo Wei has passed all the way, relying on her own efforts to promote from the civilian to the Queen's position and many female audiences are hooked. There is also a series of homosexual dramas represented by TV drama *Addiction*, which undoubtedly enriches the types of Chinese literary and artistic works and promotes the prosperity of the art market.

4.2 A good time to promote the development of post-modern feminism

As a consumer, female discourse has received special attention in spite of the consumer level, which can also be seen as an increase in the status of women to some extent. Moreover, the sexualization of men has constructed a gender-equitable cultural value, which is a good time for women to reshape women's status and promote the development of post-modern feminism.^[5]

4.3 A method to obtain commercial benefits

In fact, the final purpose of the people like businessman or film producers who construct "economy of men's sexualization" is not to let women return to the main status, but to obtain commercial benefits through "eyeball economy" and "men's appearance economy." For example, many films and television dramas now use the model, "little fresh meat" and other handsome actor to attract female consumers to obtain high ratings.

4.4 An illusion word to deconstruct women's status

We should also be aware that in the mass media, the sexualization of men created by the media in the simulation world makes women's status not being promoted but is deconstructed. As Baudrillard said that in *Simulation and Imagination*, "the things of quasi-image and simulation have replaced the real and original things because of large-scale typing, and the world has become imitated." The media uses simulation techniques such as information and symbols to construct a world of illusions. The world is dominated by symbols to form a kind of "simulation culture". Feminism has become a kind of "super-reality" in the illusion word [6].

In the variety show, women vote for their favorite male players, and buy female products endorsed by male celebrities. In these processes, female consumers enjoy the limitless pleasure brought by the mimetic world constructed by media. “It creates an illusion in which women fails to distinguish between the real world and the mimetic world, and believes they can dominate men”

5. Conclusion

On the surface, “the sexualization of men” means that women can stare at men like men staring at women in the past, and women seem to turn from the object of desire to become the subject of desire. Once women were written in books, painted in paintings, photographed in movies, watched, purchased, and discussed. Nowadays, the man is printed on the cover of the magazines, becoming the hot topic in microblog and WeChat and becoming pastime.” It seems to indicate that women's desires and aspirations are treated equally, which means achieving equality between men and women.”[7]

In reality, the patriarchal system for thousands of years will not be shaken by the consumer society or the media, and the patriarchal center is deeply rooted in society.

Indeed, women will return to reality after consuming male images in films television dramas and fashion magazines, and they still have to face the social reality dominated by patriarchal culture.

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