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Pop/Subculture, Homosexuality, and Society

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Abstract

It is in recent years that the concept of homosexuality came into public attention in China. It is no doubt a sensitive topic and requires time and effort for the minority group to be truly accepted by society, especially under the social norm of the rather conservative China. This essay will explore the main media (pop/subculture of the concept's (homosexuality) diffusion and the mutual influence with the main audience, the young generation, as well as why the effort and effect of pop&subculture are insufficient in truly bring right and acceptance for the actual minority group of LGBTQ+.

Keywords

Homosexuality; Commercialization; Archetypal Preference; Mere exposure affect; Social conformity; Education in China.

1. Introduction

From anime, to fictions, to fan fiction, homosexuality has became one the most trending and popular topic among the younger generation. It's important to note the distinction between the "fandom" of homosexually themed medias (fictions, movies, anime, etc.) and the actual supporters of LGBTQ+ movements. (The spread of the concept of homosexuality that will be addressed in this essay is primarily the spread of such concept through pop and subculture, which refers to the former one.)

While homosexually themed anime increasingly comes into existence, it is also seen as a completely normal thing to "ship" two characters of the same gender who are not romantically involved, for example, from an anime, and write romantic fan fiction of those two characters expanding from the original work. Most of them are not homosexual themselves, yet they enjoy very much of the experience of watching or reading works revolving homosexuality. Fans sharing the same actions or interest came together in recent years and formed one of the largest social groups regarding subculture—specified and named in China as the "circle of fan creations" (closest translation to English would be a fandom). Then how did it spread so efficiently in a country where most sensitive is censored by the government and a conservative, for the most part, like China?

2. Reason for Popularity

One plausible reason for the popularity, or, in other words, the reason why the concept of homosexuality is becoming a trending topic among young people is mere exposure effect. Mere exposure effect is simply the phenomenon where the more people experience a stimulus. By "just makes the given stimulus accessible to the individual's perception" (Zajonc, 1968, p1 [1]), people attitude, doesn't matter positive or negative in the beginning, towards a new stimulus would eventually grow positive. A similar idea can be used on the concept of homosexuality. Prior to the 21 century, homosexuality was still under the censorship of the Chinese government. As a result, the concept of homosexuality and the group of LGBTQ+ were not accessible by the mass public. Entering the 21 century, the expansion of internet and mass media always finds a way around the government censorship, and, as a result, novel ideas flow

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into people perception and life. Is person sees such concept on the internet everyday, or hear from their friends everyday about it, no wonder they would also enter such fandom, therefore contributing to the army of expansion.

2.1. Primary Audience/ Comparison with Heterosexual Works

The primary and earliest form of the media carrying the concept of homosexuality is fictions. Homosexually themed fictions are usually romance novels. It is fair to make an analogy between homosexually themed romance fictions and the traditional heterosexually themed romance fictions. Note that the fandom of homosexually themed fictions are mostly female and only "9.5% of readership of romance fiction consists of men"(Maryanne Fisher Ph.D., 2010 [2]). The general characterizations of the two main characters in homosexually themed fictions are: both being exceptionally handsome, one being charmingly strong and masculine, and one being charmingly beautiful and feminine. The setting is quite congruent to most traditional romance fiction as the male characters of the story are usually charmingly strong and masculine and the female characters are usually charmingly beautiful and feminine. Therefore is reasonable to explain why a great number of female audiences are increasingly being attracted by homosexual romance fiction by referring the reasons why traditional romance fiction became popular. "Evolutionary psychologists have studied romance novels and found common elements that seem aligned with the interests of women seeking the perfect mate over the course of evolution." (Glenn Croston Ph.D., 2012 [3]). By making a contrast being the two male characters in heterosexually themes, the authors of such fictions manages to buffer any sense of discomfort regarding the sudden change in gender and satisfy the projection of emotions of female audiences.

2.2. "Contagious Diffusion" of Pop-culture Through New Media Due to Social Factors

With today's advancements in internet, online surfing becomes an inevitable part of like for the younger generation. Therefore, it's also inevitable for them to get in touch with new concepts, such as homosexuality in this case. FOMO, ostensibly triggered by the internet, is actually Internet is a great facilitator, along side with FOMO (the fear of missing out), making homosexuality a prevailing topic among young people. A similar idea is social conformity and peer pressure. Like in Asche's original study of conformity, when under a social context, people tend to conform to the majority, even knowing what the majority is wrong. People conform on account of wishing to create a harmonious environment, or to avoid rejection, or others are a source of information. (Myers Social Psychology, p284 [4]). To avoid rejection is also known as normative social influence, which plays an important role in this case. The social circle in which the concept of homosexuality circulates is often in a group of friends. Once the people who are interested in such concept becomes the majority, others would join in order to be in the same pace with the rest. This is especially powerful when it comes to the younger population, where following the trend is very important in their society. This is added upon by the factor of keeping harmony int he sense of creating a topic which creates a topic of discussion and reinforces the friendship.

2.3. The Role of Entertainment Industry in Persuasion/Diffusion of the Concept of Homosexuality

Another crucial factor contributing to the frequent and wide spread of such concept in recent years is peripheral route to persuasion, "the process by which attitudes are formed or changed as a result of using peripheral cues rather than carefully scrutinizing and thinking about the central merits of attitude-relevant information"(APA dictionary [5]). Recently, there have an increase in adaptations for homosexually themed fictions in China. Though not being explicitly addressing the concept of homosexuality, the fact that the show/movie is adapted from a

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homosexually themed fiction is enough for its audience to make the allusion. In order to get more views, directors would often choose popular idols to play the roles of the main characters, creating the peripheral route to persuasion, convincing people to watch on account of the nice appearance of the idols. In this way, not only fans of the original fiction would watch the show or the movie, the fans of the idols would also inevitably watch them, or even becoming fans of the original fiction and characters. After watching the shows, the two fandom would merge together, and contribute to the archive of fan arts or fan fictions, expanding the influence and popularity. Another group people, due to the fear of missing out aforementioned, would go on the internet and discover this trending show or the fan arts/fictions made by the original fans, and decide to watch it. A great portion of them would end up liking it, therefore expanding the overall fandom and repeating the cycle.

3. Pop-culture Being A Distractor and Created A False Archetype for Homosexuality, and the Derailment from Homosexuality in the Political Context

By being exposing to an increase in the concept of homosexuality in the mass media, the younger generation are becoming increasingly acceptance towards it. The fans of homosexual worlds does act like a buffer for society to accept LGBTQ+. However, the problems emerges where the concept of homosexuality that the younger generation are exposed to might not be the right or actual form of homosexuality, as the works often draw a clear distinction between the "dominant side and the subordinate side". As what was previously mentioned, the fictions or movies often characterize the homosexual lovers with great variation as they usually land on opposite side of the spectrum, having one with more masculinity and one with more femininity. Their age range are mostly teenagers or young adult, for most in their thirties. Besides, the authors often uses great amount of details to describe their respective aesthetic superiority. Since the media carrying such ideas are mostly romance fictions, homosexuals are depicted as people who prioritizes their love life. These factors contribute to the formation of a prototype in young people's mind regarding homosexuality: two young men/women, one always dominant, the other always being subordinate, both with extremely charming faces and physical appearance, are what homosexual couples meant to fall in love. In reality, this isn't always the case. It's apparent that not all human on earth have an extreme good look and are all in their teenage or young adult years. The opposite in aroma or position is not often the case as homosexual couples don't necessarily need to have one remain in so-called dominant or subordinate side. Therefore, the information young people are absorbing from homosexual works does not reflect the actual situation of the LGBTQ+ group. When fans are cheering for the ostensible homosexuality, the actual people of the group are still remaining in a position where they are not accepted for the most part. As the fandom keeps expanding, the fact that there isn't an appropriate increase in the movement of LGBTQ+ led by the fans. A common saying of some aggressive fans saying that the homosexual fictions and fan creations are a form of protest for LGBTQ+. True, but the most apparent mistake they are making is that they are protesting for fictional charming people, not the regular, but real people in society.

3.1. Shortcomings in the Chinese Education System That Caused Such Derailment and Deviation from the Political Concept

Under the current situation, China as a country is still conservative towards this novel idea. It's not the fans' mistake to misunderstand the concept. It's just that they are unable to accept the right set of ideas for homosexuality. Similar to sex education, the Chinese education system is trying to avoid these topic as they are considered to be too progressive and morally wrong within the system. However, sex education is improving in recent years; some Chinese

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elementary school are implicating textbooks for sex education. However, in a version of the textbook, it is stressed that opposite sex attract each other and see sex repel each other, making an analogy with magnets. It's understandable now why the younger generation misunderstand the concept, because they are effected by heuristic, shortcuts that people take when making judgements. Kahneman and Tversky's representative- ness heuristic has been explained as a way of causing stereotyping and mental biases, modeling (Pedro Bordalo, Katherine Coffman, Nicola Gennaioli, Andrei Shleifer, Harvard University, 2016 [6]). Bordalo and his co-researchers approaches stereotype in the way of social cognition, where stereotype is defined as "mental representations of real differences between groups [. . .] allowing easier and more efficient processing of information."(Hilton and Hippel 1996 [6]), which corresponds to representative heuristics. Therefore, in order to correct people's impression or stereotype on homosexuality, the education system should provide students with the right idea, instead of hiding them, leading to a misunderstanding due to the inaccessibility of such ideas.

4. Conclusion

The advance in new media and its rise in popularity in pop-culture does act like a buffer for the concept and the group of homosexuality. With the psychological phenomenon aforementioned that contribute to the wide diffusion of this progress concept in the Chinese society do hint at the tendency for China to be more opened in the soon to come future. However, despite it's efficacy in spreading the idea on a large scale, the young generation are being misguided by what are being presented in pop-culture regarding the reality for the actual minority group of homosexuals/ LGBTQ+. This could be detrimental for homosexuality political under the political context due to prevalence of homosexuality in pop-culture among the young generation and in society. Tracing back to the roots, in order to prevent such derailment from reality and truly assist the minority group of LGBTQ+, China, in the future, should implement proper education for the young generation in regard of the truth of sexual orientation and the reality of the minor group.

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