

From the Perspective of Social Media the LGBT Cultural Communication

Wanding Li^{1,*,†}, Jiahui Lin^{2,†}, Jiayu Zhang^{3,†}

¹ Zhengzhou Foreign Language School, Zhengzhou City, Henan Province, 450000, China

² RDFZ Chaoyang Branch School, Chaoyang District, Beijing, 100028, China

³ New Channel, Qingdao City, Shandong Province, 266000, China

*Corresponding author: guanghua.ren@gecademy.cn

† These authors contributed equally

ABSTRACT

The study sets up a research question that whether comments on social media affect their perceptions of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) group. It was a gap and there were no people to investigate this question in the past. Also, the study used Chinese social media, Weibo, to collect the comments of the LGBT group. And then, the study sets up a questionnaire interview to get data from different people. After that, the data was analysed by some charts and SWOT. These charts explored the relationship between ages or gender and word of mouth, which could prove that word of mouth influenced people's perceptions. The summary, which was reached by charts and SWOT, commented that social media could change people's attitudes toward LGBT groups and make them accept the LGBT group more. Moreover, this paper also proved the study's hypothesis that social media made people accept the LGBT group more is precise. What is more, the reason why the study had this research question is just that the appearance of the drama of Tanbi made the LGBT group become flourish. Moreover, the implication of the research was finding people's perceptions of LGBT and their factors of change.

Keywords: Social media, LGBT, Word of mouth, Questionnaire, Perceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) in China: LGBT group is a new thing for domestic people and that means people who are homosexual, bisexual, asexual, transgender, intersexual, etc. This group also equals the sexual minority group, which means people are different in the society in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual identity, or sexuality. The emergence of sexual minorities in China can be traced back to the feudal period and the recent period of the Republic of China, but at that time, sexual minorities were regarded as heterogeneous, and even people in China were ostracized and disgusted. Because of this situation, at that time, many sexual minorities, to live in the society, just intimate normal people and after they get married, many problems appear like the appearance of gay man's wives. However, in 2019, there is a turning point, the flourishing of Internet Tanbi drama, The Untamed, which talks about the culture of Boy's Love (BL), creating a chance for LGBT organizations and sexual minority culture to officially go into the public view.

1.1. Background

During the 21st century, science and technology are developing at a high speed so that the Internet goes into thousands of households, thereby the appearance of electronic products like computers, mobile phones provide people anytime and anywhere access to the Internet. And then, people can know more timely about information and news and search more various materials abroad at home. Therefore, after the 21st century, domestic people, who contact with the Internet for a long time, to learn more about the news around the world. After that, not only the domestic people's degree of accommodation and acceptance of new things has greatly increased, but also, based on the respect for all kinds of new things, views also become more different. Not only can people get access to a wide variety of information quickly and easily on the Internet, but they can also, express their views more boldly. In The Internet Age, because of the interaction of network information and the transmission of information, it is easier for people to find

“like-minded groups.” Moreover, the LGBT group is one of them.

1.2. Previous Studies

More people correctly understand the culture of Tanbi, but also, make it possible for people began to pay attention to the development of the drama of Tanbi and LGBT organizations. After the 21st century, there has been a lot of research on the topic of the culture of LGBT organizations, which provide us with more different information and knowledge of LGBT like Loist and Skadi in 2014 used sociology and queer theory to explore and sketch out the LGBT/Q film festival’s historical development [1]. A domestic scholar Wang Xue, in 2017, by using the theory of sociology, communication, anthropology to find out the path and turn of research on media and LGBT [2]. However, due to the emergence of dramas of Tanbi and its rapid development, there has been a lot of domestic research on them like Wang Xinyue in 2017 said the analysis of a specific soap, the network drama *Go Princess Go*, the first drama by using funny ways to talk about Tanbi culture indirectly, to find out the flourish of the subculture of the network like “Coupling (CP)” and “Queer” [3]. What is more, Deng and Han in 2021 used two ways to find out the reasons for why the current culture of Tanbi throughout their environment and then attract more people that do not know them before [4]. The first way is using the competition between Tanbi culture of Chinese and Japanese to find out the difference, and the second way is carding the history of literature to find out the development of Tanbi novels and then connect two ways to find out three reasons.

1.3. Research Gap

Although more and more articles are working on LGBT issues, the study finds a problem and gap that after the 2000s, no more papers focused on social media commentary on LGBT and Tanbi culture. Therefore, to fill the gap in this field, starting a research paper and study about comments on the culture of LGBT on social media. Explanatory research is whether comments on social media affect their perceptions of the LGBT group. Based on the majority of comments about LGBT are almost positive on the internet, the study has a hypothesis that social media makes people accept the LGBT group and culture more. Consequently, the study will use viral video or information, word of mouth and consumer theory, and SWOT to prove the correctness of the hypothesis. Eventually, after getting the conclusion of the research question and proving the correctness of the hypothesis, the study will summarize the limitation of method and research and demonstrate the hope of the whole research’s future development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Word of Mouth

Word of mouth is the process of telling people you know about a particular product or service, usually because you think it is good and want to encourage them to try it. Through word of mouth people get most of the client. The definition includes the words people say and related influence.

2.1.1. Development

A large and growing body of literature researched the public opinions. In recent years there has been an increasing amount of literature on comments and words of mouth. The serious discussion and analyses of the specific impacts emerged during several years about the effects of word of mouth.

In 2016, By using the spiral of silence theory and the social projection hypothesis, Kramer and Neubaum demonstrated that technologies offer several features that allow users to monitor other people’s opinions on public issues, the content on the internet can shape recipients’ perceptions [5]. A two-session experiment revealed that the perception of public opinion and the fear of isolation that makes people pay more attention to the comments posted on Facebook are interacting with each other [5].

In 2019, there were many related kinds of research about public opinions and their influences. However, they were from different directions and perspectives. In 2019, Meng and Li published a paper that word of mouth is the key to improving the ability of network public opinion guidance [6]. Social media is a particularly important carry for spreading information [6]. Acquaintance relationship and political influence of the guider themselves have an important role in influencing the guiding effect. The criticality and importance of content information on social media platforms can lead others the most [6]. In the same year, a specific theory that the new two-way interaction and social communication mode make quasi-social communication more practical is carried out by Huang Lina from the psychological level of receivers [7]. Huang Lina pointed out that audience identification is the psychological root of the formation of public opinion attitude, and analysed the mechanism of quasi-social communication on audience emotional identification and value identification [7].

The study of the structural behavior of word of mouth was researched by Zhang Yao. He found that due to the universality and conformity of the recipients in the Internet age, online film and television commentary plays a significant guiding role for the majority of the audience [8]. At the same time, in a highly emotional society, it also causes the phenomenon of “discourse violence” in

online film and television reviews. The media attribute of online film and television commentary endows everyone with equal discourse rights and makes everyone possible to become a film and television critic and post opinions [8].

In 2019, This question is further discussed in detail, a group including Kramer and others demonstrate that peer comments indeed alter the emotional effects of the video clip [9]. Negative words lead to a reduced sense of elevation by varying the type of video like the unity of humankind, portrayals of human kindness, funny videos, and valence like positive, neutral, negative of peer reactions [9].

2.2. Cognitive Theory

In 2014, Warren W. Tryon came up with the definition of cognitive theory 2014. Cognitive things involve thinking about the thoughts, knowledge, beliefs, and intentions of others, whereas effective people involve thinking about and experiencing the emotions of others [10].

2.2.1. Development

An early paper is to determine what elements can affect cognition. Lee and Chun in 2016 compared the latitude of acceptance toward online comments and participants' willingness to speak out online [11]. Although they found there was an increase that the comments themselves becoming negative only among people with negative prior attitudes, the change was not detected among people with positive prior attitudes [11].

Malaysia is an A representative area about studying this topic in Asia. In 2019, Mokhtar and others started to understand how people use social media as a way to communicate and disseminate information to achieve their needs and gratifications with the use of gratifications theory [12]. Besides, they also found that social media have played important roles in disseminating information in Malaysia, as well as in shaping the minds of Malaysians along with the spreading of people movement in Malaysia [12].

Research aiming to find the psychological effects of online hate speech and to highlight the strong negative impact on people's cognition of this phenomenon was studied by Oana and Maria in 2021 [13]. They showed that the result of a vast amount of hateful content flooding them never would be changed, no matter how the constant effort of social platforms to moderate, flag and ban hate posts [13]. Hate speech and offensive material online, in particular, are not easy to define and may include a wide spectre of expression. They thoroughly accounted for the nature and intensity of the effects of hate speech requires distinguishing various shades of

hate speech targeting different groups and their subsequent effects [13].

Deng and Han in 2021 put forwards a new idea about China [4]. In recent years, more cultural works have been adapted into films and TV dramas, so that the vast audience began to understand different cultures. They choose adapted works represented by Chen Qing Ling (a BL film in China) as a sample. In 2019, it set off a rating frenzy at home and abroad, allowing the wide audience outside the culture circle to have a deeper understanding of culture [4].

Because of all that has been mentioned so far, the useful theory of this paper is the role of word of mouth in spreading and communication, the feature of comments on social media, and how people are influenced by others or public opinions during reading the contents. In that literature, public opinion plays role in many aspects of people like behavior, psychology, emotions, and so on. It is also known that cognition can be influenced by affecting behavior, mentality, and so on according to cognitive theory.

2.3. Gap

As technology rapidly increases and the information age has expanded, instead of just focusing on effects, people should think about how different comments on social media could be active in the change of perception, attitude, and cognition of people for not common cultures. As a niche and a little sensitive culture, it is easy to be distorted because of the benefits or grabbing attention, then People will be incited or misdirected.

Based on above situation, hypotheses can be made as followings:

Hypothesis 1 Young people will be more attracted by LGBT research.

Hypothesis 2 Females show a higher acceptance of LGBT suture than male.

Hypothesis 3 Social media contribute to the development of the LGBT group.

3. METHOD

The research conducts a questionnaire that mainly finds out how the comments on Weibo affect people's attitudes towards LGBT people. It is an internet survey that followed the idea of The National Center for Biotechnology Information: questionnaire survey can help collect a large amount of data within a certain period, and can support the result of accurate qualitative data [14].

3.1. Sample and Experimental Design

117 participants participated which aged from 12-40 years old. All subjects were joined the online

questionnaire voluntarily. The hypotheses were tested through an anonymous online questionnaire. The survey was enabled to access through the designers' moments and the internet. The questions are the same for each participant.

The testing tool is the online questionnaire. United Nations once held an online questionnaire <EU LGBT survey> contains 10 sections addressing different issues for the LGBT group like whether they were being discriminated against in several situations [15]. The format of separating questions for different contents was implied. It is divided into 3 parts: personal information including age and gender, the way of hearing the LGBT (multiple choice question), and the Likert scale with a scale of 1(yes) -3(no).

4. RESULTS

117 subjects participated voluntarily and their results were all collected. The result got the conclusion that more percentages of the participant are aged under or around 18 years old.(See Figure 1) Their average age was 18.85 years old. Supported by <Changing Media and Changing Minds: Media Exposure and Viewer Attitudes Toward Homosexuality>, the younger participants with higher media levels had more positive attitudes towards homosexuality, in other words, the younger participants were more accepting of homosexuality and the news related to it [16]. Thus the hypothesis of young people are more attracted by LGBT research is proved.

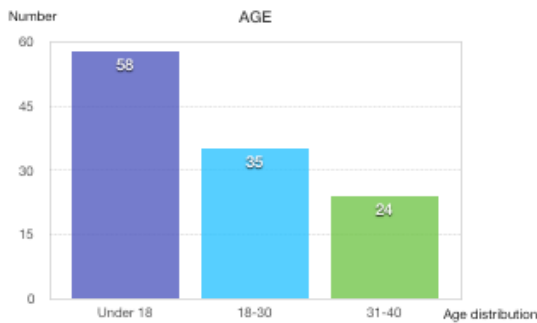


Figure 1 Age distribution of the participants.

Secondly, the result indicates the difference between gender, and this biological factor could explain the difference in cognitive processing between males and females. In the research, 71.3% of participants were female. (See figure 3) Based on the theory of the differences in empathy between males and females, it is argued that women are more empathetic while men are more systematic [17]. A previous study researched a brain scan. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a medical imaging technique that uses magnetic fields and computer-generated radio waves to create detailed images of the human body. A special type of MRI is a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), (see

Figure 2). It's specifically used to detect brain activity [18].

The ability to empathize uses the mirror nerve theory. In simple terms, by the effect of behavior, emotion, or cognition of the object around it, the action or emotion is copied, so that it has the same behavior, emotion, or cognition, like looking into a mirror, neurons fire together and wire together [19, 20]. A study from the University of Colorado found that women had larger volumes of grey matter in areas of the posterior lower frontal and anterior inferior parietal cortex, which are closely associated with mirror neurons [21]. In other words, women are more empathetic than men. It represents that females are more likely to show an interest in acceptance to the LGBT group. Therefore, the percentage of female participants is greater is reasonable and proves the second hypothesis.



Figure 2 Image of fMRI [22]

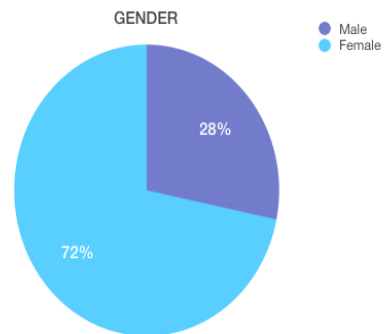


Figure 3 Gender distribution of participants

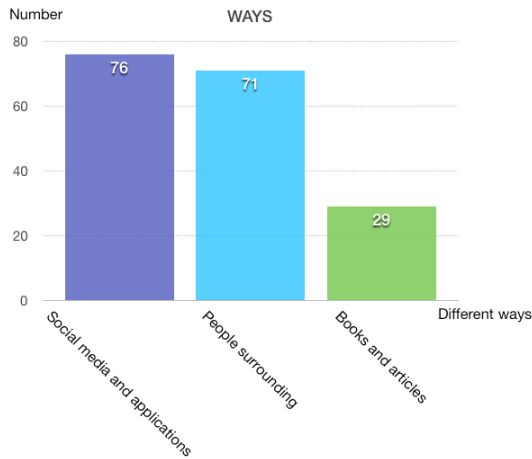


Figure 4 Diagram of how participants learn about LGBT

Thirdly, the main way of the participants to study LGBT at first were social media (60.9%) and their surroundings (65.2%). 64.3% of participants showed a more understandable and respectful attitude to LGBT nowadays, while 26.1 % still keep a neutral side. (See Figure 4) In recent years, there have been a series of dramas about LGBT culture in China, many of which have attracted the attention of the media in domestic and abroad. Some of the most popular series adapt LGBT culture in the subculture field into mainstream culture widely accepted by the audience, which plays an important role in the construction of LGBT culture. As it is getting more and more popular recently, the portrayal of LGBT in the media is produced simultaneously.



Figure 5 Diagram of participants' attitudes to LGBT

On Weibo, there are positive and negative comments for the TV series or films about LGBT culture. Participants' original attitude are collected as the baseline. (See figure 5) According to the participants, 60.9% saw more supporting information rather than negative words, and 20.7% heard more negative voices. (See figure 6) According to the experiment, implying to the research, people's attitudes and acceptance of the LGBT group

could be changed by the comments they've given from Weibo [23-26]. 79.1% of the participants chose that their mind was changed due to the words of mouth. (See figure 7) This proves our hypothesis that social media played a role in the development of the LGBT group.

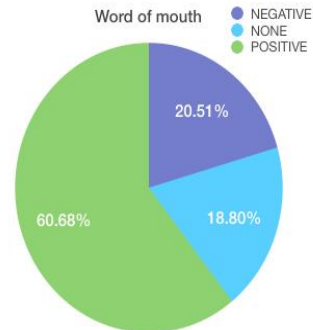


Figure 6 Diagram of comments about LGBT participants saw

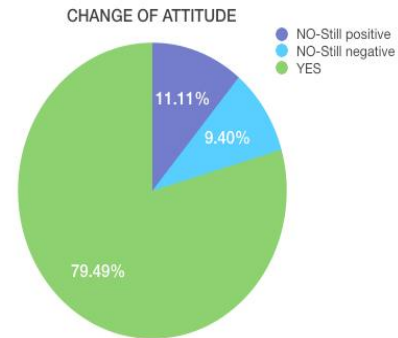


Figure 7 Diagram of whether participants' attitudes to LGBT change

5. DISCUSSION

By screening on Weibo, the study found that although most of the comments on the LGBT group were respected and understood, there still had some negative comments. These negative comments represent people's attitudes that they do not understand and support the LGBT group. Because of this situation, the study starts a questionnaire interview and gets 117 answers to six interview questions. After getting some charts by questionnaire interview's answers, the research uses SWOT to conduct a detailed analysis. Therefore, the result of the study can answer the research question of the study: why comments on social media affect their perceptions of the LGBT group. What is more, the data of the questionnaire interview also conform to the hypothesis of the study: social media makes people accept the LGBT group more.

5.1. Weakness

Although the conclusion of the study can well demonstrate the research question of the study, there are

some problems. That is because other previous studies and researches of some domestic and foreign scholars have the professional positioning and accurate research methods for their study. Thus, other studies and researches have some accurate support to their study's research questions. Thereby, this study needs to solve these problems. For example, what kind of social media comments have an impact on what kind of large-scale users or social group, what specific examples can be written in the research question to help readers quickly understand the significance and application of study and choosing to use more methods to analyze the same conclusion with the permission of ability and time.

5.2. Limitation

To put it in a nutshell, the study in this paper only makes a rough summary and statistics of the comments on one kind of Chinese social media, Weibo, during the 21st century. The questionnaire interview is made in a small range of people. Therefore, the study's data and conclusion have some certain limitations on the research's limited area, time, and object. In addition, the conclusion of the study does not have strong support. Therefore, the research hopes that in the future, some researches and studies, which take LGBT as the direction and the impact of social media comments on social groups as the topic, can be improved in the aspects described above.

6. CONCLUSION

In an information age with the rapid development of the Internet, social media is gradually becoming the main way for people to obtain information. Because the Internet is a free space, including people's comments on things, these comments are very subjective, and even to attract traffic. There will be some fiction and exaggeration. When browsing social media websites, people can see other people's attitudes towards certain things, so their attitudes may be biased by what others say.

As for LGBT culture, it is a very minority culture in China and is not particularly accepted by the public. Many people think it is against ethics and not in line with Chinese tradition. In books, movies, and TV shows about LGBT culture, first, some people make bad remarks on social media to smear and belittle these works without knowing about them. Second, under the influence of China's traditional national conditions, some people view things with preconceived notions and make comments with colored eyes that discriminate against minorities. It is easy for the rest of the public to misunderstand and turn nasty. The research question explored in this article is whether public opinion on social media will affect people's perception of LGBT culture.

By reviewing the origin and development of word of mouth and cognitive theory, it is found that word of

mouth affects different aspects of cognition, including psychology, action, and acceptance. To study this problem, this paper made a questionnaire to investigate the number of positive and negative comments on LGBT in social media platforms and whether people's attitudes will be affected by the comments on social media. The conclusion is the same as the hypothesis. There are indeed some people who change their attitude towards LGBT culture because of the comments they read.

In the discussion, this paper points out that public opinion on social media or Word of mouth plays a huge role in influencing people's cognition. First of all, for people who do not know when they see the LGBT culture can form a good or bad first impression after comments. Secondly, because the media forms of inclusion and diversity and the development of science and technology, text picture video and so on exist the possibility of a secondary editor, mixed with some from interests rather than their real idea of malicious comments. It is easy to take a partial view, even affect people's behaviour and psychology, resulting in network violence and other malignant events.

Future measures can consider to raising awareness on the topic and emphasize new healthier coping mechanisms. Social media algorithms training could be used to identify better, classify, and censor online content. In addition, the development of LGBT culture could be realized by people properly and avoid people to be guided by others' comments.

REFERENCES

- [1] Loist, S. (2014). Queer film culture: Performative aspects of LGBT/Q film festivals (Doctoral dissertation, Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky).<https://ediss.sub.uni-hamburg.de/handle/ediss/5861>
- [2] Wang, X. (2017). From "Identity" to "Cultural Identity": The Path and Turn of Research on Media and LGBT. *Journal of Shanxi Teachers University, Social Science Edition* 5: 85-89.
- [3] Wang, X. (2017). From the perspective of gender, the gender carnival of the network drama "Go Princess Go". *Journal of Chinese and Foreign Communication*, 35: 9.
- [4] Deng, N, Han, M. (2021). Tanbi culture of "out of the loop": an overview of the development of domestic Danmei culture. *Journal of Chongqing University of Science and Technology, Social Sciences Edition* 01:94-98. DOI:10.19406/j.cnki.cqkxyxbskb.2021.01.017
- [5] German, N., Krämer, N. C. (2017) Monitoring the opinion of the crowd: Psychological mechanisms underlying public opinion perceptions on social

- media. *Media Psychology*, 20.3: 502-531. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2016.1211539>
- [6] Meng, S.J., Li, J.F. (2019) Influencing Factors of Public Opinion Guidance Effect of Social Media -- An Empirical Study Based on the Perspective of Guiding Subject. *Journal of Xi' a Jiaotong University (Social Science Edition)*, 3: 106-115. DOI:[10.15896/j.xjtuskxb.201903013](https://doi.org/10.15896/j.xjtuskxb.201903013)
- [7] Huang, L.N. (2019) Quasi-Social Communication: the Psychological Path of Public Opinion Guidance in Social Media Era. *Editorial Friend*, 12: 53-56. DOI:[10.13786/j.cnki.cn14-1066/g2.2019.12.009](https://doi.org/10.13786/j.cnki.cn14-1066/g2.2019.12.009)
- [8] Zhang, Y. (2014) A study of online Film and television criticism in Contemporary China. *Ji Lin University Department of Philosophy and Humanities*.
- [9] Krämer, N. C., Neubaum, G., Winter, S., Schaewitz, L., Eimler, S., Oliver, M. B. (2021). I feel what they say: the effect of social media comments on viewers' affective reactions toward elevating online videos. *Media Psychology*, 24(3): 332-358. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2019.1692669>
- [10] Coulacoglou, Carina, and Donald H. Saklofske. *Psychometrics and psychological assessment: Principles and applications*. Academic Press, 2017.
- [11] Lee, M. J., Chun, J. W. (2016). Reading others' comments and public opinion poll results on social media: Social judgment and spiral of empowerment. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 65: 479-487. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.007>
- [12] Mokhtar, M. F., Sukeri, W. A. E. D. W., Abd Latiff, Z. (2019). Social Media Roles in Spreading LGBT Movements in Malaysia. *Asian Journal of Media and Communication (AJMC)*, 3(2): 77-82.
- [13] Ștefăniță, O., Buf, D. M. (2021). Hate Speech in Social Media and Its Effects on the LGBT Community: A Review of the Current Research. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, 23(1): 47-55. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.21018/rjcp.2021.1.322>
- [14] Jenn, N. C. (2006). Designing a questionnaire. *Malaysian family physician: the official journal of the Academy of Family Physicians of Malaysia*, 1(1): 32.
- [15] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2013). *EU LGBT Survey: European Union Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Survey: Results at a Glance*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- [16] Gonta, G., Hansen, S., Fagin, C., & Fong, J. (2017). Changing media and changing minds: media exposure and viewer attitudes toward homosexuality. *Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research*, 5(1): 5.
- [17] Margalit, L. (2015). Men systemize women empathize. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/behind-online-behavior/201507/men-systemize-women-empathize>
- [18] Mayo Clinic, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, (2021). MRI. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/mri/about/pac-20384768>.
- [19] Rizzolatti, G., & Craighero, L. (2005). Mirror neuron: a neurological approach to empathy. In *Neurobiology of human values*. pp. 107-123. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. DOI:https://doi.org/10.1007/3-540-29803-7_9
- [20] Christov-Moore, L., Simpson, E. A., Coudé, G., Grigaityte, K., Iacoboni, M., & Ferrari, P. F. (2014). Empathy: Gender effects in brain and behavior. *Neuroscience & biobehavioral reviews*, 46: 604-627. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2014.09.001>
- [21] Kirkland, R. A., Peterson, E., Baker, C. A., Miller, S., & Pulos, S. (2013). Meta-analysis Reveals Adult Female Superiority in "Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test". *North American Journal of Psychology*, 15(1).
- [22] Rutgers Brain Health Institute, Rutgers University, (2012). Center for Advanced Human Brain Imaging Research (CAHBIR). <https://brainhealthinstitute.rutgers.edu/centers-at-bhi/human-brain-imaging-center/>.
- [23] BB3 Admin. (2011) "The Rice Experiment - How Your Words Create Reality?" <https://www.billybeck.com/mental-conditioning/the-rice-experiment-this-will-blow-your-mind>.
- [24] Spiegel, A. (2012). Teachers' expectations can influence how students perform. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2012/09/18/161159263/teachers-expectations-can-influence-how-students-perform>
- [25] Elizabeth Hopper, (2019). The Milgram Experiment: How Far Will You Go to Obey an

Order? <https://www.thoughtco.com/milgram-experiment-4176401>.

- [26] Rowe, D., Ng, Y. C., O' Keefe, L., & Crawford, D. (2017). Providers' attitudes and knowledge of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender health. *Federal Practitioner*, 34(11): 28.