



# Role Performance and Self-Identity of Transgender Bloggers in Bilibili

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**Abstract.** Relying on the practice of social media, individuals can jump out of the geographical layer and construct a flowing performance space based on interest and relationship in the way of self-performance. From the perspective of the theory of Dramaturgical and the research method of network ethnography, this paper finds that the transgender bloggers of Bilibili present three characteristics in the social media role performance: exquisite performance image, positive performance content and boundary breaking performance space. On this basis, they complete the triple construction of self-identity through personality construction, relationship interaction and collective behavior adjustment. In addition, the training of social gender norms makes the dynamic game phenomenon between “other gaze” and “self-expression” appear in the process of constructing self-identity of transgender bloggers, showing the role tension of collision of values.

**Keywords:** transgender bloggers · Dramaturgical Theory · Character Performance · self-identity

## 1 Introduction

Laurel Hubbard, the first transgender athlete from New Zealand to compete in women’s weightlifting at the Tokyo games in 2021, has generated a lot of buzz. The dislocation between the inherent power concept under the physiological gender concept and the changing gender concept under the psychological gender concept makes the society to challenge the traditional gender social role of this group.

On traditional media platforms, vulnerable groups, including the transgender community, often rely passively on “transgressions” Behavior comes into the audience’s view. Confined to the “gaze” perspective of “deviant” narration, the group image is “stigmatized” and “labeled”, such as “abnormal”, “sick”, “transsexual” and other demonized and pathological stereotypes, as well as “unfilial”, “disgraceful” and other stigmatized solidified labels affect public cognition. With the development of social media, this kind of value shield is gradually deconstructed. Social media not only breaks through the time and space boundaries of time and place, but also breaks down the divisions of race, class and culture, enabling the social visibility of sexual minorities to increase with their active social media practices. Especially in the networked society, the young generation

of transgender people's identification with their own group and active resistance to prejudice and stereotype make the media practice of transgender individuals show initiative and positive characteristics different from other writing. On this basis, they reshape their social roles and self-identity.

Erving Goffman saw society as a stage and life as a theater. The main content of Goffman's theory of parodic drama is to study the logic of presentation and rules of interaction between individuals, drama groups and their relationships, in order to explain the definition of situations established and maintained through impression management strategies in social interaction. By "characters", we mean pre-determined modes of action that are developed during the exhibition and can be re-presented and demonstrated on other occasions [1]. The so-called "showcase" refers to all the activities of a particular participant in a particular occasion and in any way to influence any other participant. The spontaneity, anonymity and interactivity of social media are constantly reshaping the practice of role presentation. The image construction, behavior motivation and interaction mode of individuals in social networks have changed, which further stimulates the depth and breadth of role presentation.

From the perspective of drama-parodies theory and the research method of network ethnography, this paper examines the media practice and Role performance of transgender bloggers and tries to solve the following problems: 1. How do transgender bloggers present themselves in character shows? 2. How to construct self-identity in the practice of role presentation? 3. Is there a collision of values in the process of constructing self-identity of transgender bloggers? If so, what are the specific manifestations of the collision of values?

## 2 Literature Review

Internationally, the word "Transgender" was first proposed by Virginia Prince, an American scholar, in 1970. It describes "changing one's gender permanently through public self-expression without resorting to genital conversion" [2]. The person; In the early 1990s, Leslie Feinberg expanded the definition to include anyone facing gender oppression in transgender Liberation: A Movement; This is how the term is defined by the Digital Transgender Archive, an online portal set up by Northeastern University [3]: "It is a broad term used to describe individuals who identify and express their gender in ways that transcend binary and fixed gender norms through self-identification, self-presentation, behavior, clothing, body modification, and social interactions. "

In the foreign studies on transgender people, the 1950s centered on the professional field of psychology and psychiatry, mainly studying the symptoms of "cross-dressing" and "intersex patients", such as the case report of cross-dressing in Klinefelter's syndrome written by Walter et al. [4]. At the beginning of the 21st century, with the development of "depathification" of transgender, the research focus gradually shifted from the treatment of mental illness to the study of self-identity in the social dimension of gender and sexuality. For example, Budge believed that social support or lack of support would affect the ability of transgender youth to explore, understand and maintain their own identity [5]. Since 2010s, with the development of social media and digital activism, research on "media" and "Transgender bloggers" has become a hot topic of

Transgender research in foreign academic circles. In the former study, Billard et al. studied the expression of transgender individuals and identity in mainstream Newspapers in the United States, and found that mainstream newspapers had limited coverage of this group, and there were non-legalized expressions that affected the body political role and public perception of this group [6]. Medium of the latter research mainly around the transgender blogger in practice of the stereotype and social rights for, such as Brandon Miller of the content of the YouTube platform across sex blogger as an education tool, can help guide the same across gender identity, the audience, also can increase the mainstream audience's perception of transgender theme, And to increase understanding of transgender people's struggle with discrimination [7].

Domestic studies on the transgender community started later. In the early 21st century, scholars studied the "transgender performance" in literature and film and television works from the perspective of art aesthetics. For example, Lai Lijie and Chen Chen studied the "Tris", the first "transgender" film in Chinese films. The film shows the struggle and resistance of transgender people and everyone around them as they search for their own identity [8]. In the past decade, sociology and communication studies have focused more on the media image and self-identity of the transgender community. In the former study, Liu Jiarong conducted a framework analysis of the trans topic reports on Thepaper. cn and found that the media image shaping of the trans community has changed, with negative images being downplayed and "victims", "rights protection" and "positive typical" images appearing frequently [9]. In the latter study, Du Yao et al. conducted a focus interview with 5 transgender people in Nanjing colleges and universities, and found that a culturally inclusive school environment provided breathing space for transgender college students in a situation of broken family support [10]; In addition, subcultural fields also provide space for transgender people to pursue self-identity. For example, Wang Songdi studied the practice of gender role identity of adolescents in cross-dressing Cosplay, and discussed adolescents' active resistance to traditional gender norms and deconstruction of binary gender division [11] and so on.

Therefore, there are some similarities and differences between domestic and foreign researches on transgender community: what is common is that they both pay attention to the media image and self-identity of transgender people. The difference is that the research on transgender performance practice in China mainly focuses on the virtual field which is opposite to the real society, while foreign countries attach importance to the research on the real field, especially the active performance of transgender people on social media platforms. Therefore, from the perspective of the discipline of communication, it is necessary to study the practice of social media performance and self-identity of transgender groups in reality based on the local media environment and cultural ecology.

### 3 Research Methods

By searching for "transgender" videos in Bilibili, click on the home pages of the bloggers respectively to view all their contributed videos, and screen the samples of the bloggers according to the following conditions: 1. Self-identification as transgender in a video; 2. The video content is for self-life sharing; 3. Keep your videos up to date. According to the above principles, 233 sample videos of 17 transgender bloggers were selected as

preliminary observation objects. Then according to the video audiovisual symbol system, the characteristics of the cover to cover shows gender, makeup modelling, character voice, across gender discourse theme, emotional content, content analysis, video text elements such as through open encoding video content, and further by encoding program abstract spindle type code and select type extracting core concepts, Personality traits that represent the media image of transgender bloggers: transgender people who share their lives, experiences and voices.

In addition, the researcher also invited transgender bloggers through B private letter, and finally conducted in-depth interviews with 3 of them (@Anna Fish Sauce, @Pure Love Teacher Huang and @Li Jiahao); Each interview lasts about one hour, including initial interview and extended interview; The topics of the interview revolve around the perspectives of gender consciousness, media practice, self-identity and social integration. Finally, the words of the interview are combined with the text of the video.

## 4 Research Findings

### 4.1 The Role of Transgender Bloggers

According to statistics, in the study sample, the proportion of videos with female images as the cover of transgender bloggers' videos is as high as 85.8%. Bloggers usually take medium long hair styles and typical feminine clothes such as skirts as modeling elements. Videos with female voice as the main voice account for 54.2% and videos with male voice as the main voice account for 25.8%. Based on the analysis of the above sample videos, it can be seen that most of the transgender bloggers in Bilibili are male transgender and identify as female. Meanwhile, most of these transgender bloggers choose to appear with delicate makeup and feminine clothes with obvious gender characteristics. The voice of the characters is presented with the natural feminine timbre or the feminine voice acquired through specially trained pseudonym skills. At the same time, the real person picture after makeup is tended to be the cover of the video.

Secondly, 80.7% of the sample videos were found to contain transgender discourse on the cover and title, such as "transgender little sister", "cute girl", "transgender girl", "ordinary girl" and other words directly revealing gender orientation in the title. In terms of content and theme, 36.1% of the sample videos related to transgender science popularization and experience sharing, 58.8% of the sample videos related to interest sharing and daily life; In the emotional aspects, presents the positive emotional content of the sample of video accounted for 88%, such as release "transgender a little encounter at the airport, hope everything will be slowly getting better and better", "transgender and sister, out of the stratosphere together", "don't say I'm a freak, I'm a little fairy, hee hee" content such as identity confessions, participate in social interaction and to respond to questions.

In addition, it was found that in the cover background, private environment such as dormitory and residence accounted for 53.6%, public environment such as restaurants, streets and shopping malls accounted for 35.3%, sample videos with the flag of transgender organizations as the background accounted for 6.4%, and sample videos with unclear cover background accounted for 4.7%. As for the selection of shooting scenes, A1 said, "There was no scene planning, just to let everyone see the real life of transgender

people". A2, the interview subject, said, "I shoot videos directly at school and dormitory. Many classmates and friends know about me wearing women's clothes through videos, and they feel more free to be themselves." Transgender blogger connects the medium of practice in real life and virtual collection, "dormitory", "home" and "sitting room" private domain with background attribute space and the boundaries between the performance of front desk space is no longer clear, break the boundary of self performance locale shows across sex blogger performance authenticity and subjectivity, shaped the make public self value the role of the image.

## 4.2 Self-identity Construction of Transgender Bloggers

For the role of transgender bloggers, in the media practice through video, the comment section has become the main place for transgender bloggers to participate in social interaction. In video sample comments section, inclusive and supportive expression occupy the main part of social interaction, including "I'm on twitter direct messages of cheer for you in silence the man", "well, do the most true to yourself", transgender blogger by sharing their own unique life evoke emotional resonance, the audience give emotional support feedback directly to this, In this consistent emotional interaction, transgender bloggers build their relational self-identity. The audience and the trans bloggers work together to ensure the stability of the show and maintain the ideal self constructed by the trans bloggers.

In the flat structure of social media platforms, the gender performance practices of transgender bloggers are characterized by decentralization, spontaneity and connection. Decentralization means that the interaction between transgender bloggers is equal, and that they are not excluded from drama classes because they do not meet the criteria of "reliable people capable of achieving performance", which greatly enhances the sense of belonging of transgender bloggers to the community. Spontaneity means that transgender bloggers themselves master the initiative of interaction. They can participate in group interaction based on their own experience without being "assigned roles", which greatly enhances the sense of participation of transgender bloggers in the group. Connectedness means that the bonds of connection between transgender bloggers are visible, and that collaboration between bloggers is transparent about how to maintain a specific context definition, without being pushed aside by "hidden collaboration," which greatly enhances the sense of inclusion of transgender bloggers. In the progressive process of belonging, participation and integration, individual transgender bloggers become more and more closely related to the community, thus achieving collective self-identity.

To sum up, transgender bloggers reproduce their true self through self-narrative and realize the construction of individual self. Through the interaction between performers and audience to construct the relationship self; Different transgender individuals construct their collective selves through the practice of participating transgender bloggers and the social support between them.

## 5 Reflection: The Collision of Values in the Self-Identity of Transgender Bloggers

The typical feature of the Role performance of transgender bloggers is the struggle against traditional binary gender social norms led by gender images. They break the stigma of “transvestite” by presenting delicate images of gender identity; Breaking free from the label of “pathological” through positive narrative; By breaking the boundaries of the performance space to expose the “abnormal” voyeuristic lies. However, the training of social gender norms makes the dynamic game phenomenon between “other gaze” and “self-expression” appear in the process of constructing self-identity of transgender bloggers, showing the role tension of collision of values.

It is embodied in the following two aspects: on the one hand, it is the collision of gender flow view and binary gender view. Gender fluidity refers to “the fluidity of gender identity, that is, a person’s gender identity changes over the course of his or her life” [12]. The physical practice and Role performance of transgender people are the embodiment of fluid gender view, but when they interact with their own gender, they still fall into the mold of binary gender norms. For example, interviewee A1 said that “plastic surgery is to get closer to the feminine appearance”, and interviewee A2 said that “plastic surgery is necessary because it would be awkward to go to the toilet without feminine appearance”. Obviously, transgender blogger is shaped by delicate gender image, whether to have female identity and choose to change their reproductive organs, given their explicit sex organs such as the woman’s breasts, or his Adam’s apple and facial structure, or as a male, and choose female breast organs, using hormones change tone sex characteristics such as invisible, The performance of the body of transgender people still fails to escape the frame of binary gender, showing the training of transgender people by social gender norms.

On the other hand, in the face of the commercial logic of social media platforms and the symbolic nature of consumer society, there is a value collision between the subjective writing construction of transgender bloggers and the deconstruction of self-objectification. The first is the “other gaze” at the physical level. Jean Baudrillard mentioned when talking about the consumer society, “The body has become a commercial consumption symbol, which stimulates people’s consumption demand. People begin to pay attention to the position of the body in the commercial chain, and the body has become the most beautiful consumer goods carrying various connotations.” [13]. In the video works with the content output in the way of real person appearing on screen, the body of transgender people, a dominant symbol, inevitably becomes the object of the audience’s gaze. For example, “Just out of curiosity, do women who have transitioned to men go to the men’s baths in public bathhouses?” And other privacy related to life often appear in the comments section. This state of being watched in turn affects the content output of transgender bloggers, who satisfy their audience’s curiosity by sharing privacy. Secondly, in the context definition of transgender bloggers, narrative context also presents a situation of being split and deconstructed. For example, interviewees A2 expressed a sense of separation between Bilibili and reality, and the appeal of presenting a positive and optimistic transgender image at Bilibili inhibited the expression of negative emotions, which made her feel depressed. Obviously, the subjective writing practice

of positive narrative inhibits the subjective expression of transgender bloggers to some extent.

## 6 Conclusions

In the rapid development and iteration of the media environment and the modern environment with increasingly complex relationships, the role of transgender bloggers in media practice has become a side portrayal of China's social transformation under the social media environment: self-expression is competing with other writing and blending; Symbol consumption and subjective self compete and rise and fall. In the long-term pattern of traditional media discourse, the narrative of the transgender community has been presented from the perspective of the other, lacking subjective expression. As a result, the social transparency of the transgender community has not been effectively enhanced in the context of prejudiced, stigmatized, labeled and stigmatized stereotypes. However, the current social media environment has profoundly changed the discourse pattern of the transgender community, and they have started the process of social role shaping in the social media space with the attitude of active demonstration. Therefore, based on social media platforms, it is particularly important to pay attention to the role image presented by transgender bloggers in medialized society and the path of social role remodeling, and to discuss, think and analyze the role display and self-identity construction of transgender bloggers in modernity.

This study mainly analyzes the path of resetting the role of transgender bloggers in social media through the video performance of transgender bloggers in Bilibili. The main subject is transgender bloggers as communicators. For other transgender people who are not bloggers in society, there is a lack of humanistic care. Secondly, it focuses on the self-construction of the bloggers as the main body. Although the interaction between the bloggers and the audience is concerned, the cognitive feedback of the audience, namely the users receiving information, is not specifically collected. Therefore, there may be some limitations in the analysis of the image presentation of the transgender bloggers. In addition, due to the particularity of the identity of research objects, it is difficult to find interviewees. The interviewees in this study are mainly transgender bloggers, and the number of transgender bloggers interviewed is relatively small, so the comprehensive analysis is not enough. It is hoped that this study will be beneficial to the correct recognition and acceptance of transgender bloggers by the society, and better solutions can be found to the existing problems in future studies.

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