An Analysis of Gender Identity Expression and Transnational Communication of Queer Images in the Streaming Media Era from a Feminist Perspective

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Abstract. This paper studies gender identity expression and transnational communication of queer images in the streaming media era from a feminist perspective. Instead of providing new empirical data, the paper places queer representation on streaming platforms within feminist and queer theoretical discussions of gender performativity, orientation and visibility, as well as in media industry analyses of streaming distribution and inclusion policies. According to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology, Eve Ng's research on gaystreaming and mainstreaming, Andre Cavalcante's studies of transgender audience experiences, and recent research by Netflix and global streaming culture, this paper investigates how queer series and films present gender identity and how these representations spread across borders. It believes that streaming platforms have created new forms of queer visibility and transnational circulation, but they have also reproduced homonormative and neoliberal logics; therefore, feminist perspectives are needed to examine both the transformative potential and the limitations of streaming-era queer images. Therefore, it can be concluded that the effect of streaming media on the expression of queer gender identity and transnational communication is neither uniformly progressive nor uniform.

Keywords: Queer representation, gender identity, streaming media, feminist television studies, transnational circulation, gaystreaming.

1. Introduction

Now, the infrastructure for producing, distributing and consuming cross-border audiovisual works has become a streaming media platform. Queer images, such as series and films that feature lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other gender-diverse characters, are increasingly being distributed worldwide via subscription video-on-demand platforms.

From a feminist perspective, this development makes us consider how gender identity is expressed, what queer bodies and narratives have been disclosed, and how these representations spread across different cultures and regulatory systems. Long ago, feminist and queer media studies have shown that representations are also linked to power, embodiment and daily life, not just symbols.

This paper studies gender identity expression and transnational communication of queer images in the era of streaming media from a feminist perspective. It addresses conceptual and normative problems by employing feminist and queer theory, studying queer television and analysing streaming platforms and inclusion policies, but does not present new empirical results beyond what has been cited in the literature.

2. Feminist and Queer Theoretical Frameworks for Gender Identity

Feminist and queer theoretical discussions on gender identity offer a way to interpret queer images in streaming media. According to Butler's concept of gender performativity, one is created through repeated actions and norms, not by an innate quality [1]. From this perspective, gender identity is constructed through stylised performances, regulatory systems and social expectations, and non-normative or queer performances can reveal the contingency of gender norms [1].

Ahmed's queer phenomenology adds to this idea by focusing on orientation, that is, how bodies are directed towards objects, others and spaces [2]. She believes that orientation determines how some people feel "at home" in certain places and others feel alienated from these places; thus, queer orientation is about moving away from the standard ideas of desire and belonging [2]. Applied to

audiovisual media, this way can be used to direct the audience's attention to or away from queer bodies and behaviours through camera work, narrative structure and space.

Together, the above frameworks suggest that the way gender identity is presented in the media should not only be about whether or not LGBTQ+ characters are shown. Feminist and queer theory, on the other hand, focuses on how gender norms are reproduced or deviated from through performance, orientation, embodiment and affect, and how these processes intersect with race, class, etc. Given the emergence of streaming media, these frameworks now need to determine whether queer images broaden or restrict the idea of "all genders".

3. Gaystreaming, Homonormativity and Mainstream Integration

Eve Ng has studied gaystreaming to see how the media industry has included queer content in the mainstream [3, 9]. Her research on the U.S. network Logo shows how a channel initially targeting the LGBT community began to be referred to as "gaystreaming", added lighter fare and taste-oriented reality shows, and focused on attracting a wider audience that included heterosexual women [3]. Ng believes that this change marginalised some queer subjects and aligned with homonormative logics that emphasize consumerism, respectability and integration [3].

Ng's later work on mainstreaming gays also explores how queer content spreads through commercial television and streaming services [9]. She believes that there is a conflict between the increase in numerical visibility and the decrease in queer representation of particular bodies and lifestyles, and does not think that the spread of queer characters will lead to structural changes [9]. Feminist analysis believes that queer visibility may be used as a device in the neoliberal media economy to create inclusive images that fail to address the fundamental reasons for hierarchy.

With the development of streaming media, the concept of gaystreaming has started to draw the attention of many people regarding how streaming platforms classify, promote and profit from queer content. Category labels, recommendation algorithms and marketing campaigns can position queer series as niche products, lifestyle items or prestige dramas, and each will have different effects on which gender identities are highlighted and how they are presented. Therefore, in terms of feminism, the addition of queer characters is not seen as being in opposition to the norms of gender and sexuality.

4. Streaming Platforms, Global Distribution and Queer Visibility

Streaming services have changed the geography of TV distribution. Lobato has shown that Netflix's subscription video-on-demand services have reshaped the world of circulation by acting as transnational portals to connect various national markets, regulations and audiences [6]. Although streaming is often referred to as borderless, geo-blocking, catalog differences and local licensing arrangements restrict access and visibility [6].

Christian's work on Open TV shows how web-based platforms can offer alternative infrastructures for queer and intersectional television outside of traditional networks [5]. By supporting small-scale, artist-led productions, Open TV shows that digital distribution can foster diverse storytelling for communities that have been marginalised in the development process [5]. At the same time, Christian also indicates that these initiatives operate within a larger economic and regulatory system that determines their feasibility.

In terms of queer representation, streaming platforms have created new channels for dissemination by producing and distributing series featuring queer and gender-diverse characters around the world. Analysis of a specific program is the exploration of queer youth identities in Netflix's *Sex Education*, and it shows how streaming originals can feature queer youth and their negotiation of gender and sexuality [7]. Feminist media scholars and advocacy reports have also pointed out that streaming catalogues show uneven patterns of inclusion and continue to underrepresent queer people of colour, transgender and non-binary characters [11]. Therefore, the combination of expansion and restriction indicates that streaming-era queer visibility is both substantial and limited.

Therefore, feminist perspectives have begun to explore whether queer images are available and, at the same time, how they are presented in catalogues and user interfaces. Promotional art, categorisation tags and national content restrictions can all affect the visibility and perceived importance of queer titles, thus influencing how easily different groups of people come across gender-diverse stories in their daily streaming.

5. Gender Identity Expression in Streaming-Era Queer Images

Qualitative analysis of queer television series shows how streaming-era narratives present gender identity in various ways. Research on queer teen representation in shows such as Sex Education has examined how the gender expression and sexuality of characters are negotiated in schools, families and peer groups, and how these stories balance educational goals with entertainment [7]. Such work shows that streaming platforms can offer a space for exploring non-normative gender identities in adolescence, but they are also subject to genre conventions and audience expectations.

Cavalcante's study of the experience of transgender audiences with "first-of-its-kind" visibility in popular media shows that representation is understood through existing interpretive frameworks and everyday life contexts [4]. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, he studies how transgender viewers receive films that deviate from the mainstream culture and whether these "breakout" works are affirming or problematic [4]. In the era of streaming, the same phenomenon occurs: series and films featuring gender-diverse characters are labelled as groundbreaking works by global platforms.

Feminist and queer television studies have also shown that the depiction of gender identity in streaming-era queer images often needs to balance intersectional complexity with marketability. Some series have tried non-binary characters, trans stories and queer-of-colour perspectives; others have reproduced familiar tropes that focus on cisgender, white and middle-class experiences. From a feminist perspective, thus, the assessment of gender identity expression should pay attention to which bodies and narratives are centred, how gendered violence and structural inequalities are addressed, and how humour, drama and genre conventions shape the legibility of queer identities.

Milner's discussion of "streaming queer television" suggests that many programmes in the streaming era are either radically experimental or follow more traditional narrative structures [10]. Although some episodes may temporarily deviate from gender binaries or heteronormative family structures, these are often corrected by plot devices such as reconciliation arcs, tragic endings, or the marginalisation of gender-diverse characters [10]. Feminist readings of these patterns show that the expression of gender identity in streaming-era queer images is still controversial, and creative innovations are negotiated under industrial and cultural constraints.

Feminist and queer critiques have also shown that the culture of production and on-screen narratives shape the expression of gender identity. Writers' rooms, directing practices and casting decisions determine whose life stories and worlds are presented, and whose voices are left out. Interviews and industry reports show that queer and gender-diverse creators often have precarious work arrangements and limited decision-making authority, thus restricting the scope of stories told even when on-screen representation appears diverse [5][11].

6. Transnational Communication, Audiences and Queer Reception

Streaming platforms have a wide network abroad and thus spread queer images in many countries. Lobato believes that the overseas expansion of Netflix should be in line with local media regulations, audience demands and infrastructure deficiencies [6]. As queer series go global, they have encountered various legal systems for LGBTQ+ rights, different degrees of social acceptance, and distinct histories of queer media [6]. In other words, transnational circulation is not the diffusion of Western narratives without critique; rather, it is a convergence of global and local powers.

Boisvert's research on how audiences receive gender-diverse television shows on social media shows that reception is shaped by interpretive communities formed around these programmes [8].

According to the answers received from the series Sense8 and Billions, how viewers talk about gender-diverse characters, what boundaries of representation they negotiate, and whether they attribute responsibility to broadcasters and platforms are explored [8]. In the era of streaming, such discussions often take place across the country and are shared by fans on social media.

Ng's analysis of gaystreaming and mainstreaming also shows that, in shaping transnational queer communication, audience segmentation and dualcasting strategies are required [3, 9]. Streaming platforms may have different target groups in various areas and promote queer content as progressive branding in some places but not in others. From a feminist perspective, one can ask how queer images are marketed, what subtitle and dubbing options are available, and how to address the concerns of local audiences about gender and sexuality.

Transnational circulation also raises issues of accessibility and risk. Under the influence of regulations in some countries, queer titles have been censored, altered or concealed, and viewers face social or legal risks when consuming queer media. Therefore, feminist and queer scholars have begun to examine how streaming infrastructure intersects with censorship systems, activism and informal distribution networks, and how these intersections affect the way gender-diverse audiences interpret and appropriate queer images across borders.

Feminist theory also believes that the spread of Western culture abroad is due to media imperialism and cultural domination. Queer narratives created in North America or Europe may be received differently elsewhere; thus, viewers in other areas adapt, resist or reinterpret these stories according to their own struggles, languages and media cultures. Study subtitling practices, fan translations and regional streaming catalogues to explore how gender identity expression is negotiated in daily viewing contexts outside the assumptions of global marketing campaigns.

7. Feminist Perspectives on Inclusion Metrics and Neoliberal Governance

Recently, reports and feminist media studies have focused on inclusion metrics and their application to streaming platform governance. Inclusion studies of Netflix's scripted content quantify representation across categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQ status and disability to provide benchmarks for on-screen and off-screen diversity [11]. Although the above indicators may motivate the platform to enhance diversity, they do not guarantee that this diversity will manifest as new narratives or structural changes.

Feminist media studies have also investigated how the world's streaming platforms present discourses of gender equality and inclusion in their branding and corporate social responsibility [2, 9, 10]. Specific case studies show that the initiatives of mentorship programmes, diversity pledges and inclusive marketing campaigns operate under neoliberal frameworks that emphasise individual opportunity and market logic [10-11]. Feministically speaking, one should consider who is advantaged by this policy, whose labour is acknowledged, and how the efforts of inclusion relate to the wider movement for improved labour conditions, freedom of speech and regulation, etc.

In the context of queer images, inclusion metrics and policies will affect which projects are approved, how they are promoted, and for how long they remain in the catalogue. Feminist perspectives have also shown that the same platforms may cancel shows popular among the queer community, move programs to less visible categories, or employ algorithms that favour certain types of participation. Therefore, the discussion of inclusion should also consider governance structures, economic incentives and the uneven distribution of risk and recognition for queer creators and communities.

Milner's thoughts on streaming queer television also indicate that platforms may selectively promote certain queer works in promotional materials during Pride Month or corporate events, but otherwise keep catalogues that focus on heteronormative content [10]. Feminist critics believe that such behaviour may use queer images instrumentally as symbols of inclusion without addressing the underlying structural inequalities in commissioning, remuneration and creative control, and thus calls for a critical reflection on the discourse of inclusion.

8. Summary

Streaming media platforms have created a space for the exploration of gender identity and spread queer culture around the world. They offer new paths for queer visibility and dissemination but also reproduce and modify the old patterns of homonormativity, commercialisation and unequal representation.

Drawing on feminist and queer theoretical frameworks, studies of gaystreaming and mainstreaming, research on streaming distribution, and research on queer audiences and inclusion policies, this paper has proposed that streaming-era queer images should be understood as products of contested cultural, economic and regulatory processes. Increased exposure does not automatically lead to intersectional representation or structural changes, according to it.

From a feminist perspective, if we want to examine how streaming media present queer gender identity and transnational communication, we need to consider what bodies and stories are being shown, how platform governance and inclusion policies work, and how audiences around the world receive and challenge queer images. Feminist analysis does not assume that streaming media is inherently progressive; rather, it points out that queer images in this medium are both sites of hope and constraint.

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