

# Research on BL Culture in Media Representation and the Evolution of Contemporary Youth Gender Concepts

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**Abstract:** The rapid iteration of digital media has pushed BL (Boys' Love) culture out of the niche subculture circle, relying on various media such as online novels, film and television secondary creation, and short videos to widely spread, which has had a profound impact on the construction of contemporary youth gender cognition and the shaping of values. This article uses literature research and data analysis methods to integrate authoritative research data and real communication cases, explore the forms and communication characteristics of BL culture in media representation, analyze its dual effects on youth gender equality awareness, stereotype breakthrough, and identity cognition, clarify the inherent relationship between BL cultural communication and the transformation of youth gender concepts, and propose scientific guidance strategies. Research has found that BL culture disseminated via media helps young people dismantle traditional gender stereotypes and cultivate diverse and inclusive concepts, but there is also a potential risk of gender cognitive misguidance; The positive diversification and inclusiveness of contemporary youth's gender concepts are closely related to the media dissemination orientation and content presentation quality of BL culture.

**Keywords:** BL culture, Media Representation, Contemporary Youth, Gender Concept, Gender Identity, Media Literacy.

## 1. Introduction

The comprehensive popularization of Internet technology enables BL culture to rely on the digital communication characteristics of algorithm recommendation and social fission, continuously permeating the daily lives of contemporary youth aged 18-25 through online media formats such as online novels, short video re-creations, and online fan creations. The breakthrough of this culture in the digital communication environment is not only the cross platform communication of content, but also the penetration of youth subculture at the mass level. As the original generation of the Internet, young people's acceptance of this kind of multiculturalism is far higher than that of the previous generation groups, and they have frequent media exposure behaviors. Their gender cognition system has not yet been fully shaped, and is in the critical stage of shaping maturity, vulnerable to the deep impact of various media content. According to the 2024 Survey Report on College Students' CP Shipping Behavior by China Youth Daily and China Youth Campus Media, 91.8% of college students have participated in CP related topic discussions in daily social interactions. Among them, 68.7% of female respondents clearly prefer BL CP content, and 34.5% of male respondents are more inclined towards GL CP content [1]. This data is based on a sample of 3278 college students nationwide, which directly confirms that BL culture has formed a high degree of penetration among the youth group. The current academic research on BL culture mainly focuses on the surface description of media communication phenomena, and existing achievements have not been analyzed in conjunction with the actual behavioral characteristics of young people's media exposure. There is still a significant lack of systematic research on the correlation between BL culture and the evolution of young people's gender concepts. It is necessary to explore the intrinsic relationship between the two in the digital communication environment. This article combines authoritative research data and real communication cases to explore the specific impact of BL culture in media

representation on young people's gender concepts, striving to provide practical support for guiding young people to establish healthy and upward gender concepts and regulating the media communication order of BL culture, and also making this research have corresponding theoretical value and practical significance.

## 2. The Core Forms and Dissemination Characteristics of BL Culture in Media Representation

In the current digital communication environment, BL culture has long moved away from a single presentation mode and formed diverse and rich content forms, permeating various media scenes that young people come into daily contact with. The most representative forms are four. The most influential ones are undoubtedly online novels and comics, with platforms such as Jinjiang Literature City and Kuaikan Comics being their core communication platforms. According to the BL section data of Kuaikan Comics in 2024, nine out of the top ten best-selling female oriented comics on the platform are BL themed works. These works occupy the core of the female oriented comic market with delicate emotional depictions and diverse character settings; The top two spots on the popular chart of CCC Comic Platform during the same period are also firmly occupied by BL Comics, among which the original BL work "Day Off" has gained attention with its fresh narrative style, and the cumulative online views have exceeded 1.5 million times. In addition, film, television and short video are also important communication carriers. Although the mainland has limited the broadcasting of BL-adapted dramas, the popularity of relevant secondary creation content and plot explanations on platforms such as Bilibili and Tiktok has not decreased, which has become the main way for young people to contact BL culture [2]. Furthermore, in the field of online fan creations, BL fan fiction and comics based on popular IPs such as Mo Dao Zu Shi (The Founder of Diabolism) and Heaven Official's Blessing have been widely disseminated on

platforms including Jinjiang Literature City and Lofter, accumulating a total read count of over 10 million and becoming popular online content extensively discussed by young people [3]. At the same time, high-quality BL dramas such as *I Told Sunset About You* and *Bad Buddy Series* have been widely disseminated via online platforms, and their emotional core of equality and respect has deeply resonated with young audiences. Related positive interpretations continue to gain traction on social media platforms. The media dissemination of BL culture has its own distinct characteristics, with increasingly fragmented communication carriers such as short videos, comics, and short sentence explanations, which adapt to the fast-paced lifestyle and fragmented reading and entertainment habits of contemporary youth, allowing BL culture to reach audiences anytime, anywhere; With youth as the core communicators, BL content creators on platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili have garnered the attention of over one million young audiences through positive works that align with their aesthetic preferences; The dissemination scope has achieved cross regional breakthroughs. 'Day Off' has been translated into nine languages, covering readers from multiple regions around the world, breaking down regional and language barriers, and further expanding its dissemination influence.

### **3. The Media Path and Group Portrait of Contemporary Youth's Exposure to BL Culture**

The media pathways through which contemporary youth come into contact with BL culture exhibit distinct characteristics of diversity, interweaving, convenience, and accessibility. These pathways are interconnected, complementary, and permeating, and can be categorized into three core contact pathways. The first category is social media path. The algorithm push of social platforms such as Tiktok, Bilibili, IG, FB and so on has become the primary entrance for young people to reach BL culture for the first time. The personalized recommendation of the algorithm has made relevant content more accurately accessible. The industry report released by Taiwan Doujinshi Center in 2023 shows that out of 32,225 doujin comic works collected in that year, there are 19,508 BL themed works, of which more than 80% are disseminated and diffused through social platforms [4]. The second is the content platform channel. Online novel apps, professional comic platforms, and streaming platforms are the core carriers for young people to deeply immerse themselves in and actively consume BL content. Verticalized platform operations are more aligned with young people's in-depth reading needs. According to Kuaikan Manhua's 2024 content report, the cumulative read count of BL comics on the platform accounts for 42% of the total read count of female-targeted comics, making it a core content category on the platform. From the perspective of group portraits, the majority of young people exposed to BL culture are aged 18-25, and the gender distribution shows a significantly higher proportion of females than males. Among the 217 female youth surveyed in this study, 70.97% clearly prefer BL based CP content; Among 88 male youth, 36.36% prefer GL type CP content [5]. In terms of educational structure, the proportion of college students is far ahead, reaching 78.2%; In terms of geographical distribution, the proportion of young people in first tier and new first tier cities is significantly higher than that in second- and third-tier cities. According to

the user profile report released by BLUED platform in 2024, the proportion of users aged 18-25 on the platform is 69.3%, and the proportion of users with bachelor's degrees or above is 58.7%. This core audience demonstrates prominent cultural consumption willingness and potential.

### **4. The Positive Impact of BL Culture in Media Representation on Youth Gender Concepts**

The media dissemination of BL culture has significantly positively empowered the transformation of contemporary youth's gender concepts, and its positive value is mainly reflected in three specific dimensions, subtly reshaping the gender cognition system of youth and conveying the values of equality and inclusiveness. Firstly, to help dismantle traditional gender stereotypes, male characters in BL themed works break free from the inherent rigid labels of "masculine, strong, and restrained", displaying diverse and three-dimensional gender traits such as gentleness, delicacy, and sensitivity, breaking the inherent cognition of gender traits being bound to physiological gender [6]. In the classic BL novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi* (The Founder of Diabolism), both Lan Wangji's gentle forbearance and Wei Wuxian's sincere courage break through the stereotypical portrayal of traditional male characters, enabling young audiences to intuitively recognize the diversity and richness of gender traits. According to a survey conducted by China Youth Daily in 2024, young people exposed to BL culture have significantly reduced their identification with the traditional stereotype of "male dominance and female weakness", with a decrease of over 30%. This transformation is particularly evident among the youth population. Secondly, to deepen the gender equality value recognition of young people, BL themed works adhere to the emotional narrative core of "equal strength and mutual respect", which is distinct from the fixed paradigm of "strong men and weak women" in traditional BG themes, guiding young people to break free from the thinking limitations of gender hierarchy, no longer equating gender differences with high or low status, but paying more attention to equal respect and deep emotional resonance between people. According to a survey conducted by China Youth Campus Media during the same period, over 60% of the interviewed youth who were exposed to BL culture stated that they have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the connotation of gender equality, and are more willing to practice the concept of equality in their daily lives. Finally, to enhance the tolerance and acceptance of diverse gender issues among young people, the media dissemination of BL culture enables young people to have a more comprehensive understanding of the existence of diverse gender emotions, effectively dispelling inherent biases and misunderstandings towards same-sex emotions, and broadening the boundaries of young people's understanding of emotional expression. According to the 2024 Youth Multicultural Acceptance Report by iResearch Inc, young people who come into contact with BL culture have an increased tolerance for diverse gender groups by over 40% compared to those who have not [7]. They are more able to respect different gender choices and emotional expressions from the bottom of their hearts, demonstrating the contemporary youth's inclusive attitude towards diverse genders.

## 5. The Potential Misguidance of BL Cultural Media on Youth Gender Concepts

It cannot be ignored that the media dissemination of BL culture does not have a single positive impact on young people's gender concepts. Some media platforms' non-standard presentation of BL content, excessive entertainment interpretation, and deviation in content orientation have all brought potential cognitive misleading to young people in a critical period of gender cognition, mainly reflected in three aspects. Firstly, reinforcing the binary gender stereotype of "Seme and Uke", some BL themed works deliberately exaggerate the fixed character settings of "Seme-strong and Uke-weak" and "Seme-dominant and Uke-subordinate". This imbalanced role relationship is essentially an implicit replica of the traditional gender hierarchy order, which leads to a new solidification dilemma in the youth's understanding of gender roles [8]. This survey found that 32% of the surveyed youth clearly believe that "there must be a strong and weak distinction in BL relationships", confusing the core difference between the diversity of gender traits and the mandatory role positioning, which is not conducive to forming a diverse and inclusive gender cognition. Secondly, it gives rise to biases in gender perception among young audiences. Some media platforms unduly and one-sidedly glorify BL emotional relationships to attract users' attention, deliberately evading and downplaying the practical predicaments encountered by diverse gender groups in reality—such as social prejudice and inadequate rights protection—resulting in one-sided and idealized perceptions of same-sex relationships among young audiences that are disconnected from practical realities. According to survey data, 27% of surveyed youth stated that their understanding of same-sex relationships only comes from BL themed works, lacking objective cognition and rational thinking about the living conditions of diverse gender groups in reality. Thirdly, it has caused gender identity confusion among some young people. Young people aged 18-20 have not yet fully matured in their minds, and their value judgments and cognitive abilities are relatively weak. They are susceptible to one-sided guidance from BL content in the media, which can lead to confusion and perplexity about their own gender identity and emotional orientation [9]. What is particularly alarming is that some vulgar and homogeneous BL content is being spread recklessly on online platforms, which may not only distort the gender values of young people, but may even lead to inappropriate behaviors. This is clearly contrary to the core requirements of the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA)'s "Regulations on the Management of Audiovisual Program Services for Private Networks and Targeted Dissemination" to regulate audiovisual program content and guide young people's healthy growth.

## 6. The Path to Guiding BL Cultural Media Communication and the Healthy Development of Youth Gender Concepts

Given the current media communication ecology of BL culture and its dual impact on the formation of contemporary youth gender concepts, it is urgent to establish a collaborative guidance system of "media school family youth" to promote the healthy shaping and positive transformation of

contemporary youth gender concepts through positive guidance. Firstly, standardize the direction of media communication, and all types of media platforms must strictly abide by relevant national regulatory regulations [10], strengthen the BL content review mechanism at the source, resolutely reject vulgar, stereotyped, and homogeneous undesirable content, and focus on identifying and disseminating high-quality BL-themed works that are egalitarian, inclusive, and positive—such as the original masterpiece Day Off. Meanwhile, drawing on professional guidance from cultural communication institutions, disseminate high-quality BL works that convey the values of equality and inclusiveness, including Day Off and Heaven Official's Blessing, and embed positive gender values throughout the entire content dissemination process [11]. Secondly, strengthen gender education in schools, systematically incorporate gender equality education into the general education curriculum of universities, and guide young people to objectively clarify the connotation and essence of BL culture by combining typical dissemination cases and practical issues of BL culture. They should learn to distinguish the artistic creation of BL themed works from the diverse gender relationships in reality, help young people establish scientific gender cognition, and truly break the inherent gender stereotypes. Thirdly, families should play a guiding role: parents need to actively pay attention to the quality of BL media content their young adult children are exposed to, gain a deep understanding of their perceptions and attitudes toward BL culture, foster open communication through equal dialogue and constructive guidance, shield their children from the adverse effects of vulgar content, and nurture healthy gender values in a subtle manner. Fourthly, we should enhance the self-guidance ability of young people, continuously cultivate their media literacy and critical thinking ability, guide them to learn how to distinguish the value orientation and hierarchy of BL content, rationally view the multiple impacts brought by BL culture, consciously abandon stereotyped gender cognition, actively cultivate gender concepts of equality, inclusiveness, and respect, and make positive gender cognition an internal value criterion.

## 7. Conclusion

This article focuses on the core proposition of the dissemination landscape of BL culture in the media field and the evolution trajectory of contemporary youth gender concepts. Combining research data from authoritative domestic institutions and real media communication cases from both sides of the Taiwan Strait, it systematically sorts out the core forms and dissemination characteristics of BL culture media, clearly outlines its dual impact on youth gender concepts, and deeply analyzes the internal relationship and logical role between the two. The research results indicate that the BL culture presented by media has deeply penetrated into the daily life and cognitive world of contemporary youth, demonstrating positive value in helping young people dismantle traditional gender stereotypes, deepen gender equality value recognition, and broaden the boundaries of diverse gender inclusivity. However, the non-standard presentation and excessive entertainment interpretation of BL content by some media platforms have also led to the solidification of binary stereotypes of "Seme and Uke", biases in gender perception among young people, and gender identity confusion among young people. The gender concept of contemporary youth is showing characteristics of

diversification, inclusiveness, and individualization, which is closely related to the media dissemination orientation, content presentation quality, and value core transmission of BL culture. In summary, to achieve the positive dissemination of BL culture and the healthy development of youth gender concepts, only by building a collaborative guidance pattern of "media school family youth", continuously standardizing media content review standards, strengthening the effectiveness of gender equality education in universities, and enhancing the media literacy of young people can we promote a positive interactive development between the two. Naturally, this study still has certain limitations. In the future, we can further expand the research sample size, enrich the research dimensions, and conduct in-depth exploration into the differentiated impacts of different online media formats (novels, dramas, short videos) on young people's cognition of gender equality, thereby providing more targeted references and support for the advancement of relevant research and the implementation of practical guidance.

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