

Chinese Homosexual Males' Gender Stratification at Gay Bar

Zixi Chen *

Western University, London, ON519, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This paper adopts the ethnographic research method (qualitative research) to analyze the Chinese gays' interactions in the gay bar. As the complete observer, the author focuses on the practice of Chinese homosexual gay male exchanges to study why they gather here and the implicational meaning behind their interactions. Moreover, the paper focuses on homosexual males' interaction behaviours to connect gender differentiation and gender stratification with societal power relations. As a result, through the detailed analysis of individuals' interactions and the adaptation of sociological theory, functionalism and social construed theory provide more comprehensive explanations for this phenomenon.

1. Background Information

The JunDu gay Bar is a famous bar near West lake, one of the most famous in Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China. This Bar is near Bei Shan Road and Baochu Road. These two roads are the most famous street in Hangzhou city because many young teenagers come here for fun. The JunDu gay Bar was redecorated once and shifted its location to another place. Now, it locates at Yanan Road 292, GongLian CC Plaza, floor 601. It is from 8:00 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. every night. Even though, with the development of Hangzhou city and the wide acceptance of LGBTQ+ in Hangzhou, the increasing appearance of gay bars has become a dominant trend. As the oldest gay Bar, the JunDu Bar still plays a significant role in gathering LGBTQ+ people in Hangzhou and creating a place for them. Even now, many people still only know JunDu, when they were asked

by other people based on Gay Bar. This Bar is still located in an inconspicuous place where it takes people much effort to find. At the front entrance, there is a rainbow flag which symbolizes the identity of this Bar. Inside the Bar, there is a large-scale bar counter in the front of this room, and several bartenders stand beside the bar counter. The wine cabinet displays many expensive wines, but some wine bottles are barely empty. There are nearly ten booths, and seats are placed around one platform, which enables performers to play the show every night. The dim light, stale air, and loud music are prominent. The air was mixed with perfumes, human swear, alcohol, cigarettes and air refresher with the dark blue, purple lights.

2. Research Method (Qualitative, Ethnography)

I choose Jun Du gay bar as the location to do my ethnography because I had never come to a Gay bar before,

*Corresponding Author:

Zixi Chen,

Western University, London, ON519, Canada;

Email: 370450850@qq.com

so it was a strange place for me to come and an experience I had never had before. I lived in XiaSha District, Hangzhou City, but it still took me a 1-hour drive to come to this place. I identify myself as a heterosexual woman; even though I study a lot about LGBTQ+, I seldom have the opportunity to have the chance in real life. As a complete observer, I came to the JunDu Bar by myself with no interactions with other people. This opportunity creates a good experience for me to have more aspects and insights into the inside of the LGBTQ+. Thus I have a more profound understanding of the interactions between them.

3. Research Description and Field Notes

It is a Wednesday evening. I went to the Bar at 10:30 p.m., and it was crowded with many customers and bartenders. No one comes to me, bartenders are busy doing mixology, and customers are busy looking around and finding other people's phone numbers. I sat in the front of the Bar, near Bar Counter. The platform is on my back so I can observe all the people's interactions in this Bar. One important thing to notice is that the ratio of males and females is 9:1; that is to say, there is a small portion of females, and a significant portion of males in this LGBTQ+ Bar, those lesbians or biologically males come here.

4. Data Analysis

Based on the data research, the residence breakdown of the LGBT community in China as of August 2014^[5], by Gender, the number of respondents, gay/bi men occupied 65% of the total LGBT while lesbian/bi women occupied 35% of the total LGBTQ+. Most notably, I saw a young female; she was approximately 23-25 years old. She has concise-cut hair and wears a white shirt. She had already sat in the corner of the Bar, smoking and drinking alone. On her neck, there is a tattoo of a human skull. It is hard for others to identify her "gender" because she looks like "men" from a social perspective. There is a young male who comes to her, but his appearance looks more like a socially constructed "female". He wears a pink shirt with a large bowknot. He squeezed his voice and asked for her phone number. However, this young female lowered her voice and said, "sorry, I am a girl." As a result, this young man left immediately without looking back. It was an exciting thing to me in this Bar that young males dressed more like "female", while the biological female dressed more like "male"; however, they still identified themselves based on their biological sexes.

5. Status Analysis

It is essential to notice that "gender" is different from

"sex" and "sexual orientation". Gender has more social meanings, while "sex" has more biological meanings. Gender has three layers; it is based on self-identification, social expressions and individuals' social behaviours in society. In these circumstances, even though they both recognize that they are "girl" and "boy", their social expressions and their social behaviours are more close to the "boy" and "girl". That is why there will be more to notice in LGBTQ+, the mixture of gender identifications and the construction of sexuality.

The study of sexuality has become significant in the sociology study field. Different theories from various perspectives give meaning to sexuality. However, sociologists who analyze sexuality (sexual meanings, identities, and categories) intersubjectively negotiate social and historical products, which means sexuality is socially constructed^[4]. Social constructionism, symbolic interactionism and labelling theory help to explain sexuality. Foucault's book *The History of Sexuality* (1980) consolidated the emergent constructionist perspective^[4]. Based on Foucault's description, sexual categories are the products of particular constellations of power and knowledge. Based on this theory, the meaning of sexuality is socially constructed, and the distribution by society is based on power domination. Tracking back to the "male" looking girl, she thinks acting like the social definition of "male" is a choice for herself. It is not only the personal choice of the social content; it is the way for the dominant power in society. While the micro level, people's interaction reflects the macro social meaning that people's desire for the deprivation of the dominant power in society. It also explains the next scene in this bar, sexual stratification and power conflict.

Two males are dating around the platform, and the other is sitting at the booth; even though they are both biologically males, they act differently. The first young male wears a coat patterned with a black fishing net, triangle pants, and high heels. He is not the only man who dresses like this, he has many friends who wear similar like him, and he calls them "sisters". He dances around people and asks a man, "Are you 1?" Moreover, this man says, "I am 0, not 1". After noticing this man is a "0", He calls this man "sister" and then leaves. He claims that he is trying to find a boyfriend, but he is also a "0"; his boyfriend must be "1". "0" and "1" are the wording that happens among gay men (even not LGBTQ+, predominantly homosexual males). The definition of "1" and "0" is that "1" plays the top role, and "0" plays the bottom role. However, it usually happens during the sexual contact part. What is more, "0.5" means that one can play both the top and bottom roles. However, it is rare to see "0.5" in China; primarily,

gay males have their own “identification”, “0” or “1”. Then, a man who claims himself as “1” appears. He wears a white shirt, black pants and black trousers. He drank wine by himself; there was a car key with the logo of Porsche on the desk. He did not ask other people’s phone numbers; he sat silently. However, many young men ask him if he is “1”. He said that “I am 1”. As a result, even though he never asks for other people’s phone numbers, many still dance around him and ask for his phone numbers for further contact.

This is a new phenomenon for me, and I did considerable research to find the distinction between “1” and “0”. Based on their interactions, there are two distinct behaviours and identification among gay males; some parts of gay males identify themselves as bottom “0”; they wear black fishing nets and high heels. Even though it is wrongful to gender people’s clothes, high heels and black finishing sometimes link to the social stereotypical “sexy girl”. Moreover, he calls other “0”s as sisters. Those young males identify themselves as “biologically males” and do not want to be the “real biological females” because they are not transgender people. They utilize the behaviours, outfits, and call names to ensure their “0” position. As for the “Top 1”, his outfit looks like the stereotypical “male’s outfit”, which is different from the “0” in this bar. Moreover, his attitude towards other “0” is also different. As for “0”, they are more likely to ask people out, but “1” remains silent and waits for other “0”s to flatter him and give them his phone number.

6. Questions about Gender Stratification in LGBTQ+ Group

After getting to know the definition of “0” and “1”, here is a question that deserves to ask, why people within the same “sex” group will also create gender stratification or gender differentiation? The JunDu Bar is a small social institution compared to the whole society, so when comparing JunDu Bar to the whole society is comparing the micro part of society to the macro - society. However, when we take a deeper look at JunDu Bar itself. When we treat JunDu Bar as a macro - society, the interaction of individuals in JunDu Bar is the micro part of society. That is to say, JunDu Bar is a small society, especially for homosexual males in the LGBTQ+ group.

It is clear that micro-society has the gender stratification that the domination of patriarchal society creates many arguments and conflicts between males and females, but why is there also gender differentiation between the same biological sex? To be more specific, in the homosexual males’ community, they split the “top” and “bottom” people follow the rules of “top” and “bottom” and be like

that. What is more, the “bottoms” are trying to act like more “females” to emphasize their position, while the “tops” are maintaining their “masculinity characteristics” to sustain their identity.

The research of Connell ^[2] claimed that gay community attachment was complicated by gender and hegemonic masculinity. More specifically, gay communication attachment was also affected by various societal elements like class, age, ethnicity, heterosexual family commitments and different gender identification. The homosexual gays in JunDu bar are Chinese (Race, ethnicity), and their ages are between 20 and 28 years old. As a result, the gay community and gays’ interactions were influenced by gene identification and gender differentiation.

Social constructionism helps to explain this reason. Social constructionism is an important social science theory, especially in sociology. According to Luckmann and Berger, it means that “reality is socially constructed” ^[1].

7. Theory Explanations

Foucault’s theory can explain this, and he connects the social constructionism paradigm to human sexuality. In his idea, sexuality is not a physical quality or natural inner driver; it is a cultural construct; each institution in society has a discourse about sex, a way of thinking and talking about the behaviours and actors who are involved in sexual expression ^[3]. It applies to the Chinese homosexual males in the bar; the ethnicity and culture set more rigid gender roles and gender distribution for them, which makes them have more specific “gender” tasks in society.

Even though, in the same sex, the conflict theory can apply to this. Conflict theory means that men, as the dominant gender, subordinate women to maintain power and privilege in society. As a result, the unequal balance of control creates domination and subordination in a group. Even in the same sex, the split of domination “top” and subordination “bottom” also make the differences and influence their behaviours as more controlling. Individuals’ behaviours and interactions as the micro way that people always think it is based on themselves. For example, “bottom” behave like more “females” to indicate that they are bottom; they might think it is their personal choice. Still, it is based on society’s cultural influence and the community’s patriarchal, gender differentiation ideas.

8. Conclusions

Through my ethnographic observation, I found that gender differentiation happens not only in the different sex groups but also in the same sex group. Moreover, the racial group and different communities also help to influ-

ence individuals' behaviours and interactions. Other social institutions and different societies react differently based on their particular rules, but they also respond somewhere similar based on the natural social rules.

The JunDu bar is an LGBTQ+ bar in China and has a cultural setting of gender differentiation. Moreover, the rising power relations create an imbalance in power distribution, which establishes the status differentiation of individuals. Status differentiation creates the circumstances for people of domination and subordination. The patriarchal society stimulates the idea of male domination and female subordination, which crease the gender differentiation in the same-sex community group. It is the observation from JunDu gay Bar. However, there are more social institutions that exist this type of differentiation based on gender, sex, and power relations. It is not only within the same institution; people from different ethnic groups, social institutions, and cultural backgrounds follow social constructionism rules. It is also different from various cultural, educational and policy environments.

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