

**Scripts and Screens: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Gendered Dating Advice in Short-Form Video  
Content on Instagram and Red**

by Jindi Huang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Bachelor of Arts, Concordia University, 2023

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## Abstract

This thesis examines how short-form dating advice videos shape contemporary understandings of dating, relationships, and romantic behaviour on social media. Focusing on Instagram Reels and the Chinese platform *Xiaohongshu* (Red), the study explores how dating content creators construct and circulate knowledge about heterosexual relationships in digital environments. Using a qualitative comparative approach, the research analyzes twenty short videos by four creators across Instagram and Red. The analysis combines thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis, while drawing on Foucault's concepts of power, knowledge, and discourse, Simon and Gagnon's sexual script theory, and feminist perspectives.

The findings identify three key themes: gender roles and dating scripts, strategy-based advice and discourse patterns, and cross-cultural comparisons. While many short videos frame the dating advice as empowering, traditional heterosexual scripts continue to shape expectations around women's emotional labour and relational behaviour.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

The pursuit and maintenance of romantic relationships are not typically addressed through formal education but instead rely heavily on personal experiences, self-reflection, and often, guidance from others. While seeking understanding and direction, individuals frequently pursue validation and advice from others. In contemporary contexts, one accessible avenue for such guidance is through self-proclaimed or widely recognized dating coaches. These figures offer a range of resources, from books and manuals to long-form videos and, increasingly, short-form video content. In today's digital era, short videos, with lengths varying from under one minute to a few minutes and in vertical format, have emerged as a dominant medium for delivering concentrated information. They function not only as entertainment but also as a form of self-help, especially for younger generations such as Generation Z, the generation born from 1995 to 2010. While platforms like TikTok and Douyin (Chinese and original version of TikTok) have garnered significant scholarly attention in terms of their unique platform-based features of short-form videos, this research shifts focus to Instagram and *Xiaohongshu* (commonly known as Red). Both platforms, known primarily as lifestyle-sharing applications, have increasingly become sites for affective discourse and gendered knowledge exchange, especially with their new mode allowing users to watch and create short videos.

My interest in this topic derives from my positionality as a Gen Z Chinese woman navigating both North American and Chinese digital environments. I have observed a growing trend of dating content creators on Instagram and Red who share short videos that offer romantic advice and promote gendered dating strategies. These creators not only provide practical dating tips but also perform gender roles, reinforce romantic ideals, and construct public narratives around gender and sexualities. While some of this content fosters community and empowerment, other

videos may perpetuate traditional gender norms or propagate unrealistic standards of romantic behaviour. Notably, many creators appear to direct their content primarily toward women, teaching them strategic behaviours in heterosexual dating. This marks a shift from earlier pick-up artists' content, which typically refers to men who teach other men about how to approach and seduce women. On platforms like Red, which has a predominantly female user base, women creators often take on pedagogical roles, guiding and empowering other women. However, on Instagram, which has a more gender-diverse creator landscape, content can still reflect stereotypical or one-sided portrayals of female sexuality, especially when produced from a male perspective.

This research conducted a comparative analysis of dating content creators on Instagram and Red to explore how short-form videos reproduced and potentially reshaped gendered norms within heterosexual romantic discourses. While these videos can be empowering, they also reinforce common gender stereotypes and traditional sexual scripts. By analyzing content from both American and Chinese contexts, the research examined how self-proclaimed dating experts and influencers shape contemporary romantic norms. The working hypothesis was that despite changes in media format, traditional sex scripts continue to persist. The study analyzed 20 short videos produced from January 2024 to June 2025 by four content creators: two English-speaking American creators on Instagram (Sabrina Zohar and Niko Emanuilidis) and two Mandarin-speaking Chinese creators on Red (Gongzhu and Fan). Given the relative scarcity of male creators on Red, the selected sample included only female creators from that platform. The analysis focused on the videos' visual and verbal content, rather than user interactions in the comments section. Methodologically, the study employed both thematic analysis and discourse analysis to identify key narratives and rhetorical strategies across platforms and cultural contexts. The theoretical framework of this research was based on Foucault's power, knowledge, and discourse network,

Simon and Gagnon's script theory, and De Beauvoir's feminist theory. This study explores how digital media reshapes dominant narratives surrounding love, sex, and gender. It addresses a gap in current research by examining the intersection of short-form video culture, sexuality, and cross-cultural representations of romantic advice aimed at heterosexual female audiences. While many existing studies focus solely on either short-form videos or dating advice, this research integrates both dimensions. As digital media increasingly influences dating culture and captures public attention, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions and to offer practical insights for media and content creators.

Through the comparison between content creators from different platforms, I aimed to examine whether these short videos challenge or reinforce traditional dating scripts and how they contribute to the evolving culture of expert advice in digital romance. Since the selected content creators either clearly or ambiguously target female audiences, it is necessary to find out if the female-targeting short videos could empower or hinder women. Furthermore, to better understand the specific context of dating expertise through short videos and the shift in focus of the target audience from men to women, I also analyzed knowledge distribution from the past to today in the culture of expert advising in dating. This study aims to investigate whether contemporary online dating coaches, particularly those producing short-form video content, introduce new and creative insights within the constraints of limited time frames or whether they simply reinforce existing dating scripts. Prior literature suggests that recurring sexual scripts and conventional dating norms have persisted across various formats, including books, manuals, and long-form YouTube content, over the past decade. Short-form videos may represent either a potential rupture from these established patterns or a mechanism through which traditional gender roles and inequalities are further rooted. Therefore, my main research question is: How do short form dating advice videos

created on Instagram and Red construct and circulate knowledge about romantic relationships, and do these videos challenge or reinforce existing gendered dating scripts? Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions: How do dating content creators represent gender roles, sexuality, and relationship expectations in short form dating advice videos, particularly in content that targets female audiences? What types of strategies and discursive patterns do content creators use to present dating advice, and how do short-video features shape the delivery and authority of this advice? What similarities and differences emerge between American and Chinese dating advice creators in their portrayal of relationships, gender expectations, and dating strategies?

The purpose of this research is to critically examine the growing trend of dating and relationship advice disseminated through short-form video content on platforms such as Instagram and Red. While such videos have the potential to be informative and empowering, they may also perpetuate gender stereotypes and rearticulate traditional sexual scripts in subtle or overt ways. This study aims to uncover both the progressive and problematic dimensions of this digital phenomenon and to trace the evolution of expert romantic advice from traditional sources to contemporary social media influencers. Meanwhile, this study contributes to ongoing discussions in gender studies, digital sociology, and media studies. First, it looks at how everyday digital content, specifically short form dating advice videos, participates in the reproduction of gendered power relations. While earlier research has shown that traditional sexual scripts continue across different media, this study shows how these ideas are reworked through fast-paced and algorithm-driven video formats that reach wide audiences. By focusing on content primarily directed at women, this study draws attention to how empowerment language can coexist alongside more subtle forms of regulation. This reveals ongoing tensions between feminist ideas and expectations around femininity, emotional labour, and desirability.

Second, this thesis contributes to emerging work on short-form video by examining how knowledge about dating and relationships is produced within highly compressed and performative media spaces. Unlike longer advice formats, short videos rely on immediacy, repetition, and emotional appeal, which can shape the way viewers understand what counts as “normal” behaviour in dating. By bringing together feminist theory, sexual script theory, and Foucauldian discourse analysis, this study approaches short-form video not just as entertainment, but as a space where ideas about relationships are shaped and circulated. It also offers new insights into the ways in which these enduring narratives are reproduced or challenged through digital media. This project also benefits from a cross-cultural perspective, as it analyzes content from both American and Chinese platforms. By comparing short video content on Instagram and Red, the research will highlight gendered romantic norms in different social and cultural contexts.

Finally, this study holds broader relevance beyond the academic sphere. As dating culture becomes increasingly shaped by digital technologies and social media, and as public interest in dating strategies and awareness of gender stereotypes continue to grow, this research aims to contribute not only to academic debates but also to wider public discussions. By addressing a widely relatable topic in an accessible yet critical manner, this research aspires to inform media consumers, guide content creators, and contribute to a more equitable representation of romantic and sexual norms in the digital age.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This literature review explores research on how short video platforms, such as Instagram and China's Red (Xiaohongshu), influence dating culture and gender roles among young adults. The main research question focuses on how online dating advice shared through short-form videos reflects and shapes gender roles and sexual scripts. In this section, I will first review past and current studies on short video platforms and their cultural influence. Then, I will examine how dating practices differ between Western and Chinese societies, followed by a discussion on the rise of dating content creators and online relationship advice. The review of literature will also explore the ways in which gender roles and sexual scripts appear in digital dating content, and how feminism and femininity are expressed through social media platforms like Red. Together, these areas of research help explain how digital media, gender norms and cultural values interact in modern dating contexts.

### 2.1 Short Videos

Short videos are videos that are less than 15 minutes long, usually between 1 and 5 minutes. They are made to have a clear theme, creative editing and catchy background music that can easily grab the viewer's attention. Their short and fast style keeps audiences interested (Chen, 2023; Zhang et al., 2019). The rise of short videos has changed how people communicate and share culture. These videos also help spread culture across borders by making it easier to share and understand content worldwide (Chen, 2023). Short videos first became popular through the app TikTok. TikTok was originally launched in China under the name *Douyin* before expanding to North America. After TikTok's success, other social media platforms began creating their own short video features, such as *Reels* on Instagram and *Shorts* on YouTube (Menon, 2022). Unlike

TikTok, Reels is not a separate app, but a feature built into Instagram. Reels usually last between 15 and 60 seconds and can be shared within Instagram or on other apps like Facebook and WhatsApp. Even users who are not active on Instagram, they can still like, share, and comment on Reels. This flexibility allows Reels users to create large and connected online communities (Menon, 2022). It is also important to note that the Reels feature is built into Instagram, meaning users cannot remove or hide it. This design encourages all Instagram users to also become Reels users, unlike TikTok, which requires downloading and signing up separately.

Generation Z, the generation born from 1995 to 2010, are often called “digital natives” because they have grown up surrounded by the internet, smartphones and social media (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). This constant exposure to technology has made online spaces a natural part of their daily lives. They are comfortable navigating multiple platforms at once, switching easily between entertainment, learning, and interacting. This early exposure helps them in using digital environments to express their identity, exploring personal interests, and connecting with other users across the world (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Unlike older generations who had to adapt to new technologies, Gen Z has developed communication habits that are fast, visual and interactive. They tend to prefer content that delivers information quickly and creatively, which explains their strong attraction to short videos. Long videos on platforms such as YouTube often require more time and focus, while short formats like TikTok and Instagram Reels match their fast-paced digital habits and shorter attention spans. These platforms allow them to express themselves through trends, humor and short storytelling while staying connected to global communities. Because of these habits, Generation Z has become one of the largest groups using Instagram Reels and other short-video platforms (Doloi, 2024). Their active participation helps shape online culture by spreading trends, influencing social norms and even driving digital marketing strategies. In this sense, Gen

Z does not only consume short videos but also plays a major role in creating and defining what is popular in today's digital world.

In addition, the prevailing dominance of short videos is due to their addictive nature. Many researchers have discussed that short videos can become addictive due to their high- interactive features and fast-adaptive algorithms. In a survey of 517 university students in China, Ye et al. (2022) found that short video addiction has a direct negative effect on students' motivation to learn and their overall learning well-being. Chen et al. (2023) explain that short videos can reduce attention span, which is the mental ability to focus and process different information. People who are addicted to short videos tend to have less interest in long videos and find it harder to pay attention for long periods. Ye et al. (2022) also note that both the topic and the length of a video can affect users' attention levels, and those who are not addicted to short videos can focus better on longer videos.

## **2.2 Cross-Cultural Dating Worlds**

Dating can be understood as two people who are romantically interested in each other and engage in actions to get to know one another (Eaton & Rose, 2011). It is an important part of both adolescence and young adulthood, which are key developmental stages in the human life cycle. During these stages, people begin to explore intimacy, communication and emotional connection outside their family circle. Dating is not only about finding a future partner but also about learning how to relate to others, express emotions, and develop social and emotional maturity. It plays several roles, including socialization, recreation and companionship (Tang & Zuo, 2013). For many young people, dating also becomes a way to test personal values, independence and confidence. Since this research focuses on how dating is represented through two major social

media platforms, Instagram and Red (Xiaohongshu), which reflect Western and Chinese dating cultures, it is important to first understand the cultural and social contexts that shape dating in both societies.

There are several similarities between dating in China and in Western countries, yet China has its own traditions and beliefs that make its dating culture unique. One of the most significant cultural influences in China is the concept of *filial piety*, which emphasizes that children should respect, obey and honor their parents. This value has long shaped Chinese family life and continues to influence how young people approach dating and marriage. Parents' opinions often hold great importance in their children's romantic decisions. Even though arranged marriages have become rare, many parents still play an active role in helping their children find a suitable partner. Some parents organize introductions, attend matchmaking events, or encourage their children to date individuals from families with similar social or economic status (Blair & Madigan, 2019). This involvement reflects the idea that marriage is not just a personal relationship but also a family and social responsibility.

Dating in China is often guided by collective thinking rather than individual desire. It is closely linked to family expectations, social status and cultural responsibility. Many Chinese schools and parents believe that adolescent dating can distract from education or lead to moral issues, so it is often discouraged at a young age. However, once young people reach adulthood, dating becomes more socially accepted but with a clear expectation that it should lead to marriage. It is considered ideal to marry before the age of 30 in China. This social pressure can create stress for both men and women, as unmarried individuals over 30, especially women, are sometimes labeled "leftover women." Marriage remains a social expectation rather than a purely personal choice (Blair & Madigan, 2019). Traditional gender roles also play a strong part in shaping

relationships in China. Historically, Chinese philosophy, especially Confucian thought, defined women as inferior and obedient to men. Women were expected to prioritize their family duties, stay modest and follow their husbands' authority. This belief also influenced living arrangements: traditional Chinese families were *patrilocal*, meaning that after marriage, women moved into their husbands' homes, often living with the husband's parents rather than their own (Blair & Madigan, 2019). These customs show that the traditional gender hierarchy is deeply tied to social and family structures. Rather than viewing gender hierarchy as a static tradition, it is more accurately understood as the outcome of intersecting social, political, and economic structures. Socially, Confucian kinship systems institutionalized patriarchal authority and gendered divisions of labour within the family. Politically, successive regimes, from imperial governance to socialist state policies, actively regulated gender roles to redefine women's position in relation to work, family, and nation-building. Economically, shifts from agrarian systems to state socialism and later market reforms transformed women's access to resources, employment, and autonomy, while often reproducing new forms of inequality. These layered structures demonstrate that gender hierarchy is historically produced and continuously reshaped across different periods.

In recent years, modernization and globalization have brought major changes to dating and relationships in China. Urbanization, higher education and exposure to Western media have helped young people develop new attitudes toward love and marriage. Marriage is still widely valued, but it is no longer viewed as the sole purpose of dating. Many young adults now view dating as an emotional experience, a way to enjoy companionship and a part of personal growth. Factors such as financial stability, house ownership, education level and family background remain important considerations when choosing a potential partner for marriage (Blair & Madigan, 2019). For many families, these criteria represent security and future potential. At the same time, adolescent dating

is becoming more common and less stigmatized. Although the practice of filial piety is still existing within the dating world, Chinese young adults show a positive attitude of dating more frequently (Blair & Madigan, 2016). Chinese women, in particular, have experienced a significant shift in their social roles. With greater access to education and professional opportunities, they are more independent both financially and socially. This independence allows them to make personal choices about relationships without as much interference from family members. Even though traditional gender expectations still exist, women's achievements in education have shifted power dynamics within relationships. Studies show that women in China now have higher university enrolment and graduation rates than men, reflecting their increasing social mobility and independence (Blair & Madigan, 2016; Wu & Zhang, 2010). This progress gives women more control over their romantic and life choices, even as older generations continue to value traditional roles.

In contrast, American dating culture has developed along a very different path. The practice of going on "dates" became popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and has been considered a common part of social life since the 1920s (Bailey et al., 1988; Eaton & Rose, 2011). Dating in the United States is closely tied to the values of personal freedom and self-expression. It is not only a way to find a partner but also a form of leisure, social interaction and personal discovery. American media, including movies, television and music, play a strong role in shaping how people think about dating. Popular culture often portrays romantic love as an essential part of happiness and success. At the same time, single individuals are sometimes shown as lonely or incomplete, which reinforces the idea that dating is a necessary part of adulthood (Eaton & Rose, 2011). Although both Chinese and American young adults tend to marry later than previous generations, their attitudes toward dating differ greatly. In American society, dating during teenage years is common and socially accepted.

Most American adolescents start dating around the age of 16. There is also a greater openness toward premarital sex and casual relationships. (Tang & Zuo, 2013). As a result, the current “hook up culture’ has become widespread in North America. *Hookup* refers to uncommitted sexual encounters such as kissing, oral sex or intercourse. This behavior is often influenced and normalized under the influence of the popular media (Garcia et al., 2012). While not everyone participates in this culture, it reflects broader social acceptance of sexual freedom and individual choice in relationships. In American society, is shown that romantic relationships formed through a third party like dating apps or mutual friends are more common than meeting at school or work. It is also common for people to have several relationships before marriage, using these experiences to learn more about themselves and what they want in a partner (Whyte, 1990). In addition, the diversity of American society also shapes dating experiences. As the United States is multiethnic and multireligious, people are more open to intercultural and interfaith relationships than in the past. However, other social factors like class, income and education level still influence dating and marriage decisions (Whyte, 1990). In this way, both Chinese and American dating cultures continue to evolve, illustrating the dynamic interplay between traditions and modern values across distinct social contexts.

### **2.3 The Rise of Dating Coaches**

The growing popularity of dating advice short videos comes from several factors, including the widespread use of dating apps in recent years. These apps have encouraged many people to look for guidance from dating coaches, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic and its long-term effects changed patterns of interaction, leading many to spend less time in face-to-face social settings. As a result, dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, and Hinge

have seen a marked increase in usage, as users actively seek romantic or friendly connections online (Portolan & McAlister, 2021). The rise of digital technology over the past decade has also changed how people communicate and build relationships. Online platforms and communities are now central to many people's social lives. Dating apps have become a key space for exploring intimacy in a world where people often connect through screens, especially among younger users (Diaz & Conard, 2021). Additionally, research suggests that the format of short videos can strongly influence audience perception. Viewers often report a tendency to trust the content in these videos by default, which increase the authority and credibility of online dating influencers and content creators (Molem et al., 2024).

The existence of the dating coach is not a rare phenomenon that only occurs in modern society. In Western contexts, particularly in North America, dating advice figures gained significant visibility through self-help manuals and television programs, with prominent representatives such as Dr. Phil. There are numerous manuals written by both men and women with different academic backgrounds and careers (Hollander, 2011). The phenomenon of pick-up artists can be traced to the early 1970s. The movement began with advice books and gradually expanded into what became known as the "seduction community", a subculture rooted in Western norms, where heterosexual men shared strategies for attracting women. Originating as an underground scene in Los Angeles in the late 1990s, it gained mainstream visibility in the early 2000s, particularly following the release of Neil Strauss's bestselling book *The Game* in 2005 and the VH1 reality series *The Pickup Artist* in 2007 and 2008 (Hendricks, 2012). It is noticeable that the media tends to give negative acknowledgements to the pick-up artist genre with words like "sexist" and "misogynistic" (King, 2018). Popular dating manual writers like Dr. Phil also use the doctoral title to sell books and create the image of themselves as older and knowledgeable men

with a successful family life (King, 2020a). The 1990s pick-up artist is focused on giving men dating advice and on understanding female sexuality. However, understanding and elaborating on female sexuality from the male perspective may be one-sided or based on gender stereotypes, especially when society is still male-dominated and patriarchal. Male dominance is also associated with reproduction, and this way assigns women's sexuality to a tool of reproduction along with a low social status (Bass, 2016). Moreover, the twenty-first-century romantic world for female sexuality shows a blurred line between sexualization and romance that raises concern that sex and romance work together to construct gendered sexual identities. This will hardly benefit the underlying gendered problems and female sovereignty (Burge, 2017).

Unlike earlier dating advice, which was predominantly produced by male experts for male audiences, there has been a noticeable rise in female dating coaches who target heterosexual women. This shift marks a growing emphasis on advice that reflects women's experiences and guides them in understanding dating from a male perspective. As King (2020a) notes, women's dating advice often adopts a "feels-based" approach, prioritizing emotional intuition over empirical or scientific reasoning. Contemporary dating content frequently highlights the importance of women's self-esteem and is increasingly shaped by feminist perspectives that critique traditional gender roles and cultural scripts (King, 2020b). According to King (2020a), one contributing factor to the rise of women-centred dating advice is women's comparatively stronger interest in developing romantic relationships. Traditional dating manuals, in contrast, often overlook women's relational needs and fail to address the differing expectations and sources of satisfaction between men and women in long-term relationships or marriage. King (2020a) further argues that self-esteem plays a significant role in shaping relationship satisfaction. Some advice models directed at women resemble the structured techniques of pick-up artistry, offering

rule-based guidance that includes tactics such as concealing low self-esteem and adhering to norms like waiting for a man to initiate contact, rather than calling first. These practices mirror well-established sexual scripts, such as the “play hard to get” pattern.

## **2.4 Gender Roles and Sexual Scripts in Dating Advice**

Patriarchal gender roles have historically structured expectations by positioning women as responsible for emotional labour and domestic work, while men are constructed as dominant, rational, and economically responsible. These roles reflect a binary organization of gender that reinforces unequal power relations rather than neutral or “traditional” social norms. When looking at the advice provided by dating coaches in Western culture, it becomes clear that binary gender roles and sexual scripts, many of which can be traced back to dating manuals from the 1970s, still influence twenty-first-century dating culture, including short-form video platforms like Instagram Reels. Existing research indicates that dating behaviors often follow predictable “scripts” from the beginning of romantic interactions, especially during initial dates (Rose & Frieze, 1993). These scripts tell people how they are expected to act based on their gender roles. Gender roles are based on social expectations about how men and women should behave. Traditionally, social norms have assigned “masculine” and “feminine” traits to each gender. Women were expected to be caring, emotional and responsible for domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning and child-rearing. In contrast, men were expected to be dominant, logical and responsible for financial support and decision-making outside the home. These expectations framed men as leaders and women as caretakers and reinforced a clear division between public and private roles. Over time, these roles became linked to gender stereotypes that exaggerated the nature of men and women. For example,

the idea that men are less emotional while women are overly sentimental or sensitive (Blackstone, 2003).

In the context of dating, these gender expectations continue to shape behavior. Popular dating scripts often portray men as the initiators of romantic relationships. Men are typically expected to plan and pay for the date, make the first move and take the lead in physical or sexual interactions. Women, on the other hand, are expected to appear attractive, dress appropriately, behave politely and show restraint when it comes to physical intimacy (Eaton & Rose, 2011). Furthermore, modern dating advice often warns women to avoid early visits to a man's residence in the early dating stages, as such invitations are commonly interpreted as signals of casual sexual intentions. This perception connects to the broader "hook-up culture" in contemporary Western society, where phrases such as "*Netflix and Chill*" have become popular euphemisms for casual sexual encounters. These coded expressions reflect that sexual scripting use new language in digital contexts, while maintaining many of the same traditional gender assumptions about who leads, who follows, and what each person's behavior means in the context of dating and romantic relationships.

Simon and Gagnon (1986) describe these patterns through their theory of sexual scripting, which explains how social norms shape sexual and romantic behavior across three interrelated levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts. Cultural scenarios are the collective societal norms and expectations, such as the belief that men should pay for the first date or that women should wait to be pursued. These cultural expectations are learned through media, family, and peer influence. For instance, movies, television shows, and even social media influencers often reinforce the idea that a man's willingness to spend money or plan a fancy date shows his seriousness and romantic interest. Interpersonal scripts describe how individuals act

within specific social situations. These scripts may vary depending on personal preferences, beliefs, or cultural background. For example, while some men follow the traditional expectation of paying for a date, others may prefer to split the bill as a gesture of equality. Similarly, women may respond differently—some appreciating traditional gestures, while others viewing them as outdated or patronizing. Intrapsychic scripts involve internal thoughts, emotions, and desires. These include people’s private fantasies, personal expectations, and emotional responses during dating. For example, a woman might imagine her date planning a romantic dinner, but he might instead suggest meeting at a casual café, leading her to interpret his choice as a lack of effort or interest.

These three levels work together to influence how individuals approach dating. In today’s digital world, these scripts are often reinforced and reproduced through online dating content. On social media platforms, especially short videos, dating influencers and coaches frequently repeat these traditional expectations. For instance, many female-oriented dating videos advise women to see men paying the bill on the first date as a sign of genuine interest and commitment and suggest their female audiences to propose to split the bill as a hint of diminished romantic intent. Similarly, further elaboration often discourages coffee dates as initial meetings, because they reflect low effort, limited financial commitment, or a potentially unengaging encounter —whereas dinner dates in restaurants are portrayed as more meaningful and romantic, reflecting greater emotional and financial investment. These examples from the popular dating scripts reflect that traditional gender roles and sexual scripts still influence today’s dating world even when they are presented in a modern digital format. The persistence of these ideas shows that deep-rooted gender expectations continue to shape romantic communication and interaction (Burge, 2017; King 2020a, Rose & Frieze, 1993).

## 2.5 The Platform Red and Feminism in China

Similar to Instagram, Red (also known as Xiaohongshu) is also branded as a lifestyle and social media platform that allows users to share their daily lives. Because many popular Western social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are banned in China, Red is often considered the Chinese equivalent or replacement for Instagram (Chiu & Silverman, 2012). Red's slogan, "*Mark My Life*," reflects its focus on life-sharing, encouraging users to post "notes" in the form of text, photos or short videos (Hong, 2020). Compared to other Chinese social media apps, Red has a particularly strong connection to post-feminist culture. Its user base is dominated by young women who both consume and create content, often centered around beauty, fashion, relationships, self-care and lifestyle aspirations. By the end of 2021, Red had surpassed 200 million active users, and over 70% of them were women under the age of 32 (Wei, 2023). This large female presence has made Red a space where women can express themselves freely and discuss gender-related topics in ways that were not always possible on traditional media. Unlike earlier forms of media that tended to silence or stereotype women, Red provides a digital space for them to make their voices heard, exchange views, gain social roles, and build communities around shared experiences (Hong, 2020).

To fully understand the significance of Red and its connection to female empowerment, it is important to introduce the history and development of Chinese feminism. There are often misunderstandings about feminism in China, including the belief that Chinese feminism is simply a copy of Western feminism. Some critics, especially men, also claim that Chinese feminism creates unnecessary tension between genders or represents a "gender war" led by women against men. In reality, while Chinese feminism was initially influenced by Western feminist ideas, it has since developed its own distinct characteristics that reflect China's unique history, culture and

political context (Yin, 2022). The roots of Chinese feminism can be traced as far back as the late Qing dynasty in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of its earliest and most symbolic achievements was the abolition of the traditional practice of foot binding, which had long represented female oppression and physical control. Early Chinese feminists and working-class women also fought against imperialism, unequal marriage laws, and social customs that restricted women's independence (Yin, 2022). These struggles connected feminism with the broader pursuit of national modernization and social reform. Chinese feminist movements were strongly shaped by major historical and political events such as the May Fourth Movement, the Cultural Revolution and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The May Fourth Movement, in particular, was led by students and young intellectuals who protested against imperialism and called for cultural renewal. It linked women's liberation with the larger goal of national progress, encouraging a re-evaluation of gender roles that were deeply rooted in Confucian ideology. During this time, traditional gender hierarchies and the Confucian gendered ideologies were criticized by scholars and reformers who argued for gender equality (Yin, 2022).

During the Maoist period (1949–1976), especially under campaigns promoting women's labour participation, Chinese feminism was incorporated into state ideology through the principle of "gender sameness." This concept promoted the idea that women and men were equal participants in labor and nation-building. Propaganda slogans such as "*Women hold up half the sky*" and the image of the "*iron girl*" encouraged women to enter the workforce and perform the same physical labor as men. While this period advanced women's economic participation, it also idealized women's strength and endurance, often equating equality with the masculinization of women rather than recognizing gender diversity (Yin, 2022). After China's reform era began in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, feminism became more visible in academic and intellectual spaces. Scholars

started to reexamine gender studies and feminism through both Chinese and global perspectives. Feminist discourse gradually expanded beyond the political sphere to include topics such as sexuality, family life, media representation and body image. Following economic reforms after 1978, market transformations expanded women's educational and professional opportunities while reintroducing gendered expectations around family and femininity. The Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing further influenced feminist discourse in China by introducing global frameworks and promoting gender equality as a policy priority (Yin, 2022). In recent years, the feminist movements in China have become closely linked to digital media and online activism. Social media platforms like Red have become central to feminist expression, providing accessible spaces for women to share experiences, raise awareness and organize online movements. The #MeToo movement in China, for example, sparked public discussion about gender inequality, harassment, and women's rights, giving rise to more grassroots and community-based forms of activism (Changjian et al., 2024). Red, with its large community of female users, has become one of the main spaces where these discussions continue. The platform fosters digital sisterhood and allows women to exchange ideas about empowerment, self-worth and independence. It not only challenges traditional gender roles but also promotes women's economic participation by encouraging female entrepreneurship, content creation and brand collaboration. Since most of Red's dating content creators are women, much of the dating and relationship advice on the platform reflects female perspectives, emphasizing emotional intelligence, self-care and confidence. For instance, women on Red frequently share experiences related to workplace sexism, expectations of financial dependence in dating, and the stigma surrounding unmarried women over the age of 30. These posts often generate extensive engagement, with users offering advice, support, and critique of patriarchal norms. In this way, Red not only reflects existing gender discourses but

also creates a participatory space where users collectively question and renegotiate gendered expectations (Wei, 2023; Yin, 2022).

This literature review illustrates the ways in which short-form video platforms like Instagram Reels and Red (Xiaohongshu) shape modern dating culture and gender norms among the young generations. These platforms merge entertainment with advice and creating spaces where users, especially Generation Z, express themselves and connect with others through visual content. By comparing Western and Chinese dating cultures in existing literatures, the review highlights both global and social differences. While American societies emphasize independence and personal choice, Chinese dating world still reflects family expectations and social responsibility, even as young people adopt more individual views of love and marriage. The literature review shows that previous scholarship has established the persistence of gendered dating scripts, the role of digital platforms in shaping self-presentation, and important differences between Western and Chinese dating cultures. However, existing research does not sufficiently explain how these ideas are performed and circulated through short-form dating-advice videos. This thesis focuses on addressing this gap. Meanwhile, Red provides a platform where Chinese women share their voices and challenge these norms through digital feminism and community building. Overall, short-form video platforms do more than provide entertainment, rather they shape the way young people understand relationships, gender and identity in a digital and interconnected world.

Past studies have shown that traditional gender roles and dating scripts continue to shape people's behavior in both Western and Chinese societies (Rose & Frieze, 1993; Blair & Madigan, 2016; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Other research has examined the influence of online platforms on self-presentation and romantic communication (Burge, 2017; King, 2020a; Wei, 2023). However,

few studies explore the presence of these ideas in short form dating videos on platforms such as Instagram and Xiaohongshu (Red). Most existing work focuses on either Western dating norms or dating culture in China, rather than connecting the two in shared digital spaces. This study addresses that gap by comparing gender roles and dating expectations presented through short videos across both contexts. By examining the messages, advice, and storytelling used by dating influencers, this research explores whether contemporary online advice continues to reproduce traditional views of gender and romance. It also expands current discussions by showing the role of short videos in shaping dating discourses and relationship beliefs in today's digital world.

## Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundations that guide the analysis of dating content creators on Instagram and Red, and it examines the role of digital platforms in organizing and reproducing gendered and sexual discourses that shape ideas and practices of dating, intimacy, and femininity through multiple theoretical perspectives. The chapter begins with Foucault's theory of power, discourse, and sexuality, followed by Simon and Gagnon's sexual script theory, which explains the influence of cultural narratives on dating behaviour. The discussion then moves to feminist perspectives, including intersectionality, multiracial/multiethnic feminism, neoliberal feminism, and post-feminism, to explore the role of gender, class, and culture in digital self-presentation and online empowerment. Collectively, this theoretical framework provides a multidimensional foundation to help understand how dating content creators construct gender roles and navigate power across Western and Chinese social media contexts.

### 3.1 Power, Knowledge, Discourse

Michel Foucault's (1978) work on sexuality and his power, knowledge, discourse framework offers a critical lens through which to understand how content creators assert authority and produce normative knowledge about dating and relationships in digital spaces. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault challenges the "repressive hypothesis," arguing that modern societies have not silenced sexuality, but instead have intensified discourse about it. He writes, "What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of its ad infinitum while exploiting it as the secret" (Foucault, 1978, p. 35). He further explains that sex became "a matter that required the social body as a whole,

and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance” (p.116). In addition, Foucault (1978) discusses how modern confessions have created scientific expert knowledge to construct the new discourse of sex. The confession was primarily used by the Christian confessional activities, yet it has been reconstituted by scientists to uncover the truth about sex. Meanwhile, Foucault illustrated that scientific expertise’s influence in the discourse around sex is associated with the rise of biopower, which is used to manage the population and optimize the body.

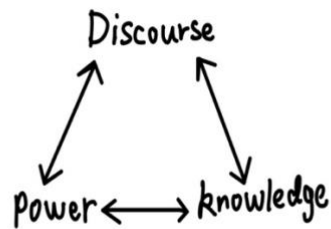
Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power and the relationship between power, knowledge, and discourse is particularly relevant for this study. Disciplinary power, as Foucault (1977) explains in *Discipline and Punish*, operates not through overt force or centralized authority, but through subtle techniques of surveillance, normalization, and self-regulation. Unlike sovereign power, which punishes through visible acts of repression, disciplinary power functions by producing “docile bodies” that internalize norms and regulate the individuals accordingly (Foucault, 1977). It relies on observation, examination, comparison, and correction to create systems within which individuals come to monitor their own conduct. The metaphor of the Panopticon illustrates this mechanism: the possibility of constant observation leads individuals to discipline themselves even when no authority is visibly present. Power therefore becomes diffuse and productive rather than merely prohibitive.

Importantly, disciplinary power is inseparable from knowledge production. Foucault (1978) argues that power and knowledge are mutually constitutive. Knowledge does not separate from power but is produced within power relations. Discourses define what counts as truth and what is considered normal or deviant. In this sense, discourse does not simply describe reality; rather, it actively shapes the ways individuals understand themselves and others. Sexuality, for example,

became an object of scientific classification, psychological analysis, and moral evaluation, which in turn produced new categories of identity and new expectations of behaviour. Within this framework, “truth” is not universal but historically contingent and embedded in institutional practices (Foucault, 1978). Experts such as doctors, psychologists, and educators gain authority to speak about sex, intimacy, and relationships, and their authority derives from their position within discursive formations. These formations establish regimes of truth that guide individual define and conduct acceptable norms. Therefore, power circulates through these networks rather than residing in one centralized authority.

In the context of dating advice short videos, content creators act as producers of knowledge and agents of discursive power. In the context of dating-advice short videos, creators do not derive authority solely from institutional expertise in the traditional Foucauldian sense. Instead, their authority is assembled through a combination of therapeutic language, personal testimony, algorithmic visibility, and commercial self-branding. Some creators invoke psychology, attachment theory, or behavioural insights, while others rely on repeated claims of insider knowledge, such as male experience or personal dating success. These forms of mediated authority are not identical to the scientific expertise Foucault described, but they similarly participate in the production of ‘truth’ by encouraging audiences to treat certain dating norms as credible and actionable. Their videos function as micro-sites of regulation, subtly shaping users’ behaviours, desires, and self-presentations in line with broader social expectations. As such, online dating content can be understood not merely as opinion but as a form of social discourse that reinforces or challenges normative ideas about gender and sexuality. Viewers are not directly coerced; instead, they are invited to internalize the dating advice, evaluate themselves against normative standards,

and modify their beliefs and action accordingly. This dynamic reflects the operation of disciplinary power in digital environments.



### 3.2 Sexual Script Theory

In addition to Foucault's framework, this research draws on Simon and Gagnon's (1986) sexual script theory to better interpret the dating content creators and offers a sociological perspective on how romantic and sexual behaviours are structured by shared cultural narratives. Script theory posits that individual behaviour is guided by pre-existing scripts, which are socially constructed expectations about how people should behave in particular contexts. Within the domain of sexuality, these scripts delineate roles and expectations based on gender and social norms. Simon and Gagnon (1986) identify three levels of scripting: cultural scenarios, which represent broad societal norms; interpersonal scripts, which involve social interaction and negotiation; and intrapsychic scripts, which pertain to internal desires and fantasies. These layered scripts interact to inform how individuals perform gender and sexuality in dating contexts. As stated in the literature review, there are some common sexual scripts in the dating world. This study applies sexual script theory to investigate whether traditional dating scripts, such as the expectation that men should initiate contact or pay on the first date, persist within contemporary dating advice content on short-form video platforms. Additionally, it seeks to identify whether

new or alternative scripts are emerging through the influence of content creators, especially within distinct social and cultural contexts.

### **3.3 Feminism, Femininity and Intersectionality**

#### *3.3.1 Femininity*

Simone de Beauvoir argues that femininity is not an innate essence but a socially constructed concept that reinforces gendered inequality. In *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir (1953) describes how women are positioned as “the second sex” and the “other” in a patriarchal society. “We have seen that poetic veils are thrown over her monotonous burdens of housekeeping and maternity: in exchange for her liberty, she has received the false treasures of her ‘femininity’” (De Beauvoir, 1953, pp. 676- 677). De Beauvoir here argues that the social expectations on women are romanticized into the concept of femininity, which creates an image of ideal womanhood for women to pursue, yet it does not contribute to women’s liberty. On the other hand, femininity, rather than being measured against a fixed standard, is argued to be fluid and subjective. De Beauvoir’s critique of gender roles and the social expectations of women continue to resonate in contemporary dating cultures. This is particularly evident in the context of this research, which examines dating advice directed at heterosexual women, including guidance offered from the perspective of a male content creator. As her famous quote “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” illustrates how the idealization of femininity constructs gender roles and sexual norms. Although De Beauvoir warns of the potential danger of becoming trapped in the performance of femininity, she also suggests that femininity can carry a certain distinctiveness and charm that should not be entirely dismissed. There is still a long way to go to achieve gender equality and women’s liberation, especially with those pre-existing gender roles as the stumbling block.

### 3.3.2 Intersectionality and Multiracial/ Multiethnic Feminism

The emergence of multiracial and multiethnic feminism in the 1960s and 1970s marked a turning point in feminist theory, and it challenges the universality of second-wave feminism. While white feminist movements frequently ignored racial oppression and class inequality, many women of color began to articulate that their experiences of oppression could not be captured by a single axis understanding of gender or race. Within this historical moment, the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black socialist and lesbian feminists, produced one of the most influential documents of the era—*A Black Feminist Statement* (1977). The Collective introduced the notion of “horizontal oppressions,” which emphasizes that women’s experiences are not universal, but shaped by the interlocking effects of gender, race, class, and sexuality. The Combahee River Collective called for a multi-axis identity politics and redefined feminist activism by shifting focus from a singular “women’s experience” to the overlap of multiple forms of oppressions (Smith, 2024).

This foundational multiracial feminist insight laid the groundwork for Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989) theory of intersectionality, which critiques both feminist and antiracist frameworks for their single-axis assumptions. According to Crenshaw, the discrimination faced by women of color is often overlooked because traditional frameworks analyze gender and race as separate categories rather than intersecting systems. Crenshaw illustrated that systems of oppression are interconnected, and individuals’ overlapping identities create unique social experiences and positions. Patricia Hill Collins further developed these ideas through the concept of *Matrix of Domination*, which explains the ways in which race, gender, class, and sexuality interact to shape individuals’ positions within overlapping hierarchies of power. She argued that all knowledge is socially situated, which means that understandings of the world are influenced by

one's social and structural position. This view suggests that marginalized groups can provide distinct and valuable insights into systems of oppression, while also recognizing that no single standpoint can fully capture the complexity of social reality (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Moreover, Bell Hooks emphasized the importance of centering marginalized voices in feminist thought. She argued that individuals living at the margins of society possess a dual awareness, as they understand both their own experiences and those of the dominant group. This position, she suggested, enables them to offer critical perspectives that can make feminist theory more inclusive and reflective of diverse realities (Hooks, 1984). Individuals in marginalized positions must continually navigate and interpret dominant social norms to operate within unequal power structures. This lived experience fosters a form of “double awareness,” through which they come to understand both their own positionality and the perspectives of dominant groups, whereas those in dominant positions are not required to engage with or recognize marginalized experiences in the same way (Hooks, 1984; Collins & Bilge, 2020).

### *3.3.3 Neoliberal Feminism and Post-Feminism*

Neoliberal feminism has emerged as a dominant form of feminist discourse in the post-2010 digital era, aligning feminist ideals with neoliberal values of individualism and self-optimization. Unlike earlier feminist movements that emphasized collective struggle and structural inequality, neoliberal feminism reframes empowerment as a matter of personal choice, self-branding, and entrepreneurial success (Rottenberg, 2014). Within this framework, women are encouraged to view themselves as autonomous subjects responsible for navigating and overcoming systemic barriers through self-discipline, ambition, and confidence—qualities celebrated by neoliberal capitalism.

Post-feminism describes a cultural sensibility that reinterprets feminist ideas within neoliberal and consumerist contexts. It assumes that gender equality has largely been achieved and reframes empowerment as a matter of personal choice, confidence, and consumption (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2008). In digital culture, post-feminism promotes empowerment through visibility and self-branding, and it frames confidence and authenticity as traits that conform to neoliberal and consumer values (Banet-Weiser, 2018). This discourse of empowerment, however, simultaneously reproduces gendered and class-based hierarchies of beauty and desirability.

Overall, the feminist theory from this section illustrates that gender epistemologies cannot be separated from race, class, sexuality, or culture. This multidimensional approach exemplifies the ways in which intersecting systems of power shape particular identities and social experiences, making it especially relevant for analyzing dating content creators on Western and Chinese social media platforms such as Instagram and Red. On Instagram, many creators construct femininity through neoliberal and postfeminist ideals, presenting themselves as independent, confident, and self-branded individuals. Conversely, on Red, Chinese creators construct femininity within a hybrid framework that combines Confucian morality, class aspiration, and nationalist consumer culture, navigating what can be seen as a form of “Chinese post-feminism,” where modern womanhood emphasizes self-improvement, aesthetic discipline, and heteronormative success rather than feminist liberation. Using an intersectional and multiracial feminist lens reveals how these creators’ identities are shaped by both global and local systems of power. Across platforms, algorithms, beauty norms, and cultural expectations privilege certain looks and lifestyles—often those associated with whiteness, middle-class status, and heteronormativity—thereby influencing which creators gain visibility and success online.

To conclude, this chapter has outlined the theoretical foundations that inform the analysis of dating content creators across Instagram and Red. Drawing from Foucault's concept of power, discourse, and sexuality, it highlighted the ways digital platforms operate as spaces to produce and circulate knowledge about dating and relationship. Simon and Gagnon's sexual script theory further provided insight into the social construction and reproduction of dating norms and expectations through media. Feminist theories, including intersectionality, multiracial feminism, neoliberal feminism, and post-feminism, offered a critical lens or understanding femininity, empowerment, and desirability within intersecting systems of power in both Western and Chinese contexts. In combination, the theories above provide a foundation for examining how content creators reinforce or challenge gender norms in digital dating cultures. The next chapter applies these theoretical perspectives to the methodological design and analytical approach of the study.

## Chapter 4 - Methodological Approach

This study employs a comparative, qualitative design to examine short form dating advice videos across Instagram and Red (Xiaohongshu). The research investigates the ways gendered romantic norms are reflected, challenged, or reproduced within these videos, paying attention to the differences shaped by platform culture and broader social contexts. The focus is on content aimed primarily at heterosexual female audiences, with a particular interest in the framing of gender roles, relationship ideologies, and expert advice within digital dating discourse. This chapter outlines the research design that supports this analysis. The analysis looks at the videos themselves alongside the broader assumptions that guide them, with attention to language, performance, and cultural differences. I begin by describing the qualitative and comparative orientation of the study, followed by an explanation of the sample selection and the procedures used to collect, transcribe, and organize the data. Next, I introduce the analytic strategies guiding this research, including thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis. The use of these research methods allowed the identification of recurring patterns and the ideological assumptions embedded in the creators' advice. Three main themes emerged from the analysis and will be discussed further in the following chapters of the thesis: 1. Gender Roles and Dating Scripts, 2. Discourse Patterns and Strategy-Based Advice, and 3. Cross-Cultural Comparisons. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of this approach, outlining both the possibilities and constraints of studying dating advice through short-form social media content.

#### 4.1 Sample Selection and Platform Overview

The primary data set comprises 20 short-form videos, averaging approximately two minutes in length, created by four dating advice content producers, two based in the United States and two in China. The American creators, Sabrina Zohar and Niko Emanuilidis, share English-language content on Instagram reels, whereas the Chinese creators, known by the pseudonyms Gongzhu and Fan, post Mandarin-language videos on the platform Red. Owing to the limited representation of male dating coaches on Red, both Chinese content creators selected for this study are female while one of the American content creators is male and the other one is female. Gongzhu has a substantial following of approximately 2.47 million and typically produces videos ranging from two to three minutes in duration. Fan, whose content exclusively focuses on dating and relationships, has a following of roughly 170,000 and produces videos that are generally slightly longer, around three to five minutes. The inclusion of both American and Chinese creators allows for a cross-cultural comparative analysis, particularly with respect to gendered norms and platform-specific content strategies.

Selection of Red content was conducted by searching the Mandarin term for romantic advice *情感建议* and filtering results using terms such as “within a year,” “videos,” and “most liked.” It is noticeable that Gongzhu and Fan’s videos repeatedly appear and are most relevant to this study. Although Fan has fewer followers, she has some popular videos with high views and likes that pop up first when searching the keywords mentioned above. For example, her video “Analyzing Deep Obsession and Emotion Roller-Coaster,” posted in January 2024, has thirty-six thousand likes.

Due to Instagram's relatively limited search functionality, the identification of suitable creators was aided by algorithmic recommendations and keyword searches such as "dating advice." This process led to the selection of Sabrina Zohar and Niko Emanuilidis, both of whom consistently produce content related to romantic and dating guidance. Sabrina is a female short video content creator as are Fan and Gongzhu, while Niko is the only selected male content creator in this research. Sabrina manages two Instagram accounts with a combined following of over 1.6 million users, while Niko has approximately 250,000 followers for his two Instagram accounts. Their video content typically ranges from one to two minutes in length. Both creators frequently appeared on the Instagram reels "For You" page during random browsing, indicating strong algorithmic visibility and relevance. Upon closer examination of their individual profiles and broader content, it became evident that their videos align closely with the focus of this study, both in terms of thematic consistency and engagement metrics. Sabrina is particularly notable for her distinctive delivery style and the dedicated following she has cultivated through her podcast, adding depth to her role as a self-identified dating expert. Niko offers a contrasting perspective as the only male creator included in the study, thereby contributing a valuable dimension to the gender dynamics explored in this research.

Five videos were selected from each of the four chosen content creators based on three primary criteria: thematic relevance, popularity (as indicated by likes and views), and recency, specifically those posted between January 2024 and June 2025. The selection of these creators was informed by a keyword search using terms such as "dating" and "advice." The accounts were identified due to the high visibility and engagement of their videos, which consistently appeared prominently in search results. Since the two platforms presented the videos in a different format on the content creators' pages, for Instagram, I selected the top five videos of the two English-

speaking creators with the most views as it is shown on their page, while for Red, I selected the top five videos of the two Chinese-speaking creators with the most likes since it is the way Red presents their most popular videos.

Then, each creator's content was reviewed in greater depth to ensure that their stylistic approach and thematic focus aligned with the aims of this research. The analysis focuses solely on video content itself and excludes comment sections to maintain analytical clarity and focus. In addition to transcribing the spoken content, the analysis also involves multimodal elements such as audio design and the visual or stylistic techniques employed to enhance the videos' viral appeal. These aspects are essential to understand how dating advice is constructed and received in short-form video formats. Observational notes were recorded alongside each transcript during the analytic process to capture these distinctions.

## **4.2 Content Creator Context**

To help contextualize the video transcripts used in this research and support the analysis presented in later chapters, this section introduces the four selected content creators from Instagram and Red. By providing further elaboration and background on who they are, the types of videos they produce, and their typical styles, it is easier to understand how their video content reflects the broader themes discussed in this thesis. These creators' descriptions also highlight differences in tone, expertise, presentation style, and platform culture, which are important for interpreting the dating advice they offer. For clarity and consistency in the analysis, the four content creators are referred to using nicknames derived from their online usernames: Fan, Gongzhu, Niko, and Sabrina.

Fan Shuishui (范水水) is a young Chinese influencer who brands herself as “Pure Love Warrior” (纯爱战士版). Her profile mentions that she lives in Spain and studied at the University of Victoria in Canada; however, I did not find verifiable documentation that confirms a specific degree (e.g. Bachelor’s, Master’s). With over 170,000 followers and 12 million likes, she describes her focus as “psychology and intimate relationship research” and emphasizes exploring the inner self. Her tagline, “not a ‘good girl’,” positions her aim against traditional gendered expectations; instead, her videos focus on self-empowerment and intimate relationships. Fan’s videos frequently address common anxieties around dating and include guidance about recognizing red flags, releasing past attachments, and reframing self-worth after rejection. Her videos not only contain a variety of casual pictures from her own photo album (pictures of the view, food, her dog, etc.), but also provide psychological insights grounded in reflective analysis.

Gongzhu (公主是用鲜花做的) is a highly visible creator based in Guangzhou, China, with over 2.4 million followers and over 250 million likes and saves. It is assumed that Gongzhu holds a bachelor’s degree in an unknown discipline based on her video content, but there is no specific indication from her Red page about the university she graduated from. Her bio emphasizes self-description themes “gender, love and growth” that summarize her content based on dating and relationship strategies, sex education, personal growth, and emotional well-being. Gongzhu’s video style blends everyday imagery (applying her makeup and eating) to create less distance between her and the audience. Her content situates intimate relationships as both sites of vulnerability and opportunities for self-growth. Across her videos, Gongzhu addresses recurring psychological and emotional concerns through lively metaphors and personal stories.

Niko Emanuilidis is a New York City-based creator, host, and dating commentator whose content centres on “healthy masculine pursuit,” boundaries, and decoding male behaviour. Niko’s Instagram page shows that he has approximately 232,000 followers on his main account @nikoeman, and he has around 10,800 followers on his podcast account @heydaddyacademy. This research will focus on the videos from his main account. Niko has a slogan, “Love, Lust & Logic,” written on his bio to give an overall impression of his videos. He attended Manhattanville College and majored in music and business. He is the only male content creator chosen for this thesis, and his videos mainly target female audiences. Besides the video content, his Linktree from his Instagram bio page indicates that he also offers lessons on dating and appears on popular podcasts. Niko frames his work through the brand “The Daddy Academy” that advances discourse centred on masculine standards.

Sabrina Zohar is a Los Angeles-based dating coach, creator, and host of *The Sabrina Zohar Show* (formerly known as *Do the Work*). This study focuses on Sabrina’s main account @thesabrinazoharshow, which has approximately 1.5 million followers. Her bio shows that she has another account, @sabinazohar, to post both video clips from her podcast and her personal life, with around 359,000 followers. She completed post-secondary education and holds a bachelor’s degree in Fashion Merchandising. She built a large audience across Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and her podcast, and she also offers courses and 1:1 coaching. Her Instagram account bio says “Certified dating + relationship coach tired of BS; New episodes every Friday; Courses, podcasts, & 1:1 coaching” while providing multiple links directed to her website, podcast, and the course. Sabrina Zohar’s content emphasizes attachment-informed approaches to modern dating, consistently centering themes of self-regulation, boundaries, and realistic expectations. Sabrina’s content is aimed at individuals recovering from relationships, while she highlights nostalgia as

distinct from recognition of harmful patterns. Overall, Sabrina’s videos operate as psychoeducational interventions that normalize vulnerability while teaching skills for resilience in relational contexts.

### **4.3 Data Collection and Coding Procedure**

After finalizing the video selection for this research, I transcribed the videos by importing video links to a transcribing website to obtain the transcripts. For the English videos from Instagram, I used “InstaSkrip” from Google Chrome; and I used a mini app from WeChat named “Quannezhushouwang” to transcribe the Chinese videos from Red. There were a few edits to do for the English videos for accuracy. For the Chinese videos, I translated the videos into English with the assistance of AI, and I changed some parts of the translation manually to ensure that a few words kept the right meaning during the translation process. The Chinese creator Fan occasionally uses some English words while speaking Mandarin in her videos, and I bolded those words in the English transcripts to differentiate them from the rest of the transcripts. Besides the title of videos, I also added to the transcripts the date, length, number of likes/views, and the hashtags content creators used. Content creators Fan and Sabrina’s videos contain captions that provide an overview or a textual summary of their videos, and I also included the captions along with the transcripts. Then, I added other details to the creators’ videos for a more detailed analysis to understand the creators better, such as the series collection of the video, the link to join their follower group chats, and the locations where they posted the videos, if any were shown.

Each video was transcribed and analyzed for both verbal and visual content, including tone of delivery, body language, self-presentation, and use of platform-specific features (e.g., filters, captions, framing). The coding process involved the identification of recurring themes such as

gender roles, romantic authority, and audience positioning. The data will be analyzed in relation to broader cultural and social contexts, with attention to how content creators perform gender and construct expertise in the following chapter. Codes will be compared across creators and platforms, and the findings will be interpreted using the study's theoretical framework and supporting literature.

## **4.4 Analytic Approaches**

### *4.4.1 Thematic Analysis*

The principal method of data analysis was thematic analysis, which identifies recurring patterns across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This six-phase process includes: 1. Familiarization with the data by transcribing the videos and reviewing the transcripts. 2. Generating initial codes by highlighting key phrases and ideas relevant to the research questions. 3. Searching for themes by grouping codes into broader thematic categories. 4. Reviewing and refining the themes based on relevance and coherence. 5. Defining and naming themes and finalizing thematic categories and their significance. 6. Writing the analysis by integrating themes with theoretical and contextual analysis (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). The thematic analysis provides insights into the ways in which dating scripts and gender performances are constructed within short-form videos, and how these intersect with platform and cultural dynamics.

I followed Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis step by step to study the video transcripts and find themes. First, I read the transcripts to ensure that the information is accurate and familiarize myself with the data. Next, I compiled transcripts, selected key quotes, and recorded notes on tone, captions, and visual style, and organized the data in a Word document to complete the analysis. Line-by-line coding highlighted early observations and recurring concepts such as

boundaries, manipulation, ghosting, and forms of emotional regulation. In sum, Fan's videos centred on emotional cycles and no contact strategies; Gongzhu emphasized persona building and materialistic filtering; Niko promoted consistency and male leadership; and Sabrina focused on trauma-informed communication and self-regulation. These descriptive codes were then grouped into broader clusters related to gender roles and dating scripts, manipulative versus emotionally mature strategies, the influence of short-form video formats that often simplify psychological ideas, cultural differences between Chinese and American creators, and predominantly targeting heterosexual female audiences. Comparing codes across creators not only revealed distinct orientations toward dating advice but also shared themes. Three main themes emerged from thematic analysis to guide the interpretation presented in the next chapter: 1. Gender roles and dating scripts. 2. Discourse patterns and strategy-based advice. 3. Cross-cultural differences.

#### *4.4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis*

To complement the thematic analysis, this study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how language and discourse function as instruments of power and ideology. CDA examines the socio-political implications of language use, particularly in relation to identity, authority, and normativity (Gee, 2014; Gill, 2000). Drawing on Foucault's (1978) theory of discourse and disciplinary power, CDA helps uncover how dating content creators position themselves as experts, shape gender norms, and influence relational behaviour. This approach is especially relevant for analyzing the power relations between creators and audiences, as well as the cultural assumptions embedded in their advice. The study considers how dating discourse is shaped by broader structures, such as patriarchy, post feminism, and consumer culture, and how these structures are either upheld or contested through short-form video content.

CDA can be traced as early as in the critical theory of Frankfurt School before World War II. As today, CDA has been widely used to study the ways in which social power circulates to create inequality through talk and text in the social and political context (Van Dijk, 2015). CDA extends beyond describing discourse structures to interrogate the social interactions, power dynamics, and institutional contexts within which discourse operates. For example, this thesis uses CDA to understand the problem of gender inequality by studying the content creators who produce discourse about gender stereotypes and ideologies within the patriarchy framework and the ways power is produced through short videos. Besides, Van Dijk (2015) points out that CDA allows the audience to understand and illustrate how power is being reproduced through social and political discourse, mass media, and professions. Accordingly, a group has more power when it can shape or influence what other groups do and think. This influence depends on having greater access to important and limited social resources, such as money, status, recognition, knowledge, information, cultural authority, or control over public communication and discourse (Mayr, 2008; Van Dijk, 2015). As Foucault (1980) states, power is not just expressed through explicit acts by the dominant groups, but it is also embedded in the taken-for granted action in everyday practices. Expertise creates a strong form of discourse through influencing people's minds, which is the discursive knowledge. Therefore, language is not just act as a form of communication but circulates and exchanges dominance and power.

Van Dijk (2005) proposed some questions to help study the discursive power by using the critical discourse analysis research method: "1. How do powerful groups control the text and context of public discourse? 2. How does such power discourse control the minds and actions of less powerful groups, and what are the social consequences of such control, such as social inequality? 3. What are the properties of the discourse of powerful groups, institutions, and

organizations and how are such properties forms of power abuse?” These questions are particularly useful for examining dating content creators as emerging forms of discursive authority in digital spaces. In relation to the first question, powerful groups do not only control discourse through formal institutions such as governments or media organizations, but also through algorithmically amplified platforms. The selected content creators come from grass-rooted backgrounds, but with the large followings they established, they can shape public discourse by defining the language of dating, setting the terms of debate, and framing what counts as “healthy,” “high value,” or “desirable.” Through repeated posts, series formats, hashtags, and platform visibility, they contribute to stabilizing certain interpretations of romantic behavior. The second question draws attention to the relationship between discourse and the minds and actions of audiences. When creators repeatedly present dating as strategy, emotional control, or value negotiation, these frameworks may become internalized as common sense. Audiences may begin to interpret their own experiences through these lenses and to adjust their expectations and behaviors towards dating and romantic relationships accordingly. This process does not require direct instruction or force. Rather, it operates through normalization and repetition, shaping perceptions of what is reasonable, attractive, or acceptable in relationships. The social consequences of such discursive influence may include the reinforcement of gendered expectations, the naturalization of competitive dynamics between men and women, and the intensification of gender polarization. The third question guides the analysis of the specific discourses and whether they function as forms of power abuse. This perspective can be further strengthened by drawing on Foucault’s (1978) framework of power, knowledge, and discourse that power can produce knowledge and regulate the discourse. For instance, when creators present generalized claims about some universal truths to determine how men/women should act, they may create more gender stereotypes and polarizations. When

authority is established through references to psychology, neuroscience, or personal success narratives without clear accountability, this can blur the fine line between discourse and opinion. In this sense, the discourse itself may reproduce hierarchical relations by positioning creators as knowledge holders and audiences as subjects in need of correction or guidance.

Besides Dijk, Fairclough also contributed a lot to the study of CDA, especially the three-dimensional model he proposed. Fairclough (2012) 's three-dimensional model conceptualizes that discourses operate simultaneously at the levels of text, discursive practice, and social practice. At the textual level, analysis focuses on linguistic and semiotic features to examine how meaning is constructed in specific texts, such as vocabulary, modality, pronoun use, tone, and visual elements. This is a micro- level study and can be used to study the specific term or idea that content creator brings to the video. For example, the naturalization of the idea of “men to pursuit, women to wait” that has been repeating in many videos. The thesis will focus more on combing the following two practices: discursive practice and social practice. At the level of discursive practice, attention shifts to the processes of production, circulation, and consumption of the text. For this research, the analysis moves beyond the wording of the videos and considers the conditions that shape how dating advice is produced, circulated, and interpreted. This includes attention to platform specific features, such as the time constraints of short form video and the role of algorithmic visibility in amplifying certain types of content in the selected videos.

Following Fairclough, this second level of analysis also attends to intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Intertextuality refers to the ways texts draw on or reference other circulating discourses, such as the ways content creators would refer to some buzzwords or discourse from the pop culture. Interdiscursivity is the mixing of different discourse types within a single text. The

most obvious example would be the blending of clinical therapeutic language about boundaries with neoliberal ideas of self-improvement or feminist empowerment that has constantly been used in the videos by content creators. Next, at the level of social practice, discourse is situated within broader social structures, such as neoliberalism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. This level also compares the difference of Chinese dating world and American dating world. At this step, the analysis connects micro linguistic patterns to macro systems of power. These three dimensions are dialectically related as discourse both shapes and is shaped by social structures. This framework enables an examination of dating advice content not only as language use, but as a socially embedded practice that participates in the reproduction of gendered norms.

Using CDA allowed me to look beyond what creators say and pay attention to the assumptions behind their advice. Short-form videos often use confident delivery, direct instructions, and simplified explanations, which can enhance the creator's perceived sense of authority. Through CDA, I examine the ways creators build credibility, whether through psychological terms, personal experience, or directive advice, and how these techniques affect the ways the audience understands dating and emotional behaviours. In addition, CDA is also important for identifying cultural differences. Since Instagram and Red operate in different social and cultural settings, creators on each platform draw on distinct discourses. For example, the two American creators often use trauma-informed language and focus on boundaries, while the two Chinese creators stress self-presentation, material expectations, and culturally specific norms. Overall, CDA adds another layer to the analysis by showing how dating advice is shaped by cultural values and power dynamics. Seeing these patterns makes it easier to understand the larger forces that appear across both platforms, such as patriarchy, post feminism and neoliberal feminism. CDA also adds another layer to the analysis by showing that dating advice is not neutral

but shaped by cultural values, power relations, and the creator's own position. This approach highlights the gendered expectations embedded in short-form videos, while also recognizing that some creators offer alternatives to dominant norms.

#### **4.5 Methodological Strengths and Limitations**

A key strength of this study is its cross-cultural and cross-platform design that enables a comparative look at dating advice on Instagram and Red. The research also combines two rising topics that past research has often examined separately by studying both dating experts and short videos. This combined focus provides a more complete understanding of the modern dating scripts. The use of thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis strengthens the connection between recurring patterns and broader cultural and gendered discourses. Meanwhile, the multimodal approach to studying the features of short videos and different styles of content creators adds depth to this analysis. The sampling criteria keep the dataset focused and manageable, and my bilingual background and familiarity with Western and Chinese social media aid a more accurate interpretation across languages and contexts.

At the same time, several limitations need to be acknowledged for the research design. First, the dataset is necessarily limited in size. While 20 videos are appropriate for a qualitative study of a master's thesis, the findings cannot be generalized to all dating-advice creators on Instagram and Red. The small sample reflects depth over breadth yet constrains representativeness. Next, the research only involves the short video content and excludes the comment section of the selected videos, which limits the analysis of audience interaction and response to the dating advice. Cross-cultural comparison also introduces complexity, as Instagram and Red operate within

different cultural, linguistic, and platform environments that cannot be fully controlled. Since the Mandarin videos were translated into English for this research, interpretation may involve subjective judgment or may not reflect the same meaning under different language and cultural contexts. Finally, the educational or professional backgrounds of some creators are not always verifiable, which limits the extent to which their self-presented expertise can be contextualized.

## Chapter 5 - Findings and Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of this study by examining how short form dating advice videos shape ideas about relationships, gender roles, and dating practices across different cultural contexts. Through thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis of the selected videos, three main themes emerged from the data: *Gender Roles and Dating Scripts*, *Strategy-Based Advice and Discourse Patterns*, and *Cross-Cultural Comparisons*. These three themes are analytically derived from and directly respond to the study's research questions, which provides a structured framework for presenting the findings. The analysis shows that dating advice creators do more than simply share suggestions about relationships. These videos circulate particular ideas about romantic relationships and gender roles, which present the audience with specific scripts for how heterosexual dating should be viewed and practiced.

The first theme, *Gender Roles and Dating Scripts*, examines how content creators reproduce or reinterpret common expectations in heterosexual dating. The analysis shows that many of the videos position women as responsible for interpreting men's behaviour, managing emotional labour, and navigating uncertainty in relationships. The sections on heteronormativity and the interpretation of female sexuality further explore how creators construct their target audience and frame femininity within these dating narratives. The second theme, *Strategy-Based Advice and Discourse Patterns*, focuses on how creators present dating as something that can be managed through specific strategies. Rather than discussing relationships in general terms, they offer step-by-step instructions, communication scripts, and behavioural rules that viewers can apply in particular situations. This theme also considers how dating discourses connect to different feminist perspectives, as well as how the short-form video format shapes the presentation of dating expertise online. The third theme, *Cross-Cultural Comparisons*, explores how dating advice

reflects broader differences between Chinese and American dating cultures. By comparing selected content creators on Red and Instagram, this section highlights variations in communication styles, emotional expression, and relationship expectations. At the same time, it identifies shared patterns across both contexts, suggesting that digital platforms play a role in shaping how dating advice is produced and consumed.

Across all themes, the analysis reveals that while short form dating advice videos are often framed as empowering and informative, they frequently reproduce conventional heterosexual scripts and gendered expectations. First, under the theme of Gender Roles and Dating Scripts, the findings show that both Instagram and Red creators continue to promote recognizable patterns of heterosexual interaction, where men are positioned as initiators and leaders, while women are expected to follow and manage emotional dynamics. Although these roles are sometimes presented in the language of self-worth and empowerment, they often reinforce binary thinkings and unequal expectations, particularly in relation to women's emotional labour and self-presentation. Second, the theme of Strategy-Based Advice and Discourse Patterns demonstrates that dating advice is frequently framed as a set of techniques or rules to optimize romantic outcomes. Creators use authoritative, simplified, and often repetitive language to position themselves as experts to encourage the audiences to adopt strategic behaviours. This approach reflects a broader shift toward the commodification of intimacy, where relationships are treated as problems to be managed through calculated actions rather than mutual processes. Third, the Cross-Cultural Comparison reveals both similarities and differences between Instagram and Red content. While both platforms reproduce gendered scripts, Red content more often integrates discourses of self-improvement and collective femininity ideas shaped by Chinese social expectations, whereas Instagram content emphasizes individualism, personal boundaries, and neoliberal ideals of self-

development. These differences also highlight how similar gendered scripts are adapted within distinct cultural and socio-economic contexts. Despite these differences, both contexts demonstrate how short-form video content functions as a powerful site for circulating and normalizing gendered knowledge about relationships. In combination, these findings respond directly to the research questions by showing that short form dating advice videos do not simply reflect existing gender norms and sexual scripts, but actively shape contemporary understandings of heterosexual dating, gendered divisions, and patterns of romantic behaviour.

### **5.1 Gender Roles and Dating Scripts**

A central theme across this study is the construction of gender roles and dating scripts within short-form video content. The selected content creators are not only describing dating behaviour but also shaping the expectations that guide it. In their videos, dating is seen as a patterned interaction shaped by gender roles of men and women and common sexual scripts. Through thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis, it became clear that these creators participate in the reproduction of cultural norms that frame femininity and masculinity in specific ways. Their advice reflects the broader dynamics outlined by Simon and Gagnon (1986), who argue that sexual and relational behaviour is guided by scripts that individuals learn and internalize. The past research addresses that gender roles and sexual scripts largely exist in the dating world. Meanwhile, it is observed that some traditional gender roles and common sexual scripts still make their appearance within the dating advice provided by content creators. These videos work within the cultural and interpersonal scripts to blend traditional gender expectations with contemporary psychological and self-improvement language. Although each creator has their own style, their

video contents collectively contribute to a landscape where gendered expectations continue to shape dating conduct. It is noticed that content creators elaborate on female sexuality and heteronormativity for the targeted female audiences.

It is noticeable that binary thinking and gendered dating scripts are frequently reproduced in the selected video samples. In many cases, women are encouraged to take a more passive role, while men are expected to take the initiative in dating. This pattern appears across different stages of relationships. Before a date, men are described as responsible for initiating plans: “He needs to plan the dates and lead the charge there” (Niko, 2024). During dating interactions, women are also encouraged to expect men to demonstrate effort through financial gestures. For instance, Gongzhu advises: “If he says, ‘I’ll pay for it,’ you say, ‘Sure, you pay.’ If he doesn’t say it, you just say, ‘Buy this for me, okay?’” (Gongzhu, 2024e). After an argument, women are further advised to remain passive and wait for men to reconcile, as Fan explains: “I basically never once took the initiative to reconcile. Because I understand that this is a part of male nature” (Fan, 2024d).

Across all four creators, the Gender Roles and Dating Scripts theme reveals a consistent pattern in which women are expected to manage emotional labour, interpret relational cues, and maintain psychological resilience. These responsibilities appear in both Western and Chinese contexts, although they are expressed through different rhetorical styles. Fan’s content emphasizes emotional vulnerability and introspection. Gongzhu’s work focuses on self-presentation and strategic performance. Niko’s videos reinforce a system where men are expected to pursue, and women are expected to evaluate. Sabrina highlights emotional regulation and communicative clarity as essential parts of feminine identity. Together, these perspectives reflect a contemporary variation of traditional heterosexual norms. The creators incorporate modern terminology and

psychological framing, yet they reinforce gender expectations and sexual scripts that have long shaped dating cultures.

### *5.1.1 Heteronormativity*

Heteronormativity refers to the social assumption that heterosexual relationships between women and men constitute the normal and preferred form of intimacy and romantic relationships (Warner, 1991). A clear pattern across the analyzed videos is the assumption that the primary audience consists of heterosexual women. With the exception of Sabrina, whose content tends to use more gender-neutral language when referring to audiences or their partners, the other three content creators frequently address their audience using explicitly gendered terms such as “girls,” while referring to their potential partners as “guys” or “him.” Through this linguistic framing, the audience is implicitly positioned as women seeking male partners. As a result, the advice is delivered within a heterosexual framework where relationships are assumed to occur between women and men. The repeated use of these gendered pronouns and labels contributes to the construction of heterosexual dating as the default context in which romantic relationships are understood and discussed.

This pattern reflects Simon and Gagnon (1986)’s “sexual scripts,” which refer to socially shared guidelines that shape how individuals understand and perform romantic and sexual relationships. Within the analyzed content, these scripts appear through the consistent positioning of women and men as occupying distinct roles within the dating process. Women are often encouraged to carefully manage their behavior, emotional expression, and self-presentation to influence male interest and commitment. Men, in contrast, are frequently described as the

evaluators or decision-makers whose attraction must be maintained. In this way, the advice reproduces culturally recognizable expectations about gendered behavior in romantic interactions.

At the same time, the absence of references to alternative relationship configurations further reinforces heterosexual dating as the normative framework. Same-sex relationships and nonbinary identities are not addressed within the analyzed videos, which suggests that heterosexual coupling is treated as the assumed context for romantic advice. From a critical perspective, these discursive patterns demonstrate how digital dating advice participates in the circulation of culturally dominant gender roles. By presenting particular forms of behavior as effective strategies for attracting or maintaining male attention, the videos contribute to the reproduction of gendered dating scripts that shape how women are expected to navigate contemporary romantic relationships.

### *5.1.2 Interpretation of Female Sexuality and Target Audience*

Given the growing tendency for short form dating advice content to target female audiences, and the fact that several of the selected creators clearly orient their advice toward women, this section explores how female sexuality is interpreted and discussed in these videos. Although not all creators explicitly state that their audience is women, the advice often assumes that women are the ones navigating uncertainty, interpreting men's behaviour, and managing emotional risks in dating situations. As a result, female sexuality is frequently framed through expectations about how women should respond, set boundaries, or present themselves in relationships. By looking at these patterns, it helps to show how short form dating advice participates in shaping ideas about gender roles and dating scripts in contemporary dating culture.

Fan offers one of the most vivid examples of emotionalized dating scripting, as her content concentrates on emotional cycles, subconscious attraction, and the lingering impact of inconsistent

relationships. In her video about “deep infatuation,” Fan talked about the ways one romantic partner’s behaviors affect another’s emotions by firstly causing pain and then bring pleasure to “create a positive feedback loop” (Fan, 2024a). According to Fan, emotional attachment is produced through a cycle in which one first induces negative emotions, such as sadness or anxiety, and then resolves them through rewarding actions, thereby intensifying pleasure and reinforcing attachment. For example, she describes a scenario in which “a guy you like does something wrong and hurts you deeply. When you’re ready to give up on him, he suddenly shows up at your door with flowers and an apology” (Fan, 2024a). She further emphasizes that “after you upset someone, give them an option they can’t refuse,” framing emotional repair as a strategic response (Fan, 2024a). Similarly, Fan suggests that women can apply this dynamic in reverse after a conflict by reinitiating contact in a way that is difficult to refuse, noting that “if you’re already at his door, he definitely can’t keep his principles” (Fan, 2024a). This explanation positions women as emotionally sensitive individuals who are vulnerable to psychological reinforcement patterns in dating. Fan frequently reminds her audience to understand their emotional triggers and to become aware of the internal dynamics that keep them attached to unreliable partners. Although she encourages emotional independence, the responsibility for emotional clarity rests primarily with women. Fan’s descriptions assume that women must cultivate insight and self-awareness to avoid unhealthy cycles. These ideas reinforce a long-standing pattern within gender scholarship, particularly in the work of De Beauvoir (1953), who argues about the form of femininity and the ways women are framed as responsible for maintaining emotional stability and interpreting relational meaning. In Fan’s advice, men are portrayed as unpredictable figures who create emotional intensity, while women need to carry the task of managing attachment, processing emotional reactions, and protecting themselves from unhealthy patterns. Her videos therefore

reinforce a version of femininity associated with emotional vulnerability paired with psychological responsibility.

Fan's videos also reflect a hybrid linguistic and cultural style. Although the primary language of the content is Chinese, she occasionally incorporates English words, particularly when introducing psychological concepts such as "sub communication," as well as popular relationship terms like "situationship" (Fan, 2024e). This linguistic mixing may reflect both her educational background and the characteristics of her audience. According to the information on her profile, Fan graduated from the University of Victoria, which may explain her familiarity with English terminology and Western psychological discourse. At the same time, prior research shows that women under the age of 32 make up the majority of Red users (Wei, 2023). In addition, women in China now have higher university enrollment and graduation rates than men due to expanding educational and professional opportunities (Blair & Madigan, 2016; Wu & Zhang, 2010). Taken together, these factors suggest that Fan's followers are likely composed largely of young and relatively well-educated women who have at least some exposures to English through formal education. As a result, the occasional use of English terminology not only signals cultural capital but may also resonate with an audience that is familiar with globalized relationship discourse and willing to engage with such hybrid forms of knowledge.

While Fan emphasizes emotional sensitivity for her female audiences, Gongzhu constructs femininity as a structured identity that is shaped by building confidence and creating boundaries. Her videos often warn women to avoid the image of insecure or eager, and she suggests that such behaviour reduces women's perceived value and invites mistreatment by their dates or partners. In her discussion of "taboos" in dating, she explains that certain insecure communication styles signal

low self-worth and make women easy to being taken advantage of. She encourages the female audience to avoid acting “silly, sweet, and innocent” but to be “I’m bad, I’m sexy, I’m confident, I’m outstanding, and I pursue quality (not money).” She also states that is how she made a good impression to her current partner when they first started dating (Gongzhu, 2024a). Moreover, she suggests a form of selective openness that balances confidence with approachability. This model frames femininity as something that must be actively maintained. Women are asked to present themselves in ways that demonstrate independence and allure. Gongzhu also promotes the idea of being slightly materialistic as a means of filtering out insincere partners and present this practice not as superficiality but as a strategic indicator of standards. She indicates that men tend to evaluate women’s lifestyles and form expectations about their behaviour through everyday consumption habits. As she explains, “In dating, men will choose gifts for you based on their observation of your daily spending level... Especially if you’re dating with the intention of marriage—otherwise, why are you building a ‘pure and simple’ image? If you attract this type of guy and marry him, won’t you suffer for life? That’s why when we date, we must establish a ‘materialistic persona’” (Gongzhu, 2024e). In this context, she advises women to present a higher standard of consumption in order to signal their value and attract more generous partners. This advice frames dating as a process in which women strategically manage their self-presentation to influence men’s perceptions and behaviour. These messages echo neoliberal feminist expectations in which women are encouraged to self-manage, self-brand, and constantly cultivate an image that protects them from relational disappointment. In addition, Her story about confronting her boyfriend over an unsatisfactory gift reinforces this expectation. She describes asking him to “make it up” in specific ways and positions relational negotiation as something women must actively steer (Gongzhu, 2024b). Instead of presenting vulnerability as a central feature of femininity, her advice frames

feminine power as the ability to maintain standards, manage impressions, and curate a consistent public identity. These ideas fit within postfeminist discourses that promote confidence, self-discipline, and individual responsibility as signs of empowered womanhood.

One big sexual script observed in this research is that men should make actions and take the lead, like texting and apologizing first, planning the date, and being financially responsible. The content creator Niko states that “The best way to see how a man feels about you is to do nothing” and “you’re not really reaching out first, every once in a while you can reach out first, I say like it's 70-30, like he should do it 70% of the time, you should do 30% of the time” in his video, suggesting that his female audience should wait around for men to plan the dates and initiate communication (Emanuilidis, 2024c). This ratio transforms romantic interaction into something quantifiable, and rule driven. Niko provided a lot of his own understanding of the men from a male perspective for his female audiences: “a man who thinks really, really highly of you is not gonna go more than like 10 days max without seeing you, I can fucking guarantee you that...A man who’s dating you seriously and really wants to get to know you and wants to make sure that he's going to see you again, you're always going to have that next date plan” (Emanuilidis, 2024c).

Unlike the other three content creators, who identify as women, Niko is the only male creator in the sample. Nevertheless, he positions himself as offering dating advice to women and interpreting femininity from a male perspective. Niko frequently presents claims about dating from a male perspective while addressing a female audience with a tone of certainty. For example, in one of his videos discussing common excuses men use when cancelling dates, such as oversleeping or getting a flat tire, Niko dismisses these explanations as signs of lack of interest. He states, “There’s no man sleepier than a man that doesn’t want to see you,” and questions the plausibility of other excuses by saying, “I’ve maybe gotten three flat tires my whole life. What are the odds

that he gets a flat tire right before he's about to see you?" (Emanuilidis, 2024b). Niko's approach introduces a contrasting gender dynamic that centers masculine pursuit and effort. His content consistently emphasizes that a man's behaviour is the clearest indicator of his intentions. He advises women to evaluate men based on reliability and consistency since serious men put in the necessary effort. Niko's videos constantly assert that men should be initiating the majority of communication and planning, while women should respond rather than lead (Emanuilidis, 2024a, c, d). His instructions suggest that a healthy relationship follows a predictable pattern where men take responsibility for moving the connection forward. This reinforces a long-standing heterosexual dynamic in which men pursue and women evaluate. The underlying message from his videos aligns with traditional Western dating scripts. By presenting himself as someone who can explain male behaviour from the inside, Niko adopts an authoritative position similar to what Foucault (1978) describes in discussions of expert discourse. His brand centers on clarity and directness, suggesting that men's intentions are straightforward and that women can interpret them by observing consistent patterns. This guidance positions women as the interpreters of male behaviour, which places the burden of relational decision making on them even as men are framed as the initiators. His videos signal that femininity involves maintaining boundaries and resisting over-investment, while masculinity is enacted through decisiveness and follow-through.

In one of his videos, Niko uses an analogy to explain situations in which a man claims he does not want a relationship but continues spending time with a woman. He states: "Guy says he doesn't want a relationship but enjoys every second of time with you. I have a perfect analogy. This is like this guy going to a car dealership and the car dealer's like, oh yeah, take this Ferrari out for a spin. You can just drive it around. See if you like it" (Emanuilidis, 2024e). Through this comparison, Niko attempts to help female viewers recognize a situation in which a man may enjoy

the benefits of companionship without committing to a relationship. The analogy is intended to clarify the imbalance of expectations and encourage women to avoid investing emotionally in partners who openly reject commitment. However, this metaphor can also be interpreted as problematic. By comparing the dating situation to test driving a car, the analogy implicitly frames the woman as an object being evaluated, while positioning the man as the consumer who decides whether to “purchase” or commit. In this sense, the comparison may unintentionally reproduce a form of objectification by depicting women as items to be assessed rather than active participants in the relationship dynamic. While the example aims to simplify a complex dating scenario for viewers, it also reflects broader cultural narratives in which women’s value in heterosexual relationships is metaphorically linked to commodities that men evaluate or acquire.

Compared to three other content creators who made it clear that they are targeting women, Sabrina’s videos seem more gender neutral, and she did not directly state that her videos are targeting female audiences in the selected videos for this research. Her videos encourage emotional regulation, communication, and self-awareness, especially when navigating anxiety and uncertainty. When discussing the importance of “going slow,” she argues that pacing is essential for avoiding emotional overwhelm and for building genuine connection (Zohar, 2024b). In her content about “limerence,” she explains that the strong emotions of obsession often come from the dopamine, and she encourages the audience to reflect on the reasons behind their reactions. According to Sabrina, “Limerence is just a deep infatuation with somebody in a very short amount of time without really knowing them. The problem is that it feels like love” (Zohar, 2024c). Instead of repeating gender roles into the dating advice, she suggests her audience to regulate their emotional impulses and maintain clarity even when confronted with excitement or anxiety. For example, in one of her videos, Sabrina encourages her audience to imagine a future scenario in

which they eventually meet their partner as a way to reduce stress in dating. She shares a personal practice to explain this idea and how it helps her manage dating anxiety. In the video, she asks viewers to consider the following question: “What if I told you that within six to eight months, you were going to meet the love of your life, and you didn't have to worry about a thing? How would you start to show up then? How would you live your day-to-day life?” She then recalls a conversation with her mother, explaining: “I remember my mama asked me that a few years ago and my response was, well, I wouldn't care then. I wouldn't be as anxious. And it hit me, oh my god, that's the point of asking that question” (Zohar, 2024d). Sabrina frequently encourages her audience to communicate honestly, define boundaries, and avoid compromising their values for the sake of temporary emotional relief. These expectations align with broader therapeutic discourses that have become common in online relationship coaching spaces.

The Gender Roles and Dating Scripts theme also connects closely to the broader theoretical framework of this thesis. Simon and Gagnon’s script theory highlights that dating behaviour follows cultural templates, and these creators clearly draw from those templates while presenting them as individualized advice. De Beauvoir’s argument that femininity is socially constructed resonates with the ways these creators teach women to regulate emotions, craft identities, and adopt specific relational postures. Intersectional and neoliberal feminist perspectives likewise help reveal the forms of self-management, emotional labour, and personal responsibility embedded in these videos. Intersectional feminist perspectives further reveal that these expectations are not universal, but are shaped by cultural context, platform norms, and broader social hierarchies. In this study, the advice directed at women is not only gendered but also reflects different cultural expectations in Chinese and Western contexts, such as the emphasis on marriageability and social image on Red, compared to self-development and emotional boundaries on Instagram. These

differences show how femininity is constructed through intersecting factors, including culture, digital environments, and normative assumptions about dating and relationships.

In conclusion, the Gender Roles and Dating Scripts theme illustrates that dating advice in short-form videos relies heavily on gendered expectations even as it adopts contemporary language and psychological framing. These content creators offer guidance that feels modern and empowering, yet their messages continue to reflect traditional ideas about gender roles assigned to women and men. While the creators occasionally challenge harmful dynamics or promote healthier relational models, they often reinforce the gendered expectations that structure heterosexual dating. The persistence of these expectations across platforms and cultural contexts suggests that short form dating advice participates in sustaining a broader system where femininity is tied to emotional labour and masculinity is tied to action and initiative. This theme provides a foundation for the following analysis, which examines the specific discourse patterns and strategic communication styles that shape the delivery and reception of dating advice across Instagram and Red.

## **5.2 Strategy-Based Advice and Discourse Patterns**

It is noticeable that in the short videos, all four content creators provide their audiences with some strategy-based advice to share with the audience, especially the two Chinese content creators, Fan and Gongzhu, who gave extremely detailed strategies to guide their audience with exact steps in specific situations. Meanwhile, each content creator has their own style and creates their own discourse. Across all four content creators, dating advice in short-form videos is shaped by clear discourse styles and strategic instructions that position dating as something manageable

through deliberate behaviours. Instead of describing relationships in general terms, each creator gives audiences specific tactics, rules, and scripts for what to say and do in particular situations. These strategies are deeply tied to the nature of short-form video platforms, where content must be concise, engaging, and instantly applicable. Because of this format, the creators simplify dating into discrete actions that viewers can implement immediately. Their discourse patterns rely on confident delivery, the appearance of expertise, and emotionally charged language, which reinforces their authority. Drawing from Foucault's theory of power, knowledge, and discourses and using the CDA model to study the disciplinary power, these creators can be seen as shaping what counts as expertise knowledge about dating and relationships. By repeatedly framing their advice as truth or expertise, they encourage viewers to internalize their strategies and regulate their own behaviour according to the norms presented.

Fan demonstrates one of the most distinctive strategy-based discourse styles by blending psychological vocabulary with emotionally charged instructions. Her transcript confirms that she offers four explicit steps to “[ make sure] he regrets losing you: “Step one: Let him have the last word... Step two: Disappear completely and become cold... Step three: Do not post anything revealing your mood... Step four: Go out and enjoy life” (Fan, 2024c). Under each step, Fan gives detailed explanations by instructing women to hang up the phone or stop replying if the man ends the relationship to tell viewers that silence will make him increasingly curious: “Since you did not end things clearly, he will be very curious and keep guessing what you are doing” (Fan, 2024c). She warns women not to post sad songs or emotional quotes because this would reveal vulnerability, instead she suggests “Let him stay in complete darkness with no clues—he won't know what you're thinking or how you feel...Go out with friends, dress beautifully, hang out with your single friends, go to clubs, join events—do all kinds of things” (Fan, 2024c). In the final step,

she tells women to dress beautifully and to take and post photos to project happiness and confidence: “Dress well not to seduce him, but to show you are simply happy and confident” (Fan, 2024c). Moreover, Fan introduces what she calls “the art of insinuation” as a strategy for addressing problems in romantic relationships. Rather than confronting male partners directly, she advises women to communicate concerns through subtle and indirect cues. According to Fan, effective insinuation relies on suggestion rather than explicit criticism. As she explains, “The essence of insinuation is that it must be subtle—sideways, indirect, quietly pricking their ego so they feel they’re not your type, that they’re not enough in your eyes” (Fan, 2024b). In this framework, indirect communication is presented as a way to influence men’s behaviour without openly challenging them. Fan further argues that this strategy can reshape men’s attitudes within the relationship by creating a sense of insecurity that motivates them to seek approval. She states that when a man experiences such subtle signals, “he’ll carry a faint sense of insecurity and fear—afraid of losing you, afraid that you don’t like him.” As a result, “he will care more about your opinion and your approval, driving him to seek your validation” (Fan, 2024b). In this sense, insinuation is framed as a technique through which women can indirectly guide men’s behaviour and strengthen the stability of the relationship. Besides, Fan introduces the concept of “sub-communication,” which involves observing a partner’s nonverbal behaviour to interpret their intentions. She suggests that subtle cues such as facial expressions or eye contact may reveal genuine feelings. For example, Fan demonstrates in the video how to distinguish between a “fake smile” and a genuine smile, using this as a way to explain how people may unconsciously reveal their emotions. She argues that paying attention to these signals can help women determine whether a man is genuinely interested or only seeking “situationship” or causal relationship. As she explains, viewers can observe how a partner behaves during intimate moments: “You can

observe: when you're physically intimate with him, does he want to look into your eyes? Does he seek eye contact? Or is he just focused on his own pleasure and ignoring yours? This is a very telling action and hard to fake. Think about it—when you don't like someone, especially in an intimate situation, you won't want to look them in the eyes” (Fan, 2024e).

Compared to other content creators, Fan has a more calming voice in her video along with the same soft background lo-fi music in most of her videos, and the selected photo background from daily life, which creates a relaxing atmosphere to the audience and provide the therapeutic vibe and more credibility for viewers while she introduces the psychological terms. This contradictory framing strengthened Fan's authority. She presented herself as knowledgeable enough to explain manipulative relationship dynamics, yet responsible enough to warn viewers against using them uncritically. In Foucauldian terms, this discourse worked through the language of expertise that encouraged viewers to monitor their emotions and behaviours as strategic practices: “First, let me emphasize again: this video will not help you establish a healthy, functional relationship. I hope you approach this purely as preventive knowledge and use it with caution,” and almost identically in another video “First, let me emphasize again: this video will *not* help you build a healthy and positive relationship. I hope you treat this purely as preventative knowledge to understand but use it cautiously (Fan, 2024 a, b), which feels contradictory as she on the one hand having a certain tone while introduce the psychology terms in both Chinese and English and provide specific examples that seem assume to inspire and guide the audience about the relationship, but also warn her audience that the video “ won't help you to build a healthy and functional/ positive relationship.” This contradictory framing strengthens her perceived authority: she positions herself as knowledgeable enough to understand manipulation but responsible enough to warn her audience. Her discourse reflects a form of Foucauldian power in which knowledge

appears scientific and rational, encouraging viewers to monitor their own emotions, social media behaviour, and even their silence as strategic tools.

Gongzhu presents a different style of strategy-based advice focused on persona construction, material cues, and subtle communication tactics. Her videos use a lot of terms from Chinese pop culture, and the stories with her current boyfriend as examples to support her arguments. She uses specific stories, such as choosing a premium ice cream brand instead of an economic brand in front of her boyfriend, to demonstrate how materialistic presentation filters men's intentions (Gongzhu, 2024e). She also warns women against appearing overly innocent or naive, arguing that the "silly, sweet, innocent girl" persona makes women look easily manipulated and therefore end up with unqualified partners: "Why are you a 'jerk magnet'? Because you think being pure, kind, honest, and not materialistic are good traits you should show him to prove you're a 'good girl.' But what you actually attract are guys who just want sex or guys who cry poverty" (Gongzhu, 2024a). Instead, she recommends communication strategies that make women seem confident and selective. She tells viewers not to use overplayed jokes, and not to respond immediately to messages, and not to use overly cheerful tones when talking with men. Her transcript includes detailed examples, such as suggesting that if a woman wants to hint to a man to take her on a date and have a specific food she wants during the date, she could fake the scenario of texting him "dreamed about eating something with him" or send an old photo of food and pretend she ate it today (Gongzhu, 2024d). Gongzhu strengthens her authority by sharing stories about her boyfriend and acting out these scenarios while multitasking, such as eating or doing makeup. On the other hand, Gongzhu also offers advice that is highly specific, and she suggested the exact wording for the audience to use and assuring them that these approaches are effective. Her strategies are not limited to verbal communication but also involve deliberate behavioural

tactics. For example, she advises viewers not to respond to men's messages immediately and to intentionally end conversations or ignore messages such as "good night." According to her explanation, these actions will create uncertainty and make the man continue wondering and thinking about the interaction (Gongzhu, 2024d). These choices give her a casual and relatable tone, but her advice reflects a strategic approach to dating in which women must manage impressions carefully. Her discourse style aligns with a Foucauldian understanding of how individuals discipline themselves. She encourages women to adjust tone, language, timing, and even their economic presentation to navigate dating effectively.

Although Gongzhu's advice about being a "bad woman" can be seen as a way to help women choose partners more carefully and avoid being taken advantage of, it also raises concerns about classism and ableism. By emphasizing a man's spending ability as an important indicator of relationship value, the advice risks linking a person's worth to their financial resources. In addition, in one of her videos, she describes a situation where her partner was going through depression and stress from work to suggest that untreated depression could make someone a burden in the relationship, unless it is quickly addressed through medical treatment or openly explained (Gongzhu, 2024c, 2024e). Therefore, Gongzhu argues that women should avoid staying in relationships that negatively affect their well-being and "must develop the ability to leave at anytime." As she states, "Because there are plenty of positive, energetic men out there—why would I choose to be with a gloomy, lifeless, sickly man every day? If we are kind to someone who is bad for us, that's just exploiting ourselves" (Gongzhu, 2024c). This framing may unintentionally portray mental health struggles as a personal weakness rather than a complex condition. As a result, the advice can imply that a person's desirability in relationships is connected not only to their financial capacity but also to their ability to appear emotionally stable and positive.

Niko uses a rule-based discourse style grounded in his identity as a man speaking to a female audience. His transcripts show that he constructs authority by presenting himself as someone who understands male behaviour from the inside. He uses the phrase “Welcome to the Daddy Academy,” which appears consistently in his videos (Emanuilidis, 2024a, b, c, d). Besides the “70/30 rules” of suggesting men being the main initiators in dating, Niko also clearly states, “ladies, you should not be chasing a man... he needs to plan the dates and lead the charge there” (Emanuilidis, 2024c). His transcript further reinforces this by explaining that a man who is serious “will not go more than ten days without seeing you” (Emanuilidis, 2024c). Niko does not rely on psychological vocabulary or storytelling. Instead, he presents dating as a series of predictable behaviours that women can interpret through simple rules. This formulaic logic gives his advice an air of certainty. His insider role functions as a form of discursive power because he claims access to male intentions that his viewers cannot verify. Besides the rules he shared to determine if the date is on the right path, Niko seems to be firm of the patterns of dating. He also gives firm answer of the right pace of dating should be “first month of dating, one date per week” (Emanuilidis, 2024a) and states that if the man has a high level of interest, there will always be next date planned: “A man who's dating you seriously and really wants to get to know you and wants to make sure that he's going to see you again, you're always going to have that next date plan. Like you're going to be texting and having good conversation, but you're always going to know when you're going to see him next’ ((Emanuilidis, 2024d).

Sabrina provides a contrasting approach grounded in therapeutic discourse and emotional communication. In Sabrina’s most popular videos for this research, two of them are about the topic of “ghosting.” She mentioned in the caption that it is suggested to let the date know if there is no longer interest in further contact instead of just being ignorant and disappearing without notice. Her

most viewed and pinned video “ghosting,” said: “Instead of ghosting, say this: hey, I wanted to be honest and share that after doing some thinking, I don’t think this is the right fit for me. I wish you all the best and it was great to have met you. Take care. Doesn’t need to be negative. Doesn’t need to be dramatic. Just let this person know in some capacity that you are not interested in pursuing this (Zohar, 2024a).” The video is concise in length, but she provided a prompt reply for the audience’s reference. It appears that the topic of “ghosting” is particularly popular, which may explain why Sabrina created another video that is very similar to this one. In “*Instead of Ghosting, Say This*,” she repeats a comparable script but adds that viewers should reflect on their own emotional maturity if they “prefer ghosting”: “Instead of ghosting, say this. Hey, it was great to have met you, but after spending some time together, I realized this is not a connection I want to pursue further, and I don’t want to waste either of our times. I truly wish you all the best. It doesn’t need to be dramatic. It doesn’t need to be anything more than just fucking telling somebody that you are not interested in seeing them again. And if your response is, I’d rather get ghosted, well then, we need to start looking at the emotional maturity that you claim to have in the way that you’re dating in the world right now” (Zohar, 2024e).

Sabrina’s strategies focus less on manipulation and tactical behaviour and instead emphasize clear communication, emotional awareness, and respectful interaction. However, her discourse still functions as a form of authority because she frequently relies on therapeutic language to instruct viewers on how emotionally mature individuals should behave in relationships. By framing her advice through psychological concepts and self-improvement narratives, she positions herself as someone capable of diagnosing unhealthy patterns and prescribing appropriate emotional responses. In addition, Sabrina’s delivery style is also distinctive. She often uses curse words and speaks in a direct and confrontational tone. In addition to the spoken advice, her videos

typically include long captions that expand on the message, offering additional explanations and emotional reasoning. These captions reinforce the central points of the video and serve as reminders of the behaviours and attitudes she encourages viewers to adopt. While her tone often appears confident and persuasive, it can also become somewhat directive or commanding toward the audience. Sabrina frequently uses phrases such as “I want you to,” “I need you to,” or “do this” and “say this” when instructing viewers on how to respond in dating situations. In these moments, failing to follow these recommendations will result in negative relational outcomes that audience must ultimately deal with on their own. For example, she states: “But what's important here is I need you to believe that because I can believe that all day, but if you don't, well then that's why we're going to just keep having these dating patterns and these reoccurring issues consistently over and over again, because until you genuinely believe it, then you will not fucking see it” (Zohar, 2024d).

From a Foucauldian perspective, this type of emotional vocabulary can be understood as a subtle form of disciplinary power. Rather than imposing authority through external control, the discourse encourages individuals to monitor and regulate their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviours according to particular norms of emotional maturity, honesty, and self-awareness. In this sense, the advice functions as a technology of the self, where viewers are invited to internalize these therapeutic standards and actively reshape their conduct to become a healthier or more self-aware subject in dating relationships. Through repeated exposure to such discourse, audiences are guided to interpret their experiences through psychological frameworks and to evaluate themselves based on whether they meet these normative expectations of emotional competence.

Collectively, the four creators in this study present dating as a series of discrete strategies delivered through distinct discourse styles. Fan uses psychologically framed manipulation tactics. Gongzhu promotes persona construction and impression management. Niko offers formula-based interpretations grounded in his insider identity. Sabrina provides communication scripts shaped by therapeutic reasoning. Although their video styles differ, each creator constructs a form of expertise that encourages viewers to monitor and adjust their behaviour. These discourses reflect broader power relations in which audiences internalize the creators' rules and apply them to dating interactions. The short-form video environment enhances these effects by rewarding clarity, speed, and emotional impact. This theme shows that strategy and discourse are central mechanisms through which dating norms are communicated, shaping how contemporary audiences think about relationships.

### *5.2.1 Feminism in Dating*

Another important pattern that emerges from the dating advice videos is how different forms of feminism appear within the discourse. While the creators do not explicitly frame their content as feminist, much of the advice centers on women's agency, emotional awareness, and the importance of protecting their own interests in relationships. Since several of the creators primarily address female audiences, their advice often focuses on how women should interpret men's behaviour, manage emotional risks, and navigate dating situations more strategically. In this sense, the videos participate in broader conversations about gender roles and women's autonomy in contemporary dating culture.

For the Chinese creators, Gongzhu and Fan, their advice can also be understood within the specific cultural context in which Chinese feminism has developed. Although Chinese feminism

was influenced by Western feminist thought, it has evolved through its own historical and social conditions. Feminist discussions in China have increasingly moved into digital spaces, where social media platforms provide opportunities for women to share experiences and exchange perspectives about relationships, gender expectations, and personal independence (Yin, 2022; Changjian et al., 2024). Within this context, advice that encourages women to prioritize their own emotional well-being or to become more aware of relationship dynamics may function as a form of empowerment. Even when the strategies appear exaggerated or highly tactical, they still encourage women to reflect on their position in romantic relationships and reconsider traditional expectations about gender roles.

At the same time, the form of empowerment presented in many dating advice videos reflects the broader shift toward neoliberal and post-feminist discourse in contemporary digital culture. Neoliberal feminism reframes empowerment as an individual project centered on self-discipline, confidence, and personal development rather than collective political actions (Rottenberg, 2014). Similarly, post-feminism operates as a cultural sensibility that assumes gender equality has largely been achieved and instead emphasizes personal choice, self-improvement, and emotional self-management (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2008). Within short form dating advice, these ideas often appear through messages encouraging women to regulate their emotions, develop confidence, and improve their communication strategies to achieve better relationship outcomes.

This emphasis on self-improvement is closely related to what Gill and Orgad describe as “confidence culture,” in which women are encouraged to view confidence as the solution to many personal and social challenges (Gill & Orgad, 2015). In this framework, problems in relationships are often interpreted as issues of mindset, emotional awareness, or personal boundaries rather than

structural gender inequalities. Dating advice videos frequently reflect this logic by suggesting that the audiences can improve their romantic experiences by changing how they think, feel, or communicate. This process can also be understood through Michel Foucault's concept of "technologies of the self." Foucault describes these as practices through which individuals actively self-regulate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours to transform themselves according to socially valued norms (Foucault, 1988). In the context of dating advice content, viewers are often encouraged to monitor their feelings, adjust their communication styles, and cultivate emotional discipline to attract better partners and build healthier relationships. In this way, dating advice videos function not only as relationship guidance but also as a form of self-governance, which encourage the audiences to continuously evaluate and reshape themselves.

However, it is important to recognize that feminism does not exist in a single universal form. As intersectional feminist scholars have argued, feminist experiences and perspectives are shaped by different social and cultural contexts (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2020). The forms of empowerment expressed by dating content creators therefore vary depending on cultural values and social expectations. While Western creators often emphasize emotional communication and personal boundaries, Chinese creators may focus more on strategic self-presentation and navigating social expectations within relationships. These differences suggest that feminism in digital dating discourse appears in multiple forms rather than following one fixed model.

Overall, dating advice can still play a positive role in encouraging women to reflect on their relationships, question common dating dynamics, and prioritize their own well-being. Even when this advice focuses on individual strategies rather than collective activism, it can still contribute to broader feminist conversations about women's agency and emotional autonomy. Examining these

videos therefore reveals how feminist ideas continue to evolve within digital media environments, where empowerment, self-improvement, and relationship strategies become intertwined within the culture of online dating advice. Several creators in the dataset frame their advice using language that appears empowering while still reinforcing traditional gender expectations. For example, Gongzhu encourages women to avoid appearing overly eager when communicating with men by suggesting that delayed responses and emotional restraint make women more desirable partners. While this advice is framed as a strategy for self-respect and confidence, it simultaneously reinforces a heterosexual script in which women are expected to regulate their behaviour to maintain male interest: “ Because he wants to chat now, but you’re not responding, you need to give him a piece of candy to keep him sweet and willing to wait for you — that’s how you have him in the palm of your hand. Then go do your own thing and ignore him.” (Gongzhu, 2024 a,d). Similarly, Fan promotes a comparable strategy by advising women to maintain “no contact” after a breakup and simply wait rather than taking action to reconcile. According to Fan, this approach allows women to regain initiative and maintain control in the relationship. She explains that if a woman is the one who reaches out first, she loses the ability to negotiate the terms of reconciliation: “If you’re the one who goes to him, you can’t set any conditions—you’re the one begging for reconciliation, so you have no standing to speak. But if you wait until he comes to you, then he’s the one asking to reconcile. At that point, you can decide whether or not to take him back” (Fan, 2024d). Through this reasoning, Fan suggests that maintaining distance will ultimately prompt men to return, in her word “I say men will definitely come back” (Fan, 2024d). Another example can be seen in American content creator Niko’s advice directed toward female audiences. He encourages women to choose partners who are consistent and willing to invest effort, while filtering out men who are only interested in short-term relationships. At the same time, he suggests

that women should take a more passive role in dating to demonstrate their value and attractiveness. For instance, he states that “you are making his lack of interest worse with your pursuit” and that “the best way to see how a man feels about you is to do nothing” (Emanuilidis, 2024c). Although this advice is framed as a strategy for helping women identify serious partners, it also reinforces a traditional heterosexual dynamic in which women are expected to restrain their initiative and allow men to demonstrate interest through action.

Intersectionality is also helpful for understanding the cross-cultural dimension of this study, as it emphasizes that gender does not operate independently but is shaped by broader social and cultural contexts. In the Western Instagram context, dating advice is often framed through ideas of confidence, personal boundaries, and self-worth. In contrast, advice on the Chinese platform Xiaohongshu is more directly connected to expectations surrounding marriage, stability, and the construction of a particular feminine persona. Although the language and tone differ across these platforms, both contexts continue to organize women’s romantic experiences within broader structures of gendered power. In other words, while the form of the advice varies across cultures and platforms, the underlying gendered expectations in dating largely remain. Across both contexts, however, the videos often combine elements of traditional gender norms with neoliberal feminist language. Women are encouraged to appear confident, independent, and self-valuing, yet the practical advice frequently reinforces conventional relationship scripts that position women as responsible for managing attraction and emotional dynamics. Rather than replacing traditional gender expectations, neoliberal feminist discourse often repackages them as forms of self-development and personal strategy.

### *5.2.2 The Features of Short Videos*

Fan's videos tend to be the longest among the selected creators. Despite their relatively longer duration, the videos do not appear dull because of the use of background music, varied visual backgrounds, and her stylistic use of English terminology. Most of her videos include acoustic, non-lyrical lo fi music that plays quietly in the background while she speaks. This type of music contributes to a calm and reflective atmosphere, which contrasts with the more dramatic tone commonly seen with other content creators. The sound design therefore functions as part of the overall presentation of expertise and creates a therapeutic and reflective environment for the audience.

Visually, Fan's videos are also distinctive. In most of her content, only a small frame of her face appears in the corner of the screen while she speaks. Unlike other creators who film themselves in visible domestic spaces such as bedrooms or living rooms, Fan frequently uses virtual or edited backgrounds rather than a real physical setting. For example, in her video series *"Dissecting Deep Infatuation,"* including the videos *"Dissecting Deep Infatuation (3/10) – The Emotional Rollercoaster"* and *"Dissecting Deep Infatuation (5/10) – The Art of Insinuation,"* as well as the video *"How to [Make Sure] He Regrets Losing You?"* the background consists of screenshots from the Apple "Notes" application. These screenshots display bullet point lists that summarize the key ideas she is explaining in the video. This format resembles lecture notes or study materials, which may reinforce the perception that the content is educational and analytical rather than purely entertainment oriented. The use of visual bullet points also helps viewers quickly follow the argument within the limited time frame of short form videos. In other videos, such as *"Why You Only Need to [Wait] and Don't Need to Do Anything (1)"* and *"How to Quickly Tell if They Truly Like You or Just Want That,"* the background images shift frequently. These include photos of nature scenery, food, memes, and images of her dog. The images appear similar to casual

photos taken from a personal phone camera, and this makes her appear closer to the audience. This style produces a different effect compared to the more structured “Notes” background. While the bullet point format signals analytical explanation, the casual photos introduce a sense of everyday life and personal intimacy. Therefore, these visual strategies help balance authority and relatability, two qualities that are important for maintaining credibility in digital advice culture.

Gongzhu’s videos display a different style of short video presentation. Her videos do not contain separate captions; instead, the video title itself functions as the caption. The content frequently incorporates expressions and concepts from Chinese internet culture and popular discourse. Gongzhu also relies heavily on storytelling, often referring to her own relationship experiences with her current boyfriend to illustrate her arguments. In terms of audiovisual design, her videos do not use background music. Instead, she often records herself while performing other activities such as eating or doing her makeup. This multitasking presentation style creates the impression of a casual and spontaneous conversation rather than a structured lecture. By appearing relaxed and engaged in everyday routines, she reduces the perceived distance between herself and her audience. At the same time, the visual activity helps sustain viewers’ attention in the fast-paced environment of short form platforms.

Western creators in this study also demonstrate platform specific stylistic choices. Niko’s videos clearly signal that his advice is directed toward female audiences. In many of his videos, he begins with the greeting “Welcome to the daddy academy,” which functions as a recurring catchphrase and branding strategy. He also frequently addresses his viewers as “ladies,” not only at the beginning of the video but repeatedly throughout the conversation. This repeated form of address reinforces the gendered orientation of his content and maintains a sense of direct

engagement with the audience. Visually, his videos typically position his face in the center of the screen, occupying a large portion of the frame, often around two thirds of the visual space. His delivery style also includes frequent hand gestures while speaking, which adds emphasis to his points and contributes to a dynamic and expressive presentation style. Unlike some other creators, his videos generally do not include captions. Instead, the message is delivered primarily through his speech, facial expressions, and gestures, relying on his on-screen presence to communicate authority and maintain audience attention.

Sabrina's videos, by contrast, contain relatively long captions that expand on the ideas presented in the video itself. These captions often restate or emphasize the central message, which allows the audience to engage with the advice through both audio and text. Sabrina's speaking style is also notably different from the more relaxed tone used by some other creators. Her delivery is more confrontational and direct, and it frequently including strong language and curse words. Niko's videos also occasionally include similar expressions. This style of communication can function as a rhetorical strategy to capture attention and project confidence, which aligns with the fast paced and highly competitive attention strategy of short video platforms.

Another noticeable feature across the creators is the setting in which the videos are filmed. Both Gongzhu's and Niko's videos appear to be recorded in private, personal environments that resemble their own living spaces. The backgrounds often look informal and domestic, which contributes to a sense of authenticity and familiarity. This style aligns with a broader trend on short video platforms where creators present advice in a casual and seemingly unfiltered manner, and this allows viewers to feel as if they are listening to guidance from someone within their everyday social circle rather than from a distant expert. Most of Sabrina's videos similarly appear to be

filmed in personal spaces, reinforcing the intimate and conversational tone typical of short form dating advice content. However, several of her videos differ from this pattern. In the videos “*What if you knew you’d meet your person in 6–8 months, how would you show up?*” and “*Instead of ghosting, say this,*” the background and filming style appear more structured and professionally arranged. The camera angles in these videos are also different from her usual format, which typically focuses closely on her face while speaking. Instead, the shots appear more deliberately composed, suggesting a more formal recording environment. These visual differences indicate that the videos may also function as promotional material for her broader media presence.

This interpretation is further supported by captions that appear at the beginning of some of her videos. For example, in the video discussing limerence, a caption at the beginning reads: “I have a podcast called *The Sabrina Zohar Show* that helps with dating, anxiety, and doing the work to heal.” A similar promotional message appears in the video “*Going slow in dating,*” where she previously introduced her podcast under its earlier name “*Do the Work,*” stating: “I have a podcast called ‘Do the Work’ that helps with dating and anxiety.” These captions explicitly direct viewers to her podcast, which focuses on addressing relationship anxiety, offering dating advice, and encouraging personal healing. As a result, the short videos do not function only as standalone advice content but also as part of a broader strategy to promote her podcast and expand her audience across different media platforms.

An important characteristic of the dating advice analyzed in this study is the way it is shaped by the short-video format itself. Previous research suggests that the widespread use of short-video platforms may shorten users’ attention spans, which make it more difficult for viewers to stay engaged with longer video content (Chen et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2022). Most of the videos in the

dataset are approximately two minutes in length, which requires content creators to compress complex relationship advice into brief and easily-digestible messages. Instead of providing extended explanations about emotional dynamics or relationship psychology, creators often present their guidance as simplified behavioral rules or warnings. Advice is therefore frequently framed as quick directives, such as when to respond to messages, how to act in the beginning stage of dating, or which communication strategies to use. This compression encourages a style of communication that emphasizes clarity, memorability, and immediacy rather than nuance or detailed reasoning.

The short-video format also encourages the use of attention-grabbing “hooks” at the beginning of each video. Since viewers can easily scroll past content within seconds, creators often open their videos with strong declarative statements designed to capture attention immediately. In the dataset, several videos begin with phrases such as “How to [make sure] he regrets losing you,” “Straight girl! Silly-sweet! Learn! All solid tips! Not a single useless word!” or “Do you know when the next date is” (Fan 2024c, Gongzhu 2024a, Emanuilidis, 2024d). Some videos also begin by responding to comments or reacting to other videos. For example, Sabrina’s video “What is Limerence?” responds to a clip of a person crying and saying, “They really do. I hate how fast I can fucking romanticize people” (Sabrina, 2024c). These openings quickly establish both the topic of the video and the authority of the creator, while also encouraging viewers to continue watching. Although similar advice could appear in longer video formats, the brevity of short-form videos intensifies the use of these simplified and directive messages.

Moreover, another distinctive feature of short videos is their reliance on visual and textual cues to reinforce the message. Many creators supplement spoken advice with on-screen captions, text overlays, and gestures that highlight key phrases or rules. These visual elements help viewers

quickly grasp the central point of the video even if they are watching without sound or only briefly engaging with the content. As a result, dating advice becomes structured around concise, easily recognizable formats such as numbered lists or short statements that can be quickly understood and remembered. The format of short videos therefore shapes not only the presentation of dating advice but also the way authority is communicated. Because creators have limited time to explain their reasoning, they often present their recommendations as confident assertions rather than carefully justified arguments. In several videos analyzed in this study, creators provide brief instructions about texting behaviour, emotional expression, or dating etiquette without offering detailed explanations of why these strategies might work. The authority of the advice is instead conveyed through confident delivery, repetition across multiple videos, and the creator's self-presentation as someone with insider knowledge about relationships.

In combination, these patterns suggest that the short-video format does not simply reproduce existing forms of dating advice but reshapes how such advice is communicated. While similar themes could appear in longer videos or written guides, the brevity and algorithm-driven visibility of short videos encourage creators to package relationship guidance as simplified, highly memorable rules that are designed for rapid consumption and easy sharing. The result is a form of dating discourse that emphasizes quick behavioral strategies and strong declarative claims rather than extended discussion or reflection.

### **5.3 Cross-Cultural Comparisons**

Cross-cultural comparison reveals how dating advice in short form videos reflects broader cultural expectations about gender, communication, and relational norms. While all four creators rely on strategies and prescriptive guidance, the meanings and functions of these strategies differ

when interpreted through the cultural contexts of Chinese and American dating. Drawing on the transcripts, theoretical frameworks, and the methodological focus on discourse and short form video structures, this theme examines how cultural values shape the tone, goals, and assumptions of each creator's advice. Despite differences, there are also shared logics that reflect the globalized nature of digital dating culture.

### *5.3.1 Key Differences in Chinese and American Dating Cultures*

The past literatures have highlighted significant cultural differences in how dating is structured and valued in the Chinese and American dating worlds. In China, dating remains strongly influenced by filial piety, family involvement, and collective responsibility, with marriage often positioned as the expected outcome of romantic relationships. Social pressure to marry, particularly for women, and the persistence of traditional gender roles continue to shape dating practices, even as women gain greater educational and economic independence (Blair & Madigan, 2016; Blair & Madigan, 2019; Wu & Zhang, 2010). By contrast, North American dating culture is more closely associated with individualism, personal freedom, and self-expression. Dating during adolescence is widely accepted, and casual relationships and premarital sexual activity are more socially normalized through popular media and peer culture. The rise of hookup culture and dating apps reflects a broader acceptance of experimentation and multiple relationships prior to marriage (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Garcia et al., 2012; Tang & Zuo, 2013). While both cultures are undergoing change, Chinese dating practices remain more closely tied to family expectations and long-term commitment, whereas North American dating is more often framed as a process of individual exploration and emotional experience. The difference within the dating culture continue to influence how content creators provide advice to their audience.

Chinese dating culture is shaped by the collective consciousness and the expectations around self-control and attention to social presentation. As Contemporary Chinese dating emphasizes the vital role of family, social evaluation, and ideas of stability and material security, these pressures lead to dating norms where emotional expression is cautious, and impression management is central. This cultural context helps explain why Fan and Gongzhu's advice focuses on regulating one's digital presence, tone, and even economic presentation. In Fan's videos, the strategies she shares revolve around withdrawal, emotional distance, and silence. For example, she advises the female audience to "disappear completely and become cold" and avoid posting anything that reveals their mood after a breakup (Fan, 2024c). She instructs them to cut off communication entirely, so the man stays "in complete darkness with no clues" and begins to wonder and regret (Fan, 2024c). This approach reflects cultural expectations that women should maintain composure, avoid emotional vulnerability, and manage impressions with precision. Similarly, Gongzhu's strategies center on persona construction and the calculated regulation of how women present themselves to men. Her advice to "pretend to be very materialistic," choose more expensive items, and avoid cheerful tones in texting at the talking stage illustrates a form of self-presentation aimed at signaling confidence and selectiveness (Gongzhu, 2024d, e). Her storytelling, often referencing interactions with her current boyfriend, reinforces the idea that dating is a test in which women must filter men who lack the potential or qualities to become an ideal dating or marriage partner. The criteria used to evaluate a "good" partner apply not only to dating and relationships but also to marriage and therefore become more rigid and prescriptive. Therefore, failure to conform to these norms is associated with negative life-long consequences (Gongzhu, 2024e). Chinese dating norms often frame relationships as exchanges of effort, resources, and commitment. Gongzhu's guidance encourages women to uphold their value by

performing confidence and avoiding behaviours seen as naive or easily manipulated. This reflects a collectivist and relationally cautious dating culture where women must actively manage how others perceive them.

For the Chinese creators, Gongzhu and Fan, their advice can also be understood within the specific cultural context in which Chinese feminism has developed. Although Chinese feminism was influenced by Western feminist thought, it has evolved through its own historical and social conditions. As feminist discussions in China have increasingly moved into digital spaces, platforms such as Red playing a key role in enabling women to share personal experiences, exchange perspectives, and build communities around gender-related issues (Yin, 2022; Changjian et al., 2024). This reflects characteristics of fourth-wave feminism, which is closely associated with digital media, visibility, and the circulation of everyday experiences as forms of feminist expression. Within this context, advice that encourages women to prioritize their emotional well-being or critically reflect on relationship dynamics can function as a form of empowerment. Even when these strategies appear exaggerated or highly tactical, they still promote awareness of one's position within romantic relationships and challenge patriarchal expectations surrounding gender roles.

In contrast, American dating culture is informed by individualist values, emotional expressiveness, and emphasis on communication. Sabrina and Niko's videos reflect these cultural norms by focusing on clarity, emotional honesty, and straightforward interpretation of behaviour. For example, Sabrina provides the exact wording viewers could use in situations such as ending communication in dating. In her "ghosting" video, she suggests a specific message that audiences could send to communicate disinterest clearly and respectfully, which emphasizes the importance

of direct and honest communication rather than avoidance (Zohar, 2024a, e). In another video, she also explains what she means by “going slow” in dating, clarifying that “going slow doesn't mean that we excuse bad behavior and just never spend time with somebody. That just means that you're not going to expedite the stages of a relationship quicker than they need to be” (Zohar, 2024b). She then provides three numbered tips for viewers to follow, such as “First one, cut the digital bullshit... The second thing, find some fucking hobbies... A third thing, we have got to start challenging our thoughts” (Zohar, 2024b). By presenting the advice in this structured way, the videos guide viewers toward practices of emotional independence and self-regulation in dating. Her insistence that emotional maturity requires clear communication rather than avoidance illustrates a cultural expectation that individuals should manage relationships through transparency and directness, which make a strong contract as the strategized communication in dating the Chinese content creator suggested. Sabrina uses confrontational ~~tone~~ tongue and expressive language to emphasize responsibility and respect, and this reflects American norms where personal boundaries and emotional honesty are central values in dating.

Niko's approach also differs from the Chinese creators by framing dating as something that can be understood through simple behavioural rules rather than impression management. His 70-30 initiating rule (men should reach out 70% of the time and women 30%) and claim that “the best way to see how a man feels about you is to do nothing” present dating as a matter of interpreting consistent patterns, not crafting a persona (Emanuilidis, 2024c). And he has been stress “consistency” in his other videos as he advice his audiences to avoid men who act inconsistent but choose those who are consistently planning dates (Emanuilidis, 2024a). His authority comes from positioning himself as a man explaining male intentions, not from psychological terms or self-presentation strategies. American dating norms often stress individual responsibility and emotional

consistency, and Niko's advice reflects this through its straightforward focus on effort and intention. The cultural assumption is that dating success depends on reading behaviour accurately rather than performing a specific image.

These cultural differences also appear in how each creator frames risk. Fan and Gongzhu frame relational risk in terms of losing power, being undervalued, or being manipulated. Their strategies aim to protect women through emotional distance, strategic silence, and calculated self-presentation. In contrast, Sabrina frames risk as emotional immaturity and miscommunication, emphasizing the need for honest dialogue. Niko frames risk as wasting time on inconsistent men and teaches women to recognize patterns rather than protect themselves through performance. These differences reflect broader cultural narratives: in China, dating risk is often tied to social consequences and relational imbalance; in American contexts, risk is tied to emotional harm, mismatched expectations, or lack of clarity.

Moreover, differences in language use can be observed between the Western and Chinese content creators. The American creators tend to use more direct and explicit language when discussing dating and sexual relationships. In their videos, sexual topics are often addressed openly, and the creators occasionally use profanity or casual slang while explaining their points. This communication style reflects a more straightforward approach to discussing intimacy and relationships in contemporary Western dating discourse, where explicit language is often normalized in informal digital spaces. In contrast, the Chinese creators in this study tend to adopt a more indirect communication style and generally avoid explicitly naming sexual acts. Instead, they often rely on euphemisms, pauses, or implied meanings when referring to sexual intimacy. For example, in Fan's video "*How to Quickly Tell if They Truly Like You or Just Want That,*" the

title uses the phrase “that” rather than directly referring to hooking up or having sex. During the video, when she refers to sexual intimacy, she avoids saying the word explicitly and instead signals the meaning through gestures such as clapping or briefly stopping her speech (Fan, 2024e). These strategies allow her to communicate the intended meaning while maintaining a level of linguistic subtlety. This difference in language style may reflect broader cultural norms regarding the public discussion of sexuality. While Western online dating discourse often treats sexual topics as openly discussable subjects, Chinese digital platforms tend to maintain more indirect ways of addressing intimacy, particularly in content directed toward female audiences. As a result, the creators adapt their language to align with the expectations and norms of their respective cultural and platform environments.

### *5.3.2 Shared Patterns Across Chinese and American Dating Practices*

Across both Chinese and North American contexts, dating is understood as an important developmental practice through which young people explore intimacy, emotional connection, and personal identity. In both societies, dating serves multiple functions, including socialization, companionship, and preparation for future long-term relationships. Despite cultural differences, young adults in China and North America increasingly view dating as part of personal growth rather than solely as a pathway to marriage. Modernization, globalization, and media exposure have contributed to shifting attitudes in both contexts, with greater emphasis on emotional fulfillment and individual choice. Furthermore, in both societies, social factors such as education level, financial stability, and social status continue to shape partner selection, demonstrating that dating is not only a personal experience but also embedded within broader social and structural conditions.

Despite the contrasts, the four creators share notable similarities that reflect global digital dating culture. All creators position themselves as experts who provide simplified strategies to navigate complex emotional situations. The short form video format encourages direct, confident instructions, whether through step-by-step methods, communication scripts, or interpretive rules. All four creators structure dating as something governable through behavioural management, which aligns with Foucault's ideas about discourse and how expert knowledge disciplines individual conduct. Chinese and American creators alike encourage women to self-regulate, whether that involves emotional control, communication clarity, or strategic interpretation of male behaviour.

Another similarity across the creators is the reinforcement of gendered expectations in dating. With the exception of Sabrina, whose advice often appears more gender neutral, the other creators tend to assume that women are primarily responsible for navigating uncertainty in relationships. Their advice frequently positions women as the ones who must interpret men's signals, manage emotional dynamics, and strategically respond to male behaviour. In this framing, men's actions are often presented as indicators that women must learn to read and evaluate, while women are expected to regulate their own reactions and make calculated decisions about how to proceed. This pattern reflects broader gendered scripts discussed in the theoretical framework, where women are expected to perform relational and emotional labour in heterosexual dating interactions. Rather than presenting dating as a mutual process of communication and negotiation, the advice often assumes that women must carefully manage the situation in order to avoid emotional harm or achieve relationship success.

At the same time, the creators adapt culturally distinct dating norms into the fast-paced format of short videos by translating them into simplified strategies. Chinese creators often emphasize structured steps and the construction of a particular persona when giving advice. These approaches align with sociocultural norms that place importance on image management, impression building, and interpreting social signals within relationships. In contrast, the American creators tend to frame their advice through emotional scripts, personal boundaries, and interpretive reasoning about men's behaviour. This approach reflects a stronger emphasis on individual expression, communication, and psychological self-understanding in Western dating culture. Although the specific strategies differ, both styles ultimately reproduce culturally embedded expectations about gender roles and relationship management.

In sum, cross cultural comparison reveals that while Fan and Gongzhu's strategies emphasize self-control, impression management, and caution, Sabrina and Niko prioritize emotional clarity, personal responsibility, and direct communication. These differences reflect broader cultural norms around dating, gender, and emotional expression in China and the United States. Yet all creators share the common logic of presenting dating as a realm that can be managed through expertise, rules, and repeatable strategies. Their advice, though culturally distinct, reflects global patterns in digital dating culture where audiences seek clarity, control, and explanation in navigating relationships.

To conclude this chapter, the analysis of the selected short form dating advice videos reveals several important patterns in how relationships and dating behaviours are presented online. The findings show that many creators frame dating through gender roles, where women are expected to interpret men's behaviour, manage emotional dynamics, and make careful decisions

about romantic involvement. At the same time, the advice often presents relationships as something that can be navigated through specific strategies, rules, and communication techniques, which positions the creators as knowledgeable guides in the dating process. Cultural differences also shape the way this advice is delivered. Chinese creators tend to emphasize impression management, strategic self-presentation, and cautious communication, while American creators place greater emphasis on emotional clarity, direct communication, and behavioural consistency. Despite these differences, similar patterns appear across both contexts, particularly in the way creators simplify complex relationship dynamics into actionable advice for viewers. It is also noticeable that much of this content is directed toward female audiences, and the advice frequently encourages women to reflect on their value, boundaries, and emotional well-being. In this sense, even when the advice focuses on individual strategies rather than collective activism, it still contributes to ongoing conversations about women's autonomy and feminist ideas in contemporary dating culture. These findings suggest that short form dating advice videos do not merely provide relationship tips but also play a vital role in shaping how audiences understand gender expectations, emotional behaviour, and modern dating practices in digital spaces.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This thesis examined how short form dating advice videos on Instagram and Red construct and circulate knowledge about romantic relationships and gender roles. Through a qualitative comparative analysis of twenty videos created by four dating content creators, the study explored whether contemporary online dating advice challenges or reinforces existing gendered dating scripts. Drawing on thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis, three major themes emerged from the data: gender roles and dating scripts, strategy-based advice and discourse patterns, and cross-cultural comparisons. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that short form dating advice videos function not only as entertainment or self-help content, but also as discursive spaces where ideas about relationships, femininity, and romantic behaviour are produced and normalized.

The findings suggest that many dating content creators continue to rely on recognizable gendered dating scripts. Across both Western and Chinese platforms, women are frequently positioned as responsible for interpreting men's behaviour, regulating emotional responses, and maintaining relational stability. While the creators often frame their advice as empowering or psychologically informed, these narratives frequently reproduce traditional heterosexual dynamics in which masculinity is associated with pursuit and initiative while femininity is connected to emotional management and self-presentation. In this sense, short form dating advice adapts traditional scripts to contemporary digital language rather than fundamentally transforming them. The persistence of these expectations reflects broader cultural patterns in which romantic relationships remain shaped by gendered assumptions about behaviour and responsibility.

At the same time, the analysis shows that dating advice in short-form videos is frequently presented as a series of practical strategies that viewers can apply in their own relationships.

Content creators often frame dating as something that can be managed through specific behavioural techniques, communication scripts, and psychological interpretations. The format of short videos encourages this style of advice, as creators must communicate complex relationship ideas in a concise and engaging manner. As a result, dating advice becomes simplified into actionable steps or rules that viewers can immediately apply. This strategic framing reinforces the authority of content creators by positioning them as experts who provide solutions to common relational problems.

The cross-cultural comparison between Instagram and Red further illustrates how dating advice is shaped by different social and cultural contexts. American creators tend to emphasize emotional awareness, boundaries, and psychological frameworks when discussing relationships. In contrast, Chinese creators more frequently highlight self-presentation, social expectations, and practical considerations such as financial stability or long-term partnership goals. Despite these differences, the analysis also reveals several similarities across platforms. Both contexts present dating as a space where individuals must carefully interpret signals, manage emotions, and make strategic decisions about romantic involvement. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that short form dating advice videos participate in the global proliferation of neoliberalism, where intimacy is reconfigured as a site of strategy, self-regulation, and performance. While these dynamics take different cultural forms across American and Chinese contexts, they reflect a shared emphasis on individual responsibility and self-optimization that transcends national boundaries. These shared patterns suggest that digital platforms contribute to the global circulation of dating advice discourse while still reflecting local cultural norms. In the Chinese context, these neoliberal feminist discourses may offer limited pragmatic benefits. On platforms such as Red, they can introduce and expose audiences to feminist ideas while promoting self-development, financial

independence, and selective partner standards, which provide the Chinese female audience with resources to negotiate traditional gender norms. However, these possibilities remain constrained by the broader emphasis on self-optimization and individual responsibility.

In sum, this study illustrates that short-form video platforms play an important role in shaping contemporary dating discourse. Dating advice creators act as informal experts who interpret romantic behaviour and provide guidance to audiences seeking clarity in modern relationships. Although some creators promote emotional awareness and self-reflection, their advice often remains embedded in broader systems of gender expectations and heteronormative relationship scripts. By circulating simplified and easily shareable narratives about dating, these videos contribute to the ongoing production of knowledge about romance, gender, and intimacy in digital culture.

While this thesis has demonstrated the persistence of gendered dating scripts in short-form video content, it also points toward the possibility for change. One important shift would involve moving away from rigid, rule-based advice toward more relational and context-sensitive approaches that emphasize communication, mutual respect, and emotional reciprocity. Dating advice videos could better support gender equity by challenging the expectation that women must manage men's behaviour or perform strategic emotional restraint. Instead, creators could promote narratives that validate diverse relationship styles, question heteronormative assumptions, and recognize the complexity of individual experiences. In addition, both content creators and audiences play a vital role in shaping the future of digital dating discourse. Creators have the capacity to use their platforms more responsibly by reflecting on the implications of their advice and avoiding the reproduction of limiting stereotypes, even when framed as empowerment. At the

same time, viewers can engage more critically with the content they consume by questioning the assumptions behind dating “rules” and recognizing how these narratives may influence their own expectations and behaviours. Educational initiatives, media literacy, and continued research can further support this process by helping individuals better understand how digital content shapes perceptions of relationships. In the end, meaningful change in dating advice culture requires both structural and individual shifts. As short-form video continues to grow as a dominant medium, it is essential to recognize its role not only in reflecting but also in producing social norms. By encouraging more inclusive, reflexive, and equitable representations of relationships, digital platforms can become spaces that support healthier and more balanced understandings of intimacy.

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