

Projective Assessment of Body Image among Young Chinese in Hong Kong

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Abstract: This study posits that the inner vision of self and body image can be explored via projective assessment, as human beings do not learn through rational cognitive processes alone. The study's aim is to reveal intrapersonal and spontaneous self and body conceptions. Both the rational and unconscious minds are believed to contribute to total body image. A role-play cloning exercise, in which participants were asked to act as if they had to clone a person and to draw their ideal self in a focus group setting, was carried out to reveal individuals' subliminal and idealized body images. Participants were asked to create a clone with their desired body image based on their initial spontaneous instinct. The results show that although the idealized thin body images conveyed by the media do lead to perceived body image discrepancies, individuals do not necessarily compare themselves upwardly with an exemplar, as previous studies have suggested they do. Intriguingly, idealized body images were found to adhere closely to individuals' real selves. This research constitutes the first use of a projective role-play cloning exercise to explore unconscious body perceptions in the body image arena.

Keywords: Projective measurement, body image, role-play cloning, Chinese young people, media influence, unconsciousness.

1. Introduction

In the realm of body image, media always project an unapproachable thin-idealized image that it is difficult, if not unhealthy, for average people to achieve. Past research showed that traditional media such as TV and magazines are powerful in shaping individuals' motivation and behavior on a daily basis (e.g., Hall et al., 2011; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003). Images presented through these forums project social realities that people will imitate (e.g., Irving, 1990; Posavac et al., 1998). Apparently, there is public concern across societies about thin-ideal portrayal of women, and Hong Kong is no exception. The desire to be thin and light-skinned is deeply rooted in Hong Kong, and is part of the "typical Asian perfectionism" expected of Chinese females (Reedy, 2009). Most research to date has employed surveys or experiments to measure immediate, rational responses to mediated messages conveying thin, idealized images (e.g., Bessenoff, 2006; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003). Affective and intuitive evaluations of media influence, such as internal feelings, personal/social values and underlying modeling motives, are generally absent. To address this gap in the literature, this study employed a projective measurement to reveal how young people in Hong Kong associate their body and self-image with mediated imagery on a subconscious level. The assumption

is that an individual's rational, conscious evaluation of media images may or may not match his or her unconscious inner awareness of self and body. Accordingly, although young people may claim on a conscious level, to be satisfied with their body, they may still internalize, on an unconscious level, the ideal image depicted in the media. In view of this assumption, this study had two main purposes: first, to examine the influence of mediated imagery on self and body image among Chinese young people and, second, to investigate the inner-self symbols that intuitively reflect body image and its relation to social comparison.

2. Significance of the Research

The media play a crucial role in formulating cultural and social understanding. Idealized media images can change the attitudes and behavior of young people by frequently constructing a perfect standard to which they aspire. In Hong Kong, for instance, the popularity of teen models encourages young women to aspire toward a light-skinned appearance and large breasts. Such an aspiration may lead some young women to obtain breast implants and/or go on fad diets. They may not even be aware that their desire to lose weight is the result of peer pressure or pervasive media influence. Even if they are aware of that pressure/influence, they may find it difficult to express their inner feelings. Doing so may be particularly difficult for young Chinese women, as studies have shown the Chinese to be relatively reticent (Communicaid Group Ltd., 2009; Hofstede, 2010). This study posits that inner vision of self and body image can be discovered via projective assessment. The significance of this study lies in its use of a projective technique to reveal participants' inner awareness of their body image and in its ability to: 1) enhance our understanding of the impact of media persuasion in Chinese society and; 2) provide an in-depth understanding of individuals' inner awareness of self and body perceptions so as to enhance self-appreciation.

3. Literature review

3.1. Body Self-Discrepancy and Social Comparison

People in Hong Kong are generally very concerned about their physical appearance (Wan, Faber & Fung, 2003). According to the Hong Kong Department of Health (2007), about 30% of men and women had tried to lose weight or maintain their current weight due to dissatisfaction with their appearance in 2007. The results of a 2008 survey conducted by the Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission (2008) suggest that the media has a profound influence on Hong Kong youth, particularly on their views about sex, body image and social norms. Previous studies have shown that the sexes differ in the parts of the body with which they are dissatisfied, with men generally more concerned about upper body strength, hips, thighs, and muscles and women more concerned about their weight and physical appearance (Leung, 2009; Silberman, Striegel-Moore, Timko & Rodin, 1988). Women's focus on being thin and physically attractive can be traced to media depictions of the ideal female body type, that is, slim and skinny (e.g., Halliwell & Harvey, 2006; Posavac et al., 1998). Societal standards of the ideal body type have changed over the past few decades. Exposure to media images often

leads to a discrepancy between the societal standard and self-perceptions of weight and body image. Self-discrepancy, which occurs when people fall short of some important standard (Higgins, 1989), may lead to social comparison. It may also moderate the negative media influence on body satisfaction (Posavac et al., 1998). A high level of self-discrepancy has been linked to various types of emotional distress, including body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem (Higgins, 1989). Previous research has indicated that women perceive a discrepancy when they think that their body shape is not socially desirable. As a result, they are less satisfied with their body and may develop eating disorders (e.g., Heinberg & Thompson, 1995). The greater an individuals' internalization of the thin-and-beautiful ideal, the higher his or her level of depression and body dissatisfaction (Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Heinberg, Thompson & Stormer, 1995; Vartanian, 2009). Several studies have found body dissatisfaction (with either specific body parts or the body as a whole) responsible for integrating the effects of media images of idealized thinness with body esteem or body image (e.g., Bessenoff, 2006; Posavac et al., 1998); weight dissatisfaction and self-esteem (Irving, 1990); and depression, anger and overall dissatisfaction with one's appearance (Heinberg et al., 1995). Often, women who are less satisfied with their body shape or appearance are more susceptible to the adverse effects of media exposure.

According to Bessenoff (2006), women with high levels of body image self-discrepancy are more likely to engage in social comparison as a result of exposure to idealized images. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests that human beings have a tendency to evaluate themselves in comparison with others, particularly with others believed to be similar to them. Past research shows comparisons with others who are superior to or very different from oneself (i.e., upward comparisons) to be associated with increases in depression and anger and decreases in self-esteem and body satisfaction. Upward social comparison is induced when beauty ideals are either a source of envy or a source of inspiration (Collins, 1996). Comparisons with others deemed inferior or similar to oneself (i.e., downward comparisons) may increase self-esteem and body satisfaction, which, in turn, results in assimilation (Cattarin et al., 2000; Festinger, 1954; Jones & Buckingham, 2005). Discrepancy that is a result of comparison is likely to lead to dissatisfaction with one's own body (Gulas & McKeage, 2000; Posavac et al., 1998). For average individuals, comparisons with thin models usually evoke an upward comparison (Cattarin, Thompson, Thomas & Williams, 2000), and this is especially true for women (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995). Overall, women are more likely to make an upward social comparison and men a downward comparison. Comparison, in itself, can lead to either self-evaluation or self-enhancement (Gulas & McKeage, 2000). Several studies have indicated that upward comparisons can be both "self-enhancing" and "self-deflating," depending on whether shared similarity or similar traits to the targets of comparison are found (Collins, 1996; Jones & Buckingham, 2005; Stapel & Koomen, 2001). Upward comparison is self-enhancing when individuals are self-confident or believe the target of comparison to be unrealistic. In addition, when individuals believe good personal qualities to be as important as outward physical appearance, such comparison is generally perceived as personally enhancing. For those lacking in self-confidence, however, comparison tends to be self-deflating. Comparison with others who are better off leads to the conclusion that they themselves are lacking, which leads to body dissatisfaction. Downward comparisons,

in contrast, are generally self-enhancing. The target of comparison is less threatening, which leads the comparer to feel better about him or herself (Collin, 1996; Gulas & McKeage, 2000). Downward comparisons occur when individuals do not explicitly compare themselves with the comparison exemplar (Stapel & Koomen, 2001) or when they share a close bond with the comparison target (Collins, 1996; Jones & Buckingham, 2005). This discussion prompts the first and second research questions examined in this study.

R1: How do men and women in Hong Kong perceive their body images?

a. To what extent are these perceptions satisfying, and how do they differ between men and women?

R2: How do men and women perceive the thin-and-beautiful idealized media images that prevail in Hong Kong?

a. Does body image self-discrepancy induce body dissatisfaction and social comparison, such that those with high levels of such self-discrepancy experience greater levels of negative body perception and upward social comparison compared to those with low levels when exposed to idealized images?

3.2. Intuitive, Unconscious Evaluation of Self and Body Image

Previous research has found immediate ratings of body satisfaction shortly after exposure to media messages/images to have a limited impact. Lopez-Guimera et al. (2010) posited that such ratings reflect vulnerability and sensitivity to the immediate social environment, such as family, peers and the media, therefore resulting in greater body dissatisfaction. It has also been argued that examination of the immediate media influence on body image in a laboratory context raises issues of external validity, as it can show state, but not trait, body dissatisfaction (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003). Some researchers have proposed that a media-induced vicarious experience is triggered by both logical, rational reasoning and intrapersonal, intuitive emotions (e.g., Tugade & Fredrickson, 2001; Williams, 2000a, 2000b). Both types of cognitive processes are important to assessing the media influence on body image and self-perception. The two complement each other in shaping and directing an individual's perception of the world. It is usually the intrapersonal, intuitive mind operating on an unconscious level that serves spontaneously as a pre-conscious motivator of attitude, which, in turn, consciously forms rational bias (Williams, 2000a). Unconscious thought theory (Dijksterhuis & van Olden, 2006) posits that the conscious mind is good at making decisions in a rational fashion, yet is limited in understanding inner-talk and emotions in any depth. Rational processes tend to overlook certain core affective aspects, which may relate to the intuitive cognitive properties of visual processes. Williams (2000a) pointed out:

Most individuals can take a quick look at the image of an ad and logically reject the idea that using the product will fulfill their needs in the way that is illustrated. Through this rejection a person may feel she/he has understood and countered the effect of the ad. But when the person finds himself or herself unwittingly standing at the counter purchasing the product over and over again, she/he must begin to consider

that their rational evaluation and rejection, in fact, did not work and that something else was at play (p. 234).

There appears to be something beyond reason operating when human beings process media messages and images. To understand the situation as a whole, the conscious mind needs to be distracted so as to allow the unconscious mind to work selectively and to think spontaneously. Evoking the emotions and intrapersonal wisdom on an unconscious level can help to foster creative thoughts at the conscious level and decrease the potential for bias (Dijksterhuis & van Olden, 2006). The study reported herein adopted a projective method to reveal how individuals associate their body and self-image with media imagery on an unconscious level. The intention of this projective exercise was: 1) to explore individuals' inner vision of body image at the unconscious level and 2) to examine how the desire to model media images may unconsciously influence an individual's perception of his or her self and body image. Participants' rational, conscious evaluation of their body image was elicited by asking them to indicate their degree of body satisfaction on a 5-point scale and their perceived actual-ideal body discrepancy via a pictorial instrument. Intuitive unconscious evaluations of body image perceptions were obtained by asking participants to create a drawing of a clone reflecting their desired image. This component of the research was based on the study's third research question.

R3: What is the desirable clone image of the self that reflects an individual's inner vision of self and body?

a. Which image do people prefer: the realistic self-image, the clone image or the mediated image?

4. Methodology

Body image can be divided into perceptual and attitudinal components (Borzekowski & Bayer, 2005; Thompson et al., 1999). Projective measures are particularly useful for investigating the unconscious perceptual aspects of body image (Radika & Hayslip, 2004). Individuals may not be consciously aware of the impact of media images of idealized thinness because of a reluctance to admit their susceptibility to such influences or because they have internalized a belief in the value of having a "good body." The projective technique is able to reveal unconscious feelings and internalization of the thinness ideal. As previous research has shown, media images that are designed to persuade seem to defy reason and sometimes function on an unconscious level (e.g., Dijksterhuis & van Olden, 2006; Williams, 2000a, 2000b). Data obtained from a projective measurement may be more truthful and comprehensive in their representation of individuals' state of mind in comparison with those collected through surveys, such as those asking respondents to provide ratings immediately after media exposure (Lopez-Guimera et al., 2010). Accordingly, the current study employed a projective role play cloning exercise in a focus group setting to reveal individuals' subliminal desired body image. Participants were asked to compare their clone image with their images of their actual self and print media images of models conforming to the thinness ideal.

4.1. Measures

4.1.1. Body Image Self-Discrepancy

Participants were asked to evaluate their perceived body image (self versus clone versus media) using a pictorial instrument developed by Stunkard, Sorenson, and Schulsinger (1983) that features nine silhouette figures ranging in shape from the thinnest (1) to the heaviest (9). They were asked to choose the number/model that best described i) their own body shape (actual body image) and ii) the shape they wished they had (ideal body image). An actual-ideal discrepancy score was generated by subtracting each participant's ideal body image score from his or her actual body image score. Higher scores indicate a greater distance between the actual and the ideal in the direction of desiring a thinner body. There were a total of ten high and six low self-discrepancy scores in the study.

4.1.2. Social Comparison Scale

The degree of social comparison was measured using Comparison to Models scale developed by Strowman (1999). The scale was shortened to a 7-item scale, which is designed to assess the extent to which individuals compare themselves with media images. It is coded on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (a lot). Item scores were averaged to create a social comparison scale, with higher scores indicating upward social comparison.

4.2. Procedures

Three focus groups sessions were held, for which 16 undergraduates (twelve women and four men) aged 19 to 20 were recruited. They were chosen because younger people are more vulnerable to media influence and they are usually the prime targets of advertisements (e.g., Whitbourne, Sneed, & Skultety, 2002). Individuals in this demographic find it difficult to resist the impact of the idealized mediated imagery. Participants were invited to discuss their body image perceptions on a voluntary basis, and were given extra credit for participation. The first group comprised of six female participants. The second group included both sexes with one female and four males, whereas the third group comprised of five female participants.

The discussion, in which conducted in Cantonese, was divided into five main parts. The first consisted of rapport building, where the participants were asked to talk briefly about their eating habits and general perceptions of body image. The second part concerned their level of body satisfaction, where the participants were asked to indicate their level of such satisfaction (on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ["very dissatisfied"] to 5 ["very satisfied"]) and to identify on a questionnaire which body part(s) they were most/least satisfied with by using the Body Esteem Scale (Franzoi & Shields, 1984). The BES lists 35 aspects of physical appearances and bodily functioning for males and females. Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction on a scale ranging from 1 (strong negative feelings) to 5 (strong positive feelings). The third part of the discussion was the projective role-play cloning exercise, where the participants were asked to act as if they had to "clone" themselves as part of a scientific

project. The aim was to encourage participants to reveal their unconscious idealized body images through drawing. They were given the following instructions.

Let's say a scientific center in Palo Alto asks you to take charge of a cloning project. You are asked to create a second life for a person of the same sex as yours. You have the freedom to choose how you look in terms of appearance, height and weight. What sort of person would you be in your second life?

The participants were asked to draw their ideal self on a piece of paper. They were told that this was a creative, imaginative exercise and that they should follow their hearts in creating the clones they desired, based on their first, spontaneous instinct. There was no restriction other than that they had to draw a clone image of the same sex as themselves. When they finished their drawings, participants were asked to describe their clones in terms of his or her age, physical appearance, hobbies, lifestyle, friends, personality, career and any other details they wished to include. The fourth part of the discussion involved social comparison. The participants were asked to indicate which thin-idealized media images they thought were attractive and explain why. They were also asked to compare themselves with their clones and their idealized media images and, to indicate which image (self versus clone versus idealized) they prefer. With a wrap-up wherein participants were asked to complete a two-page questionnaire (in Chinese) eliciting their views on their perceived level of body image discrepancy by using the pictorial instrument developed by Stunkard, Sorenson, and Schulsinger (1983) and asking for basic demographic information.

5. Results

5.1. Hong Kong Men and Women's Perceptions of Body Image and Body Satisfaction

Most of the participants of both sexes used such terms as "thinness," "females," "weight loss" and "body shape/figure" when initially asked to describe the body image concept. A few mentioned "health", "sexiness" and "muscle". All of the responses were neutral, if not altogether positive, which differs quite considerably from previous studies in which respondents' answers were mainly skewed toward the negative.

Overall, the women in the current study tended to be more satisfied with their height than with their lower torso, and only a few said they would like to be thinner. Breast size was not a concern. One female participant said, "Actually, I prefer smaller breasts as women with smaller breasts look cool and stylish..." The men tended to be less satisfied with their height. They wanted to be taller, but most liked their body shape. The women tended to have a lower degree of body satisfaction ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 0.7$) than the men ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.5$).

Only five female participants said they had tried to lose weight, taken slimming pills or consumed Chinese herbal slimming tea. In two extreme cases, one participant claimed that she used to eat nothing but one apple per day, and another said she used to lose weight by giving herself diarrhea by drinking low-quality Chinese herbal tea from Shenzhen. Peer influence was cited as the major reason for trying to lose weight. These women wanted to gain peer

recognition and look like close friends who were thin. Some said they would continue to diet, as they wanted to be more attractive.

In sum, both sexes had positive self-images in the main, with only a few female participants reporting a strong desire to be thin.

5.2. Idealized Media Images, Body Image Self-Discrepancy and Social Comparison

In terms of idealized media images, the female participants cited Hong Kong singer/actress Charlene Choi Cheuk Yin most frequently as being attractive, followed by Angelababy Yeung Wing (a young local model) and Maggie Cheung Man Yuk (a well-known local actress). Charlene Choi was praised not only for being pretty, but also because she always projects a healthy, positive and cheerful image. She was seen as having charisma, personality and style. Angelababy was also perceived as pretty and stylish. Neither woman has large breasts. Maggie Cheung was perceived as elegant, confident and stylish. Nine out of twelve female participants were high self-discrepant, although, in general, they appeared happy about who they were, regardless of their weight and body shape. They tended to follow a downward rather than upward social comparison ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 0.3$). Although a few expressed the desire to lose weight to look prettier and thinner, they realized that media images depicting an idealized thinness were unrealistic. The female participants believed themselves to be both happier and heavier than celebrities and models, as they do not need to be very disciplined in their diet and exercise habits. One female participant remarked, "Even though I am not as pretty and slim as celebrities or models, I'm happy being who I am, as I believe personality is much more important than physical appearance. I'm a happy person..." Her comment echoes the old Chinese saying: "Inner beauty is more important than external beauty."

Among the male participants, Eason Chan Yik Shen (a local singer/actor) and soccer star David Beckham were the most frequently cited attractive celebrities. Both men were described as attractive and to have versatile and positive images. Only one of the four male participants scored high on the self-discrepancy scale. Similar to their female counterparts, the men were, in general, satisfied with their body image. They seemed to be quite skeptical of the effects of mediated images, and, accordingly, most made downward social comparisons ($M = 1.3$, $SD = 0.3$). Although the male participants were aware that their body shapes were not as attractive as those of idealized male models, the discrepancy did not contribute to body dissatisfaction. Family and friends were more influential in affecting their body image perceptions. One male participant mentioned, "I'm not sure whether they are happy for real. At least I do not always need to project a happy image like them. I feel good about myself."

In sum, although the participants of both sexes agreed that the thin, attractive figures of celebrities and models would be nice to have, in general, they believed that life is more about positivity, balance and happiness than skin color or body size. Intriguingly, the majority made downward social comparisons, even though some scored high in self-discrepancy.

5.3. Comparison of Clone Images with Self and Mediated Images

In general, the female participants preferred their clones to have long hair, big eyes with double

eyelids, a high nose, long legs, small breasts, white skin and an average body size, meaning that the various body parts were in proportion to the whole figure (see Figures 1 and 2 for examples of their drawings). They would like their clones to be about 5 feet 3 inches to 5 feet 5 inches in height and to weigh 41 to 52 kilograms. They preferred happy, nice, bright, confident, elegant and positive clones whose friends were talkative, sociable, cheerful, caring, playful, active and extroverted. Most depicted their clones wearing a big smile. One participant mentioned that she would like her clone to be a sexy Westerner. Most thought their clones were likely to be university students, although one pictured hers as a public relations practitioner.

The male participants preferred clones with straight, short hair, wide shoulders, thick eyebrows, and a muscular figure with a strong upper torso (see Figures 3 and 4 for sample drawings from the male sample). Their clones were likely to be about 5 feet 11 inches in height and to weigh 63 to 68 kilograms. They were smart, helpful, confident, presentable and authoritative, yet subtle, with good leadership skills. Their friends were likely to be talkative, active and fond of playing sports, such as football and basketball. In terms of career, they were likely to be a designer, creative, social worker or businessman.

In this study, participants were asked which image they preferred, comparing the realistic self-image, the clone image and the mediated image. Results showed that the majority of both sexes were found to prefer their own self-images to the other two. The findings of the current study suggest that young women and men in Hong Kong are quite satisfied with their body image on both the conscious and unconscious levels, as reflected in the participants' self-reported body satisfaction evaluation scores and in the focus group discussion. In addition, even though there was a high degree of self-discrepancy between the idealized media images and self images, the participants were generally positive in terms of self-worth. They found the mediated images to be exaggerated and unachievable.

When asked to choose between the clone and media images, with only one exception, the participants chose the former, which they believed to resemble their actual self more closely. One participant remarked "The clone image approximates to my real self and therefore, is more realistic than the media images". Some claimed that their clone was a mixture of different ideals from different sources, including celebrities and models, their own peer group, opinion leaders such as trend-setters and DJs, family members, and even random individuals. The media images were reported to be too idealized and remote for comparison. One young woman said that models are sometimes too thin and appear unhealthy because of their restricted diets.

Interestingly, when asked to compare their clone images with their real selves, about two-thirds of participants said that they preferred the latter. They expressed confidence in their body image even though they realized that their body shape and general appearance were not as attractive as those of their clones or the idealized images of beauty appearing in the media. More importantly, they were happy with who they were. A male participant commented, "The clone is an imaginary person. He is too ideal. Indeed, I don't hate myself. When I look in the mirror, I tell myself I look good ... and I do feel good everyday...."

6. Discussion

By asking participants to draw an image of their desired self, that is, their clone, this study

was able to capture participants' internal, unconscious views of their bodies. The projective assessment exercise revealed that young people in Hong Kong generally feel happy about who they are, regardless of rationally perceived body image discrepancies with idealized media images. The majority of participants displayed positive self-worth even though they did not consider themselves as physically attractive as others, which suggests that individuals' conscious evaluations of their body image may not reveal their inner vision of self in full. Many previous studies have suggested that self-discrepancy usually leads to body dissatisfaction (e.g., Bessenoff, 2006; Higgins, 1989; Posavac et al., 1998; Posavac et al., 2001), which influences an individual's response to media effects through upward social comparison (e.g., Cattarin et al., 2000; Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Vartanian, 2009). This study proposes, however, that when an individual's rational body image perception is not on par with his or her internal beliefs and values, or when he or she makes comparisons with different sources at different times, it is difficult to determine which kind of social comparison he or she is employing. Additional research should be carried out to explore the impact of a combination of sources of comparison and its relationship to body satisfaction and social comparison.

The current study further reinforces the proposition that when individuals do not share a close bond with the comparison target, they are not prompted to engage in social comparison. For instance, the participants did not compare their body images with their favorite celebrities because they thought the standard set by those celebrities was unachievable. An interesting implication of this finding is that people actually have difficulty forming a close bond with media images, which contradicts the suggestion in previous research that perceived similarity with a comparison media target leads to downward comparison and perceived differences (a discrepancy) to the opposite (e.g., Gulas & McKeage, 2000; Stapel & Kooman, 2001). The findings presented herein suggest that young people are more pragmatic and sophisticated than that, realizing full well that media images are too unrealistic to allow comparison. Participants' preference for the clone images over the typically thin media images in the projective assessment also suggests the former were perceived as more achievable.

The findings of this study also indicate that an individual's state of mind is more important than physical appearance in body image analysis. Body satisfaction seems to be related not only to physical boundaries, such as appearance and body shape, but also to how a person feels about his or her body. Most of the participants in this study were happy with their lives and did not feel intimidated by the images they saw in the media. Some even expressed a preference for being slightly fat rather than very thin.

7. Conclusion

In sum, this study demonstrates that even though young people may exhibit an actual-ideal body discrepancy due to media influence and are fully aware of the positive social outcomes of physical attractiveness, they do not necessarily display a strong comparison intention, as social comparison theory suggests they do. They appear to perceive the idealized images of beauty and thinness that they see in the media to be unachievable, and thus they have little motivation to engage in upward comparisons with those images (e.g., Bessenoff, 2006; Gulas & McKeage, 2000; Posavac et al., 1998). According to Bandura (1977), when

individuals do not believe in the comparison exemplar and when their association with the comparison target is weak, body discrepancy's influence on body image will be affected. As previously noted, the majority of participants in this study preferred their clone images to the ideal beauty images in the media because of the former's proximity to their actual self images, which supports the proposition that a shared bond with an exemplar may moderate the effects of media exposure and body image. In addition, one crucial contribution of this study is its examination of inner visions of self and body image via a role play cloning exercise, the results of which demonstrate that the unconscious mind is better at affording an in-depth understanding of the self. The rational, conscious mind, in contrast, is limited to juggling a small number of realities, and hence is incapable of allowing examination of the inner self and body image (Dijksterhuis & van Olden, 2006; Williams, 2000a, 2000b). Reflection upon the clone images produced in this study also shows that body satisfaction is related both to such physical boundaries as face or body shape and the way in which an individual feels about his or her body. Particularly in the collectivist, reticent and harmonious Chinese context, it is the total look and disposition, rather than individual body parts, which matter. Although some of the participants in this study were not completely satisfied with their appearance or body shape at the conscious level, they intuitively gave positive evaluations of their personality and personal qualities via their drawings. This discrepancy between rational and intuitive cognitive processing is worthy of further investigation.

8. Limitations

The findings of the current study are limited by the small sample size and the sample make-up. As the sample comprised just 16 individuals, aged 19-20, the findings are not generalizable to other age groups. In addition, encouraging participation through the provision of extra credit and including a small number of participants in the focus groups may have biased the results and diminished their applicability to other contexts. However, research has shown that smaller focus groups are better able to attract the participation of each group member (Fern, 2001). In this study, which involved discussion of personal experiences, it was thought that smaller groups would provide a less threatening environment (Fern, 2001). Despite its possible failings, this research constitutes a new perspective in body image analysis. It has delved more deeply than quantitative analysis can into how individuals perceive and internalize media images, particularly at the intuitive, unconscious level. It is recommended that further exploratory studies of this nature be carried out in the future to aid our understanding of the possible impacts on body image perceptions.

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Appendix: Clone Images

♡ 戀愛中



重點：長頭髮！唔好開叉！

唔駛戴眼鏡

唔要黑眼圈

戴耳環ge

個頭細D

塊面尖D

皮膚白滑

身高：162

體重：115/165

個鼻高少少

D牙齒D

18歲

簡單/開心

Student

中6面對

a-level 嘅女仔

好錫佢嘅朋友，會聆聽她的：)

Interest：唱歌

同朋友行街

玩玩玩

笑笑笑

佢都鍾意睇書架

蒼井優

Figure 1. A Sample Clone Image Drawn by a 20 Year-old Female Participant

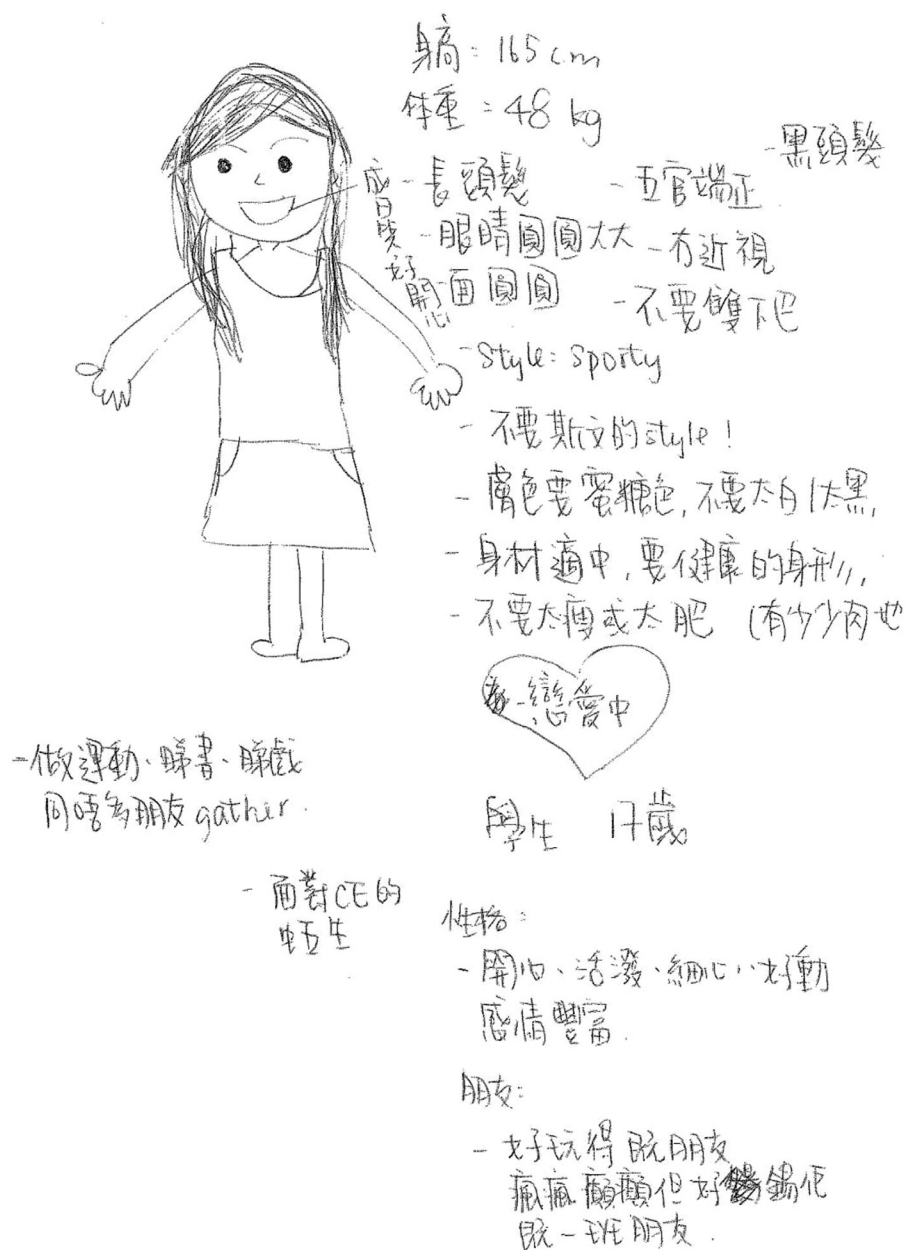


Figure 2. A Sample Clone Image Drawn by a 19 Year-old Female Participant

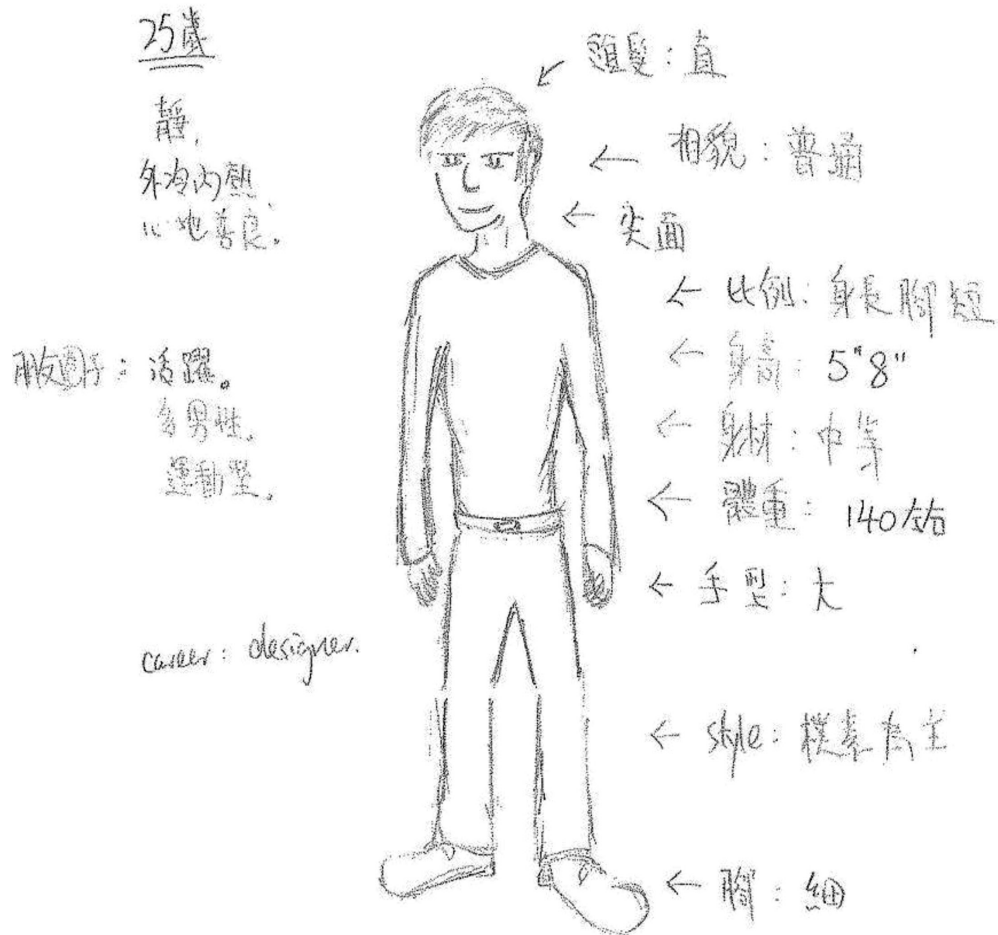


Figure 3. A Sample Clone Image Drawn by a 20 Year-old Male Participant



Figure 4. A Sample Clone Image Drawn by a 19 Year-old Male Participant