

An Analysis of Contemporary Women's Body Anxiety in the Social Media Environment

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Abstract: In today's internet age, social media has emerged as a dominant platform for people to receive and share messages. However, the widespread dissemination of information on social media regarding incorrect sizing has had detrimental effects on the physical and mental health of contemporary women. This paper, based on the theory of social discipline aims to explain how social media contributes to women's anxiety about their bodies and sizes. It also explores the specific manifestations of this body anxiety and finally puts forward suggestions for coping with size and body anxiety. To effectively tackle this issue, it is of utmost importance for the entire society, including both individuals and institutions to recognize that women should not be constrained by the aesthetic standards portrayed in mainstream media. Such awareness is essential in creating a more inclusive and accepting social environment that promotes the well-being and self-confidence of women.

Keywords: Social media, Size, Women, Aesthetic, Body anxiety.

1. Introduction

Body anxiety is a prevalent phenomenon in contemporary society, exacerbated by the pervasive notion on the Internet that "white and thin" represents the epitome of beauty. Consequently, women experience body anxiety regardless of their weight. At the same time, the popularity of some clothing brands on social media contributes to size anxiety among women due to their limited range of sizes catering only to a specific body type. The rapid dissemination of these so-called fashion trends on social media can be attributed to social norms that impose immense pressure and anxiety on modern women.

This article aims to elucidate how social media has an impact on women's physical and mental well-being, employing social norms as an explanatory framework for the entrapment within deformed aesthetics. Further, it delineates some specific manifestations of body and size anxieties experienced by women while also addressing constraints imposed by limited sizing options, in clothing shopping. Finally, this paper puts forward strategies and suggestions for alleviating body and size anxieties. In summary, this paper mainly delves into the causes behind body anxiety; however, it acknowledges that comprehensive analysis regarding factors at the social level and consumption patterns has not been fully analyzed. The purpose of this study is to analyze and alleviate the causes of social media anxiety among women in today's society. The aim of this study is to free women from the aesthetic constraints created by social media, reduce anxiety, and maintain women's physical and mental health.

2. The Impact of Social Media on Women's Perception of Size

This section mainly discusses the specific reasons why women have body anxiety on social media from two aspects: the aesthetic discipline of women on social media and the presentation of ideal body on social media.

2.1. The Aesthetic Discipline of Women on Social Media

The "white, young and thin" aesthetic spread on social media seems to have become the only standard of beauty, and this restriction on the definition of "beauty" is an aesthetic discipline, and this aesthetic discipline will bring great anxiety to women's body and mind.

According to China's *2021 Online Name Body Anxiety Report*, 54.1% of online names have body anxiety, 46.6% of online names think they are too fat and need to lose weight, and 25% of internet users weigh themselves once a day. Among them, women's body anxiety is more serious, 54.3% of women think that they are too fat and need to lose weight, 5.3% of women think that they are too thin and need to gain weight, 31% of men think that they are too fat and need to lose weight, and 12.5% of men think that they need to gain weight. In addition, the frequency of women weighing is also more frequent, 31.9% of women weigh themselves once a day, and 48.1% of men weigh themselves only once a year, which shows that women's body anxiety is very serious [1].

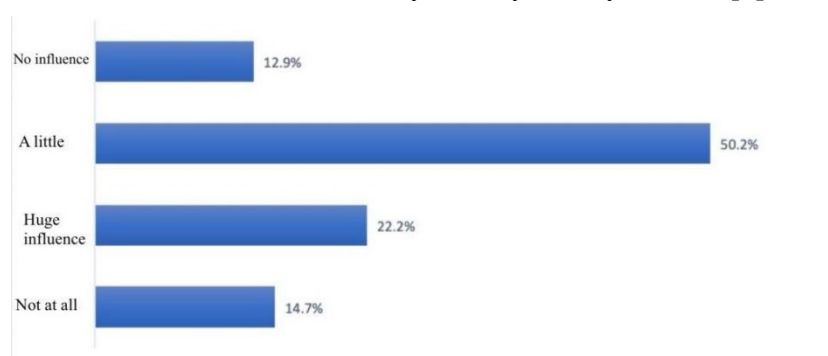


Figure 1: The social impact of obesity [2].

According to the Momo report shown in Figure 1, 72.4% of internet users believe that obesity has an impact on social networking, 22.2% of internet users think that the impact is particularly large, and 29.6% of internet users will beautify their height and weight on social software [1]. These anxieties are all influenced by the presentation and popularity of a single aesthetic on the Internet. At the same time, posting photos or videos about the body on social media will be attacked by some screen names if they do not match the public's aesthetics, and the probability of anxiety caused by this kind of online violence is 48.7%. Figure 1 shows that no matter how fat or thin, netizens have anxiety, and it is more common for netizens who feel fat to be anxious. And the World Health Organization also said that studies have shown that 47% of overweight girls and 34% of overweight boys have been harmed by family, friends and peers, and this situation "may lead to depression, low self-esteem, negative image and even suicide" [3].

In summary, the aesthetic discipline brought about by this kind of social media has seriously affected women's physical and mental health, and weakened the pluralism and diversity of aesthetics. And according to the data, a 2009 study found that female high school students were far more dissatisfied with their bodies than male high school students [4]. It can be seen that most of the single aesthetic restrictions in society are women, and women will be anxious and dissatisfied with their bodies because of this. Body anxiety is more pronounced in women.

2.2. The Presentation of Ideal Body on Social Media

Starting from the presentation of the ideal body in the summary of social media, many people on social media are now using social platforms such as Douyin, Xiaohongshu, Instagram and other social platforms to post or watch relevant content. On these platforms, there are more or less "thin" images, and as these images continue to appear in the user's field of vision, users will think that this is the "beauty" in the eyes of the public and go with the flow.

For example, a girl who thought she was in the middle of an adolescent was only 13 years old when she opened Instagram and saw pictures of her shapely body with abs and suffered from an eating disorder, and she spends three hours a day on Instagram watching the seemingly perfect bodies presented by these fitness gurus. At the same time, the Wall Street Journal staff said that "32% of teenage girls, Instagram makes them feel worse when they are dissatisfied with their bodies, and comparing themselves to what they see on Instagram can change how young women perceive and describe themselves" [5]. One slide reads, "We exacerbate body image dissonance in one third of teenage girls." All this shows that many teenagers who have not yet fully formed their values and worldview will blindly pursue these attractive body presentations on social media without considering their own conditions, thus exacerbating their anxiety. For example, another slideshow from 2019 made by an in-house Instagram staff mentioned that "teens blame Instagram for rising rates of anxiety and depression." From these data and events, it can be seen that the presentation of people's ideal body on social media can bring people some unnecessary anxiety, affect the physical development of children who are in the teenage years, and endanger the physical and mental condition of minors. Since 2016, the number of views of fitness videos has been increasing, and weight loss seems to have become a craze, and it is very convenient to follow the videos at home to lose weight. This is the promotion of social media to lose weight, which makes the public have a subconscious that thinness is beauty. And the Internet usually creates an information cocoon, putting all users into the created aesthetic environment. And whether it is in TV dramas or variety shows and short videos, it is rare to see people who are not thin. Thus giving the audience the illusion that only thin can be recognized.

3. Specific Manifestations of Body Anxiety and Size Anxiety

This section mainly discusses the manifestation of size anxiety in shopping and dressing, as well as the impact on women's physical and mental health and quality of life.

3.1. Shopping

In terms of the manifestation of size anxiety in shopping, the clothing brand BM, which has been popular among young women in recent years, is a good example. The BM brand only sells clothes of one size, and is a clothing brand developed under the perspective of male gaze [6]. As a woman, she is a woman, so she forces her body to conform to the so-called "female" characteristics and perform behaviors that conform to historical concepts. This is to make the gender of "female" a cultural symbol, thereby objectifying the female group. BM's promotion on social media is also very extensive, and it attracts many young women to consume for "fashion." The brand concept of "one size fits all" actually means that there is only "S" size, and on social media, with the help of bloggers with a certain number of fans and who meet the public aesthetics, only consumers who can fit into this clothing can be defined as "beautiful."

3.2. Dressing

This section will analyze how the aesthetic discipline is subtly influenced by dressing, video titles, and fashion trends. In terms of the title of the outfit video, many bloggers who share the outfit video

on Chinese social media software will take the title of the chubby girl's outfit and the skinny outfit. However, the blogger in the video is not a slightly chubby figure, and he is considered thin according to the body table released by the country, and the comment area also agrees that the blogger's figure is slightly chubby, and they are all thinking about how to wear it to look thinner. From the perspective of fashion trends, the popularity of BM style and the popularity of waist corset are both restrictions on aesthetic diversity. People in the waiting hood want to be recognized by society more, so in order to pursue fashion and get social recognition, they will follow this unhealthy single aesthetic. From the perspective of fashion trends, the popularity of BM style and the popularity of waist corsets are both restrictions on aesthetic diversity. People in the waiting hood want to be recognized by society more, so in order to pursue fashion and get social recognition, they will follow this unhealthy single aesthetic [7]. For example, in the summer of 2023, there will be a boom in "dopamine" and "hot girl outfits" on the Chinese internet. Uniqlo, a clothing brand, has followed this fashion trend and changed the design style of clothing, from the previous focus on loose and comfortable, simple colors to the current tight short T and bright colors. This change directly increased UNIQLO's net sales in the Chinese mainland by 40% [8].

3.3. Physical and Mental Health

From the perspective of the impact on women's physical and mental health and quality of life, in order to achieve the public aesthetics, many women will use some unhealthy methods to achieve the weight they want, which seriously affects women's physical health and daily quality of life. Wang Kui, an associate researcher at the Key Laboratory of Mental Health of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and her team conducted a series of studies on the desire of young people in my country to be thin [9]. The results showed that only 12.6% of female students and 13.5% of male students were satisfied with their body shapes, but the researchers found that only 10.58% of people were truly overweight, so even if they did not meet the definition of "beauty" on social media, it was not necessarily unhealthy. At the same time, a survey of more than 1,000 high school students in Lanzhou, China, found that 17.5% of girls would reduce the number of meals a day for weight control, and 16.1% of girls would not eat meat to control their weight. For adolescents, the impact of diet on health and growth and development is particularly large. China's food and nutrition guidelines for children and adolescents with growth retardation mention that "children and adolescents aged 6-17 should arrange three meals reasonably and eat a good breakfast" [10]. As mentioned above, for the health of women and adolescents, women should develop correct and healthy eating habits.

4. Strategies and Advice for Coping with Body Anxiety

This section will explain how to alleviate body anxiety in four ways: promoting correct sizing and personal adjustment and self-acceptance on social media, government regulation of sizing, and the definition of aesthetics. Social media should eliminate the information cocoons created for netizens, expose netizens to different types of aesthetics, increase aesthetic diversity, raise the possible consequences of improper ways to lose weight, and promote information about health. The government should formulate clothing sizes according to the size standards published by the state and actively promote them, increase the degree of discussion on aesthetic diversity, standardize the wording of online speech, put an end to online attacks on women's figures, and make women feel a warmer world. Merchants need to consider the diversity of body types and the comfort of clothing, the right clothes can give consumers the best experience, rather than reducing costs for the sake of profit and only producing one size of clothes, and should also let models of different body sizes show the diversity of aesthetics when displaying products. From the perspective of personal psychological adjustment and self-acceptance, contemporary women should not be bound by aesthetic disciplines,

nor should they pursue "white, young, and thin," but should form their own values and aesthetics. Women should not conform to the monolithic aesthetic brought about by the information cocoon created by the Internet, and women should use their own judgment to make the right choice. Every woman is an independent individual, each woman's body has its own uniqueness. Every woman has the right to wear freely; the pursuit of beauty is beautiful, but it needs to be based on her own physical condition.

5. Conclusion

To prove how social media creates body anxiety for women, this article elaborates on three parts. First, the impact of social media on women's size concepts. Second, the high prevalence of social media has affected the growth and development of adolescent groups. Some clothing brands promote incorrect size concepts for profit. Finally, women should consider their own health and not live under aesthetic discipline and follow unhealthy aesthetics. Making good use of social media can also reduce the appearance of these incorrect sizes, and the promotion of freedom of dress and anti-male gaze can greatly alleviate women's body anxiety and allow this group to live comfortably. Most of the references in this article are from web pages, and only a few are from books. The analysis of the causes of body anxiety can also be analyzed from the perspective of capital, which is the missing part of this article. Future research on women's anxiety may focus on the impact of the male gaze and the demands of society on women under patriarchy.

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