

# Beginning to Dismantle New Stereotypes: Female Body Image Anxiety Formation and Change in Social Media, Using Red Book As an Example

Linger Chen<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Beijing No.8 High School, China

**Abstract.** With the advent of the Internet society, gender stereotypes have gradually become more binding for women, and there are gender stereotypes or feminist theories spreading in both the real society and online media. This article is beneficial to the study of current feminism and the discussion of women's discourse on the Internet. By applying the theory of gender stereotypes and taking bloggers' postings on Red Book as the research object, this article analyzes the reasons for the emergence of white, thin and young as the main aesthetic theme, as well as the reasons for the gradual dissipation of this stereotype and its effects. The results of the study show that with the large number of current social media users and their rapid dissemination, the mainstream aesthetic finds changes from the gender stereotype of white, thin and young to its dissolution, reflecting the contemporary mainstream view that women are no longer objects to be gazed at and objectified. This study further demonstrates that social media has an important role in promoting the development of feminism in China and that the influence and changes produced by women's opposition to stereotypes have promoted more women to embrace a pluralistic aesthetic.

## 1 Introduction

In the Internet era, the emergence of social media has brought both opportunities and challenges to the development of Chinese women's groups and feminism. Due to the low threshold and anonymity of the Internet, the speed and scope of communication, women are given more space to express themselves and have the right to speak, and through social media, they are widely disseminated, creating a richer and more diverse image of women. More importantly, with the support of Internet infrastructure and related policies, a business model of "short video + e-commerce" provides women with more favorable employment opportunities, and digital communication technology has expanded from a tool for display and communication to a tool for women to actually benefit [1]. As a result, traditional cultural gender stereotypes are being challenged in many ways.

Many female opinion leaders use social media to promote feminist theories, such as Stephanie, a female blogger who uses short videos to advocate more feminist ideas, resonating and identifying with website users through her own experiences, promoting feminist emancipation, challenging traditional cultural gender stereotypes such as "men are superior to women, men are dominant, and women are dominant", and promoting feminist ideology. It also challenges traditional cultural gender stereotypes such as "men are superior to women and men are dominant over women" and promotes new discussions on gender stereotypes.

However, due to the deep-rooted traditional gender culture, many female bloggers such as "Bancang Forest", a blogger who share some pictures on the internet, started to promote the aesthetic of "white, thin and young" on the internet in order to attract attention and increase network traffic, thus satisfying men's imagination of women in terms of sex. These women are usually fair-skinned, thin and young-looking. The female bloggers, mainly "Bancang Forest", aim to post blogs from a male perspective, thus gaining the support of a large number of male fans. Under the strong gender discourse of male website users, a new gender stereotype is formed. The "white, young and thin" aesthetic makes women crazy about fat loss and slimming in order to create a thin body type, consciously or forcibly internalizing the white, thin and young aesthetic, generating body appearance anxiety, and even anorexia, depression, and unhealthy consequences such as plastic surgery. 2019 Tiktok report data shows that "about half of women think they are not attractive, 1 in 6 feel anxious when looking in the mirror or taking photos, and women concerned about medical beauty are less confident than the general population." [2]

Many women began to oppose women being re-"gaze", "ViccoZh Zhangng", "a bottle of Yu Zi sauce w" and other hold feminist bloggers on social media openly oppose the white thin young aesthetic, reflecting, and denying this aesthetic. Subsequently, many female website users began to follow the anti-body anxiety ideology, led by such bloggers and women, most women

\* Corresponding author: [chenlingerLW@163.com](mailto:chenlingerLW@163.com)

began to oppose the body inside the volume, the post under the remarks are invariably a rejection of anxiety rejection of the overly bonny body. Opposition and resistance to such aberrant aesthetics of women and anxiety about their looks and body shape are expressed on social media, demanding that women themselves gaze at women, that women determine the mainstream aesthetics, and reject body shape anxiety.

This paper focuses on and examines this to understand how women currently use social media to break body image anxiety, break stereotypes, and convey feminist ideas. The key questions in this paper are: how the "white, thin and young" dominant appearance anxiety is formed, what are the characteristics and manifestations, and which subjects are involved in the construction of this gender stereotype. What are the reasons for this change from the formation of a monolithic gender stereotype to the opposition to the objectification of the female body, and what are the feminist ideas implied in this change.

## 2 The present study

Appearance anxiety" is a psychology of worry or distress caused by people's dissatisfaction with their looks or body shape in modern society [3]. Young women's "appearance anxiety" is an important consequence of social aesthetic gaze in the construction of dual social relationships, including intimacy and social identity, that is, women are observed in the process of social relationship construction in the sense of gender, and are gaze at by the external society with an attitude that meets the current social aesthetic standards. In today's highly developed information network media, the phenomenon of "appearance anxiety" among contemporary young women is no longer a microscopic individual psychological problem, but a broader social psychological problem, so it is important to study the social mechanism of its formation [4]. The function of social media in shaping and transmitting gender stereotypes is also reflected in women's "appearance anxiety".

Gender stereotypes refer to relatively fixed perceptions and ideas about male or female gender attributes. For example, being brave, determined, and fearless is praised as having true manly character; being gentle, virtuous, and kind is considered feminine [5]. Some scholars argue that gender stereotypes are the result of male objectification, objectification, and commodification of women. The concept of "objectification" is based on Marx's elaboration of commodity fetishism, while stereotypes are oversimplified, lagging behind changes in reality, and generalized views of a social group [6]. Women's body image anxiety stems primarily from the socially defined gaze of the patriarchal system under a male society. The male gaze on women contributes to the worsening of women's body image anxiety by making women more conscious of their appearance, body shape, and style of dress, thus creating new gender stereotypes. In his elaboration of the "looking glass self", Cooley mentions

that human behavior depends largely on the perception of the self, which is formed mainly through social interactions with others, and that the evaluation and attitude of others towards oneself is a "mirror" reflecting the self, and the individual Through this "mirror", individuals recognize and grasp themselves [7]. In the face of anxiety, women make self-judgments and control and manage their bodies through socially "propagated" body images, putting their bodies into socialized power operations, resulting in the continuous "re-creation" of their bodies in the anxiety shaped by social discipline, and the "re-creation" of their bodies. As a result, the "reconstructed" body is constantly "reconstructed" in the anxiety of social regulation, and the "reconstructed" body is presented in "daily life" [8]. With the promotion of the Netflix economy, fragmented information brings fast-food aesthetics. To gain the audience's attention in a short period, multimedia has created a set and fixed aesthetic standard [9].

But in the current social conditions, most women who have regular access to social media are gradually changing their perceptions about body anxiety. The "white, young and thin" aesthetic is no longer the mainstream of aesthetics, instead, female celebrities or big bloggers such as Jikki Junyi and Yoko Lamu, some public figures, appear in the public eye. They promote the beauty of blackness and voluptuousness, and promote the different beauty of women, thus overturning the norm of women being objectified by the Internet and rethinking the role of social media on gender stereotypes. However, current research has focused on the mechanisms that shape appearance anxiety, ignoring the current power of women against it. Research reports that women no longer need to be labeled by outsiders or have their portraits made for them by others; female users are looking at themselves through a clearer lens and expressing themselves outwardly in a more confident way - "what kind of me I am. And when this happens, female users are no longer a single, stereotypical image, showing a diverse image style [2]. Through social media, women began to make a rise in thought, breaking free from this inequality of visual power, and women gradually became untouched by traditional slavery. From being seen to see, iter to self, industrialized single assembly line to produce a diverse and differentiated aesthetic. The rejection of look anxiety to be studied in this paper places more emphasis on women's sense of self than on the reinvention of the self-body as previously thought. This paper thus analyzes the process and causes of the transition from appearance anxiety to counter-appearance anxiety and the effects of counter-appearance anxiety under the lens of gender stereotypes.

## 3 The gender stereotype of white, thin, and young as the aesthetic mainstream

With the rapid development of the Internet environment, social media sites such as Tik Tok and Red Book have gradually taken up a large part of people's entertainment activities. Many novelty hot stems, dressing styles, and beauty products are quickly spread to daily life through

the Internet. This social model has had a great impact on women to some extent. With the power of connection inherent in social media, women's groups are more cohesive in their family life and professional life, forming an alternative community of support [1]. Many new aesthetic discussions have been brought about. The "white, young, and thin" aesthetic, dominated by the "Bancang Forest", exploded in 2020. As the name implies, "white" refers to women with white skin and delicate bodies. "Thin" is the idea that women should be thin and frail, with a figure that's easy on the eyes and a body that's weak. These two guidelines for women's bodies were popular as early as the Song Dynasty, while "young" is a new adjective that has emerged in recent years for the male gaze. The idea is that women should have a juvenile appearance in order to attract more male protectiveness and thus satisfy male desire for women. Since social media lenses and filters can create a white, young and slender image, many women have followed the example of bloggers such as "Bancang Forest" to learn and carry out "white, thin and young" image management on the internet to attract more followers and aesthetic recognition, and have started to enter the fields of medical beauty, weight loss, and plasticity offline.

The mainstream aesthetic gradually changes from "white and thin" to "white and young and thin", reflecting the new stereotype of women's appearance, which not only regulates women's bodies but also their age and appearance compared to the past. The article with the headline "Guide to developing a sense of pure desire" and "Bancang Forest teaches you three steps to create a titillating pure desire style" appeared in Red Book for a while. This kind of article is just advocating women to take pictures from a male perspective, such as the above theory of *looking glass self*. This kind of article is just advocating women to please men, stimulate men's protection desire, sexual desire perspective photo, guide female website users through the camera and social media, discipline body, appearance, form and even expression, to show waist and legs to meet male desire, requiring the face and body language to form a kind of love, "holding a pipa half cover". The seductive and pleasing image. The deeper reason for the formation of the stereotype of "white, thin and young" is that society still exists in a patriarchal society, where the mainstream of aesthetic culture is dominated by men, and gender relations are not equal in real life or on the Internet. The female body is always seen as a plane and volume to be processed, and the way and process of processing is the cultural control and cultural manipulation of girls' bodies by society [10]. Within the majority of the articles, Pure Desire promotes girlish characteristics such as "dressing in a girlish style," "a lighter blush with a larger area resembling the flush of excitement," and "a large area of exposed skin. The girly features such as "a large area of skin" and "a large area of skin. The charm of men in pop culture, aesthetics gradually fixed, the formation of assembly-line beauty and dressing style, but also let countless girls into the body anxiety panic.

Netizen bloggers, mainly Bancang Forest, create anxiety about their fans' appearance, leading them to create a "white, thin and young" and pure lust style, and

promoting excessive lust. Social media: Grooming oneself to become white, thin, and young by pursuing oneself. This type of impression management gives the spread and proliferation of this body anxiety. As a result, the aesthetic trend of "white and thin" has led many women to develop unhealthy habits, such as excessive weight loss, hunger strikes, and even depression. Women's perceptions of their bodies are caught up in gender stereotypes, and they even actively choose to undergo plastic surgery or leg slimming injections, all of which are part of women's discipline of their bodies. Feminist researchers have recognized through Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* that men construct the desired and ideal female body image through various media, and this image is internalized by women through the "empowering" function of the media [11]. The mechanism behind appearance anxiety is still dominated by the objectification of women, and social media expands the scope of people's thinking, but at the same time negatively spreads aberrant ideas. Women cannot avoid being stared at in real life, whether it is in the comments on posts or in the eyes of people walking down the street, reflecting the notion of gender inequality in society. The "white young thin" feature corresponds to the stereotypical male gaze and objectification of women, they see women as objects to satisfy male desires, and define women's beauty by specific standards. Many netizens consciously agree with the "white, young, and thin" viewpoint, and women who do not meet the aesthetic standards do not consider them to be in line with female aesthetics and femininity. Through the influence of social media, the stereotyping of aesthetics and stereotypes of women has imprisoned women's ability to discover themselves, and a large number of popular bloggers and the Internet has created a large network economy and traffic, making many women involved in anxiety.

#### **4 Dismantling gender stereotypes: Combating looks and body anxiety**

In the current society, the body anxiety formed due to the "white young thin" has caused widespread concern in the society. People gradually began to oppose this concept, academia, network bloggers, and famous social figures began to criticize the medical beauty, liquid breaks this unhealthy way to lose weight. With the "mother of eight children", "Xuzhou chain woman" and "Tangshan beating" incidents, more bloggers are aware of the injustice and harm of gender stereotypes. Women's anxiety about their body shape is one of the important factors that bind women's minds. As a result, some bloggers have started to propose topics and articles against body image anxiety in order to dispel gender stereotypes. For example, Echoch, a self-publishing blogger, titled "164, 120 slightly fat, but not skinny"[12], preaches that women must choose what they like to wear rather than visually adjusting their body proportions to "looking skinny". Bird, a stand-up comedian, gave a talk at a talk show on the topic of anti-body anxiety. I think self-discipline and freedom, which really expresses the

idea that a good body attracts the opposite sex, and that fitness helps with courtship." "Self-discipline gives me freedom, stop pie-painting me" and other anti-body anxiety from women's own perspective. The blogger Maotao also posted "Girls should always love themselves, whether they are fat or thin, tall or short" on Red Book [13]. These bloggers and social groups have used the Internet to promote the idea that "everyone has their own unique beauty and there is no need to force themselves to change in order to pursue a uniform aesthetic. The feminist ideology behind this series of articles continues to rise, suggesting that women should not be objectified by men, and that beauty is different no matter what kind of body or appearance. As women's workplace status, family status and education are rising, more and more people are gradually having their own ideas, opposing the stereotypical aesthetics of being set

in stone, advocating against body image anxiety and being their own topic. With the role of social media, women are beginning to embrace this view and have a new perspective on beauty, and they are now tending to define their beauty.

In this paper, we take a number of social media such as Red Book, Tik Tok, Weibo, and video websites as examples, and analyze the content of bloggers' posts on social media... The content of bloggers' posts on social media is analyzed, and the number of likes and comments of their posts are counted, and it is found that the number of likes exceeds 600 and the number of comments exceeds 110. This indicates that their words have a certain network influence and a large number of fans and website users pay attention to them. This shows that their posts have a certain ability to spread.

**Table 1.** Analysis of Red Book posts and comments about body image anxiety

Case	Copywriting and Red Book posting content	Aesthetics of diversity	Social mindset	Number of likes	Number of comments
'Yikoutao' Blogger	"The definition of a girl should be up to you" and "When you are confident enough to be yourself, you can turn what you thought was a flaw into an advantage with a single thought" [14]	Dark, dark skin	Self-confidence, Self-reliance Being yourself and determine on your own	619	164
"Rourou Sanliang" Blogger	"It's not illegal to have thick arms, it's not illegal to have a big belly, it's just a small part of what makes up your body and doesn't affect your own" [15]	Fat, strong	Showing yourself generously Confidence, sunshine inner beauty. Breaking female discourse on mainstream aesthetics	12,000	1808
"X-sister" Video website	The thing that X-sister teaches women is the spirit of inspiration, the efforts of women, and the unchanging sentiment" and "the traditional white, young, thin aesthetic context of women leaning back to rely on introverted low-profile non-confident expression of different words"	Sister style Sister love "Sisology"	People can be beauty over thirty. Breaking age anxiety Opposed to the appearance of young state, and the pursuit of mature temperament, Women break gender stereotypes	896	475
"ViccoZh Zhangng" Blogger	"Girls pursuing a sense of power and a sense of line is no problem" "No matter where the aesthetic is, there are many kinds of beauty forms"	European and American styles, muscularity Thin waist and fat hips	Aesthetic diversity	4633	117

According to the analysis of the above table, women began to pursue healthy and natural aesthetics, and oppose the pathological aesthetics of white young and thin, showing a diversified development of aesthetics. First, in terms of appearance: white skin is no longer synonymous with beauty. Everyone's looks no longer become the cause of anxiety for most women, they tend to show their own suitable style, accept and learn to praise their imperfect appearance, such as yellow and black skin, single eyelids, collapsed nose and freckles, which are regarded as imperfect appearance flaws in the eyes of the public, and learn to show their uniqueness, resulting in a unique aesthetic standard. The foreign trade defects perceived by the public no longer become

the reason for people to change their appearance through medical aesthetics. Instead, a diverse aesthetic of appearance began to emerge. Second, in terms of health: women began to pursue a healthy and fit body, and the emergence of Ailing Gu drove most bloggers to promote a sports style and a healthy, sunny body. People broke away from white young thin, found and accepted other forms of beauty, for example, many women began to practice vestigial line, broke away from the slim aesthetic and began to experience the demand for fit and healthy. Third, about the young state of aesthetics: the emergence of "sisology" led a large number of women in the workplace to pursue their own mature beauty. In Red Book, dressing in the style of workplace women became

popular, driving a different aesthetic trend. Fourth, about cultural integration: people began to accept and praise different cultural aesthetic trends such as Chinese style, European and American style, reflecting the monolithic aesthetics from white and young and thin to the diversified world aesthetics.

Most women, especially young women, are accepting of their physical appearance, changing their mindset, and speaking out against appearance anxiety and stereotyping on social media. For example, under a post promoting the aesthetics of black skin, the number one favorite is "Now I love my black skin and I'm super confident" (Red,2022); In a video analyzing Chinese and foreign aesthetics, the comments are "Whether it's Chinese aesthetics, Asian aesthetics or global aesthetics, they are all diverse" (Red,2022). Opposing stereotypes were widely agreed by website users. Thanks to media communication, women, especially young women, have internalized a pluralistic aesthetic and opposed the monolithic female aesthetic promoted by capital. Women are gradually accepting their real selves and becoming what they like, rather than relieving appearance anxiety by becoming white, thin and young. Women are beginning to oppose the internalization of men's rules and regulations on women, and no longer take pleasing other people's aesthetics as their aesthetic tendency.

The spread of feminist thought thus broke the traditional gender stereotypes and demanded a change in the subject of the gaze, breaking the male discipline and objectification. The traditional solidified idea that women must have thin willow waists and white skin to be called beautiful has been overturned. Women are gradually gaining the right to speak about mainstream aesthetics in society and expressing their definition of beauty on social media. Articles with themes such as "reject body anxiety", "beauty is not defined" and "fitness girls" are popping up all over the place. Stereotypes are now spreading to all aspects of society, and the mainstream aesthetic discourse is only a small step. As people continue to speak out for feminism, women are gradually gaining more status in society.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper concludes through research that feminism is gradually rising through the spread of the Internet, and that most women are unwilling to succumb to a monolithic aesthetic, but rather pursue aesthetic diversity and find their own unique beauty. The spread of the Internet initially caused the origin and development of the stereotype of white young and thin, but at the same time propagated the feminist view against objectification, allowing more women to break away from the stereotype. The ideal aesthetic and popular aesthetic was based on the ideal beauty of white, thin and young, and the pursuit of white skin and beauty brought about appearance anxiety. However, with the development of feminism, taking bloggers such as "ViccoZh Zhangng" and Meat Three Two as examples, they began to advocate diversified aesthetics, promoting being oneself, healthy

and confident and free social mentality about beauty, breaking the appearance anxiety and proposing a diversified aesthetic. In the theoretical sense, the article embodies the following three influences. First, it reflects the development trend of postmodern feminist thought in China. Second, the Internet has contributed to the growth and spread of female discourse, breaking gender stereotypes. Third, theories against the regulation and objectification of women have begun to emerge, and women have taken action to help feminist ideas spread on the Internet. In a practical sense, the rise of feminism dissolved appearance anxiety and allowed women to find more of their own original beauty and have a healthy sense of autonomy. The practical significance also further promotes the development of theories. However, this paper has fewer research cases, and more cases should be selected to increase objectivity and comprehensiveness.

## References

1. Yajie Chu, & Lin Wang. (2020). Digital communication technology and women's development: the example of short video-based social media. *Science Today* (2), 7.
2. Tik Tok. (2020). Research Report on Female Expression. *Jointly published by ByteDance and China Women's Daily*.
3. Yan Liu. (2022). Aesthetics and self-presentation: The deep logic of young women's appearance anxiety. *China Youth Studies* (5), 8.
4. S.Li., & M.Li. (2022). Analysis of the social mechanism of contemporary young women's "appearance anxiety". *China Youth Studies*(4), 8.
5. Jinhua Ma. Gender stereotypes and gender education [J]. *Educational Review*,2000, (6).
6. Wei Bu: "Interpreting the gender discourse of <Girlfriend> magazine", *Chinese Women's Culture* (No. 1), Beijing : *China Literary Association Press*, 2000, p. 89
7. Charles Horton Cooley. Human nature and social order [M]. Fanyi Bao, Yuan Wang, Translation. Beijing: *Huaxia Publishing House*, 2015.
8. Xiuhua Jiang. (2003). A cultural commentary on the act of female body re-creation. *Women's Studies Series* (3), 10. p37-39
9. Luying Gan. (2021). The shift of aesthetic culture in the context of Netflix economy: the phenomenon of female "appearance anxiety" as an example. *Southeast Communication* (5), 3.
10. Jennifer Craik: *The Face of Fashion*, translated by Yunzhog Shu, Beijing: *Central Compilation Press*, 2000, p 90-96.
11. Jianmei Jiang. (2015). The myth of the female body in consumer society. *Academia* (1), 6.
12. Red. (2022, Sep 13).165 cm&120 kg means slightly fat, not thin. Retrieved from: <https://www.xiaohongshu.com/discovery/item/6320>

- 1b1500000000800bfc7?secondshare=weixin&share\_from\_user\_hidden=true. 2022, Sep 15
13. Red. (2022, May 16). 178cm&200kg--killing body anxiety. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.xiaohongshu.com/discovery/item/6281f808000000002103cab6?app\\_platform=ios&app\\_version=7.59.1&share\\_from\\_user\\_hidden=true&type=normal&xhsshare=WeixinSession&appuid=5ba8d2ad07456200014ac3ef&apptime=1665762543](https://www.xiaohongshu.com/discovery/item/6281f808000000002103cab6?app_platform=ios&app_version=7.59.1&share_from_user_hidden=true&type=normal&xhsshare=WeixinSession&appuid=5ba8d2ad07456200014ac3ef&apptime=1665762543)2022, Sep 1
  14. Red.(2022, July 13).How is the little girl with black skin who was laughed at since childhood. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.xiaohongshu.com/discovery/item/62ceb933000000002103adad?app\\_platform=ios&app\\_version=7.59.1&share\\_from\\_user\\_hidden=true&type=normal&xhsshare=WeixinSession&appuid=5ba8d2ad07456200014ac3ef&apptime=1665762896](https://www.xiaohongshu.com/discovery/item/62ceb933000000002103adad?app_platform=ios&app_version=7.59.1&share_from_user_hidden=true&type=normal&xhsshare=WeixinSession&appuid=5ba8d2ad07456200014ac3ef&apptime=1665762896).2022, Sep 1
  15. Red.(2022, Aug 27).She is not slightly heavy, but too heavy. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.xiaohongshu.com/discovery/item/630cc0e9000000000900db68?app\\_platform=ios&app\\_version=7.59.1&share\\_from\\_user\\_hidden=true&type=normal&xhsshare=WeixinSession&appuid=5ba8d2ad07456200014ac3ef&apptime=1665762949](https://www.xiaohongshu.com/discovery/item/630cc0e9000000000900db68?app_platform=ios&app_version=7.59.1&share_from_user_hidden=true&type=normal&xhsshare=WeixinSession&appuid=5ba8d2ad07456200014ac3ef&apptime=1665762949). 2022, Sep 1