

# White Young and Thin Aesthetics: Personal Discipline in the Mirror Image of Women's Bodies in the Image Age

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## ABSTRACT

White young and thin's mirror body presented in the media platform is becoming a passive reference body paradigm for women in real life, forcing contemporary women to constantly discipline their bodies based on the aesthetic trend of the times and the gaze of the patriarchal society. The seemingly liberated female body is actually regulated by the new social logic, and gradually poisons women's aesthetic orientation, resulting in many aesthetic alienation phenomena. The real world is reduced to a mirror image, while the mirror image is elevated to a seemingly real existence. Exploring the logic behind its formation is not only a reflection on how to completely liberate women's bodies, but also on how media technology and human ethics can coexist.

**Keywords:** *White young and thin aesthetics, Body mirroring, Aesthetic alienation, Body discipline.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has stimulated the awareness of people to show their bodies recklessly on the Internet, and as the mirror image bodies on the Internet flood people's view, the body aesthetics of real women have changed to become mainly fair, juvenile, and slim. If things go on like this, this aesthetic gradually becomes morbid, triggering serious appearance anxiety of women in real life. Cases such as plastic surgery, medical beauty, uncontrolled weight loss can be seen everywhere. According to foreign studies, women's appearance anxiety is correlated with the mirror body presented in the media, therefore, it has become a topic of academic interest to explore the logic of women's regulation of their own body according to the mirror body.

## 2. THE AGE OF THE IMAGE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SCENES OF FEMALE BODY CONSCIOUSNESS

Nicholas Mirzoeff once said, "The human experience of knowing the world today is more visual and figurative than at any time in the past."

[1] The age of images has also become the main scene for constructing women's body consciousness.

### 2.1 The Age of Visual Culture Dominance

McLuhan once said that the medium is an extension of the human being, and today's image technology unquestionably extends the range of human vision. From words to pictures to videos, visual culture is the dominant and basic of human exposure to information. According to the 50th China Internet Development Statistics Report, by June 2022, the scale of China's online short video users reached 962 million, occupying 91.5% of the overall Internet users. Images have become the visual cultural representation of the real society.

The female body has been in a state and rule of being gazed at in the century-old patriarchal society, and with the development of image technology, this gaze has been freed from the restriction of having to face each other and extended to the online platform. From film and television to life, from art to reality, there are different forms of value for the female body. In terms of life and reality, in ancient times, the princesses were given as gifts to foreign emperors in exchange for national and social stability, and at this time, the women must have

sufficient visual value to satisfy the exchange logic. In terms of film and art, the female body has always been used as a selling point and a point of interest. When we talk about "Lust, Caution", the first thing that comes to mind is Tang Wei's nude appearance, but the connotation of the film is left behind. The visual domination of the female body will be more preconceived into the human vision, and at the same time, the body landscape in this state has evolved into more diverse forms with the support of media technology. "In the rapid development of new media technology, women's bodies and appearances are more inundated with people's vision than ever before". [2] This view is constantly superimposed with new spillover values, and economic models such as live bounty, product endorsement, and live goods are the forms of realizing such values.

## **2.2 Cultural Conception of the Body Constructs**

"Turner sees the body as a carrier and bearer of socio-cultural and social symbols" [3] How the body exists and is displayed represents the cultural concept of each era. In the past, the body could only be in a specific scope of time and space, possessing a low visibility and making people unaware of the great media energy that the body contains. Today's media technology has broken through the limitations of time and space, extending the individual's body from private space to public space. The category of handsome and beautiful women in the media content classification is the most direct manifestation of this, which also makes people realize the mediated nature of the body and its value.

Today's women break through the traditional body culture in the deep chamber and use their own bodies as communication content, making them into pictures and images carrying various symbolic meanings and posting them on major social media platforms. Beauty anchors, beauty videos, live streaming with goods and other forms of pictorial media are more often recorded and filmed with women as the viewing perspective, and women's bodies are presented as the main medium and content in such videos. However, the occurrence and development of this behavior has triggered an online viewing frenzy and given rise to human vanity, leading women to cater to online aesthetics in order to gain the approval and praise of their bodies from the online community, gradually forming a single, white, young and thin body

aesthetic standard, and this aesthetic standard is also constantly revolting women today, leading to various kinds of body anxiety and appearance anxiety for those women who cannot meet the white, young and thin aesthetic standard. The open body culture is a symbol of the progress of the times and the development of media technology, but if this culture is not regulated and corrected, it may lead to negative social effects.

## **2.3 Dissolution of Virtual Reality Boundaries**

The environmentalization of information environment proposed by Lippmann is becoming more and more obvious with the development of media image technology. People and things in the network have specific digital attributes, and these digital attributes act on the real life environment with their unique power, giving people an illusion that reality and virtual are integrated.

For the female body, whether it is on video platforms such as Jitterbug, Racer, Meipai, or photo platforms such as Weibo and Circle of Friends, the digital features of long legs, white skin, V-shaped face and bony body are uniform. This has led to "the phenomenon of aesthetic cognitive solidification in society after people have become accustomed to the addition of technology". [4] The long-term inculcation of this digitally embellished virtual perfection leads them to behaviorally cultivate their bodies in photos and videos as "specimens" that conform to the popular aesthetic orientation in order to seek group approval, and psychologically take the popular aesthetic standard as a self-restraint guideline, and once their body shape and physique do not strictly exist in the guideline, they will therefore If their body shape does not strictly exist in the guidelines, they will become upset and panic. However, they ignore the fact that it is the authenticity of each individual that makes them unique, and they do not realize that this individualization and differentiation is making the aesthetics of women's bodies homogeneous and narrow because of the impact of image technology.

## **2.4 Visual Sensory Fragmentation Splicing**

A concomitant property of the development of image technology is the refinement of image presentation, the direct manifestation of which is visual sensory fragmentation. Fragmented information content is dominant in today's media

age due to the fast pace of the information society and the meticulous requirements of the audience, and the acceptance of such fragmented information does not require complex thinking to obtain the desired experience. At the same time, the subjects in the visual sensory fragments carry their own amplification effect in the audience's mind, i.e. the audience will subconsciously pay more attention to the subjects in the images than usual when they see the fragmented images. The fragmented body contents such as A4 waist, peach buttocks and slap face have become body symbols, leading women to take them as the direction of their own efforts and put together the fragmented body parts into a complete body standard to measure themselves or others. This media phenomenon binds women's bodies and aesthetics in a single framework, ignoring the coordination and uniqueness of the body itself, which is undoubtedly a transformation and distortion of contemporary women's body consciousness. In the long run, people will become more and more immersed in the visual and sensory fragmentation, blindly following and losing the ability to think and interpret independently. From this perspective, the leading role of media platforms on women's body consciousness is also more thought-provoking.

### **3. BODY MIRRORING: PASSIVE REFERENCE OF THE FEMALE BODY PARADIGM**

Based on Freud's theory of the unconscious and primordial narcissism, Lacan proposed the mirror theory, which argues that human beings can recognize themselves in the mirror in infancy and fully recognize their real selves through the image of themselves in the mirror. This theory fully illustrates that human self-perception is largely influenced by the mirror image of external information.

#### **3.1 *The Pseudo-reality of Digital Glorification***

Internet technology has broken through spatial limitations, and it can connect two people separated by the sea and sky through the Internet, so the biological business cards held by individuals on social media are becoming more and more important. Everyone wants to present the most perfect side of themselves to others, and this is especially true for women who love beauty by nature. The female body, digitally beautified by various beauty cameras and beautification

technologies, almost always appears in media platforms as white, young (tender) and thin, whether in videos or photos. It is undeniable that this aesthetic orientation of the female body has unique eye-catching characteristics, especially in today's era of thinness as beauty, but over time, digitally embellished images of the female body have flooded the media screens, creating a pseudo-reality.

This pseudo-reality "forces" them to constantly use this body mirroring as a standard for their own transformation. The elongation effects in the camera can instantly turn the person in the image into a tall figure with long legs, and skin whitening can instantly make the person's skin blown out and fair and clear. It is easy to see that this digital technology creates a personal image that profoundly affects the aesthetics of the individual's body, as women who use these beautifying technologies are saying "I want to weld this makeup on my face" and "I wish I had a picture like this."

#### **3.2 *Construction of Body Consumption Symbols***

The sweep of the image age and the rise of the viewing wave have made the body a special symbol of consumption in contemporary society. Baudrillard proposed in his book "The Consumer Society" that the body carries the heaviest connotation in the complete set of equipment for consumption. And because of the long-standing historical and social attributes, women have been in the position of being watched, thus this body consumption symbol is again more inclined to the female body. "Advertising guru David Ogilvy believed that the inclusion of visual elements such as beautiful women, animals and babies were most likely to win the attention and affection of consumers." [5]

The visual economy about women's bodies, formed under the combined weight of media technology and consumer orientation, also satisfies to some extent the pleasure of women being gazed at and noticed. They are desperately eager to gain the approval of others through the perfect bodies they create, and their pursuit of such body approval has become more and more intense, leading them to accomplish various body-related consumption behaviors in their lives. The economic industries related to cosmetic surgery, beauty, slimming, whitening, skin care products, etc. have been developing and growing based on this. But this

pleasure of being gazed at slowly ceases to be a personal subject right and becomes a regulation. Women's bodies no longer simply belong to themselves, but become a kind of exhibit on the network booth, which binds women to the position that they must have a good sense of view, and women have to keep themselves regulated all the time. Thus, the female body is a symbol of consumption that satisfies the economic interests of businessmen and at the same time creates a countervailing effect on the female community, i.e., they are brainwashed into thinking that only the body that fits the framework of the symbol is perfect.

### **3.3 *The Hidden Bondage of "Other" Desire***

Although the status of women is gradually improving, the male superiority and gender dependence that have existed for thousands of years in a patriarchal society cannot be suddenly eliminated. The gender survival model in this context, i.e. the nature of female dependence on male, has been transferred to the era of visual culture, which presents the media landscape of "seeing" and "being seen". When women present themselves on social platforms, they are inevitably subjected to male gaze, and this behavioral expression, which represents men's instinctive desire, becomes a hidden bondage for women's bodies.

While men exercise their power of viewing by treating women's bodies as objects to be evaluated, women in a passive position are constantly disciplining themselves in the process of presenting their bodies in order to find self-identity and cater to the preferences of the active viewers.

According to Lacan's logic, this self-identity is actually the identity of others, the gaze of others becomes a mirror to know the self, the body discipline of the self is actually the result of seeking the identity of others. According to the relevant statistics, the most popular type of live broadcast in today's booming live industry is entertainment live broadcast, which mainly consists of female anchors being cute and pampered, showing their bodies for viewing, and the viewers are undoubtedly mostly male, with women responding and adjusting their bodies in real time according to men's comments in order to satisfy male viewers' voyeurism. Under this communication logic, due to men's innate desire for conquest and control, their aesthetic preferences are uniformly white, young and thin

female types, and these visual preferences are reflected in the female body as a passive reference body mirror. As a result, the male audience's desire for "otherness" also functions as a covert bondage to the female body.

## **4. PERSONAL DISCIPLINE: SELF-PROJECTION UNDER PERFECT BODY REFERENCE**

Lacan's mirror theory believes that the growth of the human subject is not separate from the outside world, and he divides the outside world into three parts, namely, the "imaginary world", the "symbolic world" and the "real world". People form their self-consciousness through the identity of the imaginary world, and construct the self-subject through the symbolic world.

### **4.1 *Body Imagination Under Mirror Reference***

When women face the white, young and thin standard body in the mirror, they will project this aesthetic onto themselves, thus producing the body imagination of the mirror self, which is the basis for the construction of the self in the mirror theory. Lacan believes that individuals find themselves through others in the mirror stage, by looking at the "mirror" other, giving the "mirror" other a special symbolic meaning, and "through discourse and knowledge of the other, then forming the symbolic The ideal me in the symbols." [6]

In reality, when women watch the female body of the "other" in the image through the digital media, they also give the symbolic meaning of "beauty" in their minds when they see the fair, young and thin body of the image, and through the praise and evaluation of the viewers in the commentary, they will When they conform to the body standards in the images, they will feel that they have found their self-identity in the society, while when they do not conform to the body standards in the images, they will have figure anxiety and appearance anxiety. Thus, body imagination becomes the ideological basis for personal self-regulation.

### **4.2 *Alienation of the Aesthetic Concept of the Body***

The perfection in the mirror image causes women to pursue and aspire to it, but if they cater to this single aesthetic, it will inevitably lead to the

alienation of the real aesthetic concept and lead to a series of behaviors that violate human morality.

In the media platform to create publicity, from beauty pageants, celebrity makeup to fashion models, white young thin monolithic female aesthetic subconsciously aggravate the pathological and alienating trend of the real female aesthetic, thus causing many women, especially young women whose values have not yet been fully formed, to blindly follow and imitate. In recent years, we have seen many cases of women's plastic surgery failures, some of which even cost them their lives. 2021 Hangzhou female netizen Ran died of a full-body infection caused by liposuction surgery. The bad behavior of unscrupulous beauty hospitals should certainly be punished, but there is no doubt that women themselves should correct their own aesthetic concepts. The love of beauty is in everyone's heart, but the emphasis is on beauty under the premise of physical health, otherwise it is just meaningless "mechanical beauty". Not only do people rush to the mainstream aesthetics created by the media, they even attack and suppress the pluralistic aesthetics that do not conform to the mainstream aesthetics, and through the speech platform provided by the Internet, they personally attack people who are outside the aesthetic standards of white children and thin, which is the result of the aesthetic alienation cultivated by the mirror image of the media today.

### ***4.3 Self-atrophy of the Female Body***

The self-construction after the mirror imagination is the act of personal discipline of the contemporary female body. People will always judge whether they belong to the ideal state in their mind according to the image in the mirror, and this ideal state is also obtained from the other in the mirror. Individuals take the image of the other in the mirror as an object of comparison, and in the process of constructing themselves, they strive to bring their personal image closer to the image of the other in the mirror, thus trapping themselves in the cage jointly created by others and society.

The female body in the media platform provides a variety of body styles for the real female body, but they all belong to the same template, namely, white and young and thin. The women's bodies are infinitely close to this template, and under the domination of the formed alienation concept, they cause the self-atrophy of their individual bodies. A famous movie star said on a talk show that she had taken anticoagulants to whiten her skin, but that

long-term use of such drugs causes abnormalities in her body's clotting function. This kind of behavior that builds the beauty of the body on the basis of destroying the health of the body is not only the alienation of the aesthetic concept, but also the alienation of the body. It is no coincidence that in 2021, a 20-year-old female university student in Hunan Province lost excessive weight in pursuit of a slim figure, resulting in anorexia nervosa. These cases of excessive pursuit of mainstream aesthetics at the expense of normal body mechanisms are chilling. The feminism that is constantly chanted today does reflect to some extent the autonomy and independence of contemporary women, but the white, young and thin aesthetic formed by the contemporary media society is not the same as disciplining women themselves in another social context.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The advent of the age of images is due to the development of media technology, which has made images of previously invisible things available on media platforms for people to view. Women's body aesthetics is only one of the things reflected in images, and has become a media representation that media people are concerned about under the wave of consumerism. However, this aesthetic consciousness is held hostage by the media and capital, and is in a state of having to cater to the mainstream aesthetics promoted by the media, which is undoubtedly one of the pathological phenomena of the media today. Therefore, the media, which carries the content of women's bodies and shapes their aesthetic consciousness, must take on the responsibility of guiding the public in a positive way, in accordance with the rules of social ethics, and create and disseminate a pluralistic and healthy aesthetic and judgmental standard for the public. The individual woman, as a media contactee, must truly liberate her mind in the ever-open society and no longer be bound to her body by the image of the other in the mirror, so as to achieve true autonomy and independence.

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