



# The Research on the Causes and Influences of Appearance Anxiety Among Adolescents Taking the Short Film “Malevolence” as an Example

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**Abstract.** Appearance anxiety is a social phenomenon involving many disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, communication and management, and has developed to an increasingly serious extent in recent years, greatly affecting the value orientation of youth and the public order and morals of society, becoming a huge social problem. This article takes the youth’s appearance anxiety as the research object, analyzes the reasons and influences of the youth’s appearance anxiety, and takes the original short film “Malevolence” as an example to explain the creative motivation and social problems of the work. Through the research results, it is found that adolescents’ appearance anxiety has a great impact on the mental health, and the reasons are mainly caused by family, school education and social factors. In terms of improvement, relevant films should focus on the guidance of correct values, family education should give more psychological care to teenagers, schools should also shoulder the responsibility of aesthetic education, and society should advocate multiple aesthetics, so that teenagers can get rid of the appearance anxiety under the influence of incorrect values.

**Keywords:** Appearance · Anxiety · Adolescents · Short film

## 1 Introduction

Deformed public aesthetics has begun to spread, and a majority of girls feel inferior because their appearance does not conform to public aesthetic taste. In recent years, buzzwords such as “face value” and “appearance anxiety” have repeatedly appeared in social media in various forms, which have a negative impact on the beauty of college students. In an environment where the role of “face value” is magnified, people are not confident about their own appearance. In today’s discourse logic of “value is justice”, “appearance anxiety” has gradually become a social focus issue, which makes college students in the era of “value” unconsciously fall into the aesthetic dilemma [1]. Not only adults, but teenagers today are also facing different degrees of “appearance anxiety”. Gao Li, a national Level 2 psychological counsellor and full-time psychological teacher at the Zhangzhou Mental Health Counselling Center for Minors, told reporters that in February of 2021, a questionnaire survey conducted by China Youth School Media for 2,063 college students nationwide on the topic of appearance anxiety showed that 59.03%

of college students have some degree of appearance anxiety. “Girls are more likely to have appearance anxiety than boys.” Gao Li introduced that another survey showed that college students showed certain differences in their satisfaction scores of their own appearance: 55.29% of the surveyed college students gave their own appearance a score of 3 and considered their own appearance average, 24.73% were more satisfied with their own appearance and scored 4, only 7.87% were very satisfied and chose a full score of 5; another 9.66% of the respondents said they were not very satisfied with their appearance, and 2.45% were very dissatisfied. According to Gao Li, in addition to college students, more and more secondary school students nowadays also have certain appearance anxiety. For teenagers, since their self-awareness is still unstable and their values are in the stage of formation and establishment, their self-evaluation is easily influenced and interfered by the outside world, especially in today’s modern society with developed internet, the value orientation oriented by “face value” deeply affects the teenagers. Therefore, emotions such as “fear of not looking good enough”, “fear of others seeing their flaws” and “fear of being judged” easily bother them. Under the influence of such perceptions and emotions, many secondary school students pay too much attention to their appearance, such as buying clothes or jewellery beyond their financial means, spending a lot of time on elaborate makeup and dressing before going out, or going on unscientific diets, etc. These behaviours lead many students to interfere with their normal life and studies [2]. In addition, survey shows that every summer and winter vacation, graduation season, there will be students pile up plastic surgery phenomenon, those born after 2000s have become the main force of medical beauty consumption. These teenagers are keen on plastic surgery, they are unable to distinguish between hypnotic advertising and their own needs when they receive such information and the “appearance anxiety” that is being trafficked is the culprit. Some medical beauty institutions create “appearance anxiety” through beauty bloggers and net celebrity anchors and use the opportunity to make money. Divided into two chapters, this paper discusses the creative motivations of original works and the forms and causes of adolescents’ appearance anxiety, and analyzes strategies to improve adolescents’ appearance anxiety. The author hopes that through this research, it can provide some contributions to scholars who study this field in the future.

## **2 Exploration on the Forms and Causes of Youth’s Appearance Anxiety in Short Films**

### **2.1 Explanation of Creative Motivation and the Forms of Appearance Anxiety in Adolescents**

In the film the author produced, the main character is a 16-year-girl who is experiencing appearance anxiety and self-distrust. She is going through puberty, so there are a lot of zits on her face and due to academic pressure and low mood, she begins to gain weight. She is apprehensive of the fact that she is not as pretty as before, and then falls into a deep sense of inferiority. Low self-esteem, fear, loathing to see herself in the mirror, always with her head down and her back to the sun and the crowd. Her mood is pulled

by acnes, and she loses the initiative over her emotions. Every day, she washes her face with tears and keeps looking at the pictures of herself when she had no acne. She likes to read the posts of others who have succeeded in their battles of acnes as if she had succeeded too. She fantasizes about how great it would be if she could get a new face, how her life would be better without acne. Some people may not understand her feeling, they may think she fusses, some would even laugh and ridicule at her. She has obviously tried all the methods and endured a lot of pain, but still as usual, even if there are some improvements, in the end she will always be beaten back to the original shape. The depressing emotions of helplessness, pain, and low self-esteem are intertwined in her mind, always. She begins to wear masks all day and uses them as a band-aid for her low self-esteem, but she does not know they will smother acne. She begins to go on a diet and eat nothing except boiled vegetables and water. She believes it can make her slimmer, but she does not know that she is facing bulimia behind her. She only wears long trousers and sleeves in the summer, as she believes they can cover up her flab and make her look slimmer. She isolates herself and rejects all the social activities which she actively engaged in before and becomes sensitive and irritable. She could not help herself with the vicious cycle and her life is a chaotic mess. The archetype of the character the author created is herself, indeed. The assaults the author presented in the film are word-to-word from what author's classmates had said about the author, and it happened a year ago, the author can still remember them clearly, and they affected the author even until now, the author still unwilling to take off the mask and show up the entire face. The author now very anxious and worrying about going to a new environment, afraid that the classmates will treat the author like this. The author afraid of making new friends and always wear masks because fear that they will dislike the author due to the appearance. These occasions do not only happen to the character the author created, but it applies to a lot of girls that have been attacked with language violence due to their appearance. If people search online, could see many adolescent girls expressing on social media that they have been laughed at their looks and they feel very inferior. This is not an individual problem anymore, it occurred to many teenagers and especially girls, so that the society need to pay attention to this.

## **2.2 Teenagers' Appearance Anxiety Causes**

In the film the author made, the most significant cause to the character's appearance anxiety is other people's malevolent words and insults to her, which hurt her pride and confidence. They regard her as "ugly", "fat" and "disgusting". They said that she looks disgusting with her acnes, it seems as if she never washed her face. They condemned her to always wear masks to conceal her face and stop wearing skirts. Everyone around her humiliates her like this, and she believes them. She stops believing in herself. Being affected by other people's opinions is not the only cause of appearance anxiety, in fact, there are several other causes. For instance, people may be influenced by films and magazines and think that they should imitate these beautiful models and celebrities and become the same way. This process of comparing appearances is not intentional, but it happens immediately when we view someone else's photo. The comparison is formed so quickly because the data on the internet, such as the number of likes, comments, retweets, and followers, can form an impression in a person's mind more quickly than

offline information. People cannot even notice that they are comparing their appearance or life with the one shown by others, which can cause appearance anxiety. In addition to comparing themselves to users on social media, people also compare their real selves to the persona they have constructed on dual networks. If a person is not as good in real life as he or she appears to be on social media, he or she will feel frustrated and sad. Such emotions can be interpreted as disappointment “if only I were that good and good looking” and so on, but in fact people want to put their best foot forward and tend to exaggerate their good points on social media to hide their weaknesses [3]. On the television, they seem so perfect without any flaws, oval face, double big eyes, high nose, “A4” waist, chopsticks legs, skins without pores, slim and glamorous, problems have come out here—a single aesthetic. Only girls that fit these absolute criteria the author list above can be counted as good-looking. Weighting over 50 kg is a crime and the society is somehow malicious towards slightly plump girls. Single eyelids and flat nose are not accepted and girls that have them would be regarded as common and not good-looking. In order to meet these popular standards, some people even to surgery plastic surgery, body shaping, “calf nerve disconnected thin leg surgery,” “take the rib bone thin waist,” “lipolysis needle” “broken bone to increase the height” and many other medical aesthetic surgeries. The way to “become beautiful” through surgery is tantamount to cheating in the eyes of competitors, and it has led to a competition for looks, making the requirements for looks even more demanding [4]. According to data released in 2012, there were as many as 20,000 complaints of disfigurement due to cosmetic surgery each year over the past 10 years, and some say 200,000 in 10 years faces were ruined. On one side is the huge demand for cosmetic surgery and the rapid growth of the industry, and the other side is the huge demand for cosmetic surgery and the rapid growth of the industry, on the other side is the high number of complaints and tragic cases [5]. In recent years, both film and television productions and online advertisements have shaped those symbols of beauty that are “obvious” into the mainstream aesthetic norms of society. The overwhelming medical beauty advertisements are chaotic, especially the medical beauty advertisements that foment “appearance anxiety”, false propaganda, excessive propaganda, and improper orientation, which are extremely likely to trigger undesirable psychological activities of consumers, such as low self-esteem, anxiety, uneasiness, and even “appearance anxiety [6].”

### **3 Suggestions for Improving Appearance Anxiety in Adolescents**

#### **3.1 Suggestions for Content Construction of Film and Television Works**

In film and television production, they should not show and convey the value of appearance comparison, as to prevent teenagers from being impacted. They can promote more concepts with positive energy and diversified aesthetic content, so that teenagers can face everything about themselves from the inside, accept and embrace themselves and get rid of appearance anxiety. In the first episode of the monologue “Hear Her”, “The Magic Mirror”, focuses on the topic of “appearance anxiety”. The girl in the drama spends 2 h and 37 min every day on makeup in front of the mirror in order to make herself meet the “beauty standard”. In this process, she is fixing her shortcomings little by little, but she is still unsatisfied with herself in the magic mirror [7]. Films should

contain something positive regarding to appearance, in some variety, film and television on the classification of adults and minors, to guide the correct aesthetic approach.

### 3.2 Recommendations for the Prevention of Phenomena at the Social Level

In order to resolve this problem, suppressing advertisements that narrow down the concept of “beauty” is necessary. Models representing famous brands are usually slimmer and taller than common girls, yet this imagery can be altered to encourage normal weight girls to try on these clothes. Modern governments should regulate the false publicity and malicious speculation of some plastic surgery institutions. On social media, there should be some regulatory platforms, for example, if there is obvious guidance on appearance anxiety in advertisements or film and television works, regulation can be strengthened, and such promotional works are strictly prohibited from being listed or broadcast in front of the public. Too many slender internet celebrities are motivating girls to eat less carbohydrates, which may stop their menstruation. There should be more public figures like Eileen Gu who stated in an interview that beauty is having energy, confidence, and good health. In schools, it is necessary to promote aesthetic education and diversified aesthetic concepts, to prohibit students from attacking each other wantonly because of their appearance, and to have clear regulations and educational measures to prevent the recurrence of such phenomena. The hot market of medical aesthetics reveals the current anxiety of women, especially young women, about body image perception, and generates the consumption practice of body “modification” or “reconstruction”, and the consequent economic disputes and social conflicts are increasing. Statistics from the official website of the China Consumers Association show that the number of complaints about medical aesthetics has continued to increase in recent years and has always been in the top ten in the field of complaints [8]. On September 27, 2021, the official website of the State Administration of Radio and Television (SARFT) issued a notice saying that from now on, all radio and television broadcasters and network audio-visual institutions and platforms should stop broadcasting “beauty loans” and similar advertisements, while behind the “beauty loans” are some medical beauty institutions for appearance anxiety. The notice says that from now on, all broadcasters, TV and internet broadcasters and platforms will stop broadcasting “beauty loans” and similar advertisements [9]. In, November 2 in 2021, the State Administration of Market Supervision released on its official website the “Medical Beauty Advertising Enforcement Guide”, which focuses on combating the following situations: going against social good morals, creating “appearance anxiety”, improperly associating poor appearance with “low ability”, “laziness”, “poverty” and other negative evaluation factors. “lazy” “poor” and other negative evaluation factors to do improper correlation or will be outstanding appearance and “high quality” “hardworking”, “success” and other positive evaluation factors to do improper correlation. The Guidelines regulate the medical beauty market and effectively protect the legitimate rights and interests of consumers. Market supervision departments at all levels should guide and urge network platforms to establish a sound internal audit mechanism to intercept illegal and irregular medical beauty advertising and promotional information in the process of advertising and providing Internet information services. Network platform operators who do not fulfil their platform responsibilities according to law, market supervision departments according to strict investigation and punishment.

For such “variants” regulators and platforms that provide information dissemination should increase supervision or audit efforts to reduce the risk of youth being poisoned by “appearance anxiety” from the source [10]. In terms of teenagers themselves, they can cultivate more self-confidence, understand that appearance is not all that a person is, and establish the right values. Family education can also be strengthened, so that parents can correctly guide teenagers to maintain a positive and healthy lifestyle, form a healthy rhythm of life, and guide teenagers to agree that physical vitality and healthy is also another form of beauty, not just physical appearance. so as to enable youth to establish a correct outlook on life, worldview and values, resolve social conflicts and purify the social climate. In my story, the girl’s mother encouraged her and helped her out of the problem, guiding her the correct concept of beauty and making her more confident with herself.

## 4 Conclusion

Understanding the forms and causes of adolescents’ appearance anxiety has a positive guiding effect on the mental health of adolescents in the process of growing up. The form of the short film can not only reflect the daily problems in society, but also reflect the educational effect through the display of the ending and plot in the film. This paper studies adolescents’ appearance anxiety and finds that adolescents’ appearance anxiety has a greater impact on the body and mind, and the reasons are mainly caused by family, school education and social factors. In terms of improving problems, relevant films should focus on the guidance of correct values, family education should give more psychological care to teenagers, schools should also shoulder the responsibility of aesthetic education, and society should also advocate multiple aesthetics. Because this article lacks certain qualitative research, future scholars can pay more attention to the in-depth interview method, explore the deep causes of adolescents’ appearance anxiety, and use the form of short films to actively reflect and solve social problems.

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