

## **Pre-pubescent girls' evaluations of female images in Hong Kong media**

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## **Pre-pubescent girls' evaluations of female images in Hong Kong media**

### **Abstract**

Interviews with pre-pubescent girls in Hong Kong explored their satisfaction with the images of females presented in the media. Sixteen girls aged 10 to 12 were asked to take images from media that are about “what girls or women should be or should not be; and what girls or women should do or should not do”. They were asked who created the images they collected and whether they were satisfied with the content.

Most of these young girls were able to identify some of the individuals and the institutions involved in the creation of female images. They identified promoting sales, beautifying, reflection, and questionable motives as the intentions behind creating the images as they were. The girls were dissatisfied with female images in the media.

They found them too sexy, too passive, or too artificial and expressed a preference for images of girls or women that are active, natural, and healthy.

## **Pre-pubescent girls' evaluations of gender images in the media**

### **Introduction**

Hong Kong has a media-saturated environment. Televised messages can be found at home, in various forms of public transportation, inside lifts and lift lobbies, in large public areas such as shopping centers, and on the Internet. Newspapers and magazines are traditional sources of editorial and advertising content, and Hong Kong is a city with a rich diversity of print-based media outlets. Posters and other forms of discrete printed advertisements are nearly ubiquitous, from billboards along the road to single sheets in train stations, and from inside train cars to the sides of double-deck buses. The Internet has become a staple of life and provides a wealth of text and image driven content from traditionally formulated and produced commercial messages to user-generated content of every imaginable type and configuration (Chan, Tufte, Cappello, & Williams, 2011).

Recent research on youth and the media has focused on how media content is used in daily life and how messages are decoded and understood by a young audience (Tufte, 2007). Youth nowadays are media-savvy. A survey of 405 Chinese persons aged 15 to 24 in Hong Kong found that the Internet plays a prominent role in their lives. A majority of respondents spent one to three hours per day on the Internet and identified it as their preferred medium for information-driven activities. Magazines

retained importance for entertainment and shopping, while the television retained importance for news and current affairs (Chan & Fang, 2007).

This study was designed to explore on a small scale how girls aged 10 to 12 evaluate the female images in Hong Kong media. The study also explored their understanding of the process and personnel involved in the production of such images. The study focused on 10–12 year-olds. This phase of life is of particular interest because of the salience of sexuality during this phase, not just for the young people themselves, but for the adults who impose all sorts of disciplinary measures on them (Ho & Tsang, 2002). Young consumers aged 10 to 12 are considered to be powerful influencers of their parents' consumption, as well as engaging in considerable direct consumption of their own (Andersen et al., 2008). The study adopted an innovative visual method which involved asking interviewees to collect images and discuss in what way they felt satisfied or dissatisfied with them.

#### *Gender representations in media*

While sex is a biological classification, gender is understood to be a psychological and social phenomenon that describes the cultural associations and expectations relating to one's biological sex (Rice & Dolgin, 2005). Gender differentiation takes place as children gradually learn to be masculine or feminine according to their interpretations of the gender identification expectations of their culture

(Trepanier-Street, Romatowski, & McNair, 1990). Gender roles refer to the behaviors in which men and women are expected to engage (Rice & Dolgin, 2005). According to social learning theory, a child learns sex-appropriate behaviors through a combination of reward, punishment, direct instruction, and modeling (Bandura, 1986). In other words, it is argued that gender role is a learned behavior.

Young people in Hong Kong, including young women, adolescent girls and pre-adolescent girls, are exposed to messages that tell them how they should act, how they should look, who they should idolize, and what should be the limits of their aspirations. Primary among these messages is advertising. Content analysis research tells us that advertising is filled with gender-based stereotypes and role definitions that may or may not be consistent with a particular culture's social and cultural norms or the healthy development of women and girls (Moon & Chan, 2002).

Gender stereotypes in the media have been studied extensively in recent decades. For example, gender inequality and gender stereotypes were found in a sample of 2,367 hours of children's television programs in a recent content analysis study covering 24 countries. Voice-overs were found on average to be twice as often male as female. Heroes were mostly boys and men. The proportions of male and female characters were 68 percent and 32 percent respectively. Girls appeared significantly more often in groups. Overweight girls or elderly women were seldom portrayed in

children's television programs (Götz et al., 2008).

A meta-analysis has found evidence of the stereotyped portrayal of the two genders in advertising (Wolin, 2003). Females are consistently associated with domestic products. Gender roles for females are narrow and restricted to domestic settings. Women are often portrayed as sex objects. Women rarely participate in sports in commercials. Men are more likely to be portrayed as product authorities and women as product users (Sexton & Haberman, 1974; Shani, Sandler, & Long, 1992; Siu, 1996; Venkatesan & Losco, 1975). Other and more recent studies, however, suggest that gender role stereotyping is decreasing (e.g. Allan & Coltrane, 1996; Bartsch, Burnett, Diller, & Rankin-Williams, 2000; Sullivan & O' Connor, 1988).

Research about learning from media, including diverse approaches such as Bandura's social learning theory (1986) and the cultivation theory of Gerbner and his colleagues (1994), among others, suggests that advertising messages can affect an individual's sense of self and behavior. Consumers and advertisers in this visual age are accustomed to using the computer as a portal into the worlds of information, entertainment, buying and selling, working, and communicating. Images play an important role in each of these spheres of activity (Belk & Kozinets, 2005).

*Effects of media representations*

Media offer many role models for their audience members, and therefore are in a position to play a critical part in gender role socialization (Durham, 1999; Wong & Chan, 2006). A qualitative study, for example, found that the use of mass media was woven into girls' constructions of their gender identities. The themes of the media messages that attracted most attention from girls included working on the body, an aspiration to be a bride and mother, homophobia and sexual confusion, as well as iconic femininity. The same study also found that the peer context was important as one in which gender identity was consolidated through reference to media messages that defined femininity and sexuality (Durham, 1999).

Many studies have considered the relationships between media images and teenagers' body image dissatisfaction. It has been suggested that by consistently portraying thin and attractive bodies, the media cultivate low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction among females (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). An experiment involving 219 adolescent girls in U.S. found that vulnerable respondents who initially perceived pressure to be thin and who had deficient social support were adversely affected by exposure to thin models in fashion magazines (Stice, Spangler, & Agras, 2001). A study by Ogden and Munday (1996) observed that exposure to such images increased the body image dissatisfaction of adult subjects. A study attempting to investigate this effect in adolescent girls, however, failed to reach similar conclusions

(Champion & Furnham, 1999).

A focus group study of 67 Australian girls about 16 years of age found that the media exerted strong pressure on them to be thin. However girls' awareness and sophisticated understanding of media pressure may serve to moderate these forces (Tiggemann, Gardiner, & Slater, 2000). A study of 128 Australian girls aged 5 to 8 found that by 6 years of age a majority of them desired a thinner ideal figure. Both peer and media influences emerged as significant predictors of body image and dieting awareness. Watching music television shows and reading appearance-focused magazines correlated with dieting awareness. Girls who looked at magazines aimed at adult women had greater dissatisfaction with their appearance. The study concluded that girls aged 5 to 8 are already living in an appearance culture (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006).

With the media portraying so many stereotypical images of girls and women, as well as restrictive gender roles, it is unlikely that these ideas would have no impact on a recipient's self-image (Gauntlett, 2008). Excessive media consumption by young people, and particularly the consumption of sexy or violent content, has been seen by some as a threat to society (Cheung, 2009). Audience analysis in United States found that girls are confronted with media representations that are restrictive or unrealistic, as well as with those that over-emphasize physical beauty. Girls were shown to be



ill-equipped to critically analyze these messages or to resist them (Durham, 1999).

*Media education as an intervention*

Media educators have suggested that there is a need to equip young people with the skills and abilities required to critically analyze and evaluate media content (Cheung, 2009). Several American educators have introduced after-school programs to promote girls' active involvement in popular culture and media discourse through media analysis as well as media production (Kearney, 2006). The intention is that media production may promote a more active and playful relationship with popular culture (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994). Media education was introduced in Hong Kong's secondary school curriculum in the late 1990s, and from 2009 "Liberal Studies" has been a core subject in that curriculum. "Mass Media in Hong Kong" topic is also covered (Cheung, 2009) as it attempts to encourage students to develop critical and discerning minds in decoding media messages (Cheung, 2009). Media education is not part of the official primary school curriculum in Hong Kong, but some elementary schools have taken the initiative by setting up campus radio or TV activities, or introducing formal media education lessons (Cheung, 2005). In a case study of one such initiative, elementary school students reported that they considered media education lessons interesting and meaningful. They were more conscious of media messages and better able to understand the influence of advertisements. For

example, a student said she now thought that the many slimming advertisements exaggerated the magical results and were not scientific (Cheung, 2005).

### *Gender status in Hong Kong*

Hong Kong has laws protecting women from gender discrimination in terms of education, employment and pay (Chan, 2000). For example, Hong Kong provides nine years of free education to all children, boys and girls equally. Because of improvements in education, economic development, and the influence of Western feminism, the status of women in Hong Kong has achieved significant improvements over the past two decades (Lee & Collins, 2008). The Hong Kong government takes an active role in promoting gender equality. An Equal Opportunities Commission was established in 1996, and a sex discrimination ordinance has been enacted. A Women's Commission was set up in 2001 to promote the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong (Lee & Collins, 2008).

On the other hand, as a Chinese society, Hong Kong is fundamentally rather paternal. Chinese culture accords greater esteem, privileges and status to males, and includes restrictive prescriptions about the role of women. Women are expected to submerge their individuality in the family's identity, following the orders of their fathers when young, their husbands when married, and their sons when widowed. Women's virtues are defined narrowly around a role as wife and mother (Cheung,

1996). A survey found that only 28 percent of Hong Kong respondents agreed that women could “fully realize their potential” (Women’s Commission, 2003).

Respondents reported that sex discrimination, family commitments, and physical limitations hindered women’s opportunities to realize their potential (Women’s Commission, 2003). Fung and Ma (2000) attributed the sex discrimination to the deep-seated stereotypes cultivated in families, the education system, and society in general.

#### *Studying pre-adolescent girls in Hong Kong*

Hong Kong pre-adolescent girls’ perceptions of female roles are presumably based on a mixture of traditional and contemporary role models. A sexy appearance and pre-marital sex are still considered inappropriate by girls in that age group. Tween girls show concern about global as well as domestic social issues. They use a variety of media and show interest in media content intended primarily for adults (Chan et al., 2011).

Research on youth and the media has tended to focus on media consumption and body image dissatisfaction. There has been a lack of scholarly attention to young girls’ impressions and evaluation of female images in the media. This study was designed to alleviate that deficiency. The research objectives of this study are:

1. To examine Hong Kong tween girls’ understanding of the process by which

female images are created in the media as well as the intentions of the media creators

2. To investigate if tween girls are satisfied with the current portrayal of women in the media
3. To examine what kind of media images tween girls would construct if they were given the opportunity to do so.

### **Methods**

The methods adopted in this study were adapted from the videographic techniques introduced by the consumer research scholars Russell Belk and Robert Kozinets (2005). Videographic data can be collected by videotaping group or individual interviews, through naturalistic observation, auto-videography (where informants videotape themselves and their experiences), or even covert recording using concealed cameras.

### *Procedures*

The data were collected in March 2009 in Hong Kong. Parental written consent was obtained for all interviews. Prior to a face-to-face interview, interviewees were asked to take 7 to 10 digital photographs each day for a week. The instruction (originally in Cantonese) could be translated as, "Please take images from media that are about what girls or women should be or should not be, and what girls or women

should do or should not do. These images can come from all sorts of media, including newspapers, magazines, outdoor posters, television programs, MTR (Hong Kong's subway system) posters, web sites, books and so on. The media should be the ones you will be exposed to or sometimes use in your daily life. The media can be targeting people like you or people who are different from you.”

The image collection week was followed by an interview with the investigator.

The interview involved a review of the photos and the interviewees' interpretations of the images. The specific questions asked were:

1. From these pictures, what do you think about what girls or women should be or should not be?
2. From these pictures, what behavior(s) do you think are appropriate or inappropriate for girls or women?
3. Who creates these images and why do they create them in this way?
4. Are you satisfied with the way the images of girls or women are created now?
5. If you were a media owner and/or a media producer, what would you do in constructing images of young girls or women?

The analysis of the answers to questions 1 and 2 were published elsewhere (Chan et al., 2011). The present article focuses on questions 3-5. The interviews took place at public and private venues including sports centers, schools, and the interviewees' homes. The interviews were conducted in either Cantonese or English. The interviewee selected the language that she felt most comfortable with. The interviews

took 20 to 36 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed or translated into English by a female graduate research assistant hired for the project. The photos and the interview transcripts were compared across the sample.

### *Sample*

Altogether 16 Hong Kong girls between the ages of 10 and 12 participated in the study. They were recruited through personal networks. Ten interviewees were studying at local Chinese medium schools and the other six were studying at international schools that use English as the language of instruction. Two interviewees were Caucasians and the remaining 14 were Chinese. Because of the high tuition fees charged, interviewees studying at the international schools mostly come from families with middle to high economic status.

### *Data reduction*

All the responses to questions 3 to 5 were tabulated in an Excel file. Marshall and Rossman's (1999) comparison analysis method was used throughout the data analysis to link data by constantly comparing and contrasting them (Strauss, 1987). Responses with almost the same meaning were grouped under the same item. Major themes were then identified through repetitions, as well as search for similarities and differences by making systematic comparisons across units of data. Representative quotes and images were selected for presentation.

## Findings

*Who creates these images and why do they create them in this way?*

Interviewees were asked what girls or women should or should not be with reference to the digital images they had taken. After a discussion of perceived gender roles and gender identities, the interviewees were asked about their understanding of the process of creating female images in the media. Table 1 summarizes the results.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

All of the interviewees except one were able to identify a participant in the media production process who contributes to the creation of female images. This is somewhat to be expected given their age. The players cited included newspaper and magazine journalists, image designers, photographers, advertisers, reporters, editors, bloggers, and artists' managers. Two interviewees identified the female presenters themselves as influential in the production of female images. As to why female images are created in the way they are, the interviewees attributed four types of intentions to the image creators: generating sales/promoting a product, beautification, a reflective intention, and a malevolent intention. Artists' managers and advertisers were identified as parties who use female images to sell products. One girl showed a magazine cover of a female popular singer (Figure 1) and said,

Some artists' managers signed contracts with models and movie stars and arranged some functions for them to attend. They helped them to dress up.

Sometimes artists' managers ask them to wear sexy clothes because if the artist dresses in sexy clothes, more people will pay attention to her and she will have more advertising or movie jobs. Then she will have more money. (a Chinese student, age 12)



*Figure 1.*

Another interviewee put it this way,

The artists' managers create trendy images for female models and singers in order to gain profits. If people like the images, they worship those models. The models can then charge more for advertising jobs and concert tickets. These artists' managers can get more money from the models. (a Chinese student, age 12)

Some girls perceived that those who produce newspapers and magazines, as well as photographers, use female images to sell products too. The products referred to were media products such as music albums, as well as products related to beauty such as slimming services, as well as cosmetics and clothing.

Image designers and photographers were identified as parties who beautify women. Interviewees reported that image designers and photographers use their



knowledge to help girls and women appear more beautiful. For example, one girl took a picture of a beauty column in a magazine and commented that the magazine teaches people how to do a good make-up job.

Reports, editors, bloggers and the presenters themselves were identified as parties who present both good and bad images of females, which the interviewees recognized as reflecting reality. One girl reported that “God gives people imagination and creativity to create visual images. These people can be photographers or artists themselves.” “Girls themselves” and “bad” guys were identified as parties that show female images with questionable intentions. One girl reported that the presenters themselves wanted to attract men’s attention by wearing sexy clothes. Another girl mentioned pornography as an example of images used to promote “inappropriate” business interests.

Two girls from an international school gave elaborate explanations of how magazines create images of how girls should look. One said,

I have watched the Dove real beauty campaign thing. And I saw how the magazines use computers to generate and go over things, like the eyes are bigger or some of them probably have a lot of make-up and lighting and different techniques to make them look better. So I think these images are not completely truthful.

This quote suggests that the interviewee was aware of digital editing and other image enhancing techniques used by magazines to create prettier-than-real images for girls to aspire to. In response to a question about the purposes of making these images

look better, the same interviewee said,

If it looks better, it's more eye-catching. It is probably showing like you should look like this. Or you should do what they are doing, such as wear that kind of clothing, use that kind of make-up, or something like that. Some of these pictures are actually selling people things. (a student from an international school, age 11)

In this quote the interviewee points out that the prettier-than-real images are used to encourage girls to match up those images through consumption. However, none of the interviewees studying in Chinese schools expressed any dissatisfaction with female images for being unrealistic or too perfect.

*Are you satisfied with the way the images of girls or women are created now?*

Interviewees were asked whether they are satisfied with the images of girls or women based on the snapshots they collected. Only one of 16 interviewees reported that she was satisfied with the images of girls and women in the media, and that, she said, was because both good and bad images are presented. Nine interviewees expressed partial satisfaction with the female images in the media. Overall, they were satisfied with female images that are active, natural, healthy, gentle, and caring. They were not satisfied with female images that are unnatural, too sexy, rude, inactive, taking drugs, or pornographic. Here are three typical quotes:

I am satisfied with those images of girls that are healthy and active, such as this picture from the newspaper (Figure 2). I do not like the images of girls just sitting or dressing up. It is boring. (an international school student, age 11)



*Figure 2.*

Some I like and some I don't like. I like those that are natural, poised, and graceful. But I don't like those images that have no vitality. They look sleepy and dull. (a Chinese student, age 11)

Some only. I am satisfied with the images of women who sacrificed themselves to save others' lives. But I am not satisfied with the images of women who incurred debts such as this woman featured in a television program about marriage rescue (Figure 3). I think she should not owe such a huge sum of money. (a Chinese student, age 11)



*Figure 3.* “We had a debt of about 50,000 dollars.”

Six interviewees reported dissatisfaction with images of girls and women in the media. One found the female images in ads for slimming services misleading. One

found the female images too negative, and one found them unnatural. One did not give any reason for her dissatisfaction. The two girls who discussed the manipulation of images expressed dissatisfaction because the resulting images are unrealistic and too perfect. One of them said,

I am not satisfied with the images of girls in the media. Because sometimes when photographers and people make posters for magazines, they usually computerize people to make them look better than they actually do in real life, which is not showing the real person. ... Everybody wants to be like a model, but it's not always possible. Some media lied to the public about what other people look like. And then people who read those magazines and see those kinds of posters think they should look like that person when they actually can't be like them because they don't actually look like that. The posters create this vision in the person's mind of how they should look. If people want to be like those images in the magazines, they always fail. Because nobody can be perfect, as I said before, it's a matter of liking how you look. If you don't like how you look, you will never be satisfied with who you are. (a student from an international school, age 11)

In this quote the interviewee expresses dissatisfaction with the female images in magazines because those images lie to the audience. The quote shows that the interviewee does not believe in media images and instead has a sense of acceptance of her own physical appearance.

*What images of girls or women would you construct?*

Interviewees were asked to imagine if they were a media owner or a media producer, what they would do in constructing images of girls or women. The answers to this question complement the answers previously reported. Ten out of sixteen girls

expressed an intention to construct more images of girls that are sporty, active, natural, and healthy. They defined natural images as free from heavy make-up and computerized alteration. Here are three quotes:

I want to create more positive images of women, showing them fashionable, proactive, and independent. I want to show that girls are as good as boys, and are not less important than boys. (a Chinese student, age 12)

I would create more trendy and healthy images of girls, such as girls playing sports. (a Chinese student, age 10)

I would make sure they look like they usually do in normal life, maybe give them the make-up, they can put it on themselves and then they can show people what they usually want to look like, what they look like in real life and not make them look like something other people think they want to see. I would make posters and images that people look natural and not like they put make-up kind of things, lots of eye-shadow and made it perfect and made them look so really good, like they came out of a fairy tale. (an international school student, age 11)

One girl wanted to see more images of brave girls.

I want to show girls doing things that normal people wouldn't do, such as diving into the bottom of the ocean or swimming with sharks, instead of swimming with dolphins. I want to show brave girls, and they aren't just sitting around at home cleaning the house. I want to show them helping others such as playing with refugee children. (an international school student, age 11)

Two girls said that they would construct more stylish and trendy images of girls or women. One interviewee reported that she would construct more feminine and beautiful images.

## **Discussion**

In this qualitative study, the images the girls were asked to take were intended to

illustrate their perceptions of gender roles and gender identities. The interviewees were asked about who created the images they photographed, and why the images were produced as they were. They were also asked if they were satisfied with the female images in the media and how they would construct such images if they were in charge. Their responses suggest the following observations.

Some of the interviewees were able to identify some of the individuals and the institutions involved in the creation of various types of female images in the media. Some girls demonstrated an understanding of the process of creating trendy images of media celebrities by the artists' managers in order to encourage idol worship that leads to consumption and profit. However, the media production process is very complex with a lot of individuals and institutions involved, all being part of bigger systems like markets, industries, and politics. None of the quotes showed any deep structural insight into the complexity of the media production process itself.

Interviewees were able to identify the different intentions of the image producers. Their awareness of the dual perspectives of themselves and the media producers in the creation of media images was consistent with what developmental psychologists predict for girls aged 7 to 11 (children at the analytical stage) (John, 1999). Sales and promotion intentions were most often brought up by the interviewees as the reason for creating female images as they are. Although John's (1999) model of consumer

socialization emphasizes understanding advertising and product/brand knowledge, the evidence from these interviews suggests that the understanding of these tween girls went beyond advertising and brands. They were able to identify media producers as sources that create female images to sell products in an indirect way. Images of female celebrities were perceived by some interviewees as sales agents for the products. The result was consistent with the results of a previous study by Young which found that children aged 9 and 10 were able to understand that celebrities in advertisements were used to grab attention or to influence people to buy the products (Young, 2007). Both studies found that children aged about 10 were aware of media images being presented with commercial intent.

The four different intentions reported by these tween girls indicate that they had different views about whether female images in the media reflect reality. Interviewees who reported sales or promotion intentions and those who reported beautifying intentions perceived that female images in the media are prettier than the reality. The interviewees who reported a reflection intention perceived the images as being close to reality. The two interviewees who reported questionable intentions perceived the images in the media look worse than reality. Overall, interviewees most often identified the promotion intentions of female images in the media. This is consistent

with the observation that the female body is often used as a selling-point in magazines and newspapers (Lee & Fung, 2009).

The data reveal similarities in dissatisfaction with female media images among the interviewees. One interviewee exposed to the Dove “real beauty” campaign was dissatisfied with female images used. The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty was a global corporate marketing program launched by Dove (a skin care brand) in 2004 that intended to challenge the stereotypical view of beauty portrayed in the media and to encourage a wider definition of beauty (Froehlich, 2009). Judging from the content reported by the interviewee, she may have seen an ad titled “Evolution” (1 minute 15 seconds, available online) that was launched by Dove in 2006. It featured an average looking girl being transformed into a stunning model in a billboard advertisement through a series of digital image editing processes. The campaign was produced to win a wider female audience for a new product line and was not intended to be used as material for media education. Two interviewees discussed the manipulative efforts of magazines in creating perfect female body images. Both of them criticized them as unrealistic and too perfect. One of them mentioned the Dove “real beauty” campaign explicitly, while the other alluded to its content “computerizing people to make them look better”. They both criticized the use of digital editing techniques and magazines’ efforts to make girls emulate media images through consumption. They expressed the



perception that the media lies about the physical beauty of females, and the opinion that girls need to be self-confident about their physical appearance. It seems that their critical approach to female images helps them to establish positive attitudes toward their own body images. The results suggest that knowledge about how images are manipulated has the potential to better prepare adolescent girls for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds. Further study is needed examining whether or not media education materials especially designed to raise sensitivity to gender stereotypes might better equip youngsters with knowledge of the complexities of media organization and the aims behind the media production process.

The interviewees were, in general, dissatisfied with female images that they feel are exaggerated, inactive, too sexy, or rude. If they were in charge they would construct more images of females who are sporty, natural, healthy, and brave. This suggests that interviewees do not endorse (or are unwilling to be seen endorsing) traditional femininity involving passivity, reticence, and readiness to accept the authority of males (Gauntlett, 2008). Instead, they profess to embrace bravery, assertiveness, and active lifestyles in images of females. However, interviewees did not challenge the female images of beauty and of being stylish and fashionable in the media.

It is possible that tween girls' dissatisfaction with female images may be because the content they are exposed to is often targeted at adults. Certainly, many of the images the interviewees collected were sourced from magazines, television programs, advertisements and newspapers for adults. A recent content analysis of a lifestyle magazine in Hong Kong found that over half of the advertisements with female characters portrayed them in decorative roles and two thirds of the advertisements exploited classic feminine beauty stereotypes (Chan & Cheng, 2010). So tweens' dissatisfaction with the media images may be because they cannot identify with the adult females portrayed. These tweens seem to have expressed the same dissatisfaction for very similar reasons, regardless of their educational background.

Interviewees expressed that if they were media producers, they would like to allow more diversity in female images. This indicates indirectly that they perceived the female images in the media as too restricted. This finding suggests that media educators could encourage young females to use their imaginative power to create their ideal female images in the media that are accessible to them such as YouTube and blogs. This recommendation is based of course on the assumption that girls receive basic training in media production and image creation.

It is important to note the limitations of this study. It was a qualitative study of a convenience and small sample, so the findings should not be generalized beyond the

sample. Also, the girls were interviewed individually. As a result, it is difficult to assess how girls might have evaluated the media images in a peer relationship context. The observations, however, further establish the need to examine media consumption as a multidimensional process. Further studies might profitably be conducted with older girls as interviewees to map the changes in gender role perceptions with age. Studies might also be conducted among tween boys and among older boys focusing on the perception of masculinity and its media representation. Such studies would lay a solid foundation for focused large scale quantitative research on the role of the media in the social and psychological development of today's youth.

Table 1 Summary of responses to “Who creates these images and why do they create them in this way?”

Who (total frequency)	Why
Newspaper and magazine producers (5)	To get attention in order to sell magazines/CDs; to create images to sell clothing, make-up, etc.; to tell girls how they should look; to satisfy the taste of the audience
Image designers (3)	To get attention and praise; to show the latest fashion trends; to create beautiful impressions
Photographers (3)	To get attention in order to sell products; to show the beauty of women
Advertisers (2)	To sell products
Girls themselves (2)	To get the attention of men; to promote a social cause
Reports, editors, and bloggers (2)	To tell girls what is good and what is bad
Artists’ managers (1)	To gain profits
God (1)	God gave people imagination and creativity to produce these images to share
Bad guys (1)	(pornography) To promote illegal business
Don’t know (1)	

Note: Interviewees could give one or more answers

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