

The Negative Physical Self Scale: Initial development and validation in samples of Chinese adolescents and young adults

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Abstract

This research presents four studies on the initial development and validation of the 48-item Negative Physical Self Scale (NPS), a multidimensional measure of body image concerns for use with Chinese samples. In Study 1 ($N = 1095$), exploratory factor analyses identified five dimensions underlying the NPS (General Appearance, Facial Appearance, Shortness, Fatness, Thinness). In Study 2 ($N = 1057$), confirmatory factor analyses replicated this factor structure. In Studies 3 and 4, the validity of all NPS dimensions except Thinness Concern was supported via their patterns of relation with both objective physical characteristics/behaviors and other self-report measures of body image and general self worth. Because Chinese adolescents and young adults expressed relatively more concerns about General Appearance, Shortness, and Facial Appearance than about Fatness, the NPS may have greater utility for assessing body image disturbances in China than existing measures that focus exclusively on general body satisfaction and body size/weight.

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Introduction

During the past two decades, numerous self-report scales have been developed to assess physical self concept, body image disturbances (BID) and body satisfaction (e.g., Banfield & McCabe, 2002; Ben-Tovim & Walker, 1991; Cash, 1994; Delaney, O'Keefe, & Skene, 1997; Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983; Gleaves, Williamson, Eberenz, Sebastian, & Barker, 1995; Marsh & Redmayne, 1994; Mendelson, Mendelson, & White, 2001; Orbach & Mikulincer, 1998; Petrie, Tripp, & Harvey, 2002). Such measures have considerable utility in light of research showing these

constructs are reliably associated with risk for eating disorder (e.g., Stice, 2002), diminished self worth (e.g., Thompson & Hammond, 2003), depression (e.g., Stice & Hayward, 2000), anxiety (e.g., Psujek & Martz, 2004), personality disturbances (e.g., Narduzzi & Jackson, 2000, 2002), and poor health behaviors such as smoking and drinking (e.g., Stice & Shaw, 2003).

Nonetheless, existing measures typically tap concerns with general physical appearance, body size, body shape, and/or body weight to the exclusion of other physical features, some of which may also be central to physical self-concept and body image in non-clinical samples (Marsh & Hattie, 1996) and among persons from non-Western cultures. For example, although dissatisfaction with larger body sizes/higher body weights and desire to be thinner have been reported in Asian samples (e.g., Lee, 1993; Lee & Lee, 1996; Li, Hu, Ma, Wu, & Ma, 2005),

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other physical features may also be sources of concern in light of Asians' typically leaner body types (Huon, Qian, Oliver, & Xiao, 2002). Indeed, taller height (Leong, Lam, & Size, 2001), lighter skin complexion (Lee, 1993), and even plumpness (Lee, 1993) are among the physical features that have been viewed as highly desirable, at least among women, in samples from Hong Kong. Consequently, measures developed with Western samples may have limited utility for assessing positive and negative body image in Asian countries. In particular, psychometrically sound measures are needed in developing nations such as China, a country in which little is known about the nature, causes, and consequences of BID, despite boasting the planet's most rapidly expanding economy and 20% of its population.

In exploratory research on sources of body image concern among the Chinese (Chen, 2006), 115 female and 87 male high school and university students from Chongqing, were given open-ended questions about personal physical characteristics with which they were least satisfied and would most like to change, the worst change to their physical appearance they could imagine, and physical characteristics that people they knew had expressed a desire to change. Frequency counts revealed that although being too heavy, gaining weight, or becoming fat were common sources of concern, height, facial feature(s), and skin were also prominent appearance complaints. In contrast to what might be expected in Western samples, some respondents also expressed concern about being underweight or too thin.

Other researchers have also suggested these are plausible sources of BID in China. For example, concerns both with being excessively fat and excessively thin have been reported among the Chinese. Scholars have noted that historically, thinness was linked to poverty, bad fortune, and ill-health in China while plumpness was a sign of prosperity and an ideal body type (e.g., Lee, 1993; Lee, Leung, Lee, Yu, & Leung, 1996). However, recent generations from Hong Kong and mainland China may be embracing a thinner ideal body type, despite already weighing significantly less than their Western counterparts (Huon et al., 2002; Lee et al., 1996; Leung et al., 2001; Li et al., 2005). Nonetheless, selected research has also reported Chinese undergraduates, especially males, are sometimes concerned that they are too thin and would like to gain weight (e.g., Lee et al., 1996).

If research in the West has found that relatively taller people are rated as more attractive mates (Harrison & Saeed, 1977) and have greater self esteem, perceived social status, and income after controlling for gender, age, and body weight (Judge & Cable, 2004), height concerns may be an even greater source of BID in China where

minimum height requirements are commonplace hiring criteria in job advertisements (Kahn, 2004). Perhaps due to perceptions that the taller among us have an aura of authority, positions in government offices, legal firms, banks, education, and catering and leisure industries often require men to be at least 1.70 m tall and women to be 1.60 m tall. In this context, the observation that many male and female undergraduates in Hong Kong wanted to be taller (Lee et al., 1996) is readily understood. An extreme consequence of height biases has been the willingness of some middle class Chinese men and women to undergo expensive, painful, and risky leg-lengthening operations to increase height (Watts, 2004).

Other studies have suggested facial features are central to judgments of attractiveness in China. Lee et al. (1996) assert that a woman is regarded as beautiful in China when her face is symmetrical, her eyebrows are distinct, her eyes are big and alert, her nose is straight, and her mouth is shaped like a cherry. These authors found undergraduate women more often desired bigger eyes, a smaller face, a higher nose, a smaller mouth and a lighter complexion than their male counterparts; 15.2% endorsed some facial feature as the body part with which they were least satisfied. In another study, facial attractiveness was more important than either grade point average or public examination performance among observers judging work-related skills of Hong Kong job candidates (Chiu & Babcock, 2002). As with responses to height concerns, increasing numbers of Chinese undergo cosmetic surgeries to lengthen the nose, reshape the jaw, and most commonly, to put an extra fold of skin in eyelids in bids to improve their prospects in the workplace and love (Watts, 2004).

Based on initial pilot work (Chen, 2006) and supporting evidence from other researchers, concerns with overweight, underweight, height, and facial appearance are plausible sources of BID in China. However, some evidence is indirect (e.g., tracking incidence of cosmetic surgeries) and studies from Hong Kong (e.g., Chiu & Babcock, 2002; Lee, 1993; Lee et al., 1996; Leung et al., 2001) do not necessarily apply to less Westernized, developing regions of China. The purpose of this research was to construct and validate a multidimensional measure of potential sources of BID, the Negative Physical Self Scale (NPS), intended for use with adolescents and adults from the Chinese mainland.

Study 1

Study 1 involved the derivation of an initial factor structure for the NPS. Items were created to reflect specific content areas of BID identified above (fatness,

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