



**MORE
THAN
@ne**

Yimeng Feng, Thesis 2021
MFA Design for Social Innovation



Girl Before A Mirror
by Pablo Picasso

PREFACE

When I was in college, I used to be very unconfident in my body image. Whenever I looked in the mirror, I always thought, "I'm so fat, I'm so ugly." Whenever I see Internet celebrities on social media with fair skin and skinny bodies, I felt inferior. At the same time, I experienced an eating disorder, but I didn't even know these symptoms were defined as an 'eating disorder,' and I felt very helpless.

It is my personal experience that gave me the inspiration for this thesis project. I am longing to help those Chinese young women who are challenged by appearance anxiety like me to accept themselves and use practical ways to solve the problem. Together, we can co-create a community that everyone understands and supports each other.

More Than One

is a social project focusing on coping with Chinese women's appearance anxiety and body shaming issues in society. It aims to raise awareness of body positivity and body image freedom. It provides Chinese women with tools of wellbeing & self-care to help them practice basic psychological skills and learn skills to cope with body image anxiety.

At the same time, More Than One provides a safe platform for women to share thoughts and stories where they can build a community, feel being understood and accompanied.

MORE THAN *There is **more than one** standard for beauty and you are never alone.*

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1. RESEARCH

" The aesthetic appeal of any era is closely related to society's political, economic, and cultural background at that time."

WEI

Tall and slender



TANG

Plump and natural



SONG

Flat chest, shaved shoulders, slim figure and fine qualities



易安居士三十一歲之照



MING

Good morals, beautiful face, delicate feet



QING

White and thin, small mouth, pointed chin, foot binding



REPUBLICAN

From nature to sexy



HISTORY & CULTURE

Ancient China was a patriarchal society ruled by men, and women's status was low. Chinese women were supposed to be housewives and take care of their husbands, children and the housework.

Under this historical background, the definition of Chinese beauty has always been influenced by ancient emperors and men as well as multiple political and cultural causes.

Generally speaking, traditional Chinese aesthetics had a preference for women who are young, fair-skinned, thin, petite, delicate and well-behaved, and Chinese women were expected to cater to these standards.



Women are experiencing a self-esteem crisis.

We doubt ourselves, undervalue ourselves, and second-guess ourselves, and much of this devaluation gets played out on the weight and physical-appearance battlefield.

- Cynthia Bulik

*Distinguished Professor of Eating Disorders;
Founding Director of the UNC Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders;
Professor of Nutrition, Gillings School of Global Public Health;
Associate Director, UNC Center for Psychiatric Genomics*

NOWADAYS,

with the spread of liberalization and women's rights movement in China, although traditional aesthetics and Chinese male-centered culture still exist, our society is accepting diversities and differences more than ever before. Chinese women have the rights to define themselves and the courage to show identities.

However, despite the liberation of public perceptions, **many Chinese women are still facing "appearance anxiety"**. This has both social and cultural reasons, as well as women's own internal reasons, but all these are mainly caused by **"body shaming."**

Body Shaming: criticizing yourself or others because of some aspects of physical appearance.¹



Appearance Anxiety: the fear that one will be negatively evaluated because of one's appearance.²

64%

of Chinese young women(18-30) have appearance anxiety

80%

of the Chinese young women are unsatisfied with their body images

91%

of Chinese young women are NOT considered obese but many are losing weight

Resource: China Youth Daily



1. Walden. "Body Shaming: What Is It & Why Do We Do It?" Walden Eating Disorders, 11 Sept. 2019
2. Levinson, Cheri A., et al. "Social Appearance Anxiety, Perfectionism, and Fear of Negative Evaluation. Distinct or Shared Risk Factors for Social Anxiety and Eating Disorders?" Appetite, vol. 67, 2013, pp. 125-33. Crossref, doi:10.1016/j.appet.2013.04.002.



Commercial advertising



BM女孩 身高体重表

身高	体重
150cm	33kg
153cm	35kg
155cm	38kg
158cm	41kg
160cm	43kg
163cm	45kg
165cm	47kg
168cm	49kg
170cm	51kg
173cm	53kg
175cm	55kg
178cm	58kg
180cm	61kg

Internet celebrities



Body challenges



Social media



In the age of "appearance is power", even if the original appearance is acceptable, some women will choose to dress up through makeup, or even cosmetic surgery, to have their ideal appearance when they are anxious, so that they can face others calmly and confidently.

Commercial advertising and marketing of whitening products, slimming products, plastic surgery have aggravated women's nervousness about their appearance. Many Internet celebrities have "big eyes, pointed chins, white skin and long legs" on social media; the pictures make people unconsciously compare with those ideal figures. Various body challenges are popular from time to time; media accounts post articles judging women's appearance. These factors caused Chinese women to face a very harsh social atmosphere about appearance, and many feel lost in the ocean of information.

*Weight loss is a trend.
"Thin" = "Beautiful"
"White skin" = "Praise"*

QUICK SNAPSHOT

So far I have done...

1 online survey

50+ online survey responses

6 community interviews

2 workshops with 11 participants

5 expert interviews

And I have gotten...

1 organization as my partner

2 mental health experts with me

7 community members

Generally speaking, body shaming comes from four aspects:



The media & social media

Exposure to idealized images of bodies in the media has been linked to greater internalization of bodily ideals, and increased body dissatisfaction. The same is true of social media¹.



Parents and family

'Fat-talk' (speaking about our bodies and weight in casual conversation) is common in family and daily life. Talking about weight in a way reinforces traditional body ideals and it is significantly associated with body dissatisfaction.



Comparisons with peers

Peers play an important role in reinforcing what an ideal body looks like. Especially when comparing the appearance with each other². The comparison and the unintentional words may lead to body dissatisfaction.



Cultural influences

Chinese tradition praise women who comply the beauty standard, 'young, thin and white.' Now it is still common to see this standard in current society, and those who do not meet standards may come across judgement and prejudice.



Persona

real stories from my interviewees



Qing, college student.

Qing said that she weighed 70kg before. At that time, she was very unconfident because she looked strange in the eyes of her classmates. So she found a weight-loss training camp during the summer and signed up for a three-month weight-loss course. During that period, she was suffering every day. She did many exercises and ate very little food every day. Long-term weight loss made her body very weak, and she even fainted at home once.



Yuan, graduate student.

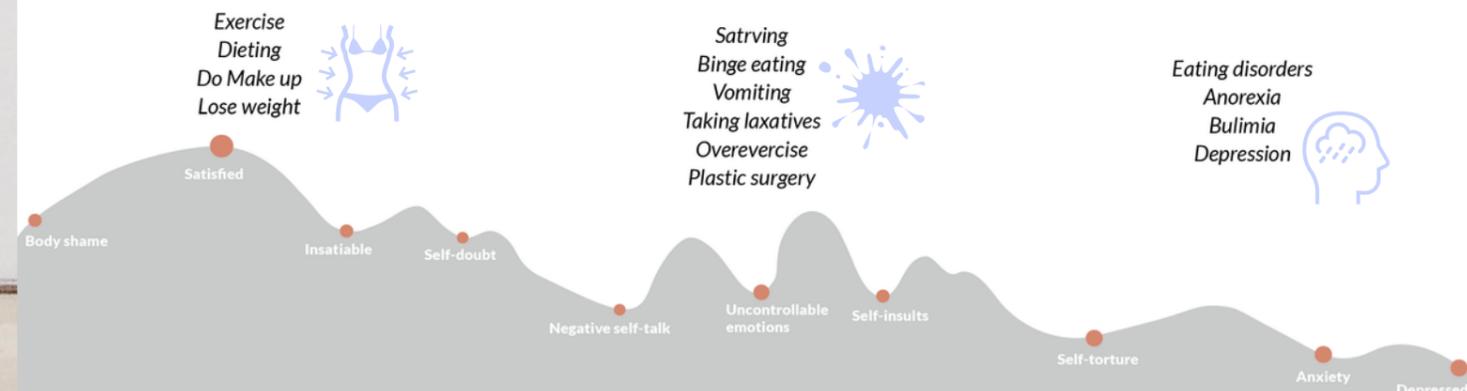
Yuan has an enviable figure, but she still lives in body anxiety every day. She goes to the gym every week to exercise, controls the diet, never eats fried foods or desserts. However, she still thinks she will never reach her ideal figure. She looks at the photos of various influencers on social media every day, and she is very envious. In contrast, she thinks she is not good-looking.



Anna, working.

Anna has been a tall and thin girl since she was young. People around her would praise her: "You are so beautiful and thin." But recently, Anna quickly became fat because of an illness. Friends around her are surprised at her fat figure. Sometimes her boyfriend jokingly said, "You are too fat now". These fat talks made Anna feel pain and unconfident. She began to seek various ways to lose weight, trying to return to her original normal figure. She is also suffering from eating disorders.

User Journey

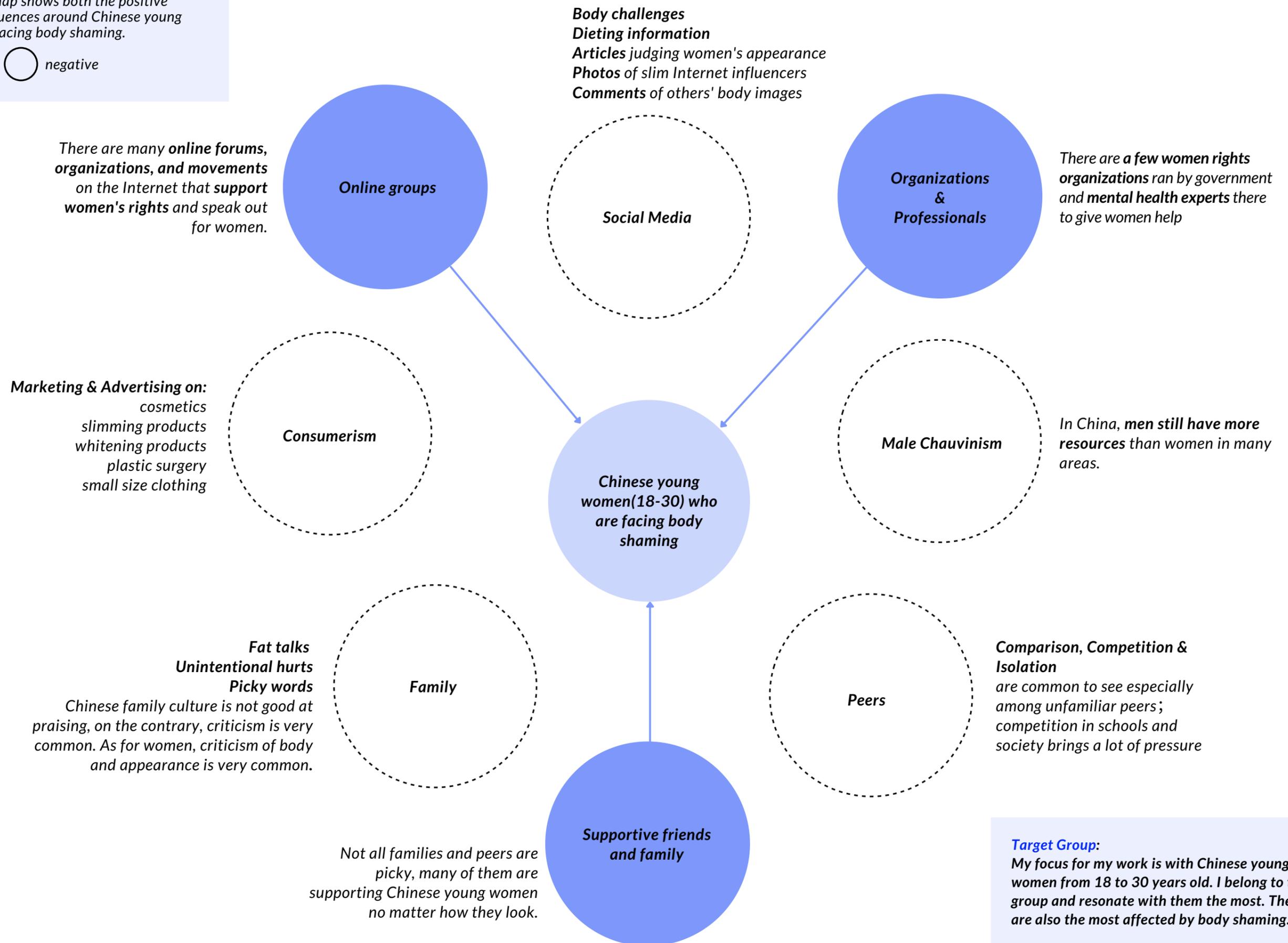


1-2 "Body Image: How We Think and Feel about Our Bodies." Mental Health Foundation, 12 Mar. 2020, www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/body-image-report.

Ecosystem Map

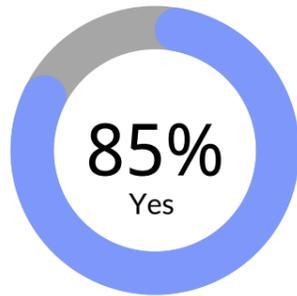
This ecosystem map shows both the positive and negative influences around Chinese young women who are facing body shaming.

● positive ○ negative

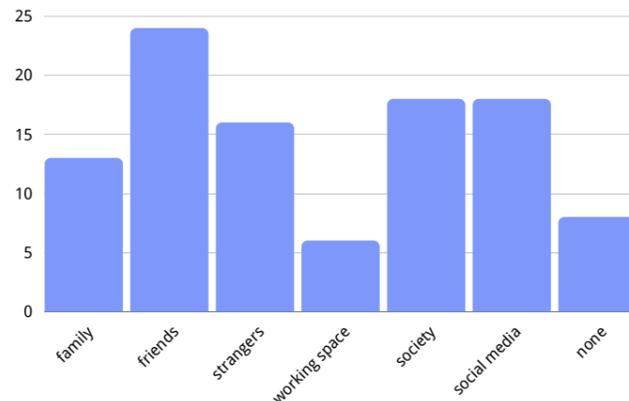


To understand how many young Chinese women struggle with body shaming and their behaviors, I did an online survey and got 49 responses from Chinese women from 18 to 40. Below are excerpted questions and answers.

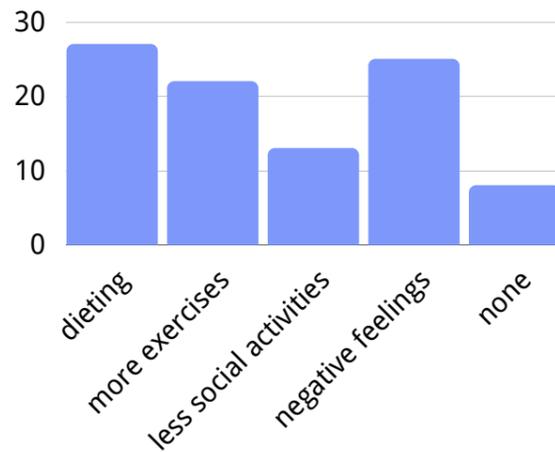
Are you unsatisfied with your appearance?



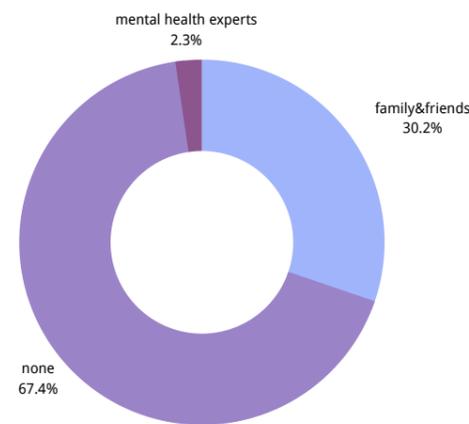
What external factors negatively affect your perception of your body image?



What impact does dissatisfaction with your appearance have on your life?



Have you ever found external supports to deal with appearance anxiety?



Insights:
 Most Chinese women face appearance anxiety, but they do not choose to find external help, especially professionals.
 Young Chinese women are easily affected by external factors and feel unconfident about their bodies.

What I heard from the interviewees who are challenged by body shaming:

"I never heard about the words 'eating disorder' or 'body shaming' even though I was suffering from it."

"I don't want to tell my body image stress to my friends or family, they just don't understand how exactly I'm feeling."

"I don't know what to do with my appearance anxiety."

What I heard from the experts working in mental health area:

"The field of psychological counselors in China is still in its infancy and is still developing. The current market is mixed, and unprofessional people are pretending to be professional doctors. It is difficult for ordinary people to distinguish professionals from the market, and even if they found experts, doctors and patients still need to run in. There are not many psychological counseling organizations, and these organizations are not well known by the public."

"The reasons why people are reluctant to accept psychological counseling are: first, they are unwilling to receive psychological counseling because they feel ashamed. Second, even if patients are willing to receive psychological counseling, they do not know where to find professionals. Third, the cost of psychological counseling is very high, and long-term investment of time and money also made people stop there."

Insights:
 Many females are ashamed of talking about their feelings and problems openly, and they feel not being understood and supported.
 There are not many organizations that support female's mental health in society.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many Chinese young women suffer from body shaming, but there are few supporting organizations in society; they lack the resources and professional knowledge to cope with the mental issues caused by body shaming.



2. PROCESS

HOW MIGHT WE

provide effective supports and build a community for Chinese young women(18-30) who are challenged by appearance anxiety and body shaming.

VALUES

Values are my compass, I begin this project with the values:

Sympathy

I can never understand others' feelings in the way they feel, but I can always show sympathy and try my best to stand in others' shoes to see the narrative.

Trust

building trust with my audiences and create space for the community to build trust and understanding.

Happiness

the project intends to deliver happiness, so always make sure it is doing good things and conveying positive messages.

Non-judgemental

our society is full of judgments and prejudices, so this project needs to be non-judgemental and encourage differences and diversities.

Openness

dealing with my community needs me to be open to others; I will always open to ideas, stories, and even pains.

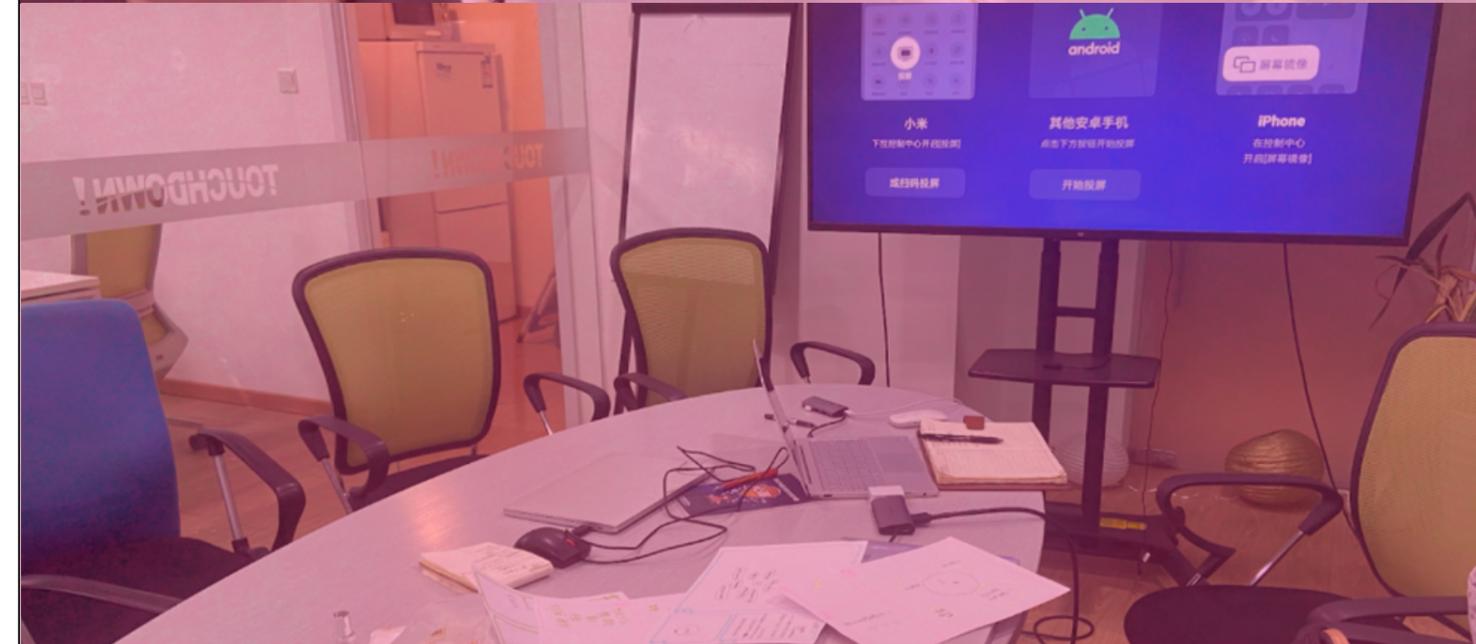
PROTOTYPE 1

To solve the problem of "women feel not being understood and supported" and "build a community" for Chinese women.

I hope to hold a workshop to create opportunities for communication and sharing, and by being together, we can unite and build a community.

What I want to test:

- Are participants willing to share personal stories about 'body shaming' with others?
- Can the participants feel better by telling their troubles?
- Are participants willing to build a group to face the challenge of 'body shaming' together?
- Under what circumstances will participants want to reflect on their own experience?



About Workshop

I organized a workshop in Beijing and found 9 participants who are Chinese young women and are interested in joining the talk about body shaming. The workshop was about an hour.

During the workshop, I prepared some small activities to break the ice and open the topic. We also had discussions around the topics:

- Why are we facing "body shaming" problems?
- Who is influencing us?
- What can women do to fight against body shaming?

PROTOTYPE 2

To solve the problem "women have little knowledge of what to do with appearance anxiety" and "give more supports for Chinese women." I hope to design a toolkit that can address the common anxieties caused by "body shaming" and help women understand the narrative better and acquire the ability to have better mental health.

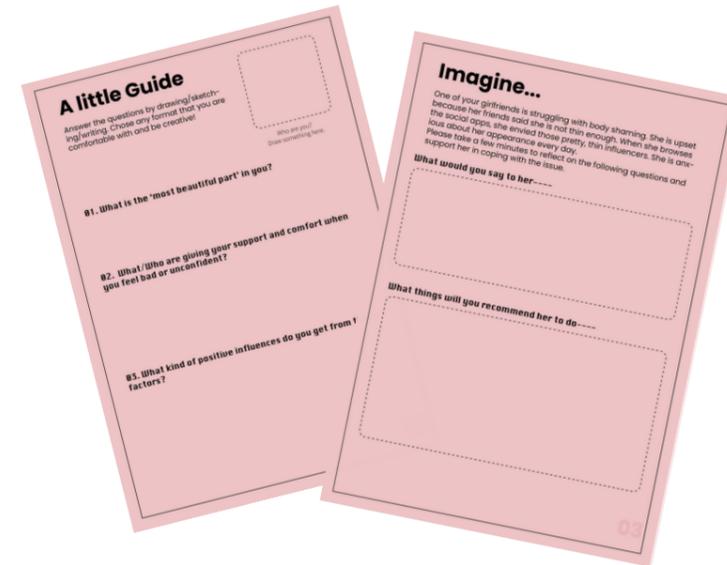
What I want to test:

- Are users willing to use the tools?
- What kind of tools do they prefer?
- How do they feel after using the tools?

About the toolkit

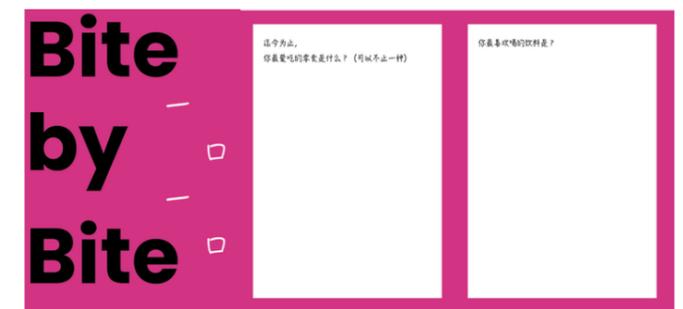
Body shaming is a very private topic, so I try to design personal work for users to do privately. This toolkit is developed based on three focuses:

- First, it hopes to help users realize self-worth. This is because we rarely praise ourselves in Chinese culture, and we are not good at discovering our strengths, so the goal is to help users know themselves without prejudice.
- Second, the expected consequences of body shaming are eating disorders, so the second goal is guiding users to discover the beauty of food and giving tips on healthy eating.
- Third, the aim is to help users build well-being by giving some positive prompts every day.



01. Guidebook - self-discovery and self-care
Encourage building self-esteem

02. Booklet - a journey about food
Engage healthy eating



03. Cards - crisp and simple prompts
Remind the happy things in daily life



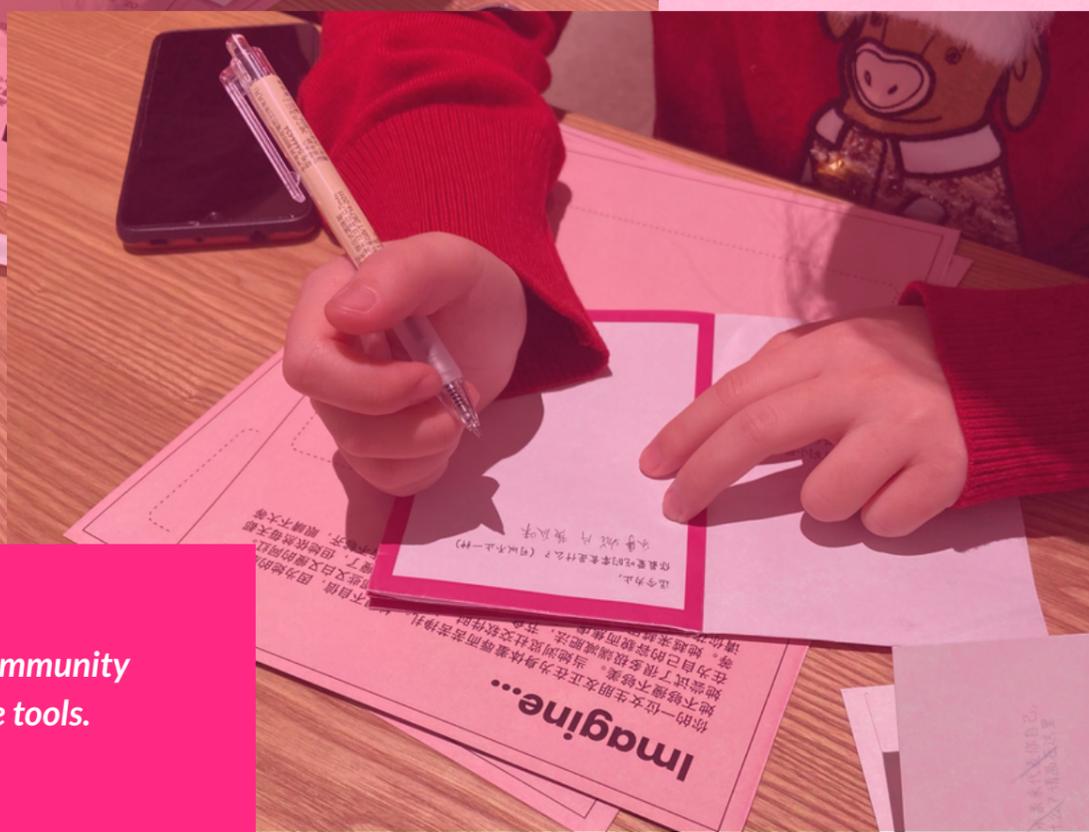


Learnings

- The participants like cute style worksheets.
- They seldom think about their strengths, and these practices gave them a chance to discover their values.
- Participants do not want to read too many words, and they prefer writing instead of drawing something.
- They have never done the practices like this before, and they are interested in these tools.

What worked

- They liked these practices' ideas and appreciated the time to recall the good parts of their life.
- They liked the prompts and the booklet because they were quick and easy.
- These practices made them feel more satisfied with themselves.



I invited two of my community partners to test the tools.

3. INTERVENTION

*Design concept:
'Positive infinity' means the
community power can be great when
we accumulate it one by one.*



*Design concept:
There is **more than one** standard
for beauty and you are never alone.*

More Than One is a social project focusing on coping with Chinese women's appearance anxiety and body shaming issues in society. It aims to raise awareness of body positivity and body image freedom.

It provides Chinese women with tools of wellbeing & self-care to help them practice basic psychological skills and learn skills to cope with body image anxiety. It also provides a safe platform for everyone to share thoughts and stories and give a space for people to feel being understood and supported by others.

More Than One is delivering the message : There is more than one standard for beauty and you are never alone.

My partners so far includes:

For a safer space:

A non-profit social enterprise that provides accessible, anti-oppressive, affirming mental health care to Chinese.



Subject Matter Experts:

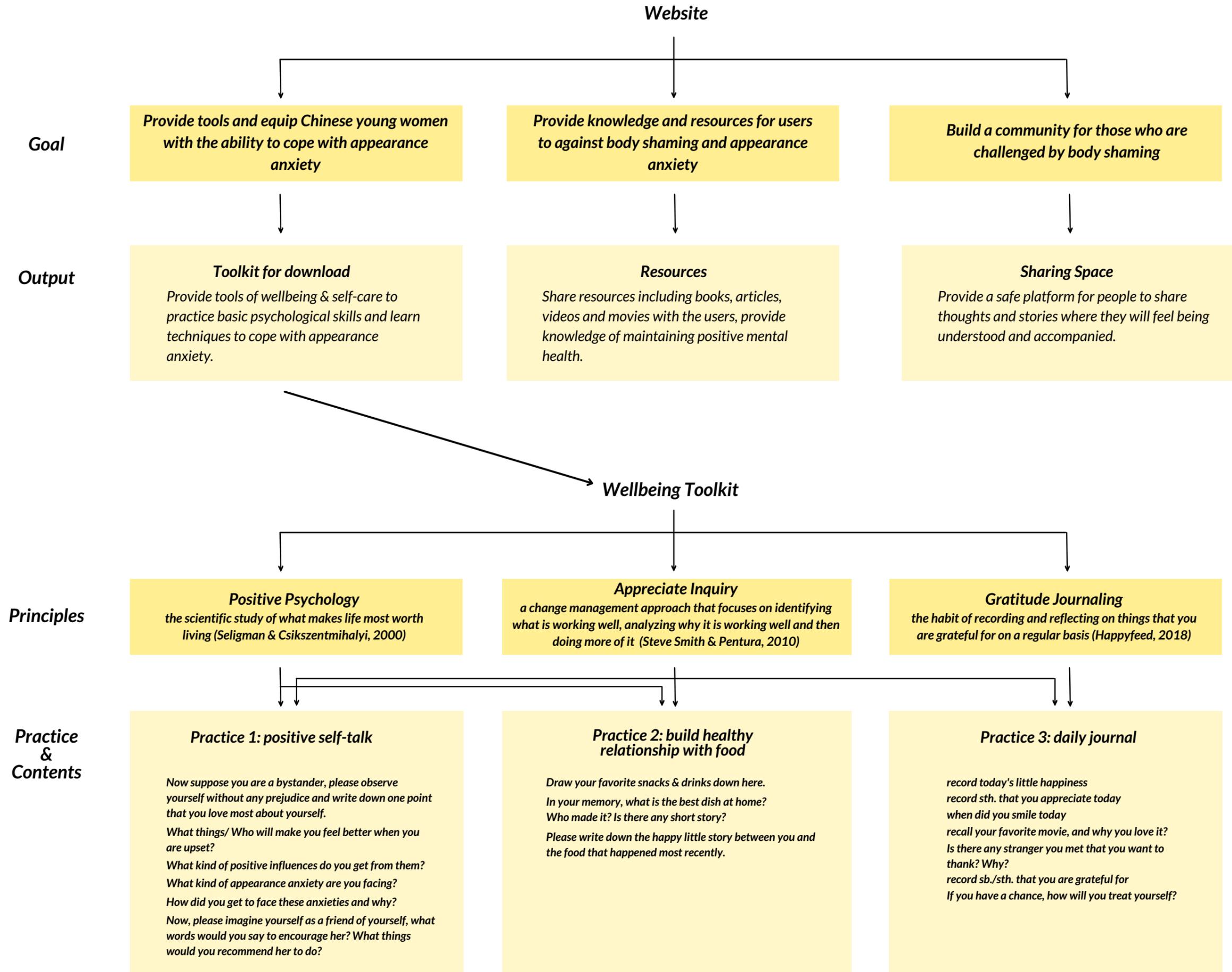
They help me with building the intervention, giving professional advice to make sure my tools are safe.

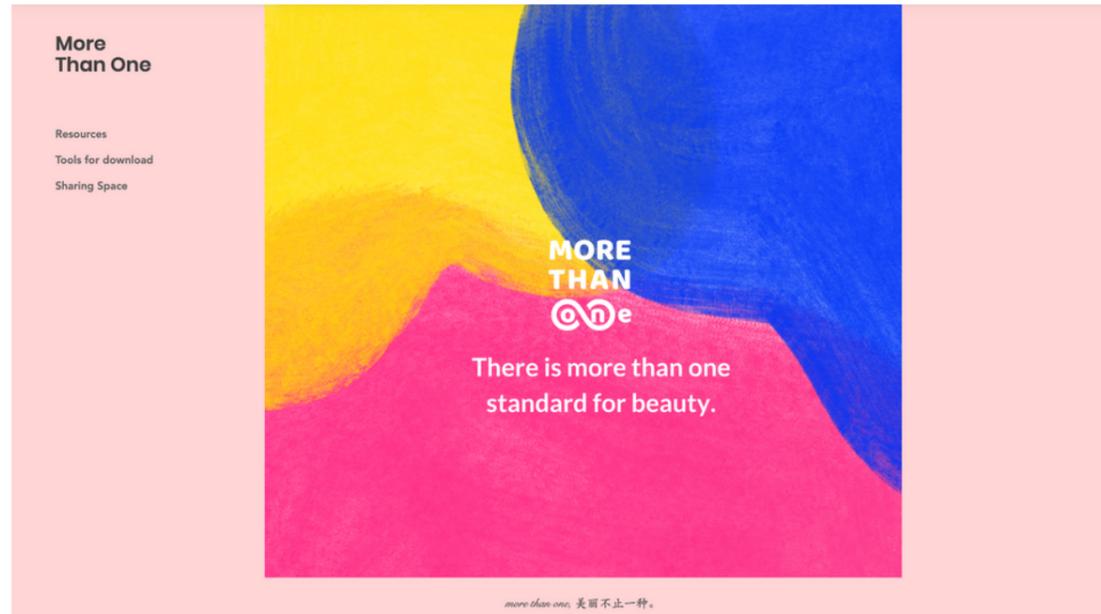


My community:

Chinese women aged 20-30 who face body shaming challenges and want to help me to find solutions.

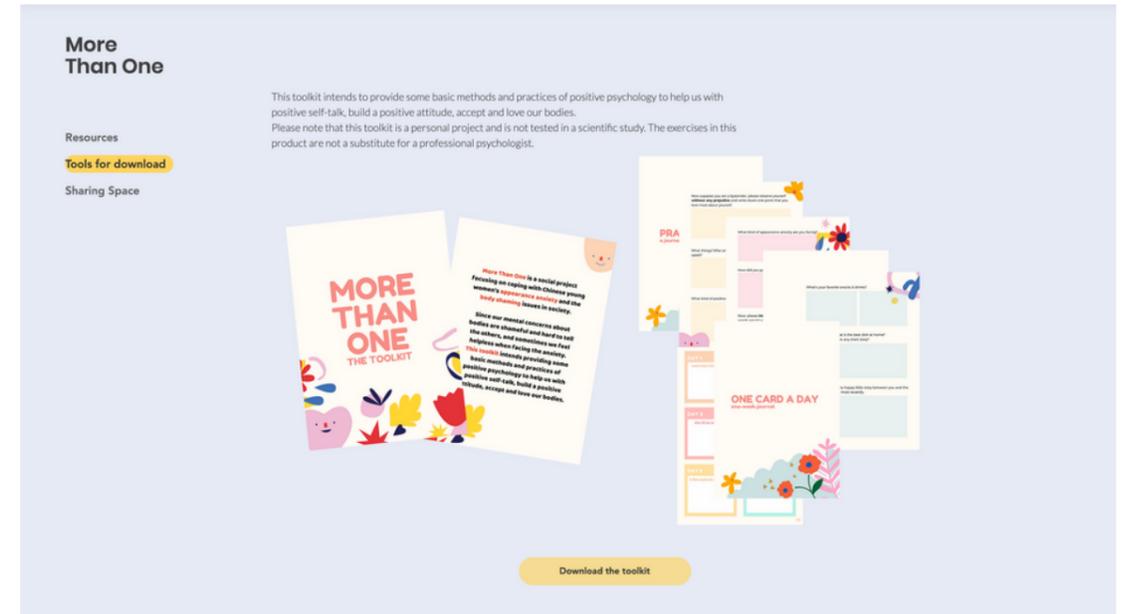






MTO Home Page

Introduce the project, show the goals, values and design concepts.



Toolkit for download

Provide tools of wellbeing & self-care to practice basic psychological skills and learn techniques to cope with appearance anxiety.



Resources

Share resources including books, articles, videos and movies with the users, provide knowledge of maintaining positive mental health.



Sharing Space

Provide a safe platform for people to share thoughts and stories where they will feel being understood and accompanied.

Go to morethanone.cn to learn more



Feedback from users

"After the practices, I feel grateful to myself, and I love myself more than before."
 - Miss Li, user

"I never know about positive psychology and gratitude journal, but I want to continue to do these practices and journals."
 - Miss Zhang, user

"I like them! And I hope there will be more free and accessible tools for us to use in the future."
 - Miss Qin, user

Approach One - Online Survey

I will design an online survey that includes quantitative and qualitative questions. After using the tool or browse the website, I will show the link of the survey at the end for the users to give quick feedback.

By collecting the feedback, I hope to monitor the effectiveness of the project and the work and understand the feeling and thoughts of the users.

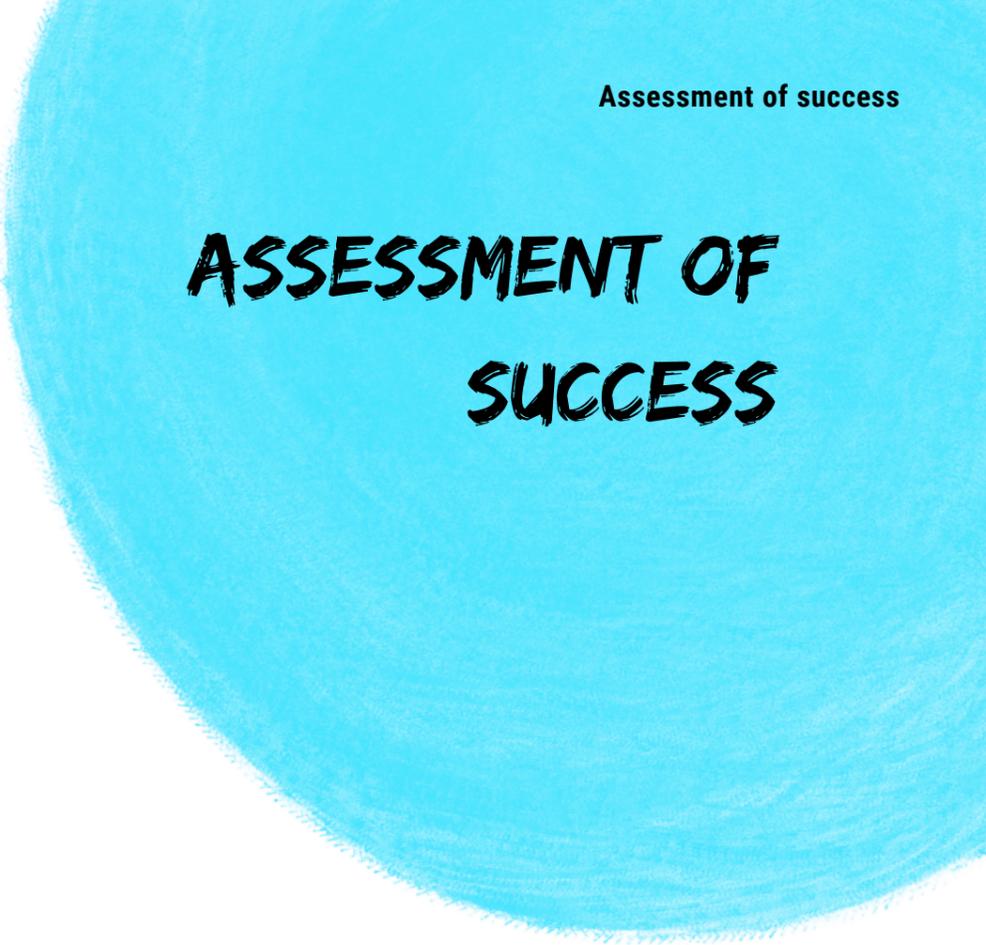
Survey Question Examples

- Do you think the toolkit is helpful? (1-5 points)
- After using the tool, what part in you have changed? (qualitative)
- Will you recommend the toolkit/website to your friends? (yes/no)
- What do you want to say to others who face the 'body shaming' challenges? (qualitative)
- If your information is safely protected, do you mind sharing your feedbacks to the website? (yes/no)

High level questions:

- How will you imagine the future of our culture?
- What changes do you want to see?
- What else needs to be done to achieve the goal?

After finish the survey, I will give the participants warm ending wishes to appreciate their openness and devotion of time.



ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS

Approach Two - Interviews

I will arrange interviews with the users, figure out their challenges, listen to their thoughts and feedbacks.

Also, I will have interviews with experts and organizations: polish the tool and promote the project, try to reach out to more audience, and raise the attention and awareness of a larger space.

Indicators:

- number of responses
- responding rate
- the scores of experience and satisfaction
- decreased anxiety of body image
- increased awareness and understanding of body positivity
- increased basic psychological knowledge and skills for wellbeing
- shift in mindset - being more positive and mentally stronger

THEORY OF CHANGE

TOC Narrative

More Than One provides Chinese women with tools of wellbeing & self-care to help them practice basic psychological skills to cope with appearance anxiety; it also provides a safe online platform for everyone to build a community where they can express themselves and support each other.

So that...

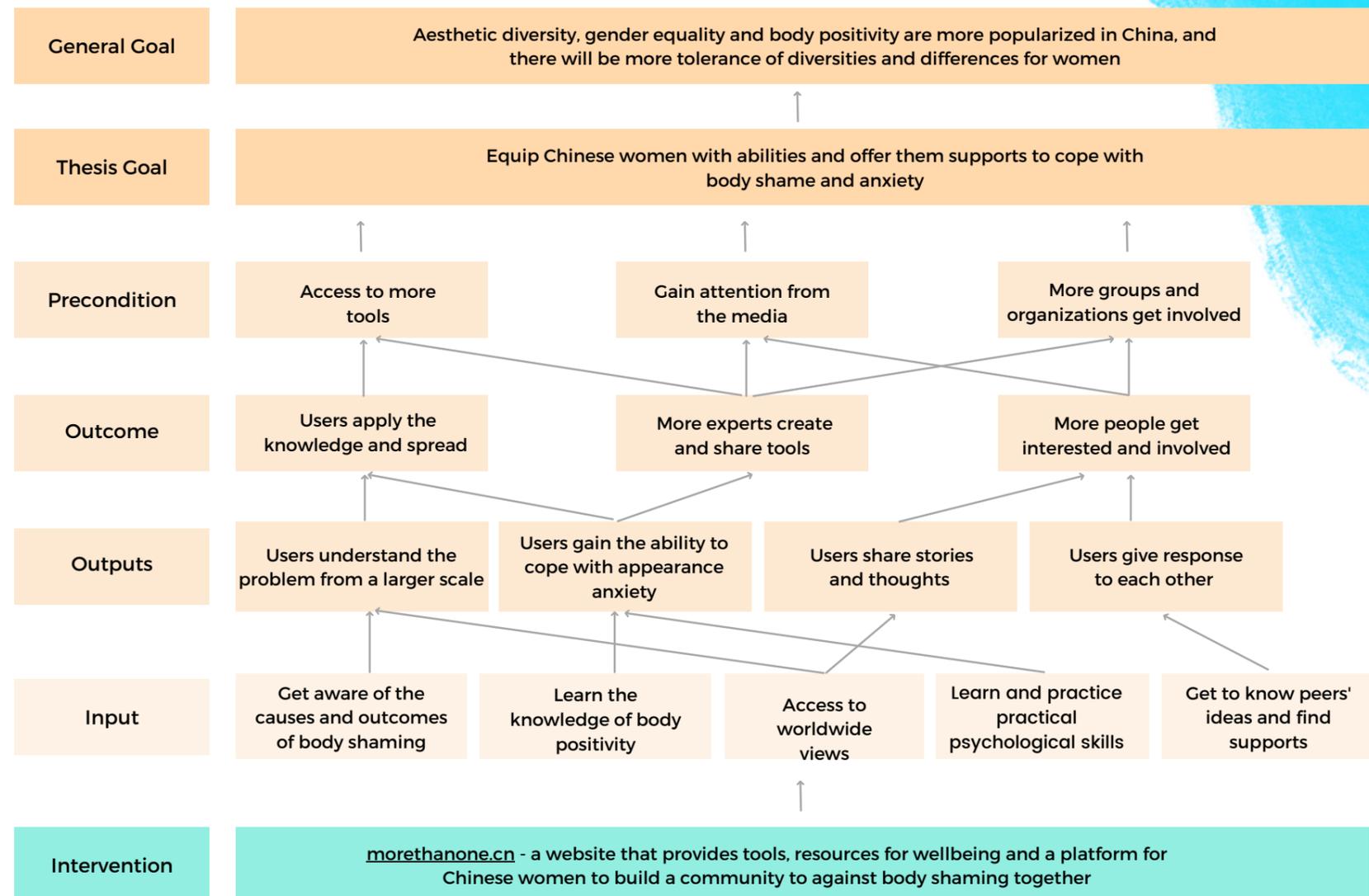
before using the toolkit and the platform, Chinese women may suffer from body shaming and anxiety and have few approaches to cope with it.

So that...

when the users learn about 'More Than One', they will feel accompanied and supported, and they will equip themselves with practical psychological skills to relieve common anxiety symptoms and maintain body positivity.

So that...

attract more attention from the society to the problem of body shaming, encourage more women to speak out, attract more professionals to focus on the psychological problems caused by body shaming and find effective solutions together.



FUTURE OF MTO

While I am collaborating right now with *For A Safer Space* to spread this tool, I hope to continue to use the power of social organization to let more people know about this project. I also aim to continue to collaborate with more women to grow the content for the more than one website and toolkit.

In the future, I hope to unite more organizations and experts to encourage them to pay attention to Chinese women's mental health; work with experts to design more free supportive tools for Chinese women.

More Than One originated from the focus of opposing body shaming, but it will continue expanding its field and paying attention to more women's issues.

AS A DESIGNER

Being a social designer, I learned a lot in the process of creating this project. I am also profoundly aware of the power and role of community in social work. Social innovation comes from the actual problems of society and will eventually go to the real world.

A clear understanding of "self" is the first step in the beginning. Only by clearly understanding my values, abilities and shortcomings can I find my positioning and make self-breakthrough.

In the creating process, there are various difficult moments, moments of confusion, moments of self-doubt, but these dilemmas have constantly polished my project and made it more useful. At the same time, I realized that don't forget my values because they are my compass and the direction of all my work.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Thanks to my partners, all my workshop participants, interviewees, prototype testers, experts, and everyone who participated in my thesis.

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*Design for Social Innovation
School of Visual Arts, New York
2021*

More Than One
Yimeng Feng