

Chapter 3

Relational Body Identities: Body Image Control Through Self- Portraits – A Revision of the Body Image Control in Photos Questionnaire

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ABSTRACT

Self-portrayal is one of the most popular online activities, especially among adolescents and young adults. The selfie-craze explosion through photo-sharing represent a new task for adolescents' researchers, but few instruments explore how adolescents can control their body image through self-portraits. One of these is the body image control in photos questionnaire. The aim of this chapter is to develop and validate a revised short version of the BICPQ, administered to 1220 Italian adolescents. The establishment of a cut-off procedure is proposed for screening purposes to identify at-risk and problematic users. Moreover, differences by gender and age are explored and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Self-portrayal is one of the most popular online activities, especially among adolescents and young adults (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010): 93 million selfies are taken each day by smartphone users, and online photo sharing in 2014 was about 880 billion (Lee & Sung, 2016).

The Internet anonymity despite the hyper-visibility, as well as the intensified and rapid control over the interactions through the web, let people use the public net-space for private or social identity purposes (Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005). For examples, people can modify their self-portraits to be posted online in order to resemble closely to social ideals (Siibak & Hernwall, 2011), by taking advantages of a positive self-image's presentation on social networks (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012). Thus, the Internet provides a virtual space in which a great amount of control can be applied over one's own external appearance, by improving or manipulating it based on the others' feedbacks. These aspects represent basic

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components in the analysis of the personal and interpersonal body-identities construction for the new generation: the so-called “millennials”. Indeed, the self-portrait’s approval may function as a part of their self-definition and self-confidence, especially during the adolescence transition, due to the modeling role of interpersonal relationships on one’s body image and self-construction, nowadays also carried on through the web medium. Considering the selfie-craze explosion and the widespread use of the Social Networking Sites (SNS) in everyday life, and taking in account the specificity of the adolescence, as a stage of life during which the body identity construction and the relational interactions represent core elements, the authors question the use of self-portraits as an instrument to control the body image and the social identity, by providing a tool for measuring the problematic use of body image control through photos.

BACKGROUND

The identity construction is a personal and psychological process that involves body indwelling and, profoundly, the connection with primary emotional and relational experiences. At the same time, it represents a public process involving both the individual “identity announcement” and the “identity placement” provided by the others, who endorse the claimed identity (Stone, 1981). Certainly, the identity construction and the *new* body integration represent phase-specific developmental tasks during the adolescence (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). On one hand, body transformations require such a kind of process; on the other hand, the experience of *who I am* is deeply related to *the way I look* and to *the group I belong to*, as they suggest what the *other* see and reflect about *me*. As a result, one’s own body image is strongly influenced by self-esteem and self-evaluation, and strictly linked to the evaluation provided by the others. Moreover, it can be powerfully affected by cultural messages and societal/media standards of appearance and attractiveness. For this reason, research investigating the process of identity construction in adolescence is increasingly exploring the Internet environment (Pelosi, Zorzi & Corsano, 2014), which constitutes a key context for interpersonal relationships and self-presentation.

Additionally, the opportunities to establish and maintain relationships on the Internet have multiplied in the last few years. Social networking sites (SNS) and smartphone apps have rapidly expanded virtual and real relationships formation through the web medium. Thus, the use of social media has become an increasingly popular leisure activity in many countries (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). People visit social media sites engaging in different types of entertainment and social/interpersonal activities such as playing games, socializing, passing time, communicating, and posting pictures (Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney & Waters, 2014; Ryan, Chester, Reece, & Xenos, 2014). Given the recent worldwide proliferation of SNS and the over-expanding numbers of adolescents joining up, these sites and apps presumably play an integral role in adolescents’ life. Although this has quickly become a normal modern phenomenon (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006), concerns have been raised regarding the potential addictive use of social media (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014; Andreassen, 2015, Griffiths, Kuss & Demetrovics, 2014). At the same time, the impact of social media usage on one’s self-view has been explored (de Vries, 2014), as well as the relationship between SNS addiction, self esteem and narcissism which has been recently demonstrated, especially in girls and young women (Andreassen, Pallesen & Griffiths, 2017).

Many image-centered social media platforms like Instagram and tumblr, and apps such as Snapchat and WhatsApp, are growing in numbers of users and importance. Recently, Kuss and Griffiths (2017) stated that SNS increasingly represent *a Way of Being* and a potential form of addiction too, as data

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