Some THIN about me

A graphic novel about a Chinese girl suffering from eating disorder.

Jiayu (Mika) He

Content

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to

the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material

previously published or written by another person (except where

explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to

a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other

degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher

learning.

Signature :   MIKA HE

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abstract

Some THIN About Me is a graphic novel dominated by memories and self-discovery. It consists of 50 pages of illustrations, photos and collages. This artwork focuses on the combination of text, images and physical materials to present an autobiographical story.

This exegesis will explore the narrative of my personal eating disorder experience, and why I consider the graphic novel as a medium to illustrate my story.

The purpose of this graphic novel is to show readers how I suffer

from an eating disorder because of my experiences of childhood

trauma and the discrimination about body shape endured by

Chinese women. In particular, I have compared the changes I

have had towards my eating disorder problem in the New Zealand

environment compared to those I had in the Chinese environment.

This graphic novel has allowed me to find a way to let my family

know of my issues and to help me towards my recovery from my

situation.

This narrative is highly dependent on some of my personal

experiences, growing up in China and studying in New Zealand.

During this journey, I have successfully begun to face my anorexic

problem. Specifically, the essence of my graphic novel can be

understood as how my childhood experiences have made an

impression on me physically and emotionally.

" This 90-point Report is Submitted as a Partial Fulfilment of the 180-point

Master of Design Degree at Auckland University of Technology."

Introduction and review

In this thesis, I will explore why the medium of the graphic novel is particularly suitable for telling stories of my anorexia and bulimia. Graphic novels are usually defined as comic books. Sometimes they will tell a complete story from beginning to end; sometimes they collect short stories or personal cartoons. Comics are a sequential form of visual art. Most graphic novels have both text and images[1]. In other words, graphic novels not only rely on words to convey meaning, but they are also supported by images, so graphic novels can illustrate thoughts that cannot be explained in words.

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[1] Rothschild, D. (1995). Graphic novels. Englewood, CO.: Libraries Unlimited

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An important point in understanding the experience of mental

disorders is that it is difficult for those with eating disorders to talk

about their thoughts and behavior. Feeling shame is a key point in

bulimia, which not only causes behaviours like purging and

laxative abusing, but also being obsessed by these behaviours.

Self-hatred can grow considerably. In order to overcome it, bulimia

patients need to find a way to learn how to bravely face shame[2].

In essence, when text is not enough to express the experience of

mental disorders, images can enhance and help fill in the gaps,

and through this interaction the graphic novel, as a medium, can

create an in-depth understanding of patients who have eating

disorders.

However, most people have misunderstandings about eating

disorders. When you hear the word "eating disorder," the image

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[2] Eating Disorder Hope. (2015). Shame and Bulimia. [online] Available at:

https://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/information/bulimia/shame-and-bulimia [Accessed 2 Apr. 2018].

that appears in your mind is a white girl obsessed with her body

shape. This does not even tell half of the story. Eating disorders

are not discriminatory, they are not designed for white girls and

they are definitely not for " better looks." They are truly, deadly

psychological illnesses. People suffering from them urgently need

support and understanding from their families, friends and the

public.

My project is an autobiographical graphic novel. I am both the

writer and the artist. Through the review and compilation of

personal experiences I tell a story of a young girl suffering from

eating disorders. The main content is about the lack of self-

awareness caused by childhood experience, as well as the

anxieties surrounding changes in body weight and shape.

However, through the encouragement from the main characters'

friends, classmates and teachers while studying abroad, she has

decided to fight against her mental illness and to try to gain

recovery. I aim to use illustration and comics as a vector to guide

readers understanding of those people who are suffering from and

going through an eating disorder. Also, I would like to use the

graphic novel to visualize the feelings which cannot be verbalized.

This essay will be a document containing five parts which explains

the literature，the creative experimentation，and my

methodology.

The first part is a general introduction. Since my project is based

on my personal experience I have defined it as a self-healing and

self-exploring graphic novel.

The second part explores the literature knowledge of this project.

In this part, I concentrate on the research of graphic novels or

research that considers narratives from a female perspective, as

well as narratives exploring childhood trauma.

The experimental practice and my methodology are positioned in

third part. Because this is a research project based on practice and

experience, this section applies metaphorical journaling and

interactive experiences as a methodological combination in the

graphic novel.   In the discussion on methodology I have

conducted an exploratory exercise in the matching of images and

texts, handcraft and collage.

The fourth and the most important part discusses the narrative

framework of the entire graphic novel during the design process,

and reveals the thinking behind the narrative approach to the

graphic novel, design comparisons, and the choice of visual

language.. In this section, I also discuss the limitations found in my

experimental practice.

The fifth section provides a conclusion for the design process

above, and describes its influence on me and further research to

be undertaken.

Review of contextual knowledge

As far as I know, there have been few graphic novels, cartoons or

illustrations about eating disorder caused by childhood trauma

from created by a Chinese illustrator. It is difficult to find any

specific academic research on how to compile this kind of anorexic

story into illustrations. So, to be precise, I defined my second part

as a review of related keyword knowledge, not a literature review.

I will discuss in this section, four aspects: China's online skinny

trend, issues around body image, the eating disorder narrative,

and the graphic medium.

Chinese Online Skinny Trends

In 2016, there was a popular craze, embraced by both celebrities

and ordinary people, called the "A4 Waist Challenge".

Promoted by the famous social media network, Sina Weibo, girls

posted photos in which they are holding a piece of A4 size paper in

front of their waist to show how thin they are.

I consider this as indispensable in my contextual research. It

demonstrates how social media values practices that influence

young girls negatively. As a Chinese person, I was also a follower

of these crazes. In other words, I was the victim of a wrong point of

view. Therefore, this research of Chinese beauty standards, both

informs and is used to illustrate my graphic novel

Body image

In recent years, academic and public interest in body image has

increased significantly, and people's fear of obesity has also

deepened (Grabe, Ward and Hyde, 2008).[3] Indeed, obesity, both

psychologically and physiologically, can impede a person.

Therefore, people's satisfaction with self-image is also affected.

More and more people begin to pay attention to exercise and a

healthy diet (Hagger, Chatzisarantis and Harris, 2006)[4]. This

seems to be a very good social phenomenon. However, under the

pressure of over-concern about the appearance of the human

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[3] Grabe, S., Ward, L. and Hyde, J. (2008). The role of the media in body image concerns among women: A meta-analysis of experimental and correlational studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(3), pp.460-476.

[4] Hagger, M., Chatzisarantis, N. and Harris, J. (2006). The Process by Which Relative Autonomous Motivation Affects Intentional Behavior: Comparing Effects Across Dieting and Exercise Behaviors. *Motivation and Emotion*, 30(4), pp.306-320.

body, people, especially women, have produced an abnormal

aesthetic standard for the appearance of the body.

Susan Bordo concludes in "Unbearable weight" (2013)[5]: "Women

stipulate their bodies in the aesthetic standards of the dominant

culture. It is precisely because of their slim bodies that they have

been given the connotation and quality of the male culture, and

once they have realized these images. With the hidden slender

ideals behind them, women will gain social recognition and

rewards, and many women are willing to fall into the illusion of slim

fantasy and endure eating disorder and anorexia in the process of

achieving a slim ideal. Paul Schilder in "The Image and

Appearance of the Human Body" (2014)[6] states that "The image

of the human body means the picture of our own body which we

[5] Bordo, S. (2013). Unbearable weight. Berkeley, Calif. [u.a.]: Univ. of California Press.

[6] Schilder, P. (2014). *Image and appearance of the human body*. [Place of publication not identified]: Routledge.

form in our mind, that is to say the way in which the body appears

to ourselves. There are sensations which are given to us. We see

parts of the body-surface." However, the fact is that those with

eating disorders cannot see a non-distorted image when they look

at themselves.

In her body image comic Colleen Clark (2016)[7] reminds us that

our body size cannot define what we are. She uses herself as a

prototype and draws a series of cartoons to express how she

views her body. In her comics, the protagonist has a huge body

size (see figure 1), and she shows how people around them treat

large crowds. She said: "I know that readers will feel

uncomfortable about the people I paint, but she is a real person.

This image is closer to the reality of women than the supermodel in

advertising". Clark also states that what she draws is what she is

willing to talk about. It is close to her heart. She hopes that when

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[7] Clark, C. (2016). Tumblr. [online] Colleenclarkart.tumblr.com. Available at:
http://colleenclarkart.tumblr.com/post/38346791555/youhavebodyissues [Accessed 12 Jul. 2018].

people look at her comics, they can relate to them and the plus-

size people around them, and in so doing help those people to
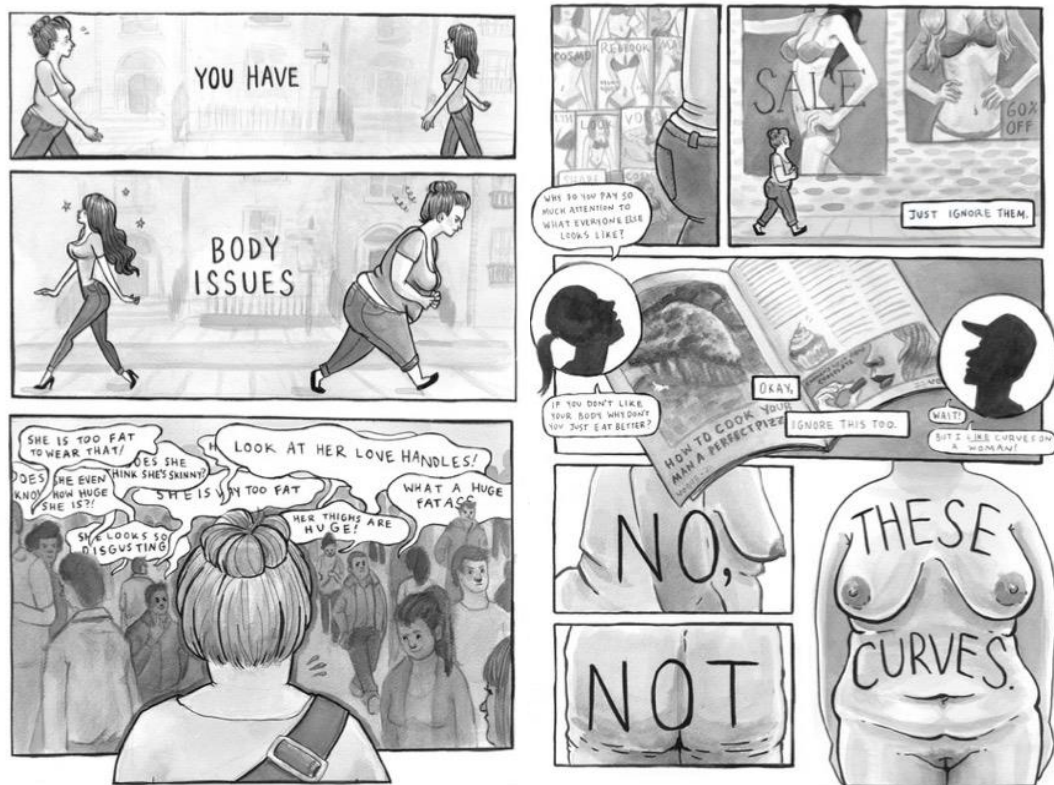
accept themselves

Figure 1. Colleen Clark (2016) "You have body issues"

The eating disorder narrative

Since the '80s, narrative analysis has critiqued topical articles on eating disorders that appear in women's magazines[8]. However, sharing stories about people suffering from mental illness appeared much earlier, in 1908. Clifford W. Beers (2014) [9]published "A Mind That Found Itself", in which he shared his abuse during his hospitalization. In addition, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) developed a unique approach to public education in 1996. Trained sharers shared their personal stories about mental illness and rehabilitation to expand the public's understanding of these diseases. This provided victims with the

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[8]   Bishop, R. (2001). The Pursuit of Perfection: A Narrative Analysis of How Women's Magazines Cover Eating Disorders. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 12(4), pp.221-240.

[9]   Beers, C. (2014). A mind that found itself. University of Pittsburgh Press.
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opportunity to increase their confidence and share their personal experiences[10].

"Life Without ED"[11] is a story about how a woman regains freedom from eating disorders. The writer Jennifer Schaefer has been associated with anorexia and bulimia. She attributes her successful recovery to the skills she learned from her psychologist Thom Rutledge. This book illustrates Rutledge's technique?

. In this case, readers are encouraged to regard eating disorders as a unique personality. In addition, they are encouraged to treat illness as a relationship rather than a condition. Schaefer names her eating disorder as Ed; her recovery involves "breaking up" with eating disorders, and she shares her course of treatment, which helps people see the illness as a relationship from a distance.

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[10] PANDYA, A. (2012). NAMI In Our Own Voice and NAMI Smarts for Advocacy. *Journal of Psychiatric Practice*, 18(6), pp.448-450.

[11] Schaefer, J. and Rutledge, T. (2014). Life without Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

They can control it, using skills to overcome negative thoughts that

plague patients with eating disorders.

Because my work is also a graphic novel about an eating disorder,

Schaefer's drawing upon inspiration from real life and likening the

mental illness to a person has given me a clear idea about the

potential structure of my graphic novel. She has also helped me to

understand the methodology I need to describe my eating

disorder, giving it more substance in relation to my personality and

human nature in general.

Graphic medium for storytelling

The graphic storytelling medium

Respected comics artists and writers , such as Will Eisner and

Scott McCloud, have conducted theoretical research into the

graphic medium as a vehicle for storytelling. They have explored

and discussed what constitutes the graphic novel, trying to offer a

definition that helps the medium gain respectability.

McCloud's explanation is the most widely used and

comprehensive definition: "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images

in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or

produce aesthetic response in the viewer".[12] Graphic novels can

deal with serious topics no less than traditional novels. There is

also a large number of novels that are considered frivolous and

have little literary value.

However, graphic novels can suffer from various misperceptions.

Most people accept novels as a medium which can incorporate

any topic and that contains few or no boundaries in relation to the

themes explored. On the other hand, the graphic novel is a genre

that has been commonly seen as children's books. When one

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[12] McCloud, S. (1993) Understanding comics. New York: Harper Collins

depicts a cartoon drawing or sketch of a teenager in any literary

work, it only reinforces the idea of the graphic novel as a silly

fantasy (McCloud, Understanding Comics 140-141). However,

traditional contact with young generation is a useful tool, especially

for authors who want to make childhood trauma look less

frightening. Through the drawings, the trauma seems more

acceptable and easier to integrate because it becomes more

general.

Versaci（2007）[13] has stated that over the past thirty years, a

huge development has occurred in both the sophistication and the

cultural importance of the graphic novel, which now has been

widely accepted as a distinct modality of literature. Autobiography

has proved to be a powerful genre in the graphic novel field, and

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[13] Versaci, R. (2007) This Book Contains Graphic Language—Comics As Literature. London:
Continuum

within this subtype, the memoir of an artist's disease and panicked

feelings are sometimes viewed as graphic pathology (Green and

Myers 2010)[14]. Herman (1997)[15] has pointed out that healing and

storytelling have been connected for a long time, and that the

telling of a person's story contributes towards the

psychotherapeutic treatment of trauma. The graphic novel has

provided people from different culture backgrounds with the

opportunity to immerse themselves in stories that go beyond the

boundaries of traditional literacy.

In addition, for many authors, graphic novels have become an

increasingly common way to express their lives and to provide a

platform for readers to participate in both good and bad

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[14] Green, M and Myers, K (2010) Graphic medicine: use of comics in medical education and patient Care BMJ

2010; 340:c863

[15] Herman, J.L. (1997) Trauma and Recovery New York, Basic Books

experiences. Jeremy C. Short & Reeves (2009)[16] proposes that

graphic novels provide an attractive medium for conveying

concepts and features that can help people learn and understand

knowledge in more effective ways than traditional textbooks.

Green (2003)[17] proposes that

graphic novels are usually designed to preserve and promote

books-length projects where the target audience mainly consists of

mature people (teenager and adults) i.e. graphic novels are a

series of illustrations that attract a mature audience. Their content

presents a clear beginning, middle, and end, rather than a series

of characters with unlimited plots that appear in weekly cartoons or

comics, and traditional comics. In contrast, these stories often

contain complex and lengthy story plots.

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[16] Short, J. and Reeves, T. (2009). The Graphic Novel: a "Cool" Format for Communicating to Generation Y. Business Communication Quarterly, 72(4), pp.414-430.

[17] Green, H. (2003). These are not your father's comics. Business Week Online. Retrieved March 27, 2009,

Case study

I mainly use three graphic novels as examples to prove my
intention of using the genre of graphic novel : "Stitches" by David
Small (2009)[18], "Fun Home" by Alison Bechdel (2006)[19] and
"Persepolis： The story of childhood" from Marjane Satrapi
(2000)[20].

These three graphic memoirs all address the theme of a lack of
communication in the family, especially with regard to the trauma
the writers have experienced during their childhood. In these three
books, the graphic media plays a particularly necessary role
because the authors are unable to verbally describe their feelings,
but instead draw upon non-verbal forms of communication (such

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[18]   Small, D. (2009). *Stitches*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

[19]   Bechdel, A. (2007). *Fun home : a family tragicomic* (1st ed.). Boston: Mariner Books.

[20]   Satrapi, M. (2000). Persepolis.

as drawing). Each of these three works explores, in depth, traumas

that may affect the mind in different ways and how they impact on

the victims.

Stitches

Stitches (2009) is not a traumatic story in the traditional sense. It

does not clearly indicate that the author's parents physically

abused him, but that they contributed towards psychological

trauma caused by a lack of emotional support. The main point of

the incident in the story was that he had cancer and lost his voice.

This scene is also one of the few repetitive scenes in his graphic

novels. On the surface, there is not much difference between this

family and any family. His mother Betty is a housewife and his

father is a radiologist. But as the story develops readers can see

that his parents deprive Small and his brother of basic emotional

support. Due to Small's parents' unhappiness and the lack of

communication between family members the family is under

constant pressure and anxiety.

When Small wrote this autobiographical graphic novel, it was more

accurate as a memoir, exploring his toughest times and through

his honest attitude looking at difficult topics that were often

overlooked or avoided. His memoirs related to his childhood and

his distorted family relationships with family members. The feelings

that the reader experiences in the course of this graphic memoir

are of those of darkness, especially when heavy emotions are not

able to be easily expressed. However, these hard-to-express

emotions are released in the writing and the creative process.

Fun Home

The second graphic memoir I reviewed was Fun Home by Alison

Bechdel (2006).

Bechdel (2006) tells about her childhood years in the late 1960s.

Bechdel lived an ordinary life in an "unusual" family. Her parents

are teachers. However, as a child, she often feels that her father's

behavior is unusual and not like that of the other men who she

encounters. In fact, her father, Bruce, hid his sexuality from his

own wife and children. He was a closeted homosexual. He caters

to the social expectation of being a husband and father, but his

closeted life has profoundly affected his family.

In re-examining her childhood Bechdel underwent a lot of stress

and tension. She rethinks her own sexuality as being caused by

her childhood obsessive-compulsive disorder. She admits that the

pressures on her childhood had a great influence on her self-

identity, for example, her family was easily isolated and she always

lived in a state of fear and struggle. So in her graphic memoirs she

uses victims as typical characters. Through the vehicle of the

memoir, Bechdel bravely confronts her dark childhood, especially

the impact of her father's influence. As a reader, I not only saw the author's trauma, but also saw the entire society's fear and incomprehension of homosexuals.

The narrative structure in "Fun Home" that is framed by Bechdel has had an influence upon my own work. I also employ a narrative without a normal chronological sequence. She recursively flashes back to the death of her father, and sets clues about chronological changes largely through the character's appearance, such as their haircut and degree of maturity. It seems that Bechdel was unable to accept her father's death, and as a consequence the repressed memory keeps returning to the surface.

The root of my eating disorder also stems from childhood trauma. Bechdel has made me realise that playing with the issues of time and recurring memory could be a good approach in emphasizing how trauma has influenced me in a large extent.

Persepolis

Persepolis： This story by Marjane Satrapi is a humorous and

unforgettable memoir of a young girl growing up in Iran. It is an

amazing book, full of both the happiness and sadness of a

childhood in a world where children are forced to quickly grow up.

It is told through the comic format, and features a series of

simplistic but mesmerising images. Her story is based on the

Islamic revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, that occurred when she

was nine. She didn't know what was happening around her. Her

parents told her about martyrs and dialectic materialism, while her

teacher announced that the Shah is divine. Then the Shah was

overthrown and a new Islamic regime took over. All the schools

were single-sex and she had to wear a veil, and the pictures in her

textbooks were torn off. Her parents' friends were released from

prison. Satrapi cleverly presents a child's view of the war and her

own ever-changing ideals. At the same time, she also depicts the

daily life in Tehran and her family's pride and love for their country,

despite all the turbulence. What I learned from this book is that

Satrapi writes from the perspective of a child, and in this way,

responds to her innocent childhood during a terrible war. The

characterization is so vivid and real that my feelings were

heightened, and I felt excited and dizzy.

Because my story begins with my childhood, after reading

Satrapi's book I realized that this childish and innocent viewpoint

would offer readers more engagement with the section dealing

with my childhood.

Methodology

In this section, I will enumerate the methodological applications

that help materialize my graphic novel. Because my project is

based on a large number of practices, which also serve the design

of most graphic novels, a practice-oriented research paradigm

could be understood as post-practical to some extent.

Bohman et al., (1991) [21]; Hacking, (1983) [22]; Hesse, (1980) [23]

emphasize that post-positivism could be characterized as

individuals being understood as self-explaining and autonomous

subjects. Also, it covers a background approach to theories and

disciplines in a larger social and historical context. In other words,

as in the explanation of Dash (1993)[24], "post-positivist is

emphasises that social reality is viewed and interpreted by

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[21] Winch, P., & Bohman, J. (1993). New Philosophy of Social Science: Problems of Indeterminacy. Philosophy And Phenomenological Research, 55(2), 472. doi: 10.2307/2108565.

[22]   Hacking, I. (1983). *Representing and intervening*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press..

[23] Hesse, M. (1980) *Revolutions and Reconstructions in the Philosophy of Science*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

[24] Dash, N.K. (1993). Research Paradigms in Education: Towards a Resolution. *Journal of Indian Education* 19(2), pp1-6.

knowledge that is personally experienced rather than acquired

from or imposed from the outside" (1993, p. 1).

Based on the positioning of the post-practice paradigm, I believe

that the utilization of research methodology, which helps in highly

integrated exploration and creation, especially when dealing with

very personal materials. A large part of my project is based on my

personal experience. Because of this I need to immerse myself in

memories consisting of tension and anxiety in relation to my

childhood trauma.

The experience of immersion

According to Chris Dede（2009）[25], immersive experiences can

be learned in at least three ways; by applying multiple

perspectives, situational learning, and transitions. He also states

that changing perspectives and frames of reference are necessary

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[25]   Dede, C(2009). Immersive Interfaces for Engagement and Learning. Harvard Graduate School of
Education

for understanding complex content. Generally speaking this is

accomplished by switching between an observational perspective

and a participant's perspective. "The immersion process enables

the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question –

to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it"

(Moustakas, 1992, pp. 28).[26]

In my practice, immersive behavior occurs mainly in my rented

personal room (see figure 17). This is my only private area in my

Auckland home. This is where I mainly work and get resources

from my overseas life - this living space contains my secret

relationship with food and myself. My room's walls are studded

with completed and unfinished work and inspiration (see figure 18).

In order to be able to be immersed into non-verbal and non-aural

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[26] Moustakas, C. (1992). Heuristic Research. Newbury Park: Sage Publications. Pp. 28

communication with myself I need a quiet and private environment.

It is here that I can safely analyze my frustrations, anxiety and

failures in my eating disorder story.
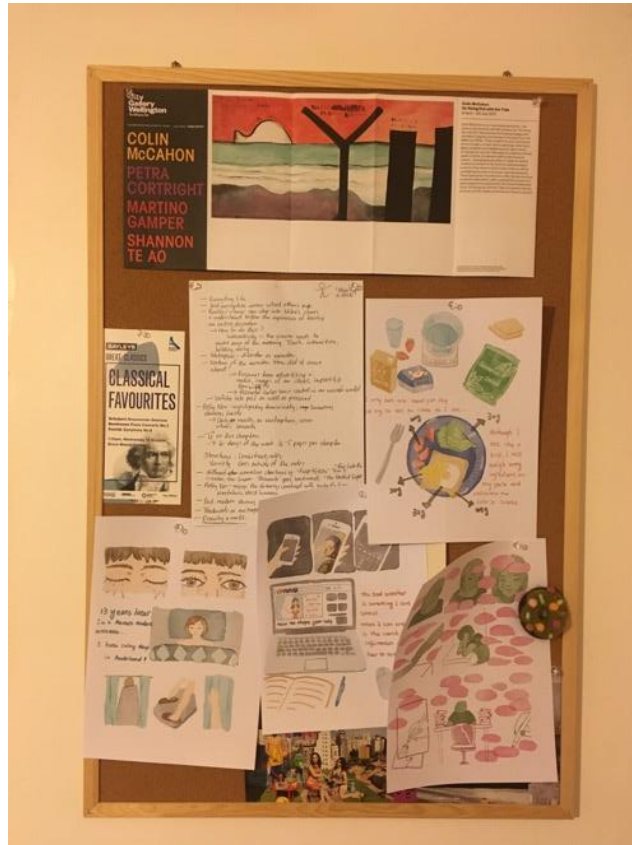

Figure 2. Mika He (2018) "My private room in Auckland"

Figure 3. Mika He (2018) "Wood board with inspiration"

In addition, for a graphic novel, story flow is very important for

working on both image and text. An excellent novel can

harmoniously organize the combination and conversion of time,

space, image and text. I highly recommend the "flow experience"

which is pointed out by Csikszentmihalyi （2014） when he

describes how "flow is the state in which action follows upon action

according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious

intervention on our part".[27]

For my practice processes, the methods I applied were various.

Firstly, I determined the theme and purpose of the project, but I did

not directly look for other graphic novels as a reference. Instead, I

began to talk about my experience with a trusted friend and

experts. I had a meeting with an art therapist, and at this meeting,

she showed me the artwork she worked with anorectic girl and

gave me some professional suggestions on eating disorder

therapy. She said that free writing is a good way for self-

exploration and figuring out the deep reasons of my having an

eating disorder may help my recovery.

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[27] Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology.*
Dordrecht: Springer.

Therefore, I started my project with free writing. Carolin Mogk

(2006) [28] believes that writing about your own feelings and

ideas has always been a powerful way to resolve tensions,

especially stressful and traumatic experiences. Pennebaker

(2009)[29] states that when a person faces a negative or even

traumatic event, he or she usually thinks that they need to share it

with others. His/her experience expects social support. However,

the consequences of telling one's deepest thoughts and feelings to

others may, depending on the other's reaction, also impact on

one's self-esteem, making one feel shame, and being mocked or

rejected. However, the function of expressive writing does not

represent a social issue that is rejected or disapproved, but it helps

reduce the emotional burden and mitigate the risk of

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[28]Mogk, C. (2006). Health effects of expressive writing on stressful or traumatic experiences - a meta-analysis. German Medical Science GMS Publishing House; Düsseldorf.

[29] Pennebaker, J. (2009). Emotion, disclosure & health. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

psychosomatic problems. Therefore, before I conceived the whole

graphic novel, I wrote about of my cognition my eating disorder

and my recollections of when I was controlled by my eating

disorder (see figure 20). In addition, I use my writing at the

beginning of my project to create a clear narrative that will make

the rhythm and intention of the narrative more cohesive. At the

same time with my writing, I also write them as sketches to

improve their clarity. These sketches do not necessarily appear in

the final graphic novel but they provided me with a good direction
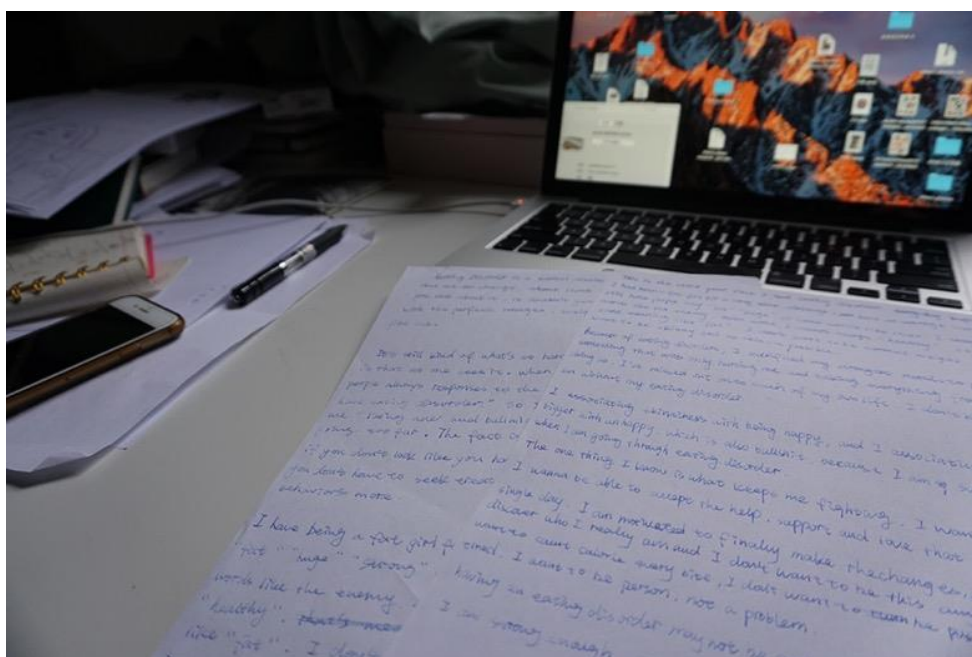
for my thinking.

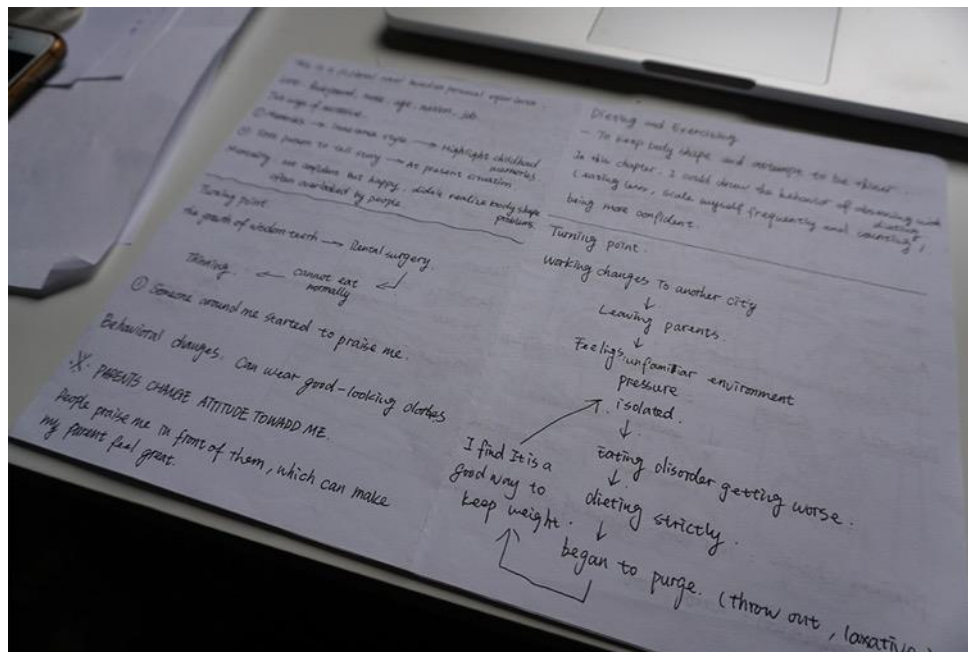Figure 4. Mika He (2018) "Free writing from my inner voice."

Figure 5. Mika He (2018) "Mapping of graphic novel"

After I wrote these fragmented texts I explored different ways of

testing and making them appropriate for my graphic novel (see

figure 22), i.e. exploratory testing. Schön（1984）[30] defines

exploratory experimentation as the "probing, playful activity by

which we get a feeling for things. It succeeds when it leads to the

discovery of something there (1984, p. 145). He also states that

experimentation is a continuously confirmed practice process and

[30] Schön, D. (1996). *The reflective practitioner*. Hampshire: Arena.

it is called "exploratory". Therefore, in the process of exploration, I

did not pursue details but focused on possibilities. For example, in

the original version of my graphic novel, the narrative of time was

completely changed by my age, from primary school to master's

degree (see figure 16), and through the line drawing method I

applied a colour element into my practice as well, both digital

colouring and water colour（see figure 27 and figure 28）. At the

same time, I tested different media to find out how interactively
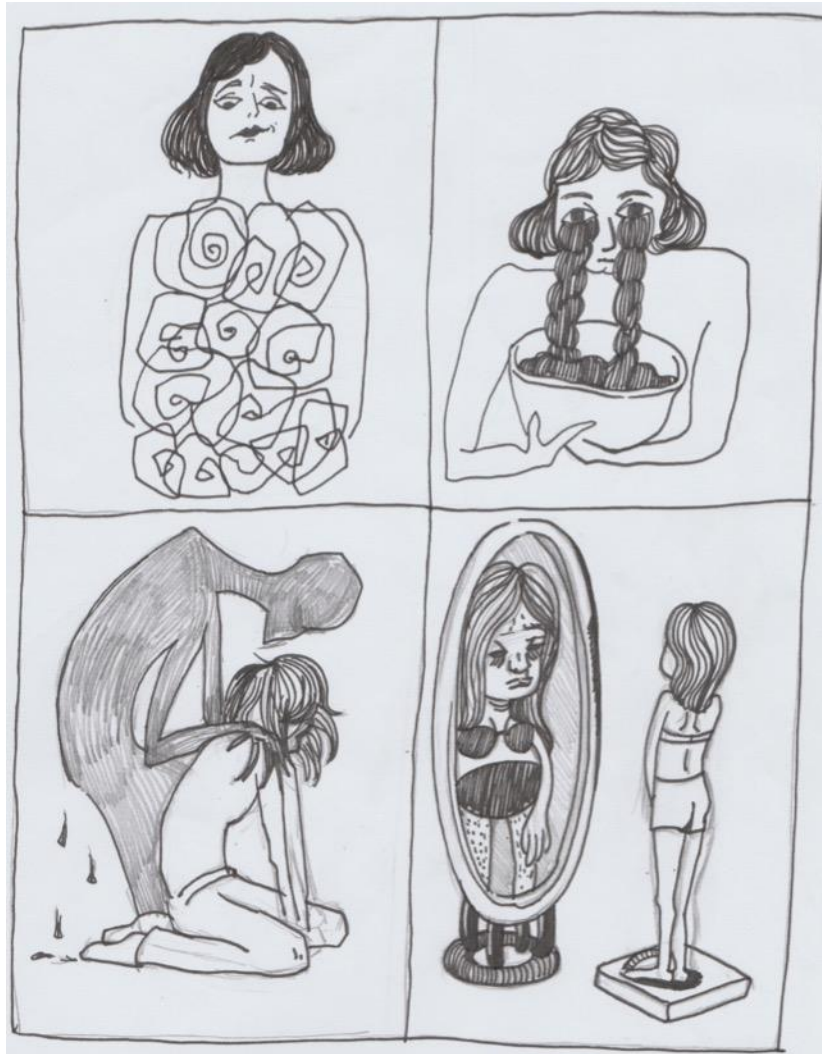
they enriched my graphic novel.
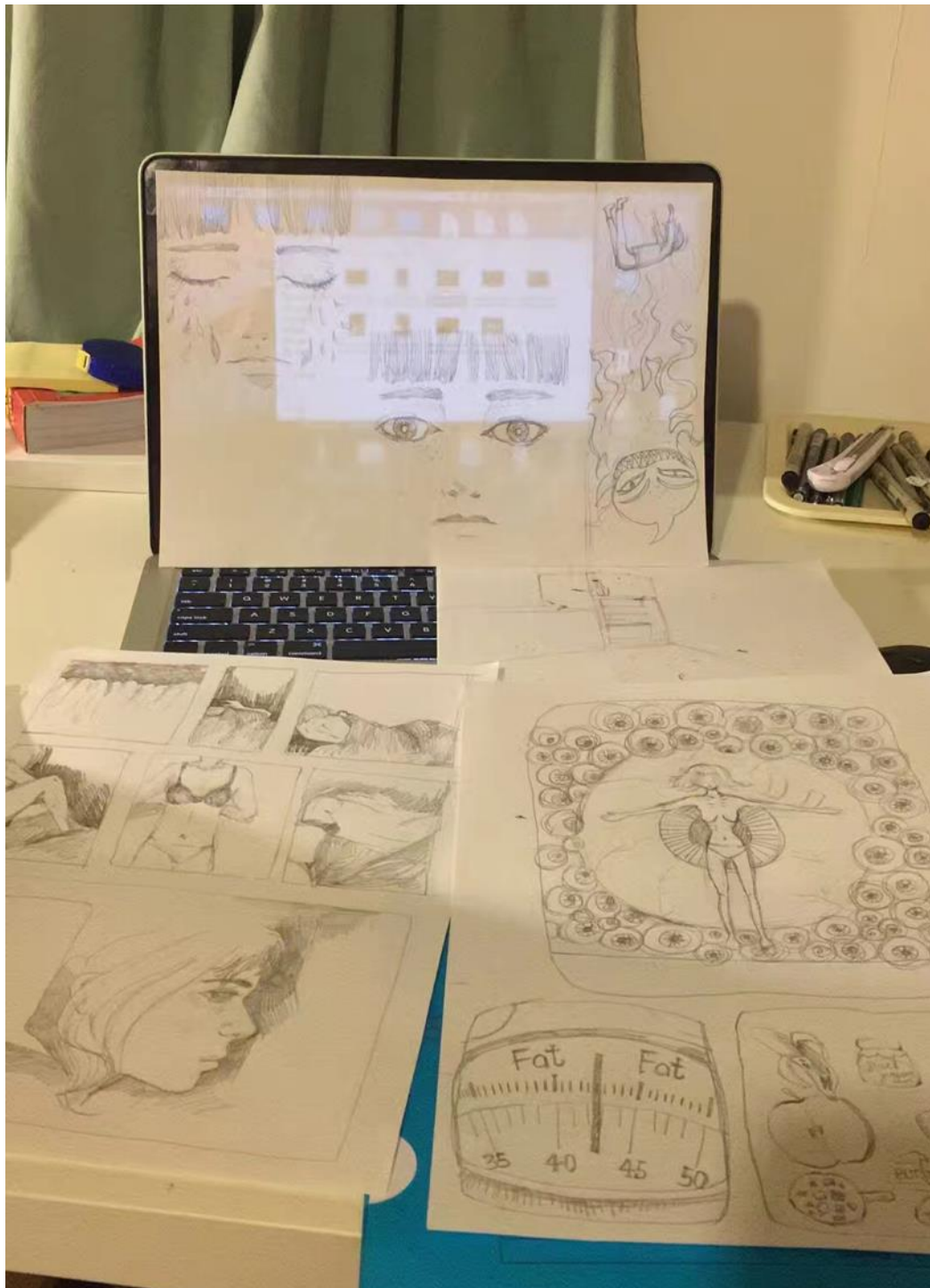
Figure 6. Mika He (2018) "Exploration process"
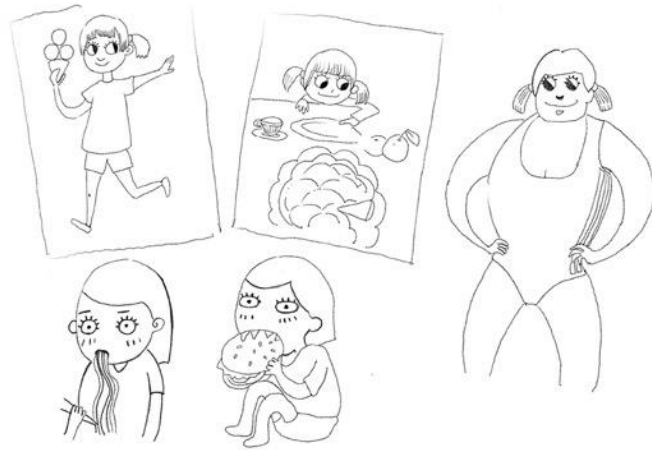
Figure 7. Mika He(2018) "Exploration process"
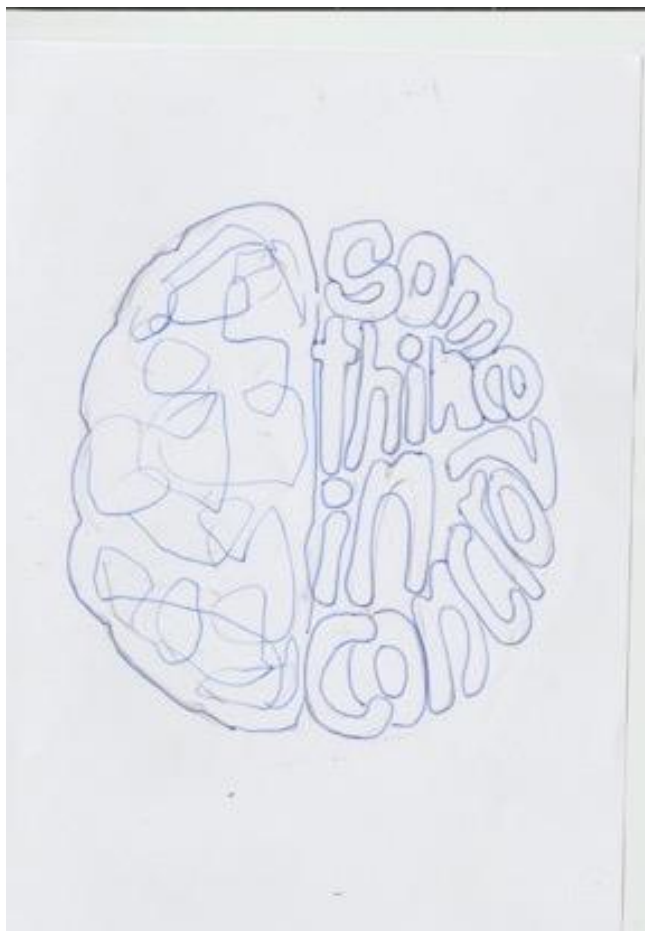
Figure 8. Mika He(2018) "Sketch of character"

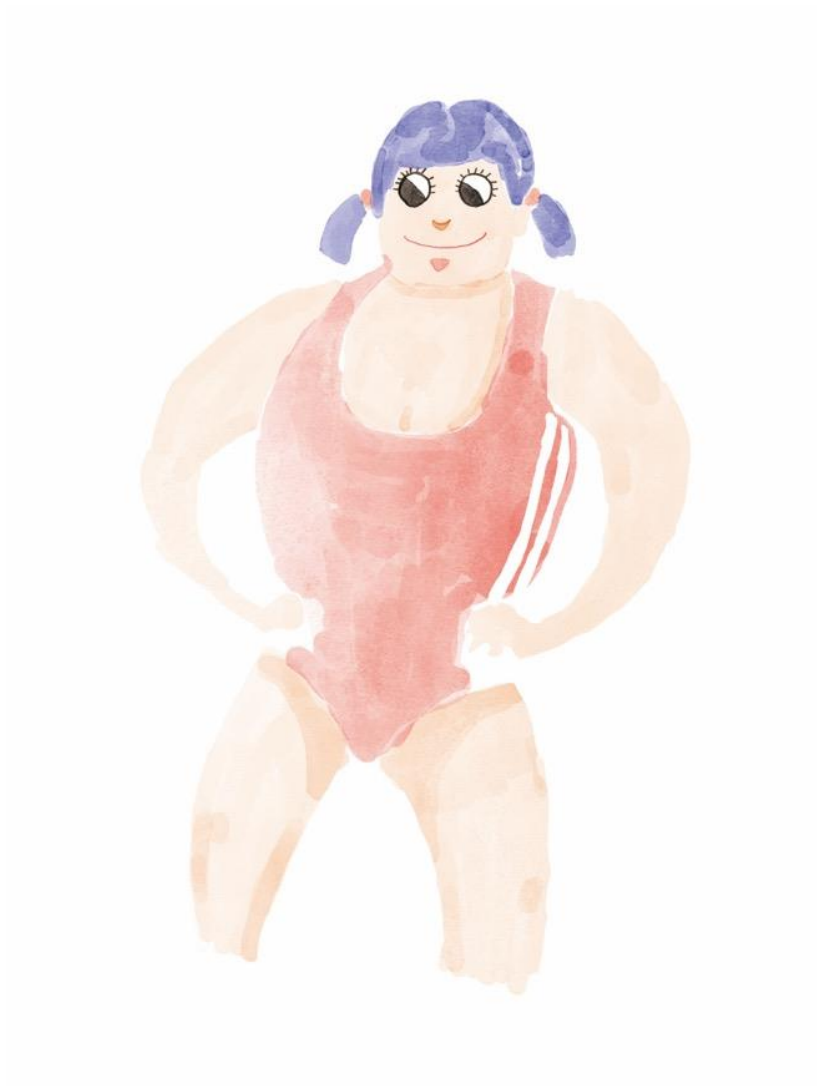Figure 9. Mika He (2018) "Sketch of montage"

Figure 10. Mika He (2018) "Self-portrait of little Mika"

Figure 11. Mika He (2018) "Digital colouring practice"

Figure 12. Mika He (2018) "Watercolor practice"

These exploration exercises are not all exhibited in my graphic

novel. In the process of practicing, I kept thinking about and

questioning methods of painting, writing, monologue, and

handcrafting, trying to find out which of the formats I experimented

with could be applied to my project.

When designing my graphic novel, I spent a lot of time adjusting

the processing of images and texts. I defined the pattern of

different image and text collocations as a process for leading

readers to follow the story and by reflective experiment, to test

which were valid and which invalid. Every idea and inspiration in

the exploration process had different potentials and meanings,

which were then adjusted and negotiated. Schön (1996) [31]claims

that research and practice both occur in the experimentation of the

reflective creator. He defines this as "reflection in action".

Although exploratory testing and reflective practice are important

approaches to generating the graphic novel consultation is another

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[31] Schön, D. (1996). The reflective practitioner. Hampshire: Arena.

valid method of improving the graphic novel's narrative and

evaluating its feasibility. Douglass and Moustakas (1985)[32]

suggest that, "through rigor and disciplined commitment, one

follows the subjective past ordinary levels of awareness, living the

question internally in sources of being and nonbeing, recording

hunches, ideas, and essences as they emerge, and, ultimately,

consulting with others regarding the phenomenon or experience"

(1985, p. 40). In other words, I could gain different perspectives

from outsiders on iterations of my project. By consulting with my

supervisor on effective drawing styles and writing, the

representation of the image and the description of the text in my

graphic novel were gradually improved. Although most of the

images are written in a simple comic style, the text is mostly based

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[32] Douglass, B., & Moustakas, C. (1985). Heuristic Inquiry. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *25*(3), 39-55. doi: 10.1177/0022167885253004

on first-person narrative, but the narrative flow has been enhanced by different ways of describing the text.

Exploration of drawing style

In exploring a process for the creation of my graphic novel at first, I applied digital drawing for the first chapter (see figure 29). On reflection, and in discussion with my supervisor, in using this style I found that there was no liveness within the images, although they were colourful and detailed they did not fit the sense of a journal or diary. In this first version, the feedback from my supervisor was that although the images were great they were not attractive and compelling. In order to solve this problem, I then reconsidered what kind of information and feeling I want to communicate and then I reworked the first chapter by using watercolour and adding childhood photos. The intention of my graphic novel is that the reader should be connected with both humour and nervous tension. This consultation process also re-defined my impression

of how to create a comic or graphic novel from real life and

changed my stereotype of graphic novels and comics, one which

was simply constituted by drawings, panels and words.

Figure 13. Mika He (2018) "Digital version of food drawing"

Figure 30. Mika He (2018) "Watercolour food drawing"

Structure of storytelling

Once the main painting style and narrative trajectory were

determined, I began to plan the structure of the entire story. In the

process, I tried different forms of memory combinations. In order to

make my story less mundane, I used a non-linear narrative

technique. Then I discussed and collected feedback. However,

feedback does not mean that it is necessary to be edited, but is a

review of the clarity of the work and whether it expresses the

intended focus. In this way, I ensured that my story process was

orderly.

Negotiation between images and text

Throughout the design of the story I kept thinking about the

relationship between images and text (see figure 31) . The main

question was how to use monologues to involve the audience as

an interactive part of this process, because I am looking for a way

not only to describe what is in the picture, but to create more

imagination in the the text in addition to the information expressed

in the picture. Using the potential of humour, metaphor and other

techniques in the text to describe the stress and trauma I have

experienced. McCloud (1993) mentions a variety of ways to make

texts interact with images which helped me to complete the

process. The methods I used include the word specific, picture

specific, additive and parallel. McCloud states that although

comics cannot be defined simply by a combination of text and

images, this combination does have a tremendous impact on the

development of comics. Pictures can depict a large number of

human experiences within comics. Therefore, despite many other

potential uses, comics have become firmly established in the

telling of storylines.

Figure14. Mika He (2018) "Combination of image and text"

Watercolour painting

The purpose of my initial study of watercolour was to record the

environment and scenery around me when I was still in college.

Because my graphic novel is similar to a memoir, it can also be

understood to be a record of my past experience, I chose

watercolour as a medium to compose a profoundly personal story.

In addition, a number of very successful and popular graphic

novels use watercolour as a drawing technique. For example,

Brecht Even(2011)[33] "The Wrong Place", Lynda Barry(2002)[34]

"One! Hundred! Demons!" and Sarah Laing(2016)[35]"Mansfield and

Me: A Graphic Memoir

", all use watercolour as their main medium. Although they all use

simple comic styles for character presentation they promote a

feeling of dynamic and natural liveness. Therefore, I began to

explore watercolour rendering as an important part of my project

from early on.

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[33] Evens, B. (2011). *The wrong place*. London: Jonathan Cape.

[34] Barry, L. (2002). One hundred demons.

[35] Laing, S. (2016). Mansfield and me. Victoria University Press.

Photomontage

The photo montage consists of a photo and/or a part of a photo.

On the first page of the first chapter of my novel, I state that I

looked at my photo collection to recall the past. Therefore, photos

were bound to become an important element in my graphic novel

(see figure 32). The reason I apply photomontage as a unique

approach is because photos are ordered and purposeful, while

montages are based largely on imagination and fantasy. When

photographs and words and drawings form photomontages,

independent elements look like they are irrelevant, but when they

are grouped together they produce subtle connections.

Photomontage also provides a more special viewing experience

for cartoon-based graphic novels.

Figure 15. Mika He "Photomontage"

Conclusion of methodology

In terms of methodology this project has been developed through

heuristic exploration which involves the recollection of immersive

experiences and past experiences. The elements in the novel are

not only words and images, but also materialized photographs in

order to make the work more realistic. From the concept stage to

the actual process of producing a graphic novel I have undertaken

a reflective practice. Using exploratory methods of testing and

reflective activities, including consultation and feedback, has

meant the development of new iterations, changes, and deletions,

all aligned to a reintegration of the completed graphic novel.

Discussion

Commentary on theme

Featherstone (1991) stated that the consumer culture in the

Western world has deliberately cultivated a special attitude toward

the body, encouraging people to constantly observe their imperfect

body and take responsibility to deal with any signs of disease,

deterioration or aging. A beautiful and healthy body is seen as a

symbol of one's discipline and self-control. However, paradoxically,

this culture also affirms the seeking of a more desirable hedonistic

lifestyle: under this condition, knowledge of health issues, fitness

and slimness are not only related to energy and vitality, but also

regarded as a personal value. For me, being reluctant to treat

eating disorders correctly by immersing myself in constraints and

control is a way of craving for perfection. I used to be unable to

accept myself and think that although I had a good body shape I

still had no sense of worthiness. However, when I came to New

Zealand, as an international student, when I was able to tell of my

experience without disguising it, I found that almost all of the

people around me encouraged me in a positive way and stated

that I could accept myself. Looking at my own imperfections and

thinking about the difference between anorexia in the Western

world and China the value for me in telling my story of my anorexia

with a Chinese background is not only a way to seek rehabilitation

and cure, but also to pass on ideas to people who do not

understand eating disorders.

Commentary on drawing skills

The appearance of my sketches

My graphic novels are distinguished by their simplicity and

distinctive drawing style. With time and geographical changes, my

drawing style transitions from naive and the splendid influence of

my childhood to more mature styles (see figure 22 ,23 & 24). In

character modeling, I chose a simple comic style and do not

portray too many details of the characters. McCloud (1994)

suggests that "when we abstract an image through cartooning, we

are not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific

details. By stripping down an image to its essential meaning, an

artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art cannot"

(1994, p. 30). In other words, when you stare at a photo or realistic

drawing of a face, you would think it is someone else, but when

you look at a cartoon face, you could believe it is yourself. At the

same time in the use of cartoon, the seemingly simple image is

often more able to allow viewers to bring themselves into the story,

to not just pay attention to the picture. For my approach to visual

style, I referred to the graphic novel "One Hundred Demons", by

Lynda Barry（2010）. Barry's visual style is simple and

imaginative, rather than tending toward realistic representation.

Her comics are mainly composed of black line art. She paints her

text and images with a brush. Hillary L. Chute (2010)[36] writes

about Barry's novel that she "does not display trauma so much as

work on the edges of event, unsettling readers by leaving us to

imagine the incidents whose aftereffects she plumbs". Eating

disorders may indeed be a serious topic around the world, but just

like Lynda Barry, I do not wish to make my novel too serious and

heavy. Rather, I prefer to use a more relaxed and humorous style.

Space and panels

In the presentation of space, I borrowed the concept of blank-

leaving in Chinese art. White space is a philosophical concept. It is

a synonym for nothingness. However, a prominent feature of

Chinese painting is that it regards the blank space as a solid

space. Laozi（BC 571） said: Knowing white and keeping it black

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[36] Chute, H. L. (2010). *Graphic women: Life narrative and contemporary comics.*

is the form of this world (Lao zi, Chapter 28). In Chinese

calligraphy, the white space was also named "Designed White." In

traditional Chinese painting, space should also represent virtual

reality, but at the same time exist. Although Weimin He (2005)[37]

thinks that the reservation of blanks is mainly used for landscape

painting, it can be said to be a method suitable for most paintings.

It does not overpaint, but it can also create imagination space

through blank-leaving (see figure 33), so that the lack of details

becomes a better overall performance. Therefore, in a large part of

the figure, I did not use the panel in traditional comics. I also

referred to the work of my favorite graphic artist Brecht Evens, who

mostly employs a non-panel format. The first time that I looked at

his book, I was deeply attracted to the way his use of a format that

distinguishes it from traditional comics. In his graphic novel, I

noticed that when he breaks the rules of panels, the space of the

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[37] He, W. (2010). Weimin He. Retrieved from http://www.heweimin.org

image gains more freedom to juxtapose events occurring at the

same time. In contrast, I also read "This One Summer" written by

Mariko Tamaki and illustrated by Jillian[38] Tamaki. Although this

graphic novel is also famous and successful, its visual style did not

grab me by the heart. As my graphic novel is based on memory ,

most of my memories are incoherent fragments, which are not

suitable for sequential panels.

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38   TAMAKI, M., & TAMAKI, J. (2014). This one summer.

Figure 16. Mika He "Blank-leaving page"

Although I prefer to use the main form of my picture novel without

panels, the importance of panels is mainly reflected in how I use

action and perspective to express the passage of time.

McCloud(1995) concluded the gutter is used as an invisible

messenger to convey information, although it is only a blank

space. Comic artists need gutters so that readers get involved in

the transition from time to action. The author largely influences

which conclusions can be drawn, and cartoonists generally do this

through the transition from panel to panel. For example, in the third

page of the second chapter, in order that feelings of anxiety,

violence, and uneasiness are effectively expressed, the distance

between each picture is very close, and the edges of the panels

are drawn as non-linear. This expresses the transition from a

stable state to a fluctuating psychological state.

Figure 17. Mika He (2018) "Time flows through panels"

Watercolor painting and coloring

Originally, to attract people's attention I planned to utilize rich and detailed colours in the layout of the entire novel, so I made the picture look more exquisite and refined. However, digitized paintings lead to emotional deficiencies, and have also contribute to moving pictures but because they are not very frequent and are more inactive this can led to visual confusion (see figure 35 & 36). This is because the colour dominates and weakens the atmosphere that belongs to the diary and to daily life.

Figure 18.. Mika He (2018) "Digital colouring practice"

Figure 19.. Mika He (2018) "Digital colouring practice"

Therefore, I changed the plan to use a unique watercolor as a tool, basically avoiding the details. Although this method seems very naive, it is full of liveness and the sense of a personal diary. Based on the storytelling, I thought that I should focus on the presentation of the story content rather than the presentation of detailed image. Therefore, in addition to sketching, I did not use too many details to colour the character. When drawing with watercolor, I also tried to use flat-painting as simple as possible instead of creating a more three-dimensional character.

In terms of colouring, I have used different colours to represent my

own different moods. For example, in figure xxx, red and blue

express different feelings in my heart. They are melancholy and

anger. At the same time, in most of the screens, my choice of

colors is collisional and incompatible. Especially in the second

chapter, when I describe the darkest time I have experienced. I

used a black background(see figure 37& 38), but I used bright

colors to express my characters. This I borrowed from Pop Art's

color matching style.

Figure 20. Mika He(2018). "Black background drawing"

Figure 21. Mika He(2018). "Black background drawing"

Materialized narrative

Ban and Tura (2011)[39] state that the application of real objects in

art not only mostly re-evaluates the aesthetic level (traditionally

associated with having "beauty" at the top) but also the way in

which the western narrative is reconstructed by photography. In

my graphic novel I use the different stages of my body shape self-

portrait to provide more actualization in my illustrative journal. I

also create some interactive pages within my book, for example,

the pullout page and the openable-page. Applying these kinds of

interactive formats should not only enrich readers' sensory

experience, but it also represents embodied metaphorical symbols

(see figure 39& 40). Ahmed (2016)[40] supports my point of view

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[39] Bán, Z., & Turai, H. (2011). *Exposed memories*. Budapest: AICA International Association
of Art Critics Hungarian Section.

[40] Ahmed, M. (2016). *Le statut culturel de la BD/ The Cultural Standing of Comics* (1st ed.,
pp. 7-36). Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-L'Harmattan.

that interactions between comics and collages include

experimental collages that combine different styles and

techniques, and the more stylized collages that are popular in

modern art movements that reflect the current state and evolution

of the concept of art itself. Because of the prejudice from which

comics suffer from high-level literary discourse this understanding

of inclusiveness reveals the degree of interaction between the

selected comics and the collages and other techniques contained

in the fine arts. It not only brings new connotations and aesthetic

textures to comics, but also breaks down the cultural level of art

and its related segments.

Figure 22. Mika He (2018). "Interactive comic"

Figure 23. Mika He (2018). "Interactive comic"

Conclusion of exegesis

This exegesis examines how I can apply my autobiographical graphic novel as a platform to demonstrate my eating disorder experience. The aim of this project is to show readers how I suffered from an eating disorder through my experiences of childhood trauma and discrimination about the body shape of Chinese woman. Creating this graphic novel is also valuable as it has assisted in my recovery from my eating disorder.

In first section, I provided an introduction of the reason why I utilized a graphic medium to illustrate my eating disorder experience, people's misunderstanding of eating disorders and an overall review of each section. The second section is a review of the contextual knowledge which I divided into four parts: China's online skinny craze, including a review of the "A4 waist challenge", body image, eating disorder narratives, storytelling as graphic medium and trauma oriented graphic novels. My research methodology is found in the third section. I defined this methodology as a qualitative, practice-led exploration. *Some THIN about Me* employs a heuristic framework to immerse the self into a relationship with both the narrative of eating disorder and trauma memory. Finally, in section four, I have discussed the critical thinking of my practice and exploration. In order to achieve this, I have borrowed from both Chinese and Western concepts, not only explaining the

aesthetics and the structure of the novel, but also expounding on the basic principles of its design.

Future Research

Graphic novels such as *Some thin about Me* are not normally written to obtain a Master's degree. This graphic novel is more like a journal for me as it records my life of study in New Zealand. Through reading my graphic novel, I am encouraged as to how brave I am in fighting my eating disorder.

The rigorousness and opportunities of my academic research have increased my depth of thinking and, to some extent, my purpose and creative process. However, I do not intend to seek to have the work published because it is still an unfinished project and there are still many parts that need improvement and development. If, in the future, I am able to recover from my eating disorder, I will complete the work and publish it. Only in this way will my work be able to show its value and inform and touch other suffers.

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Figure 20. Mika He(2018). "Black background drawing"

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