Some THIN about me

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

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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.
I would like to express my deepest thanks to my supervisor, Miriam Harris, for the continuous help and knowledge support I received during the past two semesters.

Thanks to my parents for giving me the opportunity to study abroad and support me with expensive tuition fees. I also want to thank my classmates Rita, Harry, and Jonathon for making my study abroad a pleasant and special experience.

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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.
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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 images¹. 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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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

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). 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). 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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body, people, especially women, have produced an abnormal aesthetic standard for the appearance of the body.

Susan Bordo concludes in “Unbearable weight” (2013): “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) states that “The image of the human body means the picture of our own body which we


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) 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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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) 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


opportunity to increase their confidence and share their personal experiences\textsuperscript{10}.

“Life Without ED”\textsuperscript{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.


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”. 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

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)\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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). Herman (1997) 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


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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\(^{17}\) 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)\textsuperscript{18}, “Fun Home” by Alison Bechdel (2006)\textsuperscript{19} and “Persepolis: The story of childhood” from Marjane Satrapi (2000)\textsuperscript{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

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)\textsuperscript{21}; Hacking, (1983)\textsuperscript{22}; Hesse, (1980)\textsuperscript{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)\textsuperscript{24}, “post-positivist is emphasises that social reality is viewed and interpreted by


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), 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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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).

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

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”
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.

Therefore, I started my project with free writing. Carolin Mogk (2006)\textsuperscript{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)\textsuperscript{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

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

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.
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) 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

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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”
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

valid method of improving the graphic novel’s narrative and evaluating its feasibility. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) 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

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”
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 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.

Figure 14. 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)\textsuperscript{33} “The Wrong Place”, Lynda Barry (2002)\textsuperscript{34} “One! Hundred! Demons!” and Sarah Laing (2016)\textsuperscript{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.


\textsuperscript{34} Barry, L. (2002). One hundred demons.

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)\textsuperscript{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.

\textbf{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

\textsuperscript{36} Chute, H. L. (2010). \textit{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)\footnote{He, W. (2010). Weimin He. Retrieved from http://www.heweimin.org} 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
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 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.
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”
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)\textsuperscript{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)\textsuperscript{40} supports my point of view.


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 sufferers.
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