

# Korean Beauty Standard in 200 Pounds Beauty: Gerbner's Cultivation Theory

Nailah Riaz<sup>1</sup> and Fatima Manj<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The study deals with cosmetic surgery through a K-movie, 200 Pounds Beauty. Applying Gerbner's cultivation theory the examination finds out how media influences the passion of the consumers about cosmetic surgery in achieving success. This research helps to analyze the representation as well as the cultivation of Korean beauty standards. The sample film promotes a culture where cosmetic surgery is normalized by showing the transformation of the main character "Hanna". Through the application of some elements, i.e., core assumption, cultivation differential, resonance, and second-order effect from Gerbner's Cultivation theory, the audience establishes an impact on their beauty ideals. Core assumption uncovers how the selected K-movie portrays cosmetic surgery as a means to conform to societal expectations of beauty. This suggests the film can shape viewers' beliefs about the desirability of cosmetic surgery in the pursuit of beauty and social acceptance. According to cultivation differential, high viewers (more screening time) might be adversely influenced by the idea that physical appearance is important for success and happiness. "Hanna" gets self-worth after transformation which might have a resisting impact on viewers. Resonance helps to understand that the viewers specifically going through appearance-related experiences and appearance-related-insecurities, might inhale resistive influence to aspire for cosmetic surgery. The second-order effect helps to analyze how like-movies increase willingness to consider cosmetic surgery as a viable option. This research suggests that like-movies not only reinforce societal beauty expectations but also play a significant role in the culturally different perception of cosmetic surgery. This investigation concludes that like-k-movies exercise a negative impact on consumers and societal perception. It finds out a narrow and unrealistic beauty ideal, where appearance is prioritized. Through the protagonist's transformation, this academic work indicates how complying with standards via surgery is desirably possible. However, the reinforcement of unattainable standards can lead to detrimental consequences by promoting body

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<sup>1</sup> Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Faisalabad, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup> Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Faisalabad, Pakistan

dissatisfaction, that encourages self-worth only by physical appearance, fitting within Gerbner's cultivation theory of media influence.

**Keywords:** cosmetic surgery, Gerbner's cultivation theory, passion, societal expectation, k-movies, physical appearance

## Introduction

South Korea is well known for both its powerful beauty industry and the widespread cultural impact of beauty standards. The 2006 South Korean film "200 Pounds Beauty" (미녀는 뽀로워), produced by Kim Yong-hwa, offered a unique setting for looking into the complex connection between media portrayal and beauty standards. This romantic comedy-drama focuses on the life of pop sensation Hanna Kang, an overweight ghost singer. It is based on a well-known manhwa (comic book). The story revolves around Hanna's transformation into a standard beautiful South Korean woman through notable plastic surgery.

Through the lens of Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, the Korean Beauty Standard as it is portrayed in the movie "200 Pounds Beauty" and its possible impact on people's perceptions of beauty can be examined. The purpose of this research paper is to investigate how the movie might influence the audience's development of particular beauty standards, expectations regarding their bodies, and self-esteem. This research attempts to shed insight onto the broader significance of media representation in creating cultural beauty standards and their impact on society by analyzing the media content and corresponding cultivation effects on individuals.

Gerbner's Cultivation Theory can be used to examine how media representations of beauty affect people's beliefs and actions in relation to the Korean beauty standard portrayed in the film "200 Pounds Beauty." According to this theory, viewers' views and values can be shaped by prolonged exposure to media content. Exploring this topic is crucial because this investigation sheds light on the influence of South Korean media portrayals of beauty standards that affect people's perceptions of their bodies, sense of self, and desire to consider cosmetic surgery. We can learn more about the extent to which media contributes to the acceptance

of cosmetic surgeries in pursuit of these beauty standards by examining the relationship between media consumption and trends in cosmetic surgery.

“200 Pounds Beauty” is the K-movie which was released in 2006 and this study focuses on the movie through Gerbner’s Cultivation lens. This K-movie can be delimited through Cultivation theory by examining the concept of the core assumption, cultivation differential, resonance, and second-order effect. The movie depicts the character who is forced to conform to societal expectations of beauty via cosmetic surgery.

## **Review of the Literature**

In recent years, the field of cosmetic surgery has seen significant growth and evolution, with a growing body of literature dedicated to understanding its influence via media. This review of the literature aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in this area, providing insights into the major trends, controversies, and gaps that will inform this article.

Various research focus on how cosmetic surgeries are promoted to conform to society and how people’s beliefs and perceptions are changed about it. The research was done by Heny Rahmawati (2023), in which she discusses the impact of Korean dramas and popular culture on youth, as depicted on Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI), which is significant in contemporary media research, especially when viewed through the lens of Gerbner’s Cultivation Theory. According to the theory, long-term exposure to media content can shape people’s perceptions and beliefs, aligning them with the values and norms presented on screen.

Numerous studies have highlighted the role of Korean dramas in shaping viewers’ attitudes, behaviors, and worldviews. These dramas frequently depict idealized narratives of love, relationships, beauty standards, and societal success, which, if consumed on a regular basis, may lead to the development of certain ideals, expectations, and even lifestyle choices among the youth audience.

This review delves into the existing literature on the impact of Korean dramas, particularly those broadcasts on RCTI, on youth perceptions, values, and behaviors, shedding light on how these media narratives contribute to the

development of specific cultural and social norms among young viewers in Indonesia.

Amailia (2014) investigates the portrayal of cosmetic surgery as a distinctly feminine practice within the film's narrative. Amailia's work critically examines how the film "200 Pound Beauty" reinforces and challenges conventional notions of femininity by depicting the protagonist's transformation through cosmetic procedures, building on existing literature that discusses the intersection of gender roles and beauty standards. By delving into this cinematic representation, the author adds to the larger conversation about the complex relationship between gender, body image, and societal expectations, spotlighting the film's role in perpetuating and subverting traditional gendered ideals of beauty.

Jeffreys (2005) critically examines the intersection of beauty standards and misogyny in Western societies. She labels them as "Harmful Cultural Practices in the West". Jeffreys delves into the intricate web of beauty practices, such as makeup, cosmetic surgery, and body modification, other than intertwining with harmful patriarchal norms and ideals of femininity.

The literature review for this research article, inspired by Jeffreys' work burrows into the extensive scholarship on these topics, investigating how Western cultural practices have extended unrealistic beauty standards, objectification of women, and gender inequality. The review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of these practices on women's lives, self-esteem, and broader roles in society by blending existing research, with a focus on dissecting the relationship between beauty ideals and misogyny in Western culture.

A group of researchers conducted a comprehensive literature review to investigate the potential links between cosmetic surgery reality TV show viewership and individuals' attitudes toward cosmetic surgery, body image perceptions, and the prevalence of disordered eating behaviors. The authors investigated the impact of exposure to cosmetic surgery-related content on television, considering its influence on people's perceptions of body image, desires for cosmetic enhancements, and tendencies toward disordered eating. This review of the literature serves as the foundation for their subsequent empirical research, shedding light on the connections between media consumption and personal attitudes and behaviors concerning cosmetic surgery and body image (Sperry, Thompson, Sarwer, & Cash, 2009).

Then, a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon known as the "Korean Wave" (Hallyu) and its influence on the perceptions of university students regarding Korea and Korean culture has been conducted (Park, Simon, & Kazimoto, 2021). The authors investigate the multifaceted aspects of Hallyu's global spread, including its impact on popular culture, media, music, and the appreciation of Korean cultural products such as K-dramas and K-pop. The literature review, by synthesizing these sources, sets the stage for the subsequent research, which aims to better understand how exposure to the Korean Wave shapes university students' perspectives and attitudes toward Korea and its rich cultural offerings, contributing to the broader discourse on cultural globalization and intercultural communication.

This study applies Gerbner's Cultivation Theory to the K-movie 200 Pounds Beauty. It identifies key themes as well as gaps in the existing literature. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of "Korean beauty standards and how it promotes cosmetic surgery via Gerbner's Cultivation theory". It advances the academic discourse in this area by building on the foundation of existing scholarship.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research is based on the study of Gerbner's cultivation theory in the K-movie 200 Pounds Beauty. The late 1960s saw the emergence of Cultivation Theory in response to the expanding influence of television on American culture. Communication researcher George Gerbner studied how viewers' perceptions of the world could be affected by how violence and particular social norms were portrayed in television programming. His area of interest was the long-term, cumulative effects of watching television. The theory has expanded over time to cover a variety of media content elements, including racial, gender, and social value representations. Although George Gerbner is recognized as the main creator of Cultivation Theory, over time he worked with a number of scholars. Among them is Larry Gross, who collaborated with Gerbner on the Cultural Indicators Project, a project designed to evaluate the effects and substance of television shows. This research serves as the starting point for the cultivation analysis, which was later a crucial part of the theory. Gerbner's research also brought him into contact with other scholars who were studying communication and media studies, which helped Cultivation Theory develop and become even more enhanced.

The foundation of George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory is a set of fundamental assumptions that clarify how media exposure affects people's views and perceptions. The core assumption of cultivation theory is that media content, including television, has a substantial impact on how people perceive social reality. It implies that extended and significant exposure to specific media content encourages the development of common attitudes, values, and beliefs that in turn affect how people view the world.

The idea of "cultivation differential," which holds that the effects of media cultivation are not constant but rather vary depending on an individual's exposure to particular media content, is one of the central ideas of this theory. The theory also presents the terms "mainstreaming" and "resonance" in order to fully understand the impact of media content. When a person's experiences in real life coincide with the representations and messages they come across in the media, resonance takes place.

In these situations, the media reinforces its influence by emphasizing the viewer's previous opinions. In contrast, mainstreaming implies that media exposure shapes people's perceptions regardless of their own experiences. It suggests that media content, particularly for heavy viewers, can establish a shared reality. There is also a distinction made by Cultivation Theory between "first-order effects" and "second-order effects." First-order effects are the direct results of media exposure. For example, someone who frequently watches violent media may come to believe that there is more violence in the world. Conversely, second-order effects entail more profound and nuanced shifts in attitudes and beliefs. These long-lasting, cumulative effects change people's overall worldviews and perceptions of social reality.

By using Gerbner's cultivation theory in the movie "200 Pounds Beauty", this research depicts the effect of media to reinforce beauty standards in society which can lead to cosmetic surgery. Gerbner's Cultivation Theory offers a useful theoretical framework for this research. Some elements from the theory have been applied to the movie i.e., core assumption, cultivation differential, resonance, and second-order effect. Through these elements, we will explore how Long-term exposure to media content, according to Gerbner's theory may impact a person's views and beliefs about reality.

In the movie, Hanna, the main protagonist, has extensive cosmetic surgery in an attempt to meet society's standards for beauty and achieve success as a singer. This theoretical framework will be used to investigate how the movie and related media contribute to the development of beauty standards and the possible impact of such portrayals on decisions made in real life, such as cosmetic surgery. This study may discover more about the complex relationships between media representation, societal beauty standards, and personal preferences by investigating how "200 Pounds Beauty" affects people's perceptions of beauty, self-esteem, and body image. This study helps clarify the broader cultural implications of this trend in South Korea and other countries.

### Analysis

There are several theories that can be applied to the movie 200 Pounds Beauty but this article will explore this movie through Gerbner's Cultivation theory. Hanna, the main character in the film "200 Pounds Beauty," undergoes extensive cosmetic surgery to conform to South Korean beauty standards. To analyze this in the context of Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, we can take apart the theory's core assumptions, cultivation differentials, resonance, and second-order effects and relate them to movie scenes.

#### ❖ Core assumption

The chosen K-movie depicts cosmetic surgery as a means of conforming to societal beauty expectations. This suggests that like-k-movies can shape viewers' beliefs about the desirability of cosmetic surgery in the pursuit of beauty and social acceptance. Hanna got success and self-worth after cosmetic surgery which can change the viewers' perception of beauty standards and cosmetic surgery.



Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2



Figure 4.3

The movie starts with Figure (4.1 & 4.2) Protagonist Hanna singing backstage and another girl is performing at the front stage as a lead. Then in Figure 4.3, Hanna realizes that she is being used because she is considered to be ugly and then she decides to do cosmetic surgery. These figures emphasize that if someone is not according to societal beauty standards will not achieve self-worth and success.

### ❖ Cultivation differential

This concept refers to the perceptions and attitudes of heavy and light viewers of media. Those who consume more media content are more likely to be influenced by the portrayals in the media.



Figure 4.4



Figure 4.5

In Figures 4.4 & 4.5, she got standardized beauty with the help of cosmetic surgery which indicates how complying with standards via surgery is desirably possible. Heavy consumers through like-k-movies will consider cosmetic surgery as a viable option to conform to societal expectations.

### ❖ Resonance

Resonance helps to understand that the viewers especially those going through appearance-related experiences and appearance-related insecurities, might be influenced to get cosmetic surgery in order to fit within society to gain self-worth. Resonance will be strong if Hanna's experiences or self-perception align with the consumers whose real-life experiences relate to Hanna.



Figure 4.6



Figure 4.7

In Figures 4.6 & 4.7, Hanna got accepted as a K-pop idol and this emphasizes that only beautiful appearance is the way to success. And consumers who can relate to these experiences will consider cosmetic surgery as a desirable or viable option.

### ❖ Second-order effect

Second-order effects are the accidental consequences of media exposure, such as changes in beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Hanna's extensive cosmetic surgery and transformation in the film have several second-order effects. Such as: -



Figure 4.8

From Figure 4.8, this research analyzes how her surgery initially boosted her self-esteem and confidence, which corresponds to the media's portrayal of beauty as the path to happiness.



Figure 4.9



Figure 4.10

Hanna's success as a singer in Figure 4.9 and her romantic relationship with a prominent music producer in Figure 4.10 demonstrate that conforming to beauty standards can lead to social and economic success. However, the surgery and its consequences create ethical and emotional challenges for Hanna and those around her, calling into question the belief that happiness and success are solely determined by physical appearance.

## Conclusion

"200 Pounds Beauty," a Korean film, highlights the pervasive influence of Korean beauty standards on society. Applying Gerbner's Cultivation Theory to this context, and portraying extreme cosmetic surgery as the path to societal acceptance and self-worth can have an enormous effect on people's perceptions. The story of this film reinforces the notion that conforming to certain beauty standards is the key to gaining acceptance and admiration. This research supports Gerbner's assumption that continuous exposure to these ideals can lead to the

development of unrealistic beauty expectations and a distorted self-image among viewers. The sample K-movie underpins the idea that physical appearance is the primary determinant of self-worth, contributing to body dissatisfaction and self-esteem issues. In conclusion, the film *200 Pounds Beauty* is a microcosm of a larger societal issue in South Korea and beyond, where K-movies have an observable influence on beauty standards. This research sustains how these standards are linked to the perpetuation of unrealistic body ideals and their negative impact on individuals' self-perception by applying Gerbner's Cultivation Theory. This study reiterates the significance of accepting and challenging these standards in order to promote healthier, broader notions of beauty and self-worth.

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Correspondence:

Nailah Riaz

nailah.riaz@tuf.edu.pk

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