SELF-CARE WILL TAKE YOU TO FREEDOM:
WEIGHT-LOSS REALITY TV SHOWS IN SOUTH KOREA

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DISSERTATION
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ABSTRACT

Body-care is regarded as an efficient form of self-care for ordinary Korean females in order to transform themselves into an acceptable part of society. There are two goals for this project. The first is to examine the ways in which dominant ideologies of the Korean female body and body-care are continually reproduced through the neo-liberal genre of “body-care reality TV shows”. The second is to look at the ways in which body-care, as depicted in weight-loss reality TV shows, can be considered as a new medium for ordinary Korean women to achieve self-fulfillment by taking care of their bodies as an everyday practice of freedom.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Foucault’s works of governmentality and the technologies of the self. I have traced the genealogy of the Korean female body, which explains the ways in which traditional Confucian norms and socio-cultural ideologies of the Korean female body have led to the obsession with female body-care in the concurrent society. Tracing such a genealogy shows how body-related reality TV shows have helped to normalize a particular gendered body by formulating and reproducing dominant body ideologies within the cultural, historical, and political contexts of South Korea.

Theoretical studies of socio-cultural discourse and the female body, such as this one, encourage cultural studies of sport that explore how gendered bodies have been articulated within relations of power to become a fundamental resource of Western societies. Such studies will contribute to the Department of Kinesiology and help articulate complex social issues related to the human body in daily life in the postmodern era.
To Dad and Mom: for Their Perpetual Support
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Chapter 1

Introduction: On the Obsession of Body

“The moral – and, as we shall see, economic – coding of the fat/slender body in terms of its capacity for self-containment and the control of impulse and desire represents the culmination of a developing historical change in the social symbolism of body weight and size.”

Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 2003, 191

During the past decades, the beauty and plastic surgery industries in South Korea have dramatically increased¹ (Bissell & Chung, 2009). According to Patricia Marx’s article in *The New Yorker* (2015), one fifth to one third of Korean women have gone under the knife to improve their appearance. BBC news reports that in large cities like Seoul, over fifty percent of young Korean females have undergone plastic surgery to transform their face and body. A job search website in Korea, “Find Job,” conducted an interesting survey on “what would you change if you could change one thing when you are trying to get a job?” 36.6% (Male: 48.4%, Female: 26.9%) of the total subjects showed that they wanted to switch their major, and the second majority answer was that 33.1% --a narrow margin-- wanted to change their external appearance. What really draws attention in these statistics is that only 25% of the male subjects answered that they wanted to change their appearance, whereas

¹ According to Choi and Shim (2002), researchers in Samsung Economic Research Institution (SERI), the beauty industry had a considerable portion of the domestic market with approximately US$5.5 billion in cosmetics, US$ 0.5 billion in plastic surgery, and US$1 billion in dieting.
39.7% of the female subjects (representing one female out of 2 or 3 Korean women) thought that external appearance is one of the “most” important factors in getting a job (Data News, 2006). These surveys clearly demonstrate that body-care is regarded as an indispensible passage in order to fit into society. There is no doubt that one’s external appearance offers a competitive edge and that taking care of one’s body is considered as an invisible, but powerful, standard that can measure which female body is more marketable in a capitalistic society.

In addition, Kim, Shin, Kim, and Lee (2015) conducted a survey on “suicidal ideation in underweight adults who attempt to lose weight.” The most interesting result of this study is that only 36.8% of the 101 underweight (BMI > 18.5 kg/m2) adults going on a diet perceive they are thin. However, the rest of the 63.2% tends to perceive their weight as average or overweight\(^2\). The study does not target only females, and it suggests that a lot of ordinary Korean people are obsessed with slenderness or extreme thinness in order to make their bodies more aesthetic, rather than simply healthy.

Along with the obsession of taking care of the body, numerous neologisms have arisen in South Korea such as “Eol-jiang” and “Hun-Nyu”\(^3\), “Mom-jiang”\(^4\), “Kul-bukgy”\(^5\), ‘Bagel-Nyu’\(^6\). It is interesting that these new terms initially only

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\(^2\) The average BMI of the underweight subjects was 17.6 kg/m\(^2\). In comparison with the official average BMI, which indicates 18.5 -24.99 kg/m\(^2\), the average BMI of the subjects in the study was far short of the category of normal weight suggested by World Health Organization (WHO).

\(^3\) Eol-jiang and Hun-Nyu refer to women who have a good-looking face.

\(^4\) Mom-jiang refers to people who have healthy and toned body shapes.

\(^5\) Kul-bukgy refers to a female’s thighs that look slim and healthy, but not like those of an athlete.
referred to the face (e.g., Ul-jiang and Hun-Nyu); yet, they are compound words that refer to someone who has a good-looking face and/or a good body shape. For example, Eol-jiang joins the words Eol (meaning “face” in Korean) with –jiang (meaning “awesome” in Korean). Another example is Bagle-Nyu, which combines “baby face” with “glamorous body.” The term “-Nyu” is normally used as a suffix that refers to females, and the full term “Bagle-Nyu” is common in everyday speech. These neologisms can easily be observed on TV or the Internet and may be related to both men and women. However, the phenomenon tends to primarily affect women in South Korea. The word “Bagel-Nam” does exist, which is the male version of “Bagel–Nyu”, but it is not often used. Instead, men often have another nicknames such as “Kkoch-Mi-Nam,” which refers to a man who has bright skin but not a masculine body shape, and “Sang-Nam-Ja,” which refers to a man who has dark skin in addition to a masculine body shape. These terms for the Korean male appearance indicate that men like Kkoch-Mi-Nam are welcome in Korean culture even though they are not “masculine.” This kind of social acceptance usually indicates that men are ‘attractive’ in most Western countries. In contrast, Korean females are required to take care their faces, and also to maintain toned, yet feminine bodies in order to gain a similar level of acceptance.

Furthermore, these new words have more recently been applied not only to

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6 Bagel-Nyu refers to women who have both a healthy and glamorous body and a face that looks younger than their actual age.

7 Kkoch means flower and Mi-Nam means handsome in English.

8 Sang-Nam-Ja refers to a man who is conventionally manly in terms of actions and appearance. However, this word is often used to label Korean men who are masculine in appearance only.
the face, but also to specific parts of the body, and the body as a whole – especially to the female body (e.g. *Mom-jiang, Kul-bukgy, Bagel-Nyu, Baguen-Nyu*). Korean females are exposed to an overwhelming amount of information related to dieting, fashions, makeup, and beauty products through TV and other media on a daily basis. These various media paths have played a key role in expanding the category of body parts that people--especially Korean females--need to take care of. There has been a gradual shift from facial features in the past to specific body parts and the body as a whole in contemporary society. These new terms are a strong indication of how South Korean society’s attention to appearance has shifted over the past decades.

On the one hand, the huge popularity of self-care reality TV indicates that a kind of female-oriented pop culture plays a significant role in representing dominant ideologies on the female body such as slenderness, obese-phobia, and westernized body shape by clearly representing which types of female bodies are socially and culturally acceptable. In addition, self-care reality TV shows illustrate that pedagogical information given by experts helps ordinary people take care of their problems such as obesity, and lifestyle and financial issues as a personal responsibility. In this context, the technologies of caring for oneself, gained from self-care reality TV shows, clearly articulate the concept of Neo-liberalism. On the other

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9 *Baguen-Nyu* refers to women who have both a healthy and toned body and a face that looks younger than their actual age.

10 The theme of neo-liberal policy is to maximize individual freedom by minimizing the authority and intervention of the government. Based on this, the Korean government has instituted neo-liberal policies such as 1) liberation through market expansion, 2) opening financial industries to foreign investors, 3) deregulation of industries, 4) privatization of national and public enterprises, 5) merger and acquisitions of enterprises, and 6) a flexible labor market, all of which are what the powerful country—the U.S.—and authorized institutions—OECD and IMF—demanded of Korea (Ahn, 2006; Harvey, 2005; and, Wang, 2009). Some key ideas of Neo-liberalism such as the deregulation of policies and the flexibility of capital, which have also been applied to the cultural domain, help the dominant ideologies of the body
hand, body-care, which is shown on the weight-loss reality TV shows, could be considered a new medium for ordinary Korean women to achieve self-fulfillment by taking care of their bodies as an everyday practice of freedom.

In my study, I trace a genealogy that explains the ways in which the traditional Confucian norms and socio-cultural ideologies on Korean female body have led to the obsession about female body-care in post-modern society. Tracing the historical trajectory of the Korean female body will be the key to finding the answer to the four main questions of this study:

1) What are some of the significant “technologies of the self” found within weight-loss reality TV shows?

2) What key roles do South Korean weight-loss reality TV shows play in reproducing and reinforcing the dominant discourses informing the ideal female body?

3) How do weight-loss reality TV shows fit within a longer genealogy of globalization and female-body work within South Korean history?

become easily reproduced through the mass media such as film, TV drama, and other shows. In accordance with deregulated policies in the media culture, a variety of TV programs, dramas, and films have been imported into Korea. In particular, reality television programs should be considered as perfect examples in that neo-liberal ideas have permeated both their formats and contents.

11 In the field of sociology, the French theorist, Jean Baudrillard, developed the post-modern view of capitalist society in the late 1960s. “Post-modern society is postindustrial, defined by new technologies that feature the unlimited reproducibility of objects and images” (Cited from Dickens, & Fontana, 1994, 4). Based on Baudrillard’s view of the term, post-modern society in my study refers to the era in Korea that followed rapid industrialization, which led to Korea becoming one of the major economic forces in the world. In particular, the emergence of reality TV genres, which play a powerful role in circulating, reproducing, and creating significant discourses on Korean female bodies, should be regarded as a cultural technology that helps ordinary women transfer into a part of society.
4) How are ordinary Korean women represented as invested in transforming themselves to become acceptable subjects of neo-liberal society?

To address the four main questions, my research uses Foucault’s theories of “governmentality” and “technologies of the self” as a theoretical framework through which to examine the momentum of female body troubles. I look at the history and complicated social and cultural contexts of “the Korean female body” as well as explore the ways in which females turn themselves into subjects through body-care as a daily practice.

Specifically, my research looks at the history of the female body in South Korea in order to trace a genealogy of dominant body discourse that has created and maintained ideologies of female self-care. Examining the history of the female body illustrates how body-related reality TV shows have had a huge influence on normalizing the particular, gendered body by formulating and reproducing dominant body ideologies within the cultural, historical, and political contexts of South Korea. The second purpose of this study is to examine how individuals in neo-liberal society are expected to turn themselves into subjects by embodying certain states such as self-mastery and self-fulfillment through body-care. Examining this argument allows me a meaningful platform from which to interpret not only how South Korean females are expected to conceptualize themselves, but also how this conceptualization is connected to their role(s) as social subjects. Weight-loss reality TV shows have helped to create ideals concerning the “care of the self” for contemporary Korean women. This includes dieting, which can embody self-care and provide a strong

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12 Please note that ‘the Korean female body’ in this study refers to an agent that has been reproduced by the complicated contexts of Korean history. The agency is specifically a female body, which has embodied the unique Korean contexts from the past to contemporary society.
external narrative that can replace the denial of bad habits that are often “internal and privatized” (Heyes, 2006, 141). In addition, through in-depth analysis of the research questions, my dissertation will contribute a meaningful perspective on powerful public pedagogy (Giroux, 2003), or what Ouellette and Hay (2008a) term “cultural pedagogy” of female body development and body modification though the media in neo-liberal society.

My research aims to echo the scholarship of other socio-cultural researchers who seek to expand “a range of empirical sites, including but by no means restricted to: exercise, fitness, health, dance, movement, leisure, recreation, daily living, and work-related activities” (Silk and Andrews, 2011, 8). The human body, which has always been regarded as a primary subject in the department of Kinesiology, should be understood not just as a subject on which to be physically experimented, but also as a subject that is “a central ideological resource” (Cole 1993, 85) that can be used to conceptualize complex and various socio-cultural phenomenon by means of critical, philosophical and interpretive approaches. In other words, my research provides the department of Kinesiology with a more fundamental “type of knowledge” (Silk & Andrews, 2011, 10), in that qualitative research can examine the “societal conception of human bodies” (Silk and Andrews, 2011, 5) at the micro level. In this regard, the female body should be understood as a micro-level place where social and political powers are exercised, and also where dominant cultural discourses can be

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13 A discourse is defined by Foucault as any group of statements that “appears as an ultimate, undecomposable element that can be isolated and introduced into a set of relations with other similar elements” (Foucault, 1972, 80). Based on Foucault’s definition, the female body discourse in my study refers to a certain group of statements that have been created, reproduced, and reinforced by female body-related issues including female identities, sexualities, and representations of body image formulated within similar socio-cultural contexts.
formulated. Examining the female body provides significant standards from which one can examine dominant body discourse that (re)produces a “docile body” (Foucault, 1979) in contemporary society. Therefore, this research will also enlarge the definition of the term Kinesiology to include a broad academic field, which entails understanding the body within the humanities and social sciences in addition to the typical focus on understanding human movement through the natural sciences.

**Theoretical Framework and Scholarly Significance**

*Korean Female Bodies*

Many Korean feminist scholars have studied female bodies and bodily discourse using a diversity of approaches in various academic fields, such as Korean literature, English literature, sociology, women’s studies, East Asian history, clothing and textiles, and communication. In the field of Korean literature, Go (2004) argues that Korean female bodies in “Honbul,” a Korean modern novels, are regarded as a “primitive place where occurs oppression, and alienation” (91) by embracing traditional heterosexual relationships firmly entrenched within the idea of Confucian patriarchy. However, and at the same time, she points out that the female body can be understood as a being able to resist power relations. Cho (2001) in English literature uses Butler’s performativity as a theoretical framework with which to examine Korean female body and identity. She argues that the female body, as a specifically gendered agency, has been constantly reproduced by iterating the forced gender norms of the time. Shim (1999) and Lee (2006) in Sociology examine Korean female

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14 Butler (1990) states, “the view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body” (xv). Therefore, Butler’s performativity can be understood as a repetition of historically and culturally constructed rituals.
body politics based on Foucault’s idea of power. Both scholars’ accounts have in common the argument that the Korean female body tends to be marginalized by conforming to ethical values of femininity in order to be a productive labor body for the sake of other family members. As these feminists state, gendered body ideologies have still been maintained as powerful dominant discourse on the female body, the meaning of which has been transferred from traditional Confucianism and patriarchy to a consumer capitalistic society.

Early feminists in Korea tended to approach the concept of gender differences rather than the “body” itself in order to analyze dominant body discourse. Deconstructing the “female body” based on the concept of gender differences categorizes female bodies as homogeneous subjects, encompassing a (re)productive body for the purpose of bearing children, having a mothering body, and offering a sexual body for the pleasure of men. Consequently, interpreting “the female body” in this way tends not only to analyze the “female” as one gender, but also to marginalize the “body” in female body studies. Nevertheless, the concept of gender differences and discourse on femininity, which is often found within the constructed heterosexual relationships in female body studies, has a significant role in conceptualizing and contextualizing the female body within the inherent socio-cultural background of Korea.

Since the emergence of post-modern society, the body as a physical object has tended to disappear in some veins of scholarship and has emerged in a new form as a “technologized body” (Enriquez, 2012, 59) due to the remarkable development of cutting-edge technologies such as the Internet, smart mobile phones, social networking, and the like. In the consumer capitalist society, bodies have become valued as products or objects constantly in need of “training.” In this social context,
the female body has become not only an indication of personal identity, but also a market product. There is a strong possibility that applying the “socially and culturally constructed entity\textsuperscript{15}” could re-conceptualize the female body, which has been constructed within complicated intermingled contexts of Korea.

In addition, many of Korean women’s liberation movements have proliferated in earnest among feminists, as well as ordinary females, after the early 1990’s. With the increase of these cultural movements for the female body and sexuality, various feminist cultures and art organizations have formed attempting to shed new light on the interpretation of the female body and femininity, while remaining resistant to the dominant female body discourse originating from the concept of gender differences. Approaches to the subject have tended to shift from gender differences and sexuality to the body itself. In line with academic trends, some contemporary Korean feminists such as Byun (2001), and Park (2004) are more interested in examining “the female body” as a central subject with a possibility of resisting dominant body ideologies. This concept of the female body as a main subject in “body” discourse seems like a cliché, but it obviously represents feminists taking a critical look at social and cultural contexts of which the body has experienced, embraced, and embodied. After the 1990’s, the female body and discourse on femininity were discussed in various ways, such that the female body was not to be analyzed as an object that should be protected or defended based on negative experiences throughout women’s lives, but rather exposed as a subject based on the

\textsuperscript{15} There has been a backlash against the perspective that the gendered body is constructed within a culturally structured society. New materialists in the field of feminism “consider matter or the body not only as they are formed by the forces of language, culture, and politics but also as they are formative. That is, they conceive of matter or the body as having a peculiar and distinctive kind of agency, one that is neither a direct nor an incidental outgrowth of human intentionality but rather one with its own impetus and trajectory” (Frost, 2011, 70).
autonomous perception of women. A deconstructed interpretation of the female body and sexuality has arisen, emphasizing the diverse differences among women (Park, 2004).

To summarize, there are two main points in my female body study. First, Korean female bodies have been represented as “oppressed,” “marginalized,” and “alienated” objects throughout Korea’s history, which is characterized by Confucianism and a traditional patriarchal structure. Second, women have historically been the main actors who have oppressed, marginalized, and alienated bodies in Korea. These two concepts provide a foundation upon which one can analyze female body discourse that implicitly and explicitly permeates Korean society. In addition, these issues will open up the opportunity of exploring whether the female body functions as a resistant place.

*Foucault’s Works*

Within this study, I plan to examine the Korean female body and particular discourses on body-care based on Foucault’s works. Foucault neglects to study a specific gender (“female”) in his work, but his ideas can still be applied to body research in the complicated historical and cultural context of South Korea in which females constantly focus on their bodies. “The emergence of the Foucauldian approach and new theoretical perspectives such as Foucault-inspired cultural studies and post-structuralism has significant implications for the kinds of questions sport sociologists choose to ask” (Rail and Harvey, 1995, 175). There are two significant reasons to use some of his works as a main theoretical framework for my body study. First, it allows me to explore the ways in which dominant ideologies on the female body have constantly been regenerated within the particular political and social
contexts of consumer capitalistic and neo-liberal societies. Second, it also provides my body study with a fundamental theoretical basis to examine the ways in which ordinary females can experience turning themselves into subjects as well as good citizens in society by taking care of their bodies.

- Governmentality

In Foucault’s work (2000) on a genealogy of power, he examined in-depth how conducting a population had shifted from sovereignty to a new art of government, which he calls “govenmentality.” According to Foucault, the conception of govenmentality is;

In contrast to sovereignty, government has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, and so on; and the means the government uses to attain these ends are themselves all, in some sense, immanent to the population; it is the population itself on which government will act either directly; through large-scale campaigns, or indirectly, through techniques that will make possible, without the full awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directing of the flow of population into certain regions or activities, and so on (217).

In other words, Foucault (2000) defined govenmentality as a new technique of governance, enabling certain states or institutions—any types of power groups such as authorized organizations or the mess media--to indirectly conduct their citizens by encouraging them to take care of their own issues as a personal responsibility within the constructed modes of politics and economy. Based on this concept, I plan to examine the ways in which individuals--especially females--are efficiently but subtly governed in neo-liberal society by urging them to take care of their bodies in order to become good citizens.
Ouellette and Hay (2008a) analyze the role of television in a neo-liberal government by using Foucault’s notion of governmentality. Television as a “cultural technology,” especially reality TV programs, plays a powerful role in producing good citizens by efficiently “governing at a distance.” In particular, reality TV has a strong influence on creating “a form of citizenship training” (Ouellette and Hay 2008a, 15) by providing various kinds of practical knowledge and skills, such as how to dress, how to exercise, and how to put on make-up. Ouellette and Hay’s perceptive analysis of reality television as a governing power provides a foundation for analyzing the role of weight-loss reality TV shows in neo-liberal society. In other research on the roles of reality TV (2008b), they also point out that “techniques of governmentality are circulated in a highly dispersed fashion by social and cultural intermediaries and the institutions—schools, social work, the medical establishment—that authorized their expertise” (473). In other words, reality TV as a kind of cultural technology in post-modern society could be regarded as a place that enables everyday regimes of self-care, and that “facilitates care of the self as a strategy of freedom and empowerment” (475).

Silk, Francombe, and Bachelor (2009), and Nam and Goh (2011) analyze weight-loss reality TV shows using Foucault’s conception of governmentality. They argue that the shows play a key role in producing good citizens who need to take care of themselves as a matter of personal responsibility by directly and indirectly spreading the notion of neo-liberalism. Specifically, Silk et al argue one of the significant roles of these reality TV shows is to encourage ordinary people in the neo-liberal society to take care of personal health issues like obesity by providing viewers with powerful public pedagogy. Nam and Goh also state that Korean weight-loss reality TV shows should be considered as a new cultural form of governance that
produces good citizens by indirectly delivering the idea of neo-liberalism. Sender and Sullivan’s account (2008) on body-related TV shows (they call this kind of TV show a “lifestyle show”) points out that these shows “effectively train citizens in the rules of good behavior” (582). Applying Foucault’s concept of governmentality becomes my principle method of examining the ways in which Korean weight-loss reality TV shows encourage ordinary females to transfer themselves as an acceptable part of Korean neo-liberal society.

--Technology of the Self

In his early work, Foucault (1988a) had studied how technologies of power convert individuals as an object to certain ends or domination. However, he focused more on “the mode of action that an individual exercises upon himself by means of the technology of the self” in his later work (19). According to him, the technology of the self,

which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immorality (Foucault, 1998a, 18).

Specifically, Foucault’s later works focus on human bodies at the micro level, not only in order to examine the way in which individuals transform themselves into subjects, but also how they perceive themselves as part of a community and society. His idea of “subjectivity” plays a key role in examining how females, who struggle with their bodies, transfer themselves into subjects within neo-liberal society. Additionally, his idea of the technology of the self can be used as a powerful tool to determine the ways in which females transform themselves inside their community.
In the field of physical cultural studies, Foucault’s technology of the self has been used by some scholars to explore possibilities of achieving subjectivity through various types of physical activities. Holly Thorpe’s study on discourses of femininity in the snowboarding culture states that individuals--especially females--who embody snowboarding as a practice of freedom might transfer themselves into subjects upon achieving self-awareness, although there has always existed dominant discourse on heterosexuality and femininity through the media. In other words, subjectivity can be built by recognizing certain troubles or problems, which often conflict with existing power discourse. There is a similar perspective on achieving subjectivity seen in a study on the technology of the self in the gay marathoner culture (Bridel and Rail, 2007). According to this study, weight-control for gay marathones is shown as two kinds of body modification. First, one must go on a diet in order to produce an efficient body for races. Second, one must take care of the body to produce a beautified one as a byproduct through a balance of diet and exercise. In this context, body-modification for gay marathones can be an opportunity not only to successfully perform in races, but also to achieve an ideal body shape.

Bridel and Rail’s analysis also could be applied to my body study given that the main purpose of body-care is to produce the “thin and toned” body, which is viewed as part of a successful life. In addition, one of the significant accounts in their study is that gay marathones tend to prefer a slender body shape though exercises unlike non-gay marathones who normally want masculine bodies as an ideal body shape. They point out that the marathon, as a self-governed body practice, can be seen as a physical culture, where gay marathones can be “resistant to dominant representations of male corporeality in gay culture” (127). Markula (2004) also uses Foucault’s technology of the self as a theoretical framework through which to
examine mindful-fitness such as yoga. They observed some yoga classes and interviewed instructors and their trainees in depth to help people achieve the technology of the self. In the study, she points out that the female participants tended to do the activity for “aesthetic self-stylization” (312) rather than to maintain their bodies in a healthy condition. However, she also argues that there is a possibility of achieving subjectivity through this kind of activity, but “only if its practice was accompanied by critical awareness as a technology of the self” (318).

Foucault’s technology of the self might appear in various ways depending on how a given society has gone through its own specific social, political, historical history. In this regard, using the technology of the self as a fundamental framework of my study allows me to examine the ways in which ordinary Korean females can transfer themselves into a subject through self-body care as an embodied daily practice of freedom in their own culture. This issue will be addressed more in later chapters. The point here is that the technology of the self clearly appears within the unique Korean contexts of female body care in that it allows ordinary women to achieve some important technologies as an ethical practice, and it is regarded as a rite of passage in post-modern society.
Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of 6 chapters. In Chapter 2 to Chapter 6, I address the ways in which some significant discourse on the female body, clearly represented through two weight-loss reality TV shows, is re-conceptualized and reproduced as a female-oriented popular genre within the particular historical and social context of Korea. I also examine the possibility that the culturally embodied body-care for ordinary females could influence their becoming subjects by achieving self-fulfillment.

Chapter 2: The Female Body throughout the History of Korea

This chapter examines the ways in which female bodies are represented in the history of modern and post-modern Korea. I focus more on examining the historical background of body-care, which has been regarded as an important responsibility for ordinary Korean women, by analyzing dominant discourses on the female body generated from the unique history of the society. To do so, the South Korean history is divided into three periods, 1) Modernization, 2) Industrialization, and 3) Consumer capitalistic and neo-liberal society. Historical research allows me to critically analyze how some significant discourse has been reproduced as firmly constructed ideologies within the post-modernity period of Korea.

Chapter 3: Significant Context 1
- Americanization of the Korean Female Body and Body-Care

This chapter focuses on examining Americanization, which has played a decisive role in not only reinforcing and maintaining the ideal body type of
“slenderness,” but has also been responsible for proliferating the Westernized beauty standard since the emergence of the Modernization period. In particular, I focus more on analyzing the ideal body type for ordinary Korean females, one that has widely spread into socio-cultural spheres from political-economic ones. I also address important body discourse on obesity, which has emerged as a problematic body type in post-modern Korea. The examination of the cultural effects of Americanization leads to an inquiry into the ways in which the female obese body is regarded as “in need of repair” by juxtaposing the ideal concept of slenderness against it.

Chapter 4: Significant Context 2
- Self-Care Reality TV shows in Neo-Liberal Society

In this chapter, I examine how dominant body discourses such as slenderness, obese-phobia, and Westernized beauty are constantly reproduced through the mess media--popular dramas and movies as well as popular self-body-care reality TV shows in post-modern Korea. Moreover, I examine the ways in which these specific female- oriented genres help produce neo-liberal subjects by focusing on the significant roles of self-care reality TV shows, which have been considered as a “devoted genre” within Korean media industries.

Chapter 5: The Weight-Loss Reality TV show--Diet War and Diet Master

This chapter analyzes two Korean weight-loss reality TV shows, Diet War Season 6 and Diet Master. In particular I focus on analyzing four significant characteristics of these shows, which are reproduced within the intermingled socio-cultural contexts of Korea. Some of the characteristics tend to revolve around a stereotypical figure shown in other self-care reality TV shows such as The Biggest
Loser, Extreme Makeover, or What Not to Wear – broadcast in the U.S--but some are generated within the particular cultural contexts of Korea itself. I argue that these characteristics play a huge role in supporting the dominant ideologies of the female body as well as body-care, which have been firmly constructed as an implicit cultural norm for ordinary women.

Chapter 6. Interpretations

In this chapter, I critically interpret three significant discourses on the female body and body-care, clearly shown in two Korean weight-loss reality TV shows. These powerful discourses play a key role in situating body-care as a rite of passage for ordinary Korean women in concurrent society. I focus more on examining the ways in which particular body discourses such as normalization and absence of femininity have proliferated, and I then place the idea of female body-care as an essential responsibility in order to get one’s body in ideal shape as opposed to staying healthy. I further explore the possibility that ordinary Korean females, who have always been situated in the center of the dominant discourses, transfer themselves into subjects through self body-care. Based on Foucault’s work on the technology of the self, I examine female efficient behavior, which enables ordinary women to play with the relations of power by achieving self-fulfillment through the embodied technologies of body-care.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

This chapter briefly recapitulates arguments from all previous chapters. I conclude with a suggestion about the future study of female bodies, which I believe should be continuously approached in the field of physical cultural studies. This will
make it possible to reinforce its connections to the humanities and social sciences, as well contribute to the understanding of human movement in the natural sciences at large.
Chapter 2

The Female Body in Korea: Changing Norms and Disciplinary Strategies

“The invention of political anatomy must not be seen as a sudden discovery. It is rather a multiplicity of often minor processes, of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, support one another, distinguish themselves from one another according to their domain of application, converge and gradually produce the blueprint of a general method.”

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1995, 138

In this chapter, I focus on analyzing dominant discourses of the female body and body-care that have been appeared in the most recent period, “consumer capitalistic and neo-liberal society,” by tracing a genealogy of the Korean female body. This work is important in order to know the ways in which some dominant ideologies on the female body have been reproduced within a period of social upheaval in South Korea. In addition, this work helps to examine the cultural implication of the dominant body discourses, which are intimately intermingled within the context of neo-liberalism.

On the one hand, a new type of body, the obese body, was not even referred to in previous periods, but it has now emerged as a socially problematized issue in post-modern Korean society. The obese body--especially the female obese body--is regarded as an object that should be self-disciplined and self-controlled in accordance within the logic of consumer capitalistic and neo-liberal society. This obesity
discourse is a contemporary example of the cultural politics that have always affected female bodies in South Korea. On the other hand, the slender and skinny body is highly valued and obtaining this prized body is one of the most significant reasons for Korean females to engage in self-body care.

These two types of female bodies play a significant role in problematizing the Korean female body as a social and cultural issue, framing it as something to be managed by intimately associating it with underlying contexts of patriarchal ethics on the female body, Americanized eating habits, the mass media, and authorized institutions that suggest clear categories of normalcy and abnormal status. In this respect, the dominant discourses on the female body reinforced within Korea’s most recent historical period will be given a more in-depth examination as compared to other periods. Therefore, in this chapter, I examine the ways in which not only the traditional norms and disciplinary strategies for the Korean female body have being illuminated in a consumer capitalistic and neo-liberal society, but also how body-care has been implicitly embraced as a lifetime project for ordinary Korean women in contemporary society.

Before I examine the two opposite body types that have emerged as a social issue in Korea, I need to discuss the bio-politics of Korean female body images and the types of bodies that have been considered as normal throughout times of complicated social upheaval in Korea’s history. In particular, I briefly examine the ways in which unique historical contexts in South Korean culture have changed over time, and in so doing have affected ideals of female bodies. Exploring the complex social contexts with a historical approach offers me the opportunity to investigate the roots of dominant contemporary body ideologies that have formed and maintained throughout Korea’s distinctive history. Moreover, this historical approach provides
me with meaningful knowledge to determine significant reasons why female bodies have been oppressed. Analyzing the discourse on female body images--and the female herself--which draws from the peculiar historical contexts of South Korea, is valuable for investigating the fundamental factors behind the obsession with slenderness in contemporary South Korea culture.

To examine the female body within the unique historical context of Korea, the history is divided into three distinct periods according to significant moments that have emerged within each period: Modernization, Industrialization, and Consumer capitalistic and neo-liberal society. Shim (1999), who studies the politics of Korean female body based on Foucault’s theory of power, also divides the history into three parts: traditional society, industrial society, and risk society. These periods are based on different dominant discourses and regimes seen in each period. Please note that the boundaries between the historical periods are blurred and there is no clear division between them. Although this has been a controversial matter in the field of Korean history studies, many historians claim that the emergence of modernity in Korea began in 1876, when Korea was incorporated into international society by opening ports to trade until 1945. Contemporary society\(^\text{16}\) extends from this point until the present. I divided this larger period into two distinct periods: Industrialization and consumer capitalistic and neo-liberal society. Within the social and political upheavals of these times, Korean female body discourse took on multiple dimensions.

The historical examination for this study brought up two important questions about the type of self body-care needed to stay slender or at least maintain a non-overweight or obese body: Can we simply regard it as one of the social maladies\(^\text{16}\) according to the field of Korean history studies, the period of contemporary history started in 1945, which Korea had liberated from Japan. (Naver Encyclopedia)

\(^{16}\) According to the field of Korean history studies, the period of contemporary history started in 1945, which Korea had liberated from Japan. (Naver Encyclopedia)
caused by a patriarchal system based on traditional Confucian ideas? If not, is there any possibility that female self-care can be interpreted as a new mode of resistance that is able to overthrow ingrained body ideologies within the neo-liberal society? These two questions about Korean female body will be deliberated throughout my body study.

**The Female Body in the History of Korea**

When we assume that the body is engendered by complex social and cultural influences, studying “the past” is inevitable in order to examine the way in which dominant female body discourse has been formulated by the historical background of Korea. In order for more in-depth analysis, I have divided this history into three different periods:

1) Modernization (1876 -1945): started in the late period of Joseon Dynasty. In this period, Joseon opened the door to other countries, especially to the West.

2) Industrialization (1945 -1979): In the late 1950’s, many significant human rights movements occurred.

3) Consumer capitalistic and neo-liberal society (1980 - present): After the economic crisis of 1997, there have been major changes in the political, social, cultural spheres in Korea.

These significant moments, with their strong influence on Korean society, had a major role to play in not only contextualizing the politic of the female body, but

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17 *Joseon Dynasty* was the last dynasty in Korea, which was established by Lee, Seongkye who was the first king of *Joseon* in 1392. *Joseon* had continued for 518 years until 1910. However, *Joseon* was come to the ground on Aug 29, 1910 by the Japanese annexation of Korea. (Doopedia)
also in reinforcing dominant ideologies on the Korean female body. During Modernization, traditional Confucian ideas and the patriarchal system still functioned as the main political and social ideologies in the last period of *Joseon*. Based on these dominant ideologies, the Korean female body was represented as a passive and oppressed object. This had a powerful influence on the politics of the female body, reflected as marginalized during the Industrialization period. However, there have been new approaches to the female body as part of many feminist movements. In the context of consumer capitalism, Korean has been infused with the logic of capital-centered markets. The body is regarded as a marketable product and “self-care” is needed for citizens, especially females, to become “saleable.”

*Joseon Dynasty Modernization (1876-1945)*

Before Modernization in Korea, the female body was disconnected from the world, and the social and cultural conception of “woman” was different from the way we think of it in a postmodern society. The Confucian and traditional patriarchy were still the main political and social ideologies since Modernization in the late period of *Joseon*. These ideologies had a major role in establishing hierarchies between men and women. Under those powerful social ideologies in the late *Joseon* period, the female body was represented in three ways. 1) the productive body for childbearing and mothering; 2) the chaste body for men, in particular the husband; and 3) the laboring body for physical work in the home.

In traditional Confucian society, the most important role of the female body was to “have a son” in order to perpetuate the family. “Female bodies could be ethically evaluated by their fecundity” (Go, 2004, 99). A son has to be the family heir in Confucian society. However, if a married woman could not give birth to a son, or
sons the next time, her body as a “woman” would be alienated since it could not do its major “job.” With the Confucian culture, reproductive ability was the most important factor in being an ideal body. The appearance of an ideal female body was also understood within this context.

Wi gong’s five daughters are good but Ka gong’s five daughters are not good. The Wi families are intelligent and his daughters have many children. Also, they are beautiful, thin, and have bright skin color. On the other hand, the Ka’s families are jealous a lot and his daughters don’t have many children. Also, they are ugly, short, and have dark skin color. (As cited in Shim, 1999).

As Shim (1999) argues, the female body without reproductive ability had been regarded as a “valueless” or “obsolete.” Moreover, the female body had fulfilled a social value by reproducing for family and society. Even though a woman’s body became obsolete, it still had a use as mother of the family. Her job became more important if she was the first wife (Jo-Kang-Ji-Cheo). For example, even if her body did not function as a productive female body, a woman was still required to perform as a mother in the case where the family adopts a son from one of the brothers as an heir, when the husband gets a concubine (Cheop) (s) for a son, or the mother-in-law brings in a surrogate (Ssi-Butt-i) for the family line. According to patriarchal

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18 The first wife in traditional Confucian society was not just a wife but the family’s mother. Even if her husband had an affair or even multiple affairs, she was required to play a role as the mother of the family. Her sexuality, however, was ignored.

19 In traditional Confucian society, men could have concubines if they wanted. However, if the concubine gave birth to a son, the child could not be the heir of the family unless the first wife adopted him.

20 The Ssi-Butt-i is slightly different from what we call a “surrogate mother” today. The origin of the word is interesting. Ssi-Butt-i is a compound of Ssi and Butt-i. Ssi refers to the seed of plants and also refers to sperm in Korea. Butt-i is a noun whose meaning is “taker”. Most Ssi-Butt-i’s were servants or those from the lower class. She would spend time with the man
ideology, the female body is just for “productivity” under this socially and culturally coercive society. If she was not able to do her “job”, her body was completely alienated and objectified not only from her family, but also from the community to which she belonged. In addition, the female body was regarded as an object and “the other” by having an important role as first wife, provider of sexual pleasure for men, mother, and laborer within the family.

In Confucian patriarchal society, chastity for Korean females was as important as the ability to reproduce. The idea of chastity had played a key role in disciplining female bodies by repressing their sexuality. Here, the concept of chastity refers to “physical” fidelity rather than an emotional one; and a particular code of conduct for women under Confucianism had necessitated continuous surveying of female behavior. ‘Eun-Jang-Do’, one of the classical examples of the ethics of chastity, is a little silver knife that many females in Joseon carried in their pockets. The purpose was to allow them to die by their own hand if they were raped or exhibited sexually inappropriate behaviors rather than to defend themselves from danger. Another example of the ethics of chastity is ‘Yeol-Nye-Bi’, which is a monument to faithfulness to one’s husband. In other words, there would be a monument in the community after the wife died if she paid her respects to the soul of her dead husband and took care of her parents-in-law and other households with her whole heart during her entire lifetime. As seen in these two examples of ethical conduct for females, the idea of chastity in Confucian patriarchal society had a significant role in continuously controlling and disciplining female bodies by repressing their sexuality (Shim, 1999).

who needed an heir for his family through pregnancy. When a Ssi-Butt-I gave birth to a son, the child would be adopted by the first wife in the family.
As a result, the female body had not been considered as a separate entity from the family in Confucian discourse of Joseon, but had only been imbued with the value of reproductivity (Shim, 1999) and the ability of laboring in the home. With these functions of the female body in Joseon, women had been divested of their subjectivity and had continuously reproduced the power relationship of patriarchy through the ethics of conduct for the female body.

*Industrialization (1945-1979)*

Industrialization in Korea was triggered in earnest by the third republic\textsuperscript{21}. Since this time, Korea has rapidly become sophisticated in the industrial sphere. In 1963, when Industrialization was gaining momentum, Korea was still one of the poorer countries of the world. The growing agriculture and fishing industries made up 63.1% of Korea’s economy, while secondary industries of mining and manufacturing constituted only 8.7%. Meanwhile, the Park Jeonghee government began financially supporting industries related to advanced technologies, such as cars, electronics, and oil production, while they took away support from industries such as textiles, sewing, shoe production, etc. As a result, the rate of growth for the secondary industries increased to 23.7% in 1979 from 14.3% in 1970\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{21} The third republic is a government established by Park, Jeonghee who was a captain in the Korea military in the 1950’s-1960’s and he served as 5\textsuperscript{th}, 6\textsuperscript{th}, 7\textsuperscript{th}, 8\textsuperscript{th}, and 9\textsuperscript{th} president of Korea. Park, Jeonghee, became a president in the democratic republic by giving rise to a military *coup d’état* on May 16, 1961. He is the person who carried forward the growth of the economy in Korea. In a positive way, he has been evaluated as a phenomenal leader, but in a negative way, he is seen as a dictator who had suppressed the movement of democracy. (한국민족문화대백과)

\textsuperscript{22} With extremely drastic industrialization in Korea between the 1970’s-1980’s, GDP in Korea has increased to 32,049 billion in 1979, 158,620 billion in 1989, 506,314 billion, in 1997 which means the GDP has increased 16 times for 18 years. (Statistics Korea)
With the rapid development of Industrialization and the formation of the ideology of Modernization -“indolence is the parents of poverty”-, many young females moved to big cities from rural communities to get factory jobs. In accordance with the rapid growth of manufacturing, the number of female workers in these businesses increased up to 40% between the late 1970’s and the early 1980’s. Within this political and economic phenomenon, most young females worked in factories as they had a responsibility to financially support their families who lived in poverty (Lee, 2003). Even though, a family might struggle, any male children would be educated to become heirs, while female children were excluded from education and were required to work at home. There was only a very small minority of females born into wealthy families, but being educated was regarded as a “waste of money” or “too luxurious”, and “illiteracy is regarded as a virtue of women”23. Based on this social context, there were negative social perceptions about educated females, and the resistance to them was attributed to the ideology of patriarchy, which still had been functioning in the period of Industrialization in Korea. In other words, for a Korean woman, getting an education was a behavior that deviated from traditional gender norms. Even so, most young female factory workers had been represented as experiencing “an unhappy life” under the idea of patriarchy.

According to Lee’s (2003) analysis of the autobiographies of female workers in the early 1980’s, at the end of industrialization in South Korea, the female body--in

23 The saying “illiteracy is regarded as a virtue of women” denoted that educating daughters would have a bad influence on families. There are more interesting proverbs related to this patriarchal ideology: “It goes ill with the house where the hens sings and the cock is silent”, “There is a god bless, when women cannot count the number of the bowls in the house”, and “Three generations of the house will be go out of business, if women raise their voices out of the gate”. These saying are apparent examples of the dominant discourse on the female body and its sexuality that was continuously spawned by the ideas of Confucianism and patriarchy.
spite of the entry of many women into society--was still disciplined to reproduce as a “docile body” according to the concept of “familism” within the workplace: factories or offices. “The chief of the factory could gain the perfect trust from female workers by emphasizing a ‘familial atmosphere’. Consequently, the atmosphere of ‘treating them as a member of the family’ could be the main strategy for factories in order to raise labor productivity (163).” The familial atmosphere in the factory was naturally connected to the ideology of labor exploitation and it played a powerful role in efficiently disciplining the female body. Lee has illustrated three main apparatuses for suppressing female workers in the period of Industrialization: mechanization of the body, internalization of discipline, and systematic hierarchy. Interesting examples from what she excerpted from the female factory workers’ autobiographies include “toddler training”, “training competitions”, and “hierarchical uniforms”. Toddler training and training competitions were powerful tools used to maximize the efficiency of labor and had a key role in producing the laboring body by enabling female workers to accurately and promptly react to machines and equipment. Nevertheless, the female workers needed to remain in these factories for long periods of time. They also felt guilty when they had physiological needs such as going to the restroom or having menstrual pains while working. This kind of atmosphere played a powerful role in internalizing “discipline” into the female body (169-170).

Since the emergence of Industrialization, a large proportion of females have had jobs outside the home; yet the female body and its roles have been limited by the idea of traditional gender norms within the culture of Confucianism. In other words,

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24 Lee (2003) has excerpted the example of “toddler training” from Seok, Jeongnam’s autobiography. Seok was an employee in a textile factory. According to her, this refers to walking 140 steps in 1 minute. This training was one of the important skills among female workers working in textile factories at the time in that they had to swiftly, but accurately, take care of all the machines without any mistakes (169).
the female body had been alienated from the family and also disciplined within the
dominant discourse on the nature of a docile body. In sum, the Korean female body
was no longer staying at home, but it was still represented as a passive agent with an
absence of subjectivity by forcing the worker to be productive as a mechanic in the
factories. This process of internalized discipline, which appeared during the rapid
economic development did fade; and yet, the disciplined female body still represents
the preferred productive or a docile body in post-modern society.

*Consumer Capitalistic and Neo-Liberal Society (1980 -present)*

Thanks to enormous economical development during the period of
Industrialization, average Koreans were able to lead lives of material well-being. As
the market economy became more and more established, mass production and
consumption of foods rapidly increased. In addition, rapid proliferation of American
fast-food restaurants in the 1980s contributed to the sharp rise of obesity. It has since
become a serious social problem that needs to be repaired.

According to the logic of consumer capitalism, human bodies are regarded as
“products”, a view that plays a decisive role in reinforcing the idea of body-care.
Analyzing slenderness and obesity, which rarely existed in previous periods of Korea,
allows me not only to trace why ordinary Korean women are so obsessed with their
bodies, but also to explore the ways in which they internalize the dominant idea of
slenderness. The obesity discourse that permeates concurrent Korean society has a
strong influence on justifying the slenderness discourse. It does so by defining clear
boundaries for both normal and abnormal body types, which are often suggested by
authorized health institutions or the government.
- The female body as a valuable product

With the emergence of a consumer capitalistic society, modern Koreans have had a life of abundance and have also experienced a culture of consumption. Moreover, Neo-liberal policy\(^\text{25}\), which has started to control politics, the economy, and society at large, has created body politics by reinforcing ideas and ideologies such as individualism, materialism, and appearance-priority during a time when the Korean government has suffered the worst economic crisis since 1997. Within this complicated social context, the concept of the female body tends to produce significant discourse on the body as a “subjectivity” or “resistant body” (Byun, 2001; and, Park, 2004). However, the majority of female body discourse has yet to capture the dominant ideologies and discussions in the community on reproducing docile bodies that are produced through Confucianism, patriarchal systems, and the commercialization of the body through the power of capitalism (Baek and Shon, 2002; Cho and Lee, 2012; Chung and Kwon, 2007; Lee, Y., 2006; Lim, 2002, 2004; Park, J., 2009; and, Shim, 1999). In particular, the human body tends to be construed within the logic of a capitalistic economic system. Moreover, the dominant ideologies on the female body that are constantly reinforced by major socio-cultural factors such as prioritizing appearance and the powerful effects of the mass media, play a strong role in setting the standards by which the value of the female body is determined.

According to the Korean scholars mentioned above, there are two major factors that have a powerful role in firmly shaping the dominant discourse on the female body in a consumer capitalistic society: the importance of external appearance

\(^{25}\) Since the emergence of democratization in the early 1990’s, Korea had already started to accept the idea of Neo-liberalism, and the government had also started to open markets to foreign investors, tried to hand public business over to private ones, and become a member of WTO and OECD, to name a few. After the IMF crisis, which occurred in 1997, Neo-liberalism has become a stable part of Korean society at large.
and the huge effect of mass media. In Korea, people say, “if she is good-looking, she could change her husband’s salary.” This saying implies that the prettier a woman is, the easier it would be for her to marry a man with a high salary. It does not make grammatical sense, but most Koreans tend to take this discourse on good-looking females for granted. External appearance for females functions as a powerful and fundamental influence, not only in choosing a partner, but also in getting a job. Moreover, the mass media has played a powerful role in supporting and spreading the dominant female appearance obsession by proliferating “slender images”. In this context, the normal size of Korean females has shifted from size 66 to size 55 and even size 4426, and it is increasingly harder to find size 66 in female clothing shops. An interesting example of the unrealistic size of Korean female bodies has appeared on the Internet by comparing standard body weights with the aesthetic weights of females based on the scientific scale BMI (Body Mass Index). For example, if your height is 160cm (5.25ft), your weight based on the BMI would be 56.3kg (124lb); but if you want to being seen as slender, your “aesthetic weight” should be under 47.4kg (104lb). The information in this table is viewed as credible and has been broadly accepted by ordinary Koreans. This term “aesthetic weight” is used in Korea, as well as Japan. The original source of the term and when it began spreading through these countries is unknown. However, today it is readily accessible to anyone who does a quick Internet search.

Sharing this kind of comparison on the Internet can be seen as an obvious phenomenon showing that unrealistic weight has become more plausible and is even

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26 Since Slenderness has become an important body project among Korean females, clothing markets have changed their focus from normal size to petite size. According to the official table of clothing size, size 66 converts to a size 4-6, or small, and size 44 converts to size 0-2, or extra small in the U.S. However, size 55 now converts to the U.S. small/size 0-2 categories in clothing markets in Korea.
considered to be abnormal weight based on the BMI. “Normal categories” are no longer accepted among Korean females in contemporary society.

Another interesting phenomenon related to slenderness is that G Market\(^27\), one of the biggest online shopping malls in Korea, has recently launched a petite size section for females due to the rising demand for “micro sizes” such as 33 and 44 (Focus News, 2013). The number of females who wear size 33-44 has risen so drastically that their appearance is becoming the new “normal”. Since the introduction of micro size clothing, production has only increased. Meanwhile clothing for size 66 is now regarded as “too big” by Korean women. For example, if a 66 sized woman tries to purchase pants or t-shirts for herself at a non-brand name shop\(^28\), she would most likely need to buy clothes labeled as large or even x-large. This shift in how clothing sizes in Korea are labeled has also created a shift in the social atmosphere. Korean women who wear size 66 are now regarded as having a body that is too large, and the pressure to implement body care, which was once reserved for individuals who are obese, now falls on these normal women as well.

Lim (2004) points out that the social climate in Korea should be understood as a means to induce females to undertake autonomous self-body care. She also argues that the slender project among Korean females can be understood in the same context as wearing a corset in the old West or being subjected to foot-binding in old China. These contexts have played a powerful role in promulgating the idea of

\(^{27}\) G Market is the biggest shopping mall website in Korea established in 1999. The website was acquired by eBay for the USD equivalent of approximately $1.2 billion.

\(^{28}\) Non-brand-name clothing shop refers to shops that produce their own clothing or sell counterfeit products. These shops are popular because young women in Korea can get fashionable clothing at a cheap price.
patriarchy in order to justify gender inequalities based on physical differences between men and women.

In sum, the abnormally thin body, continually promoted through powerful discourse on looking good, has not been represented as a “dream body” seen on TV and in magazines but as a “normal body” we can see everywhere. In this context, the slender body project has been perceived as an important not to be ignored duty among Korean females. Therefore, females who are outside of the normal category should try to be in it, and females who are already in the normal category should constantly try to maintain their status because “the normal body” is able to turn to a capital or a power in the appearance-priority society.

The media has a strong influence on forming current body discourse and related ideologies of the female body. One of the main functions of the mass media is “commercialization”. This characteristic of the media is a powerful cultural mechanism among Korean females to make their bodies “marketable.” Baek and Shon (2002) argue that the contemporary female body in Korea has been regarded as an object, still requiring self-discipline and self-care. Accordingly, the discourse on the Korean female body ought to be intimately interconnected with the practice of a diet. The slender body, produced through a diet as instigated by the media, is also represented as a saleable body in the consumer capitalistic society. As illustrated in feminist studies on the mass media (Bordo, 2003; Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert, 2007; Sender and Sullivan, 2008), it has a huge influence on producing and reinforcing the ideal type of female body. One striking example is the Barbie doll, which has been criticized in the past as depicting an unrealistic body image. There is no question that the media plays a key role in manipulating the idea of the ideal body type, and in increasing the value of slenderness and skinniness in society by implicitly labeling
slender bodies as those that everyone wants, but cannot have.

In addition, the marketable body, obtained through the practice of a diet, is seen in accordance with social purposes. Lee (2006) points out that “the concurrent slender body project” has reinforced the discourse on “capitalized body” and “gendered body” situated between the ideas of traditional patriarchy and capital power as espoused through the media. Chung and Kwon’s (2007) account of the consumer capitalistic body in an era of mass media states that the body has emerged as a powerful and fascinating commodity in consumer society; thus, taking care of the body becomes a “project” for everyone. He also argues that the ideal body in the mass media, namely “the body that is based on capitalistic investment” (573), leads to a confusion of individual identity and body image. In Lim’s (2004) analysis of the socio-cultural environment of dieting among Korean female college students, she agrees with accounts on the powerful role of the media in an appearance-priority society that reinforces and spreads discourse. However, she also argues that the main purpose of going on a diet is not to become a “marketable” body but to keep away discrimination based on appearance\(^\text{29}\) by getting one’s body into the normal category.

In summary, the main factor that has constantly reproduced the dominant female body discourse in a consumer capitalistic society is the appearance-priority atmosphere, which plays a powerful role in proliferating the preferred concepts of slenderness and thinness. This characteristic not only has reinforced the idea of the disciplined and docile female body based on traditional patriarchal ideology, but also has encouraged the view of a marketable body by proliferating the notion of the “body

\(^{29}\) Obese women are often targets of appearance-discrimination. For example, they may experience disadvantages when they try to get a job, or they are not treated as a ‘lady’, because obese female bodies are often juxtaposed with the absence of femininity.
as a capital or as a power” in the prevalent consumer context.

- Obesity: the problematic body

Many countries, including South Korea and the U.S, have declared a “war on obesity” ever since it emerged as an important social issue that needs to be addressed. According to recent OECD health data\textsuperscript{30} (2014), the U.S has the highest obesity rate in the world (the total obesity rate is 28.1%, while the female obesity rate is 36.3%). For this reason, numerous projects run by the government target not only obesity prevention, but also attempt to assist those who are already obese, regardless of age, gender, and race (e.g. the health campaign “Let’s Move\textsuperscript{31}”\textregistered(letsmove.gov). There has been much global research done on obesity in the field of medicine, sports, and public health; and various TV shows and the media highlight obesity as a main theme. Ironically, in contrast to the U.S, South Korea has one of the lowest obesity rates in the world, with a total rate of 2.0% and a female rate of 4.7%. Nonetheless, there has been much research\textsuperscript{32}(KISS) done in various academic fields as well as many projects proposed at the national level with the aim of preventing obesity. -e.g. “We2\textsuperscript{33}” and “We2 Kids” (Ministry of Health and Welfare) -. When I searched with the keyword

\textsuperscript{30} Data is based on the Body Mass Index (BMI) and the percentage of the total population that is larger than 30kg per square meter.

\textsuperscript{31} “Let’s Move “ is a health campaign designed by the U.S government to reduce childhood obesity. Michelle Obama, the first lady, is the leader of this national project.

\textsuperscript{32} According to Korean Studies Information Service System (KISS) and the National Assembly Library of Korea, an obesity-related study has reached 4,570 cases in KISS and 9,410 cases in the National Library.

\textsuperscript{33} “We2” (Well-Eating and Well-Exercising) is a recent health campaign designed by the Korean government to help support a healthy lifestyle and to prevent obesity. “We2 Kids” is the Korean version of Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move” campaign.
“obesity” on the KINDS\textsuperscript{34} website (KINDS), I found related news, articles and information that reached 281,013 cases. As a result, there is no doubt that obesity is considered to be one of the major social and cultural issues in Korea, irrespective of the official range rate of obesity.

Since the emergence of obesity as a social problem, Americanized-eating habits among Koreans have been a controversial issue. In particular, fast food such as hamburgers, pizza, and fried chicken, most of which have come from America, are widely known as the significant causes for obesity. In the social atmosphere of Korea, people have tended to avoid fast foods for health reasons. Nevertheless, fast food is still very popular among the younger generations due to the cheap prices, fast service, convenience, and addictive flavors (Chang and Oh, 2013; and, Lee, 2009). The first fast food franchise, \textit{Lotteria}\textsuperscript{35}, opened in Seoul in 1979; however, fast food has spread in earnest. In 1984, American food chains started opening in Korea (Kim, 2005). \textit{Burger King} and \textit{KFC} were imported in 1984, \textit{Pizza Hut} in 1985, and the first \textit{McDonald’s} in \textit{Ap-Gu-Jeong-Dong} in Seoul (one of the most hot places for younger generations) in 1988. Since then, \textit{Dunkin Donuts} opened their first chain in \textit{I-Tae-Won-Dong}, Seoul (which people call “petite America in Korea”) in 1994 and \textit{Popeye’s} also opened their first store in the same year as Dunkin Donuts. “These fast foods have started providing Koreans with ‘the flavor of America’ since 1984” (Kim, 2005, 178). The flavors or tastes of America are unhealthy, but addictive, and have become immensely popular, especially among young children and youth. American

\textsuperscript{34} KINDS (Korean Integrated News Database System) is the biggest news search engine website established by the Korea Press Foundation in 1991.

\textsuperscript{35} Lotteria is one chain of Korean fast food. Also, it was the first company that introduced the Westernized eating out business in Korea in 1979. There are over 1000 Lotteria chains in Korea and 100 in Vietnam. They have continued expanding their chains into other countries such as China and Indonesia (Lotteria official website).
food franchises have tended to open their stores in Seoul, the capital and largest city in South Korea, but they have also started opening their chains in other cities as well. Kim also argues, “Landing Coca-Cola, which represent the American culture is one of the obvious examples of the routine of American life and the essence of consumer culture of America” (170). Actually, Coca-Cola emerged before other American foods appeared in Korea. People were able to get it at the PX in the Eight U.S Army or on the black market before the drink was officially produced by Coca-Cola Korea in 1968. Getting a Coke had not been easy for everyone; but after mass production in 1968, people were able to continue enjoying (and becoming addicted to) the “American Flavor” that most had never experienced before. The mass production of Coke, starting in 1968, and a number of fast food chains appearing since 1984 came as a new, refreshing wave of culture to people who had experienced the Korean War and Industrialization at the same time.

After the radical Industrialization of the 1960s and 1970s, a consumer capitalistic lifestyle had settled within society in the 1980s, such that consuming behavior among ordinary people was about to change. Before the American fast food chains became so popular in daily lives, restaurants used to be a place where people went on a special day, such as a birthday, for a family gathering. The colorful and pleasant atmosphere in American fast food restaurants has become attractive to ordinary people whose consuming behavior has been changed along with rising income (Kim, 2005). In particular, eating fast food has become a part of the daily lives of young people. Older generations come and enjoy foods they have never tasted in an inviting atmosphere on a special day; however, younger generations do not go to fast food chains because of new tastes and a fancy atmosphere. According to a survey on usage of fast food chains--McDonald’s, Burger King, KFC, Popeye’s, and
Lotteria—conducted in 2011 by Macromillembrain Co., one of the biggest research and survey agencies in Korea, the most significant reasons to visit these chains are convenience and location near where people live or work to save time.

Research has begun to investigate the negative effects of Americanized food culture, such as fast food, as one of the major reason for the rise of obesity during the last few decades. It has been widely spread through the mass media such that consuming fast foods has tended to decrease due to “obese-phobia.” Korean obesity rates are the lowest in the world (Macromillembrain, 2011). However, eating fast food has become a daily lifestyle practice among young people because of the advantages of easy accessibility, cheap prices, and economy of time. In this context, the wide spread of Americanized eating has played a significant role not only in increasing the obese population among young Koreans, but also in producing dominant fatness discourse. Moreover, obesity discourse has powerfully influenced and reinforced the dominant idea of self-care among ordinary people, whether they are obese or not, in concurrent society where aesthetic value is regarded as an important social norm.

There must be significant reasons behind the growth of the obese population in the world. Guthman (2009) has pointed out the main causes of the “obesity epidemic” from a socio-political perspective. According to him, there are four variations that have contributed to the increasing rate of obesity: 1) the development of agricultural technologies. (A majority of grains such as corn, wheat, and potatoes have been supplied in large numbers due to a highly improved agriculture system. Therefore, calorie intake has continuously increased.); 2) the impact of the “regulatory environment” (188) on foods and the insufficiency of nutritional information. (People eat more than before, but lack guidance in finding healthy foods and better nutrition.);
3) the emergence of highly processed foods that allow large companies to maintain high profits. (Promotions such as “value meal”, “super-sizing”, and “buy one get one free” make people purchase and eat more.); lastly, 4) “the broader material landscape of food provision and urban development” (189). With the expansion of urban areas, people—especially the lower classes—not only have easier access to “junk food” but they also succumb to impulse purchase stimuli. Guthman’s four variations on the growth of obesity have been analyzed in the context of the economic and social environment of the U.S. Nevertheless, his analysis can be used to examine the growth of obesity in Korea in that political, economic, and social processes have been on a similar trajectory as the U.S.

The other significant reason for an upswing in obesity is “Americanized eating behavior” among Koreans. A massive influx of various kinds of foods from Western countries, especially the U.S., has played a key role in the rapid growth of obesity regardless of gender or age (Cho and Kang, 2004; Han and Joo, 2005; and, Kim and Lee, 2012). Kim and Choi (2012) also analyze the significant factors of the growth of obesity among Koreans from an economic perspective.

The results of many obese-related studies done in Korea are very similar to what Guthman illustrates in his study as they are based on economic obesity conditions in the U.S. They also point out that important variations in obesity growth among Koreans come from a high-calorie intake resulting from the mass provision of food and the advent of fast food. However, there are other interesting findings in the study, including “time preference” and “self-control”. According to researchers, time preference is a term in economics that explains savings and investing. It refers to the inclination of a consumer towards current consumption—expenditure—over future consumption, or vice versa. In other words, a high rate of time preference means that
an individual tends to invest more value in the future than the past and present. Based on this definition, an individual who has a low rate of time preference can be regarded as a one who has the ability to be self-regulative. For example, if a person does not take care of his or her health and keeps increasing food intake, this person is likely to become obese in the future. On the other hand, if a person has a low rate of time preference and keeps controlling her or his weight through exercising and a reduction of food intake, the person would be able to avoid becoming fat (Kim and Choi, 2012, 325). Self-control, regarded as one of the most useful skills for self-care in the history of mankind, is significant for my body study in that the concept applies not only to an analysis of female body discourse in philosophical and ethical practices, but also to the examination of the dominant discourse in economic practice.

As mentioned in the first part of this chapter, the obesity rate for Korean females is the lowest in the world. According to the national health statistics from 2011, conducted by the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there has been a slight increase in the rate of obesity for the total population and for males; however, the obesity rate for Korean females has hardly increased over the last 10 years (Figure 1). Nonetheless, obesity has been regarded as a major social and cultural knot to untangle by medical and scientific narratives that proliferate “obese-phobia” discourse in society. As a result, these narratives have played a decisive role in spreading the dominant ideology of the female body image (Murray, 2008).
Due to the proliferation of slenderness as an ideal in a society where appearance is considered as one of the most important attributes, people who are not in the obese category (such as people who are overweight, of normal weight, or even underweight) tend to think they are nevertheless obese (Lee, 2005). Within this social and cultural environment, there is more evidence that has contributed to spreading “obese-phobia” throughout society--BMI. What is interesting is that there is a global standard on “how to measure BMI” (Figure 2) simply using height and weight. However, the obesity category is different by country. For example, Americans whose BMI (Figure 2) is over 30 are regarded as obese, but Koreans are regarded as such when their BMIs reach over 25. Also, a BMI over 24.9 is categorized as normal weight in the U.S, but over 23 is categorized as overweight in Korea. In other words, Americans in the normal category based on BMI might be in the overweight category in Korea. Conversely, a number of obese Koreans might not be categorized as such in the U.S. In this context, weight category differentiation by BMI in various countries has also played a key role in proliferating obese-phobia by visually showing the scientific objective evidence. Therefore, according to this strict weight standard, many Koreans who are not obese tend to think they are.

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Figure 1. Trends of obesity in Korea by year (Ministry of Health Welfare Statistics DB)
As shown in the trend toward obesity in Korea, the rate for Korean females has barely increased during the past ten years. Nonetheless, the female body has been situated in the center of obesity discourse not only as a medical issue, but also as a socially and culturally problematized issue. There have been a number of research studies on the factors that cause (female) obesity in the fields of medicine and health over the last few decades; however, I have yet to find a study focusing on the socio-cultural view of the Korean female obese body. In this respect, Farrell’s (2009) socio-historical perspective on representations of the obese female body were useful for my study to help examine socially widespread discourse on large Korean females.

Farrell analyzes images of “fat women” on tourist postcards in early 20th century U.S. culture. She argues that the degradation of large females is inherited from philosophical mind-body dualism. Based on this concept, women were long regarded as inferior subjects, “not sufficiently developed to control their bodies. Fatness posed a
bigger transgression for women than for men, however, because women were expected
to maintain a line of civilized control” (257-258). Within this historical context, Farrell
provides two significant ways in which images of large females were represented as an
object of mockery in the early 20th century. First, physical characteristics of large
women—for example, a big butt and a full bust—were exaggerated on the postcards. As
a result, the large female body tends to be often regarded as a sexual object for men’s
pleasure. Second, large females become objects of abhorrence among so-called
“normal” men because their bodies are regarded as a “sign of primitive, out-of-control
impulses” (260). “If the men are civilized, are middle class, are white, then they
shouldn't” (260). On the postcards, however, plump women were often portrayed as
objects of romance among whom are also the “poor, working class, or silly (the
comically small or thin)” (259). Ferrell also finds similar evidence of negative images
of plump females in the medical and popular literature of the late 19th and early 20th
centuries. In this culture, this kind of abnormal relationship has produced the dominant
view that normal men can have romantic relationships with large women; however, if
they are sophisticated people but are dating large women, they would be mocked in
public. This prevalent ideology on the image of large females has played a key role in
spreading not only a derogatory view for large women among many men, but also a
preference for thinness and the idea that this makes the female body appealing to men.
The ideal of a slender body for women has been constantly produced and proliferated
as the civilized and superior body in the 21st century. Within this complicated
historical and social context, the female body—especially in regard to fatness—needs to
be disciplined and controlled; and it is “men’s responsibility to discipline fat women
and their overabundant sexuality” (261).

During the last a few decades, obesity has grown into one of the major social
issues in the world, and there are many national studies and campaigns on obesity prevention. A considerable amount of body-related research has already been done in the areas of health care and public health, in which obesity is viewed as a disease that needs to be cured because it to other serious disease like diabetes, hypertension, and cardiac disorders. Based on the medical definition of obesity, the World Health Organization (WHO) has created a visible classification of the human body by categorizing them according to their weight as related to their appropriated heights. This medical-centered view of obesity and body classification has also led to not only viewing the obese body as continuously in a problematic state within various socio-cultural contexts, but also to reinforcing the idea of self-care as a personal duty. Thus, there is need to examine why the obese body matters in a neo-liberal context. In this regard, interesting evidence includes a definition of obesity by the WTO, one of the powerful authorized institutions on public health and body care. According to the fact sheet 311 of WTO (2013), obesity and overweight are defined as an “abnormal and excessive fat accumulation that may impair health.” In other words, the definition, based on scientific criteria (BMI), classifies the obese and overweight body as having an “abnormal status”. This definition is significantly related to the neo-liberal idea that government interventions have shifted to indirect and invisible from direct and physical. In other words, the more the role of government is minimized, the more individuals need to take responsibility for their own status. In this context, obesity, which had been considered as a social and political issue, has been transferred into a personal issue in Neo-liberal society. Nevertheless, public institutions--some government-related health departments and the WTO--still provide society with information on diagnosis and guidance on obesity prevention in order to address the issue.
As a result, obese individuals are socially and technically categorized as abnormal in society. Also, following the logic of neo-liberalism, obese individuals try to move into the normal category by taking care of their body issue themselves as part of their accountability. Rail (2012) regards neo-liberal society as a place where the “bio-political project” (229) is operated based on dominant obesity discourse, which has been produced through the powerful knowledge of medical science, public health, and mass media. She also calls the place, “obesity clinic” (229), and argues that the obese body in this clinic is regarded as a failed body in terms of one’s obligation. In this regard, “the obesity clinic appears to safeguard the proper treatment of autonomous persons, offering then the tools for self-surveillance and self-regulation so that they can become entrepreneurial managers in the development and maintenance of their thinness and health” (243). Rail’s insight on the obesity clinic as a neo-liberalized place draws my attention since it plays a huge role in dividing and defining the categories of normal (slender and skinny) and abnormal (overweight and obesity). Moreover, Murray (2008) agrees that the “medicalization of fatness”, developed and proliferated through powerful institutions, plays a major role in delivering neo-liberal ideas, such as that fatness can be cured if one has the volition to take care of it.

The mass media also play a powerful role in spreading the dominant discourse on obesity, which is produced in the obesity clinic. Obesity discourse, which defines it as a serious “disease” through the power of knowledge, has rapidly spread through the media within the concurrent society (Murray, 2008). Therefore, the circulation of obesity discourse in Korean society has reinforced concerns and anxieties toward “normalization and normative appearance” (7). As Rail and Murray
argue, obese individuals can become healthy and acquire a good body shape if one wants the help of useful information provided and spread by the government, powerful institutions, and the media. Within this neo-liberal context, everyone can turn their problematic body into a “normal” body; furthermore, they can become a “good citizen” in society. Nam and Goh (2011) also agree with Rail and Murray’s accounts of the significant role of powerful institutions and the media--specifically related to body care, health, and obesity--in that they play a huge role in spreading the neo-liberal idea that obesity needs to be taken care of as a personal issue. Consequently, the abnormal body--obesity--has emerged as a major social issue, but it has also turned into a personal problem within the neo-liberal society. Obesity discourse, spreading through various paths in Korea, has played a powerful role in creating and producing the “neo-liberal subject” capable of self-care, control, and discipline of her/his abnormal body.

Korea has the lowest obesity rate among OECD member nations. Nevertheless, many Koreans, especially women, tend to fit their bodies into the dominant discourse on obesity, as produced and circulated by power groups. Furthermore, obesity discourse, created and developed within the logic of neo-liberalism, has had a significant influence on Korean women who are not obese and overweight by making them aware of their bodies as “being fat.” It indirectly forces them to care for their bodies themselves as a lifetime project. In other words, the female body is regarded as “constantly in need of care” to fulfill the self-body care project in accordance with the logic of neoliberalism, in which individual freedom of choice and personal accountability are considered as key factors in becoming a good citizen in concurrent society.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined dominant discourses on the female body that have appeared throughout the unique history of Korea within three specific historical periods: Modernization, Industrialization, and Consumer Capitalistic and Neo-liberal Society. In particular, I focus more on examining how problematic bodies (obese and slender body) have been represented as a cultural issue in consumer capitalistic society. By tracing the historical trajectory of Korean female body, I found within what social contexts the norms of traditional Confucian ideologies on female body have been maintained and have even helped to create new cultural body discourse such as obesity and slenderness.

In the period of Modernization, the productivity of childbearing is regarded as the most important role for the Korean female body. If a woman cannot give birth to a child for the family, her body is deemed unproductive, useless, and valueless. Second, chastity should be maintained at all cost, regardless of the situation. These beliefs operated as an efficient way to discipline the Korean female body in order to comply with the traditional values of Confucianism. Finally, the ability to labor was another vital ethical value for the Korean female body according to traditional Confucianism.

Before and during the period of Modernization, these three ideas formed ethics of conduct in the society and led to the oppression and marginalization of non-conforming female bodies by families and entire communities. During the period of Industrialization, the female body became seemingly free of the traditional paradigm, since many young females moved to big cities to work in factories. However, as the female body was forced into the workplace to financially help the family, it
experienced new ways of being disciplined. The focus then shifted to promoting labor productivity. Consequently, the internalized processes of disciplinary that operated within the workplace produced a female body that conformed to the practice of labor ethics in the period of Industrialization.

Since the emergence of the current consumer capitalistic society, the human body--especially the female body--tends to be regarded as a product. It might be an inevitable result of the logic of capitalism. Upon this socially constructed backdrop, dominant discourses on the female body, such as slenderness and skinniness produced by the mass media, also play a decisive role in implicitly, but noticeably, conveying the idea of body-care an efficient way for Korean females to make their bodies ‘marketable’. Moreover, as the female body has become powerful “capital” within the consumer society, the obese body has emerged as a problematized social issue. The idea of this problematic body is intermingled with the context of mass-produced foods, Americanized eating habits, and authorized scientific standard on the body, the indubitable need for body-care. Therefore, obesity has become as a personal issue in neo-liberal society, firmly rooted in the logic of consumer capitalism, and one that has shifted the problematic body label onto bodies previously viewed as normal by society.

Through the analysis of the female body, represented within the unique historical contexts of Korea in this chapter, I can examine the ways in which the significant dominant body discourses of slenderness and obese-phobia have been reformulated and reinforced as a controversial issue that dominates the culture of female body. Furthermore, this history-based evidence will serve as the foundation for the in-depth examination of the weight-loss reality TV shows that play a powerful role in re-illuminating the idea of self body-care in Korea.
Chapter 3

Americanization: Emergence of the New Trend on the Female Body

“After opening ports in the late 19th centuries, people of Cho-Sun society started admiring Western people and civilization, as they see Western people’s bodies, or as they encounter Western cultures through movies, newspapers, books, and other media”

Young-A Lee, 예쁜여자 만들기, 2011, 213

In this chapter, I examine the cultural influence of Americanization on the Korean female body, sexuality, and identity. Such an analysis is important for my study since the huge influx of American culture can be considered as one of the key factors that helps to switch the social atmosphere of Korea women from objects, which were often disciplined within the traditional Confucian norms, to subjects that are internally liberalized in their sexuality and identity. Through analysis, I found that the cultural influence of Americanization on Korean females shows oppositely in their identity/sexuality and their bodies. Specifically, Korean society tends to accept Americanized appearance; however, the society still tends to maintain the traditional Confucian norms in order to discipline Korean women’s identity and sexuality. This huge influence on Korean females’ self-image, sexuality, and identity are still evident today.

For the analysis of the Americanized female body as a new standard of beauty in modern Korean society, it is important to know the historical contexts of slenderness and body-care that are reinforced as dominant ideologies on post-modern
female body.

Based on significant Korean literature on the political, economic, and cultural influences of Americanization\textsuperscript{36}, I first look at the general background of Americanization in order to examine the ways in which it has influenced the establishment of concurrent female body discourse. This helps me to look at the way Americanization has spread within various social, economic, and cultural contexts within modern Korea. I explore how the U.S has deeply infused American values and the ideology of consumerism into the Korean culture at large. Second, I take a particular look at the presence of the U.S army and missionaries and the significant role they played in changing traditional norms of women’s body images and their sexuality in modernity of Korea. In the last section of this chapter, I examine female body discourse on Americanized beauty, a concept that firmly expresses the dissonance between the idea of traditional Confucianism and the emergence of a new civilization of “Americanization”.

Many scholars have claimed that various American influences were triggered when the U.S military started to support the Korean government with military and economic aid in the period of Japanese colonialism\textsuperscript{37}(Dictionary for Modern and Post Modern Korean History) and during the Korean War\textsuperscript{38} (Dictionary for Modern and Post Modern Korean History). For this reason, there has been varied research on the

\textsuperscript{36} In Chapter 2, I briefly discussed Americanized eating culture after many American-based food franchises were imported in Korea. In this chapter, I focus more on how Americanization has played a decisive role in formulating and proliferating dominant discourses on the female body in Korean society.

\textsuperscript{37} After the ‘Han-Il-Hab-Bang’ (annexation of Korea to Japan) in 1910, Korea had been colonized by Japan for 35 years until Korea was liberated from Japan on August 15, 1945.

\textsuperscript{38} On June 25, 1950, the North Korean troops launched an invasion across the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel into South Korea.
significant roles and negative and positive effects of America in the political, economic, social, and cultural venues in Korea (An and Yang, 2001; Choi, 2011; Choi, 2005; Chung, 2012; Kim, D, 2005; Kim, M, 2005; and, Kim, Y, 2005 et al).

According to these scholars, the U.S. government wanted Korea to become a so-called “nation they want” of which they would financially support a government that had lost economic viability after the Korean War. Based on this historical background of Americanization in the Period of Modernization, the analysis of U.S. influence will shed more light on the significant influence of Americanization in general, one that has played a key role in producing and reinforcing specific and dominant female body discourse in a particular historical period of Korea society. Most research on “Americanization” and “Americanism” done in Korea and other Asian countries has focused on political and/or economic contexts. Some have delved into the socio-cultural venues of Americanization (Choi, S, 2005; and, Yoshimi, 2003) or culturally internalized Americanization within Korean culture. As a result, my study will focus more on the process of “embodied Americanization” within various areas of Korean culture. This work on Americanization in Korean society may be used as meaningful material not only for Korean female body studies, but also for Americanization-related research in various fields such as women’s studies, sociology, cultural studies, and communication, In view of the significant evidence of Americanization of the female body in Korean society, there is no doubt that American culture has not only helped create and reinforce concurrent dominant female body discourse, but has also developed a new sense of Korean female sexuality through various channels such as the U.S Army, missionaries, and the media.
The Meaning of Americanization in Korean Society

Americanization visibly emerged within Korean society as the Korean government started to actively embrace ideas and political systems from the U.S. after the Korean War. The U.S military government was established in Korea right after the liberation from Japan in 1945. It focused more on support of the Korean army, however, than on political and social intervention. The U.S. decided to fully concentrate on the army as they thought it could be a powerful tool for their project on “Americanized modernization” in Korea (Chung, 2012, 347). At that time, Korean soldiers, who benefited from the U.S military government and were influenced by Americanized education programs, were categorized as a so-called “elite group” in Korean society. These educated soldiers often took on major positions not only in the army, but also in politics. According to Brazinsky (2007), who has deeply focused on the political relationship between the U.S. and the Republic of Korea, the significant reason why the Korean army was able to wield political power was that they had the authority to exert physical force, and they rapidly rose to become a leading group within Korean society with their higher level of proficiency and superiority. As Brazinsky has pointed out, many beneficiaries of U.S. ideology and philosophy provided by the military were appointed to important posts in the Korean government. The assumption of the U.S. military was that an educated Korean army would be a powerful leader in various areas of society, and they were right. “The leadership program by the U.S military government was to foster administrative officers and politicians in Korea. Kim, Youngsam and Kim Daejung became presidents in the future after they participated in this program” (Chung, 2012, 248). Actually, one of

39 The U.S military government refers to the period of military rule by the U.S army in South Korea as 3 years (1945 -1948) until ‘the Republic of Korea’ was established – the official national name of South Korea.
the former presidents, Kim, Youngsam, emphasized the important roles of the U.S. government and the army during a meeting with Bill Clinton (The Eighth Army).

In sum, full support of the Korean army by the U.S. government had a huge influence on political and social spheres in Korea. The young generation during the time when the U.S. military ruled played a key role in producing a positive view of America by spreading the news that the U.S was not only helping to defend Korea from external threats, but was also providing financial and political support for the government and its citizens. This pairing of U.S. political intervention and the significant influence of the U.S. army had a strong influence not only on establishing and reconstructing the government, but also on developing embodied Americanization within Korean culture. U.S military bases established in South Korea during the Korean War became places where ordinary Koreans could encounter American culture in a practical way. As a result, people began to “consume America” previously only encountered in Hollywood movies, via the bases and soldiers stationed in Korea.

This lifestyle of “consumption” in contemporary society was a new phenomenon for ordinary Koreans due to the struggles they had faced during the period of Japanese occupation and the war between North Korea and South Korea. According to Kim (2005) there is strong evidence that the cultural effects of the U.S. military played a key role in building this new lifestyle of “consuming America” among ordinary Koreans. He points out that a number of U.S. products originated in the Post Exchange (PX)\textsuperscript{40} retail stores on military bases, and then spread throughout society, mostly on the black market. Previously, only a few upper class Korean

\textsuperscript{40} Post Exchange (PX) refers to a retail store in Eight U.S military bases. This word has been used on Korean military bases since then. Now, the meaning of PX is a retail store on any military base in Korea.
citizens had the chance to procure American-made products from the U.S. military. Having an item with a “Made in USA” label was only a dream to ordinary people who had always struggled with their livelihood. As these items became more readily available, “Made in USA” was like a miracle hand that could make Korean identities disappear” (162). This led to a gradual fade of traditional values among ordinary Koreans and a growing embodiment of American cultures and ideologies.

People made a commotion with excitement, when a ‘Mi-Jea-A-Jum-Ma’ comes to a town with her big bag with a full of ‘Yankee’ products’. Her bag feels like another world to people because there are cosmetics, snacks, canned foods, cheese, coffee and shaving cream, etc. in her big bag. Complaints popped up among the whole village, if she temporarily disappeared to avoid the clampdown on selling her American stuff. Most LPs, which are a kind of dream for middle and high school students who love pop music, were swags from PXs. If KATUSA’s who belong to the U.S military police strengthen inspection on civilian vehicles to enter the base, fences bribe them with something. (Seoul economic newspaper, 2014)

Choi, S. (2011) also provides some evidence on “consuming American culture” through the U.S. military. In 1950, shortly after the war, Koreans had no choice but to depend on relief goods--most foodstuff or used clothing--from the U.S. and the U.N. Many people also altered and wore items such as blankets, uniforms, boots, socks, and caps, most of which were rations or had been abandoned by the Eighth U.S. Army. Since many factories had been destroyed during the war, they did not have the ability to produce daily necessities such as foods, shoes, and clothing. In

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41 Mi-Jea-A-Jum-Ma refers to a woman who peddles American-made goods. It is compound of ‘Mi-Jea’ and ‘A-Jum-Ma’. Mi-Jea that indicates products exported from the U.S and A-Jum-Ma means a married woman. In this context, A-Jum-Ma is a representative word for women who peddle the US products regardless of whether they get married or not.

42 Yankee is used by Koreans as a degrading expression for an American.

43 KATUSA is abbreviation of Korean Augmentation Troops to the United States Army.
In addition, the quality of the goods produced in Korea did not measure up to the “Made in U.S.A.” standard. Many goods abandoned on the bases were popular because they were both cheap and durable.

In addition, the U.S. Eighth Army recruited talented Koreans for recreation and pleasure. This did not just happen in Korea but also in other countries where the U.S. was stationed such as Japan, the Philippines, and around East Asia (Yoshimi, 2003). Yoshimi points out that the U.S. Army, which had stayed around East Asia, played a significant role in proliferating American culture such as pop music, fashion, and sexual mores in some countries in the area. For example, brokers recruited people who had a talent for singing and dancing, and the chosen people would perform on stage on the military bases. Working there was very desirable as people could make much more money than outside the base. Yoshimi illustrates an interesting example of this form of Americanization by using Kang Nobuko’s narration of a real story about Junghyo Shin.

*Junghyo Shin* later became known as the ‘godfather’ of Korean rock. As a youth, having lost both his parents in the Korean War, he listened to the American Forces radio station (AFKN) on an American military communications wireless he had bought. He then learned to play the guitar by himself, and wandered the streets of Seoul playing it. After he studying with a guitar teacher, he then became a musician in an American Eighth Army’s show. In Korea, during the 1950s, ‘playing at the Eighth Army’s show was the only way of making a living as a musician. At their height, there were as many as 264 stages where such shows were held, and those appearing in the Eighth Army’s show could earn a guaranteed yearly income of $1,200,000, at a time when the total value of a South Korean’s yearly income was about $1,000,000 (Kang, 1998, 149-154).

As illustrated in this short narrative, working for the U.S. Eighth Army was a great opportunity for ordinary Koreans to make more money to earn their livelihoods.
Many people initially wanted to work in the camp due to their financial problems. However, they started embodying the culture as they worked within the American sphere; and as a result, it became a part of their lives. Bear in mind that the story of Junghyo Shin is an extreme example of how Koreans embraced and embodied American culture; many Koreans did refuse to embrace the new ideology because they viewed it as opposition to the values of traditional Confucianism. Nevertheless, the U.S. Eighth Army played a significant role in helping ordinary Koreans naturally embrace and consume American culture and ideology because the Army offered many job opportunities, food, and products that were used in everyday life.

What Does “Americanization” Mean to Koreans?

Koreans started to visibly recognize “America” as the U.S. military administration established during the period (1945-1950) of the nation’s independence from Japan and the Korean War (Kim, Y., 2005). According to Deok-Ho Kim, a Korean scholar who has focused in depth on Americanization, the term refers to “a reproduction and a spread of social phenomenon, in which people tend to embrace or/and imitate American ideologies, regimes, cultures, customs, and the mode of lifestyle under the direct and indirect influence of the U.S” (2005, 156). Korean scholars (An and Yang, 2001; Choi, 2011; Choi, 2005; Chung, 2012; Kim, D, 2005; and, Kim, M, 2005) who studied the influence of the U.S. in Korea have also defined Americanization, but most definitions tend to be similar to those of Kim. However, Americanization to ordinary Koreans has taken on various images as political and economic circumstances changed.

An and Yang (2001) point out that during the Japanese period, Americanization to Koreans was represented as “what they do not have, namely,
Koreans had long for hope to have images of technology, abundance, dynamic, freedom, modernity” (51). These positive images of America helped Koreans settle a dichotomous formula: ‘Western county = industrialization = urban = development = sophisticated/ Eastern country = non-industrialization = rural community = un-development = unrefined. Based on the dualistic ideas held by Americans, the U.S. was recognized by Koreans as representative of all Western countries. In this regard, there was also a dominant view that Koreans needed to adopt political ideologies, economic systems, and sophisticated cultures from the U.S. in order to transform their poor country. In other words, Americanization at this moment was regarded as a part of “a process of modernization” after the liberation from Japanese colonialism in the middle of 1940s. For example, articles and news were available about fundamental U.S. ideologies such as rationalism and liberalism, political systems, and even culture. The latter included the ideal female image and exercise tips for female self-care disseminated by intellectuals who studied abroad and came back to Korea. These articles and news about the U.S. contained a very positive nuance and even demonstrated admiration (Lee, 2011; and, Kim, M, 2005). Westernization, which is considered the same as Americanization by Koreans44, and discourse written by intellectuals who had experienced colonial disruption, rapidly spread through Korean society in the 1950s (An and Yang, 2001).

However, when a new president, Park, Jeonghee assumed the reins of government in the 1960s, anti-Americanism was on the rise in Korea. The government under Park’s rule worked to create a positive atmosphere by portraying

44 The meaning of Westernization and Americanization are different in academia. However, the terms are synonymous in Korean culture. A direct example of how Koreans use these words interchangeably is that Koreans often call products that imported from any Western countries “Mi-Jae”. Mi-Jae refers to products that are from the U.S.
America as a staunch Korean ally. Continuing such a social mood, there were many movements for democracy among people who nursed a grievance over the dictatorial regime. For example, 518 democracy resistance\textsuperscript{45}(Do-san Encyclopedia) is the most representative of democratic movement in the history of Korea. During the movement, Park’s government massacred many civilians and U.S. forces there turned a blind eye to the armed repression of innocent citizens. Knowledge of this political collusion between the Korean government and the U.S. military stationed in Korea leaked out; and as a result, anti-Americanism began to grow. After a series of bloody uprisings against the government in 1980, various anti-American movements\textsuperscript{46} expressed disdain for what the U.S. military had done. Moreover, anti-Americanism, derived from political interventions of the U.S., came to the forefront as socio-cultural problems in society. Examples of the problems that arose as a result of the huge influx of U.S. ideology and culture included the absence of respect for elders, the rise of materialism and a consumption mentality, and a widening gap between rich and poor. In spite of this, the image of America still represented a symbol of “freedom, opportunity and equality” for Koreans during the 80s and 90s, and continues even today. Deeply infused within Korean society, American ideals have been embodied and reproduced by younger generations.

\textsuperscript{45} 518 democracy resistance is one of the major citizen movements in the history of Korea. The movement took place in the areas of Kwang-Ju, Jeollanam-do Province on May 18, 1980. It aimed to lift martial law and procure the resignation of the military government.

\textsuperscript{46} Since 518 democracy resistance in 1980, there were many anti-American movements such as arson attacks on American cultural centers in Kwang-Ju and Busan, and an opposition demonstration against a visiting US president, Ronald Reagan. There was the occupation of the American cultural center in Seoul during the 1980s, a movement for closure of the US military training camp for bombing in the 1990s, and a huge candlelight demonstration against Americanism in the 2000s, which aimed to investigate the truth of the case that two Korean teenage girls were run over and killed by a U.S armed vehicle. The two U.S soldiers who drove the vehicle received a verdict of not guilty from the U.S court.
There is no doubt that political and economic support from the U.S. internally implanted foreign cultures, ideologies, and principles in Korean society. As previously stated, America represented freedom and advancement for Koreans, and yet this positive sentiment has also been accompanied by sentiment anti-Americanization movements since 1980. Whereas Korean society is likely to idealize the idea of Americanism in various social and cultural spheres, the female body and its inherent sexuality is held to a different standard. I will take a close look at this interesting issue in the next section.

Americanization on Female Bodies in Modern Korea

The U.S military has had a huge influence on not only spreading Americanism in the political and economic arena, but also on facilitating the acceptance of the idea of Americanization within various cultural traditions in Korea. Within this context, Americanization from the U.S. military also played a key role in developing the ideal of female body. However, it should be noted that the representation of the Americanized female body and its sexuality were likely seen as a problematic issue in public. In addition, there was another group, the missionaries, who influenced the modernizing of Korean female sexuality and related health issues. Physical education for women, originally taught by missionaries, was emerging as a serious social problem at the beginning of Modernization in that physical activities for women were contrary to Confucian traditional norms. Nevertheless, Americanization of the female body and its sexuality by the U.S. military and the missionaries has been a touchstone for Korean women as they could now turn away from the strict traditional norms of behavior, sexuality and even identity.

Evidence of Americanization through the U.S. Army is seen in the advent of
‘Yang-Gong-Ju’\textsuperscript{47}, which took on the role of “sexual entertainment” for the army and thereby the consumption of American culture. ‘Yang-Gong-Ju’ refers to women who worked for U.S. soldiers for a living. Yang is a kind of prefix coming from Yankee (American). ‘Gong-Ju’ refers to princess in English. In this context, the term ’Yang-Gong-Ju’ is a degraded expression for women who make money by entertaining members of the U.S Army. Their role was one of the most criticized in terms of Americanized culture in Korean society. However, a lot of women who lost their husbands, sons and daughters had no choice but to become a Yang-Gong-Ju. “Yang-Gong-Ju town was established in Bupyeong right after the U.S. Army landed on Incheon harbor, where sexual trades happened between the women and the soldiers” (Choi, 2011, 7). Since then, the towns had spread around U.S. Army bases such as in Yongsan, Cheongnyangni, Dongducheon. According to Choi (2005), the wide spread of Yang-Gong-Ju and liberalism provided Korean women with freedom of sexuality; however, “these social changes were also regarded as threatening on the traditional female sexuality and the ethics of womanhood” (195). In this sense, internalized American culture and the way of life during the 1950s-1960s played a decisive role in the pervading of Americanization (a name for modernization) into the dominant ethic of female sexuality in Korean society.

Interesting elements are the make-up and outfits. Because of the characteristics of their job, they needed to adopt an “Americanized appearance.” The women made their eyes look big and their skin bright through make-up. They wore

\textsuperscript{47} Yang-Gong-Ju looked sophisticated and glamorous because of their Americanized outfits and make-up, but their lives were tragic. Most of them were war orphans or war widows, and they were just a tool for recreation and sexual pleasure for the soldiers. Some were dates for a day or mistresses. For these reasons, many were pregnant and gave a birth to half-Korean and half-American children. The children also struggled because they were hybrid as their mothers were “Yang-Gong-Ju.”
dresses to make their breasts look glamorous and to show off their feminine body shape. What they did was similar to the Ki-Saeng\textsuperscript{48} who appeared before the modernization of Korea. However, the Ki-Saeng during pre-Modernization emphasized traditional beauty such as horizontal long, thin eyes and narrow shoulders for Han-Bok. On the other hand, Yang-Gong-Ju created a modernized kind of beauty by accepting American culture in order to earn their livelihood. Both Yang-Gong-Ju and Ki-Saeng as particular groups of women who entertained for the pleasure of men in the history of Korea were regarded as objects of public criticism in terms of the ethics of female sexuality while their bodies were regarded as sexually attractive at the same time. In the parallel context of Ki-Saeng, Yang-Gong-Ju played a key role in producing and maintaining the dominant female body discourse in the concurrent society.

Along with the U.S. Eighth Army and the groups of Yang-Gong-Ju, missionaries were another group who brought Americanization into Korea. While the U.S. Army was often connected with particular groups of people such as the Yang-Gong-Ju, brokers and KATUSA, missionaries were often in direct contact with ordinary Koreans. They had established educational and medical facilities under the purview of mission work. Their achievements, based on spreading Christianity, have had a strong influence on the introduction of American culture to ordinary Koreans. While the U.S Eighth Army disseminated American culture such as pop music and food, missionaries played a key role in propagating value-oriented Americanism including ideologies, philosophy, and education in a moral manner. According to An and Yang (2001), the ”new education”\textsuperscript{49} transmitted by the missionaries had a

\textsuperscript{48} See Chapter 2
\textsuperscript{49} In my study, new education refers to Westernized or Americanized education taught by
significant influence on ordinary people—especially women—because it built a “modernized subject” by promoting “new ideas” such as the liberation of women and social participation. For example, missionaries built schools for ordinary Korean women, most of whom had a lesser chance of being educated than men.

Since then, women educated by missionaries, along with other educated women who studied abroad, have emerged as so-called “new women”. An interesting point in this regard is that physical education taught by the missionaries played a key role in developing the idea of modernization of women in the 1950s. In particularly, physical education for Korean females at that moment had a huge influence on helping promote female health (many of them were in poor health), and in shifting the Korean female body to vigorous and active body from a static and passive body.

As briefly mentioned in the history of the female body in Chapter 2, American missionaries led to the modernization of women even before liberation in 1945. Josephine Ophera Paine, the president of Ewha-Hak-Dang, made physical education class a requirement for her students’ health. There were some problems in teaching PE to Korean females because of traditional ideas of Confucianism, which required women to be disciplined and docile, shown by not moving their bodies. As a result, many women would renounce their studies having a low level of immunity and being weak. Many even died from infectious disease such as cholera during this period.

missionaries. It is called ‘modern education’, and it has played a major role in establishing education in its present form in Korea.

Ewha-Hak-Dang was the first educational institution for girls and women in Korea. It was established by Mary F. Scranton, an American female missionary, in 1886 and was renamed Ewha Woman’s University in 1928. Ewha Woman’s University is still one of the leading education institutions for females in Korea (Ewha Today, 2012).
The Gymnastic class in *Ewha-Hak-Dang* had great social repercussion in Seoul (the capital of South Korea). Many parents did not want their daughters to take the PE class and some people even said that they do not want to get a daughter-in-law who is a student of *Ewha-Hak-Dang* due to the PE class. Faced with growing public opposition on the PE class for girls and women, the government sent an official document stating that the PE class needs to be abolished. However, Paine had decided to keep the PE class for her weak students. The PE class’s aim was to improve all of the female students’ health. As a result, female students at *Ewha-Hak-Dang* had a higher resistance to infectious disease (*Ewha Today*, 2012)

In the early stage of Ewha, gymnastics was the only activity in PE class. However, various American sports such as baseball, basketball, volleyball, and skating were also taught following Korea’s freedom from Japanese imperialism in 1945. In this context, modernization of Korean women through PE class, taught by missionaries, has played a major role in not only developing women’s health, but also in spreading ideas of freedom, liberation, and resistance through women’s bodies. After the PE classes at Ewha, athletic meetings began to be held as a social campaign for the improvement of female status in early modern society. “The athletic meetings for women seek not only to urge men to introspect, but also to assert equal opportunity to get a job for women”. (*Dong-A Il-bo*, 1923) Through the physical education that was started by American missionaries, Korean women were given “a chance to come across new cultures, such as playing games. Regardless of socially constructed norms for women in traditional society, physical activities provided women with enjoyment, excitement, socialization, and self-expression.” (Kim and Jung, 2003, 19-20)

Americanization, which was widely spread by the U.S. military and the missionaries, suggests two significant perspectives on the Korean female body and its sexuality in the period of early modernization of Korea. First, Americanization tended
to be regarded as a mode of modernization and has been positively illuminated in other cultural spheres, whereas its influence on the Korean female body and sexuality has often been regarded as a controversial issue in society. An interesting specific example of this incoherent view of the impact of Americanization is the cultural meaning of a prefix “new” cited in the terms, “new education” and “new women.” It has been differently interpreted in certain eras and by gender. The word “new” literally means what it says in the dictionary, but the term can also imply various cultural meanings such as sophisticated, educated, and free as used during the time of modernization in Korea. On the other hand, when the term is applied to the context of the female body and sexuality, it has been interpreted as unruly, undignified, and indecent. In other words, this kind of paradoxical implication of Americanization in Korean women suggests that the traditional norms and ethics of female sexuality are still a priority in interpreting their bodies and sexuality in society. Second, Americanized female body and sexuality may be seen as symbolic values that allowed for the conceptualization of identity during the upheaval of Modernization. For example, Americanized education has played an important role in providing Korean women with an idea of bodily freedom. Also, women who were influenced by the new education could now have a voice in public and could be recognized for their abilities regardless of gender. Yet, Americanization of the Korean female body and sexuality is still regarded as one of the most controversial issues since it has spread so far within various contexts of Korea.

**Americanism Embodied Korean Female Body Culture**

As discussed in Chapter 2, periodic characteristics given to the Korean female body have arisen out of and have been maintained under the unique socio-
political background of the country. In particular, analyzing this dominant discourse, starting from the beginning of Modernization in the early 1900’s, is important not only to examine the ways in which the Korean female body has been a popular issue in the public sphere, but also to explore how females have been required to take care of their bodies as objects to be evaluated by others. Particularly, the consumption of the U.S. culture and ideology that was broadly spread by the U.S. Army, missionaries, and media, gave momentum to the idea of the Americanized body shape, leading to it becoming an ideal beauty standard in the society. Within this context, body-care has also become a necessary job among ordinary Korean women. It provided a chance to resist traditional Confucian values that often oppressed the female body, while liberating both women’s’ bodies and identities.

Lee’s (2011) study on the Korean female body and the dominant ideology of slenderness due to Westernization helps us to understand the ways in which the obsession with slenderness for Korean women has emerged from the history of the culture. She focuses more on a specific period-- the late Joseon Dynasty in the early 1900’s--to analyze the history of Korean female slenderness, a time when Korean society experienced enlightenment for the first time. A door was opened to Western countries--especially the U.S.- and as a result, there was a huge influx of new culture in the media, fashion, food, etc. The huge political and social changes in Korean history have played a significant role in creating the dominant ideologies of female body politics that have been maintained in concurrent Korean culture.

According to Lee (2011), by the beginning of Modernization in the early 1900’s, the female body became an object of attention in the public eye through the mass media. Since the enlightenment of the late Joseon Dynasty, a drastic proliferation of mass media occurred with the development of printing skills such that newspapers
and magazines played a significant role in not only creating the standard of the ideal female body, and also in dragging the female body into the public sphere. As a result, the female body, based on a vision-centered culture, was often illustrated as an object for a public criticism through the mass media. However, the target of much public criticism was limited to famous women such as actors, singers, Kisaeng⁵¹ (Korean geisha), and women who studied abroad (124-128). Lee also points out that the massive influx of Western culture in the late period of Joseon society is one of the significant factors that accounts for the criticism of the female body and sexuality as a major public social issue. She argues that the influx of clothing, films, and photography from the U.S. is major evidence of a shift in the beauty standard from the face to the body at this time. Through the spread of the visual culture of Western photos, magazines, and films, people had a chance to accept it without a qualm. For example, ordinary people could partake of Western culture because there were many photos of famous female actors appearing in newspapers and magazines. When people looked at these photos, they found the women to be pretty because they had a different nose, eyes, and body proportions from those of Asians.

⁵¹ Kisaeng refers to a woman who entertained others such as kings and men of a higher class. For example, their job normally was to sing songs, dance, or serve Korean wines to men. They sometimes were prostitutes. Their social status is the lowest of people in Joseon, but in accordance with the uniqueness of their work, they had many opportunities for privilege such as using luxurious clothes and accessories. In this context, they were regarded as a kind of servant for extravagance.
Within this context, positive criticism for these Western female actors was continuously publicized in the mass media. Beauty for Korean females was also standardized by the Western concept of a sharp nose, large eyes, bright skin color, and a small face. There were many articles on the Westernized beauty standard for Korean females in newspapers and magazines:

Since we have imported Western culture, our life style and the trend of our civilization have been “Americanized”. Therefore, we differently appreciate beauty (for females). Some new words such as a “physical aesthetic” and “leg beauty” have appeared in Joseon society because the female beauty standard tended to shift from a face to a body…Nowadays, we consider a woman who has long and slim legs with a short torso to be beautiful (As Cited from Younga Lee’s work 2011, 85).

As shown in the article above, Lee discusses how this change in the beauty trend for Korean females in Joseon society originated from the idea of “racial

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52 Generally speaking, Asians have different body proportions than people in the West. Asians have a relatively long torso. Since the beauty standard has become “Westernized” in the global sphere, body proportions have also become important for Asian women to be seen as “pretty and beautiful”.
In other words, the standard of the ideal female body was shifted by the “adoration of Western cultures (213)”. As in the case of the Joseon period, there is other evidence that the standard of the female body was changed by other cultures. Fraser’s (2009) study of (female) fatness in the history of the U.S supports Lee’s argument of racial inferiority arising from admiration of other cultures. Fraser points out that the ideal body type for American women shifted from roundness to thinness of figure by the beginning of the 20th century. She also argues that Americans had a kind of “European envy” and wanted body shapes just like those of European women. As a result, slenderness became an ideal for white women who were educated and part of the middle and upper classes. “Europeans had long considered slenderness a sign of class distinction and finer sensibilities and Americans began to follow suit” (12). In addition, sophisticated American females wanted to have a different body image from those who were uneducated, in the lower class, and were immigrants.

Both Lee (2012) and Fraser (2009) argue that the change in clothing trends in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, intertwined with the huge influx of other cultural influences, urbanization, and the development of the mass media, played a decisive role in reinforcing slenderness as an ideal standard for the female body in both the U.S. and Korean society. According to Fraser, plumpness in women was a sign of wealth and a symbol of sexual attractiveness before the 1980s. However, the fashion trend shifted away from plumpness to a thinner figure along with the complicated socio-economic environment in early 20th century American society. Industrialization and urbanization made it possible for people to enjoy a more opulent lifestyle than in the past, and in particular, “food became more accessible and convenient to all but poor families, so being fat no longer was a sign of prestige” (12). Lee also illustrates the intimate relationship between the change of tradition in Korean-style clothing and
slenderness in Korean society. Most Koreans wore a Han-Bok, traditional outfits before the enlightenment. Due to the characteristics of these outfits - especially women’s clothes - the female body was hardly seen or evaluated in the public eye. 

*Jeo-Go-Ri*, an upper garment, is so short that it would be hard to move one’s arms. When the arms are raised, the skin is easily exposed. Therefore, females needed to be careful at all times. On the other hand, their skirts were wide, loose, and long, so they always dragged on the ground. This traditional female outfit was strongly influenced by the ideas of the Confucian patriarchy, so most Korean women had to cover their bodies and faces with their coats. Female bodies could not be exposed in public.

However, the traditional fashion for Korean women was slowly changed by an influx of Western culture in the society.

Since knowledge of Western medical science had spread in the late Joseon period, it had been suggested that the traditional female garment, the Han-Bok, needed to be improved for health and sanitation reasons. For example, wearing long skirts would bring about a respiratory disease and a bad lung condition by dragging them on an impure and dust-laden ground. As in the example of the corset in Western countries, a chest belt, used to secure a skirt, would likewise cause pain by constantly compressing the chest. In accordance with hygienic issues, the Han-Bok started to be modified for health reasons as well as functionality. As a result, skirts were made shorter for hygiene and mobility; and the *Jeo-ko-ri* was made longer. In so doing, traditional female garments became modernized and simplified. With the spread of the modernized Han-Bok, as Lee points out, the large expansion of Western-style clothes and fashion took on a decisive role in reinforcing slenderness as an internalized ideology from the late 19th century in Korean culture. The *Sin-Nyu-
Seong, most of whom studied abroad, started wearing Western-style clothing in the early period of the enlightenment. However, these fashions also became popular among ordinary middle class women.

In sum, both Lee and Fraser propose that a huge influx of different cultures and the adoration of other customs had a powerful influence on the reconceptualization of slenderness as an ideal body image for women. Fraser argues that thinness functioned as a criterion of class distinction in the early 1900’s in American culture. By contrast, slenderness did not reflect class in the late Joseon culture. This difference can be understood in light of the varied historical backgrounds in the U.S and early Korea. For example, educated middle and upper class women were sensitive to fashion trends in the U.S. However, Kisaeng was one female group that accepted the change of modernized fashion along with the Sin-Nyu-Seong in Korea. They were in the lowest class of Joseon society and were regarded as an object of public criticism because of their sexual attraction and because they were in the class that included servants who did not need to cover their faces and bodies in public places. What they wore had an influence on ordinary Korean women because they were always placed in the center of the latest, modernized fashion trends in Joseon culture (Park, 2012).

During the time of Industrialization between the late 1950s and 1970s, Americanization, through the mass media, had been processed in earnest. Choi’s

53 Sin-Nyu-Seong, (New woman or modern girl refers to a Korean woman who received a modern education from the last period of Joseon to the Japanese colonial era. Most of them studied abroad such as in the U.S, Europe, or Japan. Christian missionaries educated some of them. Ewha Hakdang was the first private institution for Korean girls and women, established by an American missionary, Mary F. Scranton, in 1886. Ewha Hakdang changed their name to Ewha Woman's University, and it is still one of the best institutions for female education in Korea.
account (2005) of the Korean female identity can be seen through two popular films, *A Streetcar Named Desire*\(^{54}\) and *Ja-Yu-Bu-In* (Madame Freedom)\(^{55}\), which were massively popular in the 1950s. Most of those who preferred and enjoyed American culture were women, and they were often criticized for it in public. In other words, the values, ideas, and lifestyles of American women were represented through Hollywood films. For example, the main actress, Vivien Leigh, in *A Streetcar Named Desire* adversely influenced the traditional values of Korean female sexuality.

“Americanization in female cultures, sexuality, ideologies, and ethics, which were represented by the main actress--for example, she gets a god and dates with other men--in *Ja-Yu-Bu-In* was regarded as ‘a modernized desire that involve sexual immorality’” (197).

On the one hand, criticism of the negative American influences on the traditional values of women widely spread through Korean society. On the other, American culture and Americanization have played a major role in proliferating the idea of freedom in relation to female sexuality and also in helping women develop their subjectivity through “the place of resistance” (212). Moreover, the huge influx of American culture including fashion, make-up, hairstyles, and the appearances of

\(^{54}\) *A Streetcar Named Desire* was a famous play written by American author Tennessee Williams in 1947. As a result of the huge popularity of the play, it was made into a film and released in 1951 in America. The play presents the main female character, a fading but still-attractive Southern belle, whose pretensions to virtue and culture only thinly mask alcoholism and delusions of grandeur. Her poise is an illusion that she presents to others, but most of all, it is meant to shield herself from reality and is an attempt to continue to make herself attractive to new male suitors (IMDb)

\(^{55}\) *Ja-Yu-Bu-In*’ was a famous novel written by Korean writer, Chung, Biseok in 1954. The novel was remade as a film in 1956. The story is about an unfaithful wife whose husband is a professor. She was virtuous before she worked at a boutique. After she got the job, she became hooked on dancing with a student of her husband. Afterward, the relationship between them was broken, her husband forgave her, and she went back to him. This film wants to sharply criticize social phenomenon and the way traditional ethics of female sexuality had been collapsing as women entered society (Naver Movie)
Hollywood celebrities in American movies has significantly influenced the replacement of the traditional concept of beauty in Korean women. Americanized beauty becomes the new ideal.

Since Industrialization, Vivien Leigh’s slim waist in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, first lady Jackie Kennedy’s sophisticated fashions, and other Hollywood stars’ appearances and styles on TV and in magazines were intensely popular among young Korean women. Since then, many young women have started wearing miniskirts, regarded as a representative type of Americanized fashion, but also “past the line of decency.” If a woman gets caught for this, she should pay a fine.56

Figure 4. A news article about Miniskirt control by law in the 1970s. This is an article about the first control for wearing miniskirts, issued. At the time, wearing miniskirts 6.6 inches over the knee was regarded as a violation of the Minor Offences Act. (Captured from *Dong-A Ilbo*, March 10, 1973)

56 Men with long hair and females wearing miniskirts were regarded as a way of expressing rebellion against the dictatorship of Park’s administration during the 1960s. Park’s regime restricted men’s long hair and female’s miniskirts as a means of maintaining the regime (*Dong-A Ilbo*, 2013).
Since Americanized beauty had spread within the society, Korean women started “caring” for their legs because they wore modernized outfits with shorter skirts. In the traditional outfit, they did not need to worry about them. They also needed to consider their upper bodies, making sure that “curves” were visible, since they started wearing Western style clothing, such as blouses. “Body care” became an important “duty” for the ordinary Korean woman as a result of the popularization of modernized clothing. Realistically, however, ordinary women were only concerned about the duty because it was a kind of privilege for those living in big cities who were able to easily access Western culture though Hollywood films and magazines, which included many photos and articles about movie actresses and body-care information.

Another interesting factor in Lee’s study (2011) is the necessity for exercise, not only for health reasons, but also for an aesthetic body shape. It came with the advent of body-care in the late Joseon period (96). For instance, there was information on “how to make the legs slim” through shape-up exercises and “what to eat” in newspapers and magazines (Figure 5). In the early Modernization period of Joseon, girls and women worked out, because having a healthy body was an important duty needed to produce healthy children. However, the concept of a “work out” changed slightly. It became helpful not only for women’s own health, but also for achieving slim legs and body curves. In this regard, a workout was not limited to unmarried women, but was also recommended for married women who wanted to take care of their plump bodies (168-172).

These new contexts of body-care for Korean women should be understood as the fundamental idea from which the concurrent body ideology came.
The ideal body standard for Korean women in the history of Joseon tends to be intimately related to traditional ideologies such as Confucianism and the idea of patriarchy. Also, the great influx of Western culture played an important role in maintaining the dominant body ideology and the concurrent female body image. By the beginning of the enlightenment, the development of printing technology and the expansion of the mass media provided ordinary Korean women with an opportunity to reach Western cultures through newspapers, films, and magazines. Moreover, fashion trends changed to the modernized Han-bok', with its short skirt that was suitable for women’s health and mobility, and to Western-style clothing. The spread of Western clothes is significant evidence not only of firmly establishing slenderness as an ideal shape for women, but also of the importance of “intentional” body-care that emerged in the late period of the Joseon Dynasty.
Conclusion

Americanization was officially initiated by the political and economic interventions of the U.S. government after Korea was liberated from Japanese colonialism in 1945. However, there is significant evidence that Americanization of the female body and sexuality began before this time. Widely spreading American ideologies of liberalism and rationalism were hallmarks of the teaching of the American missionaries. In addition, there was a huge influx of American media such as Hollywood movies and magazines. The development of media technology, allowing them to be copied and stored, gave people easy access to movies, photographs, and gramophones (An and Yang, 2001). American culture seen through the media during the period of Modernization in Korea had a strong influence on developing and reinforcing the Americanized female body image as the ideal in contemporary Korea.

In addition, Americanization after the Korean War continued to spread via the U.S. Army. This resulted in rampant consumption of “America” by ordinary Koreans throughout the country. The rapid proliferation of “Made in USA” foods, music, movies, magazines, and fashions through the Eighth U.S. Army and the emergence of ‘Yang-Gong-Ju’ are perfect examples of the way in which the macro level of Americanization indirectly and invisibly has affected the micro level of Korean society. Americanization of men and their culture tends to be regarded as a process of modernization; however, Americanization of women and their culture has often been regarded as a target of public criticism. Felski’s account (1995) on the masculinity-centered process of modernity in Western history supports my idea of how female sexuality and identity have been excluded from the Korean history of modernity by forcing them to stay tied to traditional norms of Confucianism.
However, Americanized female bodies in modern Korea ironically were regarded as a mode of modernization. This paradoxical gendered trend on modernity is also found in Felski’s works ‘the gender of modernity’. Her analysis on myths of modernity, which was shown in Berman Marshall and Gail Finney’s books, is quite compelling. According to Felski, “for every account of the modern era which emphasize the domination of masculine qualities of rationalization, productivity, and repression, one can find another text which points--whether approvingly or censoriously--to the feminization of Western society, as evidenced in the passive, hedonistic, and decentered nature of modern subjectivity” (4-5).

During the 1950s, the wide spread of Hollywood and Korean movies, which portrayed American culture and ideology, tended to be severely criticized in public as they were thought to have a negative influence on the ethics of female sexuality as had been maintained throughout the unique history of Korea. On the other hand, before 1950, Americanized education for Korean young females--especially physical--had addressed those who tended to minimize or ignore their subjective selves since the female body was regarded as useless or static in society. It has thus significantly influenced the spreading of the importance of body and health care. Americanization through the media, especially movies such as “A Streetcar Named Desire” and “Ja-U-Bu-In” between the 1950s and 1960s, played a key role in providing Korean women with an “escape route” which could free “the repressed self” from the given norms already developed based on traditional ideas of Confucianism and patriarchy.

Consequently, the huge influx of American culture into Korean society has continually played a significant role in deeply entrenching the concept of Americanized beauty as the ideal in Korean society. As a result, Korean women have often become the target of obesity discourse, and society has required them to take
care of their bodies. Within the context of Americanization, Korean society tends to prefer Americanized bodies for women, but still wants women to inherit the Confucian traditions of female sexuality, values, and social norms. In other words, the twofold discourse on females and their bodies has produced several interesting social phenomena. For example, there is a lot of information about “creating an Americanized body” through various media such as magazines, TV, and the Internet. This kind of useful information has stirred up ideas of the autonomous care of female bodies. Nevertheless, the dominant discourse, originating from the traditional ideologies and ethics of Korean women, has kept on reinforcing their bodies as docile and disciplined.
Chapter 4

The Beneficial TV Genre: Self-Care Reality TV Shows in the Neo-Liberal Society

“Between the media images of self-containment and self-mastery and the reality of constant, everyday stress and anxiety about one’s appearance lies the chasm that produces bodies habituated to self-monitoring and self-normalization.”

Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 2003, 202-203

“Placing TV in an analytic of government emphasizes television as a resource for acquiring and coordinating the techniques for managing the various aspects of one’s life.”

Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living through Reality TV*, 2008, 12

In this chapter, I examine the significant role of Korean self-care reality TV shows, which play a huge role in not only reinforcing the dominant discourses on the female body, but also in generating and spreading the neoliberal message that self-body-care is necessary for one to be a part of the society. My work is unique in that there is not much research about these shows in South Korea, even the popular body-care related TV shows of the last decade, which apparently represent socio-cultural discourse (e.g., slenderness, self-expression, obese-phobia, or appearance-priority).

The media, especially television, is one of the major factors that plays a key
role in influencing the creation and/or reproduction of significant discourse on the Korean female body. The ideal body and the concept of beauty, as represented in the media, has led to ordinary women’s obsession with body shape and appearance.

According to Featherstone (2010), the representative characters of the 19th century such as “businessmen, military leaders, scientists, explorers, artists and intellectuals” have been replaced by “popular heroes such as Hollywood stars, celebrities and sports stars. Indeed, consumer culture has long been preoccupied with the outgoing value of personality (a charming and engaging appearance) in contrast to character (the virtues of consistency and steadfastness)” (201). Chung and Kwon (2007) point out that the media, such as advertisements, television shows, and movies, has played a powerful role not only in creating a new, unrealistic, and abnormal shape norms for bodies, but also in commercializing them. The media tends to give ordinary people “the latitude to cultivate fascinating lives” like TV stars by watching their appearance and following the unordinary lives represented in magazines or on TV shows (Featherstone, 2010). In this context, unrealistic norms of appearance, constantly produced by mass media, tend to reinforce the social discourse on appearance-discrimination. Consequently, this appearance discourse has influenced the spreading of the idea of “self-care”, which enables ordinary women to have an ideal body shape like people on TV.

To find the key to this issue, I first look at the historical background of self-care shows by taking into consideration the economic context of neo-liberalism, which has had a strong influence on successfully spreading values in the concurrent South Korean society. According to David Harvey (2005), one of the distinguished scholars in the field of anthropology and geography, neo-liberal thought is based on “political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as the
central values of civilization” (5). The main themes of neo-liberalism--such as right of private property, individual liberty and entrepreneurial freedom--have been widely proliferated as important ideologies within Korean society57. Based on these key themes, neo-liberalism promotes the idea that everyone “makes decisions for themselves” (Harvey, 2005, 5). Neo-liberal ideas have entailed some serious problems, yet they have successfully settled within Korea as a main ideology in the arena of politics and economics. Especially considering the powerful influence not only on the political/economical, but also on the socio-cultural domain, neo-liberalism should be regarded as a socio-cultural matter, not just a political and economic issue (Won, 2001). In Korean media, the TV genre effectively accepts neo-liberal ideas on “reality TV shows”. I found that the formats of most Korean reality TV programs are imported from the U.S. Using these formats has become quite popular in the Korean TV industry based on the logic of neo-liberalism. Second, I examine the dominant

57 Korea officially adopted Neo-liberalism when the Kim, Daejung administration57 received financial support from IMF (International Monetary Fund) right after the financial crisis in 1997 (Ahn, 2006; Woo, 2006; Won, 2001; Wang, 2009; Kim, 2012). Actually, switching the established economical ideology to Neo-liberalism had been surfacing in the Kim, Youngsam government57, the former administration of Kim, Daegun’s. Kim (2012), who studies labor markets and class in a neo-liberal society, provides two significant reasons why Korea has accepted the economic ideology. First, as mentioned, neo-liberal politics officially started when the Korea government started accepting financial support from IMF in 1997. However, he points out that it was already started before the financial crisis in 1997 when the Kim, Youngsam administration shifted the keynote of their policy from state-initiated economics to private-initiated policies due to political pressure from the U.S57. Another reason was the national project to join the ranks of developed countries by becoming part of the OECD57. The Kim, Youngsam administration opened and liberated both capital and financial markets in Korea in order to meet the neo-liberal conditions suggested by the OECD. Since then, open-door policies have become the major cause of a huge influx of foreign currency funds into Korea. This political decision made finances get worse. The Korean government should have accepted the conditions of the IMF in order to receive financial support. The major ones were: the large-scale of restructuring and merging of companies, the liberating of capital markets, establishing flexible labor markets, privatizing public enterprises, and reforming and opening financial markets to foreign investment, and so forth. Based on these major conditions, neo-liberal policies have been enforced such that the Kim, Daejung government has been fulfilling them (Kim, 2012).
representation of the female body in the mass media, which also plays a key role in helping these shows become so popular among many Korean women who are obsessed with body care. The mass media often tend to represent the slender body as a normal body type and a large body as an abnormal body type. This dichotomization of the female body plays a decisive role in not only reinforcing the idea of body obsession, but also in spreading self-care discourse among Korean women. When you put these economic and cultural contexts together, you can see the answer as to why self-body care reality TV shows have become popular among Korean women in the neo-liberal society.

Based on the political, economic and socio-cultural contexts of the time, I examine the significant roles of the Korean self-care reality TV shows, which help to create and reproduce dominant female body discourse. Specifically, the shows play a key role in implicitly and manifestly delivering the idea of self-care to female viewers by comparing two opposite body images such as slender and a larger body, or by categorizing larger women as “losers” in society. In other words, the shows function as a self-governance supporter helping ordinary people, especially women, become good citizens. Ideally the shows help to produce neo-liberal subjects who take care of their problems by using various information on self-care provided by TV producers.

**Why Self-Care Reality TV Shows Became Popular as Female-Oriented Pop Culture?**

*The Birth of a Beneficial TV Genre “Reality TV”*

Since the serious financial crisis of 1997, neo-liberalism has had a great ripple effect throughout South Korean society. By adjusting to neo-liberal regimes and systems within the cultural sphere, related industries have been classified as high
value-added ones. At the same time, the Korean government has started actively supporting the “cash cow” of the film and TV industries by deregulating policies and providing financial aid (Kim, 2011; and, Won, 2001). In Kim’s study (2011) on the Korean film industry in neo-liberal society, she discusses the significant role of neo-liberal regimes in the Korean film industry. Since the middle of the 1990s, “Korean blockbuster”58 movies have begun to be produced. Kim also points out that most Korean blockbuster movies, produced by imitating the systems and formats of popular Hollywood films, have been immensely popular due to the relaxation of regulations in the movie industry and also the huge financial investment by large Korean companies such as Samsung, Hyundai, and Daewoo. As a result, Korean blockbusters such as *Sil-Mi-Do*59 and *TaeGukGi: Brotherhood of War*60, whose formats and size are just like those of Hollywood but whose contents are about Korean nationalism, have broken all records in the entire history of domestic movies. Since neo-liberalism has become a major ideology in Korean society, “nothing can be freed from the logic of capital, as everything has been reverted to economic value. First and foremost, it is creating more benefits than cultural diversities” (87-88). In addition, following the logic of the market economy, Korean film directors have been concentrating more on collaborating with transnational companies to make “co-production films” abroad.

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58 “Korean blockbuster” refers to Korean films that use the formats of Hollywood blockbuster films. However, the content of the films suit Korean emotion and sentiment (Kim, 2011, 76).

59 *Sil-Mi-Do* is one of the successful Korean blockbusters, directed by Kang, Woo-Suk and released in 2003. The film is based on the true story of Unit 684 in 1968 about a group of condemned criminals. The Korean government gave them two options: laying down their lives for their country or mounting the scaffold. The criminals who chose the first option got harsh military training on a solitary island ‘Sil-Mi-Do’ in order to become assassins of Kim, Il-Sung, the leader of North Korea (Movie.naver).

60 *TaeGukGi: Brotherhood of War* is also one of the famous Korean blockbusters, released in 2004. The backstory is the Korean War of 1956. The film is about the tragic lives of two brothers who accepted forcible conscription during wartime for their country (Movie.never).
than on producing their own films in Korea. This has helped producers maintain a
good cash flow and garner high returns on invested capital.

Neo-liberal ideology can be easily found not only in the Korean film industry,
but also in the television industry. In particular, reality television programs should be
considered as perfect examples in that neo-liberal ideas permeate both their format
and content. Since the late 1980s, reality TV has become one of the most popular
genres in the world. Some of the economic advantages of reality TV--cutting costs on
scripts and plots and saving time on the process of production--have had a huge
influence on the TV broadcasting industry. As a result, the genre has spread not only
to Korea, but also to other Asian countries such as Japan and China (Lee, 1996). As
evidenced by the film industry, economic benefits are regarded as the most important
issues in the television industry in a neo-liberal society. A competitive atmosphere
among production companies has accelerated due to neo-liberal ideas such as
deregulation of media rules and privatization of public media companies. Therefore,
production companies need a “special genre” to help them invest less yet obtain a
higher benefit. In this context, the special TV genre is the reality TV program, which
meets the needs of production companies within the neo-liberal society. According to
Lee’s (1996) argument on Korean reality TV, some programs are created and
developed by Korean production companies, but they have tended to import formats
of popular TV programs from Western countries, particularly the U.S. This
phenomenon does not just apply to the Korean TV industry, but also pertains to many
countries aside from those in East Asia such as France, Russia, Mexico, and India.
Thus, reality TV as a “beneficial genre” is attractive to TV producers and companies
in that it absolutely fits within the logic of neo-liberalism. It is no wonder that it has
become very popular in Korean media industries since the format of the shows has
been imported from Western countries. In particular, U.S. reality TV programming formats as a globalized media model have played a key role in “nativizing” (Moran 2009, 152) reality TV shows in a Korean context. Using TV program formats imported from the U.S. is intimately related to the political domain of South Korea.

Along with the notion of privatization in neo-liberal society, there are several reasons why a number of producing companies in Korea have tended to use original TV programs without modification and to broadcast them to the public, or import popular TV program formats from the U.S. and modify them to fit into a Korean context. In relation to two types of formats, Moran points out that their advent has boosted the media industries in in the domestic U.S. as well as in the international sphere. In the 2000s, franchising TV program formats, which started in the 1950s in the U.S., has become a mainstay in contemporary international media culture. He accounts for two types of TV program formats. The first is called “canned programming” (151). Once a production company creates a program, it is broadcast without any transformation. For example, most cable TV companies in Korea buy canned programs from other countries, most of them from the U.S. They then broadcast the original TV shows with subtitles in a various genres such as drama (House, 24, Grey’s Anatomy, etc.), documentary (National Geographic), sit-coms (Friends, Big Bang Theory, the 70s Show, etc.), and reality (America’s Next Top Model, The Biggest Loser, Extreme Makeover, American Idol, etc.).

The second type of TV program format can be transformed according to the cultural context of the importing country. A number of production companies in South Korea have imported the format of the reality TV show from western countries--mostly from America--and have made them fit the receiving Korean culture. For Instance, Korean celebrities and experts in their fields are cast for new version of
Korean reality shows, but the format is exactly the same as the originals in the U.S.

Moran also notes that American reality TV has been sold overseas using two methods. Some shows are licensed outright to foreign broadcasters, in the way most U.S programming traditionally has been marketed. On the other hand, many more shows have been modified to portray the familiar cultural context of the country in which they will be shown. This method involves selling or licensing a program’s concept for local production with local subjects. Raphael (2009) claims that the format of reality TV shows can increase the international circulation and recirculation of products through globalized media markets. In Korea, production companies use the American versions of the reality shows they want to recreate as the “gold standard.” One reality show producer shares his thoughts on why he uses the American format:

One of the primary reasons that we use western formats--most of them are Americans--is that we need to learn how to make a popular reality TV show. There are only a few reality TV shows in which ordinary people participate in Korea. So we not only want to develop new and creative formats of reality TV shows but also to export the new format of shows from other countries by experimenting with the original version of reality shows.

(Kyunghyang newspaper, 2009)

As a result, a steady increase of reality TV programming in neo-liberal society is not a huge surprise to Korean media industries. Using imported formats makes production companies reduce costs when making a show. Also, lacing the format with Korean content not only accustoms viewers to familiarity with the programs, but also attracts them to a new type of TV genre never seen before. In particular, the most salient difference from other TV genres is that ordinary people appear on the screen. Regardless of the themes of reality TV programs, this huge
attraction appeals to viewers as “daily routine” or “things that can happen to me.”

*Reinforcing the Dominant Ideologies of the Female Body*

A number of scholars who have studied the representation of female bodies through the mass media point out that the media has played a decisive role in producing and proliferating the “standard of ideal beauty” (Bissell and Chung, 2009; Lim, 2004; Yoon, 2004; Chung and Kwon, 2007; Marwick, 2010; and, Eisend and Moller, 2007). According to scholars, the media strongly tends to regard an overweight and obese body as “abnormal” and “in need of repair” by creating a standard ideal body type that emphasizes slenderness and thinness. Lee and Lim’s study (2012) of the representation of the female body in fashion magazines has shown that the images of a “hyper-reality body” have tended to regard female bodies as “reconstructible” and “variable” entities in order to be part of “normality.”

Slenderness, denoting a well-cared for external value, is often connected with morality, ethics, and self-control. Therefore, plumpness, in contrast to slenderness, is juxtaposed with such terms as “abnormality” and “out of control.” Images of plumpness and fatness in the media still tend to be shown differently by gender. Gledhill (2009) focuses on analyzing soap operas using a feminist perspective and argues that the category of female gender becomes a social issue when it deviates from the “social standard.” For example, obese women are often represented as lazy and lacking in willpower in the media. However, obese men are frequently represented as wealthy and honorable. Sender and Sullivan (2008) illustrate that large women in the media have been represented as a “bad example” implying they are dull-witted and uneducated (573), whereas large men have often been represented as generous persons or heads of households with patriarchal power. On the other hand,
both slender women and men have been shown as sexually attractive and diligent and also as people who live successful and happy lives. As a result, the opposing characteristics of the slender and the plump body, as represented by the media, have had a huge influence on the idea of slenderness as an ideal body in Korean society.

Images of the ideal body have also served as an impetus for ordinary women to start obsessing about their body images. Kim (2004) provides two significant factors for female body obsession in Korean society. First, the ideal standard of beauty as slenderness and a Westernized body type, spread through the media, has had an enormous influence on the development of anxiety over appearance. Second, the ideal body type, homogenized as a “Westernized body” or a “Barbie doll figure” by the media, has fostered a sense of racial inferiority (Lee, 2011).

As a result, anxiety and racial inferiority can be regarded as key factors that drive ordinary women to become overly focused on and even obsessed with their body images. Also, binarities of the female body such as slenderness/fatness, normality/abnormality, Westernized body/Orientalized body, often juxtaposed in the media, have powerfully influenced the constant dominant female body discourse in Korean culture.

There are specific examples of the ways in which the female body and sexuality are shown as dichotomized representations of various types of female bodies normally set up by the media. At the beginning of the 21st century, the body had started gaining attention from the public sphere (Yu, 2007). In this social milieu, in recent years, various media genres such as film, drama, TV shows, and so forth have focused on the makeover theme. More effort is needed to examine significant social discourse on the female body, especially that produced by makeover-themed media.
genres. As we often see in movies and TV dramas that focus on makeovers, there is a common story line in which the main actress, whose character is usually plump and unattractive, goes on a diet or has plastic surgery. After her desperate efforts, she finally has a pretty face and slender body. At the end of the story, she is portrayed not only as an important person in her community or school, but also someone who lives a successful and happy life.

Most of these stories have happy endings. As a specific example, 200 Pounds Beauty\textsuperscript{61} was released in 2006, and was incredibly popular in Korea. The main character, Hanna, enjoys singing and loves sharing her voice, but the only way she can do it is from backstage. Instead of performing herself, she sings for a beautiful woman named Ami, because her obese body is not regarded as a marketable in her appearance-priority society\textsuperscript{62}. Hanna also secretly loves a man but cannot do anything about it because of her unfavorable appearance. One day, she realizes that surviving with her appearance is much harder than dying, so she tries to commit suicide, but fails. She gets plastic surgery on her entire body and goes on a stringent diet. Eventually, she attains the “ideal appearance” of which she has always dreamed. At the end of the movie, she can finally sing on stage in front of a cheering audience and

\textsuperscript{61} 200 pounds beauty is one of the most successful makeover-themed movies in Korea. The original work is a popular Japanese cartoon written by Suzuki Yumiko. According to official box office statistics conducted by KOFIC (Korean Film Council), the film ranks 45rd having earned over 6.6 million. This number is actually tremendous in the history of Korean film because there are only 10 films-including Hollywood blockbuster movies such as Avatar (drawing over 13.6 million) and the Transformer series-that have drawn over 10 million in Korea (Korean film council, 2016).

\textsuperscript{62} In post-modern Korea, many people are familiar with the inconvenient truth of appearance-priority, which is often illustrated through movies and dramas. The latest example of this is a Korean drama, ‘Chil-Jeon-Pal-Gi, (that refers to dogged perseverance) Ku-Hae-La’, which has started broadcasting on January 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2015. In the drama, one of the female characters, ‘Woori Go’ who is really good at singing and love it, but she sings behind the stage hidden from a pretty and slender female singer because her body is obese, which is not marketable.
also wins the man’s heart.

Another similar example is the Korean drama, *Money’s Incarnate*[^63], released in 2013. In this drama, the main female character, *Bok Jaein*, is disliked because of her obese body. She has a negative personality because schoolmates bullied her due to her appearance, and she has learned to release her stress by eating. As she grew up, she has had a one-sided, unreciprocated love, so she decides to change her appearance to win the man’s heart. As in the makeover movie, she is “reborn” with a beautiful face and body after she undergoes a harsh diet and multiple plastic surgeries.

According to Yu’s account (2007) of the representation of the female body in Korean movies, the female body in the media has often been shown as a juxtaposed contrast such as between slenderness versus fatness. This is especially the case in makeover-themed genres. For example, Plump *Hanna* and *Jaein*, the main characters in *200 Pounds Beauty* are represented as a “freaks” from which everyone--especially men--wants to keep away. These types are always shown as ladies with no sense of fashion, and their features are compared with those of slender women, especially in scenes where they are trying on the same dress in a different size and are getting looks from other people in the shop. Besides looks, their personalities are represented as lacking in confidence and independence, and as having low self-esteem due to their rounded bodies. On the other hand, after *Hanna* and *Jaein* underwent a body transformation through a strict diet, harsh work out, and plastic surgery, they started to become sexually attractive women, and their images became stylish and sophisticated in terms of fashion. Furthermore, *Hanna* and *Jaein*’s “new bodies” represent successful career women, full of confidence and self-esteem.

[^63]: *Money’s Incarnate* was one of the popular dramas released in 2013. It was aired by SBS, one of three major broadcast companies in Korea.
Additionally, the dichotomous female body images in makeover-themed genres have also played a significant role in promoting the dominant ideology of femininity along with the other dichotomized concepts. It is not hard to find contrast structures of the female body and femininity in the global sphere as well. For example, the Hollywood movie, *Miss Congeniality*[^64], does not show the typical contrast of slenderness and fatness, but rather it highlights the stereotypical gender norms by juxtaposing slender body images with femininity. In the film, a female FBI agent named Gracie is initially portrayed with no female characteristics. She snorts when she laughs; she always wears pants and sweatshirts; her hair is always a mess; and she drinks beer without a glass. However, she goes through a radical transformation in order to do undercover work as a participant in the Miss USA Competition. She goes on a diet to attain a feminine body shape and gets assistance from experts, including a make-up artist, hair stylist, fashion stylist, and even an expert in teaching “feminine behaviors.” As a result, Gracie is ultimately represented as a feminized, sophisticated woman with a beautiful body.

Consequently, female subjectivity and sexual identity, which have been represented in various media genres that focus on makeovers, tend to be produced and reinforced in the context of contrast structures of female body images. The women who have a “new life” through a makeover of their appearance normally become objects of attention from men. Also, their bodies, once oppressed and marginalized from their communities, are transferred into the center of the community as

[^64]: *Miss Congeniality* was released in 2000 by Warner Bros. Entertainment, one of the biggest American production and distribution companies of film, TV programming, and entertainment. The story is about a tomboy and female FBI agent, Gracie (Sandra Bullock), who becomes feminized when she goes undercover as a participant in a Miss USA pageant in order to crack a criminal case. The film made almost $14,000,000 and a second version was made in 2005 (IMDb).
liberalized and normalized. In this regard, the idea of the binarity of the Korean female body, as shown in makeover-themed media, has played a powerful role in reinforcing the dominant discourse on appearance-priority. As a result, slenderness—the dominant discourse on the female body—tends no longer to be regarded as an ideal body, but as a normal body in Korean society. On the other hand, the obese body, contrasted with slenderness in the binary scheme, tends to be regarded as an abnormal body lacking sexual identity and having an absence of subjectivity.

Figure 6. Dichotomized female identities between slender body and obese body in makeover-themed genres.

Therefore, the contrast structures of the female body often produced in specific-themed genres have a profound effect on reinforcing the concurrent female body discourse, such as slenderness and thinness, by widely spreading the message. In this context, female body politics, produced through the powerful media genres that focus on makeovers, have played a major role in reinforcing the dominant discourse such as slenderness, normality, and obese-phobia by implicitly supporting the idea of appearance-priority in Korean culture. Furthermore, body modification, always connected with a successful life in makeover-themed media, has been perceived as an “able” project for anyone who wants to improve her life.
Roles of Self-Care Reality TV in Korean Society

Reproducing Dominant Discourses of the Female Body

As mentioned in the previous section, self-care reality TV shows have successfully settled into the dominant female pop culture in the neo-liberal society. They have become so popular with Korean females because they focus on major issues such as obesity and health care, and also because they deal with diet, fashion, hair, make-up, and plastic surgery about which many women are concerned in daily life as a high value in Korean culture. In this section, I look at the significant roles of self-care reality TV shows, whose themes tend to focus more on “girl stuff.” The first role of the shows is to reinforce the dominant discourse on the female body. In this regard, I take a closer look at the mutual interaction between the dominant discourse on the female body and self-care reality TV programs with specific examples from the Korean reality TV shows, “Let me in” and “Get it Beauty”. In other words, dominant body discourse such as slenderness and obese-phobia, which have been firmly rooted within Korean culture, have played a major role in the emergence of makeover reality TV programs. These programs have had a huge influence on reproducing and circulating body discourses such as slenderness, obese-phobia, and self-care. More specifically, women-targeted makeover reality TV shows tend to make the line between normality--slenderness/thinness--and abnormality--fatness/obesity--obvious and clear.

In the field of communications and media, a number of studies have researched the representation of female body images through television over past

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65Self-care related TV shows in Korea often have themes related to dieting, make-up, fashion, and plastic-surgery, which many ‘young girls’ are often interested in.
decades. Most have concluded that there is a tendency to formulate slenderness as the female body standard. Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert (2007) discuss how specific TV genres that focus on female appearance, such as reality makeover and fashion-related TV shows, play a powerful role in producing “idealized discourses of beauty” (75) such as slenderness/ glamor/femininity, etc. by concealing the negative effects of transient transformation (in fashion reality shows) and plastic surgery (in makeover reality shows). In her article, Jones (2008) specifically presents dominant body discourse, produced through body-related reality TV shows. These TV shows not only provide gender binaries such as femininity and masculinity, but they also represent female skinny bodies as “media bodies” (521). As Jones demonstrates, television is a powerful instrument in producing dominant discourse, and it plays an efficient role in disseminating cultural ideologies in society. In this context, there is no doubt that the dominant ideology of the female body, disseminated through self-care reality TV programs, has been firmly rooted within the prevailing Korean body culture.

It is important to examine the ways in which popular makeover reality TV programs deliver significant socio-cultural messages about the female body. As Nam and Goh (2011) mention in their work on Korean weight-loss reality TV shows, these shows seek “naturalness.” They avoid written scripts and made-up stories, and instead use “real stories” showing how ordinary people are dealing with their everyday lives. Another characteristic of such programs is that “ordinary people” are the main actors. The whole process of body modification of ordinary women tends to deliver significant messages revolving around the possibility that everyone is able to change their lives for the better by improving their appearance in some way. The last characteristic is that there are always a number of experts in various fields whose role is to help participants solve their problems by providing useful tips and guidance. Get
*It Beauty* and *Let Me In*, the most popular makeover reality TV shows in Korea, could be perfect examples with which to examine the various ways that particular-themed reality TV shows deliver dominant ideas of the female body into society.

*Get It Beauty* is a typical self-care reality TV show, specifically focusing on beauty tips about skin-care, cosmetic products, make-up skills, and hairstyles. It provides ordinary girls and women with useful, easy tips. For example, there are about 50 “better girls”—ordinary girls and women—seated on a panel. Their role is to fix their make-up with tips from the experts, or they become models so viewers can be provided with useful guidance in a context of realism.

![Figure 7. Scenes from Get It Beauty. “Better girls” are trying tips provided by a make-up artist in an episode (left). An expert is putting makeup on the face of one of the better girls in the studio with a specific explanation on “how to do it yourself” (right). (Screenshot photography captured from Get It Beauty TV show, episode 4, March 20, 2013)](image)

Another example of a popular makeover reality television program, *Let Me In*,

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66 The most popular makeover reality television show, and also the top-rated, *Get it beauty* 2014 (Season 2) has been airing on cable channel *Story On* since 2010. (*Get It Beauty* web site)

67 *Let Me In* is also one of the popular makeover reality shows that focuses on plastic surgery, airing on the same cable channel. Interestingly, the before/after photos of dramatic and drastic changes often emerge as a “hot issue” on the main page of Internet search engines. (*Let Me In* website)
introduces itself as a “life changing makeover show.” As discussed in Chapter 3, many Korean females are obsessed with their appearance and they continuously work to improve it in order to fit the cultural beauty standard constantly portrayed in and reinforced by the mass media. In Korea’s appearance-based society, *Let Me In*, greatly appeals to the numerous women who want to change their lives by even getting plastic surgery from head to toe. In order to conduct numerous interviews in each episode, the show picks out an ordinary woman who has had trouble in her life due to serious appearance defects. The selected woman has an opportunity to get free plastic surgery, as well as experience special diet programs developed by experts. After her works is done, everyone in the studio cannot hold back their astonishment when she comes on to the stage to reveal her new look. In scenes like these, a group of experts who call themselves “doctors” give a detailed explanation of the entire process. At the end of the episode, results are magnified by comparing the participant before body modification with the “new her”. The new body, after extreme modification, perfectly fits the standard of ideal beauty that has been firmly planted within society.

These two makeover reality TV programs are perfect examples of programs that vigorously deliver the dominant ideal of the female body. This kind of makeover reality program often sends a message that everyone--even if you are not a movie star--is able to improve their appearance through self-care. They provide viewers with various expert tips on female daily beauty such as make-up, hairstyles, fashions, and even plastic surgery. As a specific example, comparisons of “before and after” are an efficient strategy that instigates the idea that body modification is one way to live a better life as a woman in an appearance-priority society. Moreover, extreme comparisons of “before and after” at the end of these shows play a key role in
intensifying the binarity of the female body in terms of slenderness/fatness and
normality/abnormality. Consequently, makeover reality TV programs have not only
couraged the widespread trend of appearance-priority, but they have also
“internalized its rhetoric as a universal applicable maxim. Even a healthy, slim
woman can be improved” (Marwick, 2010, 264).

Female body modification through self-care in various media genres is no
longer accepted as a new or surprising phenomenon in the concurrent Korean society.
The huge popularity of such programs, in which ordinary women actively participate,
illustrates that society requires women to fit into a mold or body standard by
improving their external characteristics. In addition, these kinds of reality TV shows
help ordinary women believe that unrealistic makeover stories represented in movies
and dramas are no longer impossible. The stories portrayed in these shows appeal to
female viewers and audiences by casting ordinary people as main characters. Positive
results of body modification done on ordinary women are magnified by comparing
“before” and “after” photos of the participants. Actually, the extreme contrast of
female body images in Korean popular culture (such as 200 Hundred Beauty and
Money’s Incarnate), tends to be regarded as possible only in movies. However, the
dichotomized female body images represented in makeover reality TV programs tend
to appeal as a possibility. Thus, unlike the contrast of female body images in other
media such as film and drama, the opposite representation of the ordinary female
body in makeover reality programs reaches female viewers in a practical way by
providing the entire process of body modification or body improvement offered by
experts. Many scholars who study makeover reality TV shows argue that useful
information provided by the shows assists ordinary people in living better lives by
helping them solve their appearance difficulties (Christenson and Ivancin, 2006;
On the other hand, many scholars also claim that this kind of reality TV show is a powerful place to create and actively circulate a standardized female body image such as slender and westernized, or a “media body” (Sender and Sullivan, 2008; Eisend and Moller, 2007; Shields and Heinecken, 2002; and, Rich, 2011). More specifically, self-care, especially as touted on makeover reality programs, reinforces the idea of a media body—a female body frequently regarded as “in need of repair”. As a result, a number of women have become obsessed with standardized body images regardless whether they are already healthy and slim. Also, useful tips provided by the experts do help viewers deal with their problems, but they normally suggest a temporary solution without “long-term follow-up care” (Ouellette and Hay, 2008a, 70), which might not be that helpful in the long run for viewers facing problems and difficulties in reality. In addition, makeover reality TV shows, especially those diet and plastic surgery related, tend to minimize or even ignore important side effects of the process of body modification such as long-time treatment and subsequent expenses (Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert, 2007), yet they are still considered as an interesting and useful in Korean society.

*Delivering Neo-Liberal Messages to Maintain a Good Society*

Self-care reality TV definitely has illustrated significant factors of neoliberalism in its various formats and systems. In other words, this special TV genre has played a key role in cutting down costs for production, and also in delivering neo-liberal ideas in terms of content. Many scholars (Nam, and Goh, 2011; Ouelette and Hay, 2008a; Rich, 2011; Sender and Sullivan; 2008; and, Silk, Francombe, and Bachelor, 2009) argue over the ways in which self-care reality TV programs help
society govern at a distance by distributing neo-liberal ideas that employ Foucault’s concept of “governmentality.” According to Foucault (2000), “in contrast to sovereignty, government has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, and so on” (216-217). Ouellette and Hay (2008a) discuss two dimensions of Foucault’s view of the relationship between liberal society and the political economy: first, the transformation of government from monarchy to “a scientific reasoning about processes of government, society, and population.” (11); second, the formulation of a self-regulating system through the articulation of liberalism and the logic of the market economy. Unlike monarchies before the eighteenth century that directly and visibly controlled citizens, the new form of government in a liberal society regulates people indirectly and invisibly under the assumption that they can have more freedom if they take responsibility for their actions. Ouellette and Hay (2008b) discuss the changing relationship between television and social welfare and the impulse to remake television viewers into active and healthy citizens in neo-liberal capitalist democracies based on Foucault’s concept “governmentality” and “technology of yourself”. They further point out that the positive relationships between the body and the media help ordinary people overcome their “problems” in regard to health and fitness. Among various reality television genres, body-related shows in particular have an important socio-cultural purpose by providing “infotainment” and “edutainment”. Today’s reality TV focuses on instilling

68 Murray and Ouellete (2004) offer a definition of reality television: reality TV is an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real. This coupling is what has made reality TV an important generic forum for a range of institutional and cultural developments that include the merger of marketing and “real-life” entertainment, the convergence of new technologies with programs and their promotion, and an acknowledgement of the manufactured artifice that coexists with truth claims.
self-management techniques in individuals. It is current foray into social work combines the technical knowledge of lifestyle experts with entrepreneurial discourse to provide detailed instructions for helping one overcome personal hardships and difficulties (Ouellette and Hay, 2008a). In this paper, the role of reality TV shows in a neoliberal society is well explained:

Popular reality TV has taken up and regularized post-welfare grammars of choice, personal responsibility, and self-empowerment and applied them to a whole range of ‘problems’ that encompass everything from obesity to housecleaning to ineffective parenting….Reality TV’s techniques for achieving ‘happiness and fulfillment’ via the management and care of the self overlap with the contemporary reasoning of welfare reform, not least because it is television’s commercialism – its allegiance and accountability to the ‘free’ market – that authorizes its ability to intervene socially (73).

In addition, Hay and Ouellette (2008a) demonstrate the relationship between reality TV shows as a key player in “governing at a distance (2)” and citizenship in neo-liberal capitalist democracies. Not only does reality television provide an experimental training ground for the government of the enterprising self, but it has also adopted an active and visible role in coordinating non-state resources (money, expertise, and outreach) to achieve the ethic of self-sufficient citizenship as promoted by neo-liberal regimes. Despite some negative ideologies of the female body image formulated and produced by weight-loss reality TV, the shows still play an important role in educating people by providing useful information so they can take care of themselves and become better citizens. Ouellette and Hay (2008a) note that “popular pedagogies” performed by reality TV seek to transform individuals into empowered actors who can learn to overcome their problems with the nudging of experts. The proliferation of ever more specialized programs of self-help has surely contributed to increased “governmentalization” of everyday life, which doesn’t require a centralized
state or even authorities to administer. Television has become the most dominant private educational system as a source of “information, evaluation, and reproach” (Sender, 2006); and reality TV, especially instructional shows, has capitalized the essence of the neo-liberal requirement of continuous learning (Lee, 2008).

Silk, Francombe, and Bachelor’s work (2009) on one of the most popular reality TV shows, The Biggest Loser, corresponds to Ouellette’s and Hay’s account in that they regard the self-care reality TV show “as a highly politicized and contested space.” In this space, the show tends to divide ordinary people into two categories - normal/abnormal or bad/good citizens--by disciplining them at a distance with pedagogical information. Moreover, Silk et al point out that public pedagogy from experts on a personal level, provided though self-care reality TV programs, plays a role in helping ordinary people take care of themselves, and it is absolutely engaged with the concept of neo-liberalism and “personal accountability.” On the other hand, public pedagogy on a societal plane plays a powerful role in producing a “self-sufficient citizenship” (Ouellette and Hay, 2008b, 472) that a neo-liberal society requires by helping “abnormal citizens” transfer into the category of normality by taking care of themselves. Sender and Sullivan (2008) claim that some neo-liberal apparatus such as surveillance and self-monitoring, often utilized in self-care reality TV programs, tends to operate by individual choice. Furthermore, the neo-liberal apparatus in the programs has influenced the producing of ideal citizens as demanded by a neo-liberal society.

Most of the research on the relationship between neo-liberalism and self-care reality TV shows has been done in Western countries, but there have been no studies on self-care reality TV programs in Korea. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, the appearance of westernized ideals during the period of modernity is one of the most
significant historical contexts, as it has played a decisive role in consolidating “Americanized beauty” as a dominant female body ideology in post-modern Korean society. This historically unique context is a key difference between my body study and other scholarly inquiries on female bodies done in western countries. Moreover, this study allows me not only to address the ways in which the neo-liberal TV genre of self-care reality TV shows clearly represent the distinctive history of an idealized beauty - westernized beauty -- but it also allows me to examine how the neo-liberal shows play a decisive role in promoting the idea of self-body care, which is inescapable for women who want to meet the ideal standard.

Following the popularity of self-care reality TV shows, some scholars have tried to interpret their popularity within the Korean context of neo-liberalism. Nam and Goh (2011) argue that weight-loss reality TV--a popular theme of self-care TV shows--operates as a form of “neo-liberal governmentality”(91) in Korean society. In fact, Nam and Goh’s study is the only study on body-care reality TV shows in Korea to date, in spite of the immense popularity. This is interesting paradox. As these shows are viewed by women in Korea, they maintain the dominant ideologies on the female body and produce distinctive body discourses in Korea’s unique context. More specifically, these body-related shows play a powerful role in supporting neo-liberal ideas in that the obesity issues frequently represented have shifted into the personal category from the public dimension. Therefore, taking care of an obesity problem depends on individual freedom of choice according to the logic of neo-liberalism.

This message has played a key role in elaborating an ideology of the body, which can be managed by individual choice and strong will.
Conclusion

There are two primary reasons why self-body care reality TV shows have been so successful within the female-oriented pop culture in concurrent Korean society. First, the logic of neo-liberalism and capitalism has provided Korean media industries with massive economic benefits. Specifically, within the context of neo-liberalism, the shows gain recognition from TV producers as a beneficial genre, which helps them kill two birds with one stone: cutting costs and achieving high ratings. These shows have also emerged as one of the most popular TV genres among viewers since they appear to deal with everyday life. Second, the mass media has had a strong influence on justifying why women need to take care of their bodies themselves by continuously reproducing the dominant body discourses that have been historically formulated—particularly, obese female bodies, which have only recently emerged in contemporary Korean society and which deviate from historically formulated norms. This, plus the binarity of the female body in the media, results in plump bodies being placed into the category of “abnormal” and “in need of repair or control.” Within this context, self-care reality TV shows have become very popular among many Korean women, regardless of the category to which their body assigns them as they look for useful assistance and information on body care in order to fit their bodies into the normal boundary.

On the one hand, the concept of self-body care in modern Korea has emerged and grown among young girls and women who want to look western in appearance. On the other hand, self-body care has arisen as a way for females to make their bodies competitive products in contemporary capitalistic society. The self-care reality TV shows are a new medium that supports both of these underlying motives by constantly distributing slender, westernized body images and labeling them as normal for female
Koreans. At the same time, these shows deliver the idea that individuals can enhance the value of their body if they take care of their bodies themselves.

Consequently, the slender discourse has been taken for granted by many Korean girls and women such that their bodies—which are often healthy, slim and even-toned—are erroneously transferred into the category of “in need of repair.” In this sense, the concept of body care should be understood as an “irony of modernity,” caused by power ideologies on female body images such as the BMI Index (created by WHO), traditionally constructed beauty standards (westernized beauty), and the huge influx of American foods (which contributes to obesity). The irony of Korean female body images is reinforced “by scientist, companies, and governments, which in wondrous fashion contributes to an increase in risk” (Beck, 2006, 332) of obsession and anxiety with their bodies.

I also address the significant roles of self-care reality TV shows, which have become one of the most popular media genres in the concurrent neo-liberal society. Specifically, I focus more on analyzing the ways in which the neo-liberal messages produced by these self-care reality have powerfully influenced the reinforcement of self-care discourse. From a review of previous research on self-care reality shows allied with the idea of the governmentality of Foucault, I found that there is no doubt that self-care reality TV shows operate as a powerful cultural apparatus for neo-liberal society to efficiently regulate people. Yet, it cannot be said that the major role of these kinds of shows is to reinforce the dominant discourse on the female body and the idea of self-care. There are various motivations or personal reasons for women to participate in self-care reality programs or watch the shows in order to take care of themselves. For example, self-care should be interpreted within the logic of reinforcing concurrent dominant body discourse in case the purpose involves other
stakes such as having a baby for one’s husband and family or being a good child for one’s parents. However, when their motivation for self-care is based on the idea of self-fulfillment and subjectivity, then it would be hard to reconcile female body discourse as it has often been shown in much previous body research. Therefore, in the next chapter, I look for the ways in which the Korean female body and subjectivity can be reconceptualized in the neo-liberal society by an in-depth analysis of popular Korean weight loss reality TV shows.
Chapter 5

The Korean Weight-Loss Reality TV Shows: *Diet War* and *Diet Master*

“Central to what is “true” and “real” for reality TV is its connection to new forms of governing at a distance, including the private surveillance of “ordinary” individuals.”

Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, 2004, 8

In this chapter, I examine two popular weight-loss reality TV shows, “*Diet War 6*” and “*Diet Master*”. I specifically focus on analyzing four characteristics created and constantly generated through the shows: shape vs. health, expert intervention, numerical values, and labels. This work is vital for my research in that the four characteristics found in the shows have played a key role in exploring the ways in which they not only reinforce traditional body discourses on Korean females, but also help to generate ideal citizens for the neo-liberal society by producing concepts of a normalized body.

The first characteristics focus on body-care as a means of helping women obtain an idealized body shape that is slender and thin, rather than helping them to be healthy. It is interesting to see that the meaning of body-care in this context is different from the purpose of body-care in broader society, where combating obesity has become a main focus. The second characteristic of the reality shows is the emergence of new expert groups called “lifestyle designers.” The experts include doctors, trainers, and nutritionists who not only help participants and viewers take
care of their bodies, but who also consult with people to change their lives in other ways. Hence the new title of “lifestyle designer.” The third characteristic evident in the shows is the emphasis on numerical values such as clothing size and weight, which are used to determine whether body-care goals have been met. This concept reinforces the way in which numerical values for the female body play a key role in determining a “marketable” body in a consumer capitalistic society. Considering that “quantification” of the human body is one of the characteristics of modern sports and physical activities (Coakley, 2009) since the emergence of modern society, numerical values applied to female bodies should be examined as a significant factor, one that has never appeared before. The last characteristic is the labeling of the female body as a problematized body. On these shows, participants accept the “obese” label for their bodies without question. One can then infer that this label matches how the female obese body is represented within Korean society. The simple act of these women has had a strong influence on embracing the dominant ideology of the normalization of female bodies. What I focus more on, however, is the concept of labeling as applied not only to obese females, but also average and skinny ones. As a result, “labeling” plays a key role in marginalizing perfectly normal bodies by stigmatizing them as “abnormal.”

Specifically, the two characteristics--expert intervention and numerical values--could be regarded as typical of body-related reality TV shows, such as makeover and diet shows produced in other countries like the U.S. The figures

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69 In Coakley’s book, Sports in Society, he uses Guttmann’s research to define seven characteristics of modern sports: Secularism, Equality, Specialization, Rationalization, Bureaucratization, Quantification, and Records. He points out that “one or some of these characteristics had been presented in games and contests during previous historical periods”(61), “but sports today have these seven characteristics, which have never before appeared together in physical games and contests.” (60)
represented in these kinds of shows should be examined since they play a significant role in maintaining the power ideologies of female bodies. Also, the other two characteristics—shape vs. health and labeling—should be meticulously examined in that they have been created from a complex social and cultural interplay ever since the emergence of modern Korean society.

The Shows

*Diet War, Season 6*70: “*Last Challenge to Be Able to Change My Life.*”

The first season of *Diet War* started in the summer of 2007; thereafter, five other seasons aired until the summer of 2012. The show was not broadcast on a public TV channel, but all seasons have been top-ranked among the TV programs aired during the same time period. In fact, *Diet War* became so popular among women and girls that according to AGB Nielsen Media Research, the viewer ratings of each season of the show were the highest of all the cable channels in the same period among women in their twenties to forties71.

I chose Season 6 of *Diet War* for an in-depth analysis for several reasons. It was the most recently released—between June and August of 2012—and ran for 16 weeks, which doubled the broadcast period compared to previous seasons. Next, twenty-four participants were selected, almost twice the number of participants in the original show. Finally, Season 6 had two more episodes than previous seasons. For

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70 *Diet War* is carried by the cable channel, *Story On*. *Story On* is one of the cable channels that targets women ages 20-45. Most programs focus on “women and girls stuff” such as diet, fashion, make-up, cooking, child-care, and married life.

these reasons, Season 6 of *Diet War* can be regarded as one of the major systematic body care-related reality TV shows in Korea. The prizes for winning in Season 6 totaled roughly $90,000 (USD). All participants trained in the boot camp for twelve weeks, after which they trained by themselves at home for four more weeks. After the boot camp, the participant who lost the most weight won half of the total prize, or around $45,000. The remainder was awarded to the participant who lost the most weight during the entire season. One hundred candidates were selected and then examined by medical experts to document measurements of body weight, abdominal obesity, and depression. Next, the group of experts interviewed the candidates to determine who needed help most desperately. Finally, twenty-four candidates were selected for the show. Only fourteen participants completed their first mission on the second episode of the season—a 10 km marathon. They went on to participate in the twelve-week boot camp training. These participants were divided into two groups—the red team and the blue team. Each had to fulfill main missions as well as sub-missions, most of which required physical ability. Since the format of the missions is competitive, the individual winner of each strongly influences which participant or participants will leave the show. For example, a team that wins a specific mission has a chance to get ‘weight-loss tickets’ or ‘weight-imposing tickets’. On the other hand, if a team loses, “virtual fats” are given as a penalty. This imaginary fat has an effect on influencing who is going to leave and who gets to stay on the show at the

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72 The interviewers—all of them experts in various medical fields such as obesity, psychiatry, or plastic surgery—select women who face serious health problems if they do not lose weight, and who are in difficult living situations, such as being a young, single mother.

73 Weight-loss tickets are useful for participants in order to stay on the show. For example, if a participant wins a ticket of “1kg weight-loss”, she can take 1 kg off her actual rate of weight-loss at the time the show decides who has the least weight-loss on each episode.

74 If a person who gets a ticket of “1kg weight – imposing”, she can give it to another person as a disadvantage for the decision as to who drops out.
end of every episode. Various physical missions are completed during the twelve
weeks and, typically, the participant who loses the least amount of weight leave the
show. The final episode of the season ends with a runway showcase of all of the
participants who have become slender; they emerge with gorgeous outfits and
professional make-up to show off their new look to the audience and their families.

*Diet Master: “The New Concept of Customized Body Change Reality Show.”*

After the end of the series *Diet War* in 2012, the network “Story on” launched
a new version of a body-care reality show called *Diet Master* in 2013. This particular
show had a totally different format than *Diet War*. In contrast to *Diet War*, which had
one theme and one group of participants who became smaller throughout the season,
each of the twelve episodes in *Diet Master* has its own theme with new participants.

Another difference was the diversity of the expert group. There is only a
limited group that includes trainers, doctors, and nutritionists on *Diet War*, since the
main theme of the show is to lose weight through exercise and consumption control.
On the other hand, there are about ten experts from various fields on *Diet Master*,
including physical trainers, doctors, oriental medical professionals, fitness instructors,
a psychotherapist, and a massage therapist who assist the participants. The greatest
difference between *Diet War* and *Diet Master* is the way participants are selected. For
*Diet War*, only larger women who look morbidly obese can be considered, while
subjects for *Diet Master* are not just obese. Anyone can be a participant, even if she is
slender but still wants to improve some particular part of her body, such as the waist,
hips, or thighs. As part of the process, *Diet Master* chooses two female participants
for each episode who take care of their bodies for at least 4 weeks, but no longer than
eight weeks.
Diet Master had two hosts, along with two mentors--female Korean celebrities whose role was to help the hosts run the show. There were also about ten masters: two plastic surgeons, two oriental medicine specialists, a massage therapist, three professional trainers, and two or three fitness instructors--experts in yoga, pole fitness, jump rope, and so forth. The pair of female participants worked towards a specific theme, such as “become size 4475”, “getting in bikini shape”, or “getting a luxurious-looking backside”. Each episode had a different theme in Diet Master. For example, the theme of the first episode of the show is “having size 44 within four weeks”. Under this theme, two female participants go on a diet with a chosen expert for a month to get their bodies to size 44. These different themes in each episode of the show clearly show what kind of body image Korean females want as well as which parts of their bodies they are obsessed with.

Participants could only work with one of the ten masters on the show. First, one of the masters would choose a participant they wanted to help and then the participant would be allowed to choose one of the masters who had already selected them. The matched participant and master then had 4-8 weeks to complete their body work. At the end of each episode, a panel of judges on the show evaluated each participant’s body. The participant whose body was “more attractive” won the competition.

As mentioned above, the most important reason why I am interested in Diet Master is because the show targets not only obese women, but all women and girls regardless of their body classification. This characteristic is obvious evidence that all female bodies, even those often classified within the “normal” category, have been

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75 44 size can be converted as 00-0 US size.
shifted into an abnormal category that sees their bodies as “problematized” or “in need of repair”.

**Characteristics of Korean Weight-Loss Reality TV Shows**

*Focusing on Body Shape Rather than Health*

The first characteristic of Korean weight-loss reality television shows is that they emphasize building an ideal body shape rather than promoting health. This indicates the depth of Korean women’s obsession with taking care of their bodies. The concept of a “diet” in Korean society differs from that of Western countries with a high rate of obesity; and the shows also tended to target only females. In the U.S., diet is regarded as a way to prevent becoming obese while recovering health by losing weight. Moreover, categories indicating who needs to diet in Korean society are not limited to “obese” women. Specifically, all women—obese or not—in the normal category, or even that of low weight, become targets of weight-loss pressure. For example, the theme of the third episode of *Diet Master* was “getting a bikini body in two weeks.” The two experts explained why women whose weight is in a normal category want to lose more.

Master 1 (professional trainer): Women who want to lose weight are not obese. They want to get their bodies in nicer shape by making up for the shortcomings of their body through body-care.

Master 2 (professional yoga instructor): (Wearing bikinis) is what all women want, as they are able to show how they can be feminine. They want to show their bodies in the most beautiful shape. That is why women categorized as normal weight keep trying to lose weight.

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76 “*The Biggest Loser,*” for example, targets obese people of either gender who are concerned about their health.
(Excerpted from *Diet Master*, Episode 3)

As the experts in the show illustrate, the concept of losing weight is regarded as a way of getting “a better body” or an “idealized body” rather than losing weight for health purposes. Thus, this characteristic of body-related shows that target a specific gender reflects how Korean women are more anxious about having an idealized body that is slender or even skinny. It also is controvertible in that the concept of female body-care is meant to focus more on getting a perfect body shape rather than focusing on improving health. The significant trait of this kind of show is intimately associated with dominant ideas of the female body that have been formulated throughout the intermingled historical and social contexts of Korea. As demonstrated in Chapter 2 and 3, the female body was subject to growing public criticism since the period of Modernization in 1990s. Slenderness is now regarded as a key value in post-modern Korean society that helps women avoid becoming a target of public criticism.

I found evidence of the characteristic of viewing body-care as a way to get in shape, rather than to promote health in *Diet War*. It should be noted that all participants on the show are obese; some of them also mentioned that they were trying to lose weight to fit into the normal categories that the Korean society values in order to become part of the community. Song (a 32-year old nurse) and a participant on *Diet War*, graduated summa cum laude from a nursing college. She applied to forty hospitals and clinics, but got only one job offer. Her situation is not very surprising, considering the very real social circumstances in Korea: if a person is obese, it is harder to get a job regardless of ability. One of the major websites on job searching is
Job Korea has conducted a survey on the effects of external appearance on an individual’s competitiveness in the work place. 87.9% of the total subjects said that external appearance could help them gain competitiveness in their fields, and 90.1% of females agreed with this. In particular, 27.3% of the female subjects showed that external appearance had “strongly” influenced their competitiveness in the work place (Si-Sa News, 2011). Both Song’s interview and the survey are a good example to show not only that external appearance is one of the important factors in Korean society, but also that ordinary women should accept the idea of body-care as a self-responsibility to live in a competitive society.

One of the participants in Diet War, Hwang—a 25-year old comedian--wanted to lose weight. She had the feeling that she was not being treated as a woman because she was “fat”. As with Song, her obese body had a negative effect on her career.

Hwang: I always played unlikable characters, such as an ugly fat woman who is always dumped by men. I feel so bad about it because I want to live as a (normal) woman, not as a fat person.

(Excerpted from Diet War, Episode 1)

It is pertinent here to mention the fact that Korea has the lowest obesity rate in the world and that this rate for Korean females has frozen in the last decade. Nevertheless, obesity--especially female obesity--has been regarded as one of the most influential factors arousing appearance discrimination in their lives. As a result, self body-care is required in order to keep them away from disadvantages caused by an unpleasant appearance. In this context, weight-loss reality TV shows have played a

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77 ‘Job Korea’ is the biggest search engine on job information in Korea. This website was ranked on 11th among a total of 90,000 search engines as one of the top websites that Koreans visit the most (Job Korea).
huge role in conceptualizing “diet” as an efficient means to fit female bodies into dominant paradigms by focusing more on helping ordinary women get in shape rather than maintaining a healthy body.

The Emergence of the “Lifestyle Designer”

There are always groups of experts to be found on self-care reality television shows. Generally, their role is to help ordinary people in unfortunate situations by providing them with useful advice. These experts in self-care reality TV shows play a decisive role in producing two significant discourses on the female body, which have been assimilated into the larger body culture in post-modern Korea.

First, they have a powerful influence on producing neo-liberal subjects as “lifestyle designers.” On weight-loss reality TV shows, the experts consist of doctors, trainers, and other professionals who focus on obesity. Their job is to help women who struggle with losing weight by providing specific knowledge from their respective fields on eating, exercising, and even the daily life cycle. For example, a famous chef on Diet War gives some useful tips on how to make low-calorie healthy dishes that are easy and delicious by demonstrating it himself with a detailed explanation.

In Diet Master, the experts provide various work tips to both participants and

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79 The experts in Diet War did not provide viewers with criteria of who should be chosen for the show, but I did find two factors in common with all the female participants. First, they were obese (based on BMI). Second, all of them had an “unfortunate story,” which made them give up on dieting. For example, the experts tended to choose a woman who was not able to take care of their own bodies, since they had struggled with serious financial problems as a poor single mother or a young woman who was the head of the household. Also, this includes some females who had serious problems getting a job and were mentally destroyed by their appearance as a result.
viewers by demonstrating “how to do it themselves at home.” On the diet reality shows, their roles are more like mentors than instructors who teach people to take care of their bodies. In other words, they counsel ordinary women, encouraging them to design their lives themselves by helping those on a diet rectify a bad lifestyle. This may disrupt the way that takes care of their bodies at home. In this regard, their role parallels neo-liberal contexts that reinforce the “idea of DIY” as a personal duty. Therefore, they can be regarded as a powerful means of producing neo-liberal subjects through weight-loss reality TV shows.

Kim, J (a professional trainer): Boxing training helps get in shape, especially the waist, legs, and arms. The most important part of boxing is that you can do it yourself! I am here to teach how to catch fish yourself, not to feed you fish that I have already caught.

(Excerpted from Diet Master, episode 2)

Second, the expert groups on the shows play a powerful role in reproducing and maintaining dominant body discourses like slenderness and a gendered body. In Diet Master, I found an interesting example of how the experts reinforce traditional body discourses by introducing themselves with a new job title. As mentioned, they are actually doctors, trainers, fitness instructors, and massage therapists by profession. However, they do not label themselves by what they do, but rather they introduce themselves with nicknames such as “the diet planner who reads women’s minds”, “secret body coach”, “miracle hand that finds the hidden body line”, “intellectual of diet”, “S line\(^\text{80}\) maker”, “director of luxurious body shapes”, and “queen of destroying fat.” In fact, their nicknames imply two significant issues in the context of female body-care. First, the nicknames shown in Diet Master describe the experts as if they

\(^{80}\) “S line” refers to an “hourglass figure.” This phrase is often used among Koreans when they talk about women who both have an hourglass-shaped figure and slenderness. If a woman who has an hourglass figure but is not skinny, Koreans do not say “she has an S line.”
were mentors who provide participants, panels, and viewers with powerful and even “biblical guidelines” about body caring. Second, the short phrases clearly illustrate what types of female bodies are welcome. It is not hard for viewers—most of them women and girls—to figure out what type of body shapes Korea society wants women to have. I also found more evidence on how they play a powerful role in reinforcing the dominant ideologies of thinness as well as the feminized body in their various conversations.

Host: Let me ask Master Kim, B. What do you think about women who have a six-pack? Do you think it looks good on them?

Kim, B (professional weight trainer): “It looks scary… what is important for the female body is a feminine body shape…for example, women who have ‘11 shaped abs’ or ‘111 shaped abs’ look pretty.

(Excerpted from *Diet Master*, Episode 2)

An (a doctor): (When women) gain 1 kg, others cannot recognize it; however, they easily become aware of it even if they have just gained just 1 or 2 kg when they try to put on clothes. They think they don’t look pretty when they look into the mirror. Even when a woman is at work, if a male colleague doesn’t seem nicer to her than before, she thinks it is because she has gained weight.

(Excerpted from *Diet Master*, Episode 2)

Consequently, the experts in Korean weight-loss reality TV shows are regarded as a power group that authorizes intervention in ordinary female lives. Their roles in a society, where appearance is regarded as one of the influential criterion for women to fit into their communities, are not limited to providing useful tips on self-body care. Furthermore, they are implicitly acknowledged as lifestyle designers who intervene in ordinary female lives and advise women how to take care of their bodies.
themselves, as well as how to manage their overall lifestyle. On the other hand, groups of experts on the shows play a powerful role in reinforcing traditional ideologies of the female body itself and the gendered body. Specifically, the experts who use unique nicknames related to ideal body shapes have a huge influence in reproducing and reinforcing the idea of slenderness and Westernized female body shapes. Their opinions on the female body, based on their professional knowledge, tend to be accepted as credible within society. As such, the slender and feminine body shape is regarded as a socially “authorized body” by experts.

The Important of “Numbers” on the Female Body

Ever since Korea entered a consumer capitalistic society, the female body has been represented in terms of numbers. As mentioned in Chapter 2, quantification of the female body can be examined within the idea of capitalism. In other words, self-body care is regarded as an efficient way for many Korean women to make their bodies “marketable objects” in society. Also, reduced numbers (size) through diet are often evaluated as personal achievements that reflect how much effort has been made. This effort and achievement are criteria for an ethical being in society. In this context, what is interesting about the numbers is that a size 55 female body--the same as U.S. size 0/2--is no longer regarded as a marketable object in Korean society. The body should get down to size 44--size 00/0 in the U.S.--in order to be accepted.

There are many examples of numbers for the female body in Korean weight-loss reality TV shows. They have clearly shown which body size is marketable and which is not by quantifying the entire female body itself as well as some individual parts (waist, thigh, upper arms, and so on). Diet Master Episode 1 shows how different size 44 and size 66 are, which earned empathy from the female audience as
Narration: (All Korean) females want to become size 44! However, their size is 66 in reality! Let’s figure out some fine distinctions, what size 44 is able to do, and what size 66 is not able to do in daily life!

First: the challenge of wearing a dress! The models--size 44 and size 66--are trying to put the same dress on, but the looks of their backsides are totally different! Then the narrator says to size 66, don’t put yourself out of the way. By necessity, she is jumping in order to zip up the dress.

Second: the challenge of taking off the dress! The narrator is saying again about size 66 that taking her dress off doesn’t look easy for her. Eventually, she succeeds in taking off the dress upside down. She makes herself look bad.

Third: the challenge of taking off skinny jeans. The narrator says about size 66 that her pants get stuck on her knees and again at her ankles. There’s no way for size 66 to take off the skinny jean at one time, which is a tragedy for her!

Forth: wearing a sleeveless shirt. Looking at the scene of size 66, the narrator says that this time, it looks like she can put on the sleeveless shirt without any trouble. The shirt looks so good on the
size 44 woman! But, another problem has happened to the size 66 woman, which are flabby upper arms. So cardigans are mandatory clothing to cover up these flabby parts. Show host: (Looking at the video) “the (66 woman’s) body is roundish.”

Lastly, there is a fine difference of skirts between size 44 and size 66 women! They are both wearing the same one. However, the 66 skirt looks shorter and has wrinkles (because of a flabby lower body.)

(Excerpted from Diet Master, Episode 1)

I was curious as I watched this interesting comparison on female clothing size on Diet Master. Why did the show want to compare two women who have a different clothing size? If a 66 size women tried to put on their own size, there wouldn’t be any problems shown in the experiment. I did not need much time to figure out “why” when you consider the social and cultural context of how Korean females want to be represented in an appearance-priority society. What is shown in these comparisons clearly illustrates what kind of body size would have more appearance-competitiveness in a consumer capitalistic society.

As a result, size 44 and size 66 do not indicate the actual volume of apparel, but should be regarded more as “symbolic” numbers that have had a huge influence on the quality of women’s lives. In this context, reducing body size from size 66—a normal size in reality—to size 44 is a mandatory task for many Korean women, now recognized as a priority in order to fit into the consumer capitalistic society.

Labeling the Female Body

The last characteristic of Korean weight-loss reality TV shows is “labeling” of the female body. I easily found many examples of this characteristic on both

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81 Size 66 in Korea can be converted to size 4-6 in the U.S.
shows--especially labels that designate each participant’s body. In *Diet War*, each participant’s body is always introduced with an explanation of how miserable it is. Some examples: a single participant with a larger body is labeled as “size 99 celibate”; a participant with a pretty face who is obese is labeled “pretty face behind fat”; a participant who suffers from depression due to her obese body is labeled “three year secluded life”; two participants struggling to get jobs due to their larger bodies are labeled as “a huge size nurse size XXXL” and “a 0.1 ton girl who dreams become a hotelier”; a participant who was a former Miss Korea before she became obese is labeled as “a Miss Korea with a 40-inch waist”; a comedian with a larger body is labeled as “a comedian who is always in charge of roles of fat woman on TV” and so forth. On these show, the titles are tied to each participant’s body size, which undoubtedly illustrates the fact that their bodies not only need certain treatments to escape obesity, but also that larger female bodies situate an individual in the “abnormal” category within society. These labels, which are used more often than the participants’ actual names, exactly reflect social stereotypes of the obese female body. As a specific example, one of the rebels, “three year secluded life”, is explicitly associated with marginalization since the female obese body is often represented as a “condemnable body,” needing a certain treatment in order to be transferred into normal body status in society.

Another interesting aspect of female body labeling on Korean weight-loss shows is the derogatory labels used for non-obese, even slender, female bodies. For example, one of the participants in the first episode of *Diet Master* was labeled as “60 kg Yuhjeong Cho” while two other participants in episode three, which had a theme of getting a perfect bikini body within two weeks, were labeled as “working mom

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82 *Yuhjeong Cho* is a famous movie star who is known for beautiful face in Korea.
who loses S line” and “a body in short of 2% of perfect bikini line.” In this context, the Korean female body, irrespective of how much weight it carries, tends to be regarded as in need of “repair” or “discipline.” My argument on labeling normal female bodies as abnormal could have a similar effect as some of the other studies on the images of female bodies in body-related reality TV shows. Sender and Sullivan (2008) point out that female bodies, regardless of their body size, were often represented as a “bad body,” and were deservedly humiliated or criticized in a public space as on TV shows. Also, Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert (2007) argue that makeover shows seem to address how good the female participants are in terms of their personalities. On the other hand, the makeover show repeatedly shows how many complaints the participants have about their unwelcome appearance. Echoing the weakness of female participants on body-related reality TV shows, this could be understood as “invisible labeling.”

Therefore, labeling the female body as done on weight-loss reality shows, plays a key role in reinforcing and maintaining dominant ideologies of the female body created by intermingled social contexts such as appearance-priority and neoliberalism. As illustrated, labeled female bodies tend to be marginalized from a society where appearance is one of the priority goals. In accordance with this phenomenon, diet shows have a strong influence on transferring the female body to the problematic body by labeling it “a failure of self-regulation”.

**Conclusion**

I have examined four significant characteristics from two specific body-care reality TV shows, “Diet War, Season 6” and “Diet Master,” which are popular with Korean women. Some of these characteristics are similar to those seen in Western
versions, such as in the U.S show, *The Biggest Loser*. However, some of them are unique, as they have been only formulated within the Korean context. *Diet War 6* has a typical weight-loss reality TV show format. The show offers a prize for the winner and all participants must live together in a boot camp or similar setting for some period of time. On the other hand, *Diet Master* has a different format than both *Diet War* and *The Biggest Loser*. The show does not offer a prize for the winner, and only two participants are chosen for each episode. Also, they do not stay in a boot camp but are trained and can get treated in other places, such as their homes, gyms, and clinics. While these two shows are presented in different formats, they are similar in that they each play a major role in reinforcing dominant discourse on female body identity.

Based on these observations, I examined the main characteristics of the two popular Korean body-care shows. The first characteristic is the concept of weight-loss, which differs from similar reality TV shows in other countries. Korean weight-loss shows tend to focus more on slenderness rather than helping people improve their health. In this sense, body-care is regarded as an unavoidable duty for Korean females, regardless of body size. Society’s focus on appearance has made it a priority and supreme standard, rather than individual abilities, character, or other aspects of individual identity.

Second is the emergence of new expert groups. The appearance of various types of experts on reality TV shows is not out of place since their roles are usually to consult with people in trouble. However, the experts—including doctors, trainers, and

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83 *The Biggest Loser* is one of the popular body reality TV program in the U.S, produced by NBC. This show started broadcasting in 2004 and is now airing Season 16 (The Biggest Loser).
psychologists—on Korean weight-loss reality shows tend to expand their roles by
naming themselves “body designers,” “lifestyle counselors” or “luxurious body
shape makers.” These roles are not limited to consulting on physical issues but also
extend to that of a mentor who is able to change one’s life. Their extended role from
an assistant who helps ordinary females in their quest for body-care to a lifestyle
mentor clearly demonstrates not only how much Korean females are obsessed with
their bodies, but also their belief that they can change their lives by transforming their
bodies to become slender. Moreover, the experts’ intervention in people’s lives plays
a key role in enabling people to conform to the idea of self-governance, which is
intimately associated with the logic of neo-liberalism. In other words, the experts’
support seems to “externally” intervene in an individual’s life to encourage her to take
care of her body. From another perspective, the experts’ short-term interventions play
a large role in generating neo-liberal subjects in that as lifestyle designers, they
provide individuals with an “internal” stimulus to take care of themselves. In addition,
expert opinions, based on professional knowledge, obviously lend powerful support to
dominant ideologies on the female body, such as slenderness and detailed standards of
beauty.

The third characteristic of the Korean shows is that the Korean female body
and its various identities are described with numbers. These numbers—weight and
height; thigh, forearm, and waist circumferences; and clothing size—are regarded
together as a powerful comprehensive standard that distinguishes a female and a
useless body. Therefore, the Korean female body, regarded as a product in capitalistic
society, should be cared for in order to fit into the ideal size of 44-55 clothing to

84 In the context of Korean society, the “luxurious body” can be replaced with a slender or
thin body, which has a connection with a “marketable body” in a consumer capitalistic society.
become “saleable.” As briefly mentioned, scientific and systematic quantification of human bodies and physical activities has emerged in modern society. Numeric values have a huge influence on establishing visible criteria of the female ideal body type, which can be more marketable or not in a consumer capitalistic society.

The last characteristic of Korean body-care is shown is the labeling of the female body as obese or not. Assigning labels that highlight how terrible female participants’ bodies look plays a huge role in shrinking the normal category of the Korean female body by deeming once normal bodies as abnormal and always in needed of repair.

Therefore, there is no doubt that these four characteristics, as represented in Korean weight-loss reality TV shows, have a powerful influence on reproducing and reinforcing the dominant ideologies of the female body and the idea of body-care. They represent a microcosm of how the Korean female body has been decoded within contemporary Korean society.
Chapter 6

Interpretations: Between Unchangeable Norms and the Possibilities on the Body

“Taking care of oneself is not a rest cure. There is the care of the body to consider, health regimes, physical exercise with overexertion, the carefully measured satisfaction of needs.”

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1988b, 51

In this chapter, I interpret significant discourses on the Korean female body and the concept of body-care produced through Korean weight-loss reality TV shows. First, the subject is approached through an analysis of particular shows. This is a fundamental step in that these shows play a powerful role in regenerating and maintaining the dominant ideologies of female bodies. Second, I interpret the ways in which the concept of body-care as an embodied practice allows ordinary females to turn themselves into a subject, which is then placed at the center of the dominant body ideologies.

For the first interpretation, I examine three discourses on the Korean female body, which are often produced through the two Korean weight-loss reality TV shows. This critical view helps examine the ways in which Korean females have embodied and consumed the embedded dominant body ideologies of slenderness and body-obsession, which are firmly situated as powerful body discourse within contemporary Korean society.
The first discourse critically examined is the traditional social ideology of Confucianism, still regarded within contemporary Korea as one of the most important motivations for women to take care of their bodies. Confucianism highly values both the productivity of the female body in terms of child bearing and rearing, as well as a traditional family value structure that marginalizes the female body, and even sees it as an object with the power to bring disgrace on the family if not properly maintained. For example, I see that female participants of the shows go on diets for others such as parents, partners and their children. Thus, their bodies are marginalized by fitting into a norm of traditional Confucian ideology of the Korean female body. Second, the shows produce the body discourse of “normalcy” by depicting various stereotypes of large female bodies as abnormal. Even some body sizes that formerly fell into the normal category are currently classified as abnormal. One of the shows, Diet Master, in particular tends to enlarge the category of abnormalcy by illustrating that average and even slender female bodies need to take care of extra flab on the waist, abdomen, and arms to get in perfect shape. Moreover, this discourse on normalizing the female body tends to be directly associated with the absence of femininity, another strong reason for Korean women to keep their bodies in good repair. Third, the shows proliferate the idea of the “flamboyant body.” Outward appearance within Korean society is highly valued, so that body-care is thus regarded as an important duty within the broad female body-care culture. In this context, the discourse has led to what I term “diet-pornography,” by emphasizing “ridiculously amazing” parts of the

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85 See chapter 2

86 In this study, “diet-pornography” is derived from the term “action sports pornography,” which has been used by professional journalists in the U.S. David Browne, an American
processes of body-care. As such, the shows greatly romanticize how female participants have been transformed from “ugly ducklings” into “beautiful swans.”

Next, I interpret the possibilities of the idea of subjectivity as a resistant discourse on the Korean female body and body-care by examining the ways in which Korean females can turn themselves into subjects through three specific technologies: *Exagoreusis, Askēsis*, and the *ethos* of self-care, which is inspired on Foucault’s later work in the *History of Sexuality* volume 2, and 3.

On the one hand, the first interpretation of the three dominant discourses on female body is based on Foucault’s early work—*The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1—dealing with ideas of normalization and disciplinary power in which he focuses on examining the power relations within a macro-level context. On the other hand, the second interpretation, based on Foucault’s later work—*The History of Sexuality* Volume 2 and 3—explores the possibilities of body-care as a subversive discourse. Here he focuses more on analyzing the relation of power, which is formulated within relationships between others and/or an individual as a subject within a micro-level context. Although his later work deals with the micro power of relations, he also points out that “the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self; these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group.” (1997a, 291) Based on his account, both micro and macro level perspectives should be taken by

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journalist, also uses this term to criticize a certain phenomenon, through which various kinds of mass media tend to romanticize extreme sports as an art without showing viewers—especially teenagers—the negative sides of the sports and inherent riskiness (The New York Times, 2007).
researchers studying a certain social event or phenomenon that is intermingled within messy contexts. In this sense, it is appropriate to apply the micro-level approach to a body study such as this one to examine the ways in which females, as subjects, constitute themselves in the practice of taking care of their bodies. The idea is placed in the center of complicated historical, political, and cultural power relations in post-modern Korean society.

**Significant Discourses**

“Re”-Presentation of the Traditional Confucian Female Body

- Body-care for shaping a productive body

In traditional Korean society (as discussed in Chapter 2), child bearing and rearing were among the most highly valued purposes of the female body. Women who did not produce children were ostracized by the husband and his family. In addition, a woman’s own parents would also reject her because her infertility brought shame on the family. In most cases, women were rejected by the entire community and were forced to move away. A woman was considered unproductive and therefore unacceptable based on her body’s ability to produce children.\(^{87}\)

Since the women’s liberation movements of the 1960s in Korea, the importance of childbearing productivity has decreased somewhat. However, a productive female body is still highly valued in post-modern society. Now, the appearance of a woman’s body can cause her to be seen as productive or not. While obesity is an important social issue for both men and women, female obesity is regarded as a significant contributing factor to the decreasing birthrate in Korea. As

\(^{87}\) Prior to the advent of modern medicine in Korea, there was no way to prove that infertility was caused by a medical problem in either the husband or the wife.
such, the stigma of infertility has been transferred to women who look obese. While they no longer face extreme ostracization, losing weight is a fundamental duty for these women in order to build a productive body. Recent scientific research on the relationship between female obesity and infertility demonstrates why women should take care of their bodies for the purpose of productivity. According to Brewer and Balen (2010), obese females (BMI>30kg/m²) “are more likely to experience pregnancy loss once pregnant, and elevated miscarriage rates are seen following natural conception, ovulation induction and assisted conception” (348). In order to prevent this problem, scientists suggest that obese women desperately need “lifestyle modification with careful counseling on diet and exercise” (357). Based on this kind of scientific work on women’s productivity, the discourse on the productive body can be regarded as one of the most important impetuses for women who feel guilty about subfertility due to a failure of body-care.

In *Diet War*, significant examples can be found of the concept of productivity frequently represented as the motivation for undertaking a diet. It is interesting to see the conflict between the traditional image of Korean women and the technological methods of body-care. The entire process on the show is scientific, modernized, and female-liberated, which diverges from the traditional social ideology of Confucianism. It is completely based on BMI and readings from technological exercise devices, among other scientific criteria. However, the motivation for body-care still tends to originate from underlying ethical norms for Korean women. For example, some participants in Diet War say that they want to lose weight to have a baby. These examples reflect that Confucian-based body-care ideas still motivate

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88 As illustrated in chapter 2, physical movements of Korean women were extremely limited in pre-modernized Korean society and there was also limited exposure of skin in public. However, they are now free of body movement.
Korean females to take care of themselves.

I have been waiting (to have a baby) for a long time. I wish I could support my waist with my hand when my belly is getting bigger. I definitely think that you should have a baby if you were born as a woman.

(Excerpted from *Diet War*, Episode 1)

If I was eliminated (from this show), I know I should pack up and go home. I really want to stay (at the next stage of the show) to lose weight for pregnancy because my husband wants me to lose weight to have a baby.

(Excerpted from *Diet War*, Episode 2)

As illustrated, this woman feels guilty toward her husband or family about failing to give birth. This important traditional role of Korean women has been constantly reproduced though the idea of body-care, regarded as an important duty for an entire lifetime.

In Korean society, a productive female body not only bears children, but it also fills the role of “mother.” More Korean women have begun to work outside the home since the modernization of Korea. As a result, a two-income family is commonplace today. Nevertheless, a woman is still accountable for nurturing the family. Therefore, most women have no choice but to quit their jobs for childbirth and rearing. The body, which is responsible for child bearing, is no longer regarded as a female body. There is only the body as “mother”. Here is an example of a participant who got married and then became a mother of a son.

People around me often say that you are a married woman and

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89 Legislation and social policy such as maternity and childcare leave for married working women are meager. For this reason, there is a silent social atmosphere that believes that women preparing for childbirth and rearing should quit their jobs.
always stay at home. To whom do you want to show your slender body (other than your husband)? When I hear that, I feel so bad about it and I sometimes think I am not treated as a woman…

(Excerpted from Diet Master, Episode 1)

Such interviews illustrate that many Korean female bodies are confined to the traditional woman’s role. In other words, the purpose of body-care is to either maintain productivity or to become a respectable member of the family. When women take care of their bodies for their own sake, it has been known to generate public controversy. An interesting example that demonstrates this point is an ordinary woman called “Mom-Zzang A-Jum-Mu\(^9\)”, who became quite popular in 2004. She was obese and a mother of two children, but she got in perfect shape through exercise and eating control. At the time, her body was controversial in Korean society. Some said that she could get her body in shape because of her strong will, even though she was in her thirties and had two kids to take care of. At the same time, there was a negative perspective on her healthy look and perfect shape, which did not fit into the traditional body image of a mother.

In short, female body-care in post-modern society is still regarded as one of the ways for Korean women to fit into traditional ideologies of the female body. Within this context, Korean weight-loss reality TV shows play a powerful role in fostering the idea of productivity by representing the type of body required in concurrent society to achieve this major role as a woman.

\(^9\) Dayeon Jung, 49 year old, created a new Korean term, ‘Mom-zzang.’ Most Koreans did not know her name, but they called her ‘momzzang azuma’ which means a middle age woman whose body is slim and toned like a young person. Her successful diet story and her before and after pictures were widely spread on the Internet and via television. Her diet book ranked on the best seller in Japan as well.
- Reproduction of the marginalized female body based on the traditional value of family

One of the significant ideologies that produces the dominant female body discourse is the traditional value of family. The family-centered value has been firmly entrenched as a fundamental idea in Korean history (Shin, 1998). As addressed in Chapter 2, Korean female bodies must be productive, and the bodies must be useful as a mother or daughter-in-law in traditional patriarchal society. In this social context, female bodies were often marginalized or even absent of subject (Go, 2004).

Since the modernization of society, there are now various types of families in Korea. Many young people have come to big cities to work in factories since industrialization began in the 1960s. As a result, nuclear families and single-person households have rapidly increased. The huge influx of young people into urban areas has influenced not only different types of families, but also the meaning of family value in traditional society. Specifically, traditional Korean families were based on paternalism and collectivism. Women were considered inferior to men, and the relationship between parents and children was also more important than the relationship between husband and wife. In Go’s account of female bodies in the traditional patriarchal society, as shown in a Korean modern literature, she points out that the traditional value of family in the early period of modern society played a key role in relegating female bodies--especially those who got married--to the role of marginal individuals, whose important purposes were bearing children, being sexually for men, and laboring for their families. As a result, the value of family has had a powerful influence not only on producing normalized female bodies, which are perfectly fit as an ethical value, but also on obliterating Korean female subjectivity. These vertical relationships, within a male-centered atmosphere, seem to have faded
over time since the rapid Industrialization of the 60s. Nonetheless, the value of traditional relationships in the Korean family has played a significant role in reinforcing the dominant ideologies of the normalization and marginalization of the female body.

There have been many examples of how Korean female body-care is motivated by the female’s role within the family--as daughter of parents, wife, and mother of children. The specific examples below clearly reflect the idea of the traditional value of family as articulated within the culture of female body-care. During the season of Diet War, applications based on the concept of traditional values of family during the interviews were quite convincing to the show judges. These motivations were accepted as plausible and rational reasons for wanting to lose weight. The interviews with the participants who were selected clearly show that one of the major reasons for body-care originated from the value of family-centeredness, including a sense of shame about having an unproductive body and being unfit for their parents, husbands, and children.

(Sobbing) My parents gave birth to me as normal, without any physical defects. (It’s completely my fault) because I have failed to take care of my body…

(Sobbing) If I would die (from obesity) before my parents pass away…I haven’t had a chance to be a good child to my mom and dad…I must lose weight because I think being obese is considered as an unfair behavior. I don’t want to die before my mom and dad. It has been three years (since seeing my parents)…They have a memory of me as pretty and (slender). I haven’t kept in touch with them since I got fat. It’s all my fault not to take care of my body. (Sobbing) I always wanted to be proud of myself to my parents as a daughter of my mom and dad. This is the reason that I couldn’t show them my obese body.

(Excerpted from Diet War, Episode 1)
These three interviews are perfect examples of why body-care for Korean women is still based on filial duty, regarded as inherent in the most fundamental traditional value of family (Shin, 1998). Filial duty as an ethical norm is ubiquitous, but Korean filial duty can be characterized within traditional Confucian society as the most essential lesson in a family as well as society (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture). The idea of filial duty seems to have faded in post-modern society, yet it is still considered as a fundamental ethical norm for Koreans. As such, this traditional idea has been regarded as a primary motivation for Korean females to take care of their bodies.

I should succeed in losing weight not because of myself, but because of my husband. I never cry at whenever situations I am in…I will do my best at losing weight.

A stout image as a mother of my child is so shameful. When my kid is grown up and goes to kindergarten… I really want to be a mother who my child introduces as ‘she’s my mom!’ in front of his friends.

(Excerpted from Diet War, Episode 1)

The interview excerpts above are also examples of the important reasons why Korean females want to take care of their bodies for the sakes of other members of the family, such as a husband or child. As shown in these examples, female participants in the shows tend to take care of their bodies in order to be an honorable member of the family rather than for their personal sakes. Female body discourse is thus articulated within the idea “absence of subjectivity” by being marginalizing as a body given by one’s parents, or a body that is respectable to one’s children. According to traditional Confucianism, the Korean female body is regarded as a marginalized entity
in the family and is even treated as an absent being within society. This marginalized entity exists to achieve someone else’s contentment.

In sum, the Korean weight-loss reality TV shows under consideration do not directly produce the dominant discourse on the Korean female body, such as marginalization or absent being. However, there is no doubt that these shows operate as a cultural tool in post-modern society by constantly reproducing the dominant discourse in accordance with the traditional ideology of the female body. In other words, they represent and emphasize the kind of female body that is valuable in society.

*Always in Trouble: Be More Slender!*

Another dominant body discourse found while viewing both weight-loss reality TV shows is that the female body is often regarded in an abnormal state. On *Diet War*, which only targets obese females, the larger bodies are obviously represented as trouble bodies. Sender and Sullivan (2008)’s account on abnormal female bodies on body-related reality TV shows—*The Biggest Loser* and *What Not to Wear*—supports this idea. These kinds of shows tend to “frame fat as a problem to be changed or disguised” (597). In addition, this problematic body is often juxtaposed with the idea of absence of femininity by representing the obese female body as an abnormal body that has lost sexual attractiveness as a certain gender “female.” In the U.S, Gallagher and Pecot-Herbert. (2007), and Sender and Sullivan. (2008) examine stereotypes of the obese female body in the American mass media, which are similar to those in Korea. They include laziness and dullness, but they do not point out their relationship to femininity. Farelle (2009) likewise claims that the images of obese

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91 See chapter 2.
females in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century in the U.S tend to over-sexualize women by highlighting their breasts and hips in a sexual manner, whereas the obese female body in Korea is unquestioningly connected with absent femininity. In consideration of the significant purpose of body-care, which aims for one to “have a normal life as a woman,” it should be understood as an indispensable rite for Korean women who want to live as normal beings in society.

In modern society, obesity is regarded as a disease in need of prevention and a cure for the sake of global health. However, there is an important point for further focus--examining the connotative meaning that has had a strong influence in reinforcing the idea of the abnormalcy of the Korean female body. As claimed in Chapter 2, bodies in the normal category, and even in the low category of weight, tend to be considered as problematic and “obese” due to the discrepancies between the authorized medical index from western countries and the Korean table of aesthetic weight\textsuperscript{92}. As if the media industry is aware of these social trends on female bodies, the network “Story On\textsuperscript{93}” discontinued broadcasting \textit{Diet War}, which targeted only obese women, and replaced it with \textit{Diet Master} in 2013, which targets women in both the normal and obese categories. \textit{Diet Master} is a perfect example of how “normal” female bodies are represented as abnormal subjects in need of repair, because most of the female participants are not obese, and some are even slender. In this context, the idea of abnormalcy of the female body, constantly shown through the weight-loss shows, plays a decisive role in reproducing the dominant paradigm of female body-care as an integral lifetime duty.

\textsuperscript{92} See Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{93} Story On is one of the popular cable channels in Korea, which only targets women and girls.
More examples of abnormalcy were found on *Diet War*. The frequent representations of larger and “abnormal” body stereotypes seen in Season 6 play a key role in reproducing the dominant discourse on female body-care. Some significant characteristics or causes of the obese female body were narrowed down to mental weakness, having low self-esteem, being lazy in public, or being seen as a freak and a loser.

As soon as my wedding date was set, I got a shot of medicine (to lose weight), and I sometimes added an appetite suppressant with the diet medications. I hardly ever ate when I was on a diet by myself. As a result, I lost almost 12kg before the wedding so I could carry off the day without a hitch. However, I have regained 27kg in a year. After that, I have had a really hard time because I am so afraid to look at myself, which has become like a monster (sobbing).

(Crying out) I want to live! I want to live as a human being!

Frankly speaking, (obese) people like me might be ostracized from society if they don't have an obedient and docile personality.

(Excerpted from *Diet War*, Episode 1)

Statements made by female participants during the show are perfect examples of the ways in which obese female bodies are being represented within society. As illustrated in the participants’ interviews above, the obese females declassify themselves from the normal category by describing their larger bodies as a freak or a loser. The show depicts the positive sides of the obese participants such as their great personalities or optimistic thoughts about their lives. However, at the same time, it keeps showing viewers how obese bodies get humiliated in public, or how miserable the women’s lives have become because of their obesity. In particular, the last interview above is interesting in showing the ways in which obese females try to rebuild their personalities as a way of participating in the normal category. In other
words, the obese body, which is placed in the abnormal category, must be disciplined, and personalities should be obedient and docile in order to “at least” exist in the society where they belong. It implies that having a docile personality is implicitly considered within the society as an internalized stereotype of obese people.

The obese female body is not only problematic, but based on scientific standards like the BMI, it is also regarded as socially abnormal. In this context, Diet War has played a key role in creating dichotomized ideologies of female body representation by drawing a line between what is normal and abnormal. Even the participants on the show tended to classify their obese bodies as abnormal; and after they achieved some weight loss, they expressed joy on becoming a normal person again. The shows thus reveal evidence of the dichotomized ideologies embodied in female body culture, as seen in the following excerpts:

I was really happy that I went out with make-up like ‘normal people’ do. I was so happy that I was walking around the street like normal people.

(A little enthusiastically) My husband looks at me (after I had lost weight) a lot when he is eating, when he stands up, and sits down on the coach because I have become a normal person.

(Excerpted from Diet War, Episode 6)

In addition, clear boundaries between the normal and the abnormal body have been enforced by scaling weight (Figure 14) at the end of each episode. This is a certain means that proves in public how hard the female participants have tried to lose weight each week. The procedure dramatically reveals how the obese female body is transformed into the slender body through body-care, and is a sort of “rite of passage” for the Korean female body as it transitions from abnormal to normal.
Moreover, this boundary of the female body, represented by clear comparisons between the “before body” and “after body” through scaling weight, operates as a norm that decides which body is feminine and which is not. In other words, the larger female body by default leads to the absence of femininity. Bartky (1990) uses Foucault’s work on disciplinary power to argue that the idea of patriarchy has a powerful influence on reinforcing and maintaining the traditional ideologies of femininity in modern society. She points out that overweight females in modern literature tend to describe how much they feel shame over their sexually unattractive bodies, as all women have internalized patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability. Fraser (2009)’s work on a brief history of fat in the United States explains that the middle and upper class American woman in the period of modernity tended to admire the “thin body,” as many European intellects had, and wanted to become slender like Europeans. Since then, the thin body shape has also been considered as a romantic figure among American females. In this respect, the obese female body is no longer the feminized figure. Both Bartky and Fraser’s accounts on female bodies are
applicable to the idea of the absence of femininity in that the transformed female body in the last episode of the show represents a romantic and feminine figure. On the show, the narrator tends to frequently emphasize that the larger female body has nothing to do with femininity, using descriptions such as “dream of living as an ordinary woman”, “diet to take her life as a woman back,” “an ordinary life of a woman in her twenties,” “who gave up on her life because of her fat body,” or “a challenge for whoever wants to reborn as a real woman.” These specific expressions strongly imply that body-care is a rite of passage for Korean females in order to fit themselves into traditional norms of femininity.

Through the shows, relationships between the obese female body and the absence of femininity are juxtaposed to the “abnormal” life of the obese women that has been accepted as the “true reality” of the female body within Korean society. The unfavorable view of the larger female body is obviously illuminated at the end of the episode by attaching “femininity” to the twelve transformed bodies. Within this context, body-care is absolutely essential for obese females who want to live as ordinary women. Throughout the whole season of Diet War, the femininity of obese participants was undermined by representing these women as androgynous or even masculine. They always wore casual or unisex outfits such as huge t-shirts, training shoes, athletic outfits and no make-up. However, the female participants who had become slender were represented at the end of the season as the highest manifestation of femininity. The host of the show gave praise to those participants who walked down to the stage like models wearing dresses and high-heels. All the compliments about their transformed bodies focused only on how well their slender bodies equated with femininity. The compliments were along the lines of: “she is reborn as a beautiful woman!”’, “isn’t she so sexy?”, “it is so amazing to see her S
body shape!”, and “her body has the perfect shape!”

Figure 10. The female participants whose bodies had been transformed from obese to slender were presented with subtitles that emphasized their femininity such as “lovely”, “elegant”, “sexy”, “cute”, “pink,” and so on. (Screenshot photography captured from Diet War TV show, episode 12, August 25, 2012)

Stereotypes of obese women that include laziness and weakness of will, frequently represented on weight loss reality TV shows, are not limited to Korean society. This representation of larger females is proliferated by the mass media in many countries where obesity is considered to be a socially problematic issue. As a result, I intend to focus in this study more on the particular social context of Korea and what plays an important role in reinforcing the direct correlation between the larger female body and the idea of absent femininity.

Another point of focus is that the relationships between body-care, femininity, and normalcy in Korean society are not limited to obese females. Diet Master gives obvious examples of how women who fall within a normal or healthy weight class are
not exempt from this label. In other words, the range of normal female body types has been altered by the expansion of groups needing to take care of the body. For example, only one episode--episode 8--out of twelve on *Diet Master* targets obese women, while the other eleven focus on average or slender Korean females who want to get rid of extra flab on the belly, arms, backside, thighs and even the face. The show constantly generates the message that women’s bodies are objects, in need of repair, since the bodies are always in trouble regardless of their size. Within this social context, the Korean female body is specified by its parts--waist, hips, thighs, and arms--in order to pinpoint defects caused by improper care, such that proper care can be given and the body can approach the ideal standard. In this regard, ordinary female bodies tend to be regarded as in trouble by re-categorizing average and slender bodies within the abnormal boundary.

*Self-Expression and the Flamboyant Body*

The last dominant body discourse concerns the flamboyant body. Body-care in Korean society is regarded as an efficient and a reasonable tool for creating a flamboyant body. The flamboyant female body, often generated through these shows, can be understood as diet-pornography. In this study, the term, diet-pornography refers to a certain social and cultural phenomenon that tends to romanticize the idea of slenderness by emphasizing ridiculously amazing parts of body-care rather than showing the mentally and physically painful and arduous processes that the female participants must endure. The idea of diet-pornography could be discussed here as a significant cultural phenomenon that plays a key role in generating the flamboyant body in a society where an external justification of one’s appearance is considered as an important cultural value.
According to Choi and Yu’s account (1992) on the socio-psychological analysis of the phenomenon of “saving face” in Korean culture, face refers to certain processes of human behavior, which elevate one or more external justifications. Therefore, saving face is more likely to be a “pretense.” One of the interesting parts in this research is that “the meaning of face is literally the exterior of the body. Therefore, one’s face could be elevated or lowered depending on how other people valuate the one.” (154). Based on Choi and Yu’s definition of face, body-care among ordinary Korean females, performed to get their bodies in slender and even a perfect shape, could be considered as an easy and efficient way to elevate the face in public. Producing it is often represented on Korean weight-loss reality TV shows and should be understood as one of the significant discourses on female body-care within an appearance-priority society. The accounts of Han (2012) and Kim (2012) on significant factors of the showy culture in Korean society point out that it is one of the unique phenomena in many East-Asian countries. In addition, Kim claims that the showy culture can be understood as “a by-product of economic growth” (95). In particular, Han’s account of the analysis of the showy culture has helped interpret the ways in which the idea of body-care has been embodied as a powerful cultural trend enabling Korean women to transfer themselves into society.

More specifically, Han analyzes three main aspects inherent in the spread of showy culture as a dominant ideology within post-modern Korean society. According to her account, the first aspect is enormous economic growth in accordance with the drastic transformation to a consumer-capitalistic society in such a short period of time. People had been struggling to survive amid nationalistic troubles such as the Korean War and the country’s colonial status. However, since the gigantic growth of the economy through industrialization, many people are no
longer worried about their livelihood. The values and expectations of life have been transferred from the struggle for existence to self-expression (Han, 2012). In this regard, the idea of body-care may be considered as an effective means for women to express themselves in public by displaying a slender body, which is exercised as a power in the appearance-driven society.

(Since becoming obese), I never like to be around the water because that means that I need to wear a swimsuit (in public places) I shouldn’t wear them (because I’m fat).

(Since losing weight), I’ve never worn this kind of skimpy outfit in my life…. (Laughing) Once I am confident about myself, I can act fair and square wherever I go, and I can enjoy that other people are looking at me.

…I want to be loved, and I’ve realized that I want to enjoy others’ attentions.

(Excerpted from Diet War, Episode 12)

As shown in the interviews of some participants who now have achieved a slender body through body-care on Diet War, weight loss has been widely accepted as a way for Korean females to show off their transformed bodies. Through body transformation from an obese to a slender body—or from an average to a perfect body shape—many females anticipate that others’ evaluations of their appearances will be elevated to a higher status. Furthermore, it would affect their “face” in public. Therefore, the slender body is a well-cared-for body that can be confidently exposed in public, whereas the larger body is one to be concealed as well as one that takes criticism for granted.

The second concept that the showy culture has proliferated throughout Korean society is collectivism. According to Han (2012), “East Asian people tend to fit their own identities and values into the standard of the society where they belong”
(104) unlike Western people who tend to value individual distinctions. Within this socio-cultural context, the main purpose of female body-care in post-modern Korean society is not to lead a healthy life, but to get the body in perfect shape in order to conform to the cultural trend. Consequently, body-care should be understood as a rite of passage, which most Korean females should achieve to fit into society as normal citizens.

The final aspect of Han’s account is the culture of decency, originating from Confucianism. In traditional Korean society, maintaining one’s dignity and decency was the most powerful way for people to show who they are or what class they belonged to. For example, Yang-Bans—the educated and upper class— in the family of Sa-Dae-Bu94 should not run, even in a case of emergency. Women and girls in a Sa-Dae-Bu family should be virtuous by covering most of their bodies in public95. These behaviors of Sa-Dae-Bu, adopted to maintain dignity and decency, have largely disappeared as time has gone by; however, new types of behaviors have emerged in post-modern society. Modernized behavior such as possessing luxury goods or enjoying upscale leisure serve to create dignity and are considered as ways to express conspicuous lifestyles. In this context, Korean female body-care can be juxtaposed within the society.

As shown on Diet Master, Korean females whose weight is in the normal category are targeted as objects in need of care. These “very ordinary” women are trying to take care of their bodies in order to get in more perfect shape. They are

94 Sa-Dae-Bu refers to people who belong to gentry families. Most of the men are scholars or administrators who work for the government in traditional Confucian society. Also, most women in a Sa-Dae-Bu family should stay at home and assist their husbands.

95 See chapter 3.
making great efforts to fit their bodies into the standard of the ideal body such as very slender or even skinny. While this is reinforced though the media, in fact most of them in reality do not need body-care. In other words, its purpose among Korean females is not just to escape from obesity, but is used to attain a perfect body that can confidently be shown in public.

A more specific example (Figure 11) of the flamboyant body is shown on episode 3 of *Diet Master* whose theme is “getting the perfect bikini body.” In this episode, two female participants look totally normal. It stands to reason that they do not need to lose weight as long as they do not want to become a model or a bodybuilder. What is interesting about their interviews is that they acknowledged that they are slender. However, they also state that they want to change their bodies in order to be confident wearing a bikini when they visit a water park; they want to remove extra flab on some parts of their bodies because it is too embarrassing to show in a public place. In other words, body-care among Korean females is considered as the most useful means to build a “displayable” body in public places in the showy culture.

At the end of the episode, their perfect bikini bodies are represented and they both look quite confident in their swimsuits. Also, their beautiful bikini bodies made the host, panel, as well as the female audience of the show all cheer in admiration.
Figure 11. One of the noticeable examples of the flamboyant body in Diet Master with the theme of “getting the perfect bikini body within 3 weeks.” (Screenshot photography captured from Diet Master TV show, episode 3, June 21, 2013)

Furthermore, producing a flamboyant female body, as represented through Korean weight-loss reality TV shows, tends to reinforce the idea of “diet pornography”. Since the shows mostly emphasize the result of a transformed body, such as slenderness or skinniness, they neglect significant negative effects of body transformation such as excessive expenses, follow-up services, and the aftereffects of extreme weight loss. Various methods of body-care, shown through the shows, tend to romanticize a post-modern representation in society. For example, Diet War targets only obese women. The purpose of the show is to help female participants transform from obese bodies into bodies that fall into the normal weight category in a short period of time by supervising them with systematic and difficult physical training and a strict diet menu. However, most of these painful scenes are not broadcast, as the show focuses more on how much weight each participant has lost at the end of the series of episodes. The scenes show tremendous weight reduction of ordinary women and seem to imply that weight-loss is the most efficient manner of self-body care for
Korean women. On the shows, ordinary women look very happy as their bodies become more slender.

In addition, the idea of diet pornography was evident in *Diet Master*. Here, if a participant decided to choose a doctor as her diet master, then she was able to get various kinds of medical assistance, such as lipolysis and taking diet supplements to maximize results. Like *Diet War*, *Diet Master* also focused more on the “after” transformation of the female body rather than showing viewers the “reality” of the processes of extreme body-care. These, Korean weight-loss reality TV shows play a powerful role in reinforcing the idea of diet pornography by glamorizing the result of body transformation and disregarding important information about the negative effects of some body-care.

Consequently, as the female body gets closer to the ideal body shape, the participant is able to become a more confident woman since slenderness is considered to be a social and cultural symbol that represents her decency in post-modern society. Within this context, Korean female body-care, as shown on weight-loss reality TV shows, has a strong influence on reproducing a flamboyant body, and is one of the significant factors that reinforces the dominant discourse of the Korean female body and the concomitant idea of body-care. Finally, the shows also clearly indicate that the dominant ideology of normalcy is juxtaposed with producing a self-conscious body by constantly re-conceptualizing the idea of a normalized body through the romanticized process of body-care.
The Possibilities: The Art of Body-Care as an Ethical Practice of the Self

In this section, I first examine some significant technologies of self body-care depicted in Korean weight-loss reality TV shows. In order to address how these technologies play a powerful role in creating ethical practices of the self, I focus on analyzing three technologies: confessions, Askēsis, and the ethos of self-care. Specifically, I examine the ways in which these embodied technologies of the self have a strong influence on producing neo-liberal subjects who perform ethical practices. Second, I examine how ordinary Korean females turn themselves into subjects though “the cultivation of the self” by playing with the relations of power, which are maintained within the unique body culture of Korea. This work will be the first in-depth Korean female body research in the department of Kinesiology. The examination of female body-care as a useful way of “care of the self” will shed new light on the power of the self, regarded as a central source of being a subject.

The Technologies of Body-Care

- Exagoreusis: The Politics of Confession

Foucault (1988a) claims that “taking care of oneself” is derived from “know yourself” (19). Also, the care of the self begins when one acknowledges their behavior and then discloses the truth to others – it could be a priest, or a doctor. Foucault mentions confession as one of the technologies of taking care of oneself. In Foucault’s early work on the History of Sexuality 1, “confession”\(^{96}\) refers to the confession of a sinner who repents wrongdoing, where the wrongdoing relates to the duty of truth, which is demanded by religion (Christianity). However, the meaning of “confession” in his later work changes. The technology of confession is not limited to

\(^{96}\) In addition, when Foucault worked the history of sexuality 1, he points out that confession is one of the religious technologies to desacralize modern sexuality.
explaining modern sexuality, but is extended to elucidate confession as a useful technology, which helps a person take care of the self in the game of truth. In other words, an individual is able to know himself for herself by examining his/her daily life though the technology of confession, and then he/she is able to achieve “the subjectivization of truth” (Foucault, 1988a, 35). Foucault provides a specific example of the confession of “self-writing” as a technology of self-examination; self-awareness is possible by examining the self through writing. It is an important element of self-reflection within the culture of “taking care of the self.”

I found examples of such confessions on the Korean weight-loss reality TV shows. As the female participants examine themselves, they also disclose information about immoral behavior to the experts who interviewed them. This kind of oral confession for the purpose of self-awareness is represented as the first step of taking care of the self. Through the interviews, the female participants are not only aware of their inappropriate behaviors that have led to obesity, but they also publicly confess bad lifestyle habits. Particularly, the oral format of the confession is shown at the beginning of the shows as participants publically speak out about their experiences, such as pursuing impractical diets and the reasons why they have always failed on various ones. In this sense, the self-examination shown in their confessions can be considered as an important technology of the self for Korean females who try to take care of their bodies in order to achieve subjectivity. In the first episode of Diet War, all women who want to be selected as participants start with self-examination through confession to experts. Self-awareness and self-examination through their interviews is the first technology of body-care that enables them to turn themselves into a subject.
Figure 12. One of the participants is being interviewed. She starts to confess her wrong behaviors that caused her “obesity.” (Screenshot photography captured from Diet War TV show, episode 1, June 9, 2012)

(Showing some pictures of herself before she became obese) I took this picture of me and my husband when we just started dating in 2006. I was about 60kg at that time. Every time we went out for a date, my hubby and I always ate high-calorie meals. Then, I soon became over 80kg. But, after we set the wedding date, I got a shot, and took some medicine (to lose weight), and I sometimes added an appetite suppressant to the diet medications, and I hardly ever ate when I was on a diet by myself. As a result, I lost almost 12kg before the wedding, so I could carry off on the day without a hitch. However, I have regained 27kg in a year. After that, I have had a really hard time because I am so afraid to look at myself, which has become like a monster (sobbing).

(Excepted from Diet War, episode 1)

Self-examination by introspecting their unethical behaviors has been shown as a stage of self-awareness in the process of female body-care. Therefore, the practice of self-examination can be considered as one of the significant technologies of the self, not only for participants on the weight-loss reality shows, but also for any women who take care of their bodies in post-modern society, thus transforming themselves into subjects in the game of truth.
Another technology of the self that Foucault mentions is *Askēsis*. This is a state of self-control used to behave in an appropriate and ethical manner, which can be achieved through the cultivation of the self. According to Foucault (1988a), “*Askēsis* means not renunciation, but the progressive consideration of self or mastery over oneself, obtained not through the renunciation of reality but through the acquisition and assimilation of truth” (35). He also points out that self-mastery transforms oneself into “a permanent principle of action, which can be a process of becoming more subjective” (35).

*Askēsis* is an interesting technology of care of the self in this female body study. It can also be practically used to transform ordinary people into neo-liberal subjects in Korean society; they become good citizens who carry out their responsibilities by taking care of their bodies themselves. Korean weight-loss reality TV shows contain many examples of self-mastery, including hard physical exercise, eating a balanced diet, and the constant examination of the female body though competition. One of the major examples of *Askēsis* on the shows is that all the participants are continuously challenging their physical limitations to accomplish their purposes. More specifically, the physical abilities of all the female participants in Diet War are contested. Through this kind of self-training, the participants experience a certain form of bodily pain; but at the same time, they can attain a certain power of self-governance.

Another specific example of self-mastery on the show is extreme dietary control. The participants are required to follow strict plans during the boot camp, which makes most of them feel extremely uncomfortable at meal time. While most of the participants conform to the strict regulations, since they know it is a vital part of
reaching their weight loss goals, their struggles with these regulations are also very apparent – some of the participants actually rejected their meals or threw up in the early part of the show.

Figure 13. A female participant is trying to overcome her physical limitations by working out vigorously (above). All meals for the participants in the show are comprised of low calories foods (below). (Screenshot photography captured from Diet War TV show, episode 3, June 23, 2012)

While the self-mastery and harsh training portrayed in the shows might be somewhat coerced due to the nature of the show, self-mastery is still regarded as one of the fundamental technologies of females taking care of their bodies in contemporary society. In this sense, there is no question that the practice of self-mastery in the discourse on the female body-care operates as a useful technology of the self.

- Ethos of Self-Care

The last technology to examine based on Foucault’s work is “ethos of self-care.” This is an embodied state of certain ethical thoughts and attitudes. In other words, embodiment of oneself refers to the result of certain repetitive behaviors
achieved through training oneself to be accustomed to ethical technologies. This kind of embodied behavior that becomes a way of life can be understood as an important technology of the self in taking care of the Korean female body. Many people—particularly females—tend to experience failure on their quest for body-care. For example, many Korean females regain weight after losing it on a diet, and some of them even gain more weight back than they had lost. Those who succeed have become habituated to self-mastery as an ethical practice.

Specifically, about 8 out of 10 adults in Korea experience losing weight at least one time in their lives. However, only 17% of them successfully lose weight. As Foucault (1988a) points out, the final aim of continuous self-mastery is to transform one’s behaviors into a set of ethical practices. What he claims could mean that if a set of practices were not embodied within one’s life, the care of the self could not be achieved. In other words, accustomed behaviors for caring of the self, fulfilled through self-mastery, should be understood as ethical practices to turn oneself into a subject. Some examples of these embodied behaviors are illustrated on the shows.

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97 This is a part of results of an online survey targeting 208 ordinary people in Korea, conducted by three institutions that have studied on obesity: Korea Academy of Aesthetic Medicine, Doctor’s Association of Obesity Research, and Korean Academy of Obesity & Aesthetic Treatment (Chosun Media, 2014).
Figure 14. One of the participants constantly works out even after the show ended. (Screenshot photography captured from Diet War TV shows, episode 11, August 18, 2012)

I will try keeping up with losing weight myself as I did for the past few weeks, (even though the show is over). It will be never ending in my life…

A narrator in the show says, Exercising in the early morning has become her daily life, not to forget her resolution that she lives a confident single life.

I have been trying not to skip working out in the morning every day, well my mind and bad habits are totally reconstructed …

(Excerpted from Diet War, Episode 12)

These behaviors can be likened to the aristocracy in the Middle Ages who fasted for spiritual purposes, when fasting was regarded as a means of developing identities. In medieval times, fasting as a Christian practice was “constructed as an arena in which the deepest possibilities for human excellence may be realized” (Bordo, 2003, 185). The concept of body-care in this study is not based on any religious aspect. However, caring for oneself through regular exercise and a balanced
diet could be regarded as a postmodern way of achieving self-fulfillment. Weight loss as an ethical attitude in Korean post-modern society also articulates the logic of neo-liberalism, since caring for the self as an embodied ethical behavior among Korean females definitely plays a significant role in reinforcing the idea of body-care as a fundamental value of the society in order to produce a good citizen.

The Possibilities: Fulfilling Subjectivity through the Art of Self-Care

As examined in the previous chapters and some early parts of this chapter, many studies on the female body and sexuality tend to be analyzed within dominant ideologies and paradigms. I do not deny that many parts of my body study also fall under some of the dominant ideologies maintained and reproduced in Korean society. Therefore, the historical and contextual work on the Korean female body is an essential part of my study, in that the dominant discourse on the Korean female body examined is “the history of truth.” Moreover, the dominant discourse on the Korean female body is exactly articulated within the logic of Neo-liberalism. In addition, powerful female body discourse has played a significant role in highlighting the idea of slenderness and skinniness. So far, I have focused on analyzing the dominant discourse based on traditional paradigms in 4.1 and 4.2. However, in this subsection, I try to examine the ways in which self-body care through the technologies of the self help ordinary Korean women turn themselves into subjects. As such, I hope to offer a creative point of view in that individuals, particularly Korean females, “transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1988a, 18). In addition, ideas on self body-care as a way of showing ethical practices cannot simply be interpreted within the dominant contexts of the female body and sexuality, which have been firmly rooted in Korean body
Some feminist scholars have inspired me to think more critically about the necessity of a new perspective on the female body. Bordo (2003) criticizes conventional feminists who tend to write gender off as just another general social factor, such as class, race, and ethnicity. She claims that gender should be studied within the practical contexts of society according to a variety of perspectives. McNay (2000) also states that “women’s embodied practices cannot be understood through the binaries of domination and resistance, but rather involve a more complex processes of investment and negotiation” (58). In the field of physical cultural studies, Thorpe (2008) points out that women do not always conform to dominant social paradigms, but they have tried to form themselves as a “subject within power relation” (209). As Markula (2004) mentions in her work on Technology of the Self and Mindful Fitness, individuals in post-modern society do not constantly behave within the category of power relations, but rather they can replace the disciplinary search for self-fulfillment with some ethical substance, possibly similar to the Greek one of a beautiful life” (307). Based on inspiration from these creative perspectives of the female body, this body study will also play a key role in offering the possibility of turning females into subjects as they fulfill a certain state of freedom and happiness.

In Foucault’s later work on the self (1997a), he points out that self-care cannot be performed out of the social and cultural power of relations. However, one can achieve subjectivity when an individual takes care of him/herself “as the conscious practice of freedom” (285). Based on the three technologies of caring for the self that I found embodied in two Korean weight-loss reality TV shows – Exagoreusis, Askēsi, and Ethos of the self -- the subjectivity attained through the practice of embodied technologies of oneself is decoded into two possibilities. First,
females who are constantly caring for their bodies are able to achieve “self-fulfillment.” There is an obvious example of achieving self-fulfillment through body-care shown during the participant interviews in *Diet War*.

A participant (32 years old): I have become confident to myself. People might say that I am still fat. Well, I am going to tell them that you can’t imagine how hard it was to go through all of the trouble to get my body like this.

(Excerpted from *Diet War*, Episode 12)

After sixteen weeks, most female participants’ attitudes on body-care had been changed from the way they started taking care of their bodies at the beginning of the show. For example, most participants used to take care of themselves for the sake of other family members, and some wanted to go on a diet as a way of saving face in public by flaunting themselves. These kinds of attitudes and thoughts on body-care clearly demonstrate that historically and socially constructed ideologies of ordinary Korean female bodies have operated as a powerful impetus. However, the female participants tried to redesign their own lives through body-care as a daily practice of freedom. This accustomed attitude, enabled through the technologies of body-care, provided a possibility for transferring themselves into subjects. In this regard, embodied technologies through body-care should be understood as a significant opportunity to achieve self-fulfillment, allowing the women to play with relations of power.

Other participants on the show also say that they had accomplished self-fulfillment by overcoming harsh physical training and strict dieting for twenty weeks. Through this process of body-care, the female body is able to shift from a body to a subject, which had been marginalized and alienated. In other words, the body, which
is reconstructed through the practices of technology of oneself, can be understood as the origin of “the cultivating of the self” in order to achieve self-fulfillment. Females who embody the technologies of oneself as a practice of freedom are able to turn themselves into ethical beings. As Foucault (1997a) mentions, the care of the self, which is embodied as an ethical attitude, “enables one to occupy his rightful position in the city, the community” (287). His account of ethos of the self is significantly related to the idea of self-responsibility, which is one of the key values in Neo-liberal society.98

Since the emergence of Neo-liberal society in Korea, many health problems like obesity and diabetes have become issues such that individuals need to take care themselves rather than being regarded as a public issue. Within Neo-liberal society, embodied technologies of the self play a key role in producing citizens who hold ethical attitudes. Consequently, the process of self-fulfillment through practices of technologies of body-care is not simply epitomized by the female participants who have dramatically succeeded in losing weight on the shows, but is also represented among female viewers who turn themselves into subjects by experiencing a similar process of self-body care.

The second possibility, which has a significant influence on transforming oneself into a subject, is that embodied technologies of body-care enable individuals to achieve critical awareness as a practice of freedom derived from the power of relations. Foucault (1997c) points out that critical awareness is an essential technology that forms an ethical subject in the practice of freedom.

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98 It is to be noted that I do not try either advocate or blame based on the logic of Neo-liberalism which tends to regard certain social phenomenon (or problems) as a personal issue. Rather, I try to explain the idea of production of ethical subjects, which is apparently shown within both a neo-liberal context and the culture of Korean female body-care.
The critical ontology of ourselves must be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, not even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (319)

In other words, individuals can act as ethical subjects in society as they problematize their identities by doing “a specific work of thought” (Foucault, 1997b, 118). On the weight-loss reality TV shows, the female participants had a chance not only to become more self-reflexive by meditating their behaviors and thoughts, but also to be able to negotiate with the dominant ideologies on the female body. In the beginning of the diet shows, most of the participants tend to be overly obsessed with only reducing their “size.” This is an obvious example of how ordinary Korean women undoubtedly conform to the dominant ideologies on the female body and body-care. In the later part of the shows, however, they are not as obsessed with ideal size or fitting into a certain category; rather, they tend to be aware that body-care should be understood as a way to care for the self in order to live a healthy and happy life. In this sense, Korean female body-care can be considered as one of the useful way to achieve subjectivity by “engaging in critical practice of the ethics of self-care” (Markula, 2004, 319).

Conclusion

I have examined the significant dominant discourse on the female body represented by two Korean weight-loss reality TV shows. In particular, I have analyzed the ways in which the female body is embodied in Korean society through an in-depth interpretation of the meanings of “normalcy” as applied to the female
body, a notion that is continuously reinforced within the country’s distinctive contexts. In particular, body-care through Korean weight-loss reality TV shows plays a powerful role in placing the dominant ideologies of the female body as a majority social trend among ordinary females by re-conceptualizing the concept of body-care within intermingled historical and cultural contexts of Korea.

The first discourse is the representation of the traditional ideology of Confucianism. Throughout its history, Korean society has undergone periods of political and social upheaval, including enlightenment, the Korean War, industrialization, and the economic crisis of 1997. However, the standards of Confucianism have endured as an ethical norm for women’s sexuality and body image; it is still regarded as a significant motivation for females to take care of themselves. On the shows, we see that many participants want to lose weight for others, such as parents or partners. They marginalize their bodies by fitting them into the norm of traditional Confucian ideology of the female body.

The second discourse categorizes female bodies as abnormal through social stigmatization. It is interesting that the discourse on the abnormal body indicates that many participants in the beginning of the shows tend to classify themselves as abnormal by labeling themselves as losers or outcasts of society. In addition, the larger women on the shows reproduce the dominant discourses of slenderness and obesity phobia by placing themselves in the abnormal category. The shows tend to enlarge the abnormal category of female bodies by representing average and slender bodies as problematic objects that always need repair. What’s more, this abnormal body concept tends to be at odds with femininity, so that the larger female body is not regarded as a feminine one. As a result, comparisons between the normal body categories of slender and skinny and the abnormal categories of chubby and obese,
clearly evident in the shows, play a huge role in not only dichotomizing the view of normal versus abnormal in society, but also in generating the idea of body-care as a rite of passage for ordinary Korean women.

The last discourse I found on the shows is that body-care can be regarded as one of the most efficient ways of eliciting self-display, which has in turn created the idea of “diet pornography.” In other words, the shows tend to romanticize “losing weight” by covertly emphasizing the dominant ideology that body-care is an unavoidable job for women who want to be viewed with dignity. For example, these reality TV shows often feature the dramatic transformation of overweight ordinary women or participants who are struggling with their relationships during the boot camp, rather than showing how much they suffer during the long and arduous process of losing weight through physical training.

Thus, the notion of the socially flamboyant body produced by body-care reality TV shows plays a key role in creating the idea of “diet-pornography” in current Korean society. The shows tend to minimize significant negative factors that often accompany body-care, such as the side effects of liposuction, the yo-yo effect, and the mental and physical pain that occur during the weight loss process. On the other hand, they tend to maximize the positive effects of the process by romanticizing body-care, showcasing successful body transformations, and highlighting the positive social view of the “after” body. These powerful strategies have the ability to destabilize the traditional idea of body-care and turn it into a requirement for Korean women who live in an appearance-priority society.

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99 Yo-yo effect refers to what happens when people who successfully lose weight on a diet then regain what they lost or even more weight. This effect frequently occurs when individuals lose a lot of weight in a short time period.
Nevertheless, women themselves have also played pivotal roles in the constant consumption and reproduction of dominant body discourse; they willingly turn themselves into subjects by taking care of their bodies as a practice of the ethical self. Specifically, three technologies of body-care are evident on the shows – confession, self-mastery, and embodiment. These technologies manipulate the relations of power within a society that implicitly compels women to conform to dominant ideologies of the female body by providing Korean females who consider body-care as a critical duty with the possibility of turning themselves into subjects. Along with analyzing the technologies of the self, embodied through self-body care as an ethical practice, this work should contribute to a creative perspective on interpreting significant discourse on the female body that has always struggled within the game of truth.
Chapter 7
Conclusion: Beyond Slenderness

“In such an era we desperately need an effective political discourse about the female body, a discourse adequate to an analysis of the insidious, and often paradoxical, pathways of modern social control.”

Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 2003, 167

In this study, I have examined how traditional discourses on Korean female body and body care have not only reinforced dominant cultural ideologies, but have also created new ideologies on the female body in concurrent society. In other words, the traditional ethical norms regarding Korean female bodies tend to be reproduced as a dominant paradigm. Also, female body discourses have been created by a huge influx of new economic and cultural ideology. By tracing a genealogy of the Korean female body, I have analyzed why Korean weight-loss reality TV shows have constantly reproduced the dominant body-care discourse, which leads women to obsess about slenderness and even skinniness. This discourse generated through reality TV shows, helps Korean females stick within the Confucian ideologies in order to fit their identities and sexuality into traditional ethical norms, while at the same time embrace the idea of body-care as a life project of turning themselves into subjects. In this context, the reality TV shows as a new medium play a huge role in reflecting concurrent socio-cultural trends of the Korean female body.

More specifically, I have addressed two major significant influences on the Korean female body and body-care through an in-depth analysis of two Korean
weight-loss reality TV shows. On the one hand, the shows are a new medium that generates self-responsible individuals by reinforcing historically and socially constructed dominant ideologies such as the westernized standard of beauty, obese-phobia, and appearance-priority. On the other hand, technologies of body-care, obviously portrayed in the shows, can be considered as efficient ways for women to turn themselves into subjects. Analyzing these two significant factors, as represented in the shows, has allowed me to reflect on mutual, cyclical relations among society, the shows, and females. When I first planned this body study, I laid out the three key factors on a linear schema. For example, society plays a powerful role as a main producer of dominant body discourse, while the media, especially the body-care reality TV shows, play a role in reproducing and proliferating body discourse between society and ordinary women. Lastly, women play a main consumer role, one where they constantly struggle to reconcile themselves with socially dominant ideologies. I later found that the relationship between the three key factors—society, the shows, and women—cannot be linear, but rather, they are intermingled in a mutual cycle. This mutual schema raises the possibility that women may play a decisive role in not only

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100 Within the linear pattern of producing and consuming female body discourse, women’s role is to accept dominant body discourses, which are produced by society and the mass media.

101 Within the mutual cycle, society, the reality shows, and women play roles in producing and consuming dominant discourses.
reproducing the dominant ideologies by internalizing power ideologies, but also in establishing subjectivity through the art and practice of body-care.

In the study of linear schema, females tend to be regarded as victims of socially-constructed dominant ideologies, which force them to be disciplined and docile. In other words, applying linear relations to female body studies encumbers the understanding of females as subjects themselves by considering their bodies as objects that never waver from the dominant social paradigms. What I hope to achieve here is not to criticize the perspective of linear schema, but rather, to take an expanded view that will shed light on the concept of subjectivity of Korean female bodies. In this sense, I have spent considerable time on an in-depth examination of dominant female body ideologies, consistently constructed within the unique historical contexts of South Korea. Using the most fundamental sources, I have examine the ways in which the subjects –society, the reality TV shows themselves, and ordinary females--of dominant body discourse have been intermingled with each other as they produce and consume the powerful ideologies of Korean female bodies.

In Chapter 2 and 3, I address the ways in which ordinary female bodies have been represented and situated within society by analyzing historically constructed discourse on the female body in Korea. This examination has allowed me to find some significant historical background on how the contemporary beauty standard has been formulated. It has shifted from traditional Korean beauty--such as narrow shoulders, a slightly rounded physique--to Westernized beauty such as big eyes, a high nose, and a slender body shape. Moreover, the slender body as a representative beauty standard has played a major role in creating the concept of body-care among ordinary Korean females as a mode of self-responsibility. In particular, the influx of American culture in the recent stage of modern Korean civilization is the most
influential factor in transforming the traditional beauty standard, which had been maintained through a long history of Korea, to a new type of beauty, the Americanized body, in a short period of time.

This historical background on female bodies, gleaned by analyzing dominant body ideologies represented within modern and post-modern Korean society, has also helped in examining the ways in which powerful ideologies of the female body have been reproduced and reinforced through weight-loss reality TV shows.

First, the traditional Confucian concept of female bodies and their identities has been reproduced through these reality TV shows by frequently showing ordinary female participants who have internalized traditional norms, regarded as a major reason for body-care. Specifically, the shows have shown that many female participants want to take care of their bodies for the sake of others, such as having a baby, for one’s husband, or in order to become a respectable member of the family, rather than for herself. Therefore, the shows play a powerful role as a new medium, one that constantly reproduces the idea of traditional Confucian values of female bodies in post-modern Korean society.

Second, the Korean female obesity rate has scarcely increased during the last ten years\textsuperscript{102}. Nevertheless, Korean female bodies, whether obese or not, have been regarded as objects in need of repair. The shows obviously reinforce this dominant idea of the female body by “labeling” obese bodies as abnormal. On the shows, the technique of labeling plays an important role in broadening the category of abnormality by stigmatizing both larger, and even normal, female bodies as problematized objects. In conjunction with such labeling, female participants on the

\footnote{\textsuperscript{102} See chapter 2. In addition, South Korea has the lowest obesity rate in the world.}
shows tend to play roles as main subjects, who strengthen the idea of abnormality through the self-degradation of describing themselves as freaks. In addition, abnormal female bodies are frequently juxtaposed with an absence of femininity. Furthermore, the shows constantly spread the idea of body-care as the most efficient way for women to transfer their problematic bodies to the category of normalcy as well as that of femininity.

Lastly, Korean weight-loss reality TV shows produce “flamboyant bodies,” which are intimately associated with certain historical and social contexts of Korea. In terms of the historical, maintaining dignity and decency in public was one of the important Confucian values for high-class individuals in pre-modern Korea (Han, 2012). This traditional value has gradually faded within modern society. However, it is still considered as an efficient way for ordinary females to “show off” their bodies in public.

In terms of social context, body-care has been regarded as a useful way for women to produce a “marketable” body ever since the emergence of capitalistic society. We need to pay attention here to body-care discourse on producing flamboyant bodies in post-modern society since it focuses on ordinary women, who are in the normal category or even in low-weight category, rather than those in the overweight one. Many examples of flamboyant bodies are shown on one of the weight-loss reality shows, Diet Master. Female participants, who appear to be slender enough, want to rebuild their bodies into perfect shapes, which is apparently confirmed within the historical and social context on body-care. The idea of a flamboyant body culture is an obvious example of mutual cycling relations among the three main subjects – society, the shows, and ordinary women. Specifically, one of the

103 See Chapter 6.
important aspects of a consumer capitalistic society is that everything can be “saleable.” Moreover, everything can be represented by scientific numerical values. Within such a society, weight-loss reality TV shows have had a strong influence in generating and spreading the dominant cultural ideologies of female bodies by representing bodies with “numbers” – clothing size and specific body size-- which then creates visible criteria upon which a body is deemed normal or abnormal, as well as whether it is more marketable in society.

Women can also be active subjects who try to fit into the cultural ideologies by taking care of their bodies. In terms of flamboyant body discourse, the TV shows produce a “diet-pornography” discourse. They tend to focus more on the positive aspects of female body-care by romanticizing the “after transformation” and by showing scenes in which the females who have attained a perfect body shape “proudly expose” them in public. Thus, the shows reinforce and spread the idea that body-care is a useful means by which ordinary women can not only meet the criteria of the ideal body shape, but also show off their bodies in public.

As I discussed in Chapter 4, weight-loss reality TV shows are considered one of the beneficial TV genres that perfectly fit into the logic of Neo-liberalism, particularly as it manifests in post-modern media industries. I have addressed how the shows’ format has been welcomed as a perfect TV genre in neo-liberal society. I have also focused more on deciphering significant contexts within the idea of Neo-liberalism that have had a strong influence on reinforcing the idea of “self” body-care as a dominant body paradigm within female body-care culture. Specifically, the neo-liberal texts on female body-care represented though the weight-loss reality TV shows are seen in both the female participants and the group of experts. For example, many female participants on Diet War tend to blame themselves for unsuccessful body-care
efforts that have caused their obesity. At the same time, they want to take care of their bodies as their own responsibility not only to transfer themselves into the category of normal citizens, but also to fit themselves into traditional Confucian values of female bodies. Various useful information on “how to take care of bodies yourself,” provided by expert groups on the shows, play a decisive role in proliferating the idea of self body-care among Korean females. Most of them have normal weight but are obsessed with beautifying their appearance. As one of the experts in Diet Master said, she hopes to “To teach how to catch fish yourself, not to feed you fish that I have already caught”\textsuperscript{104}. This expresses the idea of “do it yourself” female body-care, which has had a strong influence on producing neo-liberal citizens in contemporary Korea.

Since the emergence of Neo-liberalism in post-modern society, Korean females have been situated as center subjects within the dominant body ideologies, which are constantly reproduced through society and body-related reality TV shows. On the one hand, females have internalized and consumed the dominant body ideologies. On the other hand, Korean females try to turn themselves into subjects though self body-care. In this regard, the discourse on Korean female body-care in post-modern society should not be understood as an output formulated by dominant body paradigms such as slenderness, the Westernized beauty standard, and obese-phobia. Rather, embodied technologies of self body-care--such as self-examination, self-mastery, and the ethos of ethical behavior--allow women to transfer themselves into subjectivity by playing with the power of relations. I do not deny that these technologies, which can be achieved by taking care of one’s body, have an influence on generating neo-liberal individuals. However, please note that the concept of the neo-liberal subject might draw different meanings depending on the social context in

\textsuperscript{104} See chapter 5.
which it is analyzed. As mentioned in Chapter 3 and 4, neo-liberal individuals, who have been formulated within the dominant body discourses such as appearance-priority and consumer capitalism, tend to be analyzed as main agents who play a role in reproducing a docile body. Furthermore, these individuals who have embodied the technologies of body-care as a practice of ethical behavior definitely raise the possibility of achieving “subjectivity” as they establish a certain state of freedom and happiness. Therefore, neo-liberal subjects in post-modern Korean society should not be regarded simply as socially-subordinated individuals who take the power of relations for granted, but as culturally powerful individuals who can transform themselves into subjects by embodying the ethos of self body-care as a practice of freedom.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, examining the female body as a gendered and societal entity should be done within the Department of Kinesiology in that the body has been formulated within its own history, ideologies, and discourse. In this respect, philosophical understanding of socio-cultural discourse on the female body should provide physical cultural studies with an opportunity to enlarge the academic spectrum by exploring the way in which the gendered body can be placed within relations of power as a fundamental resource of society.

Looking toward the future, I hope to continue my investigation and analysis of contemporary body culture and the popular, as well as problematic, phenomena associated with the human body. While my dissertation focuses more on a theoretical view of the body, future research can continue to utilize cross-cultural perspectives to uncover more practical aspects regarding ideas of self-body care that are reinforced in contemporary society. More specifically, I plan to research multiple discourses produced by various kinds of non-exercise body-care industries, such as dietary
supplements and cosmetics. In the past, diet and physical exercise were the only options for body-care. The amount of effort that these options require is not feasible for everyone. As a result, many people who try to take care of their bodies in these ways experience failure. Importantly, non-exercise body-care can also be regarded not only as a humane way to achieve and maintain “good citizen” status within a neo-liberal society, but also as a connection to the concept of self-care presented by the sports industries. Arguably, non-exercise body-care is much more accessible. Options such as medications, dietary supplements, cosmetic products, or even surgery have become more and more common and have given birth to the idea that there are many easy ways to fight obesity and achieve a slender, toned body. I believe that investigating this kind of phenomena through the critical lens of kinesiology and sports studies will provide a deeper understanding of the importance of body-care and its relationship to physical activities and exercise.
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