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Discussions on Beneficial TV Genre: Korean Body-Care TV Programs in the Era of Neo-Liberalism*

Yoonso Choi** (Chung-Ang University, Research Professor)

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to discuss the major background of dominant female body discourses, which have been produced through Korean body-care reality TV programs, as regarded 'female-oriented pop culture' in neo-liberal society. The body-care reality TV programs have played a strong role in proliferating dominant discourses on female body and body-care, which are packed as a 'cultural *étiquette*' for Korean women who want to belong into the category of normalcy as a good citizen by voluntarily taking care of their bodies. In this socio-cultural milieu, this study focused more on examining the mechanism of neo-liberal messages on female body care by interrogating the behind context of two representative Korean body care TV programs "Let Me In", and "Get It Beauty". As result, Korean body care reality TV programs targeted only women have regarded the female body as an object in need of repair and this body discourse, which have shared a common thread with the neoliberal ideology in modern Korean society.

Key words: Body care, Reality program, Neo-liberalism, Normalcy

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** Corresponding author e-mail: yoonsochoi@gmail.com

Introduction

“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*, 2008a, 12.

This study aims to examine the significant role of Korean body 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 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)” (Featherstone, 2010, 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 ‘body 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 body 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. A distinguished scholar 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” (Harvey, 2005, 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 society. 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 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 and healthy-looking 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 body care discourse among Korean women. When you put these economic and cultural contexts together, you can see the answer as to why 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, the purpose of this study is to examine the significant roles of the Korean body 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 body 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 (Nam & Koh, 2011). 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 body care provided by TV producers. These significances proliferated through the Korean reality TV body-care shows concluded with a message that the female bodies in neo-liberal Korean society have been regarded as an object to keep repairing in their lifetime.

Why body care 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, so-called 'Korean blockbuster' 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* and *TaeGukGi: Brotherhood of War*, 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” (Kim, 2011, 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 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 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 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" (Moran, 2009, 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 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'. 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 (2002) 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 're-constructible' 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 & Sullivan illustrate that large women in the media have been represented as a bad example implying they are dull-witted and uneducated (Sender & Sullivan, 2008, 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

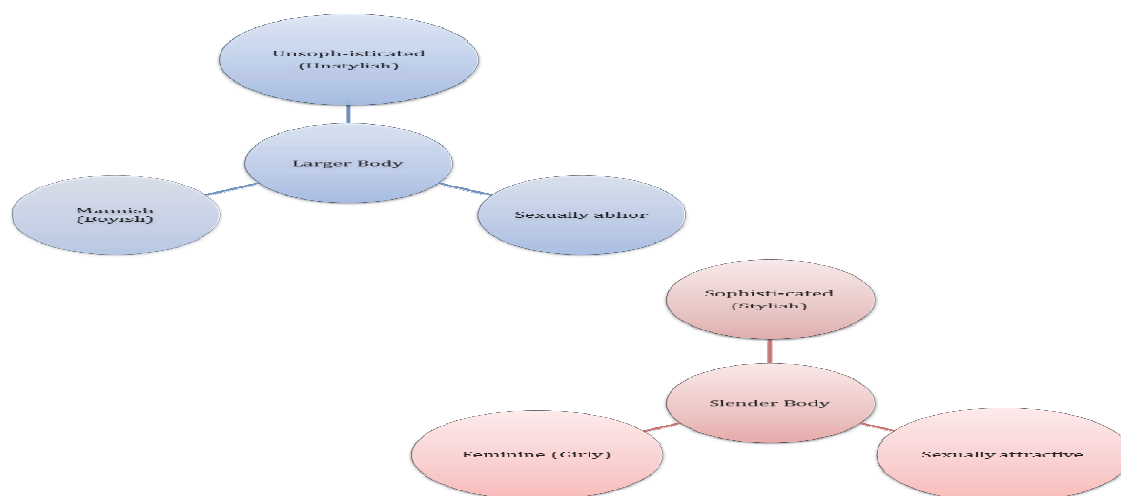
in her community or school, but also someone who lives a successful and happy life. Most of these stories have happy endings. As a specific example, *200 Pounds Beauty* was released in 2006, and was incredibly popular in Korea. The main character, Hanna, enjoys singing and loves sharing her voice, but 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. 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 also wins the man's heart. Another similar example is the Korean drama, *Money's Incarnate*, 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 Jaemin's new bodies represent successful career women, full of confidence and self-esteem. 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*, 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 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



(figure 1) Dichotomized female identities between slender body and obese body in makeover-themed genres

as an abnormal body lacking sexual identity and having an absence of subjectivity.

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 Body Care Reality TV in Korean Society

Reproducing Dominant Discourses of the Female Body

Body 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 body care reality TV shows, whose themes tend to focus more on 'girl stuff' such as make-up, and outfits. 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 body 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 body 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 decades. Most have concluded that there is

a tendency to formulate slenderness as the female body standard. Some scholars 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" (Gallagher & Pecot-Hebert 2007, 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 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" (Jones, 2008, 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 body 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 body 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. Another example of a popular makeover reality television program, *Let Me In*, introduces itself as a 'life changing makeover show'. As discussed, 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 work 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 body 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 encouraged 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 body 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; Sender and Sullivan, 2008; and, Ouellette and Hay, 2008a). 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, body 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, which might not be that helpful in the long run for viewers facing problems and difficulties in reality(Ouellette and Hay, 2008a). 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

Body care reality TV definitely has illustrated significant factors of neo-liberalism 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 body care reality TV programs help society govern at a distance by distributing neo-liberal ideas that employ Foucault's concept of governmentality. "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" (Foucault, 2000, 216-217). Ouellette & Hay 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." (Ouellette and Hay, 2008a, 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 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 & 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 (Ouellette & Hay, 2008a, 73).

In addition, Hay & Ouellette demonstrate the relationship between reality TV shows as a key player in "governing at a distance (Hay & Ouellette, 2008a, 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 does not 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 body 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 through body 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 that a neo-liberal society requires by helping 'abnormal citizens' transfer into the category of normality by taking care of themselves (Ouellette and Hay, 2008b). Sender and Sullivan (2008) claim that some neo-liberal apparatus such as surveillance and self-monitoring, often utilized in body 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 body care reality TV shows has been done in Western countries, but there have been no studies on body care reality TV programs in Korea. 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 body 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 body care, which is inescapable for women who want to meet the ideal standard.

Following the popularity of body care reality TV shows, some scholars have tried to interpret their popularity within the Korean context of neo-liberalism. Nam & Goh argue that weight-loss reality TV -a popular theme of body care TV shows- operates as a form of neo-liberal governmentality (Nam & Goh, 2011) in Korean society. In fact, Nam & 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 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 cultural milieu, body 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 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, body care has arisen as a way for females to make their bodies competitive products in contemporary capitalistic society. The body 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 regard, 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) of obsession and anxiety with their bodies. I also address the significant roles of 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 Korean body care reality have powerfully influenced the reinforcement of

body care discourse. From a review of previous research on body 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 body care. There are various motivations or personal reasons for women to participate in body care reality programs or watch the shows in order to take care of themselves. For example, body 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 body 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.

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유익한 TV 장르, 신자유주의 시대 한국 몸 관리 TV 프로그램에 관한 논의

최윤소(중앙대학교, 연구교수)

국문초록

본 연구는 우리사회 경제 이념인 신자유주의에 입각하여 여성 중심 문화 장르로 몸 관리 리얼리티 쇼에서 보여지는 여성 몸에 관한 지배 담론 생산 배경에 대한 심도 깊은 논의를 목적으로 하고 있다. 여성 몸 관리 리얼리티 TV 프로그램은 현대사회에서 정상화 범주에 속한 '착한 시민'이 되기 위해서는 자기 몸 관리가 자발적으로 행해져야 할 '문화 에티켓'이라는 형태로 포장되어 지속적으로 우리사회 지배담론으로 자리잡는데 결정적인 역할을 했다 할 수 있다. 따라서, 본 연구에서는 여성을 주요 타겟으로 하여 인기리에 국내에서 방영되었던 대표적인 몸 관리 관련 리얼리티 프로그램인 "Let me In"과 "Get It Beauty"를 분석하고 이를 토대로 몸 관리 리얼리티 프로그램이 국내 여성 중심 문화 장르로 굳건히 자리매김한 배경을 살펴봄으로써 여성 몸 관리에 관한 신자유주의적 메시지 생산 기저를 밝히고자 하였다. 분석 결과, 해당 프로그램은 한국 여성의 몸을 '끊임없이 가꾸어야 하는 대상'으로 간주하고 있었으며 이러한 담론의 생산은 결과적으로 현대사회 신자유주의 이념과 그 맥락을 함께함을 알 수 있었다.

한글주요어 : 몸담론, 리얼리티 쇼, 신자유주의, 메이크오버, 정상화

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