



## Associations Between Attitudes Toward Cosmetic Surgery, Celebrity Worship, and Body Image Among South Korean and U.S. Female College Students

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According to a report by the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (2014), Americans spent more than 12 billion dollars on surgical and nonsurgical (i.e., minimally-invasive) procedures in 2013 and top five surgical procedures were liposuction, breast augmentation, eyelid surgery, tummy tuck and nose surgery. There has been an explosion in the number of cosmetic procedures taking place in non-Western societies (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, 2011), and yet most of the studies on cosmetic surgery have relied on Western samples. Among non-Western societies, South Korea has one of the highest rates of cosmetic surgery in the world (White, 2005), which is believed to be the manifestation of negative body image. Despite the evidence that rates of cosmetic surgery in South Korea have risen sharply in the past decade, much of the available research continues to document rates of specific procedures (e.g., McCurdy & Lam, 2005). The present study aimed to examine associations between attitudes toward cosmetic surgery, celebrity worship, and body image among South Korean and U.S. female college students to shed light on this under-researched topic in the cross-cultural context. With a lack of literature on cosmetic surgery and cross-cultural applications of this topic, this cross-cultural study contributes to filling the gap in the literature.

One particular aspect of media influences that called for attention due to its under-researched association with cosmetic surgery is ‘celebrity worship’ or the idolization of celebrities as role models (Giles, 2002). The most prominent theoretical account regarding celebrity worship was proposed by McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran (2002), who postulated an “absorption-addiction” model that explains three increasingly extreme sets of cognitions: Entertainment-social (e.g., “Keeping up with news about my favorite celebrity is an entertaining pastime”); Intense-personal (e.g., “To know my favorite celebrity is to love him/her”); and Borderline-pathological (e.g., “I have frequent thoughts about my favorite celebrity, even when I don’t want to”). Celebrity worship is considered para-social relationships, in which an individual knows the other, but the other does not. Intense-personal celebrity worship of a celebrity whose body shape was admired predicted the incidence of elective cosmetic surgery (Maltby & Day, 2011).

The design of this study was an exploratory manner in which it was focused on assessing associations across selected variables between the two selected countries, South Korea and the U.S. A total of 370 female undergraduates were recruited for survey from a central university in Seoul, South Korea ( $n = 196$ ) and a university in the Northeast region of the U.S. ( $n = 174$ ). While all Korean participants were of Korean ethnicity, the U.S. participants self-identified their ethnicity as White (86.8%), Asian (6.3%) and other (6.9%). In addition to demographic details,

the participants were asked to complete the questionnaires consisted of measures of attitudes toward their favorite celebrity and cosmetic surgery, and measures of body image as well as sociocultural influences on body image. Due to body size differences across the two countries, BMI was used as a covariate for a Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) for the effect of country on all measures being employed. The MANCOVA revealed an overall significance,  $F(8, 310) = 29.72, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .402$ . Further examination of analysis of variances revealed significant effects of country as follows: The U.S. participants revealed more positive attitudes toward their favorite celebrities; the Korean participants showed greater acceptance of cosmetic surgery; the U.S. participants revealed greater satisfaction toward their bodies. In order to examine which of the relevant factors might explain participants' acceptance of cosmetic surgery, a multiple regression analysis was run for each country on acceptance of cosmetic surgery, with measures of body image and attitudes toward favorite celebrity as predictors. For the Korean participants, none of the variables served as a predictor for acceptance of cosmetic surgery. However, for the U.S. participants, the level of body dissatisfaction and attitudes toward favorite celebrities were significantly associated with acceptance of cosmetic surgery. The less participants appreciate their current bodies and the more they have positive attitudes toward their favorite celebrities, the more likely they are to accept cosmetic surgery.

A positive association between attitudes toward celebrities and acceptance of cosmetic surgery among the U.S. participants implies that compared to Korea, celebrities in the U.S. might have a stronger effect as a reference group for ideal beauty standards and play a greater role for one's likelihood of having cosmetic surgery. Despite the limited sample size, overall findings suggest that the cultural environment influence factors influencing the likelihood of having cosmetic surgery and there needs further research on this topic. Further research can examine men in cross-cultural contexts since an increasing number of men undergo cosmetic surgery procedures.

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