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## Beauty in South Korean TV Drama Series Based on Television Artistic Elements in the Series 'True Beauty'

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**Abstract :** South Korean beauty standards have become increasingly globalized, including in Indonesia, largely through the influence of the South Korean entertainment industry, particularly television drama series and K-pop, commonly referred to as the Hallyu industry. Beauty is frequently constructed as a social issue within South Korean television dramas. One drama series that explicitly addresses this issue is *True Beauty*, which portrays socially accepted beauty standards and their role in shaping interpersonal interactions. This study aims to examine the representation of beauty in the South Korean television drama series *True Beauty* by employing television artistic elements as an analytical framework. The findings reveal how these artistic elements are utilized to construct and communicate beauty ideals within the narrative. Furthermore, the study identifies representations of beauty from the perspectives of supporting characters during social interactions with the main character, who is perceived as unattractive without makeup and attractive with makeup. These interactions produce three dominant perspectives: the meaning of beauty, self-perception of beauty, and perceptions of beauty toward others. The influence of *True Beauty* extends beyond South Korea to Indonesia, where South Korean beauty ideals have increasingly become a reference point, as reflected in the emergence of beauty-related content created by Indonesian beauty vloggers following the series' broadcast.

**Keyword :** Beauty Representation, South Korean Television Drama, Television Artistic Elements



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## 1. Introduction

South Korea is one of the countries that has very high beauty standards. This is stated in an article published by a South Korean media outlet (*The Guardian.com*, 2018) entitled “*Escape the Corset: South Korean Women Rebel Against Strict Beauty Standards*,” which mentions that beauty standards in South Korea are highly unrealistic, calling on women to spend hours applying makeup and performing skincare routines involving ten or more steps at the end of each day. Beauty in Korea has become globalized, including in Indonesia. Currently, in the East Asian and Southeast Asian regions, particularly Indonesia, South Korean popular culture through the Hallyu industry is clear evidence that a transformation of foreign culture into other countries has occurred. The Hallyu industry is a cultural transfer activity that brings Korean culture abroad. The initial entry of Hallyu into Indonesia began in 2002 with the emergence of the best-selling Korean drama series *Full House*, which was broadcast by a private television station. Many Indonesian teenagers became interested and developed a strong desire to learn more about Hallyu. Hallyu, or Korean Pop Culture, basically includes everything related to the Hallyu industry, including fashion, style, hairstyle, and even the Korean way of life (Meidita, 2013, p. 980).

Based on the phenomenon in which social issues surrounding beauty require women to appear perfect, various types of television drama series have emerged in South Korea that address themes of beauty standards and body shaming. According to Nisa and Nugroho (2019, p. 5297), Korean dramas do not merely present fictional narratives centered on romance, fantasy, or sadness, but also convey information, facts, and social realities occurring within society. One such television drama series is *True Beauty*, which critiques the significance and power of beauty standards for women in South Korea.

Unlike other narratives related to beauty in South Korea that are often associated with plastic surgery, *True Beauty* delivers its moral message in a serious manner and addresses sensitive issues concerning women's appearance in Korean society. This aligns with the social phenomenon in which Korean women, when going to work or school, are willing to alter their appearance through makeup to conform to existing beauty standards (Benjamin, 2018). *True Beauty* tells the story of the main character, Ju Kyung, who frequently experiences unfair treatment from an early age due to having a face considered unattractive. This experience causes her to lack self-confidence in her appearance. Upon entering high school, she learns how to apply makeup through YouTube beauty vloggers, eventually becoming perceived as beautiful and conforming to South Korean beauty standards. As a result, she uses makeup in her daily life primarily to avoid bullying and to appear attractive in front of



others and her peers.

The television drama series *True Beauty*, which addresses South Korean beauty standards, has also become a beauty reference in Indonesia. This is evidenced by the emergence of numerous Indonesian beauty vloggers who created beauty-related content inspired by the makeup styles portrayed in the television drama *True Beauty* following its broadcast. A search on YouTube for Ju Kyung-style makeup tutorials or *True Beauty* makeup reveals many Indonesian beauty vloggers producing content that refers to the makeup shown in the drama, ranging from tips and techniques to the use of specific makeup brands. Some even replicate the complete makeup application process associated with Ju Kyung, the main character in *True Beauty*.

Based on the background described above, this study aims to analyze how beauty in South Korea is represented in a Korean television drama series, using *True Beauty* as the object of study. The research examines the depiction of beauty through televised artistic elements, as well as the perspectives on beauty presented through character roles and interactions within the television drama series *True Beauty*.

Studies related to the representation of beauty in films and television drama series have been widely conducted. This is because films and television dramas frequently depict social phenomena in the construction of reality, reflecting lived experiences that are rearticulated through artistic works and presented as public consumption. Such representations are designed to influence audiences and attract public interest. Previous studies have primarily examined how beauty is represented in films or television drama series through semiotic codes, emphasizing that women's beauty identity should not be defined solely by physical standards.

For example, Nisa and Nugroho (2019) conducted a study on the South Korean television drama series *My ID Is Gangnam Beauty*, which highlights the idea that beauty should not be limited to physical appearance. A similar perspective is presented in the study by Luckitasari and Citra (2017), which analyzed the South Korean television drama *Oh My Venus* and sought to challenge dominant beauty standards.

In contrast to previous research, this article focuses on the perspectives of supporting characters regarding beauty standards. The study examines how individuals choose to alter their appearance in accordance with prevailing beauty standards in order to gain social recognition, acceptance, and appreciation within society and the school environment. This analysis is conducted through the lens of television artistic elements in depicting attractiveness and unattractiveness as represented in the South Korean television drama series *True Beauty*. Through these artistic elements, the drama evokes audience responses that shape judgments and



meanings concerning beauty standards, which are portrayed as powerful forces that have evolved into dominant regimes across various countries.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Beauty Standard**

According to Ben-Nun (2016, p. 18), perspectives on human beauty can be interpreted and understood from various viewpoints, including social, cultural, and historical contexts, as well as age and gender. Beauty can be understood as a combination of inner beauty such as psychological qualities, character, and intelligence and outer beauty, which is reflected in physical appearance, including facial and bodily features, as well as vocal attributes.

Currently, beauty standards reflect both historical perspectives and contemporary interpretations, which are increasingly defined through analyses of visual or physical attractiveness, such as facial and bodily characteristics, as well as vocal signals. Personal appearance and physical beauty have become increasingly important in society; consequently, many individuals attempt to alter their physical appearance through facial treatments or plastic surgery. Therefore, beauty judgments should be understood as relative to individuals and the specific contexts in which beauty is evaluated. Physical beauty often becomes the primary basis for judgment upon first impression, which later deepens in relation to an individual's character identity (pp. 17–18).

Synnott (2002, p. 95) states that in social practice, beauty often holds power, while intelligence or cognitive skills tend to be overlooked. Ugliness and physical imperfections particularly facial deformities are stigmatized. Birthmarks, burns, scars, or excess body weight can cause trauma for affected individuals and those with whom they interact. Such conditions, whether congenital or acquired, may be altered through cosmetic makeup; however, perceived unattractiveness can have significant social and psychological impacts.

Furthermore, Synnott (2002, pp. 101–102) argues that each historical period constructs the meaning of beauty differently, and individuals perceive beauty in diverse ways. Beauty holds multiple meanings for different people. In this context, the meaning of beauty can be divided into positive and negative interpretations. Positively, beauty is perceived as goodness and a symbol of virtue; a source of pleasure and psychological well-being; truth; a symbol of status and sexual stimulation; subjective, objective, and culturally relative; physical and metaphysical; a gift from God; something acquired and learned; and a representation of life and immortality.



Conversely, beauty is also perceived negatively—as not a symbol of goodness but of evil; not an investment but a waste; not truth but deception; not intelligence but stupidity, as often argued by critics; not pleasurable but political; not life-affirming but harmful to life and health; not freedom but a trap; and not a solution but a major social problem (p. 102).

Xu (2019, p. 2) explains that representations of beauty are frequently displayed in the media. Media constructs beauty in such a way that society develops particular standards and judgments regarding beauty. Artists or celebrities who possess certain beauty characteristics are selected by the media to promote beauty products through advertisements across various platforms, leading society to form specific standards for understanding and evaluating beauty. Media has the ability to build social consensus in assessing women's bodies through commercial processes driven by consumerism, which can ultimately enhance or diminish societal integrity in evaluating beauty standards.

Within Social Comparison Theory, Festinger (1954, p. 118) states that individuals evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing themselves with others. In this context, evaluations function as judgments that cannot be directly tested in objective reality. Similarly, an individual's beauty is often assessed based on how others perceive them, a phenomenon that frequently occurs during adolescence.

Adolescents compare their physical appearance with images commonly encountered in media and beauty product advertisements. When physical traits portrayed in the media are absent in adolescents, they tend to perceive these differences as shortcomings, leading to lower self-confidence or feelings of being less attractive, such as having acne-prone skin, darker skin tone, or a non-ideal body shape. Conversely, when media representations align with their physical characteristics, adolescents tend to feel satisfied with their appearance, for example, in relation to height (Naha, 2021, p. 24).

## 2.2 Television Drama Series

Based on the book *Daytime to Primetime: The History of American Television Programs* by James Roman, the early development of television drama emerged from television's ability to adapt legitimate stage drama and conceptualize it as a literary form. This development was demonstrated by the emergence of a number of ambitious television series. As a result, various theatrical drama forms were applied to the television medium. Television drama was able to transcend conventional formulations and create engaging narrative forms comparable to those found on Broadway (Roman, 2005, p. 149).



Therefore, television drama series can be defined as dramatic narratives broadcast through the television medium and presented in multiple episodes or series. In this sense, the theoretical framework of television drama series is essentially similar to that of film, differing primarily in terms of mode of exhibition and broadcast format.

Film, in general, can be divided into two fundamental components: narrative elements and cinematic elements. These two components interact and function interdependently to construct a film as a complete work. Neither element can independently form a film. Narrative elements serve as the material to be processed, while cinematic elements represent the techniques or styles through which the material is shaped. In narrative films, the narrative element refers to the treatment of the story, whereas cinematic elements—often referred to as cinematic style—comprise the technical aspects of filmmaking. Cinematic elements consist of four main components: mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound (Pratista, 2017, p. 1).

Narrative elements relate to the story or thematic aspects of a film. Every narrative film is inherently dependent on narrative elements. Each story includes components such as characters, problems, conflicts, settings, time, and other related elements. These components interact and function cohesively to form a sequence of events that conveys meaning and purpose. This sequence of events is governed by the principle of causality (cause-and-effect logic). Causality, together with spatial and temporal elements, constitutes the core components of narrative structure (Pratista, 2017).

Cinematic elements, on the other hand, refer to the technical aspects involved in film production. Mise-en-scène encompasses everything that appears in front of the camera and includes four primary components: setting, lighting, costume and makeup, as well as acting and performers' movement. Cinematography concerns the treatment of the camera and film, including the relationship between the camera and the objects being filmed. Editing refers to the transition from one shot to another, while sound includes all auditory elements perceived by the audience. All cinematic elements are interconnected, complementary, and work cohesively to form a unified cinematic structure (Pratista, 2017, p. 2).

Films also contain dramatic elements. Dramatic elements, often referred to as dramaturgy, are the components required to generate dramatic movement within the narrative or within the audience's perception. These elements include conflict, suspense, curiosity, and surprise.



### 2.3 Television Artistic Elements

Television artistic elements serve as the primary analytical framework in this study on beauty representation in the television drama series *True Beauty*. These artistic elements are used to examine how constructions of beauty are articulated and visualized within the drama series *True Beauty*.

In film and television drama theory, Bordwell and Thompson explain that a film's artistic dimension is largely embodied in *mise-en-scène*. *Mise-en-scène*, literally meaning “putting into the scene,” refers to the arrangement of all elements within a frame and involves the contributions of various production departments, including the art department. *Mise-en-scène* plays a crucial role in creating realism in film, as well as producing diverse effects such as exaggeration similar to comics, supernatural terror, and indescribable beauty, among other functions. The overall function of *mise-en-scène* within a film lies in how it is motivated, how it varies or develops, and how it operates in relation to other cinematic techniques.

*Mise-en-scène* encompasses several aspects of film that overlap with theatrical arts, including setting, lighting, costume, and character behavior. Referring to Bordwell and Thompson's theory of *mise-en-scène*, the artistic elements of television drama series are included within this framework. Therefore, *mise-en-scène* is employed as the theoretical basis for analyzing the construction of beauty in the South Korean television drama series *True Beauty* through television artistic elements (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, pp. 112–114).

According to Irwanto, Kusumawati, and Tsabieth (2020, p. 1), artistic design is one of the operational units within television broadcasting stations or film production teams. Artistic arrangement plays an essential role in creating atmosphere in television programs, films, and non-drama productions. It supports mood and character portrayal on screen and functions as a key element of a program's visual appeal. Artistry can therefore be understood as an effort to create tangible forms that are directly presented to the audience.

An art director, understood as a visual or artistic designer, is responsible for all aspects related to set design, decoration, costume, and makeup. In television production, an art director is required to possess extensive knowledge and skills, particularly in production processes, photography, lighting design, effects, and editing (Leli & Purnama, 2011, cited in Irwanto, Kusumawati, & Tsabieth, 2020, p. 4). Based on these roles and responsibilities, television artistic design falls under the art department or television artistic elements, which consist of set and props, lighting, camera work, costume (wardrobe), and makeup.





In this study, the researcher examines the social phenomena depicted in the South Korean television drama series *True Beauty*, focusing on how beauty is represented within the drama. South Korean beauty standards have become globalized and now serve as a reference for beauty standards in various countries, including Indonesia. This drama series illustrates socially accepted notions of beauty as constructed and communicated through television narratives. Accordingly, this study employs television artistic elements to analyze how beauty in South Korea is portrayed in a television drama series. Beauty is examined through television artistic elements, including set decoration (setting), lighting, camera work, costume (wardrobe), and makeup.

### 3. Method

This study employs a qualitative research method. Qualitative research originates from qualitative observation, which contrasts with quantitative observation (Kirk & Miller, 1986, cited in Moleong, 2009). Moleong (2009) defines qualitative research as an approach aimed at understanding phenomena experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions holistically through descriptive analysis using words and language within a specific context and by utilizing naturalistic methods.

This research examines social phenomena related to beauty as represented in the South Korean television drama series *True Beauty*. South Korean beauty standards have become globalized and now function as reference points in various countries, including Indonesia. The drama portrays socially accepted constructions of beauty through televised narratives. Accordingly, this study analyzes how beauty is represented in *True Beauty* using television artistic elements as the primary analytical framework.

The object of this research is the South Korean television drama series *True Beauty*, which aired on tvN and consists of 16 episodes broadcast from December 9, 2020, to January 28, 2021. The analysis focuses on the main character, Im Ju Kyung, who serves as the central figure in the narrative. The study specifically examines the first episode, as it depicts the transformation of Im Ju Kyung from being perceived as unattractive to conforming to dominant beauty standards through makeup. The first episode also provides a comprehensive introduction to the motivations behind her transformation and clearly presents the use of television artistic elements to convey meanings of beauty.

Data collection in this qualitative study is conducted through primary data sources, namely documentation of the *True Beauty* television series and observation.





According to Lofland (1948, cited in Moleong, 2009), the primary data in qualitative research consist of words and actions, while supporting data include documents and visual materials. In this study, visual scenes, character actions, and artistic details recorded from the drama serve as the main data.

Data analysis is carried out by examining television artistic elements to understand how beauty is constructed and represented in the drama series. The analysis focuses on five key artistic components: setting, lighting, camera work, costume (wardrobe), and makeup. Through these elements, the study explores how South Korean beauty standards are visually communicated and normalized in the television drama *True Beauty*.

#### 4. Result

##### 4.1 History and Development of Beauty Standards in Korea

According to an article by Bokyoungcho (2015), concepts of beauty in Korea have existed since the Joseon Dynasty, the last dynasty of Korea and the longest period influenced by Confucianism. During the Joseon era, beauty was commonly associated with a round face, a large nose, a small mouth, and narrow eyes. However, over time particularly during the period of Japanese colonial rule perspectives on beauty shifted toward features such as a slimmer face and a more prominent nose.

In 1931, a beauty contest was held to select the most beautiful woman in Joseon. As depicted in historical images, the selected woman had a round face, large eyes, and a slimmer nose, indicating a transitional phase in Korean beauty standards. During this period, beauty ideals were undergoing change. Increased trade and cultural exchange accelerated the transformation of beauty standards in Korea.

Picture 1: The Woman Chosen as the Ideal of Beauty in the Joseon Era  
 Source: Bokyoungcho (2015)



According to an article by Syahrianto (2019) published in the online media *wartaekonomi.id*, Korea has been familiar with cosmetics since the eighteenth century, as evidenced by the rare discovery of personal belongings belonging to a Korean royal princess from that period. The princess was Princess Hwahyeop, the daughter of the twenty-first king of the Joseon Dynasty, King Yeongjo. Princess Hwahyeop married Shin Gwang-su, the son of a noble family, in 1743 when she was only eleven years old. Unfortunately, the princess passed away at the age of nineteen due to illness.

In an article written by Jae-eun (2008), it is explained that since the introduction of color television in Korea in 1981, makeup has become much more colorful and Westernized. Women began to indulge in makeup techniques that made Korean faces appear more Western. These techniques included contouring the sides of the nose and using dark eyeshadow. In the 1990s, however, the emphasis shifted toward skin that appeared more natural. Traditional cosmetics and ancestral makeup techniques completed a full cycle, as natural approaches using organic plants and seeds were perceived as healthier. At present, sales statistics show that makeup brands in South Korea increasingly use traditional Korean ingredients.

Un (2007, p. 55) explains that several beauty-related terms have become widespread in Korean society since the early 2000s. This phenomenon emerged due to symbolic factors that are considered values of beauty and attractiveness in certain parts of a woman's body, such as *eoljjang* (beautiful face), *momjjang* (well-proportioned body), *saengeol* (a beautiful face without makeup), *dongan* (a youthful-looking face), *longdari* (long legs), *jjukjjuk ppangppang* (tall, slim, and graceful figure), *S-line* (hourglass-shaped body), and *V-line* (a slim face with a V-shaped chin).

Korean society places a high value on physical appearance, where the body can be regarded as an asset that enables individuals to stand out from others, representing a form of physical capital or social capital that guarantees women's social success in a male-dominated society. Investment in the body is possible because women perceive the body as an important symbol that differentiates them from others. From clothing, shoes, accessories, and hairstyles to methods of bodily transformation such as cosmetic surgery or dieting, these forms of consumption imply contemporary mass desires to construct identity through bodily consumption, as well as the perception of the body as the most profitable object of investment (Un, 2007, pp. 62–63).

Won (2018) states that beauty in Korea can be achieved through cosmetic surgery or facial makeup, where the creation of a slim jawline and large double eyelids is considered common. With an open attitude toward cosmetic surgery, these beauty ideals are relatively easy to achieve. The South Korean beauty industry today has been



driven by the creation of beauty products that shape slim jawlines and double eyelids, imitating celebrity beauty and informed by Western ideals.

According to Cho (2019, p. 142), beauty icons in Korea can be seen in the appearance of Korean flight attendants. Beautiful Korean flight attendants are recognized through their fashion choices and smooth, bright skin. In addition, the natural pink color of the lips gives the impression of not wearing makeup at all. There are no visible layers or clumps of foundation. This appearance reflects a “no-makeup makeup” look, which appears light and natural yet very neat, and differs significantly from the everyday makeup commonly found in Indonesia. This beauty icon is also frequently observed in the appearance of women in Seoul as they carry out their daily activities.

#### **4.2 The Construction of Beauty in the Drama Series *True Beauty***

Tifada (2021) states that since the 1990s, the Korean entertainment industry has expanded globally, including into Indonesia. This enduring success is widely known as the Korean Wave or *Hallyu*. The Korean Wave has not only popularized Korean culture but has also introduced new global beauty standards. These standards position Korean celebrity beauty as a reference point for people around the world. Audiences adopt Korean beauty products and, in more extreme cases, undergo cosmetic surgery. The Korean Wave functions as a major driving force in exporting Korean culture internationally.

This cultural export has expanded significantly through Korean television drama series (*K-dramas*). K-dramas began to fill television programming schedules in many countries. In Asia, countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia have been major markets for Korean dramas since the 1990s. Enthusiasm for the Korean Wave increased substantially when the drama *Full House* (2004) was first broadcast outside Korea in 2004. The trend surrounding *Full House* quickly made it a must-watch program among young audiences at the time. In Indonesia, one television station even aired this contract-marriage-themed drama five times.

Some audiences admire Korean idols because of their characters, while others are attracted to idols due to their physical appearance, characterized by fair skin, beauty, a cute image, a slim body, and tall stature. This strong admiration for idols encourages fans to embrace various aspects of Korean culture, ranging from skincare routines to snack foods. One of the most visible examples is the widespread presence of imported Korean cosmetic products in shopping centers around the world. Furthermore, Korean foods such as kimchi, noodles, and matcha have also become common items on store shelves in many regions. The influence of the Korean Wave has grown even stronger as



the Korean government has actively supported the global promotion of Korean idols (Tifada, 2021).

According to Bokyoungcho (2015), a television program in Korea once announced Kim Tae-hee as the most beautiful woman in the country. Kim Tae-hee is recognized as one of Korea's most beautiful women and has been a prominent Korean drama actress since 2003. She is characterized by large eyes with double eyelids, a high nose bridge, and a slim face. This appearance closely resembles Western beauty ideals. Many Western individuals are characterized by double eyelids, high nose bridges, and smaller facial proportions. In contrast, traditional East Asian features are often associated with rounder faces, flatter nose bridges, and single eyelids. These distinctions reflect the differing beauty characteristics of Western and Eastern regions.

Picture 2: Korean drama actress Kim Tae-hee was officially recognized as the most beautiful actress of the 21st century in 2015.  
Source: Bokyoungcho (2015)



Faliha (2021) states that the drama series *True Beauty* provides audiences with many insights. Although categorized as a light drama, *True Beauty* is rich in moral messages. The series indirectly portrays the inhumane beauty standards that exist in South Korean society. These values are manifested through the drama narrative. Im



Ju-kyung, who is perceived as unattractive, is required to meet societal standards in order to be accepted. However, she never judges other women based on their physical appearance and instead considers all women to be more beautiful than herself.

The sense of inferiority experienced by Im Ju-kyung is also socially constructed by her surrounding environment. Women who are considered “unattractive” are subjected to bullying and perceived as undeserving of a good life. Im Ju-kyung represents women who fall below the average beauty standards. She employs various reasonable efforts appropriate to a high school student from a modest socioeconomic background. Plastic surgery is not an option for her due to her family's financial limitations. She is expected to be both beautiful and intelligent, yet she is unable to fulfill both expectations simultaneously. The drama emphasizes that “*True Beauty*” is not solely about physical appearance, but also about behavior, inner values, and mindset. Not only Im Ju-kyung experiences hardship; other main characters also carry their own traumas, ranging from family issues, unresolved childhood experiences, to scandals (2021).

Nuraini and Listiani (2022, p.123) explain that the South Korean drama series *True Beauty* depicts the concept of beauty through the objective reality of a student born with physical limitations. According to the drama, beauty does not merely originate from outward appearance but also from inner qualities, such as self-confidence, which enhance beauty in a more complete way. *True Beauty* reflects a Korean society where plastic surgery has become a cultural practice, reinforced by media influence. The Korean media also presents a concept of hyperreality in *True Beauty*, demonstrated through the power of social interaction media that relies heavily on societal stigma—where individuals are required to appear beautiful according to prevailing standards. This hyperreality serves to challenge established “truths” and encourages critical thinking toward long-held societal beliefs.

Due to her lack of self-confidence, Im Ju-kyung attempts to conform to South Korean beauty standards by transforming her appearance through makeup in order to look perfect, as is commonly expected of Korean women. In the television drama *True Beauty*, Im Ju-kyung enhances her appearance using makeup tools designed to conceal acne, enlarge the appearance of the eyes, and sharpen the nose. She learns these techniques by watching beauty vlogger videos. The series demonstrates that physical beauty can be achieved through makeup without resorting to plastic surgery, which is commonly practiced in South Korea.

The television drama *True Beauty* visualizes beauty concepts aligned with prevailing Korean standards, including a slim S-line body, feminine style, fair and flawless glowing skin, large eyes, light brown eyebrows, a pointed nose, and orange-





reddish lips that create a fresh and sweet impression.

Asyariri and Latifah (2021, p.322) state that the narrative of *True Beauty* portrays beauty standards deeply rooted in Korean society and actively pursued by the characters. For female characters, physical beauty is represented through acne-free skin, a sharp jawline, and a slim body. This idealized image becomes Im Ju-kyung's primary goal in developing her self-confidence.

#### **4.3 The Representation of Beauty in the Television Drama Series *True Beauty* Based on Television Artistic Elements**

Based on the findings of this study, television artistic elements play a significant role in shaping how beauty is represented within televised productions. In the South Korean drama series *True Beauty*, artistic elements are deliberately employed to construct and communicate standardized judgments of beauty that prevail in Korean society. These elements function not only as aesthetic components but also as narrative tools that reinforce social meanings related to beauty. Furthermore, television artistic elements are used to visually emphasize the contrast between women who are perceived as beautiful and those considered unattractive according to Korean beauty standards. Through the use of setting, lighting, camera work, costumes, and makeup, the series clearly differentiates characters who conform to dominant beauty ideals from those who do not. This visual distinction strengthens the audience's perception of beauty as a socially constructed hierarchy, where physical appearance becomes a determining factor in social acceptance and personal value.

##### **4.3.1 Setting**

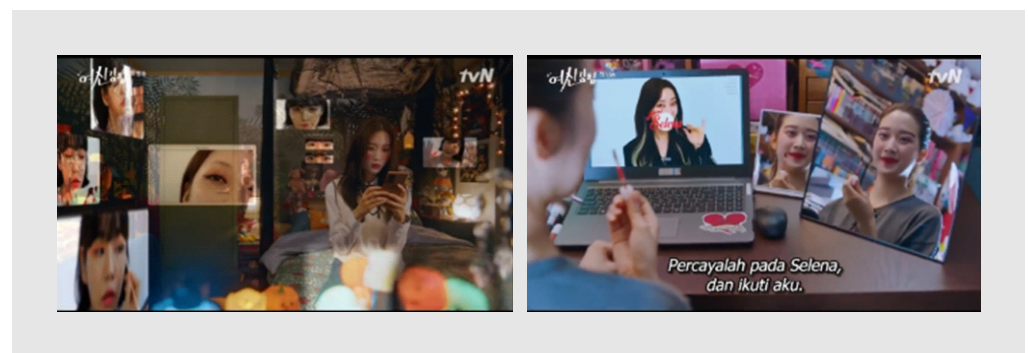
In accordance with the theory proposed by Bordwell and Thompson (2006, p. 118), setting and props function to construct space and time within a film. Setting and properties also serve to indicate a character's social class, socioeconomic status, and personal characteristics.

In the drama series *True Beauty*, the artistic use of setting is employed to establish locations and reflect the economic background of the characters, particularly in the depiction of Ju Kyung. This is evident in the portrayal of Ju Kyung's bedroom, which is initially designed with a mysterious and dark atmosphere. Ju Kyung is depicted as a character who is drawn to horror-related objects, reflecting her perception of herself as unattractive and her tendency to associate her appearance with dark and frightening imagery. Several spaces are intentionally designed with dim lighting and horror elements to emphasize her lack of confidence and negative self-image.



However, a significant contrast is presented when Ju Kyung begins to transform and learn makeup techniques to become more beautiful. Her bedroom setting shifts to a brighter color palette dominated by pink, a color commonly associated with femininity. This change symbolically represents Ju Kyung's emerging feminine identity and her attempt to reconstruct herself according to the dominant beauty standards of Korean society. Thus, *True Beauty* presents a clear distinction in the use of setting before and after Ju Kyung's physical transformation. The changing settings visually reinforce the narrative of beauty transformation, illustrating how artistic elements are strategically used to signify shifts in identity, self-perception, and social acceptance.

**Picture 3 : Comparison of the Setting in Depicting Ju Kyung's Beauty Transformation from Unattractive to Attractive**  
 Source: Screen Shot Ep 1 'True Beauty' (2020)



Thus, based on the bedroom setting when Ju Kyung is portrayed as unattractive, beauty can be interpreted as something frightening and mysterious for Ju Kyung, as the setting frequently displays elements associated with mystery. The dominant use of dark colors represents anxiety and fear. This is also emphasized through various properties that often feature horror-related objects, such as dark-colored bedding and ghost dolls. Her fondness for horror reflects Ju Kyung's character as mysterious and secretive, suggesting that she hides her true identity, including her perceived lack of beauty.

In contrast, when the setting depicts Ju Kyung becoming interested in makeup and achieving physical attractiveness, it frequently conveys brightness and cheerfulness. This is particularly evident in the vanity table setting, which is designed with dominant pink accents that are commonly interpreted as symbolizing the feminine side of a woman.

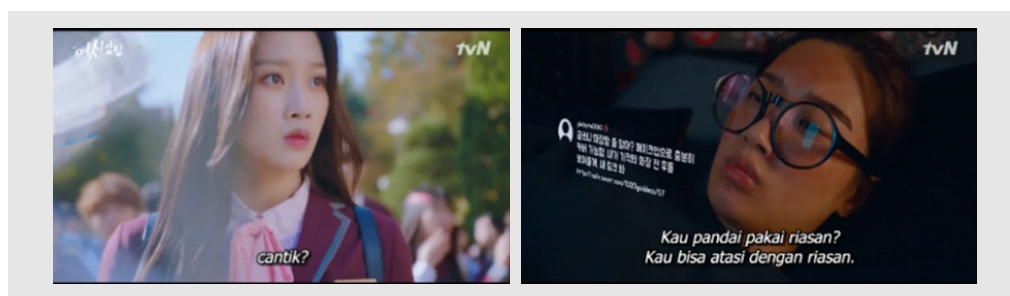
#### 4.3.2 Lighting

Based on Silberblatt's theory (2007, p. 175), images with bright lighting create impressions of happiness and a sense of security, while images with dark lighting and heavy shadows generate a mysterious atmosphere that can develop into feelings of fear. Meanwhile, images with dim lighting convey a sense of helplessness and loss of control.





**Picture 4: Comparison of Lighting in Depicting Ju Kyung's Beauty Transformation from Unattractive to Attractive**  
 Source: Screen Shot ep 1 'True Beauty' (2020)



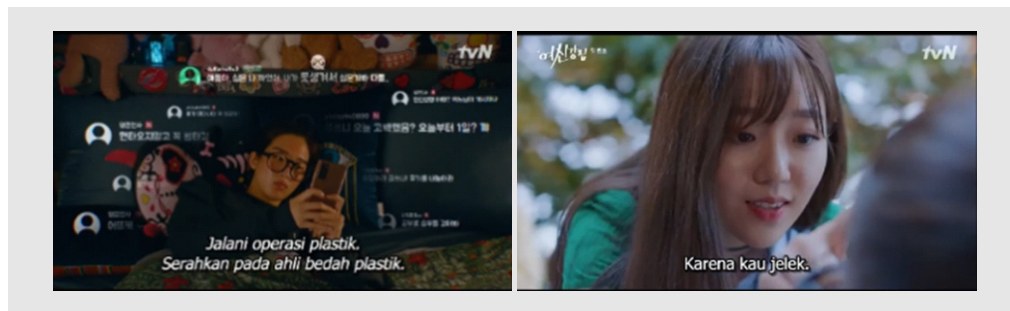
The use of artistic lighting in representing beauty in the drama series *True Beauty* also demonstrates a clear transformation, shifting from darkness to brightness. When Ju Kyung is portrayed as beautiful, the lighting appears brighter and often incorporates additional light effects, such as sunlight, which signify a visual contrast. In contrast, when Ju Kyung is depicted as unattractive, the lighting is frequently limited to minimal artificial light, symbolizing gloom and desolation. This illustrates a clear comparison in the use of lighting before and after Ju Kyung becomes beautiful through makeup.

Lighting is also employed to construct the character's emotional state. When Ju Kyung is alone in her room, dark lighting is often used to represent the pressure and distress she experiences due to her perceived physical unattractiveness. However, when Ju Kyung is able to transform herself through makeup and conform to beauty standards, bright and colorful lighting is presented, often enhanced with sunlight effects that signify her joy and renewed confidence.

#### 4.3.3 Camera

Artistic camera movement is also utilized in the drama series *True Beauty* to convey how beauty can generate meanings associated with goodness or negativity. This is particularly evident through the use of low-angle and high-angle shots, which visually represent power and vulnerability. This approach aligns with the theory proposed by Bordwell and Thompson (2006, p. 190), who state that camera framing through angles plays a significant role in meaning-making. Low-angle shots, captured from below, tend to create impressions of dominance, arrogance, and power, while high-angle shots, taken from above, produce effects of smallness, pressure, and weakness.

**Picture 5 :Comparison of High-Angle and Low-Angle Camera Shots in True Beauty**  
 Source : Screen Shot ep 1 'True Beauty' (2020)



In several scenes depicting Ju Kyung experiencing bullying, the use of high-angle shots emphasizes her perceived unattractiveness and visually represents weakness and vulnerability. In contrast, when portraying Ju Kyung's peers through low-angle shots, beauty is depicted as a source of power, suggesting that physical attractiveness grants authority and freedom to act, including engaging in harmful or abusive behavior.

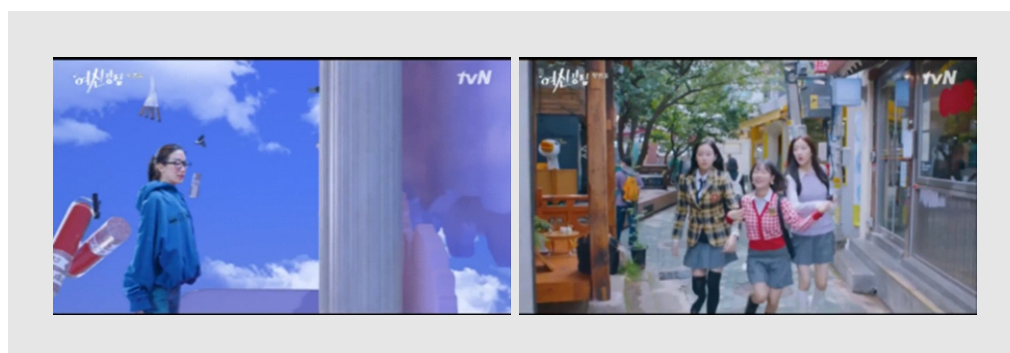
High-angle shots are also frequently used when Ju Kyung is alone, highlighting the psychological pressure she experiences due to her physical appearance, which does not conform to Korean beauty standards. This camera angle reinforces the sense of inferiority and emotional burden carried by Ju Kyung as a character positioned below dominant beauty norms. Additionally, the camera frequently employs close-up and extreme close-up shots, as *True Beauty* often emphasizes detailed facial features of the characters. This is particularly evident during Ju Kyung's transformation from being perceived as unattractive to becoming beautiful, where facial details become central to the visual narrative.

#### 4.3.4 Costumes

According to Bordwell and Thompson (2018, p. 122), costumes can serve specific functions within a film as a whole. Costumes help define and construct characters by reflecting their traits, such as femininity, maternal qualities, or a slightly tomboyish character, which can be identified through the clothing worn. Color design plays an important role in harmonizing characters with the setting and location. By being integrated with the setting, costumes function to reinforce narrative and thematic patterns.

Picture 6: Comparison of Costume Use in Depicting Ju Kyung's Beauty Transformation from Unattractive to Attractive

Source: Screen Shot ep 1 'True Beauty' (2020)



The artistic use of costumes in the drama series *True Beauty* also reveals differences in Ju Kyung's character when she wears makeup and when she does not. When Ju Kyung is wearing makeup, she is often portrayed with a feminine appearance, resembling the ideal image of women in general. In contrast, when she removes her makeup such as when she is alone, at home, or at the comic book rental shop, Ju Kyung

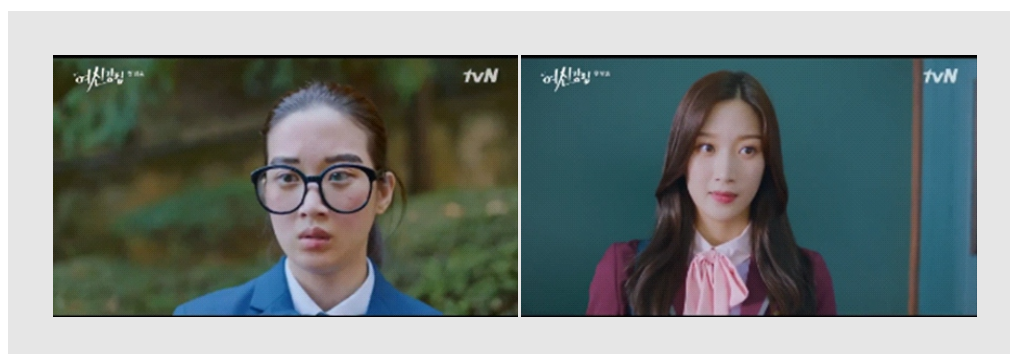


is frequently shown wearing hoodies and jeans. This style conveys a more tomboyish appearance, while still maintaining a feminine impression through her long hair and the use of colors commonly associated with femininity, such as pink and purple. Costumes also function to indicate social status. Through the clothing worn by Ju Kyung's family, they are represented as belonging to a modest socioeconomic background. As a result, cosmetic surgery is not an option for Ju Kyung due to economic constraints.

#### 4.3.5 Makeup

According to Irwanto, Kusumawati, and Tsabieth (2020, pp. 17–18), makeup can be defined as the art of painting the face using cosmetic materials and tools. Types of makeup commonly used in television and film can be classified into several categories. **Corrective makeup** refers to makeup techniques applied to conceal imperfections and highlight strengths in order to achieve facial perfection. **Character makeup** is makeup used to transform a person's appearance in terms of age, personality, facial features, ethnicity, physical form, and overall body appearance, so that it aligns with the character required by the narrative. Meanwhile, **style makeup** refers to makeup created through imagination and creativity to construct a particular character, resulting in an artistic work in the form of facial makeup.

Picture 7: Comparison of Makeup in Representing Ju Kyung's Beauty Transformation from "Unattractive" to Attractive  
Source: Screen Shot Ep 1 'True Beauty' (2020)



Based on the artistic analysis, the makeup used in the drama series *True Beauty* can be categorized into corrective makeup and style makeup. The makeup applied to the research subject functions to represent two contrasting aspects of Ju Kyung's character: the portrayal of Ju Kyung without makeup and the portrayal of Ju Kyung with makeup. Makeup functions as a tool for character construction. When Ju Kyung is depicted without makeup, style makeup is deliberately used to create the appearance of acne-covered cheeks, narrower-looking eyes, a chubbier facial structure, and a wider chin. This visual construction emphasizes her position as a character who does not conform to dominant beauty standards.



In contrast, when Ju Kyung appears with makeup, her transformation reflects the use of corrective makeup, which aligns her appearance with contemporary Korean beauty standards. Her chin appears to form a V-line through the use of BB cushion and contouring techniques; her eyes appear larger and double-lidded with the aid of contact lenses, eyeliner, and brown eyeshadow; and her nose appears more defined through the use of concealer. This transformation illustrates how makeup is used to visually reconstruct facial features to meet prevailing ideals of beauty in South Korea.

The drama series *True Beauty* demonstrates how contemporary makeup practices enable individuals to conform to Korean beauty standards. The makeup styles presented through Ju Kyung closely resemble current beauty trends in South Korea. This is further reinforced by the wide range of makeup products and skincare items displayed, including powder, foundation, blush, eyeliner, eyeshadow, lipstick, as well as skincare products such as toner, day and night creams, and facial masks, emphasizing the importance of continuous facial care.

Makeup in *True Beauty* is portrayed as a representation of modern beauty ideals, particularly through the concept of “no-makeup makeup,” a popular beauty trend in South Korea. This style is evident in Ju Kyung's appearance, characterized by smooth, fair, acne-free skin, large double-lidded eyes, a V-shaped chin, a more prominent nose, and loose flowing hair. Ju Kyung's transformation follows beauty trends she learns from YouTube tutorials, resulting in such a drastic change that even her family initially fails to recognize her.

Based on the overall analysis, the artistic elements of *True Beauty* clearly present contrasting visual representations of the research subject before and after the application of makeup. Television artistic elements are employed to depict beauty as a form of character construction, illustrating how physical beauty is framed within the drama as a form of power that brings comfort, security, happiness, social acceptance, friendship, and greater appreciation from others.

Conversely, physical unattractiveness is depicted through fear, darkness, and even associations with masculinity. The drama portrays individuals who do not meet beauty standards as experiencing hardship, social exclusion, and psychological distress, often represented as mysterious, shy, and living in constant fear. From an artistic perspective, the South Korean television drama *True Beauty* compares contemporary representations of beauty in Korea, positioning beauty as a dominant form of power while suggesting that there is little space for individuals who do not conform to prevailing physical beauty standards.



## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. The Meaning of Beauty

According to Ben-Nun (2016, p. 18), perceptions of human beauty can be understood from various perspectives, including social, cultural, temporal, age-based, and gender-based contexts. Beauty may be perceived as a combination of inner beauty, which includes psychological qualities, character, and intelligence, and outer beauty, which is reflected in one's physical appearance, such as facial features, body shape, and even voice.

Based on the role of Ju Kyung, her beauty is constructed through character, identity, and psychological traits. Ju Kyung is portrayed as a cheerful and resilient woman who, despite being frequently perceived as physically unattractive, does not give up easily. Her perseverance and positive attitude enable her to embody both inner beauty and outer beauty, the latter achieved through the use of makeup. This combination suggests that beauty is not solely innate but can also be constructed and learned.

Synnott (2002, pp. 101–102) argues that each era constructs the meaning of beauty differently, and every individual perceives beauty in their own way. Beauty holds multiple meanings for different people. In this context, beauty can be divided into two categories: beauty perceived positively and beauty perceived negatively.

Based on Ju Kyung's role, the meaning of beauty in the drama series *True Beauty* can be viewed positively, in line with Synnott's perspective (2002, p. 101). Beauty is perceived positively as goodness and a symbol of virtue; as a source of pleasure and psychological well-being; as truth; as a symbol of status and sexual attraction; as subjective, objective, and culturally relative; as both physical and metaphysical; as a gift from God; as something that can be acquired and learned; and as a representation of life and immortality.

Ju Kyung, as the protagonist, is depicted as a character with good moral values: she is helpful, forgiving, caring toward her friends, and remains cheerful despite experiencing frequent bullying. Her positive character, despite her lack of physical beauty, signifies that beauty can be interpreted as a symbol of goodness. It also becomes a source of attraction, as shown when Lee Su Ho is depicted gazing at Ju Kyung for an extended time even when she is not wearing makeup.

However, from the perspective of Ju Kyung's social interactions, beauty is also portrayed negatively. This aligns with Synnott's theory (2002, p. 102), which states that beauty can be perceived negatively: not as a symbol of goodness but of evil; not as an investment but as waste; not as truth but as deception; not as intelligence but as





foolishness, as often argued by critics; not as pleasure but as political; not as life but as dangerous to health and existence; not as freedom but as a trap; and not as a solution but as a major social problem.

In South Korea, physical beauty functions as a form of power, indicating that beauty can symbolize domination and even cruelty. Physical beauty enables individuals to exert control over others, as illustrated by Ju Kyung's former schoolmate, Park Sae Mi, who uses her attractiveness to determine who is worthy of friendship. Overall, physical beauty becomes a major social problem in social interactions within Korean society.

According to Un (2007, pp. 62–63), Korean society places great importance on physical appearance, viewing the body as an asset that allows individuals to stand out from others. Physical appearance functions as a form of physical capital, a type of social asset that guarantees women social success within a male-dominated society.

This perspective forms the foundation of the drama *True Beauty*, reflecting Un's argument that physical beauty is regarded as an essential asset and social capital necessary for social interaction. Consequently, beauty acquires a negative meaning: as a symbol of domination, a trap, and a major social problem faced by women in South Korea. Ju Kyung's experience illustrates this reality, as she is judged from an early age as lacking the “beauty capital” believed to be necessary to ensure social success and acceptance within society.

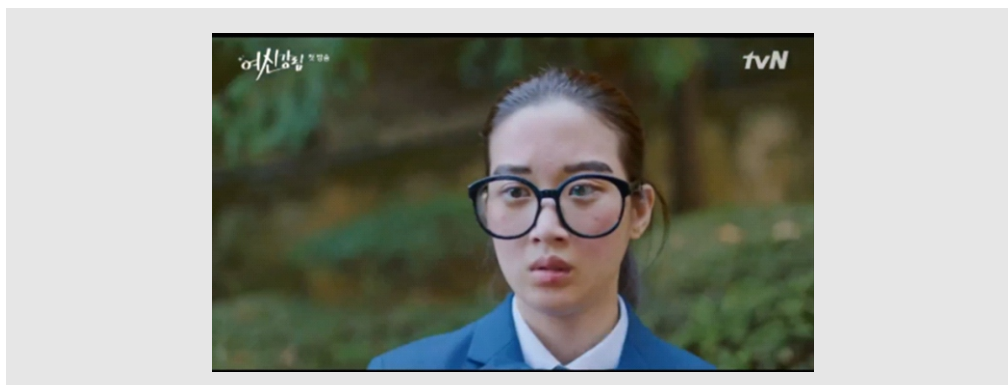
## 5.2. Self-Assessment of Beauty

Based on the role of Ju Kyung and her social interactions in the drama series *True Beauty*, there is a clear process of self-evaluation regarding beauty. As an adolescent of approximately sixteen years old, Ju Kyung evaluates her own beauty according to the perspectives of her social environment, including society at large, school peers, family members, and the opposite sex. According to Social Comparison Theory, Festinger (1954, p. 118) argues that individuals evaluate their opinions and abilities through comparison with others. In this context, such evaluations function as judgments that cannot be directly tested within objective reality. Similarly, self-perceptions of beauty are formed through the perspectives of others, particularly during adolescence, when external validation plays a significant role in shaping self-image.



**Picture 8: Ju Kyung evaluates herself as unattractive based on prevailing beauty standards.**

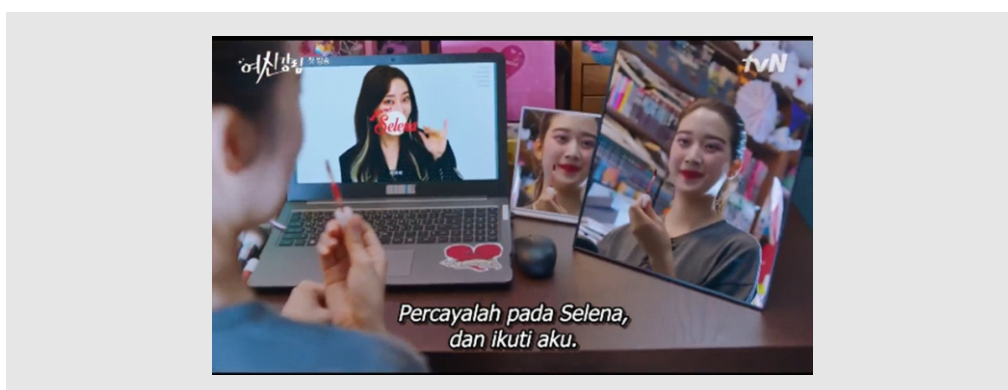
Source : Screen shot ep 1 'True Beauty' (2020)



Based on the theory above, the perspective of self-evaluation of beauty in Ju Kyung's character emerges because physical beauty is frequently discussed during social interactions. As a result, Ju Kyung evaluates herself as not fully beautiful, as she perceives many physical shortcomings in herself, such as acne-prone skin, narrow eyes, wearing glasses, tied hair, a slightly wide chin, and the absence of a sharp or prominent nose. According to Naha (2021, p. 24), adolescents tend to compare their physical appearance with images frequently encountered in the media and beauty product advertisements. When certain physical characteristics presented in the media are not found in adolescents themselves, these are acknowledged as deficiencies that reduce self-confidence or make them feel less beautiful. This includes issues such as acne, darker skin tone, and not having an ideal body shape.

**Picture 9: Ju Kyung's Perception of Beauty Standards Based on Media Representation**

Source: Screen Shot ep 1 'True Beauty' (2020)



Not only based on others' perspectives, Ju Kyung also evaluates herself by observing physical beauty frequently displayed on social media. She even learns how to become beautiful through makeup tutorials on digital media, particularly YouTube. As a teenager in 2021, Ju Kyung learns how to enhance her appearance through skincare routines and makeup techniques obtained from beauty vloggers' YouTube accounts. Realizing that her appearance does not align with Korean beauty standards,





Ju Kyung begins to study Korean women's makeup styles through digital media in order to conform to the physical beauty ideals portrayed in the media.

Cho (2019, 142) explains that the physical appearance of beautiful Korean women is reflected in their fashion choices and smooth, bright skin. In addition, natural pink lips give the impression of not wearing makeup at all. There are no visible layers of foundation, creating a look known as “no-makeup makeup,” which appears light, natural, yet very polished, and is distinctly different from everyday makeup styles commonly found in Indonesia. This beauty icon is also frequently seen in the appearances of women in Seoul during their daily activities.

Based on Cho's perspective on physical beauty as represented by Korean women through the widely known “no-makeup makeup” style, which is extensively presented in digital media, this concept becomes the reference used by Ju Kyung in transforming her appearance. Through digital media representations, Ju Kyung constructs her ideal image of beauty in order to achieve a beautiful image aligned with contemporary Korean beauty standards.

### 5.3 Evaluation of Beauty by Others

Based on Ju Kyung's social interactions, evaluations of beauty from others toward Ju Kyung clearly occur. This indicates that within social interactions, judgments of beauty are inevitably formed toward individuals who are perceived as different. Ju Kyung's character, who is considered unattractive, consistently receives assessments of physical beauty upon first encounters during social interactions.

In the drama series *True Beauty*, evaluations of beauty are predominantly based on physical criteria, including a clean and blemish-free face, ideal height, fair skin, long straight hair, double eyelids, and a high-bridged nose. Physical beauty becomes the primary and immediate form of judgment in social interactions. Ju Kyung, who possesses physical features deemed unattractive—such as narrow eyes behind large glasses, tied-back hair, a wider chin, and acne-prone skin—is perceived as not beautiful and as failing to meet Korean beauty standards.

This portrayal aligns with Un's (2007, 55) argument that South Korea is a society where physical beauty plays a central role in social interactions. Un further explains that after the 2000s, several beauty-related terms became widely circulated within Korean society. These terms emerged due to symbolic values attributed to specific parts of a woman's body as indicators of beauty, including *eoljjang* (attractive face), *momjjang* (well-proportioned body), *saengeol* (naturally beautiful face without makeup), *dongan* (youthful-looking face), *longdari* (long legs), *jjukjuk ppangppang* (tall, slim, and graceful physique), *S-line* (hourglass body shape), and *V-line* (a slim face



with a V-shaped chin).

According to Un (2007, 62–63), Korean society places a high value on physical appearance, where the body is regarded as an asset that allows individuals to stand out from others. Physical appearance functions as a form of physical capital and social capital that ensures women's social success within a male-dominated society.

Picture 10: Ju Kyung's Lack of Beauty and Experiences of Bullying  
Source: Screen Shot ep 1 'True Beauty' (2020)



Ju Kyung, whose physical appearance does not conform to Korean beauty standards, experiences difficulties in social interactions with her school peers, the wider community, and even within her family environment. In response, Ju Kyung makes significant efforts to gain recognition as “beautiful” according to prevailing Korean beauty standards in order to ease her social interactions. She actively attempts to enhance her appearance by following beauty ideals presented in digital media, which ultimately constructs a new image of beauty for herself.

According to Naha (2021, p. 22), the interpretation of beauty as a manifestation of good character is not deeply embedded in adolescents' ways of thinking. Adolescents tend to understand beauty as something closely related to constructions frequently portrayed in the media. Although adolescents acknowledge that beauty should not only be judged based on physical appearance but also on character, when asked why they consider certain peers or celebrities to be beautiful, they predominantly describe physical attributes. Beauty is commonly defined through smooth, acne-free skin, a tall and ideal body posture, fair skin, and straight hair. Adolescents also report that when these beauty criteria are absent in themselves, they perceive this as a physical deficiency. These beauty values align closely with those repeatedly constructed and reinforced by the media.



Picture 11: When Ju Kyung is perceived as physically beautiful, she finds it easier to gain friends and to be accepted in social interactions.

Source: Screen Shot ep.1 'True Beauty' (2020)



The theory above aligns with the perspective of Ju Kyung's beauty as evaluated by her friends. The primary factor is physical appearance when Ju Kyung is able to transform her facial features using makeup, she experiences a sense of satisfaction from being perceived as beautiful by others. Many people do not even recognize her at first. After receiving recognition for her beauty from others, Ju Kyung gains numerous advantages, including making friends more easily and being accepted in her social environment.

## 6. Conclusion

Television artistic elements in the TV drama series *True Beauty* are used to compare the depiction of beautiful and unattractive women. The series tells the story of a high school student who transforms from being physically unattractive to beautiful through the use of makeup. Television artistic elements—including setting, lighting, camera work, costumes, and makeup are employed to build Ju Kyung's character both before and after her transformation.

Moreover, these artistic elements illustrate the concept of beauty in Korea, which is a significant social issue. Physical beauty acts as a form of power and even as a social asset for women, serving as a form of social capital that can help them succeed in interactions within a male-dominated society. Conversely, lacking physical beauty can make daily life difficult, full of pressure and challenges. The artistic elements in *True Beauty* depict character roles to show how beauty wields power in social interactions and how those considered unattractive appear pressured and mysterious.

Overall, based on an analysis of character perspectives in *True Beauty*, the depiction of beauty in the series can be understood in three ways. First, beauty is viewed through social interactions, which assign both positive and negative meanings to it. Second, self-perception of beauty is strongly influenced by others' opinions and media representations; if a person's physical appearance does not match media



ideals, they may judge themselves as unattractive, and vice versa. Third, during social interactions, judgments about the physical beauty of others occur frequently, often becoming the first topic of discussion when meeting someone new. Physical attractiveness becomes a primary point of social evaluation to see whether someone meets the prevailing beauty standards.

In general, *True Beauty* portrays beauty according to South Korean standards. Makeup is presented following these standards: flawless white skin, a V-line shaped narrow chin, round eyes with double eyelids, a small and pointed nose, and slightly reddish or nude lips. This reflects the Korean concept of beauty often referred to as “no makeup makeup,” where makeup is applied but appears natural and barely noticeable.

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