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# Investigating the Relationship between Cultural Capital and the Tendency for Cosmetic Surgery

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***ABSTRACT***

**Background:** Cultural capital is a special type of high society values and norms. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between cultural capital and the tendency for plastic surgery in women living in self-governing hostels in Tehran in 2023.

**Methods**: The current study was cross-sectional and correlational. The population of the current research included all the women living in self-governing hostels in Tehran in 2023. The sample of the current research was determined based on similar studies on 325 people selected based on stratified sampling and available samples from the hostels of 5 geographical regions of Tehran. The research tool consisted of 2 questionnaires: Bourdieu's cultural questionnaire and Etamadi Far's cosmetic surgery tendency questionnaire. Data were analyzed by SPSS-15

**Results:** 214 of the respondents had cosmetic surgery and 111 did not. Between cultural capital and the tendency to perform cosmetic surgery in women living in self-governing hostels, r = -0.652 was obtained. The tendency of women living in self-governing hostels towards cosmetic surgery was calculated to be 93.14 ± 11.2, which was relatively high. The average cultural capital was 44.45 ± 6.45 (medium) in the surgical group and 77.15 ± 11.34 (high) in non-surgical group.

**Conclusion:** It is necessary to promote cultural capital in intervention programs to adjust and correct the desire and pathological behavior of women towards cosmetic surgery.

**Keywords**: Cultural Capital, Cosmetic Surgery, Self-Governing Dormitory

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## Introduction

Cosmetic surgery is a medical-cultural operation (Mirivel .2007). Sociology of the body explores how people's bodies are affected by social factors and forces. According to Nettleton (Nettleton, 1995), these factors are the impact of technological advances on people's bodies and efforts. People want to control, own, and position their bodies in consumption society (Saeedi, 2007).

Changes in modern society have caused more attention to the body, how to manage control and treat it in today's consumer society. One of these behaviors, which is seen as appropriate in most societies, is cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery, which is used to improve appearance, is a specialty that deals with repairing, maintaining or improving a person's physical appearance through surgical and medical techniques (Shirmohamad, 2019).

Today, worldwide, there has been a rapid increase in the demand for beauty treatments, especially in the last ten years. The American Society of Cosmetic Surgery announces a twenty percent growth for cosmetic surgery in 2015 compared to the previous year, which, including a twenty percent growth, about 12,792,337 people have undergone a variety of cosmetic surgery procedures this year, according to According to the report of the American Society of Plastic Surgery, 91% of these surgeries are performed by women (Swami, 2009). Although exact statistics of cosmetic surgery in Iran are not available, Iran is one of the countries that has the highest rate of cosmetic surgery. So that it ranks first in terms of the number of nose surgery in the world and has been called the capital of nose surgery in the world (Abbaszadeh, 2022).

Social and cultural studies have made the body a serious field for theorizing and experimental studies. It introduces different approaches, different mechanisms and processes that cause excessive attention to the body and dissatisfaction with it, which includes personal, social, ideological, linguistic, power relations and similar aspects. Thus, the culture of the body should be seen as a view that can be used to evaluate cultural developments and their trends. These days, there is a fierce competition between women and girls to excel in external beauty; So that this issue has become one of the main concerns of their lives. It is interesting that even though they are familiar with the harms and complications of such actions, they accept these risks and possible harms in order to surpass others in the field of beauty (Sarookhani, 2018).

Researchers have studied a range of factors affecting the increasing desire of women to undergo surgery. The results show that one of the most important things that probably affects women's tendency to beauty procedures is cultural capital. Bourdieu used the term cultural capital to refer to information or knowledge about cultural beliefs and traditions and specific behavioral standards that promote success in life (Khademian & Mirtaheri, 2009).

Cosmetic surgery is not for everyone, but for most people in the society, it is very important.

A reviewer of a paper submitted to a scientific journal concluded his report as follows. “There is much in this paper which is original and sound: the difficulty is that what is sound is not original and what is original is not sound.” This nicely captures the essence of the critique that the researchers wish to make out of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and of others, in which “cultural capital” serves as a central concept. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between cultural capital and the tendency towards plastic surgery among women living in self-governing hostels in Tehran in 2023.

## Methods

The statistical population of this research included all the women in self-governing hostels in Tehran in 1402 aged 15 and above. According to the statistics obtained from the capacity of self-governing hostels in Tehran. With inclusion of 15% of the empty capacity, there were about 340 thousand people.

According to the standard deviation of women's



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cultural capital obtained from a study (Haiderkhani et al., 2012) (0.92), the confidence interval of 95%, and the amount of possible error acceptance of 0.1, the sample size for this study was calculated as 325 people. This is almost 0.001 of the total population.

$n = z2 * \mu 2 / d2$

$325 = (1.96 * 1.96 * 0.92 * 0.92) / 0.1 * 0.1$

$z\ 0.95 = 1.96$

$\mu = 0.92$

$d = 0.1$

Sampling was done in two stages, the first one was stratified method, and the second one was convenience sampling.

After estimating the sample size, the researchers referred to the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization of Tehran, explained the purpose of the study, and ensured the officials of the confidentiality of the information. Then, according to the capacity of the dormitories of each floor, 0.001 of each geographic region was selected, so; a total of 325 people were calculated as the sample.

North Tehran = 50,000 people, Central Tehran = 110,000 people, East Tehran = 50,000 people, West Tehran = 70,000 people and South Tehran = 70,000 people were calculated. A total of 350 people were selected as sample, and with a probability of 7% dropout, approximately 325 people remained in the study.

Furthermore, the researchers contacted the officials of the women's dormitories through the contact number of the five-story dormitories, introduced themselves, explained the purpose of the research, and obtained their consent. Afterwards, he went to the dormitories in person, and convenience sampling, he visited women's dormitories. After explaining the purpose of the study, ensuring of the confidentiality of the information and the anonymity of the questionnaires, and obtaining the consent of the subjects, the questionnaires were distributed and collected after completion.

*Instruments*

***A- Tendency towards cosmetic surgery questionnaire by Etemadi Faret al. (2013)***

The scoring method of this 24-item questionnaire was based on a five-point Likert scale, and the options ranged from 1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree (Table 1-3). A score of 72 was the cut-off point of the questionnaire, above 72 indicated a tendency towards high cosmetic surgery, and below 72 showed a tendency towards low cosmetic surgery.

The reliability of the questionnaire based on Etamadi Far and Amani's research (2013) was obtained with Cronbach's alpha coefficient at 0.79, and its validity with confirmatory factor analysis was 0.76 (Etamadi Far and Amani, 2013).

***B- Bourdieu's cultural capital questionnaire (2013)***

Bourdieu's cultural capital questionnaire (2013) has 22 questions and its purpose is measuring cultural and artistic values and expressions in three Domains.

A- Embodied cultural capital or physical and personal capital (mental skill, skill in expressing course contents)

B- Objectified cultural capital (consumption of cultural goods, possession of cultural goods, being interested in art)

C- Institutional or normative cultural capital (educational certificates)

Bourdieu's questionnaire is standard and has been used many times in similar studies. In the study by Firozian, 2013, the Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was calculated as 87.5%, and its content validity was also confirmed by the opinions of relevant experts (Firozian, 2015).

In this research, two types of descriptive and inferential statistics have been used for data analysis through SPSS-15 software. At descriptive level, using statistical characteristics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and graphs, data analysis was done; at the inferential level, according to the level of data measurement and the basic assumptions of statistical tests from Pearson tests and Regression is used. Women who were willing to study and completed the questionnaires

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and were present in the dormitory at the time of distributing the questionnaires and were over 23 years old were included in the study, and women who were less than 23 years old and willing to enter the study if they did not have, they were excluded from the study.

In order to comply with the ethical principles, the necessary explanations were provided to the respondents and they were free to complete the questionnaires. Then, the code of ethics was received from Shahrekord branch of Islamic Azad University .The ethical code was IR.IAU.SHK.REC.1402.099.

## Results

The age group between 31 and 38 had the highest frequency (3.40%), most of the subjects had a high school diploma (29.8%),most of the women were single (9.60%), and a great majority of the cases had plastic surgery (8.65%), Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistical analysis of the research variables the women living in self-governing hostels in Tehrana

| Variable | | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Sex** | **Female** | **325** | **100%** |
| Age | 23-30 | 131 | 40.3% |
| | 31-38 | 118 | 36.3% |
| | > 38 | 76 | 23.4% |
| Academic degree | > High school diploma | 65 | 20% |
| | High school diploma | 97 | 29.8% |
| | Associate degree | 57 | 17.5% |
| | Bachelor's degree | 74 | 22.8% |
| | < Master's degree | 32 | 9.8% |
| Marital status | Single | 198 | 60.9% |
| | Married | 127 | 39.1% |
| Having or not having Cosmetic surgery | Yes | 214 | 65.8% |
| | No | 111 | 34.2% |

According to Table 2, the average cultural capital was higher in the operated group.

The mean and standard deviation of the research variables (including embodied cultural capital, objectified cultural capital, institutional and normative cultural capital, total cultural capital, institutional and normative cultural capital, total cultural capital, and tendency towards cosmetic surgery, Table 2.

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**Table 2.** Means research variables the women living in self-governing hostels in Tehrana

| Variable | | | The mean and standard deviation | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total cultural capital | Embodied cultural capital | Women with cosmetic surgery | 21.2 ± 9.6 | 18.3 ± 3.8 | 8.60 ± 11.1 |
| | | Women without cosmetic surgery | 15.3 ± 9.03 | | |
| | Objectified cultural capital | Women with cosmetic surgery | 16.3 ± 5.3 | 9.3 ± 5.4 | |
| | | Women without cosmetic surgery | 45.4 ± 7.1 | | |
| | Institutional and normative cultural capital | Women with cosmetic surgery | 21.1 ± 3.1 | 11.1 ± 2.4 | |
| | | Women without cosmetic surgery | 11.99 ± 7.1 | | |
| Tendency towards cosmetic surgery | | | - | 14.93 ± 11.1 | |

The mean and standard deviation of tendency towards cosmetic surgery in the subjects was calculated to be 93.14 ± 11.2, which was relatively high.

The results of the regression test regarding the relationship between the cultural capital and the tendency towards cosmetic surgery research (α = 0.05) were as follows.

**Table 3.** Regression test of the relationship between research variables the women living in self-governing hostels in Tehrana

| Variable | Sig | Beta |
|---|---|---|
| Embodied cultural capital | 0.00 | 0.68 |
| Objectified cultural capital | 0.00 | -0.442 |
| Institutional and normative cultural capital | 0.00 | -0.369 |
| Total cultural capital | 0.00 | -0.652 |

According to Table 3, all the relationships are considered significant at 0/05; except for the embodied cultural capital, the rest of the variables are inversely related to cosmetic surgery.

## Discussion

According to Bourdieu, there is a relationship between cultural capital and body management. Cosmetic surgeries are one of the measures where women do to manage their bodies. In this research, after analyzing data, a significant relationship was observed between the two variables of cultural capital and cosmetic surgery. The test of research hypotheses demonstrated that there was a significant difference between all dimensions of cultural capital (objectified, embodied and institutionalized), so, the amount of cultural capital among people who had not had cosmetic surgery was more than people who had. The findings of the present research were contrary to the results of the projects by Varshoui (2018), Ebrahimi, and Behnuigadeneh (2009), Panahardan and Yousefi (2014), Molaei (2022). However, unlike the past few years and with the excessive increase of cosmetic surgery, people with higher cultural capital are looking for other methods for change, and this issue is effective in the difference between the current research and its background.

Regarding embodied cultural capital, people who did not have the experience of cosmetic surgery scored much higher in items related to exercising and mastering foreign languages. In terms of objectified cultural capital, cultural goods available to these two groups of women were somewhat different. The use of personal

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libraries and paintings and such extracurricular studies was much more in the group without cosmetic surgery. Women whose cultural products are mostly satellites and virtual networks made more efforts to increase their sexual capital through cosmetic surgery. This was in line with the results of Lu et al.'s study (2014) who found that media were considered a factor to increase the desire for cosmetic surgery.

The results of Hajipoor's research (2018) regarding higher cultural capital in women with higher self-confidence were in line with the current research, but the results of Alizadeh (2015) Haji Abol (2017) and Ghasemi's studies (2020) were consistent with the results of this research regarding the existence of a significant relationship between age and the tendency.

Most of the selected articles in this research have examined the economic value of cosmetic surgery as a strong motivation for Asian women. In addition, they showed that westernization or the cultural colonialist framework is not one of the main reasons motivating women to change their appearance with cosmetic surgery. To examine the concept of relationship-oriented identity, the moral reflection of cosmetic surgery on racial characteristics should be considered as an important factor in colonialism and cultural nationalism. Both of these seem to affect Asian societies and are sources of social pressure that increase the culture of oppression against women; while cosmetic surgery reduces this culture (Maltseva, 2014).

## Conclusion

It is necessary to pay attention to intervention programs to adjust and correct the desire and pathological behavior of women towards cosmetic surgeries by promoting of cultural capital. In fact, since cosmetic surgery has emerged as a new subject in society, people use it as a tool for differentiation and legitimacy, although it is not easily possible for all classes of people. It is recommended that women use new methods for body management to improve their cultural capital, such as exercising, modifying their eating patterns, and using diets to increase their body capital. In this way, they use a method that does not harm their health.

*Limitations of the study were* lack of the respondents' time and their unwillingness to cooperate *On the other hand, the strength of this study was that* the researchers could use a student dormitory

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## Conflict of interests

Authors declared no conflict of interest.

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## Ethical Considerations

In order to comply with the ethical principles, the necessary explanations were provided to the respondents and they were free to complete the questionnaires. Then, the code of ethics was received from Shahrekord branch of Islamic Azad University.

## Code of Ethics

IR.IAU.SHK.REC.1402.099

## Authors' contribution

Conceptualization of the research was done by, M. M; Methodology was devised by, M. M.; M. P did data collection; M. M w rite the original draft; M. M and M. P were involved in data analysis and M. M supervised the process All authors read and approved the final manuscript and are responsible for any question related to the article.

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