

# COSMETIC SURGERY: WHY NOT? HELL NOT!

An analysis of Korean concepts behind the high cosmetic surgery rates in South Korea



Master Thesis MID Sociology Track  
Name: Loubna Es-Safraouy (930629229010)  
Date: 15-04-2018  
Supervisor: Gerard Verschoor



## Table of contents

Acknowledgments .....	3
Abstract .....	4
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	6
Introduction to South Korea .....	7
Why women?.....	8
The usual explanation: Neo-Confucianism and Neo-liberalisation.....	9
Problem Analysis .....	11
Chapter 2: Theoretical framework.....	11
Gender .....	11
Subjectivity.....	13
The body and the self .....	15
Ontologies .....	16
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	17
Chapter 4: Research results .....	19
Life in South Korea .....	19
Competitive society.....	21
Hell Joseon .....	23
Korean cosmetic surgery .....	24
Beauty Belt.....	25
A Korean Attitude .....	26
Anti-Japan .....	26
Physiognomy .....	28
Healing the Self.....	29
My personal encounter .....	29
Confucianist influence.....	31
Collectivism.....	31
The conceptual self.....	35
Confucianism and women .....	36
Women in a patriarchal society .....	37
Corporate life.....	37
Appearances .....	42
Entertainment industry and the media.....	49
Influence of K-pop .....	49

Malnourishment.....	51
Advertisements .....	56
Patriarchy in the industry.....	56
Friction in society .....	59
Discussion .....	64
Relation with existing literature .....	64
Hell Joseon .....	65
Limitations and weakness .....	66
Conclusion.....	67
Recommendations .....	69
Bibliography .....	70
Appendix A: Informants.....	79
Appendix C: Extra Pictures .....	80

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all my informants for their participation, kindness, and honesty. A special thanks to Sagar Pultoo for lending me his wonderful network and helping me connect with informants. I am grateful for my supervisors who provided me with the space to write freely, my family for their continuous support and my dear friends Minjung and Taeyoung for taking care of me during my stay in Seoul.

## Abstract

In this thesis my aim is to change the perspective on Korean cosmetic surgery as pure vanity and intervene in the simplicity of the debate in the literature on East-Asian cosmetic surgery and the factors causing its high rates. In the literature on this subject, I have noticed most authors forcing concepts on both sides of the structuralist-agency spectrum. Examples of these concepts are westernization, neo-liberalisation, Confucianism, or sexual empowerment. During my fieldwork I found neither of these concepts of help to fully understand this phenomenon due its complex dynamics. Therefore, I have chosen for an approach through the concept of ontologies. To understand why South Koreans are collectively visiting surgery clinics, Korean concepts and a Korean point of view are needed. In this thesis I discuss cosmetic surgery while highlighting local concepts like *Hell Joseon*, *woori*, and the unique entertainment industry of South Korea.

## Summary

Thus, in this thesis, my goal was to advocate for an understanding of phenomena through the perspective, and worldview of South Koreans by highlighting Korean concepts. Herein, we found historical, social, and economic factors to play a role in the choice of women for cosmetic surgery.

In the changing context of South Korea, young women are starting to recognize their individualism while trying to maintain norms and values of the previous generations. In the South Korean society, the booming cosmetic surgery numbers indicate an open attitude towards it, while a growing number is rejecting this trend. Viewing South Korea through the window of *Hell Joseon* we see the hardships and the extreme high competitiveness of Koreans to achieve the career they opt for. For women, appearance plays a role here in the strong patriarchal society. Through the media and the entertainment industry, images of perfect doll-like women are normalized into society as the ideal. It is then only understandable for women who wish to climb the social ladder to embrace cosmetic surgery since it provides them with the tool to succeed. On the other hand, women who are fighting the patriarchy are also part of the cosmetic surgery narrative as refusers of this pressure. As feminism and anti-feminism is growing in society, it showcases that these women have discovered the source of pressure and protest it. This is translated into an unwillingness to marry and focusing on their career, choosing for a healthy body instead of underweight skinny, and refraining from cosmetic surgery.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Walking on the streets of South Korea, everyone looks polished from head to toe, fashion trend clearly visible. I am unable to recall seeing girls not wearing makeup. Moreover, it was surprisingly the same style of make-up. Foundation a couple shades too light for the skin, a thin line of eyeliner and bright orange of red lipstick on the lips. Most important, their face structure resembled each other in an alarming way. It amazed me how synchronized the girls looked and as I spoke to more people and started visiting more places, it dawned on me that cosmetic surgery was an enormous phenomenon in South Korea. The pressure to conform to beauty ideals is of course experienced by women across many cultures, but South Korea stands out in this case due to its particularly narrow beauty standard. The face could be summarized as large eyes (with a crease), straight small nose, a V-shaped jawline, and poreless, porcelain skin. While the body is required to be thin and tanned skin is frowned upon (Shim, 2016). To achieve these beauty ideals there is a high number of South Korean women who undergo cosmetic procedures. South Korea is known for its alleged obsession with cosmetic surgery, and this hits headlines regularly in Asia and in the West due to the high take-up rate by South Koreans (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012). South Korea, according to the World Plastic Surgery Stats, is the most cosmetically enhanced country in the world. For every one in seventy-two South Koreans, one person has had some plastic surgery done (ISAPS, 2015). If we take only females into consideration, ABC News affirms that one in five Korean women have undergone some form of cosmetic surgery in Korea. The numbers are so high the entire cosmetic surgery practice is valued as a national asset. Since the cosmetic surgery numbers among women are significantly higher than among males, I chose to focus on women in my research. Herein I will try to get an understanding of the factors that are of influence on women when choosing for cosmetic surgery. For this thesis I have stayed in Seoul (which I visited before for 5 months) for 2.5 months, doing ethnographic research on this phenomenon.

During my research I realized my theoretic concepts in my proposal were constraining me from getting a clear understanding of the high rates of cosmetic surgery, and failed to fully explain the phenomenon. I found agency for example to be too western and containing an underlying assumption of individualism. I partially have used the other concepts in my thesis but most importantly I have added the concept of ontologies which I found suitable in this research. Recognizing the world as consisting of multiple ontologies and world views creates the space to allow an understanding of cosmetic surgery without judgement. A new approach

to cosmetic surgery since the literature on cosmetic surgery in South Korea clamps on the cliché of agency and structure; sexual empowerment versus the patriarchal society and neoliberal consumerism.

Therefore, in this thesis I have included background information that goes beyond cosmetic surgery but is still of importance to consider when attempting to understand this phenomenon in South Korea. Concepts like Confucian ideology, patriarchal society, the entertainment industry, as well as Korean concepts like *Jeon*, *Woori*, *nunchi* and *Hell Joseon*, have surfaced as important concepts. Through interviews with different women, and my own observations I have tried to answer the research question: How does *Hell Joseon* as other Korean concepts aid to explain the high rates of cosmetic surgery among women in South Korea?

### Introduction to South Korea

When South-Korea is mentioned, often our first thought is related to its tiger economy, which is justifiable, for how the country was able to increase its GNI per capita rapidly from US\$ 67 in the early 1950s to US\$ 22,670 in 2012. South Korea's economic spurt however did not occur without serious economic, social, and even political impacts. Below a couple examples: The fertility rate of South Korean women plunged from an average of 6,09 children in 1960 to one of the lowest fertility rates in the world with an average of 1,24 children per woman.

(Statista, n.d.)

South Korea became the world's most rapidly aging population, while Koreans still regard elderly care as the exclusive domain of filial piety. This resulted in a lack of any sort of pension system for the elderly to fall back on (Chang, 2010). The poverty they fall into is hence to be blamed for the growing rate of senior citizen suicide in South Korea. (Ock, 2015) With regard to employment, South Koreans are found to work the most hours compared to other countries. According the statistics of OECD, South Koreans worked an average of 2069 hours in the year of 2016, a significant number of hours longer compared to the average of 1430 hours worked in the Netherlands. (OECD, 2016). Still, before securing a job, South Koreans have to go through no less spartan processes of schooling, and almost all students advance to next levels of schooling up to college (Chang, 20010). In the year of 2015, 93,2percent of the pupils enrolled at tertiary schools in South Korea – the world's highest level (World bank, n.d.). To secure high grades intense work and study tend to keep South Koreans from getting enough sleep. A poll by the National Youth Policy Institute, revealed that Korean high school students sleep an average of 5 hours and 27 minutes a night, with 70 percent acknowledging that they are sleep deprived. (The Korea Herald, 2014). Thus, to say



life in South Korea stressful would be a severe understatement. This gloomy future perspective causes on a more serious note Koreans to inflict fatal harm on themselves at one of the highest levels in the world: around 32 out of 100,000 South Koreans committed suicide in 2015 (as compared to an average of 14,1 suicides per 100,000 people in the year of 2000). (World bank, nd)

In short, the above listed characteristics of South Korea caused it to receive the nickname of *Hell Joseon*, a term introduced to me through a sociology professor while doing an exchange semester there. This concept does not return in the (English) literature, but is mentioned on the internet briefly. *Hell Joseon* is a term youngsters who share the gloomy future perspective use to describe the ‘Hell’ they live in. It is a phrase that harks back to the five-century-long Joseon dynasty in which Confucian hierarchies became entrenched in Korea and when a feudal system determined who got ahead and who didn’t (Fifield, 2016) . Those who were born with a “golden spoon” in their mouths get into the best universities and secure the plum jobs, while those born with a “dirt spoon” work long hours in low-paying jobs without benefits (ibid.). *Hell Joseon* is a place where ambitions are crushed and free will is an illusion (Denney, 2015). When searching in Korean a lot more about this term surfaces, which triggered my interest to find out more about why young Koreans have come up with the term and what it signifies.

### Why women?

In *Hell Joseon*, more pressing is the position of women in South Korean society. While they are also dealing with the pressure to get high grades, find a job and be a good daughter to their parent. There is added pressure on females due to the remaining influence of Confucian ideology. Confucian philosophy -whose influence is still strongly visible in contemporary society, emphasized a strict hierarchical order of human relationships based on age, sex, and inherited social status, in which Korean women were traditionally seen as inferior to men and were assigned the role of the provider of support for fathers, husbands, and sons (Choi, 1994). This cultural position has had diverse consequences on women in present-day Korea. From longitudinal research in South Korea it became clear that women became more traditional over time, which stands in contrast to liberalizing trends in the USA and Australia (Kyungmin et al., 2015). The term traditionalizing here signifies becoming a housewife, and taking care of the children instead of chasing a career. This is explained by Jones and Yeung who argue that persistent expectations for women's traditional gender roles and a lack of formal and informal support for women to take on both roles of a career woman and a housewife make it

very difficult for today's educated women to combine work and family, thereby forcing them to choose between the two. (Jones & Yeung, 2014). Moreover, the meagre career prospects for women in South Korea in addition to the possibility of interruption due to children, make it relatively easy for women to retreat from the labour market upon marriage and childbearing. (ibid., 2014). In addition, the gender division when giving support and care for aging parents, can put even a heavier workload and pressure on women. In South Korea's patrilineal culture, a son and his wife are expected to be the primary provider for the parents, whereas daughters are regarded as belonging to other families after getting married. (Feldman et al., 2007). Meaning wives are obliged to provide instrumental support to their parents-in-law while it's not expected from the male towards his in-laws. (Kyungmin et al., 2015). More shockingly is the pressure felt by women to conform to the beauty ideals. In the introduction I gave a brief sketch of these ideals. In further details, the ideal is to have a round forehead instead of a flat one, double eyelids that clear away the tired and lazy appearance of a monolid, *aegyo sal*<sup>1</sup>, a medium-sized nose bridge, a clear "V-line" face shape, and lastly an extremely pale white skin (Kim, 2016). The question then arises, how come women in South Korea are uniformly conforming to these beauty ideals.

### The usual explanation: Neo-Confucianism and Neo-liberalisation

When 500 years ago, South Korea adopted Neo-Confucianism as its official ideology, it strived to create a Neo-Confucian state following its teachings as closely as possible. In this ideology, the human body is sacred and should be respected and remain unaltered. (Lee, 1993). Neo-Confucianism in addition made a clear distinction between the genders. Men had to engage in "rituals and techniques of self-cultivation to develop a transcendent self – or the 'selfless' self which erased boundaries between self and others" (Kim, 2003). Women on the other hand were supposed to engage in "everyday practices of family and body reproduction within a Neo-Confucian system that considered women subjectless bodies" (ibid, 2003) On a daily basis, this means women's concern is cultivating their bodies for their unborn children, delivering labour for the maintenance of the family, which reinforces the concept of their selves as primarily physical bodies. This ensured ownership over women's bodies and their reproductive rights.

---

<sup>1</sup> protruding eyebags (also called *aegyo sal*; *Aegyo sal* sits right under the lower eyelid, and naturally occurs beneath the eyes of children. It's existence in young people is the reason some people believe it can make you look more youthful and innocent)

Following liberation in 1945, the Korean War and Korea's subsequent division in 1953, South Korea endured a series of dictatorships and rapid industrialization, quickly transforming from an agrarian to an industrialized nation with an insatiable need for labour. This is when women entered the labour market. Finally, with the advent of a post-industrial, consumer capitalist society in the 1980s, women became more important as consumers than as factory workers, shifting the utility of their bodies from national labour production to national consumption, becoming, in effect, what Turner (1996) calls the capitalist body.

While South Korea was experiencing the process of modernization, creating a national identity was essential in order to create a sense of a unified South Korea after the previous wars and colonial periods. Herein, Neo-Confucianism, became a synonym for 'Koreanness' and was quickly embraced as the authentic culture of Korea. This happened in such an intensity that challenges to Neo-Confucian principles were branded as threats to national integrity (Moon, 1998). Parallely, as the modernization process was accelerating in South Korea, Neo-Confucianism as a state ideology was being pushed aside and replaced by capitalism and democracy. This resulted in Neo-Confucianism gaining ground as Korea's national and cultural identity and losing as Korea's dominant state ideology, which on its turn had an influence on laws related to women and their rights. This signified that the control over women's bodies moved from Neo-Confucian ideology to capitalist consumer models, yet the understanding of the body remained Neo-Confucian. Women are not obliged anymore to be invisible by protecting their bodies or avoiding any alterations to it, instead their bodies are being celebrated and are free to be appreciated in public space. Nonetheless, the neo-Confucian pressure to follow direction concerning the body compels women to conform to what is prescribed through fashion. The influence of this ideology, that perceived Korean woman's role as a subjectless body and the practice of strictly following rules pertaining to the body, resulted in media images having an extremely normalizing influence on women. The idea that their bodies are not their own makes fashion and beautification an act of obeying the new rules of propriety and fashion (Kim, 2003).

In this modern capitalist society, beauty has become the new standard of a woman's value. In a society as Korea where there is a high level of conformity and following the trend is the norm instead of individuality, Korean women collectively have gone to great lengths to enhance or create this beauty by reshaping their physical bodies. Beauty in Korea has become a *requirement* of decorum for women rather than a vanity. However, is this the only explanation for cosmetic surgery?

## Problem Analysis

While in the literature much is written about cosmetic surgery, many articles are focused on either the way structures [Confucianism, Westernization, Capitalism] are influencing women to choose for cosmetic surgery, or the agency of women in South Korea and how altering the body has become an expression of empowerment. There is little literature that recognizes how complicated the picture of Korean cosmetic surgery is. It is a field of “negotiation between globalized and national standards of beauty, official and non-official religious and traditional discourses and practices and national identity, as well as symbolic practices of coming of age, caring for the self, marking social status and seeking success, all play a part” (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012). More importantly, absent in the literature is attention for how South Korean women themselves view cosmetic surgery and their opinion on the issue. Likewise, the absence of Korean concepts, like *Hell Joseon*, is astonishing. There is very little ethnographic material about this subject. Much of the literature on South Korean women is written about them, instead of including their voices and stories. My research will combine the concept of cosmetic surgery and *Hell Joseon*, by using the latter as a window to describe and understand the cosmetic surgery trend in South Korea.

Therefore, my research question is: How does *Hell Joseon* as other Korean concepts aid to explain the high rates of cosmetic surgery among women in South Korea?

## Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

This theoretical framework consists of concepts used in the proposal: gender, subjectivity, the body and the self, in addition to the new concept: ontology

### Gender

As previously mentioned, women are in a disadvantaged position in traditional Confucian society. These strong Confucian traditions on women are shifting due to industrialization, changes in family structure, women's increasing participation in the labour market and the recent development of gender equality policies (Sung & Pascall, 2014). However, in East Asian countries, tradition and modernity co-exist: Western influence of gender equality ideals and traditional Confucian patriarchal family systems are intertwined within these societies (ibid., 2014). So, while women are increasingly participating in society and causing social and cultural change in South Korea, it is also important to note that traditional gender roles still prevail within the family and wider society. In this transitional period, East Asian women may

encounter conflicts within their families and societies, as well as within themselves (ibid., 2014). In order to get a better understanding of these gender roles and the hardships of women due to these roles I bring forward the concept of gender and how I'll use it in my research. With gender I do not mean solely the 'male' or the 'female', but as a concept that describes how societies determine and manage sex categories, which meanings are attached to men and women's roles, and how individuals understand their identity (Zavallos, 2014). Gender is a tool that allows us to examine how assumptions surrounding concepts such as 'women', 'men', 'femininity', 'masculinity' and 'sexuality' operate within and relate to different aspects of life (Curthoys, 1998). As I have chosen not to focus on men in my research, this consequently means that I will focus on 'women', 'femininity' and their gender roles in society; what is appropriate behaviour for a 'women', and is it of influence on women when choosing for cosmetic surgery. Women are not a homogenous group in society, so my concept of gender also includes the differences between them by including different markers as ethnicity, class, religion and sexual proclivity, to name a few. In order to give these markers a place and do justice to differences and diversity among women gender is used as a layered concept (Davids & van Driel, 2001). These layers are analysed through the gender lens, which is inspired by the work of Sandra Harding (1986), Joan Wallace Scott (1988), C. Hageman-White (1989) and Rosi Braidotti (1994), and is used in the work of Tine Davids and Francien van Driel. The gender lens consists of three interconnected dimensions, situated and interconnected in such a way that helps us understand the mechanisms at work within different discourses and related practices. It is the interconnection of subjects, institutions and practices, ideas and images that provides us with the opportunity to observe phenomena from multiple points of view and perspectives (Davids & van Driel, 2005). The facets of symbolic representation (1), institutional practices (2), and subjects (3), which in social reality constantly interact and which are distinguished here only for analytical clarity, constitute a multidimensional approach.

The symbolic dimension (1) represents symbols, ideas and images that can solidify into very persistent cultural texts and become stereotypes. For example the way it is expected from women to carry out activities related to taking care of the household and the children. Differences are articulated as absolute differences, such as differences between the man and the woman. However, the symbolic dimension does not only hold clear-cut opposite differences but these can also be contradicting. Many different ideas and versions of the woman coincide. The pretty, the natural beauty, the strong, the docile, the hardworking, the stay-at-home woman for example. These ideas, stereotypes, images, differences and

hierarchies are reflected in socially institutionalized practices (2). Differences get multiplied, reshaped and reinterpreted in different practices such as marriage laws, labour regulations etc. How people deal with such institutionalized ideas and the meaning attached to them varies among subjects. So negotiating the symbolic ground rules does not only depend on structural positioning and on identities that are ascribed to people, but also on the individual agency of actors and groups. The third dimension is then the dimension of subjectivity, where the differences between people/subjects comes to light (3). In the next paragraph I will discuss subjectivity furthermore, for it is crucial to my research.

## Subjectivity

Arguments why South Korean women embrace cosmetic surgery are not very diverse in the academic literature. For some it's an undesired effect of western cultural influence (Park, 2007; Kim 2003). Many frame it as an issue that derived from neo-liberal capitalism. An example is Woo (2004) who argues that cosmetic surgery is a political conspiracy between patriarchal consumer capitalism that promotes an inferiority complex in women and the interests of medical technology capital that claim to offer a resolution to the inferiority complex." (Woo, 2004). These women who despite being aware of the situation, and yet choose to alter their bodies, have accepted the kind of "submissive body that is encouraged by technological capital and has become the primary factor in the institutionalization of the appearance obsession and dependence on technology." (ibid. 2004). Holliday and Elfving-Hwang (2012) on the other hand perceive cosmetic surgery as Korean women divorcing themselves from a maternal body, and embracing signs of overt sexuality, such as wide eyes, thereby rejecting patriarchal models of propriety. For Holliday and Elfving-Hwang, cosmetic surgery is a way of expressing sexual (and marriage) self-determination and occupation of the public sphere.

There is a clear limitation in the previous mentioned explanations for this clear reason. However complex the description (political conspiracy) or simple (westernization), these authors fell in the trap of the dichotomy between structure and agency, in which they are strongly arguing from a structuralist point of view. Holliday and Elfving-Hwang, with many others who write about cosmetic surgery, stand on the other far end of the dichotomy, that of agency.

In my research I challenge myself not to fall in the same trap of discussing the choices of women in terms of either agency or structure, but to surpass it. Therefore, I chose Ortner's

definition of subjectivity that consolidates both arguments for structure and agency to reveal a mosaic on reasons and views on cosmetic surgery.

Subjectivity is viewing the subject as existentially complex, as a being who feels and thinks and reflects, who makes and seeks meaning. Subjectivity is the basis of agency, a fundamental part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world as they are acted upon. “Agency is not some natural or originary will; it takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts, and meanings.” (Ortner, 2005). However, what is also important in the concept of subjectivity is that subjects have a specifically cultural and historical consciousness. This consciousness is explained on two levels, the individual and the collective level. At the individual level, (as Giddens explained in his work), actors are always at least partially ‘knowing subjects’, that they have some degree of reflexivity about themselves and their desires, and that they have some ‘penetration’ into the ways in which they are formed by their circumstances (ibid.). At the collective level the meaning of consciousness is related to how both Marx and Durkheim used the term. As “the collective sensibility of some set of socially interrelated actors” (ibid., 2015). This signifies that consciousness is always ambiguously part of people’s personal subjectivities and part of the public culture.

Through the concept of subjectivity we acknowledge the complex structures of thought, feeling, reflection, and the like, that make social beings always more than the occupants of particular positions and the holders of particular identities (Ortner, 2005). Especially in the case of cosmetic surgery, it is crucial not to simplify the complexity of the reasons behind the choice to alter the body, and put effort into distilling the layers that when taken together explain this phenomenon.

This is why I will be combining the gender lens and its three dimensions with the concept of subjectivity by Ortner. Subjectivity is the third dimension of the gender lens where the previous two dimensions come together. The symbolic and the institutional practices dimensions will be of help to recognize and categorize the different layers and discourses in social reality that might influence subjects. The third dimension of subjectivity is where each subject reacts to and interprets events differently. It is the dimension where the complexity of beings is revealed instead of simply highlighting either their agency or their victim role.

## The body and the self

In the case of cosmetic surgery, the body is altered for different reasons. For some it might be to feel 'pretty' or 'better' about themselves. In this case questions about the self and how the body is related to it come to light. In this paragraph I will discuss how in my research the body and the self relate to each other.

Similarly, to what is discussed before about Korean women, Brumberg (1997), in her history of American girlhood, notes that the body has not always been the primary project and central focus of self-improvement that it is today. On the basis of her comparative readings of nineteenth- and twentieth century diaries of adolescent girls, Brumberg finds that girls a century ago rarely focused their attention on their bodies as a means of bettering themselves or achieving personal distinction. On the contrary, the way to self-improvement was through minimizing the importance of the body and focusing instead on character development and performing good works for others. Today, good looks has clearly won out over good works (ibid., 1997), and the rise of aesthetic surgery as a widely accepted practice reflects the popular belief in its ability not only to correct bodily deviance and deformation, but also to "cure" and "restore" the psyche that has been damaged by the body's stigmatization (Gilman, 1998). This results in a twofold role of aesthetic surgery: it cures the ills of the body, and the unhappy psyche at the same time. The fact aesthetic surgery has become a form of psychotherapy (ibid., 1998) points to the symbolic power of the body to reflect the status of the psyche itself (Brumberg, 1997). With the help of a consumer industry that touts its ability to sanitize and perfect the human form, the body has now become the most significant and most preoccupying project of American girls because of its status as the "ultimate expression of the self (ibid., 1997).

However, the connection between body and self cannot be taken as a universal given, as the body can be a reflection of the self but also a reflection of the community (Reischer & Koo, 2004). In the case of South Korea, the urge towards conformity derived from Confucian tradition, tremendously influences women to alter their bodies in ways and for reasons that cannot be explained solely by "expressing the self". The relation between the self and the body is utmost complex and many theorists have written about it from different perspectives, which will not be discussed here. For my research I have chosen Reischer and Koo's anthropological perspective on the body and its importance in social reality. They explain that the body serves as a powerful symbolic medium but is also endowed with the capacity to participate in the creation of social meaning. (Reischer and Koo, 2004). Due to our inability to break free from our body, it inescapably mediates us through the world. To highlight the role



of the body in the social world is to acknowledge its participation in the agency of the self. By conceiving the body as a fundamental aspect of the acting self, theorists tried to transcend the dichotomy of self as subject versus body as object to draw attention to the often overlooked role of the body in social action (e.g. Comaroff & Comaroff 1992; Csordas 1990 et al. in Reischer & Koo, 2004). Thus, a self that acts on the world necessarily does so through the medium of the body; this approach is often referred to as "embodiment" (Csordas 1990). Embodiment emphasizes the body as being a subject of culture instead of an object, and helps explain how bodies absorb paradigms and translate those into body forms and language. Thus, to say that the body is an "agent" or "subject" is not to assert that subjectivity is a feature of the body per se, but rather that bodies, because they are constitutive of subjectivity and also mediate the relationship between person and world, necessarily participate in the agency of the person.

So, in this research I find it important to highlight the role of the body, since my subject is related to body alterations. Since we cannot escape our bodies, subjects are obliged to 'work with it.' In South Korea, where appearances can make or break somebody, acknowledging the agency of the body is a crucial element. Thus, when speaking of the body in my research, I consider it a fundamental part of the agency of a subject. Herein, the concept of embodiment will be used to understand how women *embody* the popular trends and beauty discourses prevalent in society.

## Ontologies

In this thesis I ensured to include how south Koreans experience living in South Korea, how the education system works, how jobs are obtained, and marriage is viewed, not as a filler-up story, but to showcase their lived reality. This reality bears no resemblance to the reality in the west, which forced me to reflect about the concepts used in the proposal of this research. To which extent are we able to explain phenomenon as far away as South Korea, with western concepts hardly forthcoming there? In my attempt to discuss agency with my informants on the hand of own will and surroundings' influence, all of my informants pointed out the surroundings to influence their everyday choices, without any hesitation. I could argue on the level of subjectivity, how the agency of Korean women lies in the fact they are aware of the situation and knowing. However, in this thesis I choose to explain cosmetic surgery through the medium of Korean (theoretical) concepts. I emphasize these local concepts to avoid "constructed, artificial nature of cultural accounts" (Clifford 1986: 2), supported by anthropologists writing about the ontological turn. Instead of discussing cosmetic surgery as a

differing perspective on a objective and universal reality, rather acknowledging the notion of 'one world, many worldviews'. The ontological approach recognizes multiples worlds. (Venkatesen 2010; Paleek and Risjord 2012). Ontological anthropologists reject analyses that seek to explain difference by way of 'representation', 'symbolism' or 'belief', instead arguing that difference is due to existence and participation in alternative realities. these ontologies are not pre-given entities but rather the product of historically situated practices, including their mutual interactions (see also Haraway 1997; Law and Hassard 1999; Mol 2002), and these differ greatly in the context of cosmetic surgery as South Korea and Western countries do not share equivalent histories.

Building on these ideas, "misunderstandings" about cosmetic surgery occur in settings of different ontologies. Viveiros de Castro calls this uncontrolled equivocation, "a type of communicative disjuncture where the interlocutors are not talking about the same thing, and do not know this" (2004a). In other words, these misunderstandings happen not because there are different perspectives on the world but rather because the interlocutors are unaware that different worlds are being enacted and assumed by each of them (Blaser, 2009). While cosmetic surgery is understood as vanity and unnecessary in many western countries, in South Korea it can be a requirement and is seen as reconstructing one's beauty.

Tackling the question of how different worlds or ontologies are brought into being is shown by Mol who explains that "reality does not precede the mundane practices in which we interact with it, but is rather shaped in these practices" (Mol 1999:75). Along the same lines, Bruno Latour (1999) argues that "facts" or reality are better conceived of as "factishes." This term overpasses discussions whether things we see are facts ( purely external and autonomous objects) or fetishes (reifications of our subjectivity). Instead, the term factishes assumes that "what exists" is always in between the subject-object divide and that "what exists" is always the ongoing effect of practices or performances. Therefore, what we see as fact or reality, is better conceived as a "factish" in which objectivity and subjectivity (and, therefore, nature, culture, morality, and politics) are entangled with each other in an indissoluble knot because "facts" are both real and done—or, better, they are real because they are being done.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

In this qualitative field research, I use ethnography as a methodology to try and get an in-depth understanding of cosmetic surgery in South Korea. For, the essential core of ethnography is its concern with the *meaning* of actions and events to people we seek to

understand (Spradley, 1979). While some of these meanings are directly expressed in language, many are taken for granted and communicated only indirectly. This is why it's important not only to conduct interviews but to also observe in the field. In a period of two months, I will use the research methods semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and participant observation.

### **Research Area**

The area of my fieldwork is Seoul, the capital and largest metropolis of the Republic of Korea. It is the world's 16th largest city, and houses about half of the country's population of 51.44 million people. Most important, it is the plastic surgery mecca, a place where doctors are highly skilled, citizens are more than willing and the technology is top-notch (Kim, 2012). In the so-called Beauty Belt, located in the Gangnam District (~40km<sup>2</sup>), there is a concentration of around 500 plastic surgery clinics. Especially in Apgujeong, located in the heart of Gangnam and the Beverly Hills of Seoul, where sophisticated and luxurious shopping areas can be found, it is a common sight to see 5-10 clinics in a single street. (SeoulTouchUp, n.d.). In Seoul Koreans are bombarded with ads by clinics at every corner of the subway stations (ibid.). This is why I have chosen this research area.

### **Research group**

For my research I interviewed females between the age of 18 and 30, for I want to know how young women experience living in South Korea and what their thoughts on the future are. Because of my previous exchange at SKK University in Seoul I had contacts who are willing to participate, and through a friend I was introduced to females I didn't know yet. The informants ranged between university students, those looking for jobs, a freelancer and office workers. Due to the language barrier I talked to mostly English speaking students. With the help of my friend fluent in Korean and English I was able to interview two of my informants whom had difficulty with English. In this way I tried to include different females and perspectives in my research

### **Data collection**

*Interviews:* I used semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews to collect the data. With in-depth interviews is meant conversations with informants that are loosely guided by my questions, in which the informant gets to talk freely, including other subjects. Due to the possible sensitivity of the subject I skipped focus groups, and instead created a safe environment for the informants to talk freely by having one-on-one conversations. Follow-up interviews are helpful when a subject hasn't been discussed sufficiently in the first interview,

or when further questions arise based on the conducted interview. This wasn't the case, I sometimes sent text messages to them after the interview questioning what they meant with a certain sentence, or how a word is spelled in Korean. I conducted 15 interviews, spread out over the period of two months. They were all very helpful and eager to work on the research.

*Participant observation:* During the fieldwork I did not only conduct interviews but also participated in the activities my Korean friends and informants were engaged in. This, to get an idea about their daily lives, and to build a friendlier relationship with each other. This is crucial when sensitive topics as cosmetic surgery is discussed. During my stay, I spent one month living with two Korean friends, which created the opportunity of observation and deep conversations about the research.

For my observation I also made an appointment at a cosmetic surgery clinic for a consultation, to experience it for myself. It is very convenient to make an appointment, and they were willing to answer some questions. Experiencing a consultation myself would be of value to understand the way cosmetic surgeons conceive what is beautiful, while simultaneously experience what women seeking cosmetic procedures go through.

### **Data analysis**

I analysed the data I have collected by examining the material for emerging themes which then can be grouped into higher level themes. Based on these higher level themes, and quotations from the interviews as support, I wrote an interpretation based on the data that will help to answer my research questions. This method helps to arrange and make sense of the enormous amount of observations, interviews and other collected data.

## **Chapter 4: Research results**

Before focusing on cosmetic surgery, I want to give a brief description of how my informants experience living in South Korea. In their descriptions different aspects are mentioned that are of importance to understand Korean society and its dynamics. This part illustrates the pressures and hardships young Koreans face which along with other factors play a role in the high take-up rate of cosmetic surgery,

### **Life in South Korea**

The interviews started with the theme life in south Korea, in this section my informants were free to talk about any aspect of South Korea they wished. There was a noticeable pattern in the interviews, in which informants mentioned a couple positive aspects before indulging in

the many negative aspects of society. As I also have experienced, life in Seoul, South Korea, is very convenient, transportation is easily accessible and cheap, there is an abundance on restaurants, cafés, convenience stores, karaoke places, shopping districts. For tourists, Seoul is a lively 24/7 heaven. For South Koreans, it is less entertaining. The theme that sprung out most was the education fever in South Korea. Since elementary school, children have to partake in exams. Hayeong who lived both in the USA and South Korea: “When they enter elementary school the competition starts and the level of pressure is really high compared to the level of pressure the children in other countries have to go through. We basically had tests every semester even though we were elementary students.” To obtain high grades, after school tutoring at private institutions, *hagwons*, is chosen by many parents as the way to help their children.<sup>2</sup> In middle school and High school, the tutoring continues, as the important ACT exam or College Scholastic Ability Test is nearing. These exams are called *Suneung*, and students spend 12 years preparing for it. “Personally, I had to study for 12 years just for the ACT exams, the exam took from 8am to 5 pm, and after that if I fail I need to take it again, and it’s so hard” (Hyeri)

The goal is to obtain a score high enough to guarantee admission to the countries’ top universities, the SKY frame universities. Those are Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University. “most Korean students go to university, around 80%, even if they don’t want to study because the elders expect the younger ones to study as much as possible” (Ahyun)

These prestigious universities are the dream of every parent as its students gain a high social status. Baseball jackets with the name of the university and the major of the student embroidered on it, is part of campus culture in Korea, and is a very visible fashion in fall season. These jackets function also as a way for students to recognize and rank each other’s social status based on the University. “getting accepted into a university is very important you’re spending your teenage life into getting a good university because people judge you by your university first.”

---

<sup>2</sup> A typical day, former South Korean students told me, consists of around 10 hours of school, a quick dinner break, and the rest of the evening spent in mandatory study halls until 10 p.m. Students might return home to continue studying or head to *hagwons*, cram schools. Se-Woong Koo worked at a cram school and described the experience in The New York Times: “Hagwons are soulless facilities, with room after room divided by thin walls, lit by long fluorescent bulbs, and stuffed with students memorizing English vocabulary, Korean grammar rules and math formulas.”

To have children who “study well” has been advantageous and part of Korean culture since the Joseon Dynasty. Instead of the *Suneung*, there was a civil-service exam that guaranteed status to those who passed and secured a job in the government. By observing the special place Confucian scholars held in Korean society, we can say education was a means to moral authority.<sup>3</sup> (Diamond, 2016)

Many of my informants conveyed their worries about this education fever and its effects on the students. “Students only focus on studying; the goal is to go to college. Majority doesn’t know what their dream or goal is, they just follow the mass’ decision. Everything is about studying. [The] younger generation doesn’t know what to do in life, no dream, only studying” (Young). She continued to explain that the gap between the poor and the rich in Korean society becomes visible after the results of these ACT exams. “the rich kids, when they study and fail their parents can support them [to start] a new business venture, and still can make money and have a good life. The poor have to keep studying, and if that doesn’t work out and they can’t find a job, then they have to stick with the odd jobs.” These odd jobs, jobs you do not need a university degree for, are rejected by many young graduates since they decrease their social status. Jobs in construction, cleaning, secretary etc, are often easy to find, but refused by the younger generation who spent 12 years studying.

### Competitive society

During high school the focus is mainly on passing the exams, as parents and teachers put great effort in keeping students motivated to study. Hayeong explains: “In high school, our parents and teachers say going to a good university is your teenage goal, and after that you can do whatever you want to do, but that’s not true, after passing the huge test there are other pressures you have to face.” With those pressures she means, looking for and finding a job. When talking about corporations, Koreans make a distinction between small and large corporations. Most graduates aim to find a job at the latter. In this category, companies like LOTTE, Naver (Korean Google), Hyundai, LG, Samsung are prime examples. The work ethic at the companies is often outrageous compared to for example the Netherlands. My informant Rebecca told me about her friend who works at Hyundai. She leaves for work, six times a week, around 7am and finishes work around 10 or 11pm. Rebecca added that she and her friend often joke about the job paying very well, but results in her friend not having any time to spend all that money. Working in large corporations means being able to save money, but

---

<sup>3</sup> Add importance scholars in Confucianism

losing a large piece of your social life. Smaller companies on the other hand offer a less stressing schedule, but pay significantly less than their counterparts. A male friend of me who works at a small advertising company told me that even though he is very happy at the place he works, his family and friends keep making comments about his wage, and how it is better for him to work at a larger and more renowned company.

However, job interviews for large companies are strenuous and demanding. Candidates applying are required to pass an exam related to the function, and an exam related to your personality, both prepared by the company. The latter's function is to test the candidates compatibility with the company, the work ethic, and the other employees. Next to the exams, there are interviews that can range from three to even five different interviews. As the number of applicants can reach five hundred, it is common to have interviews in groups of three or four. The competition is so severe, my informant Jiyeon called it a survival game.

Furthermore, the company culture can add pressure on employees as there is a strong hierarchy in the company. Those who have higher ranks possess more power and can dictate their juniors around. Taeyoung, who refuses to work at a Korean firm and is doing freelance work, expressed her frustration about this aspect of Korean culture. "Whoever is older than you, [or] has a top position, you cannot question them or answer them back. You have to obey and respect them." As juniors, there is no possibility to ask about or question the decisions of your seniors, that means questioning their ability and knowledge. This results in a limited space for creativity, new ideas, and moving space for the rookies.

From their early years, South Koreans, are taught to be competitive about grades, Universities, and job applications. As Yoobin pointed out: "Everything is a competition. Everything is very hard and tiring." The focus is on what others do, instead of their own goals and dreams. "How am I performing and how is the rest performing." (Taeyoung). The pressure levels are high and results in many South Koreans wanting to fled their country to obtain a more peaceful life. Hyeri for example, revealed she wants to live abroad. " If I was single I would live here forever, but if I would have to get a family and give birth to a baby. I don't want to live here or give this life to my baby. Everything is so linked to competitiveness, everything is so stressed. I need to earn money and everything is expensive, inflation is becoming severe, I'm not sure if I can live with my family here." Another informant who shared Hyeri's view is already planning to move to Europe. Their frustration, showcases the alarming pressure and stress levels of youngsters, but specifically the severity of this problem in South Korean society.

## Hell Joseon

The concept of *Hell Joseon*, used by young South Koreans, covers this severity very well. The strong connotation of Hell and the despair behind it becomes visible when I asked my informants to explain *Hell Joseon* to those who never heard of it. Firstly, *Joseon* refers to the name of Korea after King Taejo took power in 1388 and founded the Joseon dynasty in 1392. The prevailing philosophy chosen by Taejo was Neo-Confucianism whose influence is still visible in modern Korean society.

Ahyun explained the youth chose Joseon and not Korea because “society is still not modern. It is still behind the trends and development.” *Hell Joseon* is a cynical word to describe how people have come to feel and call themselves slaves since they need to match the expectations, even if they don’t want. It’s a society in which dreams and reality clashes. “There is so much pain, pressure, people [came up with] *Hell Joseon*. Technically it’s pressure, stress that we see and feel, consciously and unconsciously.” (Taeyoung). There is a sentiment of having no control over your own life, but also of deceitfulness: “[humans are treated] human as commercialized material for profit and work purposes. It’s very hard to find a trustful relationship to build with one another.” (Minjung). She added that Koreans considered the tiring culture as natural, but as she spoke to foreigners . The realisation came that the lifestyle in Korea is indeed *Hell Joseon*.

Yoobin spoke about how the term *Hell Joseon* is used because it literally feels like living in a hell if you live in Korea. “It is too hard to get a job and because of the expensive rent, people are not happy because they are so overworked. Life goes on without me. That’s how it feels.” In *Hell Joseon*, Koreans seem to be on survival mode, all of the time. For, the generation born in the 90s experienced a severe financial crisis or as Koreans have named it, the IMF crisis<sup>4</sup> in the late 1990s. “Since we were born, we always heard Korea is in danger. [Due to the crisis] we didn’t really have an economic boost time, we did not experience that. In our parent’s generation it was possible to find a house if you work, now it’s impossible.” (Minji). Not only economically it is challenging to live in South Korea, but conforming to social norms makes South Koreans feel very frustrated (Yejin). However, choosing not to conform to these

---

<sup>4</sup> The IMF crisis was caused by the severe foreign exchange shortage on the brink of default of South Korea in December 1997, and bailed out by the IMF Standby Credit Facility and other international financial supports (IMF, n.d.). Surely it was not the crisis caused by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but rescued by IMF.



unwritten rules results in people feeling an outsider, and getting questioned about their choices constantly.

In this paragraph an important issue is described by my informants. The level of competitiveness in society is extremely high, due to the previous financial crisis and the education fever due to the high status that is given to scholars in Confucian ideology. This level of competitiveness has reached a level, in which a new category is introduced: appearances. For those who are not considered beautiful in South Korea according to the narrow beauty ideals, the next logical step is cosmetic surgery. The distinct aspect of competitive society is that people have to put a lot of effort into their appearance in order to deserve better life conditions (Yoon, 2013) since "society rewards those who managed their bodies appropriately and apply real sanction to those who did not" (Kim, 2003, p. 108)

### [Korean cosmetic surgery](#)

Before diving in, it is essential to state the difference between cosmetic surgery and plastic surgery for readers new to the cosmetic surgery for the two terms are often thought to be the same. Plastic surgery is defined as a surgical specialty dedicated to the reconstruction of facial and body defects due to birth disorders, trauma, burns, and disease. Plastic surgery is intended to correct dysfunctional areas of the body and is reconstructive in nature (CACS, n.d.). While on the other hand cosmetic surgery is a unique discipline of medicine focused on enhancing appearance through surgical and medical techniques. Cosmetic surgery can be performed on all areas of the head, neck and body. Because treated areas function properly but lack aesthetic appeal, cosmetic surgery is elective.

There were no plastic or cosmetic surgery techniques available in Korea around 1945. However, medicine in Korea took a new direction with the entry of Western doctors to Korea after the country gained independence from Japan. Plastic surgery, then, fully commenced during Korean War, when American doctors performed eyelid surgery on Korean patients. Later, illegal medical practices such as rhinoplasty and breast augmentation were introduced from Japan (KSPRS, 2006). Nowadays the industry is booming. The most popular cosmetic surgical procedures performed in Korea are blepharoplasty, i.e. eyelid surgery which creates a visible fold to the upper eyelid and widens the eye, and rhinoplasty, i.e. nose surgery which augments the tip and dorsum of the nose and constructs a desirable 'pointy' (as opposed to wide and flat) tip of the nose. Also, jaw reshaping which reduces the angular prominence of the lower jawbone is becoming increasingly popular, and affordable (Holliday & Elfving-

Hwang, 2012).

Furthermore, Korean cosmetic surgery can be distinguished from other countries due to the following reasons. The Korean term for cosmetic surgery is Seonghyeong or 성형, which translated to English signifies “reform”. Unlike the negative connotation of cosmetic surgery in western countries (artificial and man-made), in Korea the word reform exerts a positive connotation among people. Seonghyeong is considered a “rebirth of a new life” and makes the individual “transform to be more beautiful” (EYK, 2013). According to my informant Jiyeong, “ Korean society really doesn’t hesitate rebuilding or reconstructing. They don’t care, and they don’t hesitate. As a comparison, even buildings we like big re-buildings and reconstructions. It’s kind of the culture. So, they try reconstructing even the face.” The other reason, is the fact that cosmetic surgery is not done as an enhancement of the patient’s original facial features. The surgery is rather dedicated to reshape patients’ features to an identical form of beauty standards, fitting to the cultural-societal preferred perception of beauty. Figure 1 shows this tendency towards moulding women to look alike. In the picture we see the preferred V-Shape chins, double eyelids, big eyes, and plump under-eye belts, which add an innocent, childlike smiling-eye look to the individual.

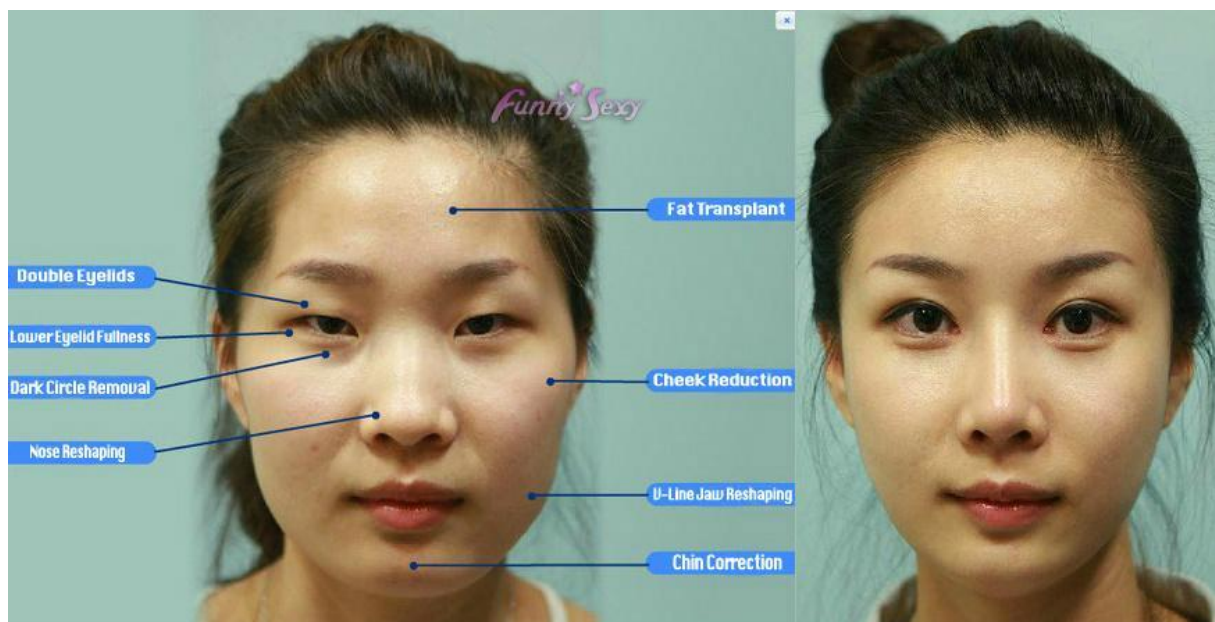


Figure 1: Before and After picture (Source: <https://hypescience.com/como-cirurgioes-plasticos-sul-coreanos-estao-criando-problema-com-fotografia-de-passaporte/> )

### Beauty Belt

Korean aesthetic surgery clinics also reached to an unprecedented scale beyond other countries, with approximately 600 clinics clustered in the Apgujeong-Gangnam area alone.

This area is also known as the Korean “Beauty Belt”. In this area, the advertisements for cosmetic surgery and cosmetic surgery clinics are numerous and people with fresh bandages are a common sight. The streets are lined with dermatology and plastic surgery clinics, body contouring clinics, anti-aging clinics and other beauty-related businesses. In addition, there are many fashion boutiques and accessories and cosmetics shops. The beauty belt is a cluster of clinics, companies and stores dealing in beauty.

### A Korean Attitude

The overall attitude towards cosmetic surgery in South Korea is “Why not?”. Except for three of my informants, everyone I encountered during my two visits to Korea, shared the view “If you can become prettier, why not?” This perception invoked my interest to research which reasons are behind this view. These will be discussed in the sections Confucianism, patriarchal society and the entertainment industry.

A resurrecting argument for the high intake of cosmetic surgery in South Korea is attempting a western look. Multiple informants also mentioned this argument when questioned why many females undergo cosmetic surgery. Also in the literature, the case of South Korea is often discussed with an underlying view conveyed by ideas that western countries are the ones holding the definition of standard beauty and that Koreans are imitating Caucasian facial features. The argument of westernization, and trying to look western, although brought up by many informants lacks to explain phenomena as the Beauty Belt, parents gifting their daughters a cosmetic surgery, procedures of calf trimming or cheekbone trimming, and beauty ideals close to the features of a doll. Using this notion to explain the surge of cosmetic surgery in South Korea fails to comprehend the complexity of Korean history, culture and society. Therefore this thesis argues against this simplification for it lacks consideration of localized discourses that intersect with more globalized practices of cosmetic surgery (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012). Instead, we should acknowledge Korea’s strong sense of nationalism, as well as its national relationship with other regional powers, for example Japan, and include those elements if we want to obtain an understanding of the cosmetic surgery craze in Korea.

### Anti-Japan

Japan annexed Korea in the year 1910 and brutally colonized the country till the year 1945. In this period Korea witnessed the imposition of a western-style modernization in via a colonizing Japanese culture, which emphasized its own superiority over ‘backward’ Korea (Pai, 2000). After the annexation of Korea, Japan enforced a cultural assimilation policy.

Herein, Koreans were forbidden to keep their Korean names since Japan imposed a new family name system. The Korean language was removed from the required school subjects in Korea in 1936, and it became forbidden to write or speak the Korean language in schools, businesses, or public places under penalty of death. (Cuming, 2011). Furthermore, large numbers of Koreans became victims of Japanese brutalities during this period. As many as 200,000 women were forced to be “comfort women” to Japanese soldiers while men were enslaved and forced to perform manual labour (Soh, 2008).

Since the liberation in 1945, predictably, much effort has gone into highlighting the ‘un-Japaneseness’ of the Korean people (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012). After the colonial period, immediately Korean nationalistic discourses mobilized the West as a way of rejecting Japan as the self-declared bearer of civilization. (ibid.) The Koreans were eager to differentiate themselves from the Japanese and therefore searched for a national identity termed as *Han’gukillon* or as “who are the Koreans” (Pai, 2000) Constructing “Korean” Origins, 258). An important figure in this period was Yi Kwang Su, the most celebrated literary scholar of the early Japanese colonial era, who described Koreans as *sonmin*, a “good race”, synonymous to “virtuous”, and “high-class”. The term *sonmin* is the direct opposite of the word *chosenjin*, used to describe the Japanese race. It implies “inferior,” “backward” and “servile.” Yi Kwang Su’s declaration clearly reflected the Koreans’ hostility towards the Japanese. To specifically distinguish between the Koreans and the Japanese, Na Se-Jin - Korea’s most quoted physical anthropologist- describes:

“The Korean is of medium to tall height, among many races of the world. The neck is thin and long, and because of the superior development of the Korean’s body and muscular structure, the posture is straight and erect. The calf is long, and since every part of the body’s measurements are very even, the Korean resembles the well-proportioned stature of the Europeans and Americans [rather than the Japanese].” (Pai, 2000: 260)

We see that as an anti-colonial discourse, the western body was mobilized in defiance of the Japanese standards of beauty (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012). This post-war situation showcases how appearances, faces and bodies, have been deployed in political and local struggles through complex interplays of sameness and difference (ibid.). While in contemporary Korea particular forms of Japanese popular culture are embraced and emulated (sometimes themselves imported from elsewhere). While in contemporary South Korea, different forms of Japanese popular culture are embraced and emulated, remnants of negative sentiments towards Japan linger among the nation. Movies set in this colonial period are

visited in large numbers. An example is the film *Assassination*<sup>5</sup>, which became the year's biggest box-office hit in the country, and taking its place as the eighth highest-grossing domestic film of all time (Michel, 2015). "It's like Japan and Korea have a love-hate relationship, hate because of colonization, but Koreans also love the culture and fast-pacedness of Japan." (Taeyoung)

### Physiognomy

After Korea's liberation in 1945, the Korean War and the division in North and South Korea in 1953, South Korea endured a series of dictatorships and rapid industrialization, quickly transforming from an agrarian to an industrialized nation with an insatiable need for labour (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012). During this period, creating a national identity was essential in order to create a sense of a unified South Korea after the previous wars and colonial periods. Herein, Neo-Confucianism, became a synonym for 'Koreanness' and was quickly embraced as the authentic culture of Korea. (Moon, 1998) As a consequence, many Koreans re-embraced traditional forms of divination, such as astrology and physiognomy, which were seen as 'authentic' elements of Korean culture (Kim, 2005). Physiognomy, or the art of face reading, has been practiced for centuries in Korea as a way of predicting a person's future. (The New York Times, 2006)

For instance, light pale skin is one of the most pursued female beauty standards since the ancient dynasties in Korea. The pursuit of white skin in Korea is due to the fact people believe such a feature shows the female's inner virtue as transparent, innocent, pure, elegant, and free of any corrupted thoughts. Therefore, the rich class used to "wash their faces with peach flower water to make their skin clean, white, and transparent" during the Joseon dynasty (Lee, et al., 2008)

Nowadays, around half of all Koreans believe that one can 'read' a person's character by looking at their face (Kim, 2005). A couple examples mentioned by my informant are: Having

---

<sup>5</sup> Set in the 1930's, an assassination plot takes place. The assassination plot is intended to take out a pro-Japanese group. Yeom Seok-Jin (Lee Jung-Jae) is an agent from the interim government. He plans out the assassination plot and gives order to An Ok-Yoon (Gianna Jun). An Ok-Yoon is a deadly sniper and she works with Soksapo (Cho Jin-Woong) and Hwang Deok-Sam (Choi Duk-Moon). She takes on the mission due to her strong desire to see Korea's independence. Meanwhile, Hawaii Pistol (Ha Jung-Woo) is a contract killer. He and his partner Younggam (Oh Dal-Su) are hired to take out An Ok-Yoon and her assassination team.

an *aegyo sal* (puffiness under the eyes) means having luck in love, and living a prosperous and happy life. Having a mole under the eye is seen as negative, as your life will have a lot of troubles causing the person to shed a lot of tears (Taeyoung). Other accounts also shared that dark spots under the eyes, called teardrops, predict loneliness and removal of those stands for warding off bad luck. While fat on the cheeks is something unwanted in the west and most people would want to remove. Korean women who want to help their husbands achieve a successful business, plump their cheeks at a cosmetic surgery clinic, for plum cheeks stand for a blossoming business. In South Korea, one out of 10 patients ask surgeons to operate on them based on what they believe would bring good fortune in the future," said by Lee Won Suk, a cosmetic surgeon.

The strong belief that one's facial features are directly or indirectly responsible for positive or negative future outcomes may have been very influential in the large acceptance and normalization of invasive surgery in Korea.

### Healing the Self

Cosmetic surgery for Koreans holds the power to change the future, but also to heal problems with the psyche. Often people who are insecure about or dissatisfied with their facial features can suffer greatly, for they are confronted with it every day in the mirror. Seohyun, for example shared: "I had small eyes, and that was my big complex. I wanted to have big eyes so I did double eyelid surgery. After the surgery I got more confidence for my appearance. I can do my make-up in more various ways. I'm really satisfied with my surgery." The significance and effect of cosmetic surgery on one's life after the surgery are very tangible in Korea, as people can truly sense how differently they look and how differently they are treated by others after appearance-enhancement operations. According to Huss-Ashmore, many South Koreans patients describe their post-surgery life positively, and consider the procedure a "healing" experience (Huss-Ashmore, 2000). Cosmetic surgery herein transforms the self, 'me' into 'the real me', the me I always wanted to be, using the body to heal the psyche. This view of body and psyche being intertwined is circular; not only are Koreans of opinion that better looking people are better and more successful people, but they feel that improving their own appearance could actively lead to the improvement of one's psyche.

### My personal encounter

My own experience at a cosmetic surgery consultation was surprisingly very pleasant. Via the (English) website of JK Medical Group I filled in the request for a consultation, and was met with a rapid reply through my email to confirm the appointment. The clinic was near

Apgujeong station, an area plastered with cosmetic surgery ads left and right. Nervous I entered the clinic and was welcomed by two friendly looking females who spoke to me in English and handed me a form to fill in. In this form questions about my native country, previous procedures and how long my stay in South Korea is. After filling the form I had the time to look around for some time, the white walls and tiles are contrasted with the golden letters JK to give off a vibe of extravagance. The females working wore a uniform consisting of a navy blue knee-short skirt, a white blouse and the same navy blue blazer. On their chest a name card and the languages they spoke. For, they also function as interpreters for foreign customers. Before my interpreter came in a lady with swollen eyelids with some bruises around the lids were seated in front of me. My guess was that she came for a check-up appointment. When I walked with JinJoo, the name of the female accompanying me, (only ladies worked there, except for the doctors who are all male). We took the elevator to the third floor, together with us in the elevator are a woman and man in their fifties, with a female in her teenage years. I could sense the girl being nervous as she was looking down the whole time, and I guessed she was also here for a consultation, maybe for her eyes. As I stepped out of the elevator the clinic seemed to have made place for a five star hotel. Marble floors, a hallway with rooms on both sides, and an amazing smell. My consultation room was small, there was a couch where I sat down, in front of me were a mirror, brochures, and napkins. I explained to JinJoo what I was doing here, I was curious what the surgeon would say about my purple under eyes, and that I became curious because of my research. I asked her why she thought so many people opted for cosmetic surgery, her answer was: “because being pretty is important, why not be pretty?” She left for a while and I was left to look at the LCD screen in front of me of stories of people who had undergone cosmetic surgery, and ads for their cosmetic products. After 10 minutes she returned with the surgeon. I could ask anything about procedures. The surgeon understood everything I said in English and responded in Korean, for JinJoo to translate. He did not suggest anything but asked what I wanted to change. I explained about my purple eyelids and apparently there is a procedure for it called blepharoplasty. Fat from the stomach can be used to cover up the veins causing the purple colour. In addition the muscles that shape the wrinkle in the form of under-eye bags can be stretched to have fresh looking eyes. The price is 2,250,000 Won (Around \$ 1900). Curious about other procedures, I asked the surgeon what other things he noticed about my face that could be changed to enhance my appearance. A question I later regretted, since he did not refrain from pointing out all the flaws. I ended up with a suggestion for Fat grafting to give my long face more structure, Liposuction to remove my double chin, and straightening the



nose a bit since it was slightly askew. More interestingly, after the surgeon has left the room JinJoo noticed I was staying for another month, and tried convincing me of getting the eye procedure. In seven days My eyes would have healed, and the price is incomparable with other places. The professionalism of the clinic towards its clients, the luxurious after-care of the patients and the price are very convincing for those still unsure about undergoing a procedure. As I was leaving JinJoo handed me her card with a phone number I could call or text whenever I had questions. At that moment I understood the phrase “why not?” even more. The process of becoming prettier is rapid, convenient, priced reasonably and the advanced technology has made success rates very high. I left the clinic after waving JinJoo goodbye and remembered something my friend Taeyoung told me “When we get old and wrinkly let’s meet in Seoul and get young again!”.

### Confucianist influence

Conformity in South Korea is visible as soon one arrives. My sister’s reaction, who has never been to Seoul, a minute after disembarking the bus, was: “Is there a ground rule here people cannot break?” Knowing what she pointed out, I deliberately asked what she meant, she explained that everyone was wearing the same clothes and looked the same. Foreigners in Korea are often shocked at how strictly everyone is following the current trends in clothes, hair and makeup. When I asked my informants where the tendency to conform came from, those who were able to answer named (Neo-)Confucianism. Yi Hye Gyung, a research professor in the Institute of Humanities of the Seoul National University, emphasized that Neo-Confucianism influenced the Joseon Dynasty even more than it did Japan and China (Gyung, 2011). Therefore, it’s of significance to shortly introduce Confucianism, to understand South Korean society. Ye Jin shared her opinion on conformity, explaining it comes from traditional values that their parents and grandparents have. “They adapted the concept of Confucianism, [in which] family is very important. Being together in harmony is very important. Doing something else out of those values and norms, you are considered an outsider. That is the concept they had.”

### Collectivism

The crucial concept of harmony YeJin spoke of is one of the core Confucian ideas, and a key value in Korean society. (Levi, 2013). Herein, all forms of open conflict are avoided. According to Torbjörn Lodén (2006), the guiding philosophy for familial and business relations in Korean society is harmony. From young age Korean children are taught to act in



harmony with the surrounding order. Therefore, in Korean society there is great emphasis “on politeness, on working together for the universal<sup>6</sup>, rather than on an individual basis.” (Levi, 2013) Korean society therefore, is highly collectivistic (Phuong-Mai et al., 2005). In societies like Korea, each person born dissolves into a collective entity, either the family or the group. This means the emphasis is placed on loyalty to the group and group orientation, for it is the group that gives one a social identity, provides a feeling of security, and receives the rewards of service. (Bell & Chanbong, 2003). In other words, the strong group feeling results in women choosing cosmetic surgery out of collectivity, rather individualism. Furthermore, if multiple members of the group are undergoing cosmetic procedures, it becomes only natural and self-explanatory others will also undergo cosmetic procedures. Group assurance is still strongly evident in Korean society as indicated by Yoobin: [There is a] community culture in our country. Do you know the word *jeong*? People help each other and care about each other positively. That’s the reason that kind of word is in our language because in our culture people care about each other a lot. If you don’t care about each other, why be polite in the first place? They are also very curious about each other.” The existence of the concept *jeong* in the Korean vocabulary and culture, again highlights the community culture in South Korea. The word *jeong* with its origin in Confucian philosophy has notions of happiness, anger, worries, sadness, joy, hate and fear as seven emotions of humanity as defined in Confucianism (Yang & Kelly, 2009). *Jeong* refers to an unconsciously formed psychological bond with somebody or something through contacts over time (Kim (1993). It is the fundamental base of Korean relationships (Lim, 1993) and has reinforced the prevalence of affective emotions, similar to family ties. Two major characteristics of those who practice *jeong* are sympathy and concern for others (Choi & Choi, 1990). The family in Korea serves as the most important prototype in human relations (King & Bond, 1985), and Korean adolescents view parental control as an indication of warmth (Kim et al., 1992). Inter-dependence and intense involvement among family members becomes therefore an essential ingredient in Korean society. Furthermore, the perceived homogeneity of Korean society and culture (due to virtually no racial or ethnic minorities: Lee, 1998a, 1998b), and total norm conformity leads to feelings of sameness and the formation of *jeong* in terms of social interdependence and emotional support (Park, 1990). This results in Koreans to view social relations as nothing more than an expansion of this family relationship (Lee, 1990). An abundance of *jeong* in society is the reason people are so

---

<sup>6</sup> Neo-Confucian scholars thought that in accordance to world-view of Neo-Confucianism, the ethical ability of the individual could generate peace in the universe.

curious and interested in each other. *Jeong* is perceived as beneficial due to its protective nature, however it holds a constraining edge. People constantly pay attention to each other, which signifies that behaviour or appearances outside of the norm get pointed out. For example, a comment about one's large forehead is out care for the person. The concept of *jeong* allows individuals to denote each other's imperfection: "In Korea its normal to ask with friends: You look thin, you look fat, why do you have a pimple, you look black, you look white. It's okay but one time when you came back from your travel, you gained weight and I told you, Oh you gained weight and then I realized it didn't feel right to say that so I reflected about that. In Korean culture is okay to say hey you're fat" (Minjung). Two years ago, when my friend Minjung pointed out my extra kilos, I had trouble understanding why Koreans are rather blunt towards each other. With the concept of *jeong*, it finally became clear to me, it is part of their protectiveness and interest in each other.

Thus, pointing out to a friend that that he/she has gained weight, or that he/she is looking terrible, is not considered impolite; on the contrary, it is a duty that must be performed to help the friend in question to do something to improve his/ her physical appearance (Galézeau, 2013). Therefore, Koreans advise each other constantly about cosmetic surgery out of *jeong* for each other. An example hereof is, 'You would look better if you do your nose!' or 'Your eyes would look more beautiful with a surgery.' These phrases are ordinary and typical for conversation between female friends.

Therefore, *Jeong* can turn into severe pressure when multiple people continue to pinpoint someone's insecurity or different style. "In south Korea people really get interested in other people, maybe you feel it also. They will look at you and watch you whenever you go to work or walk the streets. Everybody is looking. If someone is dressed really casually, people will say: Hey are you majoring in sports? Mocking them or laughing at them." (Hayeon) This is why many South Koreans choose to follow the fashion trend rather than being gossiped about. Hayeong confirms this, "lots of Korean people just wear similar clothes, if it is popular that season everyone wears that. If it's good looking everybody follows that, if they don't they will think they are not good looking. (Hayeong). I was able to experience this phenomenon myself as the winter approached in South Korea. The temperature started to drop and I started noticing males and females wearing a black (sometimes white) knee-length padded coat. Gradually the numbers of people wearing this type of coat kept increasing. Before I left, these coats were an omnipresent sight on every street nationwide, and every store that sold coats

had its own rack of black long padded coats. This allowed me to see how rapidly a trend disperses among the youth.



Figure 2: The black coats trend on the street. (Source: <https://www.koreaexpose.com/long-padding-winter-jacket-uniformity-korea/> )

The black coats analogy stands for all aspects of Korean life, including cosmetic surgery. The principle of fearing to stand out when not following the cosmetic trend is visible in the argument: “Everyone does it, so why shouldn’t I?” (Youtube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OZ3vRIve1Q>).

To be beautiful, a pretty face is not the only requirement, a skinny body is a must. Therefore, weight is an additional aspect of pressure for Koreans. Walking on the streets of Seoul, it is striking how skinny the women usually are. With the ideal height of 162 cm and a weight of 42 kilograms, many Korean women starve themselves to achieve a slender body. My friend Najung whom I had fried chicken with, shared with me that the next day she won’t eat anything because of the calories she has to burn. Her reasons to diet were her mom’s pressure on her to stay skinny, and the fact that she is aware of people gossiping. Yoobin also shared a similar viewpoint “A lot are losing weight even if they’re are not fat. Korean women are very skinny, I think so but they think they should lose weight.” Yoobin. In short, there is a narrow standard for how women should look. “People elsewhere have their own beauty style and

their own standards that they think this is pretty or not, but in Korea everyone has the same beauty standard. They don't respect the personal individual beauty." (Hyeri). Mostly because of the contrasting view on individualism and the tendency of collectivism.

### The conceptual self

The reason South Korean society is less individualistic is due to how the self is conceived. As a comparison, the western concept of the self, denotes *I* and the ontological being inherent to *I*. As a conscious being, *I* can objectify, introspect, organize and restructure the ontological being intrinsic to *I* (Danziger, 1997 cited in Choi 1997). In the Korean society, consisting of *jeong* relationships, individuals are imperfect partial beings (Choi, 1991), and this leads to strong feelings of collective identity. Therefore, there is a weak tendency to emphasize the self in Korea. Instead, Koreans use the terms *we* and *our* to as a substitute for the terms *I* and *my*, even in situations where the latter is more suitable (Choi, 1990). Koreans do not speak of my house or my mother, but of our house, our mother, our beauty. Therefore, the reason of women to choose for cosmetic surgery because others are also choosing for it, instead of an individualistic reason is valid in South Korea. Koreans' reserved attitudes toward *I* is due to a couple reasons. People are seen as individualistic in the Korean culture if they stress *I* in social interactions for the reason that Individualism is almost identical to egoism in the eyes of Koreans. In a similar line, emphasis on one's self is interpreted as excluding or rejecting the other person from the social and situational context (Choi & Kim, 2003). Something considered against the principles of Confucianism where mutual dependence between people is necessary. There are five key relationships in Confucianism: Emperor-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger and friend-friend. The majority of these relationships are asymmetrical or hierarchical. These hierarchical relationships are meant to preserve the harmony and order in daily practice in the family and nation. (Neisser & Jopling, 2010). Naturally, people conceive of themselves predominantly in terms of their roles in relation to others and the self is defined by the relationship with in-group members (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, the Korean way of relating to others includes an assumption that "what is good for the group is also good for the self" (Koenig, 2010 in Neisser & Jopling, 2010). If other women are restructuring their face, I ought to do the same. This notion is of crucial importance in understanding conformity and the manner in which many south Korean females collectively choose for cosmetic procedures, without critically reflecting on the act itself.

## Confucianism and women

To those who are aware of the strong conformity, every day is a challenge. “Like every fast changing society in general, Korea is also adapting global trends [norms and values], and those global and our parents generation’s trends clash. We want to stand out and be different, but then the older generation and the generation above us, the one who hire us, the one having authority, they created the idea that we’re not supposed to do [stand out]. (Yejin.) It is clear, this generation of South Koreans are stuck in-between. The remains of Confucianism caused Korean society to be collectivistic in the sense that group behaviour is encouraged and individualism frowned upon. The harmony in society should be kept intact by following the rules of the group instead of one’s own. Therefore, cosmetic surgery is embraced by many with the argument of ‘everyone does it.’

As mentioned previously, this thesis will focus on South Korean women, therefore, and equally important for this is how neo-Confucianism, with its emphasis on clearly defined hierarchical roles for everyone in both public and private life, resulted in a significant backwards step for women's rights and status in respect to their position in previous Korean thought systems (Cartwright, 2016). Women in contemporary society are well aware of the effect of Confucianism on their lives. Ahyun shared with me that “In the past girls did not have the opportunity to work or study because of Confucianism. [The] elderly do not want women to be socially strong, and empowered. They do not want to acknowledge women and men have [the]same rights.” Instead there is still a strong belief in the stereotypical gender division. As an illustration she mentioned her friend’s parents who told their daughter to “not go to college, just get a job and then you can marry and not work.” (Ahyun). The older generation seems to still hold onto son preference as clear from Hyeri’s anecdote from her own family: “I have one cousin who is a boy, the same age as me, but he’s not better than me at all. My grandparents always care only about him, even their password of their home is his birthday. Like seriously? I felt that for my entire life until I get a bachelor degree better than him, they only care about him not me.” During the Korean holiday Chuseok, the holiday of ancestor worship, Confucian traditions become apparent as gender roles on this day are clearly defined: Women prepare the food for the ceremony, and men perform the ceremony. For the family meal in Hyeri’s case, “We have a males table and the girls table. My mom wanted me to go to the male table just to be the innovative girl, but my grandpa said I should sit there, have a meal with mom and grandma, with the other girls. I feel so ... It was unfair.” As a result of Confucian ideology, South Korea became a strongly patriarchal society, this in

its own way has an influence on the way cosmetic surgery is consumed in Korea. The patriarchal society is discussed in the next paragraphs, where feelings of frustration about the persistent gender issues in South Korea were high among all my informants. In the next paragraph we will dive deeper in their concerns and how they experience life in South Korea.

## Women in a patriarchal society

### Corporate life

When 600 years ago, South Korea adopted Neo-Confucianism as its official ideology, it strived to create a Neo-Confucian state following its teachings as closely as possible. In this ideology, the human body is sacred and should be respected and remain unaltered. (Lee, 1993). Neo-Confucian techniques of governmentality made a clear distinction between the genders. Men had to engage in “rituals and techniques of self-cultivation to develop a transcendent self – or the ‘selfless’ self which erased boundaries between self and others” (Kim, 2003). Women on the other hand were supposed to engage in “everyday practices of family and body reproduction within a Neo-Confucian system that considered women subjectless bodies” (ibid, 2003) On a daily basis, this means women’s concern is cultivating their bodies for their unborn children, delivering labour for the maintenance of the family, which reinforces the concept of their selves as primarily physical bodies. This ensured ownership over women’s bodies and their reproductive rights. However, after the Korean War and liberation of South Korea, and under Park Chung Hee's policies of rapid industrialization and modernization in the 1960s and 1970s, women’s role transformed into becoming a vital part of the burgeoning workforce. Their bodies had become important for nation building both as workers in the factory and as mothers at home, fulfilling their duty in the public and private sphere (Kim, 2003). Nonetheless, the expectation that a women’s priority is her husband and children remained. “even if you’re working and helping your husband in terms of finance, still as wife, mother, and woman you have a responsibility at home.” (Taeyoung). The term a good woman means “both being a good mother and being a successful professional woman. In south Korea there isn’t a good distribution of housework” (Jiyeon). Or as Yejin concluded Korean women have a double shift.” An example from Rebecca’s household and a reflection of the mindset of a generation reads: “When I think about my family, both my parents work, but still my dad doesn’t do anything. When my dad comes home and my mom comes later because she overworks, then my dad texts us in the family chat, what about my dinner? Women have more responsibility to work publicly and privately.” This strenuous pressure of

being active both outside and inside the house causes many women to quit their profession to focus on their ascribed role as a wife. “[Korean] women unlike western societies, we quit our jobs when we got a child. Now women want to develop their careers even more. [However,] the concept still exists in companies (Yoosang). The hesitation of seniors and higher-ups to hire women is thus rooted in the conviction that women leave the company eventually, since they will get married and conceive children. They assume “girls will get married and [become] pregnant, quit job in longest 5 years. So why hire so many girls. They prefer men more. If they choose limited amount, then they choose the pretty ones”. (Rebecca). In a situation where both the man and woman share the same qualification, the latter makes less chance to obtain the job. This is mirrored in the labour participation of females in Korea- only 52% is active (World Bank, 2017)-, and the skewed men-women ratio in the office, as stated by Minji “the ratio between women and men is 70% and at some [companies] 80%. I don’t think this ratio comes from difference in ability.” Furthermore, , the current ratio of women to men in upper management positions and public office is a meagre 1 to 9, according to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2016. At 114th, Korea ranks below some of the world’s least developed countries, such as Burkina Faso and Malawi (GGGR, 2016). The gendered selection method is highly problematic, especially in conjunction with the focus on appearances of the women. In the first stages of applying for a job in Korea, applicants are required to have a picture on the resumés. “the beautiful photoshopped [picture]”. The importance of this picture is mirrored in the large numbers of photo studios scattered around Seoul, who are specialized in taking professional photos and photoshopping them for the customers. “Some seriously think about having cosmetic surgery, because looking beautiful or nice is an advantage in the job interview. It’s sad because it only applies to women” (Hayeon). For women, there is an added condition of looking pretty to obtain the job. “In University, I have friends who go to job interviews. No one wears glasses. When they go they wear so much makeup, they tie their hair back, they wear high heels. Men just fix their hair and go, they wear glasses.” (Rebecca) Even though, appearances are not related to the qualities of the person to perform well, women are required to look pretty. “For guys it is not required to put on makeup, but here many people want women to decorate themselves.” (Yoosang)





Figure 3: During lunch break in the offices district: as visible on the picture most teams consist of one woman.  
(Source: Own picture)

Furthermore, women find company culture to be rather burdensome. Especially the concept of *Hyesik*, an after-work activity for example is detested by many women. Hayeong explains: “In Korea if you work in a company, there is this stupid culture where you go eat together, an extra after work, it doesn’t have to do with work. You have to go there. Usually, it’s all guys, old men. I don’t know if I’m generalizing too much, but they don’t treat you as a person working in the company, but as a woman. If that person is beautiful, then they just make stupid comments. Even though it’s a compliment, I don’t want to hear how I look, I never asked them to look at me as a woman.” As *Hyesiks* are crucial to every company, not participating results in getting excluded from the group. In different Korean dramas I watched *Hyesik* is portrayed as highly uncomfortable for the women, as a lot of alcohol is included. These after work gatherings create the perfect opportunity and context for men to sexually assault female colleagues. According to a survey held by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in South Korea in 2015 on sexual harassment in the workplace, female respondents cited company dinners as the most frequent setting for sexual harassment (44.6%), and the most frequently cited forms of harassment included “sexualized analogies and appraisals of physical appearance”, “obscene talk and sexual jokes”, and “being forced to pour drinks or sit next to people at company dinners” (Hankyoreh, 2016). It is a severe problem, acknowledged



by society, as the Korean drama *Misaeng* achieved high ratings by showing these problematic issues in the workplace. The drama was especially popular among Korean white-collar workers in their twenties and thirties largely because its realism resonated with their experiences (Lee, 2014). “[*Misaeng*] showed how competitive company life is, there was an episode that showed all sexual assaults and problems working women have to go through, like wearing tight skirts in the company. If you go to the core of the problem, it’s a men-centred culture.”(Hayeon). Not only short skirts are an issue, often women are forced to participate in activities they are not comfortable with. An example that recently sparked anger is a group of new nurses at Hallym University Sacred Heart Hospital who were made to dance in skimpy outfits at work-related events.(Choon, 2017). Working conditions are evidently different for women compared to men.



Figure 4: Screenshot from the K-drama *Misaeng*

Those who settle upon not quitting the job after marriage, have to deal with all the previously mentioned, but it becomes more difficult when child birth is approaching. The maternity leave in South Korea depends whether you are a government official, work in a large, or small company. For government officials, the maternity leave is three years. However, “you cannot have that [the full three years], there is something called *nunchi* (Young), or ‘eye sense’. With *nunchi* is meant the skill in perceiving non-verbalized codes and understanding a situation (Yi & Jezewski, 2000). It is part of the high social sensitivity of Koreans (van Rijn et al., 2006). Young explained it as “Someone tells you to eat, it’s your food, but you’re uncomfortable to

eat it. So, even you're granted three years, the women cannot use all three years." Similar to this situation, Rebecca spoke about maternity leave at small companies, who most of the time give a one year leave. Her friend, "she got one year maternity leave for her first baby, the second time she could get one year, but the pressure of what others might think of her when she leaves again for so long, she took 4 months." Although Rebecca did not mention the term *nunchi*, it is clear that her friend sensed what the rest expects from her and acted accordingly. *Nunchi*, or the ability to read each other's minds and react to the needs of the other without explicitly stating them, is of great significance to understand the behaviour of South Koreans.

-Here *Nunchi* is discussed in the context of maternity leave, but it is of significance also in the context of cosmetic surgery. For instance, women applying for jobs or seeking romantic relationships sense they need to look pretty, for they know the focus on appearances in society. To succeed one needs to be socially sensitive and sense the context. It is *nunchi*-

Lastly, large corporations who provide higher wages compared to other companies, seem not to be open to the idea of maternity leaves. In view of how competitive and demanding the job is, it's unthinkable to leave for a long period of time. At Hyundai's newcomers introduction, they announced that women usually quit after three year. The time they reach their thirties and thus the age of marriage, since they are unable to keep up with the competitiveness of the company after marriage and childbirth (Rebecca). To illustrate the impossibility to grow in a company as a married woman she spoke of her experience at an internship at a marketing company. "There were five women and two men. The five women were all unmarried and in the age of 27 to 43. The two men, in their 30s and 40s, were both married and had babies. There is realised I want to work in a marketing company but if I want to marry I should think about it more." (Rebecca). In this example, the three women had to abandon the idea of marriage and children in order to focus on their careers and climb the corporate ladder, while the men are able to combine marriage and a career.

The unreliable child care system is still an apparent problem in South Korea, being the biggest hurdle for career mothers looking to scale the corporate ladder (Kim, 2015). "If you want to leave your kids, you need to ask your parents or sister, but they also have a life." (Taeyoung). Furthermore, Parents are doubtful to send their children away after footages of abuse incidents at day-care centres keep emerging (ibid., 2015). This resulted in waiting lists of more than a year at state-run centres that are cheaper and better maintained than private ones, with official data of the year 2015, showing as many as 98,000 children in line for a place in government centres.

These conditions have caused more women to rethink marriage, as most of my informants mentioned their aversion to marry. Hayeong, for example shared: “I studied a lot and went to a good university. Frankly speaking, I have a high possibility to have a good job and succeed in society, but still they expect me to ruin my career, to be a good mother. If a guy I want to marry tells me I want you to be a good mother, I won’t get married to him!” For Rebecca there is a visible trend in Korea: “Many of my friends don’t want to get married because then they will have a baby. They studied so long and then suddenly they become a mom forever.” Parallel to this is Minji’s outlook. “More and more women don’t get married these days, because in Korea if you marry as a woman you will be in a kind of hell. Although she laughed at her weighty statement, she resumed her clarification on a serious note. “The pressure is still on the woman, and that’s why we don’t want to have children. That means in the bigger picture the end of the career because we need to stop working when we need to raise a child.” It is fascinating to observe that even though women receive around 61% of what their male colleagues earn (OECD, 2016), and experience diverse struggles, women or at least my informants are determined and persistent to enter the labour market and to pursue the career they opt for.

## Appearances

### The face

With everyone following the fashion and diet trends the standard for appearances becomes very high. Especially if we zoom in on beauty of the face. The standard of beauty is found to be extremely high by all my informants, as they feel pressured to always look presentable. In South Korea, to look presentable is linked to make-up. “Overall society has an impression that not wearing makeup is not caring for yourself. (Hyeri). Many only realised this after travelling abroad. “I realised when I was in the Netherlands, a lot of friends only put make up if they had special occasion. In Korea, they put makeup on a daily basis. It is kind of an atmosphere. (Yoobin) “I agree that Korean women have a lot of interest in fashion and cosmetics but maybe most of that is because of social pressure. For example, so many girls are wearing makeup. If my friend is not interested or not using it. People will ask why are you not wearing makeup ... when coming to the office?” (Ahyun). Interestingly, most comments come from male colleagues or fellow students. A couple examples shared by my informants: “One of my friends couldn’t do her makeup and one male friend reacted to us and said why don’t you wear the makeup. I couldn’t recognize you. Can you please wear your makeup?” (Hyeri). “My first days at university, I didn’t put make-up, friends who were male would tell

me why didn't you put any makeup on! You look terrible! It is said as a joke, but they don't say things like that in other countries. There is that kind of pressure. (Yoobin). "It's so common for guys to make comments about girls." (Hayeon). Applying makeup has become a daily habit for many females, even though it contradicts their own values.

## Makeup

Zooming further on beauty of the face and make-up, it is remarkable how in South Korea makeup is applied. Jiyeong calls it: "A standard make-up face. Pale skin, rosy blush, bright lips, and simple eye makeup (Figure 5).

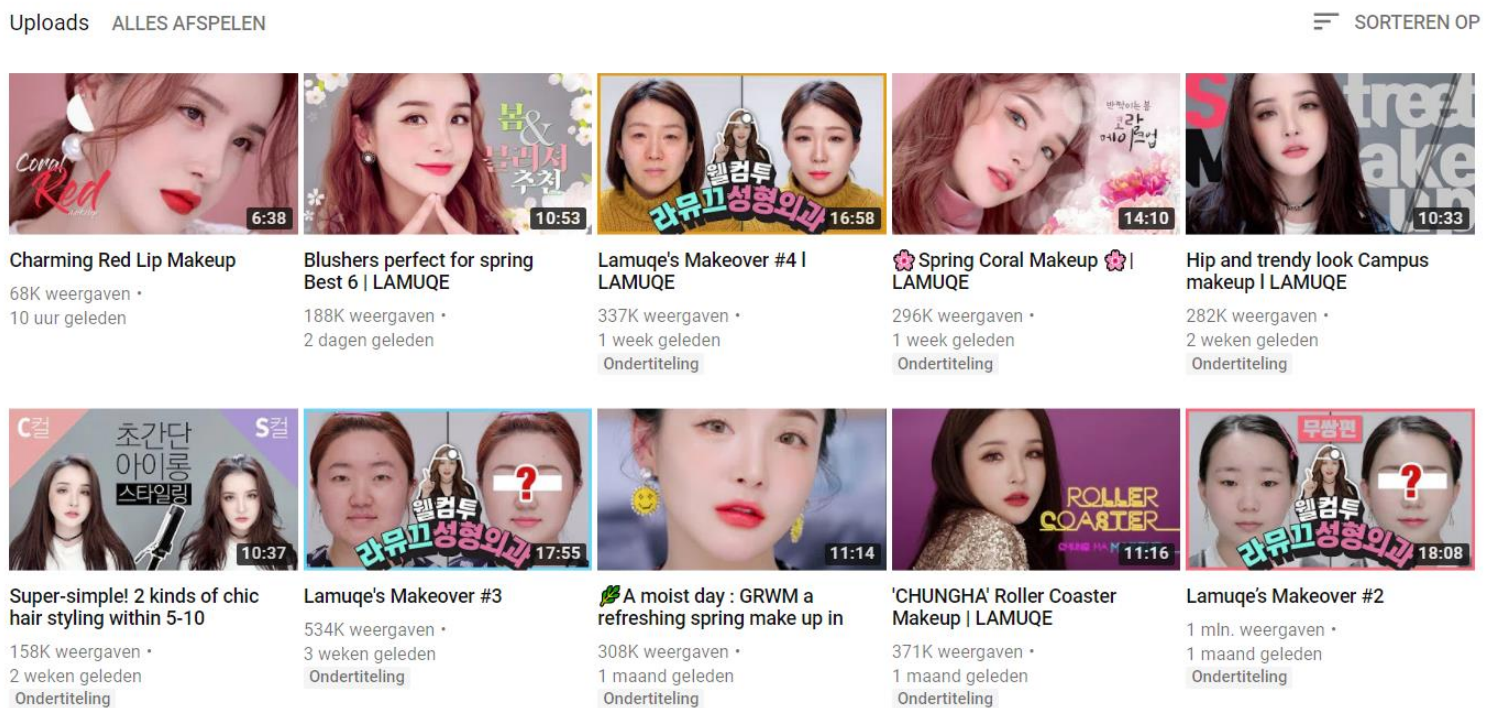


Figure 5: Screenshot of LAMUQE'S makeup tutorials

She added that the focus of the make-up is to look younger than your age, to look "Dong-an", even though you're an aged woman, the standards for the beautiful woman is usually trying to look 20." (Jiyeon). By making use of Botox and many other skin treatments at dermatology clinics, many older women spend lots of money to get rid of their wrinkles (Daehyun). As the aim is to look young and fresh, South Korean women rarely put on dark shades of eyeshadow, heavy contour or a dark lip colour. "You don't wear makeup that looks too aggressive or too strong like big eyebrows, brown lipstick, the kylie Jenner style. That style will never be accepted here now. we think it's cool, but guys will think it's too much, too aggressive" (Hayeong). Interestingly, she mentions women might like the strong make-up look, but abstain from actually applying it that way since it deviates from the norm. This norm is

portrayed by the well-known singer IU, who received the title Nation's Little Sister (국민 여동생), a title that refers to "a young female celebrity in her late teens to early twenties... [who is] cute, bright, and innocent. (Dramafever, 2012) "The style she wears is the standard image in Korea: Looking very young although she's 25." (Hayeong).

With makeup or cosmetic procedures many South Korean females aim to acquire a beautiful look. As mentioned previously, the standards to be considered beautiful are narrow and standardized. The ideal is to have a round forehead instead of a flat one, double eyelids that clear away the tired and lazy appearance of a monolid, *aegyo sal*, a medium-sized nose bridge, a clear "V-line" face shape, and lastly an extremely pale white skin (Kim, 2016). In the picture of IU below, these ideal face characteristics are portrayed.

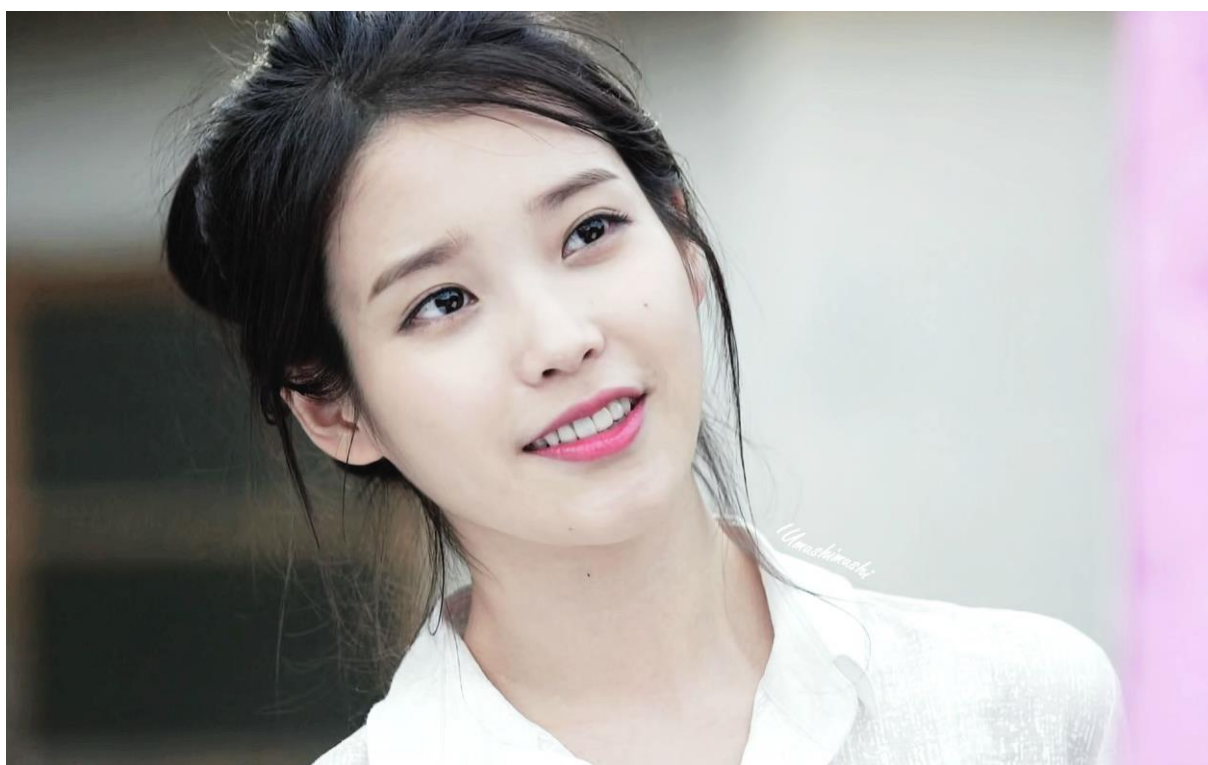


Figure 6: Singer/actress IU (Source: <https://www.dramafever.com/news/iu-returns-to-romantic-tv-drama-in-my-mister/>)

### **Cosmetic surgery**

Beauty is of influence on many aspects in the lives of Korean women, on the campus, in their jobs, and relationships. Therefore, it is only natural for many south Korean women to want to chase these beauty ideals. When makeup is not enough cosmetic surgery is the next logical



step. Discussing this subject in Korea is less sensitive than in other context, as the main attitude towards cosmetic surgery is: Why not? “Ten to 15 years ago when we see a woman who did plastic surgery, we would say look she did surgery, now It's more 50/50. It's their body, their beauty, if they can afford, why not.” (Taeyoung). The image of cosmetic surgery used to be negative as it was considered artificial. Nowadays if the procedure looks natural, it is fine. “Double eyelids and nose is natural, but your [facial]bones, jaw then they think hmm you're doing plastic surgery. You're fake.” (Rebecca) Key in cosmetic surgery is avoiding an extreme look that fails to look Korean. Furthermore, procedures that have failed and caused the person to look unnatural are met with great backlash and name calling. “if we say the failed result we call them plastic monster.” (Young). By merging the words for plastic surgery *songhyun susul* (성형 수술) and monster *gwaemul* (괴물) into the word Song-gwae, Koreans named the phenomenon of girls who have ‘overdone’ their plastic surgery. If the result is very bad and the woman is still ugly, then people make fun of it. (Haeyong). Related to Song-gwae is another well-known term in Korean society, Gangnam-unnie. Those who look the same but awkward and artificial. Not those beautiful ones after getting cosmetic surgery. Girls who look awkward (Hayeong). Gangnam refers to the district known for the large amount of cosmetic surgery clinics, and the place where these girls are often found walking. Unnie is the Korean word for a female, who is older than oneself. From my surroundings I heard many jokes about the Gangnam district and how it seems like a female has passed by you 15 times, but in reality they are different females who share an identical look.



Figure 7: A caricature of the Gangnam-unnie (Source: <https://onehallyu.com/topic/33631-how-does-someone-look-plastic/>).



Figure 8: A woman considered a Gangnam-unnie (Source: <https://onehallyu.com/topic/16069-what-does-a-gangnam-unni-look-like/>).

These jokes, and much harsher comments are also found on the internet. Websites are specifically created to shame and ridicule Gangnam-unnies. Some of these females even committed suicide due to the pressure and cruel comments on the internet, according to my informants.

An example case is Eli, previous member of the boy group UKISS introduced his eleven years older wife to the public. Ji Yeon-soo, who is known as a race model received a flood of comments online. A snippet of those comments are listed below

1. [+958, -61] Looks like Korean men like plastic surgery beauties after all
2. [+836, -70] So what hospital did she get all that work done? It came out nice;;
3. [+663, -38] She doesn't look 11 years older than him~
4. [+108, -6] I think I could see his wife at Myungdong ㅋㅋㅋ that face is so common
5. [+97, -4] Hmm... her work is a bit obvious... she shouldn't get any more done
6. [+60, -2] Looks like your typical import model face
7. [+59, -3] She has a strong plastic surgery monster look to her
8. [+56, -4] I'm a woman and I honestly don't find faces like her pretty at all ——
9. [+53, -3] Wow, that is some crazy plastic surgery work
10. [+50, -2] I honestly know at least 3 other women who look like her
11. [+44, -2] Looks like she went with the C package at Gangnam's plastic surgery
12. [+41, -3] Proves that men don't care if women got work done, as long as they look young and pretty

Source: (One Hallyu, 2016)

### **Cosmetic surgery as dollification?**

The obsession with looking younger and the make-up style associated with it, hides a deeper problem in society according to Jiyeong. “Here in Korea we have a paedophile culture: Our society has that kind of culture of treating an older woman as a girl. The make-up style here

makes the woman look very young. We have to convince those guys by the appearance that we will listen to them very well, we won't make them feel uncomfortable, we are nice, kind and shy looking. Those makeup trends are very connected to the paedophile culture." I found Jiyeong's claim during the interview quite strong, however some other informants seemed to agree with her viewpoint. "I'm trying not focus on misogynist society, but subconsciously, the way women fill the beauty standards is how men expect it. Men want a girl with long dark shiny hair, big eyes, an angelic look, white clean skin, nice outfit" Taeyoung. Males seem to have an influence on how females view beauty ideals.

Although many informants mentioned the West in relation to South Korean beauty ideals- the big eyes, double eyelids and a high nose bridge- the current Korean ideal beauty appear distinct from western beauty ideals. In the past, there might have been a stronger link between American and Korean beauty ideals since the influence of historic events and the American presence on the Korean peninsula cannot be overlooked. However, these have shifted over time and deviated from each other. "Before, the style was dark makeup and huge hair like America, but as time evolved our generation wanted a simple and natural look. We like to look at the cartoon version of Japanese manga: the big eyes, white face, long hair. Concept of beauty in Korea is not focused on sexiness or glam, but more on cute and natural and simple. Somehow you invoke the manly instinct to protect you, love you, and cherish you. I'm not saying Korean women say they want protection from a guy but want a feminine version of beauty (Taeyoung). The key of Korean beauty is related to a cute, young, fresh and shy look, unlike a bold and dark look popular in the west. Nowadays, the difference between the two have become so large, we need to search for further arguments overpassing the simple explanation of imitating western beauty ideals. The influence of Japan once again is significant herein.



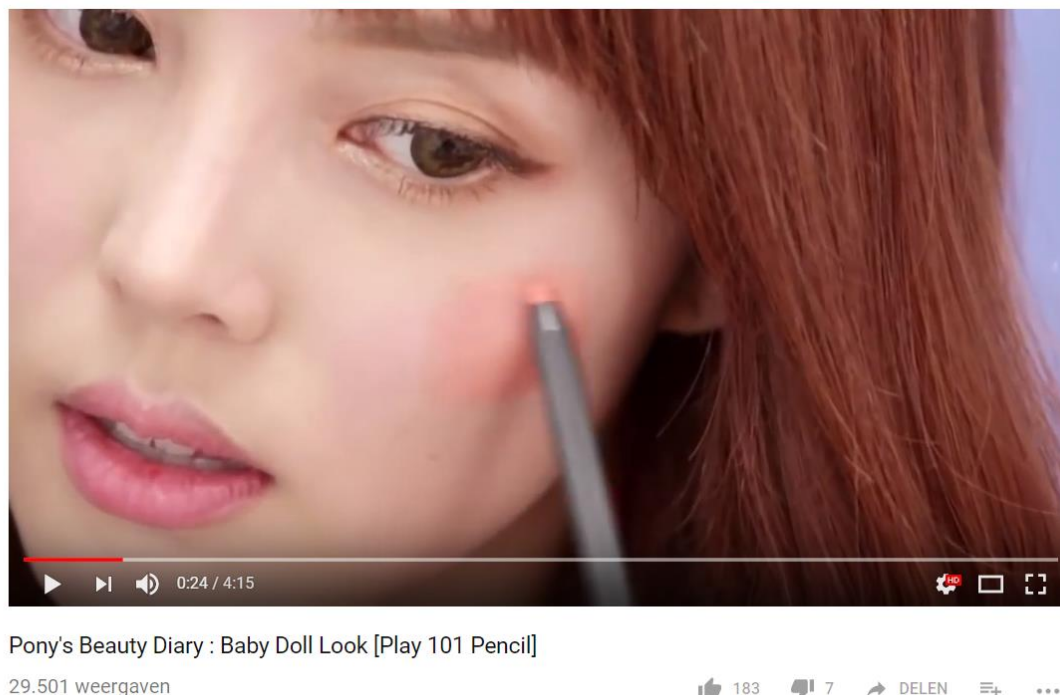


Figure 9: Screenshot of a Youtube Makeup tutorial by PONY, a famous makeup artist

Important in the informant's description of the beauty ideals is the reference to the Japanese manga, immensely popular among males in South Korea. From my experience, South Koreans consume large amounts of comics in the form of *manga*, *manhwa*<sup>7</sup>, webtoons, which can all be found online. When alone on any transportation I noticed young people to either play games on their smartphones or read some form of *manga* from their screen. The manner women are drawn in these comics reflects the beauty ideals I observed in South Korean society. Together with the concept of *aegyo*- cutesy behaviour-, prominently visible in Korean society there seems to be a tendency towards a doll-like ideal. *Aegyo*, pervades the private realm of couple-related behaviours of Korean adolescents and young adults and it is often perceived as attractive and desirable beyond limits of intimate relations. It entails acting charming yet childish, vulnerable and volatile, pretending sudden surprise or unmotivated sadness or anger including pounding of feet, lightly kicking the partner with closed fist, pout, bloated cheeks, distorted child-like voice, petrified and decontextualized linguistic elements implying helplessness or confusion, e.g. *Eoddeokhae*, *eoddeokhae?*, i.e. "What to do, what to do?" Therefore, the beauty ideals, the *aegyo*, and the clothing style seem to reflect an ideal of a young dollified Korean woman. In the literature, dollification is addressed by Pužar (2011), who dives deeper into this argument. With dollification is neither meant the insulting

<sup>7</sup> Korean comics and print cartoons

orientalist approach in the media towards Asian femininity, nor the heavily occurring metaphor in sex-related industries, but mostly the Korean character of beauty ideals leaning towards a doll.

Herein, leaving a judgement behind whether the latter is problematic or not, since being called a doll is unsettling for many yet perceived as a compliment by others. In the next paragraph I will discuss the field where these doll-like ideals are embodied and maintained, the entertainment industry and the media.

### Entertainment industry and the media

While in the past the attitude towards cosmetic surgery was negative, the media played a crucial role in transforming this attitude into a positive one. As cosmetic surgery techniques developed more, an increasing number of entertainers had cosmetic surgery to become more beautiful. After Koreans observed the changes in appearance, they became more accepting of it (Daehyun). Furthermore, cosmetic surgery is discussed openly and joked about in different shows. Entertainers make comments as “your eyes changed!”. Since it is often mentioned, Koreans came to think of cosmetic surgery as a very common thing. This section will discuss the entertainment industry of South Korea and how it is of influence on young females.

### Influence of K-pop

K-pop stands for Korean popular music, and while most articles about this subject highlight its global reach, in my research I’m interested in its influence in South Korea. K-pop entails a large portion of the entertainment industry, for these idols appear on different shows, and sometimes make their way into acting careers. While comedians do not have to be pretty, actresses and female idols cannot make their debut if they aren’t beautiful. Therefore, I will focus on the latter two.

For beginners, K-pop is a musical genre consisting of electronic, hip hop, pop, rock, and R&B music in South Korea. It differs from music produced in the West in the fact that it is mostly performed by groups, the focus on catchy tunes, and synchronized dancing (Yoon, 2010). The era of K-pop started around 1990 when the group Seo Taiji and the boys brought new catchy tunes to the public and won over the hearts of the public. The K-pop idol culture we are familiar with nowadays, began with the boy band H.O.T. in 1996, as K-pop grew into a subculture that amassed enormous fandoms of teenagers and young adults (The Economist, 2010). Simultaneously, President Kim Dae-jung saw the economic potential of K-pop during

the IMF crisis in 1998. He took action to restore the Korean economy by issuing a governmental intervention, called *Presidential Proclamation on Culture*. In this act priority was given to the cultural industries in the government budget, and large grants were issued to various organizations that introduced K-pop culture to other countries, facilitating the way for K-pop to grow further. (Kuwahara, 2014).

Three large companies emerged leading the Korean idol-pop, which are SM, YG and JYP. They have developed young idol groups independently since the mid-1990s, and it was in 2006 that each company began to competitively occupy a major portion of the Korean music market. Interestingly, each of these entertainment company has built up a line-up of idols who express the particular style of the management company. SM, founded by Lee Soo Man a singer in the 1980s, and the herald of idol industries, actively appropriates Japanese idol culture for Korean audiences and aims its idols at the global market. SM controls famous groups as Girls' Generation (girls), and Red Velvet. JYP (JinYoung Park) with experience with musicians in the US, cultivated Wonder Girls and TWICE. The head of YG, Hyunk Soek Yang, and former member of the legendary idol group SeoTaeji and Boys is famous for merging American and Korean hip-hop cultures to create Korean hip-hop idol groups such as 2NE1 (disbanded) and Black Pink. The purpose of developing entertainment was to deliberately foster Korean economic development and global popularity.

For an entertainment company to produce a group, large investment is needed. Groups are highly manufactured and require a team of managers, choreographers and wardrobe assistants, as well as years of singing lessons, dance training, accommodation and living expenses (Williamson, 2011). Considering how expensive it is to foster a group, when they debut they are managed strictly to bring in as much money as possible (Doo, 2016). To debut in a group, talent is optional, however physical beauty is everything. As an illustration, ex-TAHITI member Hanhee shared in an interview her recruitment process: "They asked me to sing, and I'm *not* the best singer, but that doesn't matter in K-pop, everything can be touched up." (Volodzko, 2016). She showed her frustration with the industry during Reddit AMA 2014 where she was asked whether she liked K-pop. Her reply was: "I hate it. No one is an actual artist." She additionally pointed out K-pop artist have no artistic input in the songs they perform, the songs, dance routines and clothes are handed to them. "Fans favour certain groups because of their look, "not because they are talented." The competitiveness in the K-pop world does not allow for unpretty idol groups, as fans prefer them to be good looking rather good singers.

However, in this harsh industry, looks are just as manufactured as talent. According to different articles on the Korean website Nate prove artists are often forced to undergo cosmetic surgery before their formal debut. Except for the company YG<sup>8</sup> who forbids cosmetic surgery, all other companies are guilty of this practice.

Almost every K-pop star has gone through cosmetic surgeries from the minor double-eyelid operation, V-shape chin shaving, to skin and body shape fixing. Like a living billboard, K-pop culture fuels the public pursuit of perfection. K-pop culture (Marx, 2015) does not only shape the music people listen to, but also gives an indication of how females should look like.

### Malnourishment

Apart from the cosmetically enhanced face, almost all girl groups seem to be malnourished. Severe diets and busy schedules caused different idols to faint on stage. In 2016 girl group member JinE from Oh My Girl took a break due to anorexia. JinE who at that moment weighed around 30 kilograms with a height of 159 cm, retreated to her hometown to rest. (Doo, 2016). Another episode, is Tiffany of Girls' Generation who on the talk show "Radio Star" shared that with her weight of 48 kilograms and a height of 162 centimetres, she was teased by the other group members for being the heaviest by calling her a "pig". Thin girl group members are praised for their figures, and are asked on tv shows how they obtained such a body figure. The diets are highly problematic and extreme. Examples of idol diets are: the "cup" routine -where all contents of a meal fit inside one small paper cup- , "one meal a day" method, IU's one apple, one sweet potato and a protein shake, or Ladies' Code's Sojung one orange, 15 cherry tomatoes, one piece of sweet pumpkin" (HelloKpop, 2015). Not conforming to this standard is met with cruel treatment from the press. PRISTIN's Kyla who was cheered on by international fans for her curvy body, was met with loads of negative comments and reporters often ignored her when it was her turn for the photographs.

---

<sup>8</sup> YG produces hits influenced by hip hop, and focuses in general on the talent of the idol rather than appearances.



Figure 10: Kyla posing as cameras are turned to the other members (Source: <https://www.koreaboo.com/news/pristins-kyla-always-ignored-fanmeets-fans-furious/>)

Girl idols have are often recruited as advertising models for school uniforms. In the advertisement of popular brand ‘Elite Tuning Style’ female idols with their slim bodies are seducing young female students into buying the brand. The brand promises them equally attractive bodies in slogans such as ‘We guarantee every part of your body, except face’ and ‘Don’t worry, be slim’. (Kim, 2011).

Simultaneously, school uniforms are used as promotion and stage outfits by girl idols. Most girl groups are to be divided in promoting a sexy or an innocent concept, with some alternating between the two. While the sexy concept is straightforward about using sex to sell, the innocent concept is more secretive about it. The example of school uniforms is by now picked up by almost all groups in the innocent category. The fantasy of the subtly revealed sexual body clothed in a school uniform originates in ‘Sailor Moon’, a Japanese manga and anime series of the 1990s (Driscoll, 2002). Their white knee-high socks, and miniskirts, along with pretty faces and infantile gestures, give an impression of an eroticized innocence (Bray 2009).





Figure 11: The innocent look (Source: <https://www.soompi.com/2015/11/11/the-not-so-innocent-side-of-the-innocent-k-pop-girl-group-look/>)

the infantilization of female pop idols is clearly visible in the music videos. When IU released the album *chat-shire*, she sang about the pressure put upon female stars to appear childlike, despite the fact they are becoming a mature woman like herself. However, the public critiqued her for dressing like a child in the video and accused her of using paedophilic imagery to sell records (Inquirer, 2015), rather than spark a national dialogue about the paedophilic overtones of dressing grown women like schoolgirls.

The girl idols' long hairstyles, decorated with ribbons and flowers, and their clothes create the childlike appearance of pretty girls. Their stage dress is normally cute and youthful with punk-style short pants, t-shirts and miniskirts, or school or military and navy uniforms, all of which are typical garments of asexual infantilization. In contrast to the childlike uniforms, their legs are revealed in hot pants and high heels or knee-high boots are worn, which are stereotypical of fetishized femininity. KARA's Gyuri summed up this issue in a statement on a TV talk show where she said she always made sure to wear high heels. When the host questioned her about this, she replied with "Because I don't want to ruin my fans' fantasies" (Soompi, 2014). Interestingly, she uses the term fantasies, her awareness of the male fantasies of girl groups. The survival of girl groups is strongly related to their male audience. For example, actor Yoo Seung Ho after his military service spoke about how girl groups are an important aspect of military service. There he found that conscripts "begin their mornings

with girl groups and finish the day with girl groups at night.” He explained that girl group videos gave soldiers a sense of healing (Soompi, 2015).

The fantasy narrative of dress, cosmetic surgery and having specific body shape relates again to dollification, because the standard of comparison for performers seems to be not living women but dolls:

“Illustrative here is the case of the South Korean singer G.NA who was born in 1987, and whose bodily measurements and curves are not only matter of fan discussion, media speculations, or blogging as it is usual in the world of pop-idols, but also have been made part of the promotional campaigns, with G.NA regularly compared to a mannequin doll, and on several occasions publicly, and in front of cameras, posed next to plastic mannequins. Her body, with official numbers of 168 cm and 47 kg, that includes a small face, natural D-cup breasts and a pronounced waistline, is called “the mannequin body,” an image promoted by her own production house.” (Saeji, 2013, 333)

In my interviews, each informant I asked where the pressure to be pretty originates from, has mentioned the South Korean entertainment industry at a certain point in the interview. “In the media, K-pop idols are so skinny, very young and pretty, but they are stars. A lot of students in their high school and middle school idolize them. So they think they should be like that. Not many men want to become like male idols but females do. Because of media they have that perception on beauty. They see that kind of media from young age, their perspective is solid and hard to change. (Yoobin). Girl fans in their teens and twenties dream of self-identification with girl idols, as expressed through the practice of ‘performance and imagination’ of the idols’ music, dance and fashion styles (Longhurst et al. 2007, in Kim, 2010). Through these girl groups females are given an ideal of beauty constructed through consumption of beauty industry products and services – like cosmetic surgery, dieting and slimming products- This creates a flourishing beauty industry (Kim, 2003).

The reason teenagers are affected more by these media images is again related to the education system. “When I were in high school I went to school at 8 am and left by 10 pm, I was there for 18 hours, you cannot go out and have dinner with friends you are all there. So, during breaks we watched videos on our phone. In berlin I saw teenagers hanging out, going to the shopping mall. So maybe because you’re physically locked in school, you look for amusement entertainment possibilities. What you see from tv, is different from our reality.

I'm ugly studying at school all day, they are pretty and skinny, I think that gets to their minds.” (Rebecca). These entertainers make exceptional appearance seem real and normal, and if we do not meet these standards we may consider ourselves as deviant (Alibhai-Brown, 2010)

Any fear of cosmetic surgery is decreased through numerous TV shows that accompany the viewer through the entire process of making a decision, selecting the features that need to be altered and the process of cosmetic surgery. A well-known show “Let Me In” shows how ordinary people transform through cosmetic surgery into beauties that resemble the contemporary Korean standard ideals. These shows give encouragement to women by showing the possibilities of cosmetic surgery despite having facial features that deviate from the beauty norm. Everyone in society carries the potential to become attractive. By reducing the secrecy of the topic of cosmetic surgery they normalize the practice of changing facial features.

Side by side to these TV shows are Korean dramas and movies promoting cosmetic surgery. An example is the movie 200 Pounds Beauty that came out in 2006. However, the original Korean name 미녀는 괴로워, *minyeoneun goelowo*, which literally translates as *Beauty is painful*, hauntingly reflects the actual message of the movie. Herein, the heroine is an obese girl with a heavenly voice ghost singing for a talentless but beautiful and petite starlet. The main character disappears for a year, undergoes multiple major surgeries to return as a slender and beautiful woman, just like her voice to get the idol job as well as the man of her dreams (AsianWiki, n.d.).



Figure 12: The movie poster 200 Pounds Beauty(Source: [http://asianwiki.com/200\\_Pounds\\_Beauty](http://asianwiki.com/200_Pounds_Beauty))



## Advertisements

In addition to this, the abundance of advertisement in the subway and the subway station adds to the normalization process of cosmetic surgery and provides encouragement to those still in doubt. Especially subway stations near Gangnam and Apgujeong, where most clinics are nested, are plastered with beautiful faces. Before and after shots of patients, and quotes like “Everyone but you have done it” and “This is the reason celebrities are confident even without their makeup.” The constant exposure to these images contributes to the “Why not?” attitude of Koreans as they have grown accustomed to the scene of cosmetic surgery.

## Patriarchy in the industry

In the entertainment industry we see the patriarchal society resurface in the fact that female K-pop groups are moulded into products that appease men who watch them. Previously I only discussed the visuals produced by the industry. However the lyrics of these songs are just as intriguing. Lyrics of the song I got a boy by Girls’ Generation portray women as incapable, inferior to men, and that their lives devolve on men.

Lyrics:

[....]

OMG! Look at her, look

What happened to her that she cut her hair, huh?

OMG! Again look at her

From head to toe, her style has changed

Why did she do that? I'm curious to death

Why did she do that? Tell me

Hahaha! Eh let me introduce myself

Here comes trouble, whoo! Follow us

Oh oh oh eh oh (Eh eh eh eh)

Oh oh eh oh oh oh oh oh

You really are something else

Who is she? Ridiculous

Do you know you're too self-assertive?

She thinks I'm average (Oh)

I guess she really liked him!

No way! No way!

She became so pretty and sexy  
It's because of him, right?  
I almost asked her  
What her new makeup was

Truthfully, I've seen it for the first time  
The deep eyes, like a scarred beast  
I was dizzy by just talking to him  
You really are something else  
You really are something else

[chorus]

Ayo stop! Let me put it down another way

I got a boy a cool one, I got a boy a kind one  
I got a boy handsome boy who took all my heart  
I got a boy a cool one, I got a boy a kind one  
I got a boy awesome boy guess I've fallen for him

Ah, my prince  
When are you gonna come save me?  
Like a white dream  
Will you lift me in your arms and fly?

I'm in panic  
He wants to see my bare face  
I really like him  
Would it be okay to show it to him?  
Oh, never (That's right, that's right)  
Let's keep what needs to be kept (Right, right)  
Until you get all of his heart

Don't ever forget this

Oh oh oh eh oh, oh oh eh oh

Even if I stay up all night, it's not enough

Oh oh oh eh oh, oh oh eh oh

He's our biggest interest

[rest of song]

### **K-drama's: aggressive male**

In Korean drama's the narrative is of no difference. "In drama's you see scenes in which the guy randomly grabs the women aggressively. People think its manly, but is so messed up. The actor is handsome but in real life even if he was handsome you'd say hell no!" (Hayeong). Most Korean dramas have a similar plot featuring an innocent, naïve and pure-hearted woman (with shortcomings) who pursues an incredibly attractive yet cold man, typically rich. Their relationship starts incredibly unfair as the man is incredibly cruel towards the woman. He treats her like dirt on the rare occasions he acknowledges her at all. The woman melts his heart, over time by her unwavering pure-heartedness and kindness. He then becomes kinder, falls in love with her, and they live happily ever after at the drama's conclusion (Beyond Hallyu, 2013). One of the most celebrated drama, achieving fame in and outside Korea is Boys over Flowers. This example showcased the problematic character of Goo Joon-Pyo, whose bullying of another student in the opening episode drives him to attempt suicide. After the female lead Jan-Di confronts him to protect the student, she becomes his next target to be tormented. It went as far as three students attempting to sexually assault Jan-Di after Joon-Pyo tells them to scare her. The drama "Playful Kiss" encourage girls to pursue a cold and emotionally abusive man who often embarrasses the female lead in public and destroys her self-esteem. "Secret Garden", another legendary drama, even normalized stalking. In "Our Gapsoon" the male lead forcibly kisses the female lead until she submits and kisses back, signalling a message that women are merely playing hard to get, and romanticizing violence.



Figure 13: An example of a forced kiss in K-drama's ( Source: <https://www.allkpop.com/article/2016/10/our-gab-soon-under-review-for-dating-violence-in-kiss-scene>)

We see that in these dramas male leads often embarrass, humiliate, call the female leads stupid, not beautiful enough for them, and belittle them. What seems as clearly abusive and dangerous behaviour is brushed off as spoiled, and arrogant. The image planted on relationships and the manner to treat females becomes heavily skewed in the minds of those watching Korean dramas. This then of course reflects into society. As Hayeong shared with me: “In our university, in front of the library, last two months there were two to three times where people wrote a huge list of sexual assaults that happened on the campus. It’s usually done by those guys who have no clue on these issues. For them, making those sexual comments and treating woman like that is normal as breathing for them.”

The media serve as a stabilizing element in society by being a crucial source of standards, models and norms which are needed for shared public life (McQuail, 2010). In South Korea the media is making sure the previous power relations are conserved in the form of letting males decide on a big portion of how women should look like and should behave through the K-pop and drama industry. Instead of addressing problematic issues in the entertainment industry, women are attacked constantly.

### Friction in society

The restrictions and pressures put on women are not endured by everyone as more and more women are starting to resist and highlight the gender issues. However, discussing gender issues seems a tedious process in South Korea. “When we talk about equality of gender, always the issue of the army comes up together even though they are separate. As long as the

army exists gender equality won't be settled well." Here Minji points out the mandatory military service for males in Korea that takes around two years to finish. "It's really hard to serve there, so all the Koreans guys have this feeling that guys are the victims of society. Why are girls always complaining about your lives. We waste 2 years and see crazy things in the army to protect this country. You don't serve yet complain about society. That's the point they attack girls with. That's not the core, even though we would go to army we know this problem won't be solved." (Hayeong) The military service is not the core of gender issues, but the way it is used to silence women about gender issues, manifests a deep problem in society, the fact that there are men who still believe women to be inferior to men. "Some guys even in my age, they still think women are below men, in power, social power. If a girl becomes a leader of a [student] club in a division of the university, some bad guys, not many but some will say you cannot lead us. We will not conform to you, they ignore {her position}." (Ahyun). The young people are very frustrated, especially men, if they compare their lives to that of their parents' generation," says Lee Mi-jeong, a research fellow at the Korea Women's Development Institute. Young Korean men, who no longer enjoy the same economic security and position of power in society, are virtually, and literally, taking their frustrations out on women. Yet as more women push against deep-set conservative attitudes in Korea, the backlash has been very vicious.

Two important events in South Korea that shook society and awakened the feminist in many women are the MERS virus and the Gangnam murder.

When MERS broke out in South Korea, two Korean women who allegedly contracted the disease while traveling on a flight from Seoul to Hong Kong for a holiday were blamed for the outbreak since they refused to be quarantined in Hong Kong. On a popular Korean message board called DC Inside, users viciously attacked the two women for 'damaging South Korea's reputation abroad' and for their selfishness (Steger, 2016). The situation deteriorated as the women were later led into quarantine, and the comments became worse. The women were called *Kimchi bitches*, women who are obsessed with wealth, and *doenjang girl* (*doenjang* is a cheap bean paste stew) referring to those who save for luxury goods by skimping on essential goods (ibid., 2016). However, the outbreak was later confirmed to be linked to a Korean man returning from the Middle East. Astonished and enraged about the accusations, women used the same board to post messages, adopting a controversial method of mirroring. The same rhetoric and nasty words were shot back at men calling them Kimchi

men, and mocking them for having 6.9cm penises (Hayeong). After the website DC Inside banned the use of the work *Kimchi men*, these women decided to start their own website Megalia.com.



Figure 14: The logo of the website mocks the 6.9cm penis (Source: <https://www.koreaexpose.com/megalia-south-korean-feminism-marshals-the-power-of-the-internet/>)

The controversial website is often accused of misandry and is shut down various times due to the controversies shared on the website, as pictures of chopped male genitals and stories of females raping males. The feminist group however keeps resurfacing on the internet as derived websites, as Ladism and Womad. A victory for feminist groups was the closure of the website Sora.net an illegal site that hosted up-skirt photos and other voyeuristic images and videos. More alarming were the messages exchanged between users of the website who solicit co-conspirators for rape, along with other heinous crimes. An example hereof is a person who posted a picture of his passed-out girlfriend from being too intoxicated, and asked others to join him so that they could “have a go for an hour or two” (Steger, 2016). The authors of these posts sometimes make women unconscious on purpose by administering a mix of alcohol and date rape drugs. (Cho, 2016)<sup>9</sup>

The second incident, on 17 May 2016, a 23-year-old woman was stabbed and killed in a mixed bathroom in a building near Gangnam subway’s exit 10, an area as busy as New York’s Times Square or London’s Oxford Street (Steger, 2016). The culprit, a 34-year-old man, admitted to the police he committed the crime out of his hatred for women as they had

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://jtl.columbia.edu/sora-net-when-online-conspiracies-become-a-reality/>

ignored and humiliated him all his life. The police labelled the crime as due to a mental illness. Camera footage showed how six men came into the bathroom and left unharmed, and how the killer waited for a woman to enter to attack her. The incident resulted in a large amount of anti-misogyny protests both offline and online. Women swarmed to the subway exit in the following days to pay tribute to the victim by sticking Post-its with messages on walls, bringing flowers, and holding discussions about misogyny (Hankyoreh, 2016). The incident brought attention to the numerous and growing violence crimes against women.

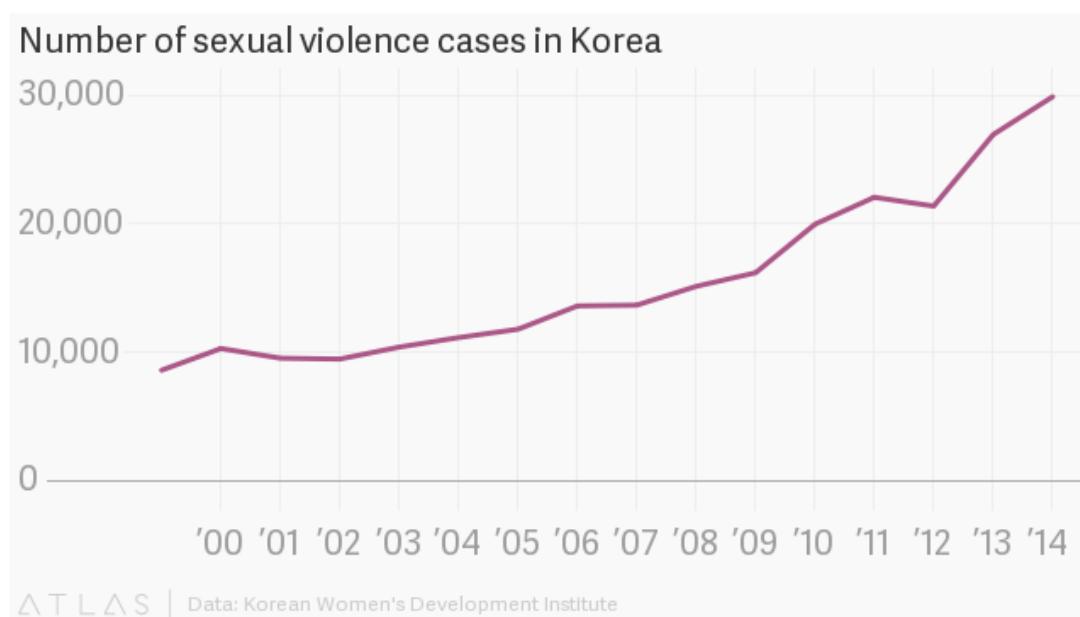


Figure 15: The increase in sexual violence cases in South Korea (Source: <http://www.newsfo.com/2016/11/01/an-epic-battle-between-feminism-and-deep-seated-misogyny-is-under-way-in-south-korea/>)

For Hayeong and many others, “Those events in 2015 and 2016 really became a window of society. Before those events I wasn’t aware of anything. I seriously, when guys made comments about me, I was thinking about it for long, like guys want skinny legs and mine aren’t. when I eat a lot I get fat on the bottom, so I get stressed and when guys made comments on it I thought it was my problem, but after hearing all those things at school, I realised it’s their problem and not mine.”

During my second visit to South Korea, although not clearly visible, I noticed how there is a small percentage of women who wore bright hair colours, or dressed very casually. Something I did not see two years ago. Although one in a hundred, and barely apparent, resistance against these patriarchal pressures is there and growing. Another example is Yejin, who shared she used to be pressured by skinny idols to diet. Now, “I don’t want to be skinny

anymore, I'd rather be fit and happy." Another informant shared, "I used to feel pressure but after I learned about feminism, it made me more free. My major is especially related to feminism, so from freshman year, I learned a lot about it and made me free. I'm still learning how to escape that pressure. I read a lot of books about feminism and I gave up watching k-drama, K-pop. I choose Netflix or foreign things. I'm trying to compare my society with many others societies in other countries. It made me more confident, there are many other cultures and this is not the right one. I don't need to choose this one" (Jiyeong)

Feminist movement encouraged many in society, but it also led to strong backlash from females who do not identify with the movement and men who view the movement as anti-men, resulting in anti-feminism and menimist groups. An example hereof is the NGO for Gender Equality (ironic?), with 35.000 likes on Facebook, who strive for equality for men. A representative of the group when interviewed after the Gangnam murder, pointed out that while the economic situation for men has worsened compared to that of their fathers' generation, women are getting ahead because of "reverse discrimination," even as men are still expected to assume the role of breadwinner (Steger, 2016). Others on the Facebook page discuss abolishing the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, for its support for single-parent families is promoting divorce. "The divorce rate is so high these days... women usually get child custody rights, and then they will get money from the government as well as from the husband," Jong Chan Lee wrote in May on the group's Facebook page (ibid., 2016). Similar sentiments were noticed by my informants. "Guys can be divided into two guys. Those who accept the change, study and see the problem, and those who are anti-feminists. If they hear the conversation we had, they will say: are you a feminist or something?? Those guys who still have no clue on it. But I think anti-feminists there are more of them than those who understand, a rate of 90% to 10%." (Jiyeong). Hayeong explained when she discussed gender issues with her male friends, the usual response is "You're not ugly, why do you act like those ugly feminist girls? You don't have any problems," suggesting feminism to be a strategy for women who are unable to achieve a beautiful look. Because of the severe gender tensions in society, some refuse to talk about feminism and anti-feminism out of fear for clashes with the other. "These days the social problem {in South Korea} is the conflict between men and women. Extreme feminists are becoming bigger and bigger. I don't talk my opinion to anyone. It will cause problems as conflict between men and women." (Hyeri). My informant's worries showcase how severe the social situation is in South Korea, in terms of patriarchal pressure, which amplifies the feeling of living in a *Hell Joseon*. A Hell not only in



terms of economic competitiveness, but as well pressures of the entertainment industry and the patriarchal social context . This paragraph unveils the reasons various young women are resisting the pressures of beauty, linked to South Korea's patriarchal structure, and the backlash those women face. Likewise, it illustrates the rationale of the women opting for cosmetic surgery due to the same patriarchal structure. Different women react in various way in the same socioeconomic context, and all reactions are of importance to take into account in the cosmetic surgery case.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Relation with existing literature

In this thesis I chose a different approach to cosmetic surgery which challenges existing concepts in the literature on this subject. South Korea is a strong patriarchal society, which is used as a strong structuralist argument for the high rates of cosmetic surgery. For example, the question that comes to mind is, are women who manifest doll-like faces tricked into favouring these features over their natural characteristics? With the concept of governmentality (Foucault) I could argue women are controlled and managed according to the preference of males in South Korean society. Herein, good behaviour (choosing for cosmetic surgery) is praised and awarded with high status and more opportunities in life, and bad behaviour (resisting cosmetic surgery) is punished with comments from society and the absence of opportunities in the labour market or love relations. Although, highly conscious of the strong patriarchy in South Korea and its consequences on women, I find the governmentality approach towards cosmetic surgery lacking recognition for the South Korean women who are aware of male pressure yet decide to undergo a cosmetic procedure for their own enjoyment, such as being able to apply eyeshadow in diverse ways. Such an approach results in viewing women as victims only, rather than being part of the decision making for cosmetic surgery. Those who are positive towards cosmetic procedures have seen others become more confident and comfortable in their body. As previously mentioned, in South Korea the body and the psyche are interconnected. When one heals the scars of the body, the mind becomes more at ease. In addition, the concept of governmentality denies the fact cosmetic surgery is a ladder for many who want to achieve a high status in society. Again, the importance of appearances is crucial in South Korean society, in which beautiful people are perceived to be better at things and have more luck in their lives. Status in a country still holding on to its Confucian traditions, is of importance in a highly hierarchical structure of society. In this sense cosmetic

surgery serves as a tool for women opting for a higher status and who play the game according to society's norms and rules.

On the other hand, I am neither suggesting viewing cosmetic surgery as agency. For, I encounter hardships to describe the act of forcibly undergoing cosmetic procedures as agency, which is a reality for many. The idols, actresses and the ones persuaded into it by their parents, friends or employers. Therefore, I started rethinking how we view agency and if it's applicable in an Asian context. Often, we see agency as producing individual, personal acts and attitudes, it makes and remakes culture through creating personal meanings about the significance of things and through acts such as choosing particular kinds of education, jobs, or cosmetic products. According to this conception, individuals negotiate their lifestyles in interpersonal dialogues, or they construct their psychological "life spaces" individually, independent of even interpersonal, linguistic interactions (Ratner, 2008). Although in the concept of subjectivities social constructs and broader structures are acknowledged, it still focuses on the individual level, explaining social phenomena in terms of facts about individuals.

This individualistic approach to understanding the behaviour of humans is characteristic of western society but remains unfit for Asian countries where behaviour is determined by the demands of the situation rather than individual dispositions. (Norenzayan & Nisbett, 2000). During my interviews, the concept of agency was rather unfamiliar for my informants as they referred to one's surroundings, society, and family as keys for their choices and behaviour. This is not an argument leaning towards structure in the structure-agency debate, but an argument for allowing non-western concepts to explain certain phenomena. Concepts that are unknown to western societies, and unpopular in the literature. In this case, the concept of *woori*, binds Korean society together and results in a rejection of the concept of individualism or an individualist notion of agency, for it is seen as egoism and dangerous. *Woori* highlights the degree of collectivism and affirms the legitimacy of a choice that is taken in consideration of others rather the self.

### [Hell Joseon](#)

An additional contribution to the literature on South Korea and cosmetic surgery in this country is the concept of *Hell Joseon*. Elaborating on the argument of ontologies, and understanding phenomena by adopting the worldview of that particular society, cosmetic surgery in South Korea should be viewed and understood through the window of *Hell Joseon*. This Hell in which economic certainty is absent- the IMF crisis still engraved in the memories of many- the education fever and the limited quantity of jobs available at large companies fuel

the competitiveness in society. For women, tenacious gender role stereotypes, and the expectation of resigning after giving birth results in companies selecting significantly less women to join the company. Thus, a combination of remainings of the Joseon dynasty in the form of Confucian gender roles and unfortunate economic conditions resulted in the birth of a new category for competitiveness for women, beauty. The high rates of cosmetic surgery are partially produced by the pressures of *Hell Joseon*, yet the term is absent in the literature.

Therefore, my approach is to abandon preconceived notions when exploring non-Western phenomena, and to allow -in this case- Korean concepts explain the high rates of cosmetic surgery in South Korea. The strength of this thesis lies in the intervention between the structure-agency debate in the literature on East-Asian cosmetic surgery and opening a new gateway to view cosmetic surgery in a new light. A Korean light.

### Limitations and weakness

In this subjective research, I am highly aware of myself as the research instrument and how my attitude and understanding of South Korean culture could have directed the course of the research and the conclusions. The interviews I held were with mostly high educated women, although I included some informants who were not. Furthermore, most of my informants have also visited foreign countries which might have changed their perspective on South Korea, and caused them to be critical of South Korean society and cosmetic surgery. This critical stance is clearly visible in my thesis. Due to my engagement with South Korea and Korean culture for over seven years, I am sure not everyone is critical of cosmetic surgery, and therefore I ensured to protect also a positive perspective on cosmetic surgery and include this in the research. Although this is done occasionally, I should have put more effort in highlighting this perspective more.

Furthermore, the language used with most informants is English which excludes many perspectives of women who are unable to speak English. In the research I did include two informants who do not speak English with the help of a mutual friend as translator.

Translation of an informant results in possible errors for it is difficult to translate every word said, nevertheless, I included these interviews for their great added value to the research. Another limitation is the scope of the research, in which time played a role. I was able to interview 15 women, which is not an immense number to represent a whole country. Yet I was able to receive an incredible amount of information and data, which I am grateful for.

Lastly, it could be perceived by many as a weakness not to label some practices as wrong (dollification for example), but i deliberately chose not to, for I wish to clarify a phenomenon rather insert my judgments.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this thesis I aimed to answer the question How does *Hell Joseon* as other Korean concepts aid to explain the high rates of cosmetic surgery among women in South Korea?

I identified, when discussing cosmetic surgery there is much more than vain reasons to become prettier in South Korea. We are discussing remains of Confucianism, *Hell Joseon*, collectivism, gender inequality, sexualization of women, and anti-feminism. Most literature looks at these types of phenomena from an overtly structuralist or an overtly agential perspective. As my results have shown though, these perspectives have severe limits, as they do not consider a Korean perspective which includes their lived realities and local concepts as *Hell Joseon*, *woori*, *jeong*, and Japanese influences for example.

Cosmetic surgery in South Korea has a role of affirming a Korean identity. It needs to enhance a Korean look that celebrates Korea's homogeneity and confirms its nationalistic tendency. Due to continuous interference of neighbouring states followed by abuse and maltreatment, Koreans have grown to emphasize their nationality and their distinct looks. The focus on appearances have been part of Korean culture for a long time. Physiognomy, which relates the future of the person to facial features enforces the idea that those who appear better enjoy a better life. As physiognomy helps understanding why cosmetic surgery is integrated in society, it does not explain popular contemporary facial features like a v-chin and round eyes. The westernization argument of authors like Park (2007), Kim (2003), and Cho (2009) to justify the rounder high nose and the double eyelid surgery is just as lacking. The influence of globalisation is inescapable and I am aware of flows between the East and the West. The double eyelid surgery may for some be the reason to look more western, but for others it is mainly eliminating the tired and uninterested vibe a monolid carries and the difficulty of applying eyeshadow in different styles. The high nose-bridge may be influenced by a western face-shape, however, the white skin (peachy, almost translucent skin), the round eyes, the V-shape jaw and small lips all deviate from a western look. Furthermore, the way makeup is applied confirms that the aesthetic South Koreans seek is a natural dewy look that enhances Korean beauty instead of a heavy contoured and dark makeup look popular in the West right

now. This means that other factors are of influence on the beauty ideals. Here Japanese influences come into the picture and highlight the love-hate relationship between South Korea and Japan. Although there is a negative sentiment in society towards Japan, the younger generation shows recognition towards the advanced technology and fast-paced culture. Part of this culture is the anime and manga craze that resulted in beauty ideals close to those of a doll. Large round eyes, V-shape face, small lips and a slender body. Related to the doll-like features that seeped through to South Korea is the concept of *aegyo*, in which someone with much *aegyo* is able to win hearts by acting in a cute and shy manner. In the literature connected to concepts of dollification (Pužar, 2011), which immobilizes women, and ensures the conservation and perseverance of stasis. The term doll carries a negative connotation for its reference to plastic, impossible body proportions and facial features. While for some South Korean women, who lean more towards a cute, young and polished look, a doll has positive connotation, and is considered a compliment. There is also resistance against this dollified notion of beauty among women, as showcased by my informants in this thesis.

Furthermore, harmony and respect for the elders are concepts that remained important in Korean society from the era of Joseon. This has hampered efforts to engage in activities or pursue looks considered outside of the norm. Through *jeong*, which emphasizes care and protection towards one another, women advise each other on beauty and cosmetic surgery, and frown upon unnatural or un-Korean looks. Being blunt and straightforward about one's flat nose, dull eyes, or broad jaw is perceived as necessary advice out of love for the person. Collective behaviour combined with competitiveness created the perfect opportunity for cosmetic surgery to grow. For instance, when one's surrounding (female) friends, who all share the same educational background, opt for cosmetic surgery to increase the chance of a job, it is only logical the pressure to undergo cosmetic surgery oneself grows as well.

Moreover, the positive connotation of the term cosmetic surgery (restructuring), the large numbers of cosmetic clinics, advertisements for cosmetic procedures, daily manifestation of cosmetic surgery on television, music videos, and in conversation causes the attitude towards cosmetic surgery to be extremely positive in most cases. How can one be against a tool that cures the psyche, facilitates, eases and improves one's life? This certainly clarifies the attitude of the 'Why not' camp on cosmetic surgery. These Koreans perceive physical beauty as a source of confidence, a weapon in competition--to win school admissions, job applications,

promotions, marriage, etc. Hence, regardless of how many failed surgeries, post-surgery symptoms, medication, or scarring cases there might be, they pursue their ideal look.

Although cosmetic surgery is perceived positively by most people, there seems to be a growing number of women who acknowledge the problematic side of it. The fact that many are pressured into undergoing cosmetic surgery, like recent graduated high schoolers, and women searching for a job in a company, and especially female trainees who want to debut as an idol or actress. Many of my informants have condemned this pressure to look a certain way almost no one resembles naturally. The perfect doll-face inspired by Japanese manga and Korean historical beauty features, bothers those who critique the cosmetic surgery industry, for its almost impossible, and narrow standard for beauty. Those who reject it for being too invasive, connect it to the patriarchal society and point out the pressure created by men for women to look beautiful, while men enjoy the freedom of looking as it pleases them. Together with other previously mentioned examples of male dominance in society, like aggressive males in K-drama's, have created a clash between the sexes. While feminism is on the rise on the internet, it is counterattacked with anti-feminism.

In South Korea, there is no agreement on a common perspective on cosmetic surgery. All those perspectives deserve recognition as legitimate, valid and underrepresented in the existing literature on cosmetic surgery in South Korea, as a result of employing static and un-Asian concepts to explain cosmetic surgery. Much information, and local concepts that are often difficult to translate completely, suffer simplifications into western concepts as neoliberal consumerism, westernization, and agency. Concepts local informants are unfamiliar with or fail to identify with. Therefore, with this thesis I argue for an academic approach acknowledging multiple ontologies, with an openness for local concepts to analyse and clarify phenomena. Beyond judgement whether the high rates of cosmetic surgery in Korea should be celebrated or critiqued is the space where one draws an understanding of the factors having an influence on women to choose for cosmetic procedures.

## Recommendations

From my acquired conclusions and results I formulated the following recommendation:

- My first recommendation is to acknowledge the world as existing of multiple ontologies and realities, and to view phenomena (in my case cosmetic surgery) through this specific reality to obtain a deep understanding. To achieve this, one should shed off their preconceived concepts, and embrace concepts used and spoken about by locals, to start seeing and understanding their reality, reasoning and behaviour.

-My second recommendation is to further research the concept of *Hell Joseon*, a concept familiar to all Koreans but unknown in the literature. The existence of this term showcases a feeling among youngsters in Korea, which should be taken seriously.

-Third recommendation stems from the previously mentioned feminist movement and its countermovement. Both movements need further research, especially as clashes happen mostly on the internet. On the streets of Seoul, clashes between the genders are unnoticeable.

-Lastly, physiognomy is taken highly seriously in South Korea, and is part of fortune telling culture. A booming business. The trust in fortune telling in such a technologically advanced country is interesting and worth further research.

## Bibliography

AsianWiki. (n.d.). 200 Pounds Beauty. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from [http://asianwiki.com/200\\_Pounds\\_Beauty](http://asianwiki.com/200_Pounds_Beauty)

- Bell, D. A., & Chaibong, H. (Eds.). (2003). Confucianism for the modern world. Cambridge University Press.
- BeyondHallyu. (2013, March 29). Dangerous Men: The Normalisation of Domestic Abuse in Korean Dramas. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <http://beyondhallyu.com/film-tv/tv/drama/dangerous-men-domestic-abuse-in-korean-dramas/>
- Bray, A. (2009). Governing the gaze: Child sexual abuse moral panics and the post-feminist blindspot. *Feminist media studies*, 9(2), 173-191.
- Brumberg, J. J. (1998). *The body project: An intimate history of American girls*. Vintage.
- CACS: "Cosmetic Surgery vs. Plastic Surgery." California Academy of Cosmetic Surgery. Accessed March 01, 2018. <https://www.calcosmeticsurgery.org/patient-resrouces/cosmetic-surgery-vs-plastic-surgery/>.
- Cartwright, M. (2016, November 09). Confucianism in Ancient Korea. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <https://www.ancient.eu/article/969/confucianism-in-ancient-korea/>
- Chang, K. S. (1997). The neo-Confucian right and family politics in South Korea: The nuclear family as an ideological construct. *Economy and Society*, 26(1), 22-40.
- Chang, K. S., & Song, Y. M., (2010). The stranded individualizer under compressed modernity: South Korean women in individualization without individualism. *The British journal of sociology*, 61(3), 539-564.
- Cho, H. (2016, February 19). Sora.net: When Online Conspiracies Become a Reality. Retrieved March 09, 2018, from <http://jtl.columbia.edu/sora-net-when-online-conspiracies-become-a-reality/>
- Choi, E. (1994). Status of the family and motherhood for Korean women. *Women of Japan and Korea: Continuity and change*, 189-205.
- Choi, S. C. (1991). Cheong: The socio-emotional grammar of Koreans. Paper Presented at the Colloquium Series, Department of Psychology, University of Hawaii, January
- Choi, S. C. (1997). The psychological characteristics of the Koreans. *Understanding the modern psychology*, 695-766.
- Choi, S. C., & Choi, S. H. (1990). We-ness: A Korean discourse of collectivism.



Choi, S. C., & Kim, K. (2003). A conceptual exploration of the Korean self in comparison with the Western self. *Contributions in Psychology*, 42, 29-42.

Choon, C. M. (2017, November 18). Workplace sexual harassment in South Korea sparks anger, and tougher penalties for offenders. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/workplace-sexual-harassment-in-south-korea-sparks-anger-and-tougher-penalties-for>

Csordas, T. J. (1990). Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology. *Ethos*, 18(1), 5-47.

Cumings, B. (2011). North Korea: another country. The New Press./ Cumings, Bruce G. "The Rise of Korean Nationalism and Communism". A Country Study: North Korea. Library of Congress. Call number DS932 .N662 1994.

Curthoys, A. (1998). Gender in the Social Sciences in Australia. *Challenges for the Social Sciences and Australia*, 2, 177-217.

Dauids, T., & Van Driel, F. (2001). Globalisation and gender: beyond dichotomies. *Globalisation and Development Studies Challenges for the 21st Century*, 153-75.

Denney, S. (2015, September 25). Is South Korea Now 'Hell Chosun'? Retrieved September 01, 2017, from <http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/is-south-korea-now-hell-chosun/>

Diamond, A. (2016, November 17). South Korea's Testing Fixation. Retrieved March 01, 2018, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/11/south-korean-seniors-have-been-preparing-for-today-since-kindergarten/508031/>

Doo, R. (2016, September 25). Dangerously skinny K-pop girl groups. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20160926000372>

Dramafever, B. (2012, November 19). History of Korean "National Little Sisters". Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <https://www.dramafever.com/news/history-of-korean-national-little-sisters/%7B%5B%7Bnotification.object.url%7D%5D%7D>

Driscoll, C. (2002). *Girls: Feminine adolescence in popular culture and cultural theory*. Columbia University Press.

EatyourKimchi. (2013, December 12). Plastic Surgery in Korea. Retrieved March 11, 2018, from <http://www.eatyourkimchi.com/plastic-surgery-in-korea/>

Feldman, M. W., Tuljapurkar, S., Li, S., Jin, X., & Li, N. (2007). Son preference, marriage, and intergenerational transfer in rural China. In A. H. Gauthier, C. Y. C. Chu, & S. Tuljapurkar (Eds.), *Allocating public and private resources across generations: Riding the age waves* (Vol. 2, pp. 139–162). London: Springer.

Fifield, A. (2016, January 31). Young South Koreans call their country 'hell' and look for ways out. Retrieved July 20, 2017, from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/young-south-koreans-call-their-country-hell-and-look-for-ways-out/2016/01/30/34737c06-b967-11e5-85cd-5ad59bc19432\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.2b22467b1ed4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/young-south-koreans-call-their-country-hell-and-look-for-ways-out/2016/01/30/34737c06-b967-11e5-85cd-5ad59bc19432_story.html?utm_term=.2b22467b1ed4)

Gilman, S. L. (1998). *Creating beauty to cure the soul: Race and psychology in the shaping of aesthetic surgery*. Duke University Press.

Hankyoreh. (2016, April 6). 8 out of 10 S. Korean workers experience sexual harassment, most don't report it. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_national/738499.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/738499.html)

Hankyoreh. (2016, May 20). Mourners crowd Gangnam Station exit 10 to mourn murder victim. Retrieved March 09, 2018, from [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_national/744757.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/744757.html)

HelloKpop. (2015, April 27). Kpop Idols And Their Unbelievable Diet Regimen. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <http://www.hellokpop.com/list/kpop-idols-unbelievable-diet-regimen/>

Holliday, R., & Elfving-Hwang, J. (2012). Gender, globalization and aesthetic surgery in South Korea. *Body & Society*, 18(2), 58-81. SAGE Journals. Web.

Huss-Ashmore, Rebecca (2000). “‘The Real Me’: Therapeutic Narrative in Cosmetic Surgery’, *Expedition* 42(3):26-38.

IMF Standby Credit Facility (SCF). (n.d.). Retrieved March 01, 2018, from <http://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2016/08/02/21/10/Standby-Credit-Facility>  
Inquirer. (2015, November 11). K-pop sweetheart IU mired in pedophilia controversy. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <http://entertainment.inquirer.net/183292/k-pop-sweetheart-iu-mired-in-pedophilia-controversy>

Ja, W. K. (2004). The beauty complex and the cosmetic surgery industry. *Korea Journal*, 44(2), 52-82.

Jones, G. W., & Yeung, W.-J. J. (2014). Marriage in Asia. *Journal of Family Issues*, 35, 1567–

1583.

Karupiah, Premalatha. "Modification of the Body: A Comparative Analysis of Views of Youths in Penang, Malaysia and Seoul, South Korea." *Journal of Youth Studies* 16.1 (2013): 1-16. Web.

Kim, A. (2016, August 02). Why You Probably Aren't 'Attractive' In South Korea. Retrieved September 20, 2017, from <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/you-probably-arent-attractive-in-south-korea>

Kim, C. (2015, January 27). In South Korea, childcare burden derails women's careers. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-women-childcare/in-south-korea-childcare-burden-derails-womens-careers-idUSKBN0L00B220150127>

Kim, E. (2009) 'The Politics of the Body in Contemporary Korea', *Korea Journal* 49(3): 5–14.

Kim, K., Zarit, S. H., Fingerman, K. L., & Han, G. (2015). Intergenerational Exchanges of Middle-Aged Adults With Their Parents and Parents-In-Law in Korea. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(3), 791-805.

Kim, T. (2003). Neo-Confucian body techniques: women's bodies in Korea's consumer society. *Body & Society*, 9(2), 97-113. SAGE Journals. Web.

Kim, U., Kim, U., Triandis, H.C., Yoon, G. (Eds.). (1992). "Introduction to individualism and collectivism: Theoretical and methodological issues."

Kim, V. (2012, August 09). Welcome to the plastic surgery capital of the world. Retrieved September 25, 2017, from <http://travel.cnn.com/seoul/visit/ideals-beauty-plastic-surgery-capital-world-389581/>

Kim, Y. (2011). Idol republic: The global emergence of girl industries and the commercialization of girl bodies. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 20(4), 333-345.

Kim, Y. R. (1993). Jeong and Han (Korean).

King, A. Y., & Bond, M. H. (1985). The Confucian paradigm of man: A sociological view. In *Chinese culture and mental health*(pp. 29-45).

KSPRS (2006). History of the Korean Society of Plastic and Reconstruction Surgeons. Retrieved March 01, 2018, from [http://www.plasticsurgery.or.kr/php/eng/s01\\_02.php](http://www.plasticsurgery.or.kr/php/eng/s01_02.php)

Kuwahara, Y. (Ed.). (2014). *The Korean wave: Korean popular culture in global context*. Springer.

Lee, C. (2014, March 27). Telling stories of 'incomplete lives'. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140328000496>

- Lee, E. P., Min, H. J., & Belk, R. W. (2008). Skin lightening and beauty in four Asian cultures. *ACR North American Advances*.
- Lee, P. H. (ed.) (1993) *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization*, vol. I: From Early Times to the 16th Century. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lee, S. W. (1990). Koreans' social relationship and Cheong space. In 1st international Conference on Individualism and Collectivism: Psychocultural Perspectives from East and West, July (pp. 9-13).
- Lee, Soohyung, and Keunkwan Ryu. "Plastic Surgery: Investment in Human Capital or Consumption?" *Journal of Human Capital* 6.3 (2012): 224-50. Chicago Journals. Web.
- Levi, N. (2013). Confucianism in South Korea and Japan: similarities and differences. *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia*, (26), 185-195.
- Lim, T. K. (1993). Communicational base of Korean relationship: Chaemyun, Jeong, and Nunchi (Korean), Korea media research autumn conference
- Lodén, T. (2006). Rediscovering Confucianism: A major philosophy of life in east Asia.
- Lodén, T. (2006). Rediscovering Confucianism: a major philosophy of life in East Asia.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological review*, 98(2), 224.
- Marx, P. (2015, March 23). The World Capital of Plastic Surgery. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/03/23/about-face>
- McQuail, Denis. (2010). *Mass Communication Theory*. Sage
- Michel, P. S. (2015, September 09). Japanese Demons and Crotch Bombs: The Tense State of Asian Cinema. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/09/east-asian-films-wwii-anniversary/404152/>
- Moon, S. (1998) 'Begetting the Nation: The Androcentric Discourse of National History and Tradition in South Korea', pp. 33–66 in E. Kim and C. Choi (eds) *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Ock, H. J. (2015, November 29). Seoul suicide rate highest among elderly. Retrieved August 13, 2017, from <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20151129000387>
- Neisser, U., & Jopling, D. A. (Eds.). (1997). *The Conceptual Self in Context: Culture Experience Self Understanding* (Vol. 7). Cambridge University Press.
- Nguyen Phuong-Mai, Cees Terlouw, Albert Pilot, 'Cooperative Learning vs. Confucian Heritage Culture's Collectivism: Confrontation to Reveal Some Cultural Conflict and Mismatch', *Asia Europe Journal*, October 2005, Vol. 3, Issue 3, p. 404.

- Norenzayan, A., & Nisbett, R. (2000). Culture and causal cognition. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9, 132-135.
- OECD. (2016). Earnings and wages - Gender wage gap - OECD Data. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <https://data.oecd.org/earnwage/gender-wage-gap.htm>
- OECD. (2016). Economic Survey of Korea 2016. South-Korea
- OneHallyu. (2016, August 30). [Netizenbuzz] KNETZ react to Eli's wife's gangnam unnie face - Netizen Nation. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <https://onehallyu.com/topic/387857-netizenbuzz-knetz-react-to-elis-wifes-gangnam-unnie-face/>
- Ortner, S. B. (2005). Subjectivity and cultural critique. *Anthropological theory*, 5(1), 31-52.
- Pai, H.I. (2000) Constructing 'Korean' Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-formation Theories, Harvard East Asian Monographs, 187. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Centre and Harvard University Press
- Park S.U. (2007) ““Beauty Will Save You”: The Myth and Ritual of Dieting in Korean Society’, *Korea Journal* 47(2): 41–71.
- Park, S. H. (1990). A social-psychological study on the Koreans’ we-hood-ness. Master's thesis, Department of Psychology, Chung-Ang University, Seoul: Korea.
- Park, S.U. (2007) ““Beauty Will Save You”: The Myth and Ritual of Dieting in Korean Society’, *Korea Journal* 47(2): 41–71.
- Phillips, M. (2014, March 10). It takes \$290,000 in cash to rent an apartment in Seoul. Retrieved September 01, 2017, from <https://qz.com/183412/koreas-crazy-system-for-renting-apartments-is-driving-the-country-deeper-into-debt/>
- Phuong-Mai, N., Terlouw, C., & Pilot, A. (2005). Cooperative learning vs Confucian heritage culture's collectivism: confrontation to reveal some cultural conflicts and mismatch. *Asia Europe Journal*, 3(3), 403-419.
- Pužar, A. (2011). Asian dolls and the westernized gaze: Notes on the female dollification in South Korea. *Asian Women*, 27(2), 81-111.
- Ratner, C. (2008). Cultural psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and indigenous psychology. Nova Publishers.
- van Rijn, H., Bahk, Y., Stappers, P. J., & Lee, K. P. (2006). Three factors for contextmapping in East Asia: Trust, control and nunchi. *CoDesign*, 2(3), 157-177.
- Reischer, E., & Koo, K. S. (2004). The body beautiful: Symbolism and agency in the social world. *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.*, 33, 297-317.
- Saeji, C. T. (2013). JUVENILE PROTECTION AND SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION:

ANALYSIS OF THE PERFORMANCE FRAME IN KOREAN MUSIC TELEVISION  
BROADCASTS<sup>1</sup>. *Acta Koreana*, 16(2), 329.

Seoul TouchUp. (n.d.). Gangnam Plastic Surgery Beauty Belt. Retrieved September 25, 2017, from <https://www.seoultouchup.com/why-the-beauty-belt-in-seoul>

Shim, S. (2016, May 26). What it's like growing up with korean beauty ideals. Retrieved September 25, 2017, from [https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_us/article/qv85g3/what-its-like-growing-up-with-korean-beauty-ideals](https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/qv85g3/what-its-like-growing-up-with-korean-beauty-ideals)

Soh, C. S. (2008). *The comfort women: Sexual violence and postcolonial memory in Korea and Japan*. University of Chicago Press.

Soompi. (2014, December 10). KARA's Gyuri: "I Wear High Heels so as Not to Ruin Fans' Fantasies". Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <https://www.soompi.com/2014/12/10/karas-gyuri-i-wear-high-heels-so-as-not-to-ruin-fans-fantasies/>

Soompi. (2015, March 28). Yoo Seung Ho Explains What Girl Groups Meant to Him While in the Army. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <https://www.soompi.com/2015/03/28/yoo-seung-ho-explains-what-girl-groups-meant-to-him-while-in-the-army/>

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Orlando: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Statista. (n.d.). The 20 countries with the lowest fertility rates in 2016. Retrieved August 15, 2017, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268083/countries-with-the-lowest-fertility-rates/>

Steger, I. (2016, October 23). An epic battle between feminism and deep-seated misogyny is under way in South Korea. Retrieved March 09, 2018, from <https://qz.com/801067/an-epic-battle-between-feminism-and-deep-seated-misogyny-is-under-way-in-south-korea/>

Sung, S., & Pascall, G. (Eds.). (2014). *Gender and welfare states in East Asia: Confucianism or gender equality?*. Springer.

Surgery', *Expedition* 42(3):26-38.

The Economist. (2010, January 25). Hallyu, yeah! Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <https://www.economist.com/node/15385735>

The Guardian. (2011). South Korea: a model of development? <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/nov/28/south-korea-development-model> (visited on 11-07-2017)

The Korea Herald. (2014, February 17). Korean students sleep just 5.5 hours a day: survey. Retrieved August 14, 2017, from <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140218000688>

The New York Times. For love and money, Koreans turn to facial tucks - Asia - Pacific -

- International Herald Tribune. (2006, May 14). Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/14/world/asia/14iht-face.1734557.html>
- Turner, Bryan S. (1996) *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*, 2nd edn. London: Sage Publications.
- Volodzko, D. (2016, April 25). K-pop's gross double standard for women. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-04-25/k-pop-s-gross-double-standard-women>
- Williamson, L. (2011, June 15). The dark side of South Korean pop music. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13760064>
- Woo, Keong Ja. "The Beauty Complex and the Cosmetic Surgery Industry." *Korea Journal* 44.2 (2004): 52-82. Web.
- Worldbank;
- a) Overview South Korea. (n.d.). Retrieved July 12, 2017, from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/korea/overview>
  - b) Urban population (% of total). (n.d.). Retrieved July 12, 2017, from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>
  - c) Gross enrolment ratio, tertiary, both sexes (%). (n.d.). Retrieved August 13, 2017, from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR?locations=KR>
  - d) Suicide mortality rate (per 100,000 population). (n.d.). Retrieved July 12, 2017, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.SUIC.P5>
  - e) Labour force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15) (modeled ILO estimate). (2017). Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>
- World Economic Forum. (n.d.). *The Global Gender Gap Report 2016*. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/>
- Yang, I., & Kelly, A. (2009). Assumptions in Korean organizations and their implications in a cross-cultural setting. In *Advances in global leadership* (pp. 297-320). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Yi, M., & Jezewski, M. A. (2000). Korean nurses' adjustment to hospitals in the United States of America. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 32(3), 721-729.
- Yoon, L. (2010, August 26). Korean Pop, with Online Help, Goes Global. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2013227,00.html>
- Zevallos, Z. (2014, November 28). 'Sociology of Gender,' *The Other Sociologist*, Retrieved



## Appendix A: Informants

Ahyun: Seoul, 21 years old, Business and Management  
Jiyeong: Seoul, 23 years old, Cultural Anthropology + Mass Media  
Hayeon: Suwon, 21 years old, Chemistry  
Seohyun: Suwon, 22 years old, Business and Management  
Minjung: Seoul, 26 years old, Receptionist  
Taeyoung: Seoul, 31 years old, Freelance Entrepreneur  
Young: Seoul, 30 years old, Studying for Civil Service Exam  
Hayeong: Seoul, 21 years old, Public Administration  
Yejin: Seoul, 23 years old, Economics + Sociology  
Minji: Seoul, 23 years old, Economics  
Yoobin: Seoul, 22 years old, English Literature  
Daehyun: Suwon, 23 years old, Chemistry + Chemical Engineering  
Hyeri: Suwon, 22 years old, Business and Management  
Yoosang: Seoul, 27 years old, Secretary  
Rebecca: Seoul, 23 years old, Business and Management + Sociology

## Appendix C: Extra Pictures (my own)

### Cosmetic products shops



Plastic surgery clinic: Jk Cosmetic





## Slimming Products







**SY PLASTIC SURGERY**  
**에스와이성형외과의원**  
SY 整形医院

나만 몰랐던  
코 성 형

SY성형외과는 성형외과 전문의가 진료합니다.  
비대칭, 출혈, 염증 등 부작용이 있을 수 있습니다.

상담/예약 (中文商談)  
**02.333.4800**  
2호선 홍대입구역  
1번출구 KEB하나은행 건물 3층

SY  
에스와이  
성형외과의원

KEB  
하나은행

GGV  
홍대점

상상디자인  
트러자

홍대사육사

2호선  
홍대입구역

홍대입구  
사거리

