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PRO GRADU THESIS

**How South Korean female university students perceive  
women's beauty standards and their connotations**

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## Abstract

This thesis is focused on the topic of South Korean women's beauty standards from the perspective of female university students. The topic, besides beauty standards, focuses on their connotations – K-beauty and plastic surgeries. The goal of the paper is to investigate how beauty influences the social life of Koreans. The thesis is based on the 4 semi-structured interviews I conducted and previous studies. Beauty standards in Korea are defined by media; current ideals for perfect beauty are white skin, small face, big eyes and skinny body.<sup>1</sup> Due to constant exposure of beautiful people by media, women feel pressure to look attractive. Make-up and plastic surgeries are two methods which usually women use to change their looks. Make-up is the easiest way but seems to not be that popular among students. Plastic surgery is something more invasive. Double eyelid surgery is the most popular type of plastic surgery among Koreans.<sup>2</sup> When it comes to the influence of beauty on the social life, appearance is valuable. Good looks seem to have an insignificant impact on creating relationships. The same can be said about work life as looks are mostly meaningful at the job interview. Marriage prospects may be influenced by appearance, but it mostly depends on a person. Different areas are affected by good appearance to a different degree.

Keywords:

beauty standards, South Korea, K-beauty, plastic surgery

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<sup>1</sup> Jordan Genovese, 6, accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang, 2012, 60.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

“A women's greatest asset is her beauty” - Alex Comfort

Alex Comfort was a British researcher and author who often wrote about subject of sexuality.<sup>3</sup> In the above quotation Comfort states that beauty is the advantage of a woman. Feminists argue that the society is preoccupied with the appearance and women are pressured to look beautiful which may be linked to anxiety and low self-esteem.<sup>4</sup> Beauty seems to be important to women but is it the most significant value? In today's consumer society, people and in majority women are in the pursuit of beauty. Women want to have attractive appearance so they use make-up, wear fashionable clothes and even in order to make bigger changes go for cosmetic surgeries. They desire beauty from different reasons, some women try to be more beautiful for themselves, while some do it because of pressure from the society.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the reason for their efforts, they all feel that the struggles in the end will be repaid.

I became interested in the topic of beauty because we are always surrounded by it. While staying at home I browse the media which are full of advertisements where attractive women and men are shown. Going outside, looking at others I can see that most of people take care of how they look and do their utmost to show the best appearance. With constant exposure I start paying attention to my own look and become conscious of my own appearance. The first question that comes to mind while researching on beautiful people is to ask who can be considered beautiful, what are the criteria. To put it simply what are the beauty standards. Having such a train of thoughts I became interested in the topic of ideals of beauty.

Topic of my research are women's beauty standards in South Korea from the perspective of female university students. My topic covers beauty standards and their connotations which are K-beauty and plastic surgeries. Research is based on the theory that beauty is a social capital which means that it influences people's social lives. Therefore, what I am investigating in the thesis is beauty standards and their implications on social life from the perspective of my informants.

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<sup>3</sup> Britannica, accessed 10 May 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, 2016, 699-700.

<sup>5</sup> Vichitra Amarnathan, accessed 16 May 2021.

The research focuses only on the South Korea, I choose to dedicate the work to this country as it is my main field of interest in the Master's degree program. Other important factors were, fact that I travelled to Korea for exchange studies and the another, which is my investment in the Korean dramas. As an avid watcher of Korean TV shows it is not difficult to observe media showing so many good looking personalities. As Korea and its culture was something that I was passionate about I started watching Korean programs. After seeing many beautiful celebrities, I wondered if people in Korea will look like those famous figures. Being able to go for an exchange I was happy that I would be able to satisfy my curiosity. During the exchange period, when I stayed in Korea, I was constantly surprised by how much beauty I could see everywhere. This fact reassured me that choosing Korea as topic for topic of beauty standard was an appropriate idea.

Main interest of my work are women, I try to investigate women's beauty standards, from women's perspective. On the grounds that I am a university student my main circle of the acquaintances revolves around students. As a result, in the research I decided to examine perceptions of the university students toward the topic. I focus on the current beauty standards and associated topic, which means that the work mostly contains studies that are done in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The exception from this is in chapter 3 where I wrote about history of beauty standards around the world.

Topic of my research is not new as many scholars studied beauty standards of different countries for instance Laura Miller describes beauty ideals in Japan<sup>6</sup>, while Kristen Marrinan presents beauty standards in America.<sup>7</sup> What I think is unique and more specified in it is the perspective of the paper. My focus is on the women's beauty from young women's perspective, specifically from perspective of female university students who will graduate and look for job and start families. What makes the topic even more compressed is fact that the target group of the study are university students. Furthermore, my research should feel the gap in the literature with the new perspective.

In the paper I have four chapters where I investigate the research topic which are chapter 5,6,7,8 while the rest of chapters covers other important aspects that needed to be included in the dissertation.

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<sup>6</sup> Laura Miller, "Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics", 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Kristen Marrinan, "American Beauty Standards: "Paling" in Comparison to the White Norm", 2019.

In the chapter 2 I discuss the literature review presenting papers that I was using while writing the thesis. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the framework of thesis where I mention how I used the concept of the beauty as a social capital. In the chapter 4 I mention how I used the data I gathered in the paper.

Chapter 5 is focused on the idea of beauty standards. Firstly, I brush the topic of what are the general beauty standards. I explain what current ideals of beauty in South Korea are by mentioning works of other scholars. The other part of the chapter is focused on presenting findings from the interviews I conducted. I give student's answers to questions of what beauty ideals are, who is responsible for defining them. I also put information to the associated topic which is whether students pay attention to the appearance.

Through chapter 6 I present two industries in Korea that are connected to the beauty market. I mention cosmetic industry the K-beauty and the reasons why Korean women use make-up. The second industry I present is the plastic surgery industry. I show how plastic surgeries appeared in Korea, what are the most popular ones and the reasons why women decide to undergo a plastic surgery. Through different reasons why women decide for such method there is also need for having higher status which is connected to the concept of beauty as a social capital which is described in next chapter. This chapter also includes data from the interviews. From the students I ask for information about popularity of plastic surgeries and which they think is the most popular one.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to the concept of the beauty as a social capital. I describe the term and show which areas of social life are included in it. This chapter is mostly covered by findings from the interviews. I look for answers to find if students think that beautiful appearance has impact on social life which would be social interactions, impact on work life and impact on marriage prospects.

General findings and conclusions I have came up to with after completing the whole research are written in the last chapter 8. The final chapter summarizes what I investigated from the conducted interviews and previous studies.



## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

When people meet each other, the first thing they pay attention to is appearance. Often opinions and thoughts about person are based on their looks. Although it is said that judgment about someone should be based on the character, how person appears is usually more important, especially during the first meeting. Having said that, how people present themselves is significant in the contemporary society. People who are perceived as beautiful may have better opportunities than those with worse looks, yet they also may be exposed to the harm. Topic of beauty is often displayed in mass media as well as academic texts as researchers write about the importance of beauty.

My research for Master's thesis is focused on the beauty standards in South Korea. Research is about what young women think about Korean beauty standards and if they feel pressure to look beautiful. Besides it, what interests me are also consequences of those standards such as increase of the number of plastic surgeries and popularity of Korean cosmetic industry. High demand of both methods results in the expansion of those markets that provide beauty products. To understand the topic, I looked for data about beauty standards, mainly focusing on the Korea and reasons why Koreans want to be beautiful. I also searched for methods to achieve good looks such as plastic surgeries. The last aspect I focused on was the huge industry of K-beauty which is Korean beauty market.

### **Beauty standards and their origins**

As the work focuses on the beauty standards it is important to look for what they are. Important work that helps with understanding the beauty ideals is one written by Heather Widdows. In the "Perfect Me: Beauty as an Ethical Ideal" author outlines the contemporary standards for beauty. In this book author describes ideals which are universal, showing what is perceived as generally beautiful. Four characteristics of beauty are presented: thinness, firmness, smoothness, youthfulness. Author also highlights the fact that presented features may vary in different places.<sup>8</sup> What is important in the work is argument made by the author about connection between beauty and morality. Author argues that beauty and what we do for it is assimilated with goodness. To show an example author describes how Disney movies portray good

characters as beautiful while the evil ones as not attractive.<sup>9</sup> Although the book is important as it shows the importance of the beauty it is not focused on the South Korea so the information on the ideals maybe slightly different.

In the context of the South Korea and the beauty article by Jordan Genovese “Same Face, Different Place: Kpop and the Western world shaping beauty ideals in Korea” explores the standards of beauty which are crucial to the research. Article describes what are the standards in appearance of women in South Korea when it comes to their bodies and faces. Author emphasizes beauty standards for women that she bases on the studies of other scholars. The beauty ideal for women are slender bodies and with V-shaped faces. Other fact that the author mentions is that Koreans are conscious about their weight which results in dieting. Author also gives insight into Korean entertainment industry – K-pop and presents the beauty ideals in this sphere. Jordan Genovese brings also fact that western culture plays role in beauty standards in Korea as Koreans are influenced by the American culture. Beauty standards in Korea are affected by the domestic values and the Korean pop culture, but there is also an influence from the globalized American popular industry.<sup>10</sup> Article gives the overall information about beauty industry in South Korea and beauty standards and that is why it vital for the research. Thus, findings from the article are helpful as they provide base for the standards of beauty in Korea.

Connected to the beauty standards is topic of femininity, which are the characteristics and attributes that are associated with women. Book which explores subject of femininity in South Korea is written by Joanna Elfving-Hwang. In the “Representations of Femininity in Contemporary South Korean Women's Literature” about perceptions of femininity. Although it is not about strictly about beauty, it is still valuable. Author shows changes in perception of femininity from the concepts of Neo-Confucianism till the contemporary times. Author in the book shows the model of families and how women were bound to the house. It presented the inferior position of women. Women were also depicted with role of birthing children and taking care of them.<sup>11</sup> This book is useful to show the position of women and how it relates to their

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<sup>8</sup> Heather Widdows, 2018, 6-20.

<sup>9</sup> Widdows, 2018, 17-18.

<sup>10</sup> Jordan Genovese, accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Joanna Elfving-Hwang, 2010.

appearance. Book shows how women were perceived by men and the pressure on women to act accordingly to the wishes of men.

### **Feminist perspective on beauty standards**

Beauty standards impact our lives and according to the feminist researchers they influence as negatively. Deborah L. Rhode in her work “Appearance as a Feminist Issue” discusses appearance of woman in the world where people are surrounded by beauty. Author states that while for some women pursuing beauty maybe empowering to others it may bring complexes and negatively impact the psychological well-being. In her work author shows how feminists have seen beauty practices in different years and different feminist groups. According to the author the goal of feminist groups is to find create a concept of beauty that will help women with their self-esteem.<sup>12</sup>

Another scholar who wrote about beauty and feminism is Michelle M. Lazar who in her paper “The Right to Be Beautiful: Postfeminist Identity and Consumer Beauty Advertising” mentions different waves of feminism where they look upon beauty differently. Author states that some feminists view beauty industry negatively which is burdening women, while other feminists view it positively and think of beauty practises as something enjoyable.<sup>13</sup>

### **Reasons for altering appearance**

Besides understanding what are the ideals of beauty it is important to find what are the reasons why women want to look beautiful and their methods to obtain dreamy look. This field in academics is depicted by vast number of authors. Beauty can be something subjective that is why firstly I wanted to know more about general reasons why Korean women want to become beautiful. Article by Yuri Lee and Sunwoo Kim titled “Why do women want to be beautiful? A qualitative study proposing a new “human beauty values” concept” which is focused on this topic is important with its findings. Authors were studying the topic by conducting interviews. They research the subject by interviewing people from South Korea, China and Japan. Authors introduce new concept of human beauty value (HBV) which is a value focused on human beauty as well as a belief related to desired body. Article shows the reasons for pursuing beauty in each country, showing that there are differences between cultures of Japan, Korea

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<sup>12</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, 2016, 697-710.

<sup>13</sup> Michelle M. Lazar, 2011, 37.

and China. Korean women in the article have more negative feelings about their bodies and are willing to improve their looks by different procedures.<sup>14</sup> Article gives comparison of three Asian countries that although have similar cultures they perceive beauty differently. Although research does not focus solely on the South Korea it is still vital with the findings.

Reasons why women try to be beautiful are also stated in the article written by Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang in 2012. Main focus of the article is plastic surgeries while author also mentions what are the reasons why women try to change their looks. Article titled “Gender, Globalization and Aesthetic Surgery in South Korea” describes the reasons why South Koreans both men and women undergo plastic surgeries. First of all, authors show how Koreans perceive plastic surgeries, how they see it as something rather positive. One of the reasons for Korean women to undergo surgeries lies in neo-Confucian conformities and patriarchal society. Second to this is globalization, as popularity of surgeries spread around the world. Women are expected to be pretty for men and as the global standards for beauty are usually white women, they tend to try to look more like them. Authors also as a reason for doing surgery state physiognomy through which people think that if they alter their appearance, they will achieve success. Authors argue that Koreans want to rather than looking ‘Western’, having features of people from western countries prefer looking more Asian, having characteristics of Korean people. They perceive beauty ideals as how it was before, when other countries did not have influence on Korea. Article proves that beauty is important in life and what procedures people undergo to look better.<sup>15</sup> The most important findings to me are the conclusions which authors reached that the Koreans tend to change their looks due to their indigenous identity. They try to look like the ideals of beauty that were portrayed in the history of Korea. To understand the contemporary standards of beauty one should go back in time. Article is vital to my research with its information about the reasons for undergoing plastic surgeries.

Another article which is focused on methods which help to obtain desired looks is “Gangnam-Style Plastic Surgery: The Science of Westernized Beauty in South Korea” by So-Yeon Leem from 2017. Author describes plastic surgery methods in her article and introduces new type of beauty ideals. In the article author shows the

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<sup>14</sup> Sunwoo Kim and Yuri Lee, 2018, 1–25.

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang, 2012, 58–81.

combination of old ideals from West with various new combinations that are perceived as beautiful in Korea. Author also presents which type of surgery is currently popular besides those already known such as eyelid surgery or rhinoplasty. The jawline surgery is gaining a lot of attention in the circle of beauty procedures. South Korea is often perceived as place where everyone wants to look the same and get their ideals from celebrities. Yet, the procedures done in plastic surgery clinics show that there is diversity in what people see as beautiful. Author gives information through research done by her in the plastic surgery clinic.<sup>16</sup> As in the article by Joanna Elfving-Hwang, So-Yeon Leem proves that nowadays the Western look is less popular than Asian look in the South Korea. Author also shows that the excessive modification gives the unnatural look, which is no more beautiful, like surgery on jawline which creates the V-shape.

Article “The Beauty Complex and the Cosmetic Surgery Industry” by Keong Ja Woo from 2012 deals with the topic of connection between women inferiority in beauty and cosmetic surgeries. Article focuses on the topic of obsession with beauty. According to the author women in the patriarchal community are feeling inferior and that leads them to obsession with their appearance. Their look can give them better job, marriage and different prospects which makes women unsure about their appearance. Because of that they are willingly undergoing plastic surgery processes. However, it has also negative effects as it makes women dependent on such procedures and gives them feeling of uncertainty about their own appearance. Although women are aware about downsides of surgeries, they are still willingly altering their bodies. Article deeply explores the reasons why women undergo plastic surgeries and want to enhance their looks. It also shows the importance of good looks and beauty for Korean women and what they can gain if they are beautiful. Important findings to my research are reasons for altering own appearance that relate to possibilities it brings.<sup>17</sup>

Topic of the plastic surgery is also deeply covered in the Master’s Thesis by Mary Hyunhee Song. In the thesis “Cosmetic Surgery and Rites of Passage in Korean Society – A Study in Cosmetic Surgeries after University Entrance Exam” author shows the popularity of the surgeries and the reasons why young women do them. In the thesis Mary Hyunhee Song interviews women who undergone plastic surgeries and learns

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<sup>16</sup> So Yeon Leem, 2017, 657–71.

<sup>17</sup> Keong Ja Woo, 2004, 52-82.

about why they came to this decision. Described reasons are the pressure from society and families. Thesis is mostly focused on one surgery which is the double eyelid procedure. As it is not such an invasive treatment it is not treated as surgery but as procedure. Author shows how young women strive to have double eyelid which are known to be beautiful.<sup>18</sup> This work is as it focuses not only on the young Korean women who want to be beautiful but also shows that they are under pressure to look beautiful and it is not always their own idea to alter their appearance. Findings from the author are crucial to what I want to study.

### **Connotation of beauty standards: K-beauty**

Afterwards, the data that I searched for was focused on the opportunities which beauty brings. Beauty ideals in the South Korea play vital role as they let its beauty market grow to enormous size. Article published by Hyo-Won Lee in 2018 focuses on the topic of K-Beauty. Article titled “K-Beauty Experience: In Depth and Personal” depicts the industry of K-Beauty which is popular around the world. Article presents the beauty market in South Korea, which is one of the biggest in the world. Article shows the importance of the beauty in Korea by presenting popularity it has domestically and internationally. Author shows what is important in the appearance of Korean women which is natural look. Women want to look naturally with healthy skin. Author proves that in the beauty market the make-up is more important than fashion. Appearance of the face plays a key role and as the make-up is cheaper than the clothes there is a high demand for such products. Besides make-up, different treatments for skin are popular as they can improve condition of skin and the beauty of the person. is also meaningful is the impact K-beauty has outside the Korea. It shows the influence of Korean beauty standards in foreign countries and how the standards change quickly not only in Korea but also in other nations.<sup>19</sup> From the article most valuable information about beauty market of Korea shows its intense growth and its international popularity.

The beauty market in South Korea is huge. According to the Allied Market Research report in 2019, the K-beauty industry products were valued at 10.2 billion dollars.<sup>20</sup> To gain more knowledge about this market and potential of it, article by Chan-Koo Kang was helpful. Article “The Cosmetics Industry Adopts a High-Tech

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Hyunhee Song, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Lee Hyo-won, 2018, 28–33.

<sup>20</sup> Allied Market Research, accessed 15 May 2021.

Makeover” from 2012 describes changes in the beauty industry. Author shows the growth of the market and what helped in the expansion of it. According to author what is pushing the industry to grow is mostly biotechnology, high-tech materials, research development. In order to let the market, grow more government must invest further. Article was informative and useful due to its understanding of beauty market. Although data is from 2012 and numbers about size of the market changed, they still prove that beauty industry is enormous.<sup>21</sup>

### **Beauty as a social capital**

Lastly, I researched topic of beauty as a social capital. I found academic papers that are useful in my own research. Article written by Kathleen M. O’Connor and Eric Gladstone “Beauty and social capital: Being attractive shapes social networks” discusses the term that is introduced in the title. Authors describe what is the meaning of beauty as a social capital which has the impact on social lives of people. Authors introduce their own research that is connected to the term.<sup>22</sup> My interest in this paper was mostly the term that authors described. The topic is further explored by Kathleen M. O’Connor and Eric Gladstone in their other work “Sitting Pretty: Attractiveness, Social Capital, and Success” where authors describe how attractiveness brings positive outcomes in life. Authors argue that attractive people have better opportunities which gives them better results. Authors in paper discuss the positive outcomes in work and social life.<sup>23</sup>

The other research that is helpful to my thesis is “The Halo Effect and the Social Capital of Beauty: A Psychological Perspective” written by Amanda Matthews. Author shows there that beauty is perceived as commodity. Attractive people may more advantageous in their lives as their work and social lives are positively affected. Author discusses the psychological phenomenon that links beauty to the intelligence and better social skills.<sup>24</sup> From this article what had the most value to me were information on which spheres in life are affected by appearance.

Quantity of the literature connected to my research topic varies depending on the given subject. Most information about the topic of beauty can be found on websites as

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<sup>21</sup> Kang Chan-Koo, 2012, 99-103.

<sup>22</sup> Kathleen M. O’Connor and Eric Gladstone, January 2018, 42-47.

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen M. O’Connor and Eric Gladstone, 23 February 2018, 2-3.

<sup>24</sup> Amanda Matthews, 2013, 15-21.

articles or newspapers. Academic text is also focused on the beauty and its ideals but there is less information, especially when it comes to beauty standards in Korea. Most of the presented literature in this chapters are focused on the effects which beauty standards bring which is desire to change one's appearance. One of the methods to change the appearances are plastic surgeries, which due to their popularity made the South Korean industry one of the most recognizable in the world. The other method, not invisible is make-up. Korean beauty market known as K-beauty due to its high demand is growing not only domestically but also internationally. When it comes to the beauty standards they are not broadly described in the academic papers when it comes to the South Korea. A lot was researched on the beauty standards around the world but focus on the one country is less popular. Most literature is from the articles and websites.



### Chapter 3: Framework and concepts

Through my research I plan to find how established beauty standards in South Korea are seen by young women and how they affect them. With the research I want to understand why women strive to be beautiful and what are the consequences of this pursuit of beauty.

To comprehend the topic what needs to be explained first is the terminology. The definition of the key term is based on my own understanding. Whole research revolves around the beauty standards (ideals) – which are different characteristics that decide on the attractiveness of a person. Feminists scholars view beauty standards as something oppressive as Deborah L. Rhode in her article brought fact that women under pressure of society try to fit into the ideals. Rhode states that as women are more pressured than men, their confidence is more dependent on their appearance.<sup>25</sup> Another scholar Michelle M. Lazar states that women should feel free to look how they want, they have right to be beautiful. According to the author this right does not mean the right to fit into the standards of society but right to feel beautiful by own's principles.<sup>26</sup>

Through the research I want to know how young Korean women perceive standards of beauty that are imposed on them. What according to them those standards are as well as their understanding of this term. In the research I also investigate why women want to look beautiful and what are the aftereffects of their pursuit. With the research I argue that beauty can be perceived as a social capital. This concept of beauty and social capital was already studied by researchers. According to Kathleen M. O'Connor and Eric Gladstone beauty has an influence on the social life of people.<sup>27</sup> People who are perceived as beautiful may have more prospects with their jobs or personal life. Social interaction of such people is better than those who are supposed to look worse. In their work life they also may encounter better prospects such as higher position or pay. They also argue that person who sees themselves as beautiful will act different than the one who does not. What also differs is the outcome of the actions. People who consider themselves more attractive will have better communication skills.

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<sup>25</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, 2016, 703.

<sup>26</sup> Michelle M. Lazar, 2011, 39-40.

<sup>27</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor, Eric Gladstone, 2018, 42.

<sup>28</sup> This concept existed already in the earlier years. To check when it had more meaning it is important to go through the history of beauty standards.

This phenomenon of importance of beauty was already seen in the ancient times. Ideals of beauty could be seen across the ancient Europe. The oldest standards come already from the ancient Greece. Beauty was important as it was associated with goodness. Beautiful people were good, all heroes in the mythology were portrayed as beautiful. In Greece women were considered good when they were fair skinned, and their bodies were plump. Their position in the society was lower than man so ideal women were taking care of the household. They were considered to be a tool for reproduction, so their bodies needed to be ready for pregnancy. Desired woman was the one whose body was good for bearing children. In regard to the fair skin, it was a sign of wealth. Rich people did not need to work outside and could keep their pale complexion. Women also used make-up to beautify themselves. At that time men with their higher status were also supposed to be better looking than women, it was said that male bodies were ideal.<sup>29</sup> Women were attractive if their bodies could bear children. Those beautiful women were more desirable, and they had better prospects. This was connected to their social life as they could quicker get a husband.

On the other hand in another part of the world in ancient Egypt women were treated with more equality to men as they the same legal rights as men from their social class.<sup>30</sup> Although they could have more freedom they were still supposed to be in management of household and lowering their position to this inferior to men. Contrary to the ancient Greece, in Egypt women were appreciated for their beauty. What was left from the ancient texts is for example a love poetry, in those texts artist described ideal women. Beautiful woman was supposed to be slim and have a long neck and small but firm breasts. What also characterized her was pale skin and black hair. The poetry written by men portrayed women in an idealized way and created the cannon for beauty.<sup>31</sup> In this area of world beauty was something to be admired and did not have that much of an impact on the social life of women.

Another part of the world Asia also had different standards when it comes to the beauty. In ancient China and Japan people payed attention to face. What was important

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<sup>28</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor, Eric Gladstone, 2018, 42-47.

<sup>29</sup> Mireille M. Lee, 2014, 44-46.

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Watterson, 2013, 6.

was eyes, as the centre of the face. Chinese scholars wrote even how to evaluate eyes and what mattered in the evaluation was primarily their size and movements as well as proportion between black and white parts. In both China and Japan, it was said that narrow eyes were considered to be beautiful. Other important aspect to Chinese people were eyebrows and lips which could be painted with the use of make-up. Another part of the face that was notable was nose to which attention was brought later in the history. Ideal nose was supposed to be straight, both in China and Japan. When it comes to the body shapes in China popular body was slim with a narrow waist. There was also a time in the history like Tang dynasty where plump type of bodies were said to be beautiful. There was no mention in the literature about woman's breasts and no discussion about the naked bodies so usually women portrayed in paintings were having flat breasts.

Besides shape of the body and facial features, what distinguished beautiful women was white skin. This characteristic was important both in China and Japan. In order to obtain desirable effect women used special powders. Those powders were applied not only on the skin of face but also other visible parts like neck or arms. Desire to have a pale skin was visible in Asia as it would suggest that those who have fair skin are wealthy and do not need to work. This was truth not only in Asia, but also other parts of world like Europe. Already in ancient times women were used to using make-up from painting their brows to whitening powders, showing that they need to alter their appearance to become beautiful.<sup>32</sup>

During the ancient times women who had higher social status were mostly tied to their homes with not many chances for social interactions. Women were tied to their own homes as it was their job to take care of the house and upbringing of the children. Freedom of women was dependent on men, which blocked their possibilities in social interacting. When it comes to work as women were primarily taking care of household it was seen as their job. Due to this fact beauty could have impact only on their chances with marriage.

In the Middle ages literature, which describes beauty of women focuses on the fair but rosy skin. What also characterizes a beauty is sparkling eyes and richly colored hair. There is not much when it comes to the shape of the bodies and its weight so it can be concluded that it did not have any impact on how attractive woman was. Although

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<sup>31</sup> Barbara Watterson, 2013, 10-15.

women need to pay attention to their weight as obesity was associated with sins. Literature shows rather consistent ideals of beauty, but different regions could favor different colors of hair or even skin. Women that were considered beautiful had blond hair although in some regions black hair was considered as attractive. Other features were small head, mouth, fine nose. Body should have large hips, small feet and trim waist. Natural beauty was considered to be the best and make-up was said to be a sinful. For people inner beauty played crucial role thus why enhancing appearance was seen as a sin. Although how the body looked like was important another aspect that was linked to the beauty was behavior. Those who were well-behaved were considered beautiful. Women should act according to the norms and would need to pay attention to their own reputation as well as reputation of their husbands.<sup>33</sup> In the medieval times beauty had more to do with the morality than the social capital. Women needed to behave and look properly. They would be immoral if they would try to alter their appearance. As taking care of one's beauty was linked to being immoral, the beauty was not perceived as social capital it did not influence women life. Women were still only responsible for their families and homes, so their beauty did not have much impact on their social life. As women were restricted with their freedom and were mostly spending time at home socializing was restricted.

Renaissance period can be distinguished for its known standards of beauty. Looks were very important to women as if they possessed a great beauty, they could raise their position in the society. In Italy various literature and painting portray beautiful women what is included in all of their descriptions is blonde hair, pale skin, rosy lips and small breasts. What was also important for women was to have a hairless skin. To attain this kind of look and live up to the pressure they felt from the society, women used various make-up methods. Women used different recipes to look beautiful, as they even dyed their hair to look beautiful. Although women used different recipes for make-up they were often criticized as according to Christian Church it was a sin to change their appearance.<sup>34</sup> Through the renaissance women were having more freedom they were less restricted when it comes to social life. Beauty was important to women as it had effect on their status. Beauty was connected to social capital as beautiful women had better prospects in terms of their social life and class.

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<sup>32</sup> Cho Kyo and Kyoko Iriye Selden, 2012, 21-34.

<sup>33</sup> Theresa A. Vaughan, 2020, 159-165.

<sup>34</sup> Marlisa den Hartog, 2020, accessed 14 February 2021.

20<sup>th</sup> century brings more pressure for women to be beautiful due to the growth of popular culture.<sup>35</sup> It was to woman obligation to make herself beautiful, but it was also associated with something enjoyable. With this issue there was increase of number of cosmetics in the market and appearance of cosmetic surgeries. Using make-up was a common occurrence and the industry was growing rapidly. Beauty besides the appearance was also based on the fashion. Beauty ideals were often based on the popular actresses that were shown in the movies, so they varied when it comes to their appearances. For example, in the 1950s popular actress Marilyn Monroe was seen as the ideal, the characteristics of her beauty that were known were her body curves and also blond hair. People paid attention to the entertainment stars – their look, clothes and hair.<sup>36</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a lot of changes when it comes to the life of women, they gained more freedom, but they also fought for their rights. Women besides caring for their homes were also working with such changes their life opportunities were bigger. How they looked had more impact on their lives. They could gain more in their social and work lives.

Concept of a beauty as a social capital existed for a long time. For women it was seen mostly in the times where they gained more freedom and could work. As their possibilities in life were widened, they needed to pay attention to their appearance. Beauty was connected to their status and could gain them opportunities in their lives. In the latter part of the work I will discuss this concept in the contemporary South Korea.

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<sup>35</sup> Louise Wood, accessed 15 February 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Louise Wood, accessed 15 February 2021.

## Chapter 4: Methods and data

The purpose of my research as mentioned in the beginning of the thesis is to study how South Korean female university students understand beauty standards and its aftereffects which are the Korean beauty industry and plastic surgeries. In this research I want to use the concept of beauty as social capital. This concept will be used during the analysis of the data.

When it comes to design of my research it is a qualitative research. This type of the research focuses on the analyzing experiences of people. In this type different techniques maybe used to study people's experiences such as observation or in-depth interviews.<sup>37</sup> Basis of the research are previous studies, but they serve as a secondary source while interviews which I conducted are the primary sources. In the study I also used my own observations from exchange studies period as a secondary source. The research is focused on the exploring the topic of perceptions of beauty standards. The goal of the study is to find out what students think about the topic and analyze their perceptions with the concept of beauty as social capital. Studying the problem from the point of view of the participants is the characteristic of the qualitative research which is why I choose this method in my own work. Due to the fact that I wanted to study thoughts of people and their experiences I think that the qualitative research is the most suitable type of research for my own work. To obtain the data I choose method of semi-structured interviews as most questions I had prepared beforehand. This type of method was most relevant to me when it comes to studying perceptions of people in this research.

As the base of my research are the previous studies in order to understand the topic of the beauty standards in Korea I searched for academic papers like books and journal articles in the libraries and online archives. The works which I found were used while writing chapter on conceptual framework. For the research I studied papers from the University of Turku library as well as during my exchange studies from Kyunghee University library. In regard to the online tools I searched through the Internet search engine – Google as well as various online databases such as JSTOR, Wiley Online

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<sup>37</sup> Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey, 2020, 10.

Library and Sage Research Methods Online. I used the online databases to research the topic so the most used terms I searched for were “beauty standards” and “social capital”.

For the purpose of this research I conducted interviews in April 2021. Interviews were semi-structured as I had a series of questions prepared beforehand. Some questions that were added during the interviews. Prepared questions were based on the theory mentioned in the introduction. Semi-structured interview is a type in which interviewer has developed set questions that will be used for all interviewees. Questions are prepared before conducting the actual interviews. Even though interviewer has a format which they follow, the question may vary depending on the situation.<sup>38</sup> During period of my exchange studies in Seoul in South Korea from August to December 2020 I got acquainted with Korean university students. Due to the fact that situation with COVID-19 pandemic I was not able to attend offline classes and in result I could not meet many of the students. The other issue that could create a limitation for the research is fact that the interviews were conducted in English. Because I am not a Korean native speaker I did interviews in English. Although English is a language all around the world it is not first language for both, me and the interviewees. As a result, there is a possibility of miscommunication. Nevertheless, few of those who I met participated in my research as interviewees. The rest of participants I got to know through others, by the snowball method. All of the participants are students from different universities in South Korea in the time of conducting interviews they may be not attending classes as they took a break from studies or graduated.

As the study involves research of people’s perceptions what needs to be taken into considerations are the ethical issues. During the interviews I informed everyone on their rights, topic and the purpose of the study and asked if they agree to participate in the research. I also determined that everyone was voluntarily taking part in the interviews. Participation in interviews has its risks as informants may be identified by the public thus, they were briefed about how I am going to secure their identities. In order to protect the identities of interviewees I used pseudonyms for them. All informants will be called students and to differentiate between them they will be given a letter from the alphabet. Data gathered from the interviews will be kept confidential and interviewees will be able to have access to it. Informants will be able to withhold information they do not want to share and will be able to resign from participation any

time. Informants will also have access to the results of the interviews and the whole research.

Student A – student from the digital business major. We met in the airport and as she helped me with communicating in Korean, we became friends. Currently she is taking part in a start-up project.

Student B – student from the business major, who I met in one of the classes during student exchange in Seoul. She is currently taking a gap year in order to obtain an accounting license.

Student D – student from economy major. We became friends during her exchange in Finland through other friends. Later when I came to Korea, we had chance to meet again. Recently she graduated and is preparing for an internship.

Interviews were conducted not face-to-face as I conducted them from Finland whereas interviewees were in Korea. In order to conduct them I used an application ZOOM through which I held online meetings with participants. All the data obtained from the interviews is obtained through recording the interviews.

In the research I study people's perceptions and although interviews help in understanding them, they also are more restrictive. Due to the fact that the number of participants is small it is difficult to generalize the results. As the research specifies that those who are studied are female university students from South Korea, the results from the interviews may not reflect how all the students think. As this method is time consuming it also creates a barrier as it is better in studying smaller number of people. I managed to interview 4 university students. All of them were conducted in the April 2021 and they lasted approximately 40 minutes. Interviews were conducted in English and as it is not a native language for me and the informants, I needed to pay attention to words I used. I tried to construct questions in a way which will be easy to understand.

In the analysis of the data from the interview I firstly identified themes that occurred in the interviews in order to further understand the topic. For the analysis, the method I used was deductive. Deductive analysis makes use of prior concepts during the analysis which is contrary to the inductive analysis.<sup>39</sup> I used the concept of beauty as a social capital as well as data from previous studies to create questions for the

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<sup>38</sup> Marilyn Lichtman, 2014, 248.



interviews. Thus prior to conducting interviews I had themes that I planned to research and analyze.

In the interviews different topics that revolved around the main subject of beauty standards were brought up. Those topics can be put in different categories. First of all, as the topic is about beauty everything that was discussed is under this term. Beauty is an umbrella concept and under it I distinguished few categories that I wanted to develop. First category were beauty standards where focus was on identifying them, describing their importance and finding who defines beauty standards. Secondly it was K-beauty where the concentration was on paying attention to one's appearance. Next was plastic surgeries where attention was brought to popularity of surgeries, identifying most popular ones and reason behind people who undergo them. Lastly, the category was beauty as social capital where the topic was divided on three parts – social life, work life and marriage prospects.

In the topic of beauty standards my research contributes to the previous studies with its approach as I focus on the specific group which is female university students from South Korea. Besides the approach in the research data comes from the interviews that I conducted thus it also is a contribution to this topic. The aim of the research as well as the interviews is to show the perspective of the generation of young people who are new members of the working society.

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Thorpe and Robin Holt, 2008, 112-113.

## Chapter 5: Beauty ideals

People have private and social lives. Social life means that you meet others and interact with them. When people interact with each other they pay attention to the character and appearance. While looking at each other they assess the other person's looks, if they are considered to be beautiful or not. To judge the appearance of another person there needs to be some basis on which we can assess who is considered to be beautiful. For different people, different characteristics may look prettier than others.

Although people have their own thoughts about looks there are also general standards of beauty. My interest is in the beauty ideals of women that is why I focused on the standards that concern women's beauty. According to Heather Widdows there is no ideal of beauty that is perfect. People cannot say that for example height of 160 cm is a perfect height of a woman. People with different sizes, heights, hair or eye colors may be perfect or ideal in terms of beauty. Despite this fact there are some globally dominant characteristics that are considered beautiful.<sup>40</sup>

First of all, it is a thin and slim body. Lot of women care about how thin they are and do diets in order to be slimmer. Furthermore, it is difficult to say how to measure thinness. For different women being thin may vary. Also being thin may have different meanings depending on a person – one may want to be thin but have some curves while other may prefer being slim but athletic body.<sup>41</sup> The other feature of body is firmness which is also a bit vague. It is connected to the thinness. If a person wants to be slim but have the curves, they also need to look good. For instance, breasts need to be firm in order to look beautiful. Firmness of a body requires work as diet will not work to have a healthy and strong body. So, to obtain their goal women work hard to not only be slim but also firm.<sup>42</sup> The next characteristic mentioned by Widdows is smoothness. In order to have a perfect body the skin should be smooth without scars or blemishes. To have a good skin woman needs to take care of it to not have wrinkles or large pores. This need of flawless skin is connected not only to the skin on a body but also on face.<sup>43</sup> The last feature is youthfulness, to put it simply women do not want to look old. If a woman

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<sup>40</sup> Heather Widdows, 2018, 20-21.

<sup>41</sup> Widdows, 2018, 21-22.

<sup>42</sup> Widdows, 2018, 22-24.

<sup>43</sup> Widdows, 2018, 24-25.

wants to be beautiful, she needs to look young. This characteristic is easier than others as here it is simple how to decide whether woman is beautiful or not.<sup>44</sup> Heather Widdows presents characteristics of woman that are considered ideal. Those features are general and should be considered as popular everywhere.

During my exchange studies I went to study in Seoul, South Korea. What surprised me during my time there was being surrounded by the beauty. Everywhere I went I could see advertisements of actors, idols and other famous celebrities. With such surroundings people can become conscious of their own appearance. I also become more aware of how I look. I looked at myself and thought if I am beautiful enough. When meeting other people, it is inevitable to also judge their appearance and I also had this in mind whenever I met others. I tried to analyze what kind of looks seems to be popular in Korea. Although everyone has their own standards, there are also general cannons of beauty there.



**Picture 1: Advertisement on the street in Imun-dong**

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<sup>44</sup> Heather Widdows, 2018, 25-26.

(Advertisement for the app “직방” (zipbang) that helps in looking for apartments and offices) – photo taken by me



**Picture 2: Advertisement in the subway station in Mapo-gu**

(Advertisement of anniversary of solo music from artist Chen)

Presented photos (picture 1 and 2) were taken by me when I was strolling in the streets of Seoul. All pictures included in the thesis were taken by me. First picture shows a standing advertisement on which is presented a popular actor – Lee Dong Wook. When it comes to the second picture it was taken in the subway station. Picture shows an advertisement of anniversary solo music of artist – Chen from the boyband EXO. Although presented photos show men, during my stay I saw equal number of advertisements of both genders. From the photos it is seen that both men are good looking and given the fact that there are many similar advertisements it is obvious that people become self-conscious when they are surrounded by those types of adverts. Though I took pictures of men my research is focused on the beauty of women and thus those photos are merely to show popularity of adverts with good-looking people.

## Chapter 5.1: Beauty standards in South Korea

During my research I focused on the beauty standards of women in South Korea so firstly I wanted to know what kind of appearance is generally said to be beautiful. So, what are the canons of beauty according to the researchers. When it comes to the body – there are different types but the ones that are most popular in Korea are body with the “S-line” – this means that when we look at the body from the side a woman has defined breasts and buttocks. The other popular type is the “X-line”, in this type a woman is characterized by long arms and legs. Another feature is a narrow waist.<sup>45</sup>

Both body and face have equal importance when it comes to assessing beauty of a person. In regard to woman’s face what first is said to be beautiful is the size. Small faces are the most desirable. Also, women who have a face with pointed chin that is said to be a “v-line” are considered beautiful. Other features that are of less importance is symmetry of the face as well as fact that the jaw is not protruded. When it comes to the eyes, there is a popularity in having a double eyelid. All those characteristics have an impact on assessing the appearance of the woman.<sup>46</sup> Such features are considered beautiful as they are often seen in the mass media. According to website *Seoulspace* many of the Korean idols are characterized by their small faces and slim figures.<sup>47</sup>

To find out what are the ideals of beauty according to the students I asked my informants what their opinion on this topic is. According to student A the first thing that she thinks of when she heard about beauty standard was a skin tone:

A: “The first thing that pops in my head is a whiter skin tone. It has a long history about white skin. Really long time ago like Joseon dynasty and even more than that, there was a hierarchy like there were lower people and middle people, like slaves and everything. The higher people tend to not work outside so they keep their skin white compared to workers who works at like seas and mountains. So people have a stereotype that if you have a whiter skin you are noble or like rich people. So the stereotype comes from the old hierarchy system. But right

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<sup>45</sup> Jordan Genovese, accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Genovese, accessed 15 May 2021.

now, these days the beauty standards are expanding and changing so not many people think that white skin is prettier or better. We also think that dark skin is sexier and healthier. It is changing but the typical beauty standard will be white skin.”

Through her explanation it seems that the beauty associated with the skin tone was linked to the hierarchy and although the hierarchy system disappeared people still are bound to the old customs and stereotypes. According to article from *Borgen magazine* women and men in South Korea are still not considered equal in some spheres such as earnings. Women are paid less than men.<sup>48</sup> What was interesting to see is fact that there is also a change in the standards as not only white skin is considered to be beautiful nowadays. Student D also put importance on the fair, white skin and said that this ideal of beauty in Korea did not change for a long time. Asking student A further about the standards of beauty to get know more about body or facial ideals I got such answer:

A: “It really depends on people, but the general idea of beauty standard of facial shape would be a small face. But I do not really understand why the people prefer small face. I think that normal Korean people think that shaper, thin especially for girls like a v-line stands for your skin is very tight. If you have a small facial structure its gonna look better when you take a selfie so I am guessing that is the reason why people prefer small facial structure. But I do not know why people prefer it. Body shape it also really depends on age and generation and like style. High school students or middle school students when they are young they prefer skinnier type of body like Victoria’s secret models like less fat and things like that. But if you are in your twenties or thirties or even more people prefer to have a like a slender type of body because like they do think that being a woman with muscle stands for more like healthier or sexier. So younger people prefer skinny but twenty, thirty years old people [prefer] that slender, well-balanced those type of body structure.”

From the answer it is seen that as mentioned earlier small face with V-shape is the most popular. Other informants mention the same answers, focusing on the small

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<sup>47</sup> Seoulspace, accessed 16 May 2021.

face. What I find interesting is fact that although it is popular many do not know why it gained such popularity. Other mentioned characteristics are small face, big eyes, straight nose and good complexion. Student A also mentions in her answer taking pictures, which are linked with mass media. Informant shares that having beautiful appearance is advantageous for taking pictures. People nowadays take picture of themselves to share the on mass media. This shows the influence of mass media on people as they pay more attention to their appearance.

An ideal that got me interested which I have learned from student D is dark eyebrows. She mentioned importance of not having a “bland” eyebrow. When it comes to the ideals of body, informants typed a skinny body as the ideal. Different shapes are said to be beautiful but what nowadays gains importance is the healthy body. I believe that it is a result of women being more self-conscious about their weight. Though all interviewees said that Koreans prefer women who have skinny body, student D commented that the situation with obsession over being skinny is not in good state right now.

D: “I think the standards for body it is getting harsher and harsher every year. The people say the size of women clothing are getting smaller every year you know, the free size. Like you know how big Korean online markets are right? For the clothes and everything and they also make their own products. And they usually name it free size but it is usually for like... I do not know what size you have in Europe. So for us the smallest size is 4 and 5 is like standard and 6. I mean 5,6 are like common. We also have 7 and 8 and so on. But most of the online malls they make their own products like t-shirts and they name it free size. They also attached small sentence this will fit to 4 to 5 and a half. So yeah...It feels like they require people to be more skinnier definitely.”

Student D refers to the fact that nowadays women are expected to have a very skinny body. Clothes that are labeled with the free size usually have a range of different sizes that are included in the one size. In Korea it seems that this range is small and not practical. When I was staying in Korea, I also purchased clothes and while shopping in the big hall where most clothes are free size, I could not always buy them due to their size. Some of my friends with bigger built could only look at the clothes as the sellers

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<sup>48</sup> Jamal Patterson, accessed 16 May 2021.

did not provide sizes beside the one size. According to *The Korea Herald*'s article being skinny is also heavily advertised by media as they promote the unrealistic skinny bodies.<sup>49</sup>

A: "Also these days American Korean, type of celebrities are on the TV shows a lot so they are spreading, making beauty standard in Korea more like expand. For example Jessi. Jessi is Korean-American singer and she prefers to be tan as she can and have a really wide hips as she can, something like that. Something like really Americanized beauty standards so she is spreading that kind of new beauty standard in Korea as well so lot of backgrounds and cultural differences expand beauty standards in Korea for sure."

Student A mentions always slight changes in the standards of beauty due to the influence of celebrities that have mixed heritage. They do not have standard Korean appearance and may be influenced by the ideals of beauty from other countries. As a result, when they appear in Korean media, they also affect the standard in Korea. Situation is constantly changing as different people are occurring in the Korean media.

Knowing what type of appearance is considered to be beautiful in Korea, the questions that come to mind is who actually defines those standards. I asked the interviewees what kind of entity is responsible for the beauty standards they have in Korea these days.

A: "I think the Korean K-pop, K-drama, idol industry impacts huge part of beauty standards cause actually they are made like a products. So actually the normal people cannot compare with those celebrities cause they are mean to be like for sale and to show to other people. They get a body care, facial care like a lot a lot. Like, a lot. I mean really a lot. So it is incomparable. But people keep comparing with the celebrities cause they saw their like favorite singers, actors every day. So they unconsciously compare with the celebrities but it is yeah not a good culture. They are big part of the beauty standard those type of industry."

Based on the interviewee answer celebrities have massive impact on what people perceive as a beauty standards in Korea. Mass media portray idols and actors as a basis for people to understand who can be considered beautiful. Other informant also

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<sup>49</sup> Rummy Doo, accessed 16 May 2021.



mentioned media and famous personalities as a definers of beauty ideals in Korea. From my own experience during my stay in Korea, although I was not watching TV constantly, whenever I went to a restaurant that had their own TV, I could see programs that portrayed those young idols and other famous personalities. The fact that celebrities influence beauty standards in Korea is also mentioned in the paper “The Korean Beauty Industry: How does it affect its society” by Siena Barone and Claire Leonard, where authors mention that either try to create new ideals or try to fit into the ones that are already set.<sup>50</sup> This mindset is popular among people yet one of the informants had different opinion, student C and her answer mentioned another indicator of beauty standards.

C: “Actually I think I define myself as beautiful. Each person likes a different image, so there will be different standards for thinking that it is beautiful.”

According to student C it is us who have the most to say when it comes to the beauty. People are different and like different appearances, so they are the ones who decide whether they themselves feel beautiful. Student C in all answers was convinced that each person should know themselves the best and know whether beauty is important for them.

As media influence beauty standards in Korea I asked my informants what they think about the representation of people in media. I wanted to investigate whether media portray only those who fit in the beauty standards or they show variety of different people. My question was if they think that media shows different kind of people or rather those beautiful.

A: “It depends on what type of a TV programs, but like variety tv shows does not really care about appearance a lot. But the TV industry, like dramas and music they do care about beauty a lot, appearance and style, and like fashions and everything. So in that specific industry they want it be, look as good as they can so sometimes it feels too perfect.”

B: “I think like before it was, they had very strict boundary of beautiful. But I think now because it is becoming more international, like in Korea there are many foreigners entertainer joining the shows so I think it kind of broadened the standard. Like I think it kinda extended all the beauty standards. So I think it is a

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<sup>50</sup> Siena Barone and Claire Leonard, 2019/20,8.

good thing cause yeah like now people kind of you know prefer to gain some weight, put some weight. And now the people are also wanting to see that from the idols and all the influencers like it is kind of changing in a good way right now.”

C: “Yes. I watch a lot of TV since I was young. At first, there are always beautiful and wonderful contents and people in cartoons, dramas, and entertainment shows. Celebrities seem to be talked about, especially by people, as a standard of beauty. It seems that the standards of beauty continue to change and change like fashion. People with double eyelids used to be pretty, and now there are many beautiful celebrities with single eyelids. Nowadays there is a personality and it seems to be the standard of one's beauty.”

Student A, B, C all mention that media pay attention to the appearance, it does not pay a crucial role. For student A good appearance is crucial in regard to entertainment and music shows, whereas variety shows presents people with different looks. Student B mentions fact that Korean media are influenced by west as well as fact that foreigners appear on Korean media more often. As the effect there is more diversity of people. This also proves that ideals of beauty are changing and are affected by the western celebrities. Foreign influence on Korean culture and especially American influence can be seen due to the globalization. In her article Jordan Genovese brings up fact that American celebrities are portrayed in Korean magazine advertisements.<sup>51</sup>

According to student C media always portray beautiful people. Nowadays there are people with different looks shown in the media which means that the beauty ideals are constantly changing. From the gathered answers I can deduct that media, mostly television show people who fit in the beauty standards but those are changing which results in presenting people with variety of looks. Student D came up with slightly different answer than the other interviewees.

D: “In case of Korean media, so in case of male entertainers they do have various figures, like overweight or in different heights, different looks. But I have to say when it comes to female entertainers the looks are quite the same, like standards are quite the same even for the comedians. And of course, like in comedian industry they have the most varieties but those kind of differences are

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<sup>51</sup> Jordan Genovese, 6, accessed 15 May 2021.

usually turned into humor, like turned into comedy which is not so good. And especially in actor industry like all the woman actresses they at least have some sort of beauty standards. But when it comes to the male actors, they all have such a different characteristics with all their features. So I always wanted to see a female actress who is a little bit not like the beauty standards. So I think the standards are softer when it comes to male celebrities.”

Informant D believes that media are not strict with how men look like. In the media shows have men who present different appearances. On the other hand, women have it worse as media portray mostly those who fit in to the ideals. Student D also mentions that in the comedian shows people who may look different are often using their looks as a part of the comedy. Media show that inequality in the society between genders as women are the ones who should fit in the strict ideals. While men although should look good, they do not need to pay so much of their attention to their appearance.

## Chapter 5.2: Importance of appearance

Learning who is considered beautiful in Korea, current beauty standards and what had impact on how the ideals were created, it is also important to investigate if people pay a lot of attention to how others look like. In order to find the answer to the question I asked the interviewees if they pay attention to the appearance of the other people.

A: "For me, not really. Cause I am not a type of girl who cares about make-up and outfits that much compared to other Korean girls. So for me, I do not really care, like actually I do not care at all. Like if someone wears a blue eyebrows, or if they use yellow mascara I do not mind actually. I think it is more like cool, more like confident. But I do pay attention if they have some kind of confidence like that. I some girl wear brand new eyeshadow or something like that it does not give me any interest at all."

B: "I think it depends on situation. If I just hang out with my friends around my hometown maybe, I do not. Cause even I do not wear make-up when I meet with my friends. But if I go to like school, like go to a place where there are many people I prefer to wear make-up, cause I think that it makes me more confident about myself. So and yeah aside, I think I do care about other people's appearance too."

C: "No, I do not. I look at other people's appearance as just passing by. But yeah I do not care. Because a beautiful person passing by can attract attention, but I cannot care about all the appearance of a person."

D: "For right now, I also grew up of that phase. Since I do not care much about my appearance. I also became less interested in how others looks, how others take care of their self in superficial ways. Yeah (...) I used to but not anymore."

Comparing all the answers although there may have used different words and they had different thoughts on the topic all of the informants do not pay attention to others appearance. Informants mentioned that appearance is not as important as the personality. When they meet others how they look may give them some impression of others, yet what matters more is their character. Personality is the basis on which the relationship between people is created.

Paying attention to own others appearance depends on a person. But from the gathered answers, I learned that my informants are not the ones who put importance to it. Nevertheless, students mentioned that people feel pressure to look beautiful. Student A and C do not feel the pressure on them but think that other people do. Students B and D both when asked if they feel the pressure to feel beautiful have answered:

B: “Yes, cause even for women we judge men by how they look. Not deeply judge but we just talk, oh yeah he is good looking, he is hot and he is not. So I think it is the same for the guys. Guys also judge women. I am not saying it is bad thing, I mean they can do it. But it is just that because we know they judge us we try to look good. We (...) not only for the pressure, we feel insecure about ourselves. Because we know how we look with make-up, without make-up. We keep comparing ourselves with that. So I think the media the people and ourselves just put pressure on myself to you know look good and yeah try to be perfect.”

D: “In the very beginning of my college year I did not even know that I was being pressured. But now that I think I have been pressured by the media and everything. Cause they show you were to do the plastic surgeries or they show you where to buy the skirts and all the things that I do not even like that much. If it were my go to thing I would not mind but those are not my thing at all. But because of the pressure yeah I bought them anyway. But after that, after I ditched my make-up I did get few pressures from my friends like why I am not wearing any make-up. Some of my friends were like can I at least give you my lipstick so you can wear. That actually happened. So yeah society and my peers usually. But right now people in Korea they learn how to embrace others tastes cause it does not happen anymore. And also most of my friends do not wear make-up as much as they did few year ago. So things are getting better.”

Both student as a factor that makes them feel pressure present media as well as the society. Student B is mostly pressured by the society, as he she thinks that people are judgmental of how others look like. Though she mentions media as other factor she does not think of it that much. Whereas student D is more inclined toward media. According to her the media has the biggest impact on the people as they force on us all the information how to obtain perfect looks. Media shows who are the ideals of beauty and how to pursuit them. Student D also talks about the society as she mentions her peers who put pressure on her to wear make-up. Article by Siena Barone and Claire

Leonard mentions fact that women are pressured by society. As women are surrounded by beauty standards, they feel that they need to comply with the ideals. The beauty of women is their advantage in gaining power. Such thinking of society leads women to try their best in terms of how they look.<sup>52</sup>

Lastly in regard to the topic of beauty standards I wanted to investigate the significance of beauty for Korean people. My goal was to find out whether they actually think that being beautiful has any weight in their lives. I asked students whether they feel that beauty has much value for them.

A: “No it is not cause beauty cannot be define as a one certain way so as long as the standards of beautiful match each other's own definition it is enough. I mean some people think that being healthy can be their own standard of beautiful or being comfortable with their self is other personal beauty standards.”

C: “No there are so many reasons to like people. Just because there is little external beauty does not mean he is not beautiful. It can be beautiful to like his job and work hard, and I can look beautiful in many ways, such as helping others. But it may not be beautiful. It is okay. it's not beautiful does not mean it is wrong. Beauty is not an important factor because each person has different personalities and standards of beauty.”

D: “For a while I thought it is important to you know feel beautiful and like embrace yourself and all those things. But now I just feel like it is okay not to be beautiful. It is not like the end of the world. So if a person thinks being beautiful is important then just go for it, I do not care. For me being beautiful it is on the very bottom of my list.”

All the informants answered that they do not care about beauty. Those students think that beauty has not much of the meaning in their lives. For them there are more important values in life. Both student A and C mention that beauty may have different meaning for people, and it may not only be an appearance. Beauty maybe connected to the health or the personality. Beauty is viewed by people by their own standards so its importance may also be different. Student D answered that although she thought that being beautiful was significant, her thoughts changed and now she cares much more about other values in her life.

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<sup>52</sup> Siena Barone and Claire Leonard, 2019/20, 14.

To sum up, ideal beauty standards in Korea are defined by media as they portray celebrities with perfect looks. Media are full of idols, entertainers and other celebrity figures who present their perfect looks. The standards for perfect beauty for women in Korea are mostly fair skin, small face and big eyes. Women also should be skinny. Although media define the standards as they are changing, people with variety of appearances are presented. With the influence of media and society women feel pressure to look beautiful. My informant although may feel pressure to look pretty do not pay attention to the appearance of other people. They also think that beauty does not hold much significance in their lives.

## Chapter 6: Effects of the beauty standards

Because everyone cares about own appearance, people try their best to look good. In order to appear beautiful and fit in to the beauty ideals people may try different methods. Women who may feel that they do not look good enough may use cosmetics to change how their facial features look. As people are imposed with standards of beauty, they strive to fit into them. Two industries, cosmetic and plastic surgery are connected to people struggle to look beautiful.

As it was said earlier women who want to be more attractive try different methods. To change their appearance women, use make-up. This method is the easiest when we want to look more beautiful. It is also non-invasive as the make-up stays on your face as long as you want to. Both women and men in Korea can be seen using make-up.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless it is market mostly dominated by products for women. Korean make-up products are popular around the world and I also am interested in them. During my stay in Korea I visited a lot of make-up stores that offered products from various Korean brands. In those shops the clients were not only Koreans but also foreigners which proves fact that they are also interested in the Korean products. While shopping whenever I had a question staff in the stores offered help in English which means that they are prepared for influx of the foreign clientele.

The other mentioned industry is the market of plastic, cosmetic surgeries. This kind of method is invasive and may also be dangerous for a patient. As the effect on the body last longer than the make-up, those who decide should be 100% sure if they absolutely need it. As it was with the cosmetics women tend to undergo surgeries to beautify themselves more often than man. Popularity of plastic surgery clinics can be seen through the fact that advertisements of clinics are everywhere. I often saw such ads while being in subway or in the malls.

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<sup>53</sup> Jessica Rapp, accessed 15 May 2021.

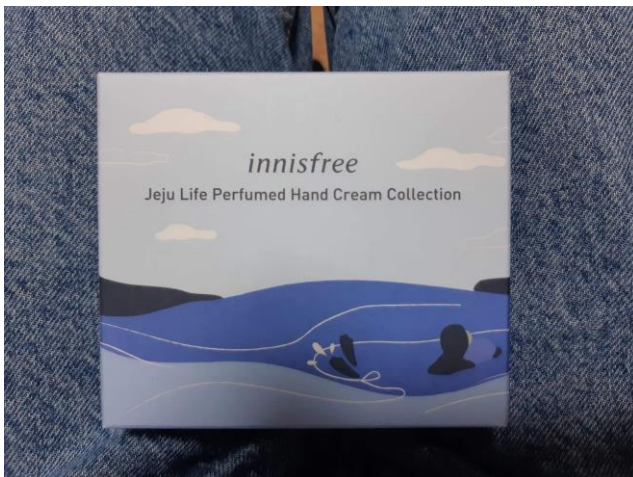


## Chapter 6.1: K-beauty

What exactly is K-beauty? The abbreviation K-beauty is simple and stands for the Korean beauty. The K-beauty is an umbrella term as it includes Korean products such as goods for skin care, bath-and-body and make-up.<sup>54</sup> Often the products are made with natural ingredients that are innovative and cannot be found in foreign brands. Popular ingredient that can be found in Korean cosmetics is snail mucin. K-beauty besides products is also about how to use them. There is a skin care routine for how to look after own skin.<sup>55</sup>



**Picture 3: Hand creams from *Innisfree***



**Picture 4: Box for hand creams**

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<sup>54</sup> Dana Wood, accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>55</sup> Alicia Yoon, accessed 30 April 2021.

Given photos present hand creams that I bought in Korea. They are from the Korean brand “Innisfree”. The brand originated from the Korean island – Jeju. In the cosmetics there are used natural ingredients from this island.<sup>56</sup> Products that I bought in the picture are part of the Korean skin care. As I was curious about the Korean cosmetics during the exchange period, I purchased number of different goods.

Korean cosmetic industry is one that grew tremendously. In 2011 the size of the cosmetic industry approached 8,9 trillion won. With advanced technology, usage of the biotechnology and the adequate marketing the market of beauty is increasing steadily.<sup>57</sup> In 2018 Korea was number 8 global market for beauty products. In the Korean cosmetic market what plays vital role besides products for make-up are skincare products. Koreans pay attention to their complexion, so they have variety of merchandise focused on this field of expertise. Importance given the skin tone is linked to the fact that from early years in the history of Korea fair skin was more valued. Interestingly although beauty market is dominantly focused on the women, in Korea men also are a target group for the beauty products. With the expansion of Korean culture abroad many foreigners became also interested in the beauty market in Korea and as a result they choose Korea as their trip destination. Many choose Korea for the skin treatments as well as cosmetic operations.<sup>58</sup> The popularity of the skin care products influenced research in the field of biotechnology. The concept of beauty in terms of the condition of skin pays importance to the youthfulness and health.<sup>59</sup>

Although using make-up is something done by many, there are people who are not in favor of it. One of my interviewees – student A stated that she does not particularly like using make-up products.

A: “For me I do not like doing make-up cause I think that every person has their own beauty without makeup. I am not like a big fan of make-up or nothing like that. If I need to put a make-up it is for like I would say it is for manner in some type of way. Cause if I look fresh, like awake not like dark circles and everything it would help. It makes me more bright or something like that, makes me vibrant or healthy.”

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<sup>56</sup> Innisfree, accessed 30 April, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> Chan Koo Chang, 2012, 99-103.

<sup>58</sup> Hye-Won Lee, 2018, 28-33.

<sup>59</sup> Chan Koo Chang, 2012, 100.

According to student A although make-up can make her look better and make her a little bit more confident it does not have much impact on her life. Because of that she does not use make-up very often. Other informants also use make-up, but their motivations behind it are different.

C: “Actually I put on makeup when I meet my friend or go to a part-time job. When I was young, I thought I should wear makeup when I grow up, but now I just do it because I want to decorate myself when I take pictures or hang out with my friends.”

Student C who usually wears make-up when she goes out with her friends is using it to simply beautify herself. The informant simply tries to look a little bit more beautiful when she spends time with other people.

B: “I think YouTube had the most impact, cause all the beauty YouTubers wearing make-up, showing make-up. I think that influenced me the most. And also peers, like all my friends, they started using make-up one by one and yeah.”

B: “Yeah and I think that is when the puberty hits, so you feel kind of insecure about yourself and make-up is the only way to cover that up. So yeah.”

When it comes to the Student B and her answers about usage of make-up, I learned that she wears make-up to cover her insecurities. Although she uses make-up to boost her confidence, she usually wears it when she is in contact with other people. Student B feels that she needs it when she meets others but those who she is not well acquainted with. She does not wear it when she is with her friends or in her neighborhood.

D: “Like in the very beginning I wore make up because it was some sort of thing you that you do when you go to college. You know like wear a make-up. Since you wear uniforms when you are in middle school, high school, you buy clothes that look some sort of feminine and a little bit I do not know flashy. Those were sort of stereotypical thing by the time I was going to college. So I just went to that mainstream.”

Student D answers that wearing make-up was something everyone did in the university and that is why she also started using cosmetics. For her middle school and

high school where times where people where looking the same so when she was in university it was time to shine. In university she wanted to look different, more feminine and make-up helped with obtaining desired looks.

From the gathered answers I found out that mostly girls in Korea usually first start wearing make-up when they are in middle school. Such age is usually when girls are having their puberty so it is not surprising that they may not feel secure about their appearance. My informants also stated that they started using make-up products around this age. The only different answer was from student D who started later in the university, she also mentioned that she thinks girls start using make-up around that age.

My informants wear make-up on different occasions, but it is not done often. Currently with the global pandemic of the coronavirus, people in Korea use masks when they go outside so they tend to go without using cosmetics. Student D notices that during this time there are people who wear make-up but those are people who actually want to do it. Their reason is simple – they like it, so they do it. I also found out a new trend that emerged due to the situation with pandemic.

A: "...We are wearing masks every day, every single day, so not only me lots of Korean people. There is trend thing called foundation-free makeup. It is a big thing in South Korea. Not only me, but many people prefer not to wear makeup these days. For me I do not really [use] make up that often."

From student A I got to know that although with the situation where half of our faces are covered whenever we step outside the home people still try to come up with new ideas in the use of make-up. As the situation changes even the cosmetic industry is evolving. New trends in make-up are influenced by the situation around the world and although now people go out less, they still use make-up.

Cosmetic products are made in other to beautify ourselves, from what I found out, the use of make-up by the informants may is usually connected to it. Make-up for them is used to boost the confidence, self-esteem. For informants rather than just to present better look it is better to be more confident. Although the Korean beauty market is growing enormously, students which I interviewed are not using cosmetics that often.

## Chapter 6.2: Plastic surgeries

Secondly in regard to enhancing the appearance, the more invasive method to look beautiful is plastic surgery. Although surgeries may be harmful to the body still many are undergoing them in order to look more pretty. Cosmetic and plastic surgery industry came to Korea from the western countries. At the beginning Asian women were branded as those with inferior appearance to the women from western countries. With expansion of the influence from the West plastic surgeries grew in popularity. Over the years the industry expanded, and the number of clinics rose up. In 2001 in Seoul there were 467 clinics from which 199 were in the Gangnam area.<sup>60</sup>

It is difficult to pinpoint when exactly plastic surgeries came to Korea. It can be said that the surgeries came with the American occupation. Modern plastic surgeries were first introduced when American doctor with doctor from Swedish Red Cross were operating on people injured during the Korean War. Article from the American doctor from 1955 mentions how the doctor met a patient who wanted have eyelid surgery in order to have a “western” eyes.<sup>61</sup> Later when the American culture became popular globally the 1960s and 1970s were met with changes in terms of beauty standards in Korea. In order to get closer to their ideals women often choose a path of undergoing plastic surgeries.<sup>62</sup> Nowadays having a western look is not as popular as it was decades ago as the standards changed. Beauty aesthetics transform with time and different type of looks become popular.<sup>63</sup>

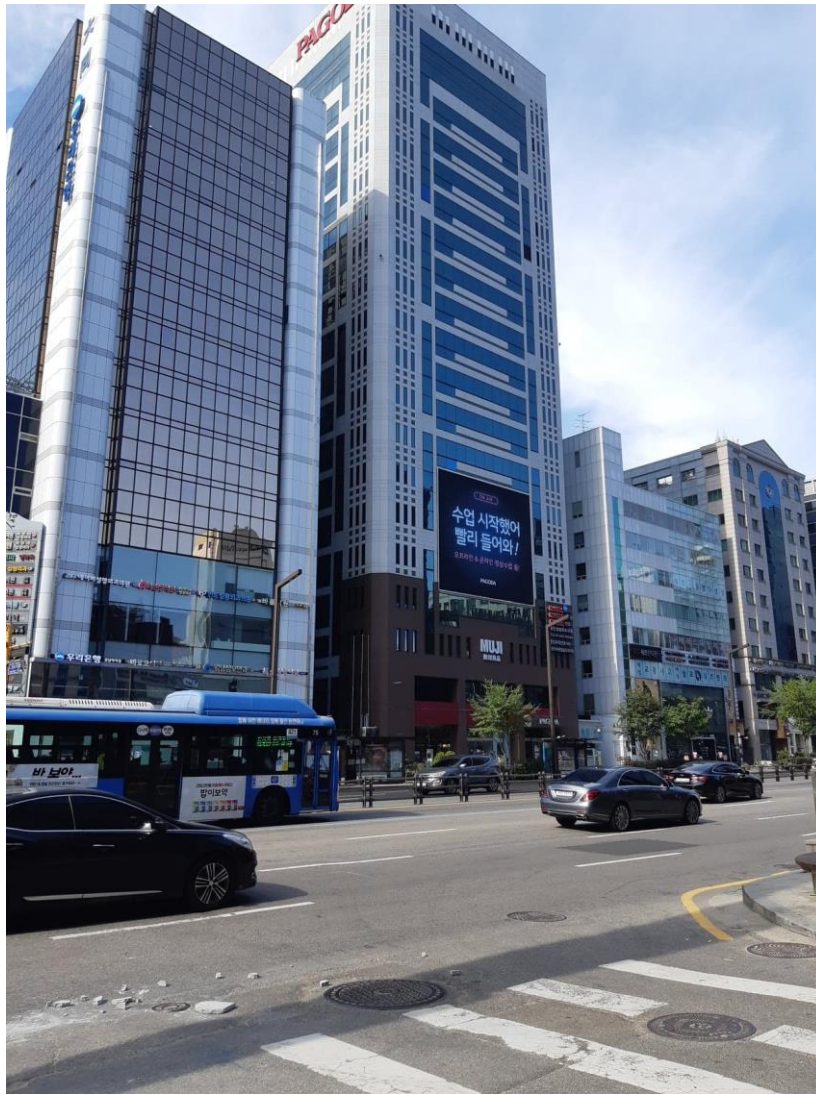
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<sup>60</sup> Keong Ja Woo, 2004, 60-61.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Hyunhee Song, 2016, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Keong Ja Woo, 2004, 60.

<sup>63</sup> Mary Hyunhee Song, 2016, 8.



**Picture 5: Street in Gangnam area**

Here is the picture of the Gangnam district in Seoul. This is the district which is said to be the most popular when it comes to the plastic surgeries. As it is one of the wealthiest areas in Seoul it is not unusual that there are many clinics that offer cosmetic treatments and surgeries.



Picture 6: Advertisement of plastic surgery clinic in Myongdong

**SAME PRICE**

BEST 5		BEST 5	
脂肪吸引 20cc	1万円半税込	V-Fットリフトリフト注射 9cc	90,000
韓国産眉毛 100本	13,555円税込	エラボトックス 50 ユニット	19,000
小鼻切開術 1cc	6,755円税込	RFU 300ショット	135,000
鼻中隔切開 鼻部切	9万円	ピコレーザー	120,000
顔部注射 10単位	1万円半税込	赤い点注射	99,000

BEST 5		BEST 5	
SVF 400cc	90,000	鼻骨整形 0.5cc	59,000
ヒアルロン酸 50cc	19,000	全顔切開 14ヶ月	19,000
脂肪移植 1cc	69,000	4ヶ月切開 50unit	19,000
ヒアルロン酸 1cc	19,000	韓国産眉毛 300本	135,000
RFU 300ショット	135,000	耳垂切開 1cc	120,000

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We operate with the equal medical charge system where there's no price difference from Korean procedures.

**High quality medical services**  
We provide medical services by Specialists with customer-centered prices.

**Specialized in Global treatments**  
Provide interpreter services in Chinese, Japanese, Thai, English and Vietnamese. Free interpreter service, tax-free.

Picture 7 Advertisement of plastic surgery clinic in Myongdong (2)

Picture 5 and 6 show an advertisement of a plastic surgery and dermatology clinic. Such advertisements are not difficult to find while walking in Seoul. This advertisement I saw in the shopping mall.

Gangnam besides being area where the clinics are focused became also a part of new term which is Gangnam-style beauty. So Yeon Leem describes the term by presenting it as a combination of old and new beauty standards. The combination may be more influenced by either of sides and with use of plastic surgery may create a perfect beauty or the unsightly person.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, author describes what may be an undesirable result: “The plastic surgery monster or Gangnam beauty with a small and lean jaw and wide eyes, a high-profile nose and flat cheeks, but all too much may be an extreme version of a hybrid - the hyper-embodiment of Gangnam-style beauty ideals”.<sup>65</sup> All this show how that although people strive for better appearance, they may end up with something not expected, looking less beautiful than before.

Plastic surgery industry is a huge market for different types of treatments. Women undergo different surgeries from which, ones are more popular than the others. What are the most popular ones in Korea?

A: “I would say it is definitely eyelid, like eye surgery. Cause there are some people who prefer like mono eyelid, but there is a people who prefer double eyelid because if you have a double eyelid your eye is gonna look more bigger, brighter, something like that. Slightly more people prefer double eyelids.”

From the research <sup>66</sup> and answers from the interviewee A, eyelid surgery is one of the most popular types of plastic surgeries done in the Korea. Although interviewee mentions that Koreans prefer to have double eyelid, having a mono eyelid is not viewed as not beautiful. Double eyelid surgery was introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through Japan. So, the trend where double eyelids were branded as beautiful came from Japan.<sup>67</sup> From my informant student C I got to know that she also has undergone such surgery.

C: “Actually double eyelid surgery is popular. Actually I did this surgery because my mom said I hope you have double eyelid. I was okay and just did it.”

Student C told my that she did is surgery when she was nineteen after graduating from high school. Although nineteen is an age where people are already considered

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<sup>64</sup> So Yeon Leem, 2017, 19-20.

<sup>65</sup> Leem, 2017, 19-20.

<sup>66</sup> Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang, 2012, 60.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Hyunhee Song, 2016, 42.



adults in many countries, in Korea people become adults when they are turning nineteen. The age of being legally adult in Korea was even lowered as before it was twenty.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, from the same informant I learned that double eyelid surgery is considered as basic type of plastic surgery so something really common among people.

In her dissertation thesis Mary Hyunhee Song presents how popular the double eyelid surgery is among young Korean women. This surgery is inexpensive and even and orthodontics would cost more which is a reason for its popularity. Also, it is common due to the fact that the double eyelid surgery is viewed more like a procedure than the operation. According to her research women tend to do this after they finish high school or during their university studies.<sup>69</sup> After getting to know that the answer of my informant was no longer surprising.

Other plastic surgery that is also popular which was mentioned in the answers gathered from the informants is nose surgery.

B: “And maybe the next one would be like the nose job. Like lots of people do nose job now. And like a botox, that has become yeah popular trend also (...) like if (...) you have been in Korea so you know there are so many plastic surgery places in Korea and yeah it is just crazy.”

Student B mentions popularity of the botox and that getting botox became a trend these days. Part of this trend is getting a lip botox. Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang addressed the double eyelid surgery and nose surgery as one of the most popular ones. The other which authors write about is the jawline reshaping surgery. Besides the surgeries that are focused on the face what became generally known is also liposuction and the breast augmentation.<sup>70</sup> To undergo a surgery women visit clinic and have consultations with the doctors about their desired look, what results they expect and how obtain them. What is interesting is fact that doctors show pictures of Korean celebrities do describe different perfect parts of body. Often photos of celebrities from Korea and abroad are also compared to show which look are better.<sup>71</sup>

Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang besides addressing how the market of plastic surgery looks like and commenting on what kind of treatments are usually done

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<sup>68</sup> Robert Lee, accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Hyunhee Song, 2016, 83-85.

<sup>70</sup> Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang, 2012, 60.

<sup>71</sup> So Yeon Leem, 2017, 15.

in the clinics mention how according to different studies women choose to do plastic surgery due to the long history of patriarchal society and fact that women needed to become more feminine to increase their chances with getting married. Authors mention that as women were in inferior position to men their job was focused on being a wife and mother. Women were mostly confined to their houses as men took care of them. With changes in the society and the consumer capitalistic boom women finally left houses. Being in the public sphere they were visible for men, who scrutinized and judged them. Women became objects of assessment, objects which can be altered. With thought in mind numbers of plastic surgeries increased.<sup>72</sup> This stance is connected to the thought that typically media present Korean women who decide to do plastic surgeries as the ones who pursue western appearance. Looking more Caucasian became popular due to the globalization and fact that men may prefer such looks proves that women do surgeries for the men.<sup>73</sup>

Slightly different approach to the topic of why women choose to do plastic surgeries has Keong Ja Woo. Author emphasizes that women changed their roles in the society. While the society was patriarchal, they were downgraded to being mothers while it changed, they could be more active and seek pleasures in life. Author mentions that being beautiful make women satisfied and also it brings them kind of status in the society. Women to pursue beauty willingly undergo surgeries as the helps them feel their empowerment. This has in some cases dire results as women may become addicted to constantly altering their appearance.<sup>74</sup>

So Yeon Leem in her paper emphasizes that nowadays women undergo procedure of plastic surgeries to have a better prospect in work or life as it may improve their standing in the society.<sup>75</sup> According to Mary Hyunhee Song “the desire to become prettier is born out of the meritocratic society in Korea”.<sup>76</sup> Beautiful appearance can help in obtaining better position in the society. As people strive to achieve the status they turn to method of plastic surgeries. With ideal looks their standing in the competition in work and social life is definitely higher. With those mentioned reasons it is not unusual to understand how popular plastic surgeries are in Korea. This reason is

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<sup>72</sup> Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang, 2012, 66-67.

<sup>73</sup> Holliday and Elfving-Hwang, 2012, 74.

<sup>74</sup> Keong Ja Woo, 2004, 78-79.

<sup>75</sup> So Yeon Leem, 2017, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Mary Hyunhee Song, 2016, 88.

connected to the term of social capital as beauty is seen as something that may influence status. Beauty can bring more possibilities in social life.

Mary Hyunhee Song shows also a different reason why women choose plastic surgeries. In the paper author proves that mothers have a lot of influence on their daughters. She mentions that mothers often are the ones who introduce the idea of getting plastic surgery to the daughter.<sup>77</sup> These correspondents with my informant. As mentioned earlier student C had a double eyelid surgery after her mother proposed it to her.

Both Keong Ja Woo and So Yeon Leem link plastic surgeries with social life of people. Authors show that getting a plastic surgery relates to the term of beauty as a social capital. Appearance has impact on how person is viewed in the society. Siena Barone and Claire Leonard state that women are constantly surrounded by beauty and the beauty standards make women feel inferior. As women try to change how they look they turn to plastic surgery. Women feel that their appearance affects their social, so they try to change. Plastic surgery helps them in gaining confidence.<sup>78</sup>

As mentioned earlier while women do plastic surgeries it sometimes may lead to addiction. While seeing one imperfection changed, the desire to improve other flaws increases. With the possibility of getting addicted it is vital to see whether doing plastic surgery is necessary or is it just a blind pursuit of the beauty.<sup>79</sup> Getting a plastic surgery may have negative effects yet people still choose to get them. From my informants I know that only one of them got a plastic surgery. Nevertheless, surgeries are popular as students mentioned that many of their friends chose to do them.

In Korean society plastic surgery are something common, changing own appearance happens in many clinics. Striving for ideal beauty through this method leaves is invasive and may impact the health but compared to the significance of beauty people choose to gamble.

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<sup>77</sup> Mary Hyunhee Song, 2016, 56.

<sup>78</sup> Siena Barone and Claire Leonard, 2019/20, 16.

<sup>79</sup> Song, 2016, 88-89.

## Chapter 6.3: Diets

Lastly, I found that Koreans to be more beautiful, or to say have better figure use another method which is dieting. Diet is the easiest way to lose weight. According to Alina Petre from website *Healthline* Koreans are said to have skinnier bodies so what they eat became popular globally. Diets inspired by Korean cuisine or diets that are used by the K-pop idols gained worldwide attention.<sup>80</sup> Dieting in Korea according to Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang comes from the thought that femininity advocated suffering in order to obtain greater effects. Women were willing to experience suffering to become beautiful.<sup>81</sup>

“I think of the beauty standards, there a lot of diets, diet food and diet related products in Korea. But I think that is mainly because of the media and how they portray the perfect beauty standards. I think of course like facial surgeries are a big problem but diet is also a very big problem in Korea cause people try to be, look good and not just skinny, like super skinny like all the idols and stuff. So I think diet is the most, is the most influence because, the problem we are dealing with right now.”

Informant B provided me with the information that dieting is quite problematic in Korea. People tend to have extreme diets to become abnormally skinny. Such behaviour is followed by the fact that media show the skinny celebrities. Idols and other famous personas have perfect figures and people who watch them every day want to follow their example.

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<sup>80</sup> Alina Petre, accessed April 30 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang, 2012, 67.

Make-up and plastic surgeries are to the most popular methods through which a person can alter their appearance. Big Korean make-up industry is globally popular. Lots of people abroad use Korean cosmetics. Although women use the cosmetics, their reasons for putting them vary and not always are linked with the need to become more beautiful. My informants mostly use cosmetics to boost their confidence, although they use them, they do not do it often. Plastic surgeries like the cosmetic industry thorough years become more and more popular in Korea and became a mean to obtain desirable look. Double eyelid surgery is the plastic surgery that most people undergo. Other trendy surgeries are those focused on the nose. What is also mentioned by the informants is the botox. Women do plastic surgeries because of different reasons, nowadays they usually want to do it as a mean to have better standing in the society. Other method to get beautiful is dieting. Informants mention that Korean women often do extreme diets in order to get very skinny. With influence of media that promote such skinny, even unhealthy bodies, women decide to do diets.

## Chapter 7: Beauty as social capital

We are living in the society that is obsessed with image. Thus, the most significant value is a beauty. Although defining what and who is beautiful should be the role of the one who is concerned about it, there certain standards. People created ideals of beauty. With this development beauty became a commodity.<sup>82</sup>

Appearance of a person has influence on the person's life, both private and social. When it comes to the social life, appearance may influence social network, future prospects in work and marriage life. Kathleen M. O'Connor and Eric Gladstone in their research investigate the influence of beauty in the social life. Authors argue that people who are better looking have more advantages in their social lives. According to them people who are considered attractive are advantageous when it comes to their social network, work life and marriage prospects.<sup>83</sup>

Women in the Korean society were always inferior to the men. Joanna Elfving-Hwang in her work discusses the role of women in the Korean society. Women were always the one responsible for taking care of the domestic affairs. Women from the higher social class had not many opportunities to leave their homes. Those who were educated did not have means to work as there as no jobs available for them. Later when they had means to work, they need to choose whether to marry or to work. Few women were deciding to do both and struggle between work in society and work at home.<sup>84</sup> With changes in the society and the shift to more equality between genders women were met with new possibilities. Women started to have social lives and pay more attention to their work. Siena Barone and Claire Leonard in their work "The Korean Beauty Industry: How does it affect its society" mention the fact that today's standards of beauty have impact on women's daily life as well as their social awareness. Those norms associate women with their appearance which means that women are more conscious about how they look and whether they are able to fit into the society.<sup>85</sup> What I plan to examine in this chapter is the effect of the women's appearance in their social lives.

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<sup>82</sup> Amanda Matthews, 2013, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor and Eric Gladstone, January 2018, 42.

<sup>84</sup> Joanna Elfving-Hwang, 2010, 65-68.

<sup>85</sup> Siena Barone and Claire Leonard, 2019/20, 14.

Firstly, to familiarize myself with what students think about significance of the good looks in social life I asked interviewees about their opinions. My question to interviewees was whether they think that other person's appearance has impact on their relationship.

A: "No. Absolutely not at all, because when I talk with someone, the look is not that important. The important thing is the connection like how well we are communicating and something like that. As long as they do not like bleed or something like that I do not really care about appearance."

C: "Maybe no. Because people's appearance does not seem to matter much in a relationship. When I look at celebrities, I may wonder what kind of person they are, but I do not think relationships are differentiated by appearance."

From the answers of student A and C I learned that they believe that appearance has no impact on the relationship. Student A states that communication is what matters in a relationship. To student C appearance is only a factor that makes her interested in other person but does not affect the relationship.

B: "Frankly, yes of course, cause if you meet someone, their face and like that is the first thing you see. So, I think that obviously have an impact but it in long term that is not the only impact. Of course, their characteristics are more important, but we try to give the best impression for ourselves when we first meet other people. So I think, yes appearance has a lot of impact."

Student B thinks similarly to student C that good looking appearance may rise interest in another person. But contrary to what student C believes, informant B argues that appearance impacts a relationship.

D: "If the relationship is (...) in a friendship wise it never impacts, it has zero impact on me. But in a boyfriend, girlfriend thing (...) yeah in that kind of relationship to be honest it definitely matters."

Student D differentiates relationships for this question. According to her appearance has no impact on a friendship. But it is a different matter when it comes to a dating relationship where appearance has more significance.

## Chapter 7.1: Beauty in social life

Kathleen M. O'Connor and Eric Gladstone argue that people prefer being in presence of beautiful people as they enjoy it more than interacting with those less attractive. This statement show that beautiful people are more desirable in social circles. Those attractive people have more chances to interact with others thus their social skills are superior. Communication skills of beautiful people are far better than those of the unattractive ones.<sup>86</sup>

In her work Amanda Matthews also mentions fact that social skills of physically attractive people may be better than those of less attractive ones. This fact is connected to the idea that being beautiful helps in finding better social circle. Author refers to studies about children which show that more attractive kids are more popular among teachers and classmates. But attractive kids are also pressured as higher expectations are imposed on them.<sup>87</sup>

Investigating how attractiveness impacts social life of people I wanted to research the benefits of being considered beautiful in social life. I asked my informants if they think that there are any advantages to being attractive when it comes to their social life.

A:” If I say absolutely no it is gonna be a lie cause it is true that everyone wants to be like healthier, prettier, like something like that. If I say totally no it is gonna be totally lie but at the same time I do think that it does not impact that much. Cause like first impression only lasts for few seconds. So things that last longer are like your warm, kind heart like something like that. So it can be in fact but I do not think it impacts that much. Like if you are being prettier than others, than people might treat her more nicer, something like that. But I do not think that that is they thing that last long and something sincere, meaningful, something like that. It has impact but a little.”

According to student A being attractive has little impact on the social life of a person. People may treat beautiful person better, but it is not something that will last for long as there are more important qualities.

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<sup>86</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor and Eric Gladstone, January 2018, 43.

<sup>87</sup> Amanda Matthews, 2013, 2.



B: “Especially nowadays I think there are many advantages cause YouTube has been a big trend and there are many YouTubers and the most I think easy way to gain subscribers is through you know showing off their face, showing off their body. So I think and that is how you gain your popularity. And even on Instagram there are so many Instagram models nowadays. They get sponsored, they get paid, they advertise content because they are beautiful. So I think yeah it is a big advantage.”

Interviewee B mentions that nowadays there are many advantages due to the existence of social media. Beautiful people show themselves on various platforms and attract others. Such people gain on popularity create their own wide social networks; they also often manage to earn money. So, their appearance affects their social life as tremendously.

D: “Yes. Yes I guess so. But I think it is also universal thing having advantages and disadvantages because of the appearance. Like one of my friends she is really pretty so sort of advantage she can just hang around with new people very easily. But also she has some sort of disadvantages of having like.. I think it is some kind of a Korean problem having like sort of perverts. Unrealistic things happen to her like stalkers or like she has suffered for bad breakups with rumors inside the campus and things. Those things can also happen when you are not considered absolutely beautiful but I think it happens quite often. I think if person is considered beautiful and she is female she is more vulnerable in Korean society. It is not like we have best women rights here in Korea so (...)”

Student D also refers to the fact that attractive people are better at accessing social circles. It is easier for them to meet others. Student D points out disadvantage of being beautiful. She presents fact that beautiful people attract others but sometimes the other person may not have a good character.

After learning that good looking people may find themselves in better social circles are other are more attracted to them, I tried to examine whether it is easy for attractive people to find friends. My question to the informants was: is it easier for beautiful people to make friends?

A: “Not really, because it also depends on their characteristics, like their personality. If someone is beautiful, but if she is introvert then it is gonna be problem with meeting new friends or something like that. So it really depends on personality like extrovert, introvert, something like that.”

C: “No. Because people can be interested if they look beautiful, but making friends is a different story. A person's personality, mood, everything works to make friends. So I think personality is more related to this than appearance.”

According to the students A and C being beautiful will not help while making friends. Both students answer that personality is more valuable for making friends. People depend on their character more than on their appearance while they look for new acquaintances.

B: “Yeah I think. Cause as I said before, your face is the first, that is the first impression you get from the people. So of course if you are good looking and charming people will try to be more friendly, try to be nicer to you. But... I think it is only at the beginning of the relationship, but as you develop your relationship with people beauty is not the only characteristic that people need to consider.”

Student B believes that appearance is important at the beginning of making new relationship. People consider the first impression while they meet each other so it is a benefit to be good looking. Beautiful person may have better chances to meet someone who wants to be familiar with them. Nevertheless, what matters most in getting acquainted with other is personality as the appearance will not influence the whole relationship.

D: “I do think it is easier because I have seen it through my teenage life and in my college life also. It is not like they can have friends when their personality sucks but they do need much of an effort. You know when you are shy it is a little bit more difficult to make friends. For me it always seemed like when you are actually cute, or pretty or handsome, whatever, the personality does not go that much. Even when you are shy, someone comes by you and just like that you make friends. But yeah I think it definitely happens.”

Informant D is convinced that it is easier for beautiful people to make friends as people will naturally approach them. If you are good looking you have a better chances that another person will come to you and try to befriend you. According to article of Kathleen M. O’Connor and Eric Gladstone people are more likely to befriend those who are more attractive. People feel more positive emotions while seeing attractive person.<sup>88</sup> Although Student D believes that attractive people are more approachable, but personality also matters, as no one will want to be friends with someone who has a bad character.

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<sup>88</sup> Kathleen M. O’Connor and Eric Gladstone, 23 February 2018, 8-9.

## Chapter 7.2: Beauty in work prospects

According to Kathleen M. O'Connor and Eric Gladstone different studies prove that having an attractive face may affect person's career. Such people may have longer professional careers and their income may be higher.<sup>89</sup> Authors in their work argue that appearance affects the future in the work.

Amanda Matthews in her paper mentions different studies that prove fact that attractiveness impacts the work life. First referred study by author was conducted on the attractiveness and success of law school graduates. According to the research more attractive attorneys had better earnings. Next author presents studies which show that beautiful people have higher salaries as they earn 5 - 10% more than less attractive people. Amanda Matthews also finds that people with better looks tend to look for occupations where their beauty will produce better results.<sup>90</sup> Siena Barone and Claire Leonard in their paper state that workers in Korea while sending their resume need to attach their picture which may impact whether the person gets the given job. Authors mention the appearance of potential worker from the picture may influence not only their employment but their position.<sup>91</sup>

Trying to examine if attractiveness is meaningful regarding the future work life, but with the goal to find out what actually people think, I asked the interviewees about their thoughts. My question was simply if they think that being beautiful has impact on the work life.

A: "It is gonna depend on the industry where you work. Cause if you are like a model, something that you need to show your body or face to others then it is gonna be. There first impression of your appearance will be a big part but if you are were working as a desk job or like an office job then it does not really matter I think."

C: "As I said earlier, there seem to be cases where jobs such as flight attendants and announcers in Korea still benefit and disadvantage based on their appearance or height. In some cases, companies want to look neat and smart, not just pretty and handsome."

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<sup>89</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor and Eric Gladstone, January 2018, 43.

<sup>90</sup> Amanda Matthews, 2013, 15-16.

Student A and C both mention fact that beauty has impact when it comes to work life, but in certain industries. Informant A mentions fact that appearance is significant in the industries where body and face are on the display. She also acknowledges that first impression is important but if you are going to spend your time behind the desk in the office, your look should not matter. Careers that informants refer to where person's look is noteworthy are model, announcer, flight attendant. There is a lot of jobs that would fit into the criteria of having beautiful appearance, but most of the should be in the entertainment industry.

B: "I think yes, but I do not think it is only beauty. It is more like smart beauty (...) I do not know. More like how work suitable face you have. Cause if you search on media, if you type like job interview make-up, they are thousands of videos showing how to look good on job interviews. So I do not think it is only beauty but they have this preferable face for interviews I think. So it [beauty] is not considered that important in workplaces."

C: "There is no such thing as no impact. When joining a company and interviewing, neat impressions are also included in the first impression. So regardless of being handsome and pretty, I think I can make a first impression. However, there seems to be no discomfort in working due to appearance."

Answer of student B and another answer from student C are focused on the different aspect of work life which is job interview. Student B mentions that appearance has impact on the job interviews and there is number of videos that show what kind of make-up should be worn for the interview. Student C answers that the first impression is vital in the job interview, so the appearance of a person is also assessed. Nevertheless, both state that overall, in work being beautiful has not much significance beside the beginning. Lastly the answer from student D also mentions fact that people use service of professional make-up artists when they go for job interview. People want to leave strong first impression with their looks.

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<sup>91</sup> Siena Barone and Claire Leonard, 2019/20, 14.

D: "I am not the one who employs others so I cannot be 100% sure but there are some people who go to a professional make-up artists just for the job interview. And you know we still attach our photos when we apply to Korean companies. So I think it implies that it definitely matters in your work life too. And I am not like considered beautiful but because I look a little bit like I heard it from my friend. She was drunk. She told me she used to be a little bit jealous during our college when we were like seeking for a part-time jobs. So I always easily got the job, but she could not. Because she has a little bit of fierce looking face. For her it was always difficult to get a simple part-time job like being a barista and everything. But for me yeah I look little bit easy-going and it was not that difficult for me. I have never noticed it but after she told me that it kinda shocked me."

Student D tells her story of how she thinks appearance influences the job prospects. Informant states that never had any problems while seeking part-time jobs and it may be connected to the fact that she has an easy-going look. According to her it matters what is your appearance as her friend struggled with finding a part time-time work due to her look. The friend had a "fierce" looking face so was deemed not suitable for the jobs she applied to. Student D brings also the fact that while applying to company it is obligatory to attach a picture. This shows that even before an actual job interview a person's appearance is assessed.

## Chapter 7.3: Beauty in marriage prospects

Korea is slowly is changing its patriarchal tendencies that restricted roles of women to only these of mother and wife. Yet there are still leaning toward patriarchal inclinations. In the patriarchal society while choosing a marriage partner men focus mostly on the appearance of the woman rather than character or qualifications. Women with the lower social standing should just be an obedient, feminine woman, have a beautiful appearance. In Korea matchmaking companies are popular while looking for a spouse. In those companies' women are assessed by their appearance. In the evaluation their look has the most significance. Beautiful women have better prospects.<sup>92</sup>

Siena Barone and Claire Leonard also mention that women's appearance has impact on the marriage market. Authors state that "women are psychologically encouraged to compete over their appearances with both men and women" thus making the appearance a key value.<sup>93</sup> Beauty becomes an important element for women to achieve success not only in professional life but also social.<sup>94</sup>

To investigate influence of the beauty on the marriage prospects I asked interviewees if they think that beauty has impact on the future marriage.

A: "If you are looking for a dating partner the appearance may impact a lot but if you are looking for a marriage material then appearance does not really matter that much because you need to live with someone for like a really long time so the appearance like the mind and what they think is way more important than how they look. So appearance for a marriage is not really important at all."

C: "Actually I want a handsome guy, but I care more about personality. I am tall but my future boyfriend or marriage partner may have kind heart, good personality and the height is not that important."

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<sup>92</sup> Sunwoo Kim and Yuri Lee, 2018, 15.

<sup>93</sup> Siena Barone and Claire Leonard, 2019/20, 15.

<sup>94</sup> Siena Barone and Claire Leonard, 2019/20, 14.

Students A and C state that appearance is not that important when it comes to looking for a marriage partner. Their statements were made regarding the appearance of possible partner. Student A explains that while dating appearance may have significance but in marriage where you spend rest of your life with the other person there are other important qualities. Student C mentions that while a good looks are something desirable, the personality of the spouse has more value. Different opinions have the other interviewees.

B: “Oh I think it has a huge impact. But I do not think that is not only problem in Korea, just everywhere. I mean you want to marry person who looks good, not? Yes so I, of course it has a big impact, I think.”

D: “Yeah definitely. Cause we have (...) I have never tried it but we actually have this app that is sort of like Tinder. But you need to go through a face check to join that app. So it definitely matters, especially for a woman. Guys think being pretty is important quality than being you know professional and independent and so. So yeah definitely matters in marital life.”

Both student B and D answer that appearance has an impact on the marriage prospects, having a contrasting opinion to the student A and C. Their thoughts differ as they take a different perspective. Student B thinks that not only in Korea but in other countries appearance affects the marriage prospects. It is common for people to desire a beautiful marriage partner. According to the student D being beautiful is very important especially for women. They are the ones who are mostly judged and their look may impact their prospects in marriage. Student D mentions that even dating applications require a face check proving how meaningful it is to be beautiful.

Studies like those of Kathleen M. O'Connor and Eric Gladstone show that appearance influences person's social life. A good looking person has better opportunities in creating social networks and in finding a marriage partner as well as has more benefits when it comes to a work life.<sup>95</sup>

Although studies prove given statement my informants present different opinions on the topic. Appearance to the interviewees is not that important when it comes to relationships. Although a person may be influenced and try to make friends with beautiful people, but personality matters more. In regard to work, appearance



matters in the industries in which person needs to present their body and face. Good look is also significant at the job interview, but it is mostly a first impression and what should matter more are qualifications. Lastly when it comes a marriage half of informants believes that while finding a spouse personality is the most important. While the other half takes a different perspective and stresses that appearance greatly impacts marriage prospects and people desire a spouse who is attractive.

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<sup>95</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor and Eric Gladstone, January 2018, 42.

## Chapter 8: Findings

Appearance is something that people put importance on. Whether it is our own look or the others it something people asses. There people who are considered beautiful and those who are said to be unattractive. To evaluate person's looks criteria were created that helped in judging. People came up with standards of beauty which influenced our lives.

South Korea is a country where people are surrounded by beauty. Attractive people are presented everywhere. The standards of beauty of perfect women in Korea are changing in time. These days small face and big eyes are the most popular. The ideal that has been known thorough the years is white, fair skin. When it comes to the standards of body, women in Korea should be skinny. Body shapes are not that significant in comparison to the slenderness of body.

Ideal beauty standards are created by Korean media due to their depiction of perfect beauties. Actors, idols and other celebrity figures have perfect appearance and dominate the scene of media. Although mostly beautiful people are presented in Korean media this is nowadays changing. Due to the fact that standards of beauty are not constant the ideals may differ. Also number of foreigners is depicted in media as they are influenced by the west. All in all it brings more variety in the media as more people with different appearances occur on the scene. Women feel pressure to take care of their appearance, they feel need to be beautiful as they are constantly surrounded by media that show attractive people.

Students do not pay much attention to their looks and the appearance of the others. It is not something that greatly affects them when they meet new people. Although looks are not significant to them, they know what the current standards of beauty are. My informants although may feel pressure to look pretty due to the media or society they are not greatly affected by it. For the informant's beautiful appearance is not much significant in their lives. Interviewed student show that though beauty standards are deep rooted in the society do not necessarily have much impact on them.

To look beautiful people use different methods the ones that are popular in Korea are plastic surgeries and make-up. Their popularity is reflected in the size of the markets as well as fact that they are known to the international audience.

Korean cosmetic industry known as a K-beauty is one of the biggest in the world. Numbers of people who use Korean cosmetic products are enormous and not only in the country but also abroad. Even though women use make-up it is not always for the purpose of becoming beautiful. According to the interviewed student reasons for using make-up may vary. It is something that more likely depends on a person. My informants stated that they wear make-up in general to gain more self-esteem. Students also mention that they do not use cosmetics often and with the current global situation people generally tend to use less make-up.

Plastic surgeries the other highly popular method through which women alter their appearance and obtain their ideal appearance is industry that also has a massive size. Plastic surgeries came from western countries and first operations were done after Korean War. Double eyelid surgery is the plastic surgery that is the most common among Koreans and even one of the informants underwent it. Other popular surgeries maybe those on the jawline. Students mention also other popular surgeries such as nose or botox. Although getting a botox is not very invasive according to doctor from the Peteraon Plastic and Aesthetic Surgery clinic it may be regarded as a type of a cosmetic surgery or a procedure.<sup>96</sup> In my thesis I regard botox as a surgery type. Women do plastic surgeries with different motivations. In the Korean patriarchal society women were focused on life at home where men took care of them and they needed to have good looks just for them with changes in society women were out of their zones which resulted in their indulgence of self-care. Some of the women did plastic surgeries to look beautiful for men while other did it for themselves. These days they the main motivation behind the decision of doing a plastic surgery is for a better standing in the society.

Other method mentioned by the informants which is used by Korean is dieting. Body has also standards when it comes to the beauty. Interviewees stated that women in Korea aim to be very skinny and to obtain their goal they have extreme diets. Usually women decide to do them as they are influenced by media. Perfect bodies presented by media are unhealthy as they are extremely skinny.

Different studies recognize influence of appearance on the people's life. According to those studies person with good looks has better opportunities in life.

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<sup>96</sup> Peterson MD, accessed 16 May 2021.

Firstly beautiful people have better chances with social circles as others are willingly interacting with them. Mingling with people help with their social skills and expands their social network which also benefits in their marriage prospects. Attractive people also have more advantages in work life as they are prone to have higher salaries and have longer careers.

Though studies prove given statements, from my informants I learned that not everything is proven, and it may also depend on a situation. Interviewees believe that beautiful appearance is not significant in regard to relationships. Although people are influenced by others looks, they are only motivated to start conversation with them. Appearance is the first impression, so through it people decide whether to approach someone but it does have impact in making friends.

The interviewed student state that when it comes to work appearance is definitely valuable but only in specific industries. Good looks matter in fields where it is necessary for people to present their face, body. For such jobs informants give the example of model or announcer. Appearance matters in one aspect of work life which is job interview. According to the students, people pay attention to how they look when they prepare for an interview. Nonetheless, their appearance is only the first impression and is not as significant as qualifications. Half of the interviewees express that being beautiful is not important for marriage so marriage prospects should not be affected by appearance. In their opinion personality is the key. The other half declares that looks affect marriage prospects and it is common for people to search for a partner who is beautiful. Those informants also mention that even dating apps in Korea make it necessary for the users to do a face check.

To sum up, the findings of my research students whom I interviewed have different thoughts on the subject of beauty influencing social life of people. However through their answers what comes up is fact that although in different degree appearance has some impact on social life and it is impossible that there is no significance. Beauty standards and their connotations which here means the industry of plastic surgery and K-beauty have impact on young Korean women. Women may pay less or more attention to how they appear, but they are still influenced by media who show how they should look like.

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## Appendixes

### Interview questions

1. Do you use make-up?
2. When did you first start using makeup?
3. Why do you use make-up?
4. Do you also pay attention to how others look like?
5. Do you think that other person's appearance, how they look like have any impact on your relationship with this person?
6. What do you think are the beauty standards in Korea ?
7. What about facial features or body shape?
8. Who do you think defines who is beautiful?
9. So if people see them like every day would they consider plastic surgeries?
10. Do you think that because of celebrities people want to do surgeries? As they see them look beautiful they are affected by that and want themselves to look good?
11. Do you know what is the most popular type of plastic surgery?
12. Do you think that there are any advantages of being considered beautiful by others for example in social life?
13. What about in work life? Do you think being beautiful has impact for example if you go to a job interview?
14. Do you think people feel pressure to look beautiful?
15. Do you think beauty standards are well reflected in media? Do they show only beautiful people or variety of different people?
16. Do you think being beautiful has much impact on marriage prospects?
17. Do you think people who are considered beautiful are better at making friends? Is it easier for them?



### Interview transcript 1

I: This interview is conducted for my thesis about beauty standards in South Korea. So all the information will be confidential and data will be used only for the purpose of my research. To protect your identity and anonymity I will use a pseudonym for you. Is it okay to record this interview?

A: Yes.

I: Do you use make-up?

A: Not everyday life, especially right now. We are wearing masks every day, every single day, so not only me lots of Korean people. There is trend thing called foundation-free makeup. It is a big thing in South Korea. Not only me, but many people prefer not to wear makeup these days. For me I do not really [use] make up that often.

I: When did you first start using makeup?

A: Do you mean full make-up or the small things like lipstick?

I: Just like small things.

A: Okay, then. I would say I started to put my make up when I entered middle school, Korean age thirteen, international age eleven to twelve.

I: Why do you use make-up?

A: For me I do not like doing make-up cause I think that every person has their own beauty without makeup. I am not like a big fan of make-up or nothing like that. If I need to put a make-up it is for like I would say it is for manner in some type of way. Cause if I look fresh, like awake not like dark circles and everything it would help. It makes me more bright or something like that, makes me vibrant or healthy.

I: So to freshen yourself?

A: Something like that. Like gain more confidence, something like that. But it does not effect that much.

I: Do you also pay attention to how others look like?

A: For me, not really. Cause I am not a type of girl who cares about make-up and outfits that much compared to other Korean girls. So for me, I do not really care, like actually I do not care at all. Like if someone wears a blue eyebrows, or if they use yellow mascara I do not mind actually. I think it is more like cool, more like confident. But I do pay attention if they have some kind of confidence like that. I some girl wear brand new eyeshadow or something like that it does not give me any interest at all.

I: Do you think that other person's appearance, how they look like have any impact on your relationship with this person?

A: No. Absolutely not at all, because when I talk with someone, the look is not that important. The important thing is the connection like how well we are communicating and something like that. As long as they do not like bleed or something like that I do not really care about appearance.

I: Okay. What do you think are the beauty standards in Korea ?

A: The first thing that pops in my head is white, whiter skin tone. It has a long history about white skin. Cause really long time ago like Joseon dynasty and even more than that there is a people, there was a hierarchy like there were lower people and middle people, like slaves and everything. In really really old days. The higher people tend to not work outside so they keep their skin white compared to workers who works at like seas and mountains and everything. So people have a stereotype that if you have a whiter skin you are noble or like rich people. So the stereotype comes from the old Korean hierarchy system. But right now, these days the beauty standards are expanding and changing so not many people think that white skin is prettier or better these days. We also think that dark skin is sexier and healthier. It is like changing but the typical beauty standard will be white skin.

I: What about facial features or body shape?

A: It really depends on people, but the general idea of beauty standard of facial shape would be a small face. But I do not really understand why the people prefer small face. I think that normal Korean people think that shaper, thin especially for girls like a v-line stands for your skin is very tight. If you have a small facial structure its gonna look better when you take a selfie so I am guessing that is the reason why people prefer small facial structure. But I do not know why people prefer it. And the body shape it also really depends on age and generation and like style. High school students or middle school students when they are young they prefer skinnier type of body like Victoria's secret models like less fat and things like that. But if you are in your twenties or thirties or even more people prefer to have a like a slender type of body because like they do think that being a woman with muscle stands for more like healthier or sexier. So younger people prefer skinny but twenty, thirty years old people [prefer] that slender, well-balanced those type of body structure.

I: Who do you think defines who is beautiful?

A: I think the Korean K-pop, K-drama, idol industry impacts huge part of beauty standards cause actually they are made like a products. So actually the normal people cannot compare with those celebrities cause they are mean to be like for sale and to show to other people. They get a body care, facial care like a lot a lot. Like, a lot. I

mean really a lot. So it is incomparable. But people keep comparing with the celebrities cause they saw their like favorite singers, actors every day. So they unconsciously compare with the celebrities but it is yeah not a good culture. They are big part of the beauty standard those type of industry.

I: So if people see them like everyday would they consider plastic surgeries?

A: It is true that a lot of people are getting plastic surgeries, especially for the not a body part, but like a nose, eyes, chins or something like that. But I do not think they want to be like celebrities and getting a surgery. Because normal people get surgery to get the (...) like to boost their confidence up, something like that. I do not think that they do surgery to look like celebrity.

I: Do you think that because of celebrities people want to do surgeries? As they see them look beautiful they are affected by that and want themselves to look good?

A: I think they impact a hugely beauty standards in Korea, but there is too many beauty standards. And if anyone does a surgery it is for their own purpose and not to look like celebrities.

I: Do you know what is the most popular type of plastic surgery?

A: I would say it is definitely eyelid, like eye surgery. Cause there are some people who prefer like mono eyelid, but there is a people who prefer double eyelid because if you have a double eyelid your eye is gonna look more bigger, brighter, something like that. Slightly more people prefer double eyelids. And if you have a mono eyelid they will get plastic surgery to get a double eyelid but if someone is like if mono eyelid is my advantage they will not get a plastic surgery. And for me, I was born with double eyelid but there is type of people like someone who has a really thick double eyelid but someone like me does not have the thick double eyelids so if I do not like my think double eyelid I would do a plastic surgery for a, like get thicker eyelid but I am okay with my eyes.

I: Do you think that there are any advantages of being considered beautiful by others for example in social life?

A: If I say absolutely no it is gonna be a lie cause it is true that everyone wants to be like healthier, prettier, like something like that. If I say totally no it is gonna be totally lie but at the same time I do think that it does not impact that much. Cause like first impression only lasts for few seconds. So things that last longer are like your warm, kind heart like something like that. So it can be in fact but I do not think it impacts that much. Like if you are being prettier than others, than people might treat her more nicer,

something like that. But I do not think that that is the thing that lasts long and something sincere, meaningful, something like that. It has impact but a little.

I: What about in work life? Do you think being beautiful has impact for example if you go to a job interview?

A: It is gonna depend on the industry where you work. Cause if you are like a model, something that you need to show your body or face to others then it is gonna be. There first impression of your appearance will be a big part but if you are were working as a desk job or like an office job then it does not really matter I think.

I: Do you think people feel pressure to look beautiful?

A: My personal experience is not at all. But I do talk about this topic with my friends a lot but it happens a lot with people who have low self-esteem. If you have a low self-esteem then you might gonna be obsessed with your looks, or like appearance, something like that. But as long as someone is happy and feel good being themselves then it does not really matter.

I: Do you think beauty standards are well reflected in media? Do they show only beautiful people or variety of different people?

A: It depends on what type of TV programs, but like variety tv shows does not really care about appearance a lot. But the TV industry, like dramas and music they do care about beauty a lot, appearance and style, and like fashions and everything. So in that specific industry they want it be, look as good as they can so sometimes it feels too perfect.

I: Do you think being beautiful has much impact on marriage prospects?

A: If you are looking for a dating partner the appearance may impact a lot but if you are looking for a marriage material then appearance does not really matter that much because you need to live with someone for like a really long time so the appearance like the mind and what they think is way more important than how they look. So appearance for a marriage is not really important at all.

I: Do you think people who are considered beautiful are better at making friends? Is it easier for them?

A: Not really, because it also depends on their characteristics, like their personality. If someone is beautiful, but if she is introvert then it is gonna be problem with meeting new friends or something like that. So it really depends on personality like extrovert, introvert, something like that.

A: When I was young most of people preferred to be a cute type of girl and boys wanted to find a girlfriend like cute type of girl. But right now that does not really work like

this. Cause now we all know that not only cute but also sexy, musly type of women is really good.

I: Do you think it is important to be, feel beautiful?

A: No it is not cause beauty cannot be define as a one certain way so as long as the standards of beautiful match each other's own definition it is enough. I mean some people think that being healthy can be their own standard of beautiful or being comfortable with their self is other personal beauty standards.

I: Do you have something to add?

A: Also these days American Korean, type of celebrities are on the TV shows a lot so they are spreading, making beauty standard in Korea more like expand. For example Jessi. Jessi is Korean-American singer and she prefers to be tan as she can and have a really wide hips as she can, something like that. Something like really Americanized beauty standards so she is spreading that kind of new beauty standard in Korea as well so lot of backgrounds and cultural differences expand beauty standards in Korea for sure.

I: I think this is it. Thank you so much for participation.

## Interview transcript 2

I: This interview is conducted for my thesis about women's beauty standards in South Korea. So all the information and the data that I got from you will be used only for the purpose of my research. To protect your identity and anonymity I will use a pseudonym for you. Is it okay to record this interview?

B: Yes

I: Do you use make-up?

B: Yes, I do.

I: How often do you use make-up?

B: Because of corona since I do not go outside that often, nowadays I only use it like once a week. But before when we had offline classes I used it every day.

I: When did you first start using makeup?

B: I think fourteen, fifteen. When I went to middle school.

I: Is it normal for girls in Korea to start using make-up at that time?

B: I think a lot of people start wearing it at like elementary school, sixth grade around. But the thing is, I was in Dubai during middle school and that is when I started using make-up. But I think I was pretty late, not late, but relatively late maybe, compared to the most of common Koreans. I think all the Koreans they start using make-up when they enter middle school or like before. But I think that is, now people are using it in earlier age right now.

I: Why did you start to use make-up?

B: I think YouTube had the most impact, cause all the beauty YouTubers wearing make-up, showing make-up. I think that influenced me the most. And also peers, like all my friends, they started using make-up one by one and yeah.

I: So you were like everyone does it so why not try it?

B: Yeah and I think that is when the puberty hits, so you feel kind of insecure about yourself and make-up is the only way to cover that up. So yeah.

I: Do you pay attention to how others look like?

B: I think it depends on situation. If I just hang out with my friends around my hometown maybe, I do not. Cause even I do not wear make-up when I meet with my friends. But if I go to like school, like go to a place where there are many people I prefer to wear make-up, cause I think that it makes me more confident about myself. So and yeah aside, I think I do care about other people's appearance too.

I: Do you think that other person's appearance, how they look like have any impact on your relationship with this person?

B: Frankly, yes of course, cause if you meet someone, their face and like that is the first thing you see. So I think that obviously have an impact but it in long term that is not the only impact. Of course their characteristics are more important but we try to give the best impression for ourselves when we first meet other people. So I think, yes appearance has a lot of impact.

I: What do you think are the beauty standards for women in Korea?

B: I think it is big eyes. Skinny, like I mean not skinny in like Europe or America, like skinny version in Korea. And uhm, white skin, pale skin. Mhm and what else (...) Beauty standards? Not too much make-up, cause they (...) Yeah not too much make-up. What else? I think it just kinda focuses on the idols and k-pop singers. I think depending on how they dress, how they put on the make-up, that kind of becomes huge trends in Korea. So yeah (...)

I: So beauty standards are influenced by the media and the idols?

B: I think it has impact, cause that is what we see every day.

I: Who do you think defines who is beautiful?

B: I think yeah media, cause they kind of portray the perfect woman. Yeah (...) and they kind of put like a boundary to people. Like this is called beautiful, this is considered beautiful. Like if you look at the k-pop singers they are all very skinny, they all have very small face. That is also a beauty standard in Korea. They are all skinny, they all have like a long legs. So yeah I think that it just became (...) oh that is considered beautiful. And uhm if you look at the other singers, not like Korean singers. You can see many like healthy singers, you know who they are uhm people like them because they can sing well because they dance well, because they have nice songs. But in Korea I think it is more like, they are popular because they have beautiful face, because they have nice body. So I think it is very different because of that media. I think it influences the beauty standard.

I: So if people see celebrities like every day are they influenced to become more beautiful? Would they consider plastic surgeries?

B: I think popularity of plastic surgeries is getting higher and higher nowadays. Not only in Korea, I can see a lot of influencers having plastic surgery, not even (...) Like it is most famous in Korea but I think that is kind of you know being spread to other countries, to other people. Like before, plastic surgery had a negative image. People would like be oh that is so fake, like why would you do it, you have to love yourself more. But now I think it is more like if you wanna be confident plastic surgery is not a bad way(...) So the impression of plastic surgeries kind of is changing and I think yeah

that (...) So like cause before when we say plastic surgery, my friends even they were like oh do not do it, like you are beautiful the way you are. But now people are like oh yeah you are gonna look nicer that way. So I think yeah it has kind of changed.

I: Do you know what is the most popular type of plastic surgery?

B: I think, you know the eyelid surgery? Ssangkopul? That is literally the (...) most than half of my friends have done it. And there are so many people who have done it so I think that is the most common one. And maybe the next one would be like the nose job. Like lots of people do nose job now. And like a botox, that has become yeah popular trend also (...) like if (...) You have been in Korea so you know there are so many plastic surgery places in Korea and yeah it is just crazy.

I: So plastic surgeries are mostly focused on the face?

B: Mhm, they all focus on face or the body shape.

I: Do you think that there are any advantages of being considered beautiful by others for example in social life?

B: Especially nowadays I think there are many advantages cause YouTube has been a big trend and there are many YouTubers and the most I think easy way to gain subscribers is through you know showing off their face, showing off their body. So I think and that is how you gain your popularity. And even on Instagram there are so many Instagram models nowadays. They get sponsored, they get paid, they advertise content because they are beautiful. So I think yeah it is a big advantage.

I: What about in work life? Do you think being beautiful has impact for example if you go to a job interview?

B: I think yes, but I do not think it is only beauty. It is more like smart beauty.. I do not know. More like how work suitable face you have. Cause if you search on media, if you type like job interview make-up, they are thousands of videos showing how to look good on job interviews. So I do not think it is only beauty but they have this preferable face for interviews I think. So it [beauty] is not considered that important in workplaces.

I: Do you think being beautiful has much impact on marriage prospects?

B: Oh I think it has a huge impact. But I do not think that is not only problem in Korea, just everywhere. I mean you want to marry person who looks good, not? Yes so I, of course it has a big impact, I think.

I: Do you think people feel pressure to look beautiful?

B: Yes, cause even for women we judge men by how they look. Not deeply judge but we just talk, oh yeah he is good looking, he is hot and he is not. So I think it is the same for the guys. Guys also judge women. I am not saying it is bad thing, I mean they can



do it. But it is just that because we know they judge us we try to look good. We (...) not only for the pressure, we feel insecure about ourselves. Because we know how we look with make-up, without make-up. We keep comparing ourselves with that. So I think the media the people and ourselves just put pressure on myself to you know look good and yeah try to be perfect.

I: Do you think that because of beauty standards reflected in media show only beautiful people or variety of different people?

B: I think like before it was, they had very strict boundary of beautiful. But I think now because it is becoming more international, like in Korea there are many foreigners entertainer joining the shows so I think it kind of broadened the standard. Like I think it kinda extended all the beauty standards. So I think it is a good thing cause yeah like now people kind of you now prefer to gain some weight, put some weight. And now the people are also wanting to see that from the idols and all the influencers like it is kind of changing in a good way right now.

I: Do you think people who are considered beautiful are better at making friends? Is it easier for them?

B: Yeah I think. Cause as I said before, your face is the first, that is the first impression you get from the people. So of course if you are good looking and charming people will try to be more friendly, try to be nicer to you. But (...) I think it is only at the beginning of the relationship, but as you develop your relationship with people beauty is not the only characteristic that people need to consider.

I: What do you think about beauty standards impact people in Korea?

B: I think of the beauty standards, there a lot of diets, diet food and diet related products in Korea. But I think that is mainly because of the media and how they portray the perfect beauty standards. I think of course like facial surgeries are a big problem but diet is also a very big problem in Korea cause people try to be, look good and not just skinny, like super skinny like all the idols and stuff. So I think diet is the most, is the most influence because, the problem we are dealing with right now. And, and uh you know like the dermatology?

I: So skin treatments?

B: Yeah that is very big trend in Korea right now and if you search on youtube there are like literally millions of videos of people visiting dermatologist and you know showing off their skin, like how their skin looks good and getting botox. Lip botox is like another trend in Korea. So I think before the main problem was only the face like, a perfect beautiful face but now it is getting bigger. It is now it is all about diet and having the

perfect body, having the perfect skin, having the perfect like lip shape. Yeah another trend would be a face massage that makes your face smaller. It pushes the bone together, to have the perfect v-shape.

I: I think that would be it for the interview questions. Thank you so much for participation.

### Interview transcript 3

I: This interview is conducted for my thesis about beauty standards in South Korea. So all the information will be confidential and data will be used only for the purpose of my research. To protect your identity and anonymity I will use a pseudonym for you. Is it okay to record this interview?

C: Yes.

I: Do you use make-up?

C: Yes, I do.

I: How often?

C: Actually I put on makeup when I meet my friend or go to a part-time job. When I was young, I thought I should wear makeup when I grow up, but now I just do it because I want to decorate myself when I take pictures or hang out with my friends.

I: When did you start using make-up?

C: I started wearing make-up when I was twenty years old, after basic makeup in high school.

I: Do you think other girls started wearing make-up at the same age as you?

C: Maybe earlier. My friends started in middle school or high school. Maybe in general in middle school. But I did not want because make-up is oily so I did not start early.

I: Do you pay attention to people's appearance?

C: No, I do not. I look at other people's appearance as just passing by. But yeah I do not care. Because a beautiful person passing by can attract attention, but I cannot care about all the appearance of a person.

I: Does other person's appearance have impact on your relationship?

C: Maybe no. Because people's appearance does not seem to matter much in a relationship. When I look at celebrities, I may wonder what kind of person they are, but I do not think relationships are differentiated by appearance.

I: What do you think are beauty standards?

C: I seem to be pursuing overall beauty rather than a particular appearance. A person's personality, tone and the like. Overall a good person looks beautiful.

I: Is there only one universal beauty ideal?

C: No, there is no right or wrong in everything. I do not think many people can agree with the ideal of beauty, but I cannot say it is wrong about the other beauty ideal.

I: What do you think are the beauty standards for women in Korea?

C: Eyes, nose and mouth are also important factors, but I think the atmosphere of appearance is also important. Elegance of appearance is also important. There is an elegant atmosphere, a refreshing atmosphere, a cute image, and the likes, yeah.

I: What about standards for facial features?

C: I think actually big eyes, like skin is good, a good skin, like in good condition. I look mostly at the eyes, like oh they eyes are pretty. Hmm like good hair, yeah. That is all maybe.

I: And what about body?

C: When I was young, people said that body like coke bottle was good, but now I like a healthy body.

I: Who defines what is beautiful?

C: Actually I think I define myself as beautiful. Each person likes a different image, so there will be different standards for thinking that it is beautiful.

I: Are plastic surgeries popular in Korea?

C: Plastic surgery has become more familiar in our lives in Korea than before. I do not just think plastic surgery is bad. In extreme cases, it is necessary to refrain, but the technology of plastic surgery increases, giving new hope to people who have injured their faces in burns or unexpected accidents. There are also people who think about their complex for a long time and live satisfied. So I do not just look at it negatively these days.

I: What about plastic surgeries for a sake of beauty?

C: Actually double eyelid surgery is popular. Actually I did this surgery because my mom said I hope you have double eyelid. I was okay and just did it.

I: When did you do it?

C: Maybe when I was nineteen. After high school graduation.

I: So what kind of plastic surgery is the most popular?

C: Actually the double eyelid is the basic, so yeah it would be the eyes. And next is nose I think.

I: Do you think there are any advantages of being considered beautiful by others?

C: There is no such thing as no impact. When joining a company and interviewing, neat impressions are also included in the first impression. So regardless of being handsome and pretty, I think I can make a first impression. However, there seems to be no discomfort in working due to appearance.

I: Do you think being considered beautiful has impact on marriage prospects?

C: Actually I want a handsome guy, but I care more about personality. I am tall but my future boyfriend or marriage partner may have kind heart, good personality and the height is not that important.

I: Do you think that your appearance has impact on your life for example in work life?

C: As I said earlier, there seem to be cases where jobs such as flight attendants and announcers in Korea still benefit and disadvantage based on their appearance or height. In some cases, companies want to look neat and smart, not just pretty and handsome.

I: Do you feel pressure to feel beautiful?

C: Actually no, I do not feel pressured, but I think I want to take care of myself. I think that by taking care of myself both inside and outside I can satisfy myself.

I: Do you think other people feel pressure?

C: Yes I think. Because people show their appearance, they check if they have make-up. So the plastic surgeries are now very popular because people feel pressure.

I: Do you think those who are beautiful are better at making friends?

C: No. Because people can be interested if they look beautiful, but making friends is a different story. A person's personality, mood, everything works to make friends. So I think personality is more related to this than appearance.

I: Do you think beauty standards are reflected in media?

C: Yes. I watch a lot of TV since I was young. At first, there are always beautiful and wonderful contents and people in cartoons, dramas, and entertainment shows. Celebrities seem to be talked about, especially by people, as a standard of beauty. It seems that the standards of beauty continue to change and change like fashion. People with double eyelids used to be pretty, and now there are many beautiful celebrities with single eyelids. Nowadays there is a personality and it seems to be the standard of one's beauty.

I: Do you think it is important to be beautiful?

C: No, There are so many reasons to like people. Just because there is little external beauty doesn't mean he is not beautiful. It can be beautiful to like his job and work hard, and I can look beautiful in many ways, such as helping others. But it may not be beautiful. It is okay. it's not beautiful does not mean it is wrong. Beauty is not an important factor because each person has different personalities and standards of beauty.

I: That is all from me. Thank you so much for participation.

#### Interview transcript 4

I: This interview is conducted for my thesis about beauty standards in South Korea. So all the information will be confidential and data will be used only for the purpose of my research. To protect your identity and anonymity I will use a pseudonym for you. Is it okay to record this interview?

D: Sure.

I: Do you use make-up?

D: Yes. Yes but I have not wear make-up for in years. Like two, three years but recently I had to wear make-up because of my job interview.

I: When did you first start using makeup?

D: I first started to wear make-up in my freshman year of the college. And for about one year I wore a make-up quite daily, like more often than I do right now. But now I kinda got out it.

I: Do you think other girls start at the same time as you?

D: It depends on the how much makeup you put on. But as far as I remember the make-up for your (...) the base make-up usually starts around high school year I think. It really depends. I am not weird to start using the make-up in the college.

I: Why do you use make-up?

D: Like in the very beginning I wore make up because it was some sort of thing you that you do when you go to college. You know like wear a make-up. Since you wear uniforms when you are in middle school, high school, you buy clothes that look some sort of feminine and a little bit I do not know flashy. Those were sort of stereotypical thing by the time I was going to college. So I just went to that mainstream.

I: Do you pay attention to how others look like?

D: For right now, I also grew up of that phase. Since I do not care much about my appearance. I also became less interested in how others looks, how others take care of their self in superficial ways. Yeah (...) I used to but not anymore.

I: Do you think that other person's appearance, how they look like have any impact on your relationship with this person?

D: If the relationship is (...) in a friendship wise it never impacts, it has zero impact on me. But in a boyfriend, girlfriend thing (...) yeah in that kind of relationship to be honest it definitely matters.

I: What do you think are the beauty standards for women in Korea ?

D: I think for a long time it was always been like lighter skin. Bu by lighter skin, you will know how there are Koreans who have a very light skin. Very different from

Caucasian style. That kind of light skin is always something. Like it has been a some sort of beauty standard for like hundreds of years. And (...) so that thing has not changed for a long time. Also I would say (...) eyebrow that are not so bland, you know. Like people always at least they always draw their eyebrow a little bit darker. I think it is to give a stronger impression because that is also the only make-up that I wear when I have to wear a make-up nowadays. And definitely like lively colored lips you know. People always tend to wear lip make-up more than my European friends. Those three I guess.

I: What about facial features or body shape?

D: I think eyes I do not know. That is the thing mono lids are thing, are quite popular. But it is like you have to have mono lid but also you have to have big eyes you know. That kind of dilemma. Nose (...) I think it is always better to have like straighter, stronger nose. I am not sure about lips though. Oh and it is not a big thing right now but we used to have this word describes your jawline. The ideal line would be like v, alphabet v. It is not big of a thing anymore but I think it still exists a little bit. Like we never say it but yeah. So some of my Korean friends do not understand when people are into like but chin you know. Some of my Korean friends do not understand why people find it attractive cause they are more used to the v-lines and things. I think the standards for body it is getting harsher and harsher every year. The people say the size of women clothing are getting smaller every year you know, the free size. Like you know how big Korean online markets are right? For the clothes and everything and they also make their own products. And they usually name it free size but it is usually for like (...) I do not know what size you have in Europe. So for us the smallest size is 4 and 5 is like standard and 6. I mean 5,6 are like common. We also have 7 and 8 and so on. But most of the online malls they make their own products like t-shirts and they name it free size. They also attached small sentence this will fit to 4 to 5 and a half. So yeah (...) It feels like they require people to be more skinnier definitely.

I: Who do you think defines who is beautiful?

D: I definitely think the media does everything. Yeah like the media and the Korean idols we see, the actors, actresses. And once they invent award or once they invent a fashion keyword or once they invent a body feature words like I said v-line and things it all (...) I think it all starts from media and spreads to people. And yeah Tiktoks, Instagram (...) I believe Instagram because Tiktok is not such a big thing in Korea yet so (...)

I: So if people are influenced by media do they consider plastic surgeries?

D: Well I am not sure but I think I have read cases. Those cases are actually like people who do a whole lot of plastic surgeries to fit into standards are quite rare. Those cases you can read from the newspapers. But small surgeries like making double eyelids (...) I think this is like the simplest and the most popular thing to do, common thing to do. But that thing kinda melt into our society so deeply and very naturally. I do not think it is even about the media it is just (...) right now it is not considered as a big thing anymore in Korea. But commercials definitely have something because you can see plastic surgery advertisements in subways or anywhere. I think that kind of thing makes people a little bit blend and getting used to the fact that of plastic surgeries which is not so good.

I: So is the double eyelid surgery is the most popular kind of plastic surgery?

D: I think so. I do not know many friends who actually did the plastic surgery but most of them who did they have done the double eyelid thingy.

I: Do you think that there are any advantages of being considered beautiful by others for example in social life?

D: Yes. Yes I guess so. But I think it is also universal thing having advantages and disadvantages because of the appearance. Like one of my friends she is really pretty so sort of advantage she can just hang around with new people very easily. But also she has some sort of disadvantages of having like (...) I think it is some kind of a Korean problem having like sort of perverts. Unrealistic things happen to her like stalkers or like she has suffered for bad breakups with rumors inside the campus and things. Those things can also happen when you are not considered absolutely beautiful but I think it happens quite often. I think if person is considered beautiful and she is female she is more vulnerable in Korean society. It is not like we have best women rights here in Korea so (...)

I: What about in work life? Do you think being beautiful has impact for example if you go to a job interview?

D: I am not the one who employs others so I cannot be 100% sure but there are some people who go to a professional make-up artists just for the job interview. And you know we still attach our photos when we apply to Korean companies. So I think it implies that it definitely matters in your work life too. And I am not like considered beautiful but because I look a little bit like I heard it from my friend. She was drunk. She told me she used to be a little bit jealous during our college when we were like seeking for a part-time jobs. So I always easily got the job, but she could not. Because she has a little bit of fierce looking face. For her it was always difficult to get a simple



part-time job like being a barista and everything. But for me yeah I look little bit easy-going and it was not that difficult for me. I have never noticed it but after she told me that it kinda shocked me.

I: Do you think being beautiful has much impact on marriage prospects?

D: Yeah definitely. Cause we have (...) I have never tried it but we actually have this app that is sort of like Tinder. But you need to go through a face check to join that app. So it definitely matters, especially for a woman. Guys think being pretty is important quality than being you know professional and independent and so. So yeah definitely matters in marital life.

I: Do you think people who are considered beautiful are better at making friends? Is it easier for them?

D: I do think it is easier because I have seen it through my teenage life and in my college life also. It is not like they can have friends when their personality sucks but they do need much of an effort. You know when you are shy it is a little bit more difficult to make friends. For me it always seemed like when you are actually cute, or pretty or handsome, whatever, the personality does not go that much. Even when you are shy, someone comes by you and just like that you make friends. But yeah I think it definitely happens.

I: Do you think people feel pressure to look beautiful by society or friends?

D: In the very beginning of my college year I did not even know that I was being pressured. But now that I think I have been pressured by the media and everything. Cause they show you were to do the plastic surgeries or they show you where to buy the skirts and all the things that I do not even like that much. If it were my go to thing I would not mind but those are not my thing at all. But because of the pressure yeah I bought them anyway. But after that, after I ditched my make-up I did get few pressures from my friends like why I am not wearing any make-up. Some of my friends were like can I at least give you my lipstick so you can wear. That actually happened. So yeah society and my peers usually. But right now people in Korea they learn how to embrace others tastes cause it does not happen anymore. And also most of my friends do not wear make-up as much as they did few year ago. So things are getting better.

I: Nowadays because of corona they also wear make-up less, right?

D: Yeah, like people who want wear a make-up, wear a make-up which is a good thing.

I: Do you think beauty standards are well reflected in media? Do they show only beautiful people or variety of different people?

D: In case of Korean media, so in case of male entertainers they do have various figures, like overweight or in different heights, different looks. But I have to say when it comes to female entertainers the looks are quite the same, like standards are quite the same even for the comedians. And of course like in comedian industry they have the most varieties but those kind of differences are usually turned into humor, like turned into comedy which is not so good. And especially in actor industry like all the woman actresses they at least have some sort of beauty standards. But when it comes to the male actors they all have such a different characteristics with all their features. So I always wanted to see a female actress who is a little bit not like the beauty standards. So I think the standards are softer when it comes to male celebrities.

I: Do you think it is important to be, feel beautiful?

D: For a while I thought it is important to you know feel beautiful and like embrace yourself and all those things. But now I just feel like it is okay not to be beautiful. It is not like the end of the world. So if a person thinks being beautiful is important then just go for it, I do not care. For me being beautiful it is on the very bottom of my list.

I: I think this is it for my questions. Thank you so much for participation.