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(Un)saving face, or the designer face as a new consumer commodity

Maria Kniazeva^{a,*}, Eva Babicheva^b^a University of San Diego, School of Business, 5998, Alkala Park, San Diego, CA 92110, United States^b Hanyang University, Department of Clothing and Textiles, 222 Wangsimni-ro, Seongdong-gu, Seoul 04763, Republic of Korea

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ABSTRACT

The designer face as a new consumer commodity is a focus of this work. By venturing into the global marketplace of elective plastic surgery, the authors aim to develop a concept of the face in the consumer behavior discipline. “What is the face?” – is the fundamental research question. What makes the face the site of voluntary alteration? How do marketing forces drive the mainstream embrace of surgical correction of facial features as a commercial commodity, similar to shoes? This study takes place in South Korea, a nation that places a strong metaphorical value on the face and has historically developed the honor-centered concept of “saving face” as a guiding principle of life. Specifically study examines the normative function of advertising as presented in street billboards. Results show a transition occurring for the face’s major functions and highlight emerging newer functions - the face as a mask and the face as fashion.

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1. Introduction: are you proud of your nose?

The girl’s eyes are softly closed, her gently tightened lips are stretched in a light smile, and the overall look of her face profile hints at the sweet bliss the young female is experiencing at this very moment. The billboard copy reads: “Be proud of your nose. Have it done at Wannabe Plastic Surgery clinic.” Another model on the same poster shows off what is described as a “natural eye line,” also crafted at the same clinic. Both females appear to be mature, though their faces look like those of teenagers. The billboard resides on the wall of a subway station in Seoul, next to others promising bigger eyes and v-line shaped chins. These advertisements are close to kiosks and stands selling shoes, bottled water, and rice cakes.

The designer face as a new consumer commodity is a focus of this work. Starting with futuristic fiction, the “designer body” idea is moving fast from the exclusive domain of celebrity personalities to the mainstream marketplace (Kim, 2015) and is embraced by consumers working on their identity formation (Shrum et al., 2013). As a result, cosmetic surgery to alter facial features is becoming more commonplace as a means to achieve a satisfactory self-concept (Liu, Keeling, & Hogg, 2016). The female face in particular is the topic of this research, because women reportedly make up about 90% of plastic surgery patients (Chang, 2015).

On the basic physiological level, the face is the most distinctive human body element that sets a person apart from others. “More than any other part of the body, we identify the face as *me* or *you*”

(Synnott, 1993, p.73). Unless veiled, the face is always on display, revealing clues about one’s age and racial distinctions, such as the shape of cheekbones, noses, lips, and eyes. In this sense, the face is a powerful communication medium that establishes initial relational ties. Unsurprisingly, consumer behavior studies give due attention to the face, primarily addressing the management of aging faces (Jacoby, 2011; Noble, Schewe, & Kuhr, 2004; Yoon & Cole, 2008) and examining the meaning of wrinkles (Schouten, 1991; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). This study aims to bring stronger focus to the face by exploring more feature elements yet to be conceptualized in prior consumer studies.

The research objective is to develop a concept of the face in the consumer behavior discipline. “What is the face?” – is the fundamental research question. Why is the face an object of voluntary alteration? How do marketing forces drive the mainstream embrace of surgical correction of facial features as a commercial good, similar to shoes? To address these questions, this study examines “idealized” facial features in Asia. This geographic location is meaningful because many Asian countries place a strong metaphorical value on the face and have historically developed the honor-centered concept of “saving face” as a guiding principle of life (Lee, 1999). Scholars suggest that women in Asia give much more attention to their facial features than women in Western societies who generally are more concerned with the body (Kim, Seo, & Baek, 2013).

South Korea is a justifiable study country because an estimated 20% of women have something surgically altered on their faces, arguably the highest known proportion in the world (Willett, 2013). Academic research asserts that the traditional Korean conceptualization of ideal female beauty emphasizes the face rather than the body (Jung & Lee, 2009). Face size and shape are the most important factors for judging overall facial beauty in the culture (Cho, 2002). Reportedly, one in ten

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Kniazeva@sandiego.edu (M. Kniazeva), babicheva.eva@gmail.com (E. Babicheva).

South Koreans who have plastic surgery done is in his or her teens (Kang, 2015). Double eyelid surgery and nose surgery are considered to be the best high school graduation presents in the nation. Moreover, South Korea has one of the highest numbers of plastic surgeons per capita of any country, followed by Brazil, the U.S., Japan and Russia, according to the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (Swanson, 2015).

2. The face as a construct

Scholars in various disciplines collectively identify the multifaceted nature of the face and define an evolution starting from merely a physical body part to a carrier of deep symbolic, cultural, and social meanings. Sociologist Synnott (1993) summarizes the findings of face research by function. As “the prime symbol of the self,” the face is physical, unique, personal, private, and intimate. As a source of verbal and non-verbal communication, the face is public, malleable, and subject to fashion. Semiotically, the face links to God, love, the self and the soul. Synnott shows how the birth of physiognomy establishes the face as a marker of character. Aristotle, the first scientist to view the face as a particularly suitable part of the body to signify mental character, wrote: “The face, when fleshy, indicates laziness, as in cattle... A small face marks a small soul, as in the cat and the ape... So the face must be neither large nor little: an intermediate size is therefore best” (Aristotle & Barnes, 1984, p.1246). Aristotle offers an early attempt to normalize facial standards, without influence from marketers. Instead, the message originates from a Greek philosopher who is fascinated by the natural human form and “facism” in particular.

The face's function as a marker of fate was developed during the Renaissance with the rise of astrology. This time period attached cosmic significance to the face and transformed face-reading techniques from the descriptive to the predictive mode. From an astrological perspective, a face is viewed holistically, including moles, warts, and wrinkles. The specialized discipline of metoposcopy engaged in the reading of facial lines and spots. The belief was that past, present, and future were written in the face. Paintings of the 16–17th centuries document the “divine” significance of facial imperfections that were often plotted in detail in the portraits.

The concept of the face as a marker of fate advanced further with the suggestion that certain physical features signal a potentially criminal character. The clues to the criminal self, according to the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, include outstanding ears, abundant hair, a sparse beard, enormous frontal sinuses, broad cheekbones, a low forehead, oblique eyes, a small skull and, in women, a masculine face (Lombroso, 1968, pp. 369–72). Detective writer Agatha Christie (1987, pp. 51–3) highlights “the criminal jaw” to describe the “villainous looking man” in one of her popular novels.

Over time, the construct of the face converged with the concept of beauty (Synnott, 1993). The notion that bodily beauty is located primarily in the face, was widely shared in the past, and the historically praised aesthetic value of facial features is reflected in the images of the Egyptian royal beauty of Nefertiti and mysteriously smiling face of Mona Lisa. The Bible warns about the seductive power of facial beauty: “... nor let her allure you with her eyelids” (Proverbs 6:24–26).

While historically the facial beauty was objectively defined by the symmetry of facial features, academic studies also find cross-cultural relativism and subjectivity of perceptual beauty. Thus, the first scientist to offer an early anthropology of beauty, Michel de Montaigne (1965, pp. 355–6) describes the Indies who painted their faces “black and dusky, with large swollen lips and a wide flat nose” and locals in Peru who considered big ears to be a symbol of beauty.

Originated respectively by Aristotle and Plato, the themes of the face and beauty now constitute two intertwined elements of the symbolic self in contemporary thought that provides analysis of the facial beauty ideals, identifies earlier religion and modern day media as forces normalizing beauty standards, and gives attention to the consumer

behavior resulting from the notions of facial beauty. Beautification as face management is a focal point of the latter studies that demonstrate the current societal acceptance of things like make-up and tattoos. This view differs from the distant past when up until the Renaissance, Christian tradition declared the face as a mirror of the soul and regarded beautification as sinful. “Enlarging eyes with paint” was condemned as vain, “smearing faces with the ensnaring devices of worldly cunning” was seen as only appropriate for courtesans, the use of cosmetics signaled “the deeply diseased soul,” and having “rouge and white on a Christian woman's face” was “an evidence of unchaste mind” (Synnott, 1993, p.85).

3. Methods

Driven by the fundamental question “What is the face?” within the face-saving culture of South Korea, this study developed a working research question to guide our inquiry: what makes a culture rooted in conservative beliefs so openly question and surgically correct the “quality” of the body received from one's parents? Given the collectivist character of Korean culture, the primary interest is identifying the guidance coming from societal forces such as outdoor advertising (Fedorenko, 2014) to legitimize the embrace of a novel pattern—facial plastic surgery—in consumer behavior.

The exploratory nature of the research questions shapes the qualitative methodological approach and focuses on “what” and “why” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and the respective design of the study. Following norms and values dictated by the prevailing Neo-Confucian beliefs against those manifested through marketing channels, the study aims to theorize the concept of the face. Specifically, this study aims to uncover the normative messages and consumer directions coming from marketers. Researchers performed a close reading of advertising billboards and street signs promoting plastic surgery and located in Seoul, the capital of South Korea. Employing this methodological direction, results extend the studies that view “facism and the beauty mystique” to be primarily visual phenomenon, most apparent in films, television programs, and advertising (Synnott, 1993). Ad images tend to have “an extremely normalizing influence on women” in Korea who are drawn to them in search of bodily templates (Kim, 2003, p. 109). The Korea Consumer Agency claims that ads influence one-third of local patients choice of plastic surgery hospital (Kang, 2015). Moreover, scholars report that the number of advertisements in fashion and beauty magazines in South Korea that focus on female models' faces is greater compared to the United States (Jung & Lee, 2009). This latter finding suggests similar results in outdoor advertising.

Subway billboards and street signs exemplify the intrusive and impersonal nature of street marketing (Lee & Callcott, 1994; Rosewarne, 2005; Wilson & Till, 2011). Contrary to print, TV or social media advertising, billboard advertising hardly requires any action from consumers, such as browsing a webpage, turning on the TV, or opening the newspaper or a magazine (Taylor & Franke, 2003). A billboard's impersonal nature defines the commercial language of the street—indiscreet, bold and loud, pursuing anyone and everyone (Lopez-Pumarejo & Bassell, 2009).

Fifty subway billboards and street signs encouraging facial plastic surgery form the data set. Employing ethnographic research tools, photos of the outdoor signs were taken by the authors between late 2014 and early 2015 while purposely visiting subway stations in the Gangnam district of Seoul. This district, made famous by Psy's worldwide hit song, “Gangnam Style,” has a reputation as a “beauty belt” and boasts 362 plastic surgery clinics (Tal, 2015). One of the authors, who speaks Korean as a second language and currently resides in Seoul, translated the textual information in the billboards into English. To verify translation accuracy, the other author sent the original photos and translated text to a female native Korean speaker living in the United States. This step validates the translated content and added some cross-cultural interpretation to the data. For example, the native

informant commented that having plastic surgery in Korea is like a “piling up one’s insurance with God.”

Both authors separately engaged in close reading and coding of the data. The goal was to extract the meaningful themes coming from both the visual images and the textual material and to illuminate the concept of the face. Two identifiable sets of “players” emerged from the data—one was presented by the images of (mostly male) surgeons, while the other included images of the (mostly young) female patients. Most surgeons were shown statically, sitting or standing, and dressed in professional attire. The pictures of patients followed two structures: one approach utilized a “before” and “after” template, while the other offered only the “after” themed images, emphasizing either the physical transformation of the women or intangible benefits accrued after the plastic surgery.

Initial coding of the taglines and textual copies identified “before,” “during” and “after” the plastic surgery content. Next, the data were examined holistically looking for recurring topics and emerging themes within each grouping. The “before” category, centered around perceived facial flaws and imperfections, generated the theme of unbeauty; the “during” category presented formal listings of surgical procedures, celebrated surgeons, and manifested the theme of surgical urgency; the “after” category articulated the transformation resulting from the surgical facial intervention and suggesting newly defined beauty. After interpretive comments were combined and coded, the three resulting themes formed a basis for analysis.

4. Results

4.1. The alphabet and “baby” beauty

The striking discrepancy between the traditional and contemporary markers of beauty is prominent in the data. If in the past, nature was the frame of reference for beauty standards, the data demonstrate the shift to the modern Western civilization and employment of the Latin alphabet and English language word “baby” to signify newly emerged beauty standards. For example, the advertisement divides into two sections: a female face on the left, and the image of a woman’s full body on the right. The taglines read: “Regardless of age – V line” and “Regardless of age – S line.” The double reference to age strengthens the normative meaning of the message, as if validating the cosmetic procedures and setting norms for everyone. Not only does this advertisement give consumers beauty directions, but the message also exemplifies the contextual distance from the markers of beauty in the past.

During the five-hundred-years-long Joseon dynasty which ended in 1910, the full moon (*boreumdal*), flowers (*kkot*), white jade (*hayang ok*), the morning star (*saetbyeol*), lakes (*hosu*), red cherries (*aengdu*), and clouds (*gureum*) were standards of beauty borrowed from nature and against which facial features were judged (Lee, 2011). An ideal woman’s face of the time is wide like the full moon and white colored like jade; it displays small lips plump like cherries, exhibits tiny eyes sparkling like bright stars, and features a cloudlike hairstyle.

Today’s ads include reference to the letters V, S, and C to describe ideal face and body styles. The so-called V-line refers to the currently desirable face shape that follows the lines of the letter V. An S-line connotes a slimmer version of the Western hourglass figure with a well-articulated waistline. The letter C refers to fuller breasts—a result that cannot be achieved with bra padding and requires plastic surgery. These terms are commonplace in Korean advertising content for cosmetic surgery. A series of subway ads places the models in the playful confines of the letters S, C and V. Two billboards advertising unrelated clinics display images of female faces fitting perfectly in the inner outlines of the letter V. Ad content offering a “V-line face surgery” is routinely present in the ads, with occasional brief specifications, such as “chin reduction.”

The “baby” face is another beauty standard. The phrase refers to facial features that maintain proportions specific to the faces of young

children (Jang, 2015). The “baby” face is desirable in today’s Korea for perceived aesthetic attractiveness and also has a symbolic meaning of innocence and purity, qualities highly valued in the society. “Medical face lifting for baby face,” reads the billboard with two sets of “before” and “after” images. While the first set depicts a young woman, the second presents a female who could easily be someone’s grandmother. Both women’s faces are significantly transformed and they look much younger in the “after” version with presumably “babyish” looks. In another ad, the “baby” face belongs to a bride, who by Western standards looks unnaturally young to get married. One advertisement sells a popular “baby eyes” surgery that makes the area under the eyes look a little swollen, which is considered to be cute. These ads reflect a cultural preference that Korean society assigns to a childish appearance, and send the indirect message that “baby” face reconstructive surgery extends the youthful appearance.

At the same time, nature remains an arbiter of facial beauty. In the modern form, advertising language does not utilize specific references to natural objects; instead ads reintroduce nature by using the general word “natural,” describing ideal noses, eyes, and chins with “natural looking” results. “A natural line!” exclaims the tagline of one ad, showing off an attractive young woman touching her cheeks. “Natural and visible! As if you always had double eyelids,” assures the clinic behind another series of ads. One more ad shows an image of the girl who visually supports the “natural claim” of the double eyelid surgery, yet she has unnaturally large eyes. Another young woman showcases her post-procedure profile with a “natural aristocratic nose.” The “natural profile of an aristocrat” and a “natural hairline” are key selling points of several ads. Collectively, these messages redefine the meaning of “natural,” which is now something that looks attainable and not something given by nature.

4.2. Unbeauty is in the eyes of the beholder?

Besides identifying the anatomical features of facial beauty, ads provide guidelines for recognizing undesirable aesthetic characteristics. Women receive criteria to judge whether or not they measure up to these externally imposed aesthetic standards. One whimsical advertisement, presented in the form of a letter from an anthropomorphized plastic surgery clinic advises a potential customer how the clinic can make her jaw look less protruding. The copy reads, “Dear Square Jaw. You think that long hair will hide you? But it is actually better to wear hair up in a top knot. Don’t forget that it creates extra volume on top of the head.” Though the text’s intent is using humor, the undertone sounds rather insensitive toward those women who indeed happened to inherit wider jaws. The ad blatantly reminds the target audience of the necessity to be conscious of their hairstyles to minimize an unattractive facial feature. The implied solution is visiting the plastic surgery clinic whose name is displayed on the billboard.

Social class is a strong part of the ad rhetoric. The data support that a square jaw, big cheekbones, single lid eyes, and a flat nose are the flaws that make a woman look unappealing and belonging to lower social class. Conversely, a v-shaped face, big eyes, a straight high nose and full lips create a light and sophisticated “noble” look compared to the “rural” face (a term used in ads) characterized by the heavier features. “Noble face surgery,” detailed as facial bone contouring, “noble nose” and “noble jaw line” surgeries represent fanciful description of the dry medical terms like rhinoplasty, double eyelid surgery, cheekbones and square jaw reduction, and face fat transplantation.

The social dimensions of the face are strongly established in Korean culture (Song, Gwangje, & Ryu, 2003). The higher social class historically associated with a particular kind of beauty, represented by the faces white like jade and round like a full moon. Modern social pressures serve as a strong incentive to surgically change less desirable facial features. Ads suggest benefits come with the loss of facial flaws. An ad encouraging noble and v-line faces has two sets of “before and after” photos, in addition to a big image of a young woman. Given her white

dress and the bouquet of flowers she holds, she is a bride, and the clinic's message suggests surgical procedures transform the ugly-turned-beautiful face and increase the possibility of marriage. The tagline goes: "Beautiful girls know!" The images "before" are women who, being less refined and without the sophisticated noble look, were presumably not desirable or loveable.

Another "before and after" ad shows photos depicting unexpectedly attractive girls in the "before" versions, who do not look like their faces need any surgical corrections. The ad's normative message suggests that minor imperfections or individualistic features also need surgical intervention because the girls will not be considered pretty until they have the standard facial shape, chin, eyes, nose and lips.

Surgically correcting undesirable facial features is positioned as an easy and insignificant procedure. "Surgery in one day. Discharge from hospital the same day," encourage hairline correction surgeries. An ad with a happy looking woman next to her smaller "before and after" images, trivializes the square jaw reduction surgery: "This is the surgery that you will do over the weekend. A small incision behind the ears and you are ready for a square jaw reduction surgery." In a small font, a hardly noticeable disclaimer reads, "Such complications as asymmetry, neurological damage, and fever may occur." Other ads mention bleeding, irritation, and infection as possible risks, but these disclaimers are lost among the dramatic representation of the newly defined unsophisticated facial appearance juxtaposed with the romanticized presentation of the surgically obtained beauty.

4.3. Consumer guidance

The data set offers consumers clear directional guides, couched in urgent terms. Calls to immediate action sound from the billboards, which favor imperative constructions: "Make it happen!" "Have it done in... plastic surgery clinic!" Ad copy encourages immediate action using the tagline "You have to do it!" along with photos of doll-like female faces. "Still! Haven't made up your mind yet?" reads the copy supporting the image of a young woman's beautifully sculptured face, confidently exhibited on the billboard. Another ad targets high school students and uses multiple exclamation marks ("Nonheong district, 2nd floor, right here!!") to strengthen the urgency in pitching rhinoplasty, fat transplantation, and square jaw reduction. This ad shows "before and after" images of a girl wearing a headband with a bow and a school uniform.

Customizing facial features receives attention in the ads. "Make your small eyes look bigger," encourages an advertisement that visually resembles a page from a commercial catalog, but sells an unusual product—eye shapes, depicted in the "before" and "after" format. If not being recognizable after the surgery is undesirable outcome, an option exists for customers to receive "subtle" changes. "Your eyes will still look like your eyes," assures the ad.

The ads capitalize on the drive for perfection inherent in Confucian culture and normalize plastic surgery by promoting newly established norms. Consumers are offered a template of perfection that they can use to estimate how far from the perfect shape their own faces are, and they can do "the fitting" in the underground subway station. A billboard boasting "three-dimensional facial contouring surgery" includes not only an image of the beautiful face, but also a big mirror with a perfect v-line contour to help potential patients see how they measure up. This innovative advertisement works as a casual reminder of the importance of having the "right" face, which women need to fit socially approved aesthetic standards, and provides a model for the proper face.

An appeal to conformism is strong in another ad that features four confident and attractive young girls who look like fashion models. The tagline reads, "Everyone wants to become a 'model.'" The word "everyone" is a clear sign of the conformist society, where individuality is deemphasized, and the group preferences trump individual values. The reference to a "model," written in quotation marks, is a nod toward the glamorized world of models, and also reinforces the idea that beauty

is a worthy aspiration. This advertisement provides guidance on the "correct" desires, implying that having a surgically altered face is one of them. "Correct" desires also may result in envy, a similarly worthy aspiration in the Korean culture.

Being envious of someone's superiority or achievements means recognition of them and simultaneously indicates that the envious person saves his or her face (Choi, 2002). Possessing such achievements saves face by exhibiting pride. In this case, the objects of pride and envy are straight noses and v-line chins. The pride-envy dichotomy also underlines the social nature of beauty that necessitates engagement of two sides for social judgment. A person looks and feels beautiful, and she legitimizes beauty by evoking envy or admiration. Ads suggesting that people will stare at your redesigned face in awe or full of envy, capitalize on this aspect of Korean culture. Beauty is expected to be flaunted, and this normative message is very clear in the ad that shows the "before" version with the loose hair, and "after" image with the hair high in a bun that opens and flatters the newly redesigned face. A meaningful example is the image of a scene in a coffee shop where three girlfriends get together. While one of them is taking a selfie with her smart phone, the other girls envy her looks as the tagline "If you envy" suggests. The girl taking a picture obviously had plastic surgery as her face exhibits the perfect v-line and a small straight nose. The surgically altered young woman wears a sparkling tiara, implying she is as beautiful as a princess. The message is straightforward. To look like a princess, you need to visit this clinic.

5. Discussion

Results support the complex understanding of the face and the multiple functions prior studies note. One's face is a representation of self, a marker of character, and a marker of fate. At the same time, this study highlights a transition occurring for the face's major functions. Newer functions are emerging, specifically, the face as a mask and the face as fashion. This research goes beyond confirming that "beauty is becoming less about luck and more about choice" (Oorschot, 2013). Results also uncover new layers of facial attractiveness, including one in the form of natural beauty and the other as artificially created. Because so many faces now show signs of surgical intervention, and the "plasticity" of the face has become a reality, this artificial beauty needs conceptualization in the theoretical construct of beauty. Is the surgically redefined face a positive sign of taking care of one's body, an indicator of social status and economic standing? Does fake beauty serve as a negative marker and sterile attractiveness without personality? Do mainstream cosmetic surgeries present an example of human power and the eradication of unattractiveness? These questions should guide further inquiry in the research on the human face.

5.1. The face as a mask

The prevailing metaphor of "the face as a window" echoes the longstanding belief that the face provides insight into the person being viewed. How is a person's mental character, family, fate and the soul viewed when the image does not fit the construct of the modern face? The evidence suggests that the face is now more a mask than a window. Contrary to the notion "the face tells the truth" (Synnott, 1993, p. 93) the deceitful nature of the modern face better fits the mask metaphor. After undergoing plastic surgery, the modern face may lose visual evidence of the genetic ties between family members, if the patient becomes too unrecognizable. The media provides anecdotal news about babies born to mothers who do not look like them due to the mothers' plastic surgery (Stone, 2013). Chinese patients coming to South Korea for facial plastic surgeries are now issued certificates to be presented during the passport control, because their passport photos do not mirror their new appearance (Ashcraft, 2014).

A similar problem exists with the features that before could "truthfully" signal a woman's character or "predict" her future. Imperfections

are now gone. Clues to a woman's "true" character and her past and future are vanishing and the face no longer serves as an honest representation of the self; instead, the face becomes a calculated reflection of society's physical ideal. As such, the modern sculptured face is a mask that the consumer puts on in response to societal pressure. "A burqa made of flesh" is the metaphor outlining the Catholic perspective on the bioethical angles of plastic surgery—an association with refusal and rejection of the body (Oppenheimer, 2015).

A noticeable theme in the data is the extent of the socially acceptable change in one's physical appearance, which falls in the range from "subtle" to "astonishing." The ads show radical transformations in the "before and after" images, as well as verbally express the promise to women of not being recognized as a result of the surgery. A typical example is a billboard that uses both approaches—strong wording ("astounding results") and images showing dramatic facial transformation of young models. Indeed, the change in "before and after" pictures is astounding. One can hardly believe that the same person is depicted in both photos. Such drastic changes are evidently welcome, and this advertisement demonstrates the extent to which the idea of "remaking" one's face is mainstream behavior in Korea. The patient abandons everything that genetically connects a woman's appearance with her parents to become someone designed according to the aesthetic norms dictated by society.

Ironically, the function of the face as a marker of fate remains. Now, the marker of fate is monitored and tailored by the consumer herself rather than by cosmological forces. Facial beauty becomes a commercially acquired instrument or tool. Modern surgical techniques help a woman to gain new benefits and proactively shape her fate. Getting married is not the only outcome attached to the plastic surgery. The advertisements offer "a nose that brings you confidence and self-respect" and promise to eliminate one's inferiority complex. Plastic surgery potentially serves as a tool to moving up the social ladder, after the consumer buys the "profile of an aristocrat." Perhaps, acquiring the "correct" nose is enough to lead a consumer to a "correct" fate? Although being a mask and a "lie," the face is now also an investment, and a kind of empowerment.

5.2. The face as fashion

The face is now a fashion commodity, which serves as new function to be added to the construct of the face. Fashion's province has extended by converting desirable pointy noses and v-shaped chins into socially desirable features or items similar to pointy shoes or designer handbags. The fluid nature of the face that can be surgically changed, manipulated, customized, and even reversed supports cosmetic surgery's fashion claim. While some clinics promote double eyelid surgery as a way to go, others offer double eyelid removal surgery: "Double eyelid.... I really hated it."

Moreover, surgically constructed facial beauty is now categorized like products in a fashion catalog: given quality rankings ("ideal," "perfect" beauty), assigned aesthetic categories ("natural," "baby" beauty), classified by social standing ("noble," "aristocratic" beauty), and labeled by aspirational motives ("princess" and "model" beauty). Facial beauty is also an object d'art in the promise of "the face they can't take their eyes off."

The face as a fashion product comes in an extensive assortment and targets multigenerational consumer segments. Judging by the ad with a beautiful face which seemingly meets all the canons of beauty, the model is still labeled as the "before" picture because female hairlines are also the object of surgical alteration. The clinic offers solutions for bold, high or simply imperfect foreheads. As a true fashion commodity, facial beauty is multigenerational, which is evident in the images of the older woman in the billboard encouraging a "baby face," and images of girls in school uniforms in the square jaw reduction ad. The conversation between a mother and her presumably teenage daughter is featured in ad copy that reads, "Mom, you told me that I would become

pretty when I grow up. Where exactly do I have to grow, so that I become pretty? Let's go." The clinic's name is stated in the ad. This example legitimizes the notion that facial beauty is a fashion commodity that can be acquired surgically, and implants this idea early in the girl's life. When the girl becomes older and receives a new nose, why not be proud of her newly acquired fashion item, as the tagline "Be proud of your nose!" instructs. Plastic surgeons are now use titles such as "beauty designers" rather than medical doctors (Fifield, 2014).

Surgically reshaping the face is not an act reflecting one's quest for identity; rather the manipulation of the face manifests the trend to conform to society. Cosmetic surgery is the way that consumers interact with modern society—creating the look favored by society. Real life offers strong support to the face as a fashion statement by providing examples of how consumers alter their faces in response to social trends and to the dictums of the media and celebrity power. In the US, plastic surgery patients now request faces copied from the model Cara Delevingne and avidly follow celebrities in search of facial templates, "consuming" Olivia Munn's eyes, Scarlet Johansson's lips, Kate Bosworth's chin and Kate Middleton's nose among the most requested features (Chang, 2015). Those going from China to Korea for their new faces, arrive with the photos of the hottest Korean stars saved on their smartphones (Kang, 2015). In South Korea, the most requested face is that of Jun Ji-Hyun, an actress from the soap-opera "My Love from the Star" (Fifield, 2014).

When the face stands as a mask or fashion, the value signals a malleability of identity experienced through embodiment. In a creative way, such malleability of identity was demonstrated in art, when in the 1990s the French feminist artist Orlan underwent and videotaped a series of nine cosmetic procedures in order to present herself as "a living work of art" (Lupton, 2012). From the surgeons, she requested specific facial characteristics borrowed from classical paintings – the forehead of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, the chin of Venus in Botticelli's Birth of Venus, the nose of Gerard's Psyche, the lips of Boucher's Europa, and the Diana's eyes of the anonymous painter of the French school of Fontainebleau. Orlan's radical play with her own body was meant to "disrupt the standards of beauty" (Jeffries, 2009), and her choice of facial characteristics reflects a mosaic of cultural meanings: refusal to submit to men (Diana), spiritual beauty and desire for love (Psyche), bravery (Europa who looked to an unknown continent), fertility and creativity (Venus), androgyny (Mona Lisa, as the legend says that underneath the top-layer of paint is the portrait of a man) (Davis, 1997). This artful exploration of the meaning of the face also demonstrates disconnect between interior and exterior self, as exemplified in the present study as well.

5.3. Evolution of the Korean face

In the context of South Korea, the evidence shows a strong interconnection between the physical face and the social face, a symbiotic relationship defining the function of the face as an imposed mask. The surgically "redesigned" face is a purposely-refashioned physical face that creates a desirable social face. In other words, findings suggest that not saving one's genetically inherited face serves to save one's social face. Paradoxically, saving one's "natural" physical face, imperfect by the newly legitimized societal standards, equates to losing face.

Metaphorically speaking, fashion plays an important role in the decision to alter facial features in Korea. If self-expression influences fashion in Western cultures, conformity drives fashion in the Korean context. Being fashionable is an act of obeying rather than an act of individual self-expression. Korean women do not believe in beauty as an individual, but they believe in some social ideals. The closer they are to being "like others," the more beautiful they are (Kim, 2003). Research findings support these proposals. Templates of facial fashion displayed on the billboards express and institutionalize the beautification standards.

As a major regulator of Korean women's everyday life, Neo-Confucian culture prescribes clear unwritten standards of female beauty, where bodily attractiveness is one of the four traits women must strive for, along with upright behavior, female virtue and womanhood (Lee, 2011). In the book *History of Korean Women through their Bodies* the author clearly shows how facial features alone do not define a pretty face. This insight appears to be in striking contrast with the emphasis put on facial beauty in today's Korea. The job seekers in the country now must attach their photos to job applications, and a woman's look appears to be one of the decisive factors of getting a job (Stewart, 2013). What do the photos of surgically manicured faces convey and how do employers interpret them? As the findings suggest that beauty is only skin deep, the present study just begins to answer these questions. Further academic inquiry is needed to explore this phenomenon. Conducting future studies in a different geographic domain would help overcome a shortcoming of this work that has drawn conclusions only in one Asian locale, and present more generalizable findings.

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