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“Yes! I Had Cosmetic Surgery”: Celebrities’ Cosmetic Surgery Confessions in the Media, and Their Impact on Korean Female College Students’ Perceptions

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This paper analyzes celebrities’ cosmetic surgery confessions in the media and explores the impact of the confessions on non-celebrities. Based on the analysis of talk shows and online news in Korea today, I argue that celebrities’ confessions are the result of the interaction between celebrities and the media, and the confessions serve as an atonement ritual to make a new start for the celebrities themselves. The confessions also have the effect of trivializing cosmetic surgery. Analysis of Korean female college students’ self-accounts about the confessions confirms these arguments and shows the students’ strong endorsement of cosmetic surgery as well as their tendency to view cosmetic surgery as a means of upward mobility, given the success of surgical celebrities. The survey questionnaire developed for this study, completed by 217 female college students, reveals that more exposure to such confessions predicts greater normalization and trivialization of cosmetic surgery in the respondents’ everyday lives.

I just became slightly more beautiful than before. I originally had creases in my eyelids but my boss (the president of the entertainment agency) said they looked glassy, so I got eyelid reshaping...and my nose just got an injection. My teeth were straightened. My face has improved just a little bit, partly, but people say my face was given an extreme makeover, which made me upset. (Hara Ku, 19, a member of a Korean girl-group, KARA)

All the face has is eyes, nose and mouth! (One of the guests)

(Laughter) (*Nerves of Steel*, 2010).

I fixed my eyes, nose and forehead. My mom said I would have to be good-looking to be a singer so she brought me to a cosmetic surgeon... Mom thought I would be okay just with a fixed nose but she soon found that it was still not enough. She suggested fixing my eyes. And then it was still not enough. So I also got cosmetic surgery on my forehead. (Kwang-Hee, 22, a member of a Korean boy group, ZEA)

So [due to the side effect of the surgery] you feel no pain in your forehead? (One of the guests)

I had a mild headache.

(Laughter) (*The Quiz to Change the World*, 2010).

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These remarks, uttered during top-rated entertainment programs on South Korean television in 2010, are among numerous examples that clearly show a recent trend in the Korean entertainment industry: Celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions. In these confessions, the stars reveal that their beauty is artificial and the reason for the surgery is often not initiated due to their own will. Here cosmetic surgery is seen as just a slight correction necessary for becoming a celebrity. This kind of confession becomes the center of attention and guarantees high ratings. Ku's cosmetic surgery confession put the show in the number one rating for its television time slot and resulted in 92 articles on the Internet news. Kwang-Hee, who had not been well-known to the general public before his confession, became an instant star and was praised for his candor and wit.

Celebrities' cosmetic surgery is hardly something new. However, the cosmetic surgery confession is a new phenomenon for twenty-first century Korea. Since Nam-Ju Kim, one of the top actresses in Korea, confessed to having cosmetic surgery in 2001, more and more celebrities have begun to reveal their beauty secrets. Now top-rated talk shows and entertainment news programs are bombarded with this kind of confession.

In Korea, traditionally, under the influence of Confucianism, which highly values filial piety, transforming one's body has been regarded as the most undutiful act, as a body is given by one's parents. However, following rapid economic growth and Westernization, Korea is now one of the countries in which cosmetic surgery is most widely performed. According to statistics released from the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, Korea ranks seventh among 25 countries in terms of the number of procedures performed in 2009 (ISAPS, 2010). However, when it comes to the number of procedures per capita, given the size of its population, Korea holds second place. Hyun-Shin Um (2007) surveyed 810 Korean women in 2007 and found that 61.5% of women in their late 20s, and 40.1% of women in their early 20s, had undergone cosmetic procedures, both surgical and nonsurgical (p. 73). At the same time, paradoxically, criticisms of the rampant phenomenon of "lookism" in Korea have also increased. The media self-deprecatingly call Korea "The Cosmetic Surgery Republic." Although cosmetic surgery has become more acceptable, a celebrity who has not had cosmetic surgery is highly praised as a "natural beauty." Thus, with this fusion of tradition and new culture, Koreans are ambivalent towards cosmetic surgery.

Grounded in this ambivalent atmosphere, this paper explores the function of the celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions, recently on the rise, through the media and their impact on Korean female college students' perceptions of cosmetic surgery. First, celebrities' confessions in the media are analyzed in order to investigate the function of the confessions. Next, I examine Korean female college students' detailed self-accounts of the confessions in order to look into the impact of the confessions. Based on these findings, a survey is conducted in order to determine whether the findings can be generalized. In doing so, this paper also reviews feminist theories and findings.

Media and Celebrity Influence on Cosmetic Surgery

The rapid growth in the number of cosmetic surgery procedures is a worldwide phenomenon. The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) reported in 2010 that the total number of cosmetic procedures, both surgical and nonsurgical, has increased by more than 147% since 1997 in the U.S. (ASAPS). In 2009, 17,137,780 men and women around the world underwent cosmetic procedures (ISAPS, 2010). With the popularization of cosmetic surgery, studies have explored the factors that influence the decision to have cosmetic surgery, and they can be divided into three categories.

First, body image dissatisfaction may serve as a mediator between ideal media images and the pursuit of cosmetic surgery. Studies have confirmed that ideal media images may lead to body image dissatisfaction or lowered self-esteem, especially in girls and women (Cash, Cash, and Butters, 1983; Harrison and Cantor, 1997; Botta, 1999; Hargreaves and Tiggemann, 2002; Groesz, Levine, and Murnen, 2002). In turn, body image dissatisfaction may predict cosmetic surgery (Sarwer et al., 2005; Phillips and Diaz, 1997; Soest, Skolleberg, and Roald, 2006). Especially, Sarwer, Wadden, Pertschuck, and Whitaker (1998) proposed a theoretical model explaining the relationship between body image and cosmetic surgery. They argued that the interaction between “body image valence,” the degree of importance of body to one’s self-esteem, and “body image value,” the degree of body image dissatisfaction, leads to cosmetic surgery (Sarwer, 1998, p. 14-16).

Second, studies have shown that media exposure increases the desire or the likelihood of undergoing cosmetic surgery (Delinsky, 2005; Swami et al., 2008). With the rise of cosmetic surgery reality television, in particular, this media genre has been viewed as promoting and domesticating cosmetic surgery (Tait, 2007; Nabi, 2009).

Third, many scholars have pointed out that celebrities’ cosmetic surgery influences non-celebrities as celebrities serve as models of an ideal beauty (Elliot, 2008; Cashmore, 2006; Blum, 2003). This should be understood in the context of consumer culture. As Dyer and McDonald (1998) put it, celebrities are “the models of consumption for everyone in a consumer society” (p. 39). According to Cashmore (2006), celebrities in the past had an “otherworldly quality” but new celebrity culture shows that celebrities are more ordinary than we thought and their privileges are more related to luck rather than talent. People still want the identification with stars but the distance between them and the celebrities has been closing. In the meantime, cosmetic surgery is made more available. It is well known that most celebrities have had cosmetic surgery. This means that all of us can buy good looks just as they did (Cashmore, 2006, p. 109-112). Blum (2003) also claimed that film and television have fostered identification with celebrities and now transforming our bodies is considered as a means of upward mobility.

In this context, Cashmore (2006) suggested that celebrities had better admit their surgery (p. 112). This is, in fact, what is actually going on in Korea. No study has explored the

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stars' confessions in the media and the impact on non-celebrities. If it is evident that both celebrities and the media influence non-celebrities' cosmetic surgery, I argue that it is worthwhile examining celebrities' cosmetic confessions as they are created by the interaction between media and celebrities, which affects non-celebrities. This phenomenon clearly demonstrates the mutual influence between the media and celebrities.

The Interaction of the Media and Celebrities

In a sense, celebrities cannot help going through cosmetic surgery in order to survive the media's scrutiny. In Korea, trainees, who become members of an entertainment agency in order to make their debut as an entertainer, are the best customers in the cosmetic surgery market. It is speculated that 90% of entertainment trainees in the big agencies have had surgery even though most of them are teenagers whose bodies are still growing (Choi, 2010).

Due to the Internet, they cannot hide their past after a debut. As soon as a celebrity begins to get public attention, his or her graduation pictures are posted on the Internet. Korea is the most broadband-networked country in the world, where 95% of households have broadband connections (Anderson, 2010). Moreover, 99.5% of the population, from teens to adults in their 30s, uses the Internet (Jung, 2009). Owing to this Internet power, debates over "who had what" are always going on. The Internet has become a huge archive of celebrities' images and people are eager, even obsessed, to learn about their past. As Blum (2003) points out, stars' cosmetic surgeries are more interesting than stories about their sex lives. If they do not seem to be natural beauties, people "hungrily chase their beauty to its origins." It is like following the star's history: How did you become a celebrity? (Blum, 2003, p. 206-08).

Under such a relentless media spotlight from the earliest days of their careers, celebrities have no choice but to confess their surgery. They do so after the controversy about their altered appearances has already heated up the Internet. Thus, their confessions are based not on their honesty, but on meticulous calculation. Broadcasting companies use these confessions to raise ratings. Online news dealing with a celebrity's confession on TV programs usually ends with an announcement about the date and time on which the show is aired. This is because the news is based on press releases issued by the broadcasting companies. This advance publicity leads to high ratings. After the broadcast, online news endlessly reproduces the stories, which leads to thousands of readers' comments. Online news usually praises the celebrities' candor and confidence as it thrives on the kind of news such confessions generate.

In sum, the media search avidly for the evidence of stars' cosmetic surgery and make a profit from the subsequent revelations. Celebrities undergo cosmetic surgeries for the media, and confess it on the media, because of the media, especially the Internet.

The Functions of Celebrities' Confessions

“I am too beautiful. I am too sexy. Beauty is my weapon. I am a beautiful girl. Everybody loves me. I am a beautiful girl” (the theme song of the film *200 Pounds Beauty*, 2006).

A hit 2006 Korean film, *200 Pounds Beauty* epitomizes the function of celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions. In the film, Hanna (played by A-Joong Kim), a chubby and ordinary-looking young woman who wants to be a singer, undergoes cosmetic surgery all over her body and becomes popular under the new name, Jenny. However, her surgically-altered appearance makes her feel insecure and finally Jenny confesses her secret on stage, with tears, in front of thousands of fans.

“I'm really sorry. I'm not Jenny. I'm Hanna. I was an ugly, fat girl...I got cosmetic surgery from head to toe, everything. Now that I'm pretty, I can sing and I've been in love...But I've deserted my friends, my dad, and myself. I don't know who I am anymore” (*200 Pounds Beauty*).

Through her confession, she admits that her beauty is artificial and she was punished because of her choice to be beautiful. At last, she is embraced by the public due to the confession. While this movie joyously shows Jenny's delight after acquiring beauty, it also emphasizes the price of cosmetic surgery through Jenny's confession. Here I argue that celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions serve as an atonement ritual. By an atonement ritual, I neither mean being judgmental about cosmetic surgery nor do I mean that celebrities expiate their guilt just as Jenny did in the film. Sometimes celebrities admit that their choice was wrong but confessions, often inevitable because of the proliferation of images of their younger, pre-surgery selves on the Internet, function more as an opportunity to end the controversy and make a new start. If they do not confess, they become branded as a liar. It is an atonement ritual to admit their artificial beauty, and thus, to be forgiven and renewed in the eyes of the general public who still prefers a natural beauty although they are not negative about cosmetic surgery.

In the real world, stars' confessions can be classified as three types. First, for celebrities whose altered appearance provoked a controversy, confession in the media serves as a place for self-reflection, often with tears, which arouses sympathy. In this case, celebrities are already famous before surgery so the public has trouble adjusting to their new, altered image, which leads to hostility. For example, Mira Yang, a Korean actress, made a debut as a model in a hamburger commercial. She had a comic image and was called a “Burger Girl.” In trying to overcome the comic image, she had cosmetic surgery and her new look was published on-line in many photos. She was severely condemned on the Internet and could not return to television. After two years, she appeared on a television show in 2009 and made a confession.

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“The greed to be more feminine was excessive... The photos are still in my room and I don’t know who the woman was... At that time, as soon as I turned on the computer, I could see all kinds of swear words... I was afraid of meeting people (with tears)” (*Nerves of Steel*, 2009).

She confessed that her surgery was not appropriate and appealed to viewers to understand her agony. After this confession with tears, she received enormous attention—both positive and negative—and returned to appear on a television series. This form of confession is often accompanied by self-denial. Hey-Jung Kang, an actress who had been loved due to her unique image but who lost her distinctive looks after surgery, which she still claimed to have been therapeutic for her, appeared on an entertainment talk show and said, “After that, I asked myself, ‘Who are you?’ Even my dog did not recognize me” (*Fortune Teller*, 2009).

Second, celebrities who had cosmetic surgery before a debut or celebrities whose image is not dramatically changed after surgery, emphasize that their cosmetic surgery was a slight one and they were pretty even before the surgery. For example, Yu-e, a member of a girl group, said, “I was suspected to have cosmetic surgery all over my face but actually my eyes were different in size so I got a slight eyelids reshaping” (*Imagination Plus*, 2010). Hara Ku, as seen at the beginning of this paper, also argued that her face is almost the same as that of her childhood.

Third, some celebrities acknowledge that they are plastic beauties and use the fact as an opportunity to draw attention to themselves, and as a source of humor. Ka-Eun Jung, a rising star, said “My first double-eyelid surgery was unsuccessful so I came to have these eyes after triple surgeries” (*Infinite Girls*, 2009). Hyun-Young, an actress with a comic image, has said many things about her cosmetic surgery: “I have done ‘repair works’ year by year” (*Good Morning*, 2007). “I appeared on the catwalk just after my nose job. After the show, the implant in my nose was skewed due to the shock of walking, so I got surgery again” (*Happy Together*, 2010). “It did not cost me a lot to have cosmetic surgery. I got a discount!” (*Fortune Teller*, 2008). These celebrities became famous by using cosmetic surgery in a self-deprecating, candid, and humorous fashion. In their remarks, the body seems to be a mere combination of many parts that can be replaced at any time.

Although the tone of the confessions varies according to the occasion, the three types of confession have something in common. They aim to reveal the origin of the celebrities’ beauty, about which the public are curious. By admitting their plastic beauty, celebrities get “indulgence,” showing that they are at least not a hypocrite pretending to be a natural beauty. Through the confessions, celebrities are reborn as official plastic beauties who do not have to suffer any longer from controversies on the Internet. Jones (2008) argued that bodies transformed by cosmetic surgery reality television are “‘media-bodies’ that come about via ‘screen-births’” (p. 515). Similarly, it seems that “made-for-the-media bodies” of celebrities are given a “rebirth” through their confessions in the media. Therefore, I

argue that celebrities' confessions in the media serve as an atonement ritual to give them a new beginning.

Moreover, all of these confessions were made on entertainment programs, without exception. As a result, these confessions are always accompanied by laughter—even when the celebrity sheds tears, laughter comes before long. As seen in Kwang-Hee's remark, introduced at the beginning of this paper, that he had a headache after surgery. Even the side effects of cosmetic surgery are trivialized in celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions. The cheerful and pleasant atmosphere of entertainment programs softens the seriousness of confession, and thus, I argue, cosmetic surgery is shown to be a trivial thing, not a serious but a laughing matter. The question here arises as to what is the non-celebrity reaction to those confessions that dominate television and the Internet?

Female College Students' Perceptions 1

Method and Result

In order to investigate the impact of cosmetic surgery confessions on non-celebrities, ten Korean female college students' self-accounts were examined. This study answers the following research question: What are the non-celebrities' opinions about celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions? It was assumed that respondents could more openly talk about their opinions when they freely write about how they felt rather than when they had to answer a questionnaire. In this study, the tone of their answer needed to be analyzed. It was also assumed that the result could be the foundation to set up the questions for quantitative research.

The respondents volunteered for this research after seeing the notice seeking participants posted on an online community. All of them (A-J) are living in Seoul, the capital city of Korea, and are in their early 20s. Five of them (A-E) were recruited from those who had undergone cosmetic surgery in order to compare their opinion with those of women who had no surgery (F-J).

They were asked to write about the following questions: How do you feel about stars' cosmetic surgery? What do you think of their cosmetic surgery confessions? What is the effect of the confessions, in your opinion, on non-celebrities?

Regardless of whether the respondents had cosmetic surgery or not, they were not negative about cosmetic surgery. They stated their beliefs that women should be beautiful and having surgery to be beautiful is a way of enhancing one's self-worth.

Cosmetic surgery is a matter of self-confidence... What's wrong with being more beautiful? A pretty woman is loved by everybody, even though she is surgical. (A)

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I did not have cosmetic surgery to be more beautiful. I was so ugly and even everyday life was so hard for me. I just wanted to be ordinary. It is wrong to make a judgment about other's surgery. (C)

The important thing is to be beautiful now, the past is not important. (F)

Therefore, respondents view celebrities' cosmetic surgeries as a means of surviving.

Stars make a living by using beauty. For them, correcting their shortcomings is a matter of courtesy. (B)

Nobody watches drama in which an ugly heroine has a romance. (F)

Regarding celebrities' confessions, the respondents were negative about the confessions, unlike the media. Seven claimed that celebrities' confessions are simply the only option to avoid being criticized in this Internet-saturated society. However, all respondents agreed that confession is much better than lying, because pretending to be a natural beauty is the worst thing. This clearly shows the function of those confessions, an atonement ritual in order not to be perceived as a hypocrite.

Confession is their self-defense to avoid criticisms...but lying, even though they smell of plastic beauties, is so disgusting. (C)

Cosmetic surgery confession is like blowing the whistle...Of course, it is privacy, but if they do not confess, it's like lying that they are a natural beauty. (D)

Being frank is a lot better than denying. Now we can clearly see who had what even though they deny it. (E)

Tae-Yeon (a singer) is so ridiculous. Her surgery is obvious...she had better admit it or not comment on it but she still claims that she is a natural beauty. (G)

There was a marked contrast between the surgical and non-surgical respondents in terms of the effect of the confessions. Four out of five who had cosmetic surgery thought that celebrities' confessions do not prompt people to have cosmetic surgery. They also denied that their surgery was influenced by the confessions, but their self-accounts invalidate their denial because they also argued that the confessions may normalize and even trivialize cosmetic surgery as if it were not a serious thing that requires careful consideration.

I was not influenced by stars' confessions... it was my own choice.
Having facial surgery is not as easy as people think...but for other people,

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the constant reminders on television and the Internet seems to make it appear to be nothing. (C)

My surgery was not affected by those confessions... Actually, Hara Ku was beautiful before cosmetic surgery... I thought... ‘Oh, even a beautiful woman undergoes cosmetic surgery’... This makes cosmetic surgery seem to be as simple as applying a Bandaid to a wound and a prerequisite for being an entertainer. (D)

In contrast, non-surgical respondents acknowledged those confessions encourage cosmetic surgery.

Whenever I hear what they say, I think... Oh, cosmetic surgery makes women beautiful.... (F)

We always guess who had what... but we are not an expert so there is no 100% guarantee... but when the fact is uttered by stars themselves, it gives people opportunity to think more about cosmetic surgery. (I)

Some of them added that people were eager to discover celebrities' surgery because they wanted to confirm those celebrities' ordinariness before surgery, which meant they could be transformed like the celebrities. This implies that cosmetic surgery can provide a means of upward mobility.

Their pre-operative faces are just like ordinary people. Maybe worse... If just one surgery can change my life, who wouldn't do it? (H)

I saw past pictures of Seo-Woo (an actress) on the Internet news. I felt sorry for her but I was surprised because she had a very plain face before surgery. (I)

Stars' confessions make people get caught up in a fantasy. Jeong-Eum Hwang (an actress) is a good example. Given the money she got after becoming beautiful, my friends and I could not help but say... ‘She got her money's worth!’... It's like surgery provides a better life. (J)

Discussion

The self-accounts of female college students have supported the result of analysis of stars' cosmetic surgery confessions. The confessions were perceived as a strategy to avoid being criticized. Also, the respondents thought that cosmetic surgery was trivialized in one's own or others' everyday life by the confessions.

Along with these, two tendencies were identified. One is that the female students, whether they had cosmetic surgery or not, strongly approved of cosmetic surgery. From a

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traditional feminist perspective, cosmetic surgery has been seen as conforming to patriarchal culture and expressing gendered inequity (Wolf, 2002; Morgan, 1991; Jeffreys, 2005). Wolf (2002) argued that the present “beauty myth,” which holds that there exists an objective and universal beauty that women must embody is more “insidious than any mystique of femininity yet” (p. 12-19). Recently, however, popular culture has been full of post-feminist discourse claiming that feminism is obsolete and emphasizing “freedom” and “choice” (McRobbie, 2004, p. 255). In the post-feminist perspective, women’s “active political agency” and “subjectivity” largely operate within consumer culture (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2006, p. 260). Thus, beauty is something that can be bought and it is a matter of individual consumption. Post-feminist framing regards cosmetic surgery as “individual choice,” “empowerment,” and “self-love,” and this perspective has been reinforced by television discourse (Tait, 2007, p. 120-22). It turned out that the respondents were deeply influenced by post-feminist discourses.

The other trend worth noting is that cosmetic surgery was seen as worth the financial and emotional costs by most of the subjects, given the success of surgical celebrities. Through the confirmation of a star’s ordinariness before surgery, those students seemed convinced that cosmetic surgery provides a better life. As Blum (2003) pointed out, due to the identification with celebrities, celebrities’ “shape-shifting images” affect non-celebrities profoundly. The story of the “ugly-duckling” transformed into a beauty is a “favorite Hollywood story” that teaches us “beauty is the inevitable ‘right end.’” She argued that this kind of story makes us think: “Why can’t we all transform in similar ways?” (Blum, p. 177-93).

Although this research confirmed the ways in which the respondents thought of stars’ confessions, it was impossible to determine how the degree of exposure to such a discourse is related to the students’ perceptions. Thus, in the following research study, the relationship between the exposure to such a discourse and perceptions of cosmetic surgery is explored.

Female College Students’ Perceptions 2

Method

In order to investigate the relationship between the exposure to celebrities’ confessions and women’s perceptions, 231 Korean female college students living in Seoul, Korea were surveyed. This research has four hypotheses based on previous findings. First, celebrities’ cosmetic surgery confessions will serve as an atonement ritual for the respondents. Second, more exposure to such discourses will predict stronger endorsement of cosmetic surgery. Third, more exposure to the confessions will intensify the trivialization of cosmetic surgery in the respondents’ lives. Fourth, more exposure will increase the tendency to view cosmetic surgery as a means of upward mobility.

The questionnaire was randomly distributed on the campuses of five universities: Yon-sei University, Myong-Ji University, Sung-Shin Women's University, Ewha Women's University, and Han-Yang University, from August to September in 2010. All of the subjects volunteered for the research. Only college students were allowed to participate. The questionnaire consisted of 37 questions. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were, for the most part, already decided (female, college students, living in Seoul). Thus, the questionnaire queried only age and household income. Interest in celebrities' pre- and post-operative pictures on the Internet and their cosmetic surgery confessions were measured by a 1 (very indifferent) to 5 (very interested) scale. In order to measure the exposure to celebrities' confessions, the names of 60 celebrities who had confessed their cosmetic surgery through the media were presented on the questionnaire and the respondents were asked to answer how many of those celebrities' confessions they had heard or seen. They were also asked if they had undergone cosmetic procedures themselves, both surgical and non-surgical.

Next, the respondents were asked to indicate, based on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree), how strongly they agreed or disagreed on statements in six indexes. Both *The appearance evaluation* (Cronbach $\alpha = .76$) and *The perceived importance of appearance in life* consisted of four statements and were developed for this research (Cronbach $\alpha = .71$). The remaining four indexes were constructed to measure the effects of celebrities' cosmetic surgery discourse. These fall into the following four categories: A – *The degree of endorsement of cosmetic surgery* (Cronbach $\alpha = .79$) was five statements indicating the approval of cosmetic surgery. Among them, three were modifications of the ones that Sarwer et al. used in their 2005 research that investigated female college students' cosmetic surgery experience, and attitude. B – *The normalization and trivialization of cosmetic surgery* consisted of five items that measured the degree to which they thought cosmetic surgery was normalized and trivialized by the celebrities' confessions. (Cronbach $\alpha = .61$). C – *Cosmetic surgery as upward mobility* was an index of five questions to measure the degree to which they see cosmetic surgery as a means of upward mobility. (Cronbach $\alpha = .73$). D – *The perception of celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions* was an index of five questions to learn how the respondents thought of the confessions. These were to assess their diverse opinions and interests, thus internal consistency of this index was not calculated.

Result

The survey was completed by 231 undergraduates, but 14 questionnaires were excluded because the age of respondents was over 26. Given the purpose of this study, the respondent of this survey should be an undergraduate. Even though respondents were notified that they should be a college student to participate in this survey, it was possible that some graduate students misunderstood it and took part in the survey, given that in age-sensitive Korean society, an undergraduate student over 26 is not that common. In addition, this study aims to analyze the responses of typical young female college

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students in their early 20s. It was assumed that female students in their early 20s were more interested in stars' cosmetic surgery and confessions.

Thus, the total number of respondents was 217. Their mean age was 20.73 (SD=1.88). Most of them belonged to the middle class (39.5%) or upper middle class (25.9%), given their reported household income. Among them, 95.4% reported that they had seen celebrities' pre- and post-operative pictures on the Internet, and 97.7% reported that they heard or saw celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions. This demonstrates that celebrities' cosmetic surgery discourses are prevalent in Korea. They knew on average half of the names of celebrities who confessed their cosmetic surgery (M=29.71, SD=14.91).

Among the respondents, 87 (40.1%) reported that they had undergone a cosmetic procedure. It was a surprising result, given that only 5% of 559 undergraduates in the U.S, surveyed by Sarwer et al. in 2005, had undergone a cosmetic surgery procedure (p. 934). The high result may be partly explained by the fact that the present research included dental cosmetic procedures, unlike Sarwer et al. (2005), which is very common in Korea. Nevertheless, it is still an astonishing figure. Sixty-four (29.5%) reported undergoing a single procedure. Sixteen (7.4%) reported two, six (2.8%) reported three procedures. One respondent reported five procedures.

In order to examine the correlation between variables, correlation analysis was conducted ($p < 0.05$ *, $p < 0.01$ **, $p < 0.001$ ***). The respondents' age was correlated to the appearance evaluation ($r = .213$ **). The older they were, the more they were satisfied with their appearance. Also, their age was negatively correlated to the amount of exposure to cosmetic surgery confessions ($r = -.154$ *). The mean of interest in celebrities' photos and confessions were positively correlated to the amount of exposure ($r = .190$ *), the number of surgical sites ($r = .160$ *), the importance of appearance in life ($r = .355$ **), and indexes A ($r = .407$ ***), B ($r = .353$ ***), C ($r = .391$ ***). The decision to use the mean of two interests was based on the recognition that respondents were highly unlikely to remember where they learned about stars' cosmetic surgery. Thus, it was assumed that more interest in both areas showed overall interest in celebrities' cosmetic surgery.

The amount of exposure also showed positive correlation with the importance of appearance ($r = .161$ *), and indexes A ($r = .206$ **), B ($r = .218$ **). And it had negative correlation with the appearance evaluation ($r = -.135$ *). In other words, more exposure was associated with less satisfaction with one's appearance. The number of surgical sites had positive correlation with household income ($r = .262$ ***), and appearance evaluation ($r = .260$ ***), and indexes A ($r = .197$ **) and C ($r = .245$ ***).

Indexes A, B, C and the perceived importance of appearance were strongly correlated to one another. In other words, the degree to which one admits the importance of appearance, the level of approval of cosmetic surgery, the trivialization effect of stars'

cosmetic surgery discourse, and the inclination to see cosmetic surgery as a way up were all strongly connected to one another (in all cases, $p < 0.001^{***}$).

Next, multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine a causal relationship between variables. A multiple regression analysis of the amount of exposure, predicted by age, the mean of two interests, the number of surgical sites, and household income ($r^2 = .062$, $F = 3.307$, $p < .05$) revealed that interest in celebrities' pictures and cosmetic surgery confessions (the mean of two interests) predicted more exposure to cosmetic surgery confessions ($\beta = .180$, $p < 0.05$). Also, the older the respondents were, the less they were exposed to such discourses ($\beta = -.165$, $p < 0.05$).

A multiple regression analysis of index A, *The degree of endorsement of cosmetic surgery*, predicted by age, interest, the amount of exposure, the number of surgical sites, household income, the appearance evaluation, the perceived importance of appearance ($r^2 = .293$, $F = 11.585$, $p < .001$) revealed that interest ($\beta = .249$, $p < 0.001$) and the perceived importance of appearance ($\beta = .334$, $p < 0.001$), were strong predictors of index A scores.

A multiple regression analysis of index B, the normalization and trivialization of cosmetic surgery, predicted by the same variable as above ($r^2 = .314$, $F = 12.839$, $p < .001$) revealed that interest ($\beta = .225$, $p < 0.05$), exposure ($\beta = .145$, $p < 0.05$), and the perceived importance of appearance ($\beta = .380$, $p < 0.001$) were predictors of index B scores.

A multiple regression analysis of index C, predicted by the same variables as above ($r^2 = .405$, $F = 19.040$, $p < .001$) also revealed that interest ($\beta = .226$, $p < 0.01$), the number of surgical sites ($\beta = .132$, $p < 0.05$), and the perceived importance of appearance ($\beta = .470$, $p < 0.001$) were predictors of index C scores. The amount of exposure was not a predictor of index C.

As mentioned, index D was used just to see how the respondents viewed celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions. Frequency analysis revealed that 60.9% agreed or strongly agreed that pretending to be a natural beauty is unfair. Moreover, respondents had a negative feeling about celebrities' confessions as shown in the analysis of female college students' self-accounts, as 60.9% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that celebrities confessed their surgery not because they had been honest, but because they needed to. Also, only 17.5% agreed or strongly agreed that those celebrities looked confident and candid.

Discussion

The analysis of the survey completed by 217 Korean female college students partly supported the four hypotheses. Although it was expected that the amount of exposure would have an impact on women's perception, the mean of interests in pictures and confessions was the strongest predictor along with the perceived importance of appearance in life. It seems that one's values and attitude are more important than

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temporal exposure in shaping one's perception. It is important to note that the respondents' level of interest did not necessarily coincide with the amount of exposure. As we live in the age of excessive information, we constantly face the kind of information that we do not want. Thus, the amount of exposure does not seem to be necessarily proportional to one's interest, and interest is more significant than mere exposure. Moreover, the perceived importance of appearance in life played a critical role in shaping one's perceptions of cosmetic surgery.

Overall, the results of the survey can be summarized in the following manner. First, cosmetic surgery confession as an atonement ritual, previously confirmed by the content analysis of talk shows, is further supported here in that the respondents were largely negative about a plastic beauty putting on a semblance of a natural beauty, the same as was shown in self-accounts. As has been seen, the media discourses have been filled with compliments paid to the celebrities' confidence. In contrast, female college students were media-savvy enough to know the reasons underlying the celebrities' confessions. Nevertheless, they thought that an artificial beauty had better not pretend to be a natural beauty. This indicates that celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions serve as a media ritual, showing at the least that they do not lie to the public.

Second, more interest in celebrities' pictures and confessions predicted more endorsement of cosmetic surgery (index A). There was no difference between surgical and non-surgical respondents, also the same result as was shown in self-accounts. However, unlike the expectation, the amount of exposure was not related to the endorsement of cosmetic surgery.

Third, more interest and more exposure to celebrities' confessions led to more trivialization of cosmetic surgery in the respondents' everyday lives (index B). The third hypothesis was perfectly supported in the second study. In contrast, in the analysis of self-accounts, surgical respondents thought that they were not influenced by the confessions, but both surgical and non-surgical respondents thought that others might be influenced. In the survey, there was no difference between those who had cosmetic surgery or those who had not. However, interestingly, the respondents thought that the effect was stronger for others. The degree to which they considered their own cosmetic surgery after seeing celebrities' pictures or confessions ($M=3.10$) was lower than the degree to which they thought others were influenced by the confessions and images ($M=3.94$).

The second and third results are closely connected to each other. At first glance, they seem to be the same. However, by the degree of endorsement of cosmetic surgery, I mean the general attitude towards cosmetic surgery. By the normalization and trivialization of cosmetic surgery, I mean more active communication regarding cosmetic surgery, caused by celebrities' photos and confessions. This trivialization effect prompts people to talk about, consider cosmetic surgery and to think that it is not serious thing.

Fourth, more interest prompted the respondents to see cosmetic surgery as a way to a better life (index C). There was no difference between surgical and non-surgical respondents, the same as the self-accounts. It is evident that stars' cosmetic surgery confessions serve as a proof of elevated social status through self-enhancement. As non-celebrities are more interested in stars' cosmetic surgery, they are highly likely to think that stars' success is associated with a surgically altered appearance. This intensifies the belief that being beautiful is ultimately good for one's life. Nevertheless, there was no correlation between household income and this tendency, although it was expected that lower socio-economic status would lead to stronger tendency. It might be that most respondents were from the middle class or above. If more respondents had been included from less affluent backgrounds, the results might have been different. Interestingly, index C was predicted not by household income, but by the number of surgical sites. Those who have undergone more cosmetic procedures had a stronger tendency to think that cosmetic surgery is a way to a better life than those who have undergone fewer, or no procedures. It seems that they needed to justify their cosmetic procedure by viewing it as ultimately good for their lives.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated how celebrities' cosmetic surgery confessions in the media influence Korean women. It has demonstrated that their confessions are perceived as just a media event in order to be reborn as a plastic beauty. Also, for someone who has interest in such discourse and thinks that appearance is important in one's life, cosmetic surgery is highly likely to be endorsed and seen as a way of improving one's life. Also, for someone exposed to more cosmetic surgery discourse, cosmetic surgery is more likely to be trivialized.

However, the special circumstances of Korean society, including the prevalence of cosmetic surgery procedures and frequent stars' cosmetic surgery confessions in the media, should be considered. It should be also noted that the respondents in this study were all college female students living in Korea's capital city. In addition, the sample size, 217 students, was too small to generalize the findings.

Tait (2007) contended that, in the past, the imperative was to conceal the truth so as not to be seen as “inauthentic” but now cosmetic surgery reality shows are legitimizing “synthetic beauty ideals” (p. 127). In this regard, stars' cosmetic surgery confessions are another form of a cosmetic surgery reality show, because the confessions work to make viewers embrace celebrities' inauthenticity and become more familiar with the inauthenticity. Thus, I argue that celebrities' cosmetic surgery confession through the media, caused by the images on the Internet, is the zenith of the media and celebrity effect on cosmetic surgery.

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