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### Respect Under the Knife

You wake up in the morning, brush your teeth, wash your face, look at yourself in the mirror and frown at what you see. While this scenario may be common to most of you, it is especially common in what is known as the capital of cosmetic surgery: South Korea. Every day, young South Korean girls wake up with thoughts such as “my nose is too thick” and “my face is too round.” Ubiquitous as a gift for graduating seniors and with one in five women undergoing cosmetic surgery in Korea, there is no doubt that these girls will one day get cosmetic surgery (Seoul Fashion Week). Of course, the majority of Americans would be concerned and disapprove of plastic surgery and the act of permanently altering one’s appearances. And while there are those who have had the surgery, they are often frowned upon when the changes are noticeable. While this stigma against cosmetic surgery rises and as people continue to deem this practice unhealthy, I believe most critics fail to recognize the social and cultural factors, such as physiognomy and competition, that have influenced this epidemic. While people focus on the practice of cosmetic surgery itself, I believe they should focus more on the creation of the high beauty standards, and reasons behind why one would choose to go under the knife. From there, I would hope that critics can learn to respect the individual's choice to change.

Throughout this essay I will use the term “cosmetic surgery” rather than “plastic surgery,” as plastic surgery tends to connote to a more inauthentic look and because the term also

covers reconstructive surgery. Reconstructive surgery covers procedures used to fix dysfunctional parts of the body rather than cosmetic surgery, which is used to become “more beautiful.” Gangnam, a city in the province of Seoul, is considered the “beauty belt” of South Korea where more than 300 cosmetic surgery clinics are lined up and down the streets (The K-Pop Effect). There, plastic surgeries only cost around \$2,000 to \$5,000 dollars in comparison to the \$8,000 price of the same surgery in the United States. It is a city where people travel to, not for the sake of seeing the inspiration of the popular and energetic song, but for the cheap yet professional beautifying process that it offers. In fact, out of the 7.8 million tourists which South Korea received in 2009, 60,000 were medical tourists seeking the cosmetic surgery offered according to Samuel Koo, president and CEO of Korea’s tourism board (Suhyun, Lee). These figures account only for 2009; as of 2014, it was estimated that about 7.5 million people had travelled to South Korea for the sake of getting work done (Chang and Thompson). It is expected that these tourists would be receiving one or both of the two most popular surgeries: double eyelid surgery and rhinoplasties, or nose jobs. There is even the “Kpop combo” which includes double eyelid surgery, the raising of the nose bridge, and creating a V-line of one’s jaw in order for them to appear more delicate and feminine (Padget). While tourists flow in to receive these surgeries, the looks they are paying to gain have not always been so desired.

Historically, Korean beauty meant round faces and slanted eyes (Stone). According to Duyen Truong-Ngoc Tran in her book *The Obsession of Aesthetics Plastic Surgery: The Deconstruction of an Artificially Obsessed South Korean Society*, “under the Chosun dynasty, the standard beauty of a Korean woman was described as: “round and smooth face like a moon, wide and rigid forehead like a sky, eyebrow like a branch of a willow tree, horizontally long,

slender eye, and small lips like a cherry” (22). Nowadays, however, the standards seem to have taken a one eighty degree turn with young girls wanting bigger eyes and a smaller or thinner jaw. I conducted a survey targeted at those who are familiar with the Korean culture and found that the Korean beauty standards include a high nose bridge, double eyelids, a V-line jaw, pale skin, and full lips (Chun). These standards seem completely unachievable without the use of cosmetic surgery, however, those who do not fit the standards are excluded and those who receive plastic surgery to achieve the standards are criticized. I believe that rather than attacking the practice of plastic surgery, we should attack the standards which people are hoping to achieve. The question would then become, why and how have these standards become ingrained in the Korean culture? To answer this question, I have combined my observations and own experiences with answers I have gathered from my own conducted survey as well as analyses of Korean music, media, and TV series. *My* answer to the question above is that these standards were created by the Korean culture’s strong belief in physiognomy, its highly competitive and visually focused society, and even Hallyu, also known as the Korean wave.

The Korean culture has always been focused around the idea of status and ranking. In my survey, one of the responses to my question about why the modern standards exist, brought up an interesting point about how status can affect the beauty standards. In regards to the standard of having pale skin. She stated, “In the past, you worked in the fields if you were poor and had darker skin as a result, therefore, whiter skin became a symbol of affluence.” She also stated that “chubbiness is admired only in poorer countries where food is scarce. In well-off countries, having the time and money to monitor your weight is indicative of your class” (Chun). The standard of pale skin has been around for centuries as, historically, people were categorized and

ranked based off of their work — whether they were royalty, in military, or worked the fields. As it is with the color of the skin or the weight of a person, the Korean culture focuses heavily on the status of the individual in the society. In this case, the term “status” refers to how much wealth the individual has in comparison to others and the commercial objects which they are able to purchase. Author Duyen Truong-Ngoc Tran recounted her experience living in South Korea. She stated “the building in which I reside is far from a luxurious building, but in the parking lot the majority of the cars are the luxury brands BMW, Mercedes-Benz or Lexus” (55). Koreans, like many other cultures, show their status by buying luxury brands which show that they are affluent and which represent a life of luxury. In this same sense, cosmetic surgery has been categorized as a luxury. Authors Ruth Holiday of the University of Leeds and Joanna Elfving-Hwang of the University of Western Australia stated in their article *Gender, Globalization and Aesthetic Surgery in South Korea*, that “Successful surgery with no expense spared should look ‘natural,’ where natural is importantly defined as enhancing Korean features... only the well-off can afford the services of the best clinics, hence the ‘natural (Korean) look’ emerges as a sign of affluence and middle-class status” (Elfving-Hwang and Holiday). While cosmetic surgery is cheaper in South Korea, it is still an expensive feat and is seen as a symbol of affluence. The combination of the desire for a higher status and the connotation of luxury that plastic surgery gives causes the individual to feel more enticed by the surgery.

While cosmetic surgery is seen as a symbol of affluence, it is also commonly performed on teen girls for the sake of standing out in job interviews, as one’s occupation is just as important as their status. Historically speaking Much like how it was in history, whether you

work in an office job or do manual labor determines the respect and power that the individual has in the Korean society. Education is highly valued in Korean society and is the focus of many teens. As Tran states, “education is regarded as the most important factor of young South Korean adults’ lives... given pressure from parents, guardians, teachers, and society, — getting a high score on university entrance exams determines their future in terms of marriage, career, and the wealth of being” (Tran 54). This being said, because so many students are focusing on their education, they need some way in which to stand out amongst their peers. It is then where the matter of beauty comes in. Each job application in Korea requires a photograph of the applicant. According to a recruitment agency, JobKorea, 80 percent of recruitment executives consider the physical appearance of the applicant to be important (Elfving-Hwang and Holiday). Because everyone has similar skills and education, the looks are what defines the applicant, which means that without a “beautiful face” it becomes harder to obtain a job. Sharon Heijin Lee, an assistant professor at New York University states, “in Korea, for a woman to be capable, it’s not enough just to have a certain skill set. You have to be beautiful as well. After the Korean economic crisis in 1997, competition for jobs led to the surgery boom ; people trying to get a leg up in the job market in any way they can.” (Sharon Lee). Her statement comes to show how competitive the South Korean job market is. This gives individuals, especially women who have been historically oppressed, more motive to receive cosmetic surgery as a way to become beautiful and stand out amongst the crowd. In my survey, about 80 percent of the responses said that one’s looks defines their chances of success. Many of the reasons why included the fact that looks are what determine one’s first impression of another. One response described how looks can show how detail oriented you are, while another stated that if you appear friendly, beautiful, innocent,

or charismatic, you have a high chance of success in industries or business (Chun). No one can deny the fact that looks play a large part in job applications and interviews considering the fact that humans instinctively place a lot of importance on them. However, it seems the Korean culture takes this human instinct one step further with their concept of physiognomy. As Holiday and Elfving-Hwang state, “having the ‘right face’ can also be a determining factor in gaining employment in a Korean job market... the ‘right face’ is one with no inauspicious features and one that connotes youth, vitality, and upper-class looks. Since a photograph is a requirement of all job application and physiognomy is often used to evaluate candidates where qualifications and experience are equal, an employee with ‘friendly’ facial features will always be preferred, given the importance of social bonding in the workplace” (Elfving-Hwang and Holiday). While the high competition in the job market gives Koreans a large incentive to receive cosmetic surgery, the practice of physiognomy is the catalyst which ultimately drives the beauty standards which the applicants wish to achieve.

Physiognomy is the belief that a person’s face defines their character and chances of success. In other words, physiognomy is a type of fortune telling based off of one’s looks. While other countries may find this practice to be outrageous and illogical, it has become a \$200 million business in South Korea according to Baek Woon San, president of the Korean association of Physiognomists (Suhyun, Lee). It has been deeply rooted into the Korean culture for centuries thanks to stories such as that of President Chun Doo Hwan. It is said that his mother had met a wandering monk who told her that she would give birth to a successful son if she were to have less protruding teeth. Because of this, she smashed her teeth out with her rock and Chun Doo Hwan became president (Elfving-Hwang and Holiday). Through this story, Koreans have

gained the belief that if they change their appearance, they will not only become successful themselves, but their children will also gain from it. While physiognomy has remained prevalent in the Korean society, the standards of what brings success and what does not have changed drastically. Traditionally, Korean physiognomy had portrayed round eyes as symbols of lust, which was chastised. However, the beauty standards in our contemporary world favor the “doe-like” eyes as a symbol of youth. Hence why blepharoplasties, or double eyelid surgeries, are so popular. Like Holiday and Elfvig-Hwang stated “wider eyes signal youth, energy and alertness.” By the same token, historically a large ‘moon face’ had been preferred as it symbolized fertility, which was the main role for women yet girls are now having their jaws narrowed to create the desired V shape (Elfvig-Hwang and Holiday). Today, the characteristics of big eyes and full lips are the ones which point to fortune and success. As Suhyun Lee stated:

“Bigger eyes and cherry lips- with the size of the upper and lower lips balanced - are particularly popular with women going under the knife because they suggest happiness and love to come. And for those wanting to ward off bad luck, the removal of dark spots - especially those under the eyes, which are called ‘teardrops’ and predict loneliness - is a must.” (Suhyun, Lee).

While all cultures tend to prefer flawless and spotless faces, Koreans prefer this for a reason other than aesthetics. If dark spots mean bad luck, then there is no other choice than to rid themselves of it. In fact, every aspect of the face has been given a meaning in Korean physiognomy. According to Leila Lomax’s book *Physiognomy*, the chin represents the qualities of energy, tenacity, force, self love, gluttony, sensuality, and obstinacy. The eyes are the “instruments of intellect” and expresses one’s thoughts while the nose defines one’s wits,

refinement, intellect, capacity, reserve, curiosity, love of luxury, suspicion, and cruelty (Tran 93). While these characteristics seem absurd, they are a large aspect of the Korean cultures. With a strong belief in the fate that these characteristics brings, the appeal of cosmetic surgery to South Koreans increases to the point of normalcy. Plastic surgeon Dr. Lee Won Suk stated that “one in 10 of my patients asks me to operate on them based on what they believe would bring good fortune in the future” (qtd. in Suhyun, Lee). An example of these patients would include people such as Kim Eun Young — who had her cheekbones plumped up — and Koh Eun Seo — who had her wrinkles removed— both of whom were told that such features would cause a loss of money (Suhyun, Lee). As stated previously wealth and money are highly important in the Korean culture. With the belief that cosmetic surgery could change their fate simply because certain characteristics point to success, it is no surprise that there is such a large appeal.

Along with the highly competitive society and desire for success, much of the influence to receive cosmetic surgery comes from the Korean media which plays a large role in the lives of the public. From the train station to phones, there are constant influences and advertisements telling women that, to take care of themselves and be successful, they must get cosmetic surgery. Professor Nicholas D. Hartlep of Illinois State University recounts his trip to South Korea in his paper *Modern Em(body)ments of the Model Minority in South Korea* and states:

“While commuting via Seoul’s first class subway system I could not help but notice the prevalence of products and physicians that seemed to support the idea that South Korean women should undergo cosmetic and bodily surgery... on average, Koreans spend an hour or more on the subway at any given time, which ultimately amounts to a lot of exposure to posters, advertisements and videos.” (Hartlep).



In many Asian countries, trains and subways are the most common means of transportation. Because of this, cosmetologists have learned to take advantage of the time in which citizens spend waiting. By looking at the images in which Hartlep provides of the advertisements, train goers can see the comparisons of before and after pictures along with not only beautiful models, but beautiful doctors as well. They not only send the message that drastic changes and improvements can be made to one's face through the surgery, but also that by getting the surgery, perhaps one could become as successful as the doctors performing it. The advertisements are not only for the Korean audience. They are also written in different languages like Chinese and Japanese which sends the same message to foreigners visiting who are also affected by the Korean beauty standards. In addition to that, the advertisements all picture female models targeting women who are more susceptible to lowered self esteems and, therefore, are more likely to believe in the process. These advertisements do an incredible job in attracting people towards cosmetic surgery, however, they are simply the final push towards the individual believing that surgery is the best option. There is another aspect which I believe could be the primary reason behind the low self confidence and the high beauty standards in South Korea: Korean pop, or Kpop.

Kpop has only recently surfaced in America, but has been thriving tremendously in its home of South Korea. According to the Vice documentary *Seoul Fashion Week: K-Pop to Double Eyelid Surgery*, "Kpop accounts for \$3.8 billion worth of the economy" (Seoul Fashion Week). With this being said, there is not doubt that it would have a huge influence on the lives of the people. For example, regarding In regards to Kpop and the Kkorean beauty standards, one of my surveyors responded, with "I think they're [korean beauty standards] heinous, but also

something difficult to combat against. With the media's fixation on Kpop— which encourages perfect looking humans— media consumers find themselves questioning their beauty which leads to the desire to change their body” (Chun). One of the reasons Kpop has become so successful is the visually aesthetic and seemingly perfect Kpop idols which are admired by their audience. All of the female idols seem to have the perfect pale skin and hourglass body. In regards to the cause of the high beauty standards in Gumi High School in South Korea, reporter Zara Stone claims that “it's [the standards of beauty] driven by videos from the WonderGirls and Girls Generation, girl groups that launched with 17 to 20 year old singers. They all have small faces, large eyes, and tiny button noses. Chins are pointed, cheeks are wide, and their faces glow artificially, imbuing them with anime quality” (Stone). The word “idol” itself gives the connotation that these singers were made to be worshipped, and therefore, should have enhanced qualities on top of their talent. ABC News publishers Juju Chang and Victoria Thompson stated that “Korean women are seemingly trying to emulate to doll-like features of the K-pop girls in the ‘Gangnam style’ video and bands like Girls Generation” (Chang and Thompson). When young girls see these idols with their flawless faces, and see the admirers which these idols receive, they cannot help but desire these looks which become aspects which they need for success. Because they see these similarities in the advertisements, their phones, and on TV, these enhanced looks become the norm. A prime example of this would be the story of Hua In, who received double eyelid surgery as a graduation gift from her mom. In reporter Jeannette Francis's interview with Hua In's mom about her thoughts on allowing her daughter to receive plastic surgery, her mother stated, “When Hua In looks at herself, she thinks she's ugly... because every Kpop star on TV looks so pretty like a doll, she sees them as a standard of what is beautiful”

(The K-Pop Effect). Hua In is just one example of the thousands of girls who wish to match their idols. Francis also interviewed three South Korean high school girls from America named Gina, Sally and Laura, who stated, “In America you say I want a skinnier nose or I want bigger eyes, but in Korea they would say I want the eyes of whoever, I want the nose of whoever. Please make my nose into the size of this star” (The K-pop Effect). Rather than trying to simply become more beautiful Kpop influences these teenage girls to want to look just like their idols. This comes to show the huge influence that Kpop has on how normal people view themselves and the decisions in which people make.

Being a Kpop fan myself, I understand the deep admiration which comes from following the lives of the idols as well as how their actions can influence my own. Another response from my survey about the effect of Kpop on an audience was “perhaps fans of Kpop may start thinking about having plastic surgery and try out certain makeup products” (Chun). I can attest to this based off of my own experience as a fan of the Kpop group BTS who have recently released a line of makeup in collaboration with the Korean beauty brand VT Cosmetics. Before, I was someone with no interest in makeup whatsoever, but after hearing about their collaboration and expansion to the US market, I immediately drove to their store and bought as much as I could. Another most recent example would be the laundry detergent Downy which sold out in South Korea after BTS’s member Jungkook announced he used that brand of fabric softener. Immediately fans ran to the stores and the stock disappeared leaving Jungkook to suffer the consequences with his empty bottle of Downy. The influence of idols is extreme in Korea. Not only do their actions and choices influence people’s ideals of beauty, they also influence people’s decisions ranging from how one acts and talks to even if one decides to live or not.

Authors King-wa Fu and C. H. Chan studied the impact of celebrity suicides in Korea and their effect on the public and found that after seven celebrities killed themselves in a time range spanning from September 2008 to March 2009, the suicide rate in South Korea climbed up to 31.0 per 100,000 people in 2009. A specific example which they gave to further show that celebrity suicides influence fans to do the same was the death of EJ Lee and how, after her death, there was an increase of 65 suicide deaths in the same week (Chan and Fu). If celebrities are able to influence people to do something as drastic as take their own lives, there is no doubt that they can influence the public to believe in certain beauty standards and to receive cosmetic surgery.

While much of the celebrity influence comes from the fans simply observing the stars' daily lives, it can also come from the music and dramas which the celebrity creates and star in. For example, singer Park Boram's song "Beautiful" which discusses her transformation after extreme dieting and maybe even plastic surgery does not fail to promote the idea of "self improvement" that the advertisements in the subways discuss. Her song features lyrics such as "They say I got pretty... they say they couldn't recognize me. What did you get done and where... one banana, two eggs... you got pretty, words I wanted to hear everyday, words never heard." From those Boram talks about her extreme diet of only eating one banana and two eggs a day in order to lose 66 pounds which supposedly made her "pretty" and promotes that her audience should do the same in order for them to be pretty and receive attention as well. In addition to this, there is the matter of Korean dramas which allow the audience to escape from their monotonous lives. Sooyeon Lee, a Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Equality Policy Center at Korean Women's Development Institute in Seoul stated, "the fantasies of the Korean wave television serials hinge on ideal love, ideal human relationships, and ideal

characters” (Tran 59). When an audience watches these dramas, they wish to live the lives of the protagonist and go through the same adventures, gain the same love, and experience the same happy ending. However, because the actors tend to be comprised of those who fit the standards set by the idols of the pale skin, big eyes, and doll-like features, the audience begins to believe that it is their looks that bring success and hence the reason why they themselves do not have that exciting and perfect life. This drives the individual to try and better their lives by receiving cosmetic surgery to change the way they look in order to match the protagonist.

Recently, the South Korean society has become increasingly a bit more aware of the impact with which the entertainment media has on the public. The industry has attempted to combat the influence with dramas such as *My ID is Gangnam Beauty* which tells the story of a girl named Kang Mi-rae who went through a bulimic stage in order to lose weight and received cosmetic surgery out of high school after being harshly criticized for her inherent “ugly” looks. In the drama, her life seemingly improves as she gains new friends, excels in her college life and even gains a handsome boyfriend. The drama focuses greatly around the idea of beauty and how it supposedly makes one’s life better and introduces the antagonist Hyun Soo-a as a way to combat that message. Hyun Soo-a represents the most beautiful and popular girl in their college who Mi Rae idolizes because of her looks. However, as the drama continues, the audience learns that Soo-a was abandoned by her mother and, in fact, lives in poverty while hiding her bulimia as she has grown up striving for attention believing that beauty is the only way to achieve that. At the end of the drama, Soo-a is “attacked” by one of her admirers who claimed she led him on, it is then where Mi Rae comes to comfort her. Soo-a yells at her asking questions like “why do you keep pretending you’re better than me? Why do you keep pretending you’re happier than me?”

She ends off her questions with a confused and painful murmur of “you’re not even prettier than me.” It is here where the idea of beauty bringing happiness is brought up once more and where audience can begin to see that in Soo-a’s case, that belief is not always the truth. To her yelling, Mi Rae ends with a statement that encompasses the whole message which the drama was made to portray. She states:

“You’re right. I’m not pretty. I got plastic surgery. I wasn’t happy because I was ugly.

Just

like you said... but what about you? Are you happy because you’re pretty? Are you happy? Why do we have to be like this? You lose weight even though you’re not fat. You throw up everything you eat and put a knife to your throat. Do we not have the right to live if we are not pretty? We rank people’s faces and fight with each other. Why do we have to be like that? I really don’t want to be like that... I’m going to seriously think about what will make me happy from now on.”

This was a grand statement eloquently written by the writers to tell the audience that happiness does not come by changing your looks. It does not matter whether you are considered beautiful or ugly, there are other things that can make you happy. Mi Rae states, “we rank people’s faces and fight with each other. Why do we have to be like that?” almost as if it was the director of the drama having a conversation with the audience and asking them to consider why they themselves rank people off of their looks. By having the protagonist realize this fault and claiming that she no longer wants to live in that way, the creator hopes that the audience will continue with their normal behavior and follow in her footsteps. While the drama does well in clearly stating the message and trying to instill the idea happiness being found in places other than a pretty face,

there are also some faults in it that can send some negative messages as well. For example, while they often prevent the audience from seeing Mi Rae's younger self in many of the scenes, in hopes that they will not set a standard for what is considered "ugly" and what is considered "beautiful," they still show the younger version of her that ate a lot and was considered "fat." This can send the message that while she may have seen no reason to change her face, losing weight is still a good investment and, therefore, the audience would feel inclined to do the same. At the same time, the drama also introduces the character Kim Tae-hee who was consistently made fun of for being "chubby," yet she was in fact what I and many other Americans may consider to be of average weight. Not only that, but she was also shamed and lost her boyfriend in the drama which gives the connotation that being anything other than the standard of the thin hourglass figure will leave you to a life without love. While these fat shaming methods are still prevalent in this drama, I believe that it can still prove to be the first step to a change in the Korean society and the way in which people view themselves and breaking the belief that your looks are what will define your happiness.

While *My ID is Gangnam Beauty* is the first step in breaking the belief in physiognomy, I believe that a stronger solution would be to change the "perfect" looks of the celebrities in Korean media and make them appear more natural. Like I discussed previously in this essay, the public idolizes their celebrities and will mimic the behaviors of their favorite idols. In that sense, if the idol were to be less perfected and if the industry were to focus less on the visual uniqueness and rather on the pure talent and personality of the artist, perhaps the audience would do the same and the Korean society could break their harsh beauty standards. However, taking this route of breaking the ubiquity of the practice of cosmetic surgery and the high beauty

standards of the Korean society may be hard to carry out. Because Kpop is so visually focused, to change the visuals which fans currently admire, could cause the industry to fall, Given that Korean Pop is such an integral part of the Korean economy, it would be difficult to change it out of fear that the Korean government would also lose much of its money. Despite this, there are currently a few Korean idols who are working to combat the normality of the perfect visuals in the Korean media industry. For example, girl group F(x)'s member Amber Liu has chosen to ignore the standards of the pure feminine look and has taken on a more tomboyish and rebellious image. She does not have the long straight hair desired by many, but rather has a short pixie cut akin to a male hairstyle. Not only that, but she has also gotten an abundance of tattoos, a practice which is criticized amongst Korean idols. However, to her, it is a means of self expression. There is also boy group BTS who have been spreading the message of loving oneself through their "Love Yourself" campaign and series in order to help the younger generation feel more confident and supported. Both of these examples have had a huge influence on the Korean media audience and are the first steps taken by the industry to break the impossibly high beauty standards and complexes that have been created.

While the practice of Korean cosmetic surgery is often frowned upon by the more western cultures, much of the Korean society is built around the practice. The only way to counter this practice would be to change the beliefs of the individual. Many of those who go through cosmetic surgery receive it because they believe that changing their looks will bring them fortune. Or they believe they are not beautiful enough to stand out and get a job, or find love and fortune. All of their decisions go back to their beliefs. In order to prevent the individual from altering their features, we must change their perception of themselves and the beliefs that



have been ingrained in them. We would need to break down the tradition of physiognomy, break down the competitiveness of their society and break down the Korean entertainment industry. To decrease the popularity of cosmetic surgery, we would need to change the people. However, while I believe self love is important, I ultimately believe we should respect their decisions and the culture. Of course, we should work to promote self love and confidence in one's own abilities and looks. And of course we should put more focus on the personality of a person rather than their exterior. But overall, we should respect the person's desires and not criticize them for their actions because everyone has a reason behind their choices. Amber Liu, the previously mentioned idol going against the norms, recounted in her YouTube documentary series *Ranting Monkey* a story which not only changed her perspective on the matter of plastic surgery, but mine as well. She stated:

“In all of this it comes down to respect... In my opinion, I love tattoos. I'm for piercings. I have my style. But to be really honest, I don't agree with plastic surgery. There was a time when one of my friends wanted their nose done. I just kept saying ‘Why would you change your face? Why would you do this?’ And she said something that made me kind of shut up: ‘Amber, well you have tattoos. Who are you to say that I can't have plastic surgery?’ And it hit me like wow Amber you are really insensitive and rude. She was right. It's the same principle. Something meaningless to you can mean something to someone else. We should try to take time to understand what they're thinking about. Why they're doing certain things...”

Ultimately what Amber is saying is to respect the person and their decisions because, while you may not be able to see it, their choices have symbolism to themselves. In my survey, I asked

what the difference was between wearing makeup, getting a tattoo, and getting cosmetic surgery. Many of the responses included a more direct point of the permanence of one versus the other or how much one can alter the appearance of the individual. And some responses discussed how makeup is for fun, tattoos are for art, and cosmetic surgery is for change. In my perspective, there is no difference. They are all a means of self expression or self improvement. All of them can be a way to cover up scars or better their lives. No matter what the reason, I believe that we should respect the individuals' decisions and not criticize others for their actions. We all want to be happy and successful in our lives. If one person believes that changing their looks will bring fortune or if they simply want to change for the sake of gaining confidence, then we should respect them and their decision to go under the knife.

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