Plastic Surgery In Korea, Theory Of Two Bodies By Mary Douglas And How It Is Connected

In this essay I will firstly explain what Mary Douglas means by Two bodies and theory behind this. I will take a look on relations between those two bodies and what is role of symbols in this relationship. Next, I will analyze how controls play important role in this relationship. I will also mention experience and what purity rule is. In next step I will try to connect Information gained from this theory to link it to the beauty industry in Korea mainly how it relates to field of plastic surgery. I will take look at the relations between society standards and how beauty and body alteration is anchored in modern society thanks to such things as K-pop and Americanization.

Mary Douglas in her article starts explaining that how the social body controls how is our physical body perceived in society. She states that “The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society.[footnoteRef:1] Then she proceeds to explain how much power is held by continual exchange of bodily experiences and how this experience is reinforcing each another. Sometimes those two bodies are so close to each another that they almost merge but on the other hand they can also be far apart from each another, and the tension between them essentially allows the elaboration of meanings. [1: Mary Douglas: The two bodies article pg.78]

Symbols hold an important role between two bodies. There are multiple modes. She states that ”Each symbolic mode enhances meaning in a different way and in the other, and so the ends of communication are furthered.” [footnoteRef:2] then she starts to talk about bodily control which I interpreted that society can control to some aptitude control your behavior or way how you express your own image in society. This is usually dictated and offered by mass media that is present in everyday life and thus shaping our view on certain aspects. She also gives us hypothesis that bodily control is an expression of social control and experience. [2: Mary Douglas: The two bodies article pg.79]

And now is the point where I try to connect it to the modern Korean society and its beauty industry. Biggest part of beauty industry which I think is affecting views of one’s body is plastic surgery. Korea is considered one of leading countries in process of plastic surgery and thanks to data provided by ISAPS or International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, Korea had just in year 2015 of total 1,156,234 procedures made which is 5.3 percent of world vide procedures made that year[footnoteRef:3]. [3: ISAPS International Survey on Aesthetic/Cosmetic (2015)]

There exists to mainstream types of surgery which I think could also represent two bodies in hypothetical way. First is plastic surgery which is concentrating on reconstruction after some major accident. Reconstructive surgery refers to medical operations on facial and body defects, which might be caused by birth deficiencies, accidents, burns or diseases.[footnoteRef:4] I consider this as physical body since those defects can be present at the birth and thus they are ones of natural cause or it was caused by accident which was not planned and thus I also consider it natural. [4: Yuqing Wang Pg.1]

Next is much bigger part of this industry which is heavily affected by media and concepts of

beauty and what Korean people consider pretty. Its name is Cosmetic surgery and main role of this cosmetic procedure is to “fix something about ourselves that we don’t consider pretty, however this view is heavily altered by society and modern media and things that we idolize.. I consider this cosmetic surgery as second body from Mary Douglas’s article and that is social body since cosmetic surgery and one’s image is dictated by society standards and so by us altering our bodies to match the society standards we are creating second “social” body. For Korea there two main influencers and those are K-pop and American style. “Korea’s most frequently performed surgery—double eyelid surgery demonstrates the same ideology that Koreans attempt to disassociate with the stereotypical Asian image.”[footnoteRef:5] This was in history because when American soldiers came some of the Korean people went to American doctors that came too and asked them to make their eyes rounder and this was for that they won’t be considered communists. Miss Kate?ina Mudru?ková in her thesis states something similar “This discourse is evident especially in the Western media - in them is often stressed by the desire of the Koreans for the western body that is represented as social pathology and internalized racism.”[footnoteRef:6] [5: Yuqing Wang Pg. 22] [6: Bc. Kate?ina Mudru?ková Pg.53]

However, “in real terms the boundary between aesthetic and aesthetic reconstruction surgery is largely wiping. While reconstructive surgery should have only a medical purpose, which only underlines its support from health insurance, cosmetic surgery covered by the client itself is associated with aesthetics.”[footnoteRef:7] And this is the part where I think that this is really similar to the two bodies since one is not existing without other and thus creating this circle where both are relying on another. [7: Bc. Kate?ina Mudru?ková Pg. 17]

“Korean Pop refers to Korean popular culture, termed as “Hallyu” in Korean or K-pop in brief. K-pop became increasingly popular towards the end of the twentieth century. It consists of film and television shows, pop music and dance, fashion and cosmetics.”[footnoteRef:8] Korean Pop culture have huge influence on beauty industry in Korea and also on Korean population since what is showcased in the tv is instantly new trend and many young people are following new trends even to the extent of undergoing plastic surgery. However this creates pressure on those individuals who are comfortable in their bodies and with their looks because society is adapting to the new trends and those who are not following them can even be pushed to the borders of social groups or even society itself. On this note I would like to talk about personal experience of my friend and her time spend in Korean university. She was studying there for one semester. She told me that one day she decided to go to school without make up. Before the class her teacher stopped her and asked if she is ill. Her answer was obviously no and then teacher send her home and told her that she should come back when she put her make up on. Her being an foreigner and get such hard judgement based on her look it must be multiplied for native residents exponentially. [8: Yuqing Wang Pg. 37]

In this essay I tried to connect the theory of two bodies by Mary Douglas and plastic surgery in Korea and how Korean society is shaping natives into something that is accepted. Thanks to media many people try to change their physical bodies into social bodies. I explained the difference between reconstructive and cosmetic surgery and connected it to the social and physical body. Then I proceeded to give multiple examples such as why Korean people do so many changes on their bodies and what is the biggest inspiration. Biggest inspirations were America and the idea of Caucasian look and this lead to most popular surgery which is double eyelid surgery. Next big influencer in the play is Korean pop or k-pop which is creating new trends and thus dictating new ways that one should look like. Media gives people new ways to

present themselves however it also creates the pressure n people which decides to not to go with it.

Used Bibliography

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