



Speaker	A/Prof Jo Elfving-Hwang
Talk title	Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder
Venue	Market Grounds
Time	Tuesday 29 October 2019, 7.00pm

Scott Nicholls

Hello everyone, it's great to see so many people here and we hope that you are enjoying this lovely venue and that you have had a chance to get a drink and something to eat.

I would like to start our session by acknowledging the Whadjuk Noongar people as the traditional owners of the lands and the water that we meet on today and I pay my respects to their elders, past, present, and emerging.

Welcome to Raising the Bar Perth. Today or tonight we have twenty-two UWA academics speaking at ten bars across the city.

At UWA, we are excited to make education a part of our cities popular culture and we are doing this by transforming bars like this into places where not only you can enjoy a drink but you can learn a little bit about our research and the impact that it is having in our community.

If you are going to be using the “socials” tonight if you are going to be tweeting or putting anything on social media about Raising the Bar, we strongly encourage you to use the tags @UWAresearch or to use #rtbperth19.

I should also mention as well that we will be recording this presentation as we will be recording all the presentations across all of the bars and will be publishing them as podcasts and they will be available through our social media in the near future as well, so keep an eye out for that.

Let me introduce our speaker tonight.

So we have got Associate Professor Jo Elfving-Hwang.

She is a cultural sociologist who specialises in Korean culture and society at the University of Western Australia. Her current research focuses on beauty cultures and cosmetic surgery, maybe cosmic as well [laughing] as well as ageing and beauty in South Korea. Jo is also an award-winning university teacher at UWA where teaching is a big part of her professional identity which she really enjoys.

Please welcome Jo with her talk, “Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder”.

Welcome, Jo.

[clapping]



A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

Thank you.

How exciting! They let me out of the classroom. I am however, I have to say, quite used to talking to people who are drunk. I suspect, that a lot of my students, they are right at the age as they stumble out of bed still reeling from the night before, trying to stay awake but they ... I am used to that, so carry on, enjoy your drinks.

I just wanted to ... I feel like going, "Hello Wembley!!" it's just like a really cool vibe here.

That's my dream, it's a pipe dream, maybe someday, maybe I am in a wrong thing, I might not sing or maybe I will! Anyway, I just wanted to put the big elephant that is me, they gave me this wonderful tee-shirt which is why I said, "YES" to this talk, when they asked me, "Could you talk in a pub?" I said, "Sure, no worry!" and they said, "We'll give you this shirt ..." look! Does my bum look big in it, don't say it, don't say it! [laughing] So, it's awesome and it goes very well with my earrings. They are selling these at a really high price at UWA and all the funding will be used to feed hungry students.

So, who am I and why do I have this weird accent?

I am actually originally from Finland. I am not Korean. Sometimes people think I am because I have a funny name which is impossible to pronounce but you did an awesome job but then stumbled on the "comic surgery" bit.

I was born in Finland. I have been mostly educated in Europe, in Belgium and in the UK where I spent a lot of time with my awesome husband, who is for the first time actually listening to me talk about my research.

This morning he is like [moaning] [inaudible 04:11] listen to your talk.

So here we are, thank you for turning up, you have proven the point that some people are interested in sociology of the body and then I lived in Yorkshire for a long time so I have got two beautiful Yorkshire kids and now all these as well.

We are a very typical Perth family and of course, lived in Korea as well.

So, Sociology of the Body? Why am I researching bodies? Well, why not?

Bodies are pretty important to us, we can't really escape our bodies and if you do, that's probably not a good thing, it might mean you're dead! So, it's a really good thing to really study.

Since we can't really escape our bodies it's ... for Sociologists it's a really interesting thing to then think about, what is it that these bodies mean to us? You know, what kind of cultural and social meanings are attached to our bodies? How do we experience them and particularly in terms of beauty, how do we present "self"? What is it ... how do we make ourselves attractive and why do we do it, we always think, "it's all about sex?" but obviously it's not always just about that, as you will find soon.



Some of the reasons why we do things with our body and why we present our self in certain ways may seem commonsensical but when you actually start scratching below the surface, you find all sorts of interesting nuances of how we actually highly individualistic in how we use our bodies.

So, often you read in media and people say things like, “All women, want to be just thin and very pretty and they do beauty this way.” As if there was a universal constant but when you actually ask individuals, you find some individuals are very, very agentic, they have a lot of agency in how they use their bodies and it is often very calculated as well.

That’s why studying beauty is really fun and it’s a good thing to do.

Why Korean beauties and bodies?

Now, I am a Koreanist [laughing] and a Koreanist is basically a really fancy word that us people who study Korea in Korea have invented for ourselves, in order to sound very important. Because if you say you’re an “ist” it means there must be something super clever. So, it’s a very small group of people, globally who do Korean studies and I am one of them but I am of course also a Sociologist.

But, there is also another reason.

Now, if I was to ask you, what comes to mind and if you are Korean, don’t say anything. What comes to mind, if I say, “Korea.” What would you say, just shout out?

Sorry?

K-pop – what else?

Kimchi – good food!

Fried chicken, that’s a new one, it's not food.

Plastic surgery!

No one said, Kim Jong-un, that’s really unusual.

Usually, people say North Korea, right?

Often when we talk ... I think about Korea, a lot of people think about beauty and plastic surgery because it is reported in the media a lot.

If I was to ask the same thing about Australia in Korea, people would probably say things like, “So, when I say Australia, what would think?” People go, Kangaroos, Koalas, surfing, BBQ, bees but they don’t say “Beauty” right?

And despite the fact that Australians actually do a lot of beauty. Maybe 10% of Australians have actually had some form of surgical procedures.



It can be a bit less invasive, I am not talking something super major, but a lot of Australians are actually having surgical procedures but we just don't really talk it, whereas in Korea it is very much, I hate the pun "in your face".

So, people are very much talking about and it's thought about in a very different way in Korea. There is no similar, typically, no similar stigma attached to it.

I had my eyes done, I had my lips done, I had my but done and it's sort of like, "Oh, good on you! You can afford it, good!" if you do that here, it's like, "Oh, right, you are one of them!"

There is a different sort of value attached to it.

You are here with us, a glass in your hand, I better address the title of my talk as well, is "Beauty in the eye of the beer holder."

Now, just in case you were expecting a scientific study, or some kind of empirical study on the links between alcohol consumption and perceptions of beauty let's put this one in the clear.

Research has actually conclusively shown that there is a link between alcohol consumption and how attractive you find other people. So it is an incredible amount of research. A lot of scientists have spent a lot of taxpayer's money to prove that there is in fact, a thing that scientists very super scientifically call "beer goggles". This means that you see other people as very attractive but also they have recently done a study in Canada ... wait, wait, wait, wait, wait ... in which 94 French male subjects, where they found that if you drink, you actually find yourself more attractive. [laughing]

So, if you are sitting here, I have to say that sample of this study was 94 French guys, so we may need to do a follow-up study in Perth to see whether this is also a kind of, universal thing whether that applies to Australian males as well.

But if you are feeling not very secure in yourself today, go and get another drink and you will soon find that you feel very attractive.

But what about outside the bar, what defines beauty outside the bar? And what makes a person attractive?

Body shape has been one of those things that we can definitely say, is not constant. So, if we only look at western art and western culture there is the voluptuous body shape of the renaissance age, used to be the "in" thing. So, it used to be ... today if a beautiful voluptuous lady would go and see their GP and the GP might suggest to them that they might need to, go perhaps on a diet and watch their weight but in those days, if you had a lovely translucent whitish skin and a beautiful garment as a sign of class that would be considered beautiful and also a sign of fertility, which was very important.

Now, these ideals, of course, evolved throughout the ages and from the 1920s onwards, we start seeing this kind of fashion, that is more figure-hugging, especially for women, more suited to stick insects perhaps, and as the western fashion industry moves towards really hating ageing bodies and



bodies that are not very thin and then we have moved towards the “Twiggy” ideal to really almost expecting thinness in women and I am talking about western perceptions here.

Eventually, now, we have hit Kardashians, which represents a kind of new idea and it’s really interesting to see where we go next as the sort of body images keep on evolving.

Human faces have been much more constant, however, and this is where we can see some of the universal similarities where we can see that there are crossovers between different historical moments and also between different societies and cultures.

This is what scientists, social scientists a lot of artists would be very interested in human faces and they have tried to understand how humans perceive beauty and why certain facial features seem to be more attractive than others.

Symmetry has often been quoted as one of those things that people look out for and some research of this as the super principle. So if you have a very symmetrical face that is supposed to make you more attractive ... don’t panic people ... if you haven’t got a super symmetrical face, I have got really good news for you. This is actually really simplistic and not really entirely true.

If you have a degree of symmetry in your face that’s a good thing, it’s a good thing, don’t flag it off, but beauty can’t really be reduced to this single element. In fact, Rhodes reports, Rhodes in research that she did in 2006 or it was published in 2006, she reports that people actually are more drawn to things like averageness. Looking very average. Its good news isn’t it!? Yay!

And, also things like having a kind face and looking well-groomed. I can see there are lots of well-groomed people here, so you are halfway there, youthfulness and also what they call, sexual dimorphism, which means looking very feminine or looking very masculine. So, interestingly, actually, research shows that for women this is more distinct so if you are ... if you look more feminine, that increases your attractiveness in women.

But for men, it’s actually not so straight forward.

Men actually have a little bit more leeway, so you can be a little bit soft-featured, you don’t have to be a chiselled guy to be attractive.

That is very interesting to know and also, there is another good piece of research, you might want to ... this is for you ladies ... there is an actual piece of research, taxpayers money, very well spent. You think we are wasting it but we are doing practical research.

So, if you go to a pub and you look kind, only ladies, not guys, if you look very kind or intelligent, drunk men or men who are drunk are more likely to look at your face [laughing] but if you look unkind, and not very intelligent they are more likely to look at your other things! So here is my tip to you, funded by the taxpayer in Canada [laughing] not here guys, Canadian taxpayers, remember to look smart and kind and then you are going to get ... this ... see! There we go.

So, are there any cultural variations, however?



Now, my own work looks at Korea and why did I start looking at Korea? Well, I am a Koreanist, so that's one of the reasons, it's my job to look at things Korean but in 2007 there was a whole big media thing that started building about stuff happening in Korea. All those Koreans having heaps of cosmetic surgery, all of them!

It was almost as if everyone galloping there. There are all those poor Korean ladies the can't help but to go and have cosmetic surgery and it was ridiculous.

If you actually go to Korea you have to sterile lots of ... surgery is available but not everybody is constantly having surgeries at all. So I thought, "Wow!" this is quite interesting. Why is it that people are representing a career in this way, I think Korea has very uniformed beauty ideals and as that people were not able to resist the kind of beauty ideals.

I think they didn't have any agencies or that they were not able to think through this thing and I thought that was incredibly unfair.

From that has actually spanned to ... its twelve years now ... that I have been researching Korean beauty. A really interesting journey of looking at where have these Korean beauty ideals come from? I looked at a lot of historical archival records, looking at past historical records of the Joseon dynasty which they ... a kind of kingdom before Korea was colonised by the Japanese in 1910 and then looking at various other different periods and then looking at where have come now.

I have interviewed a lot of cosmetic surgeons and a lot of individuals in Korea and also groups that you wouldn't usually talk to such as this! [laughing]

I talked to middle-aged Korean men and I can tell you this is really fun. Korean guys in the middle age ... so you know when they are in the forties and their fifties, they are not particularly known to feel comfortable talking about their beauty practices, especially to a blond lady who speaks Korean.

I have had very interesting conversations with them and interviews. Awkward moments, I will not get to that, I can tell you some funny stories afterwards.

So, currently, if you look at how Korea has been represented in media, a lot of media commentators, when they talk about Korean beauty cultures, they tend to suggest that Korean beauty cultures are completely, almost completely informed by western beauty ideals and we have a little bit of tendency to do this in the west. It's what we call "western solipsism" about ourselves. Everyone wants to be like us.

We have a little bit of a tendency to go and say, "This thing is done here and it looks a little bit like what we doing here, they must want to be like us." And, I would challenge you all to THINK carefully when you see these kinds of reports.

Even if it looks like it once you start digging a little bit deeper, you might find that that's not really necessarily case, and I like to suggest while we can definitely say that some local aesthetic beauty practices and ideals like definitely uninformed by global flows for fashion and beauty and when I say



“flows” it doesn’t necessarily start in America, it might start in Japan and go to America and then come back and so we are talking about global flows of beauty.

They might be mediated through popular culture, through fashions but there is ... if we start talking about things like “universal beauty” I would like to suggest to you that that is a constructed idea. It is a constructed idea that it is floating in the media space rather than a biological fact. So we will put it out there.

By this, I mean that while we can identify certain facial features as drawing similar responses in other people across different cultures, what constitutes to beauty in a given historical ... a given time in history is a much more complicated process and I want to show you ... I will tell you a little bit about how this came about in Korea to give you a case study, if you like, of how the process came to be.

What I am trying to show here is that the perceptionism of beauty is actually historically and culturally contingent. You always have to think about beauty in this way and the processes of how and what is displayed as beautiful or attractive are also linked to these considerations as a result.

Like in the west, Korean beauty ideals have gone a huge serve on the whole, over the years.

In the past, in the so-called Joseon dynasty, so if you learn one thing today, it’s Joseon, that’s what Korea used to be called before it became Korea.

Women, in particular, I am talking about women as an example here. What women tend to aspire for, would be not necessarily beautiful faces, beautiful faces were not necessarily thought to be a good thing because it would ... actually, it was considered to be sometimes a bad thing because it would make you more likely to run off with some dude if you looked really pretty, right?

So once you get married you are supposed to stay with your hubby and your kids, so the facial features that would be desirable would be the ones that were auspicious. There is a thing called physiognomy in East Asia, so would auspicious features, you know, the kind of features like a “round” face. Koreans talk about *pal ulgool* “moon face” and the moon face means that you have a lot of babies, so it’s a good thing.

So its “V-lined” a very different shape. In fact, fun fact, Koreans have the lowest rate of fertility now and a lot of women have “V-lines” so there might be something to that physiognomy thing.

Anyway, a healthy body shape was also a good thing, it was considered a very important thing because it meant a lot of children and good healthy skins.

Koreans have ... if you look at some Palace records in Korea there are some really interesting ... if you are looking for really good skincare routines, don’t go for the ten-step K beauty, go for the historical records, there are some really cool things there. And they were very interested in translucent skin.



Not white skin as thing pinky thing you see here, but a kind of porcelain-like skin, that's what they talked about. The porcelain-like skin that was really denoting upper class and also displaying wealth and status, through things like silk that you could afford.

Then Japan became Korea's colony ... sorry ... Korea became Japan's colony, if only, "if only" says my Korean husband, that would have been so just and so right, but "No!" It was the other way around.

So Korea became Japan's colony in 1910 and with that process of colonisation, also came Japanese fashions which had elements of western fashion in them, but they came as a sign of modernisation. So, if you were a modern girl in the 1920s or what they called a modern boy, you would wear a fancy watch, a watch was really an important thing and some shoes and a western-style suit and that was about being modern.

So, it's less about changing race which seems to be a kind of assumption in a lot of contemporary reporting about what is happening in Korea. It was really about being modern. It was a mark of modernity and then after the Korean War, Korea was actually ... and I am talking about South Korea here ... Korea was desperately poor and it was completely devastated by the war and millions of people died, it's one of the cold forgotten wars because not many people talk about it, even though it was devastating for the peninsula.

Millions of people died, it was completely flattened, it was desperately poor and what people were really aspiring for was to feel safe and secure and Hollywood movies really represented this kind of ideal safe space.

When I interviewed some elderly Korean ladies about their beauty practices, the eldest was 93, she was very funny and they would talk about how they would see these Hollywood stars in the movies and they would say, it was like a dream, like a dream country where everything was safe and there was enough to eat for everybody. Now you are thinking 1950s here, right? But then Korea very quickly develops, it's one of those success stories of modern history and in fact, I have to brag here a little bit even though I am not Korean but I am a Koreanist, Korea is the first country that turned actually, from a developing country into an aid-giving country only, quite recently. So it really is an economic success story.

As Korea, particularly from the 1980s onwards becomes very wealthy, with it comes the kind of development of modern consumer culture.

Korean fashion cultures, as well as the cosmetics industry, have been developing actually from the 1950s onwards but they really take off from this time, onwards. They take a lot of influences from places like Paris of course but they are developing a very Korean like, taste of themselves. AmorePacific, which is one of the biggest cosmetic companies in Korea, in fact, sends these evangelists of beauty around villages and this is a true story.

They have two functions, so they were these lovely dressed ladies in 1970s and they went around in villages looking like angels, my informers tell me. They would turn up in these villages in their high



heels in the mud and everything and they would go from home to home to teach women how to do beauty and the ladies I interviewed they said, “They were like, they looked like film stars and we all thought, oh, we just want to be like this,” but they also had a secondary function, they were checking if there were any North Korean spies hiding in the homes, so that’s they were to go and the government allowed them to go around because they were also doing checking whether there were any “extra” people hiding in these villages. True story!

Anyway, also, cosmetic medicine begins to develop around this time and a lot of the influence for that comes from America. The first Korean cosmetic surgeon to actually become a practising surgeon trained in America and so a lot of those influences actually came from working with Korean American or Asian American patients, so they brought a lot of influences with them as they started to operate on Korean patients as well in Korea.

With these technologies of the body, medical science develops possibilities of what can be done to the body or with the body or for the body, develop as well. It’s a really quickly developing picture.

Korean surgeons when reading what they are writing around this time are very interested in developing an idea of, “What is Korean beauty?” So, they are never talking about, “What is global beauty or something.” They are very interested in defining Korean beauty and this is where you actually get this current look from.

Korean cosmetic surgeons have been very interested in what they call the “golden ratio idea” have you heard of this? Yes? The idea of “golden ratio” or the “divine proportions” and there’s a lot of writing by Korean cosmetic surgeons about this.

The beauty mask, I think a few of you are familiar with this concept, it is sort of like a grid that you put over somebodies face to check ... there are computer programs and apps you can use now as well ... so you can put this thing over your picture, like a picture of your face and you can see how “golden ratio” your face is and you can test what you would look like if you were “golden ratio” [whispers] it’s quite freaky!

You should try it, it’s really fun!

This was considered a very scientific kind of thing.

By the 1990s then when people were actually super-wealthy, it was quite a well-established idea that this kind of thing is beauty. You have to be symmetrical and so forth and so forth and there were a lot of self-help books ... I brought a couple with me, if anybody wants to have a look at them, they are all in Korean, but you can learn, come to UWA and you can study Korean. It’s a really big program, it’s bigger than Chinese!

A lot of people are then engaging with these surgical practices, also because, not just because it’s possible but it’s also because there is less anxiety attached or less psychological wrangling attached to the decisions to undergo surgery.



So in the west, I use the west in really broad terms, so, say if you are in Holland for example, in the Netherlands, you might actually have to give some kind of psychological reason to have surgery.

“Oh, I need to have my nose done.” You could be actually just wanting to have your nose done but you go to your GP and you say, “Oh, I really feel ... I have this psychological issue with my nose and I really need to have my nose done.” Then you kind of justify it, it’s a very western thing, you need to justify things. “I am a bit wrinkly here, maybe I should have a facelift, it’s causing me psychological grief, therefore there is a medical reason, I really, really need it ... “ and the best thing is like when you get older and I am warning you, darling, you are going to have to pay for this [laughing] when you get a little bit droopy eyelids, the joys of being Caucasian, your eyelids start drooping like this and you have to Blepharoplasty to open up the [inaudible 31:29] a little bit. It’s not a vain thing, it’s for medical reasons. That’s the truth, isn’t it, “for medical reasons.”

In Korea it is more like, “It’s good, I like the doctor” it’s like “mm” “yes” a very practical ... or sort of like ... “Umm, I like it, I will get it done” ... “Oooh, did you get your eyes done?” ... “Yes, I got my eyes done” ... “Ah, really nice, really nice!”

So it’s a kind of different thing. It’s not ... there is no big kind of [shivers]!

So, which one is better, which one is worse?

It’s just a rhetorical question, don’t answer it.

Exam papers will be given out later.

Then the Asian financial crisis happened and I am nearly there, don’t worry, are doing like signs [inaudible 32:23] He is going to go like this ... when it’s time to finish!

Then the Asian financial crisis happened in 1997 which is everything collapses and people lose their jobs and before that, economists were like [pheeew] so if you graduated from a university in the mid-1990s you could just walk into a job, a really good thing.

After 1997, if you could keep your job for more than three months that was really awesome.

From the 2000s onwards, particularly young people have not had it very easy because it’s very hard to find a job. Do you think it’s hard to find a job here? Of course it is. In Korea it is very, very hard because everyone is really highly educated, 80% university-educated, yes, it’s true, Koreans like to study, well I don’t know if they like to study, but they are very highly educated.

Really image management became part of your repertoire as a job seeker. So if you then go and look for a job and you know that people respond better to this nice-looking face, and you don’t have to, “Oh my gosh, its medical reasons kind of thing,” then you can just go, “Okay I look a little bit cross so maybe I will have a little bit of a thing done and then I will look nice, I will look friendly! Makes sense, totally makes sense!” So why would you not do it you can afford it especially when the government was, Korean Government, true story was giving tax breaks from 2007 until ... I think it lasted for only two years. They were giving tax breaks for people having cosmetic surgery, why



because it was like enhancing your employment opportunities. So, it's a bit if you filed your tax returns now and then they say, "Have you educated yourself in order to get a job?" It was a similar category. It didn't last very long, it was overused a bit. There you go!

Then, of course, there was a lot of advice on how you could do this. Bloggers, bloggez, social media, a lot of self-help books, makeover programs and so forth and it was a bit of a perfect storm really.

But is this beauty uniform for all Koreans because that's also what media keeps telling us, that all Koreans look the same.

There was a fake meme and I was very cross about this, about Korean ... Miss Korea contest in Seoul, they were supposed to have looked exactly the same. That was actually doctored, don't believe it if you see it.

The answer is, so is beauty in Korea uniform. The answer is no. It depends on who you are and I can prove it to you because I have done highly unique and interesting research into this.

One is this group of women that I interviewed a group 65 to 93-year-old women about their everyday beauty practices.

I went into this project and I am thinking, I am doing this only because I genuinely went and I looked, both in Korean and in English, whether there was any research done in this particular group and there was nothing. There was just about how sad it is that all Koreans are getting very old and they are going to be a huge burden on the economy. "Ugh, those old people, it was almost [shouting] OLD PEOPLE COMING AAAH."

So, I thought I will go and talk to them and I expected it to be a really sad kind of thing and it was the best project ever.

Not only were they really happy with their bodies, a little bit sad about not being as mobile, but most of them, basically the findings were that they were incredibly happy about the fact that they now have time to pamper themselves. A lot of them, actually, in fact, none of them believed in anti-ageing stuff and almost all of them made their own makeup, not makeup but this treatment.

So I have the best ever collection of home remedy beauty from Korea from ladies well over the age of 65 and I am going to make a lot of money one day, when I write them down – boom! There you go! [laughing] So come and ask me what you can do with spinach and water and Manuka honey. So there you go.

And also, for men, they were pretty happy about the fact that they could do a lot of [inaudible 36:56] for men it was really, "oh my God stop it now!" For men, it was very, very much about ... they were worried about, can you believe their waistlines and their hairline who were they doing beauty for? Can you guess?

No, if they could choose and just sit in a corner and drink all day long because they were so stressed.



They were doing it for their bosses, fancy that! Makes total sense, doesn't it?

So, you do beauty, you do body management, because you want to look sharp because otherwise, if you are in your forties, you may be in your fifties and you start looking a bit droopy, you are going to be the next one out of the door when the next thirty-year-old, smart Seoul National University graduate walks in, right?

They were very much concerned about their hair, their waistlines are looking trim and that was a fun project.

I asked both the elderly participants and the men, I asked them about what they thought about K-pop beauty because that seems to take so much space in reporting these days.

There have been quite a few articles recently about things like, "Are Korean men becoming more effeminate? Are Korean men feminising themselves?" because we see BTS, everyone knows BTS, shall we sing together? BTS ... they do look very pretty, don't they? They have very pretty faces. A lot of the Korean people whom I interviewed were not the least worried about this for the reason that they didn't really feel that this in any way threatening career masculinity because these guys are in their twenties and that's when you have fun and you can experiment and then my friends, you go to National Service and you grow up.

It's very much seen as a fleeting state until you go through this rite of passage of becoming a real man! By entering the Army.

Also, I promise I will finish, this is a lecturer's disease [laughing] I love my modem! [singing sound]

He is thinking, "Oh my gosh I am going to have to go home with her and this is"

So, yes and then when we look at [inaudible 39:31] masculinities, we of course also have to remember that it's for the State.

When your BTS guys go home, they are not actually wearing makeup, they are probably just looking pretty normal, so, just bear that in mind too.

I am going to conclude now.

Beauty is then as I said at the start, ultimately in the "eye of the beholder or beer holder" in this room and that is because we experience our bodies and its aesthetics and what certain routines and fashions mean to us as highly individualistic, even when we all placed in a seemingly quite uniform beauty cultures.

Celebrities and media personalities, they are often exceptionally beautiful and good looking and because that's their job. That's what they are supposed to be like, that's what my Korean informants tell me.



When we look at the everyday context of beauty and attract them as ... they are actually quite age-specific and there is a lot of leeway, also in Korea, very much so, they are very age-specific, they are very gender-specific, they are very occupation-specific.

I don't look like a lecturer today, I am really anxious, I don't have my tweed jacket to feel smart.

Often, these are ideas are guided by social standing and aspirations of the person concerned, so, finally then, in case your beer goggles haven't quite clouded your self-perception and you are feeling terribly self-conscious here.

Remember that if you think you look pretty average, just remember that that's probably just perfect!
[laughing]

Thank you.

[clapping]

Scott Nicholls

Thank you so much, Jo. We have about thirty seconds left for questions [laughing] No, we actually have plenty of time left for questions.

So if you would like to ask Jo a question I have got the microphone, I will bring it over to you.

So, over to you.

Audience

I love the sound of my own voice too [laughing]

What is the most common cosmetic procedure in Korea, do you know?

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

Yes.

There are quite a few, it just depends ... you mean invasive or non-invasive?

I think we would do pretty much all the surgery as people are doing in Korea. It's just done differently.

I think the one that people talk most about is the Blepharoplasty, so it's the double eyelid surgery. It's quite simple surgery. It's done a lot here too.

There are different shapes, Koreans are very good at it, I can give you a little thing that you can look at different shapes of the eyes, that's one.

Rhinoplasty, your nose job is also done.



Interestingly Koreans didn't really used to do any breast enhancements as much. That has come just quite recently, so it's whether a K-pop image that's become a thing.

There have been also things invented. So, if you are asking about surgeries that we don't do here, there was at one point, when there was a bit of a downturn with cosmetic surgeons ... there is an area called Jinhae and Incheon in Seoul where most of the ... and [inaudible 43:12] obviously, where a lot of these clinics are and I was interviewing some surgeons and they were very cross about some of the others ... these bad surgeons ... there are good surgeons and bad surgeons and the bad surgeons were inventing surgery that the good surgeons ... I only spoke to good surgeons, didn't really agree with them. One of them was a "Joker smile", it was a kind of little dimple, you have this eternal friendly smile. If you went wrong, it was quite bad [laughing]

The good surgeons didn't really like it and the other one was the "sausage eye". It's this cute eye thing, you have heard of this. It was started by the TV guys, there is like a little sausage, almost, inserted underneath your eye, here and it was supposed to make you look cute! Again, if it went wrong, it was going to look a bit weird. [laughing]

There are also a lot of surgeries, reversed surgeries, but what happening now, which is really interesting, which is also reversing double eyelid surgery, so that has become a bit of a thing.

But now, there's a shift, emphasising East Asian, the eye has become a bit of a hit thing as well.

He wants to record your voice.

Audience

What about other body parts like bums? Do Koreans like big bums? [laughing]

A/Prof Joanna Elfvig-Hwang

It has not taken off quite as much, but there were, at one point, this was a really, not so good fad ... but this not happening very much anymore ... so because I am going around, crazy stuff happening in Korea ... there was a surgery that was called a "calf-thinning" surgery. Basically, that involved killing the end of one of your calf muscles which shrunk the muscle and then that gave you like a really thin calf.

The problem with that surgery was two-fold, one was if you had quite well endowed other bits of your body, and then very thin legs then it didn't look quite right. So you're ... like this ... if you are wearing ... so you can actually see ... or maybe I can just see because I am looking

That was a problem and then the second problem is can't walk up the stairs [laughing] because your muscle is dead, so that was really bad.

Those didn't really take off, get it? That well!



One of the main problems of the industry, both in Korean and here, here too, so just don't point at Korea and also in the UK and other places is that their industry itself, is very, very badly regulated, so we have a lot of problems in Australia as well.

We often hear of stories about people dying, having septic shocks and things.

Cosmetic surgery is the only surgery that you would have which is actually what they call, "medically counter indicated". So, you don't actually need it. If you have a heart attack and you need a double by-pass, you need it, you are going to have it but you don't need to have aesthetic cosmetic surgery, but you are going to live if don't have a rhinoplasty or something.

It is actually introducing a potential problem to your body so that's why it's a very special kind of surgery.

Sorry, I just completely just took over there. [laughing]

Scott Nicholls

Any other questions?

Audience

Hi.

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

Hello.

Audience

In the 80s and 90s when South Korea was really pushing its soft power with its K-drama and its K-pop, was beauty on the agenda? Did they intend to influence the world with their beauty and their ideas of beauty?

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

In the 80s?

In the 80s Korea wasn't really anywhere with the K-pop thing, that really started in the late 90s and then early 2000s. That came as a complete surprise!

If you read the government propaganda advertisement material, promotional material, it was "Yes" it was being planned. It actually came as a real surprise.

The big thing was supposed to be the film industry and then suddenly all of these K-dramas and things and K-pop started getting really big in South East Asia and then in China and then in Taiwan,



it was like “Oh my gosh, this is really good!” and people in Europe are like doing this ... and now it’s really big.

It actually then, the government started pushing the K-beauty idea, also when, dig this, everything is K- in Korea, it’s like K-special, Special K, K-food, K-pop, K-drama ... what am I leaving out, help me? ... Everything is K. K-beauty, K-food ... K is in everything ... K-design is there as well.

It was like a branding of the whole Korea thing.

Korea was the first and only country in the world to have a ministerial appointment for nation branding and that was part of it.

K-beauty was actually part of a much bigger portion ... to create new industries for South Korea as a nation, instead of doing things, like building cars and ships and things and it worked.

It's really amazing.

The only problem with that industry is that you can copy it quite easily.

The cosmetics industry is really difficult to stay competitive in, but in that respect that they are doing a pretty good job at the moment.

Its good stuff!

Scott Nicholls

Any more questions?

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

There's been one here, for a long time! Here! See, my teacher's eye.

Audience

This is more like a personal question but for your kids who are, I am guessing, bi-racial, how would they be perceived in Korea?

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

Well, research tells us that “mixed” kids are actually quite universally considered as more attractive in various context.

We don’t quite know why this is, sometimes these things ... think it is a bit of an idea that, in the same way as if you look attractive, we instinctively you are quite healthy, so the idea that there's no mixing of genes or something but they can't prove it, that’s there kind of thing.



How do they ... how are my kids perceived ... pretty well, would you say? Yes, my Son has got chased by girls, he was terrified. He ran into the car and cried. Oh my God, this is being recorded now. He will kill me. Sorry, Son!

Audience

My question is whenever I go to Asia, particularly my parents in China, all the cosmetics like the BB creams and so on, if it's got "Made in Korea" on it, its worth about three times the price of any of the local stuff, so I guess my question is, is there anything special about Korean makeup and Korean BB creams or am I just being sold a dud product?

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

Koreans are incredibly savvy with beauty products and they are very demanding customers. The industry itself is super developed. I went to one of the factories where they actually do all the testing and there is a lab but they didn't let me into the lab but I saw a lot of the production a days later, and how it all works.

There is a lot of emphasis on using natural things and there are apps in Korea where you can actually scan the product and if it has got anything that has been reported like hormones used or something like that, it's bad and then people won't buy it.

The consumers are actually quite powerful in Korea and they are really driving the industry. We should do the same here. Just like an app and got bad, a bit like what you can do with eggs, whether they are actually free ... we care more about chickens than we care about our faces, I think sometimes, it's true.

There are some people at the back.

Audience

Has it improved mental health outcomes for people in Korea or has it actually made things worse, given the quest to achieve beauty or has it made peoples mental health outcomes better or worse?

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

Has cosmetic surgery ...

Audience

Yes, cosmetic surgery.

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

... made people better or worse?

Audience



The mental health outcomes of young people who are striving to achieve?

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

Maybe not health outcomes so much, you mean people who have had surgery?

Audience

Mental health outcomes? Has it made it better or worse for people?

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

Thank you, great question.

In terms of health, if it's for health reasons, if the surgery is for health reasons, that's difficult to say, because there is no research.

There has been research done, however, on employment and surgery, so the idea that you have surgery and then that makes you more employable. They did actually a huge study with this one and I think they had 300,000 people that they surveyed and they found out that the difference was something like 0.3% better employment outcomes if you have had cosmetic surgery.

In terms of employability, it probably doesn't make a huge difference but for the individuals, if it goes well, it can have a huge boost for your self-confidence, so don't get me wrong, I am not here to talk cosmetic surgery, it can be wonderful, if it's done by a good surgeon and it's all ... find yourself a good surgeon and a very good aesthetician too.

Yes and No.

But there are many non-registered clinics in Korea too in the same way as we have had many here, where there have been some quite terrible health outcomes where the surgery has gone wrong, horribly.

Think of this quite big pendulum, is that okay?

Scott Nicholls

Have we got any more questions?

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

I think there was one at the back?

Scott Nicholls

At the back?



Audience

This question might be slightly off-topic, but can you explain the attraction of Mukbang and its connection for beauty? Given that it's grown in South Korea.

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

Is everyone familiar with this?

Muckbang?

It's the practice of watching someone eat online. It is quite popular, you should do it, really you should watch it, it's quite entertaining.

The practice itself, it may be not so much to do with beauty as such, but incredibly all of these Muckbang people who eat, sometimes live, the stream themselves eating noodles like [quick slurping sound] then go [ooooaah so good] they are really thin. Super thin, they seem to be really glamorous and eat whatever they like and they go [eating sounds] they are having chicken, someone loves chicken and beer, Chimek, Koreans call it like a Mekjuan chicken and they seem to be really thin but it's really about a lot of Koreans are very busy, but people are very social so you want to ... seeing someone sit alone and eating Korea is ... you are thinking "What's wrong with them?" ... "aah, they must be so sad?" You almost feel like you, it's weird when in live in Korea because you want to go and sit next to them and it's ... okay, do you want to eat with me?

That is like an online version of eating together but with somebody.

It's I kind of online mediation of closeness from distance. That sounded very complicated, does that make sense?

Scott Nicholls

I think we have got time for one more question.

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang

I think I have exhausted them.

Scott Nicholls

I feel like we could do this all night. [laughing]

Maybe will wrap it up now, Jo are you going to be hanging around for a little bit.

A/Prof Joanna Elfving-Hwang



The University has given me this which means I can go and have a drink and then you are going to look really pretty! [laughing]

Scott Nicholls

So, if you have a burning question then I am sure you can follow up with Jo afterwards.

On behalf of the University, I would like to thank you all for coming down tonight, I hope you really enjoyed Jo's talk, I know I did and I hope you learned something about the University and about Korean culture today as well.

We hope you have a good evening and we look forward to ... we would love to see you at a future event as well, so Good Night.

Thank you, Jo.

[clapping]