This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Au, A. (2023), Framing the Purchase of Human Goods: Cosmetic Surgery Consumption in Capitalist South Korea. Symbolic Interaction, 46: 72-93, which has been published in final form at https://doi.org/10.1002/symb.623. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions. This article may not be enhanced, enriched or otherwise transformed into a derivative work, without express permission from Wiley or by statutory rights under applicable legislation. Copyright notices must not be removed, obscured or modified. The article must be linked to Wiley's version of record on Wiley Online Library and any embedding, framing or otherwise making available the article or pages thereof by third parties from platforms, services and websites other than Wiley Online Library must be prohibited.

FRAMING THE PURCHASE OF HUMAN GOODS:

COSMETIC SURGERY CONSUMPTION IN CAPITALIST SOUTH KOREA

Anson Au[1]

Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Published in *Symbolic Interaction*

[1] Please direct correspondence to the Department of Applied Social Sciences, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Email: anson-ch.au@polyu.edu.hk

FRAMING THE PURCHASE OF HUMAN GOODS:
COSMETIC SURGERY CONSUMPTION IN CAPITALIST SOUTH KOREA

ABSTRACT

Sociological and cultural research on market participation has been preoccupied with creative markets and traditional labour markets, overlooking alternate types of markets, particularly those of human goods which have proliferated in Asia. This article analyzes South Korea's cosmetic surgery market to examine how and why consumers participate in markets of human goods on the micro-level vis-à-vis macro-level social structures in an advanced capitalist economy. This article theorizes two cognitive frames (normative conformity and competitive edge) that rationalize and which motivate surgical modifications as an alternative vehicle for financial and marital stability in response to macro-level economic challenges from the nation's developmental trajectory and cultural anxieties from its Confucian traditions about marriage.

Keywords: cosmetic surgery, frames, markets of human goods, South Korea

FRAMING THE PURCHASE OF HUMAN GOODS:
COSMETIC SURGERY CONSUMPTION IN CAPITALIST SOUTH KOREA

INTRODUCTION

There is a rich empirical literature on how actors participate in capitalist markets (for a comprehensive review, see Fligstein and Dauter 2007). Inspired by Bourdieu's (1986) *Distinction*, an important thrust in this work has been to demonstrate the profound connections between different types of resources that one possesses and acquires in pursuing upward mobility within markets (Cao and Nee 2000; Lin 2001:56). Numerous studies compare the labour market outcomes of those who obtain their jobs through personal contacts versus other means, producing rich theoretical conceptualizations of conversion pathways between social and economic capital through interpretive processes that orbit around the evaluation of social credentials (Granovetter 1985; Kmec et al. 2010; Rubineau and Fernandez 2015). Recent work advances the argument by documenting how such processes hold true in creative markets of musicians, models, and artists, showing how social capital, like knowing more actors in the core of a network, can yield better evaluations of one's social credentials according to institutional frameworks of sedimented meanings or field-specific norms (Godart and Mears 2009; Lizardo 2017).

But, most social scientific accounts of market participation have been preoccupied with creative markets and traditional labour markets in the West, overlooking alternate types of markets, particularly those of human goods which, characterized by the exchange of products originating in the human body, have grown rapidly over the past decade in Asia (Boas 2011; Healy 2010). Human goods are unique in the immediacy and magnitude of the bodily risk they pose to the people who partake in their consumption or production,[1] including the possibility of

losing important bodily functions, catching blood-related diseases, or even dying (Healy 2010). Additionally, such goods are bound up in an interpretive collapse of the interface between humans and objects (Tober 2001).

This article sheds important light on why participants are motivated to participate in this genre of risky activity, namely, markets of human goods on the micro-level. This article advances an empirical analysis of the cognitive frames used to participation in the cosmetic surgery market of South Korea, a growing neoliberal, capitalist economy in Asia,

Consumption among non-celebrity consumers has swept across the globe over the past ten years (Featherstone 2010; Gimlin 2007), but has grown most of all in the Asia-Pacific region, which has witnessed growth in cosmetic surgery ranging from to 200% to 500%, far outpacing Western counterparts (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery 2017). South Korea, however, exhibits the fastest growth and extremely gendered consumption where over thirty percent of women have had surgery (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012), making it an ideal case to examine the nuances of the upsurge in global consumption.

South Korea became a leading hub for surgery from the mid-2000s onwards, during its rise to prominence as a cultural exporter in the region (Jin 2007), following the creation/dissemination of a standardized, winning style of cultural production in Korean music and television production. During this time, cultural scholars noted the formation of a distinctly South Korean, pop, cultural identity that encourages cosmetic surgery by transforming male and female bodies into a metrosexual, feminized, objectified appearance that pop idols, almost all of whom have had surgery, represent (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012).

As a corollary, “beauty” in South Korea is not as subjectively interpretable as in Anglo-American cosmetic surgery markets (Featherstone 2010), but highly *standardized* in the

technical characteristics expected of bodies and faces, suggesting a state of cultural acceptance towards the cosmetic surgery market typical of mid-/later- phases of innovative adoption. Here, consumers converge in their stated bodily goals for undergoing surgery: smaller/slimmer face, larger eyes, thin double eyelids, high nose bridge, pointed nose tip, small alars (nostrils), larger breasts (for women), flawlessly tight skin, reduced cheekbones and jawbones, and thinner body frame—bodily images argued to originate in a mimesis of Western features and youthful fitness (Blum 2005:25; Elfving-Hwang 2016; Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012; Holliday et al. 2017).

The Korean market is an especially provocative case of the varieties of gains that actors seek in surgically modifying their bodies for aesthetic purposes in parallel markets around the world, its burgeoning success amidst a modern national trajectory of cultural power and economic development. High rates of cosmetic surgery, particularly among women, appear antithetical to the values of gender egalitarianism, personal autonomy, weaker conformity to authority, self-expression, and tolerance that one might expect to be much more strongly represented in advanced capitalist states. Even still, locals are participating at such high rates in the cosmetic surgery market, which is creating irreversibly "identical faces" at potentially great risk to health in South Korea (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012), one of the most advanced capitalist nations in the Asia-Pacific region. The rate of surgery is also disproportionately high among women than men, despite the fact that representations of idols in domestic pop culture are not disproportionately gendered to begin with (Holliday 2017). These qualities of the Korean market suggest that mass media influence, the primary explanandum for high surgery consumption rates (Featherstone 2010), is unsatisfactory by itself.

Based on participant observation in cosmetic surgery clinics from 2018 to 2019 and qualitative interviews with consumers in South Korea, this article interrogates how consumers

relationally develop frames to interpret and rationalize the purchase of cosmetic surgery on the micro-level and contribute to the growth and perpetuation of the cosmetic surgery market. In so doing, this article ultimately contributes to an existing theoretical discussion about markets in the social sciences, which has focused on inequality of economic and social capital (Lin 2001), by interrogating narratives of intention and success with cosmetic surgery to identify cognitive frames used to motivate the practice as a massifying type of human good and its potential impacts on life chances.

THE SOUTH KOREAN CONTEXT

The South Korean context is exceptional on a macro-level for the economic and cultural anxieties that have emerged out of its storied history of rapid modernization and Confucian values. First, the South Korean context is characterized by economic strains owing to its development trajectory from a bureaucratic-authoritarian state. This has created a modernization process fraught with *risk* for the country. A history of military rule during the late twentieth century destroyed the social fabric of civil society (Han 2001), generating long-term disequilibrium in the labour market and developmental strains in exchange for overall economic growth (Stubbs 2009). By 2018, the nation's unemployment rate had risen to 4.2%, an eight-year high. According to Statistics Korea (2018), this was both cause and result of a highly unstable minimum wage and labour-force participation rate that, over the past decade, has wildly oscillated such that cumulative job losses outpaced job creation. These instabilities, Han and Shim (2010) argue, later in collaboration with Ulrich Beck (2016), were the consequences of a push for rapid modernization from its bureaucratic-authoritarian origins that now fuels a sociocultural sense of risk unique and universal to civil society institutions in South Korea (see Han et al. 2016).

Second, familial traditions inform conceptualizations of the family to delineate gender roles, expectations, and rules for acceptable behaviors for its members (and locals at large) throughout the life course. The lynchpin of these expectations circle around marriage as a rite of passage—a fulfilment of obligations to one's heritage and family under the promise of continuing the family line (Au Forthcoming; Han and Shim 2010). Local traditions mandate that parents oversee their sexuality, whereby failure to marry is branded as the mark of defective social character for men and women alike. Within these traditions, women experience another level of disadvantage: unmarried women living alone "without parental protection… risk the derogatory reputation of having loose sexual morals" (Song 2010:132). Young, single women are constantly harassed for their single lifestyle and recommended potential partners by family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers (Song 2010). This suggests that the pressure to marry generates another set of social anxieties/risk not only born of submission to patriarchy, but of an obligation to enact familial piety and potential access to lifestyle choices and economic activities that are culturally prohibited without marriage, such as living independently (Chang and Song 2010).

Labor patterns from South Korea's development from a bureaucratic-authoritarian state into a rapidly modernizing one generated labour market and economic aftershocks that, combined with strong neo-Confucianist traditions that govern social institutions like the family, effect a unique type of social risk that East Asian sociologists have called the "triple mode of collision" of risk (Park and Han 2014)—risks typically only present in industrial and traditional societies that are paradoxically present in modern East Asian states like South Korea, spread out in diffuse parts of civil society (Zhang 2006; Liu 2009). This embedded sense of *social risk* is

what permits higher-level field logics (like the pressure to conform to authority and the need to satisfy demands for familial piety) to bleed into network interactions.

For instance, this potentially means that a scarcity of job opportunities and a competitive job market combine to exacerbate financial anxieties for locals that urge them into capitulating to cosmetic demands, which simultaneously gain freedom to introduce gatekeeping practices based on unofficial criteria (appearances) from both the cultural popularization of cosmetic surgery and a changing job market where the general supply of jobs has steadily become more valuable than that of labor. This is accentuated by South Korea's exceptional hiring policies that mandate the omission of education from resumes, wherein, despite being a meritocratic capitalist society, human capital, typically useful for upward mobility, plays a reduced role in actors' financial prospects, how accepted they feel amongst their peers, and the appeal of cosmetic surgery.

A FRAME ANALYSIS OF COSMETIC SURGERY MOTIVATIONS

Drawing on Goffman's (1974) frame analysis, I argue that micro-level meaning-making ascribed to bodies helps consumers make sense of the economic challenges and familial traditions unique to South Korean context. Meaning-making and economic challenges shape and embed action through frames.

Scholars largely understand frames as cognitive structures that shape the interpersonal production of meaning in action and thought, such as to serve as sources of identity-formation (Franceschet 2004; Johnston and Bauman 2007). Yet, as Myra Marx Ferree (2003, 2020; Ferree and Merrill 2000) evocatively suggests, frames are more than expressions of identity: they are ensconced in a relationship with ideology and discourse.

As a heuristic, Ferree depicts this tripartite relationship in the form of an inverted pyramid, whereby the top of the inverted pyramid is discourse, a "conflictual ideational realm"

(Johnston and Bauman 2007:171) that interlinks ideational concepts. This is the level at which contentious repertoires described in social movement studies exist. Below discourse is ideology, which is more evocative and implies a coherent system of related ideas that combine explanation with normative prescription (Ferree 2003; Ferree and Merrill 2000). At the bottom are frames, which are thus the distillation of the prescriptions of ideology, but comprise specific cognitive structures possessed—and advanced—by actors to shape interpretation and understanding of specific issues (Oliver and Johnston 2000).

The lynchpin determinant of the cognitive stabilization of micro-level frames, McAdam et al. (2001) posit, lies in their macro-level social structural context or "frequently recurring causal chains, sequences, and combinations of mechanisms . . . that operate identically or with great similarity across a variety of situations" (p.27). In similar fashion, I theorize that cognitive frames for cosmetic surgery are "situationally cued" by the macro-level economic and cultural anxieties unique to the South Korean context (DiMaggio 1997:265).

For Goffman, this situational cueing is facilitated by social structures on a higher level that exert influence on micro-level frames, like when social constructions of gender roles filter into women's everyday choices about and through which they infer meanings from observations of other women's actions in context (Goffman 1979:2; Oyserman 2009). Indeed, though such "pattern[s]… [are] not followed fully… [they] serve as a model, a detailed pattern to follow, a foundation for form" (Goffman 1974:41; c.f. Fine 1983; Torelli and Puddephatt 2020). So pressing and capillary are these myriad pressures that they buttress a single "definition of the situation," a single reality of urgency to seek alternative pathways to achieving instrumental capital gains; an impulse "upheld by active efforts, and defended against breakdowns and rival definitions" (Collins 2004:24) to make this shared reality effectively real for its participants and

transform the prospect of cosmetic surgery into a micro-interactional ritual with prospect for capital gains.

I delineate what I call *normative conformity* and *competitive edge* as two distinct frames that consumers use to cognize and which motivate cosmetic surgery as a vehicle for obtaining different types of capital gains in response the economic and cultural anxieties unique to the South Korean context.

Competitive edge is the frame through which consumers distinguish their bodies and themselves from others. This evaluation process breeds desire for distinction among actors, just like how firms and workers perpetually seek to carve out niche areas of expertise within bounded markets to obtain positive evaluations of their performance necessary for stable outcomes like profits (Podolny 2001; White 2008) and control over other relationships/resources (Burt 2005). Consumers strive to perform better and reap superior instrumental gains than others in real and imagined reference groups, which modified appearances can help achieve as informal indicators of symbolic capital (Wolkowitz 2006), an act that they perceive to improve their chances of impressing peers and prospective romantic partners as a means of upward mobility and obtaining economic capital.

Normative conformity is the frame through which consumers "normalize" their bodies and attitudes according to standards of appearance valorized by others. Here, what I refer to by "normalize" and "others" are not the practice of fixing bodily defects that detract from physical function (i.e., a cleft lip), but conforming one's appearance in accordance with beauty ideologies that valorize surgically modified bodies in mass media and which bleed into network interactions. The actionization of this frame draws upon cognizations of social capital, especially

romantic social capital, from the social approval they receive from their real and imagined reference groups.

I focus on the development and application of the two frames in one particular social space: peer groups. The specificities of the macro-level economic and cultural context of South Korea make this setting an especially poignant space where the perceived gains of cosmetic surgery pay off. In South Korea, social relations are embedded in a traditional networking culture called *yonggo* that valorizes a moral obligation to serve and seek out help from ties, so much that their personal reputation in their networks depends on how well they do so (Bian and Ikeda 2018). Peer groups are thus the site of evaluation where one's status is judged based on a preoccupation with conformity. Most importantly, this assignment is not sterile of cultural influences. Rather, cultural resources and identities that an individual possesses are determinants of upward mobility within them (Erickson 1996). Knowledge about music, whether one is gay, and how one appears are all latent ways for members of peer groups and workplaces to evaluate the worthiness of their counterparts (Au 2022; Cech and Waidzunas 2022), such that an improved reputation has accordingly been linked to higher wages and, conversely, a poorly evaluated identity like being physically unattractive can serve as the basis of discrimination.

METHODOLOGY

From 2018 to 2019, I conducted fieldwork within seven cosmetic surgery clinics in Seoul. These clinics varied in size, including larger clinics (which self-referred as hospitals, with at least five floors, run by multiple in-house physicians, each specialized for one type of procedure) to smaller clinics (typically two floors, with one to two in-house physicians responsible for all procedures). As a participant observer, I attended special promotion events and interacted with consumers in the clinics and took notes on consumer interactions with

clinicians (staff agents in the "front-end" of the clinic responsible for meeting consumers, connecting consumers to physicians, and effectively "selling" the procedures to consumers). In addition to forming my interview protocol, this fieldwork revealed how consumers developed their interest in cosmetic surgery.

During this time, I also conducted in-depth interviews with 32 cosmetic surgery consumers (7 men and 25 women), sampled with a non-random quota sampling scheme to better capture the gender proportions of consumers in the market at large (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012). This offered analytical leverage in understanding the differences between men and women to interrogate gender inequality within the cosmetic surgery market. All participants were middle- to upper-class (monthly income of about US$3600 upwards), since cosmetic surgeries requiring general anesthesia (US$5100 upwards) cost thrice the average monthly income (about US$1870). It can be inferred that participation in cosmetic surgery has some restriction based on class, but which is beyond the scope of this study—although it supports the connection to cosmetic surgery as an informal indicator of capital.

To build this sample, I worked with cosmetic surgery groups on online forums about cosmetic surgery to recruit participants who represented the widest differences in their social-biographical situations and networks and based in Seoul, home to the disproportionately highest rates of surgery in South Korea. To illustrate, according to a 2015 Korean Gallup poll data report, 36.7% of cosmetic surgeries took place in Gangnam-gu alone, an affluent district of Seoul (Korean Gallup 2015), making Seoul an ideal space to examine the workings of the social structures that uphold the nation's cosmetic surgery market. Interviews took 40-60 minutes. Participants included salespersons, accountants, university researchers, business managers, consultants, homemakers, and hairdressers.

I coded my transcripts and fieldnotes in a two-stage discourse analysis. In the first stage, I inductively identified important frames within subjective accounts of cosmetic surgery and the body, excavating evaluation processes or "presuppositions and attitudes" (Ang 1985:11; Charmaz 2001). In the second stage, I cross-compared codes about evaluative framing processes important to conceptualizations of cosmetic surgery in connection to different fields, parsing out the micro-level modes of market participation that cosmetic surgery represented and situated within macro-level social structures in South Korea. Iterative between theory and data, my analysis of transcripts and codes took place against the backdrop of Goffmanian frame analysis, ultimately developing tertiary codes that form the cognitive framing of cosmetic surgery on the micro-level.

COMPETITIVE EDGE: MARRIAGE, ECONOMIC CAPITAL, AND FINANCIAL STABILITY

Competitive edge invokes an evaluation process rooted in a desire to resolve social anxieties derivative of macro-level forces like unemployment and familial cultural traditions, giving rise to the cognization of marriage as an interpretive, unconventional vehicle for attaining economic capital.

Face-to-face interactions were transformative moments in evaluations of cosmetic surgery and when surgically modified bodies and faces first gain their capital. Observing cosmetic surgery consumers being rewarded by romantic pursuits in social groups were the *turning points* for many consumer participants, who then (re)evaluated the body as a form of "capital" with generative potential for marriage and upward mobility.

Seol, a 28-year-old woman working as a consultant, depicts an appearance bias as the originating motive for cosmetic surgery when describing its ability to endow consumers with distinction and advantage:

> Seol: Nowadays, beautiful girls in society are more likely to be respected by everyone or get jobs. And in general, if you are good looking, you will get preferential treatment. That's why cosmetic surgery is so common. Everyone is striving to appear perfect and better than others.
>
> Interviewer: How did you come to believe this?
>
> Seol: Well, I first thought about it when I saw the show *Let Me In* [a show tracing people's physical transformations before and after cosmetic surgery], but it was really my girlfriends who helped me become decisive. First one of my best girlfriends in our university friend group got rhinoplasty and eye enlargement surgeries. Her nose was so straight and tiny, and her eyes were so big! Everyone in our group said she looked like a pop star. My other friends got really inspired by that and ended up getting surgery in the same year. It took me about one or two more years before I decided to do my eyes and nose as well.
>
> Interviewer: What was the greatest benefit of doing so, if any?
>
> Seol: I would say it was meeting my boyfriend [laughs]. Some of my friends got actually got promotions at work by impressing their managers, who were men. I didn't get any [laughs], but I did impress my boyfriend, who was a friend of a friend at first. I didn't get financial benefit from work, but I did in a way from my boyfriend, who takes really good care of me. We stay at his place near Jongno-gu

> and I don't pay any rent. We buy each other things, but he does buy more stuff for me than I do him.

For Seol, cosmetic surgery helped her conform to growing peer-group pressures toward the economic decision of purchasing surgery as well as the aesthetic beautification they demanded, within a reference group she was deeply embedded in (her university friend group). This prompted her to view the decision and the peer-group pressure positively, framing the surgery as a competitive edge in her ascertainment of romantic and financial stability.

In connection to a latent sense of appearance bias, cosmetic surgery consumers viewed beautiful bodies and faces as a means of obtaining marriage. For some, marriage was a form of upward mobility, such as through investment and promotion potential, but for all, it was the preservation of their class standing by satisfying economic anxieties by maintaining their standing in their reference groups.[2]

Nearly all consumers corroborated this account, crediting their own interest in cosmetic surgery to *competitive edge* in terms of acceding to ritualistic demands for economic stability, which they observed and gleaned legitimation for from first- and second-hand accounts. This was an important area where the competitive-edge frame embedded rationalization through an *anticipatory socialization* that emerged from interactions that shaped consumers' projections of their life course, creating (a) the assumption of an inherent financial deprivation that demanded remedy with (b) maximizing—and stabilizing—one's income through marriage. Similar to how women are harassed if they are single (Song 2010), for instance, participants were better evaluated by peers in their workplaces and romantic lives if they were married, creating a sense of stability that, even if did not lead to outright raises, helped protect their present class positions.

Here, gender roles and expectations defined by familial traditions blended with economic anxieties to generate gendered experiences of inequality and rationalizations of cosmetic surgery.

One way the competitive edge frame in marital prospects was connoted among consumers was through its perceived improvements to *income and investment potential*. Min, a 23-year-old Korean woman and a recent university graduate, recounts how interactions with her parents comprised a part of this socialization:

> When I turned eighteen and graduated high school, my parents gave me a large sum of money. They told me "either you use this money to attend college or get plastic surgery, become beautiful, and marry a rich man."

From her quote, we observe how financial and familial cultural pressures are two parts of the same anxiety that cosmetic surgery helped to ease. Ultimately, she decided to pursue her education, but also underwent procedures throughout her time in college. Despite deviating from the binary laid out by her parents, what remained was a sense of social anxiety about her ability to attain financial stability and to purchase property that created an embodied self-discipline. She explained:

> I couldn't just risk it, you know. An education will help me get a better job, so it is a source of [financial] stability… But I also want to make sure I am secure in every way possible. Getting married will help because you'd have *two salaries* instead of one in the household [laughs]. You can't buy a house by yourself nowadays. You *need someone to help you.* And only someone beautiful could attract someone to get married.

Min's insights were echoed by other participants, many of whom still lived with their families and could not afford to move out. Consumers all brought up that in South Korea, metropolitan

areas are among the world's most populated and housing prices have skyrocketed (Jeon 2019). Thus, getting married offered a way for locals to increase their property purchasing power, particularly for women. Women frequently reported that they earned less than their male counterparts, a pattern that remains true for roles across primary and secondary labor markets and corroborated by recent city-level analyses of the gender wage gap (appearing in every sector) in Seoul (Lim et al. 2015).

Like Seol, Min identified financial benefits from her cosmetic surgery, a rhinoplasty and double eyelid surgery, through her encounter with her boyfriend. In her words,

> I eventually got the dual income [laughs]. My boyfriend and I live together and we share in expenses, so I save a lot maybe twice more than what I did before. It's been a year that we've been together now and he says he loves me for more than my appearance, but who doesn't love beauty? He saw my pictures through Instagram first, so it was my appearance that caught his eye anyway. And I noticed early on that his ex[-girlfriend] before, who didn't have surgery, I sound mean, but she isn't as pretty as me."

Min's interactions with her boyfriend and his ex-girlfriend within a triadic group as well as the rewards of partnering with him informed her framing of surgery as a competitive edge in her ability to relieve her financial anxieties through romantic achievement. Her vivid contrast between his boyfriend's ex-girlfriend as someone who did not purchase cosmetic surgery and herself was especially poignant as a "social motivation" for consuming surgery by charging her with an "intensity of motivation" for stability (Collins 2004:xv).

Additionally, Min's framing invoked a Goffmanian natural framework (1974:22) where the difference in outcomes cast between herself and her boyfriend's ex-girlfriend, the fact that Min was the one who successfully partnered with her boyfriend whereas his ex-girlfriend had

failed, was naturalized as a matter of aesthetic differences owing to cosmetic surgery. It was not that she blamed his ex-girlfriend for failing to obtain cosmetic surgery. Rather, there was in Min's cognitive framing an index that matched beauty to social attractiveness, where superior beauty equated to greater attention. Min's successful partnership was simply a greater reward that she was owed for choosing to attain a higher level of beauty through cosmetic surgery.

Although recasting romance as a means of income appears to be an unorthodox evaluation, it is what empowered this frame as a method of distinguishing oneself—empowering the frame of competitive edge as it became socialized as a strategy for financial improvement. This study shows how variegated sources of interaction realize macro-level economic strains from South Korea's rapid, capitalist modernization (a high unemployment rate, rising costs of goods and services, wage stagnation) to anticipatorily socialize consumers to experience financial strains and strive for beauty through cosmetic surgery—an embodied discipline evoked that is not "externally imposed onto bodies, but operates through the embodied actions of free subjects—often by exercising choice in the market… operat[ing] at the level of emotion, as structural problems are individualized as private burdens felt in everyday life" (Cairns and Johnston 2015:2).

Indeed, another interrelated way the competitive edge frame was sustained was through *satisfying gendered expectations of marital roles* outlined by South Korean familial traditions in connection to income. For Korean women, this surfaced in the consistent references to the need to appease their husbands, reflective of gender biases of assumptions that women succeed less than men. While this is in line with Western scholarship on cosmetic surgery as a sign of women's subjection to patriarchy (Bordo 2000; Davis 2003), my findings suggest that Korean *men* were privy to mounting pressure to undergo surgery as well for the connections they

believed to have with instrumental gains in a wide range of fields. As Choi, a 29-year-old man working as a salesman, recounts:

> The pressure is just too great. Jobs are so hard to find now though. So I'm now considering cosmetic surgery. It used to be something for women, but I recently noticed how other men are better looking. Some men are even putting on make-up. I'm not gay. It's just about being good-looking, especially in Korea. It may get you a better job, spouse, [health]care, etc… [if] you're extra alluring.

Choi's account reflects how growing proportions of men undergo some form of aesthetic surgery in South Korea (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012). Like what have been called *kkonminam* ("flower-like men"), we observe how images of masculinity that Choi believes are valorized are being reordered from hyperbolic militarized men into emotive metrosexuality (Elfving-Hwang 2011). Just as important, Min and Choi show how constructions of cosmetic surgery are folded into these shifting images vis-à-vis local cultural influences.

Choi alludes here that masculinity is not characterized by a static image, but by its implications for "get[ting]… a… job, spouse…" resonating with the social anxieties of cultural acceptance per tradition and of financial security in the modern Korean state (Han and Shim 2010). In this way, men subordinate *themselves* to the control of the cosmetic surgery industry (Gimlin 2002:131) and simultaneously reinforce the subordinate position of *women* by rendering them dependent on men for upward mobility, like having "[a man] to help you [move out]" (Min), and objectifying them into symbols to enhance men's status, such as being "…a *better* spouse" (Choi), implicitly suggesting status differences that erode women's agency (Gimlin 2007). Indeed, the popularity of cosmetic surgery apparently spilling over the gender divide does not signal gender equality, but the repercussions of South Korean social anxieties about

competition and a wide-reaching appearance bias that participants believed the growing industry of cosmetic surgery alone could satisfy—both of which, as this and the next section demonstrate, reproduces disproportionate pressures—and outcomes—for women.

NORMATIVE CONFORMITY: ROMANCE, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND RITUAL

Normative conformity invokes an evaluation process concerning consumers' social identities as they navigate social and symbolic boundaries. This section articulates the various social identifications that consumers used to valorize and rationalize cosmetic surgery as a means to generate romantic social capital and the wealth of social relationships (strengthening, forming, and maintaining ties) they believed they would acquire as a result.

Romantic social capital here has more to do with romantic appeal or the general ability to obtain a romantic relationship. It is thus similar to the previous frame in that it offers reprieve from macro-level anxieties, but here, it is ideated first and foremost as a kind of social capital, because valorizations of cosmetic surgery related to this frame were rooted in the satisfaction of marital rituals ordained by familial traditions. Put differently, romantic social capital was the satisfaction of cultural anxieties for their own sake. Accordingly, the relationality of romance and rituals was an important area where this conversion was most felt amongst consumers, especially given that network ties are normatively sustained by expectations of the sanctions and rewards that other members of the network confer to one another (Plickert, Cote, and Wellman 2007). Implicated is how romantic ties interweave with personal characteristics, like norms and roles, and emotional investment to create and sustain norms of (group) behavior (Miller and Darlington 2002).

Consumers spoke at length about *marital achievement* and *maintenance*, an important core of their rationalizations and valorizations of cosmetic surgery. These conceptualizations of

marriage as a ritual were gendered and inspired by South Korean familial expectations for where marriage figured into the life course.

Jung, a 30-year-old woman, calls attention to themes of gender inequality and instrumentality in describing her ideations of *marital achievement* as:

> Men love beautiful women. Tall and handsome men naturally look for beautiful girls. Men who are not tall or handsome will try their best to make a successful career and attract beautiful women that way. A woman who is not good-looking really has a hard time meeting a good man. In the end, she usually makes do with a mediocre man. When people go to parties and bars, they always try to chat up beautiful girls, but even then, many beautiful girls are ignored… so you must be the most beautiful.

Like Min, Jung naturalized differences in romantic outcomes to a matter of one's beauty. But unlike Min, the procedures that Jung received were fewer and not as extensive, neither was she partnered at the time of the interview. The two facts, in her view, were related and naturalized. In her framing of cosmetic surgery and its latent beauty ideology, Jung believed her singlehood was an "undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, 'purely physical'" (Goffman 1974:22) result of her lack of attractiveness, which, in turn, was because she did not purchase sufficient cosmetic surgery.

Even when pushed to reflect on women who did purchase surgery, Jung advances the same narrative: that women failing to procure attention from men, even after receiving cosmetic surgery, was not grounds for assigning moral blame to men or women, but merely the result of a natural stratification owing to surgically-produced attractiveness. Within her natural frame, the body "retains its capacity as a natural, causal force, but not as

an intentioned, social one" (Goffman 1974:32), such that if women are still ignored after receiving surgery, it means they need more of it.

Jung's quote also sensitizes us to the latent gendered scrutiny that women experience relative to men. Echoing assumptions of subordination among women manifest in the rationalization of marital prospect as means for economic gain, she offers an important lead into observing the gendered expectations of marriage imposed on women by South Korean familial traditions. Among consumers, this was an important source of motivation for cosmetic surgery, underscoring the positive social benefits of "being beautiful" through surgical modification in terms of the ability to meet new people. Geon, a 33-year-old man who worked as a hairdresser, described how:

> Everyone will love you and want to make friends with you [if you're beautiful]… Like, having a *beautiful friend* will look good for you too… it will also help enhance your image.

Like how market actors pick up on cues to make inferences about the quality of others' positional resources, participant accounts show that cosmetic surgery itself and the mere fact of having contacts who have undergone cosmetic surgery ("having a beautiful friend") convey interpretive cues about the social credentials that a consumer possesses, which is conducive to forming new ties (Lin 2001:20).

Participants experience the boons of cosmetic surgery for marital achievement, according to Woo, a 31-year-old man who worked as a business manager, as flows of positive attention after undergoing cosmetic surgery:

> Few friends invited me to a party before I had cosmetic surgery, and I couldn't get to work in my favorite position, [but now I can] so I thought it was a successful

> choice. I met more people at parties and some of them I went out for dinner with. This was not possible without [cosmetic surgery].

Like Seol and Min, Woo framed the benefits he received by way of invitations to participate in social activities after his decision to undergo cosmetic surgery to the decision itself, but emphasized the added sociality he experienced as an end rather than as a means. That is, like Geon, Woo had successfully conformed into a social group (cosmetic surgery consumers) to become the "beautiful friend," facilitating the accumulation of privilege through enhancing prospects of meeting new potential romantic partners.

Although men corroborated the fear of not acquiring a marriage, they did not report what women reported as the *risk of marital loss,* a perpetually looming risk that demanded continual, active resistance by "beautifying themselves." This evaluation of marital risk was implicated in the process of *marital maintenance*, described as the *lifelong* process of sustaining a marriage.

Ji-yeon, a 33-year-old woman who was a homemaker, made sense of cosmetic surgery as means to keep her marriage by adorning her body with a youthful appearance:

> Cosmetic surgery makes me beautiful… [so] my husband loves me more and my family is more harmonious. What I mean by harmonious is… I don't want him to cheat. He may want to find someone younger and prettier later on, so I have to keep myself that way, like Ham So-won [laughs].[3]

Ji-yeon's desire to satisfy her husband, also corroborated by other participants, was more than simple subjection to patriarchy. Rather than a case of the highly-subjectified surrender of women's bodies to representations of men's desires that Bordo describes (2000:276; Blum 2005:26), participants' efforts to placate their spouses were bound up in a desire to

satisfy marital expectations per familial traditions. Specific to women, anxieties about romantic prospects were intensified by an emphasis on a perpetual risk of romantic loss even after marriage.[4]

Similar to Min, Ji-yeon's framing of cosmetic surgery relied on a naturalization of beauty and the benefits of cosmetic surgery. For Ji-yeon, who was older than Min, beauty and attractiveness were naturally ordered on a similar index to Min's, but she additionally conceived of the degradation of beauty as not the result of some "willful agency causally and intentionally interfering," but a naturally "purely physical" (Goffman 1974:22) process that was only reversable with cosmetic surgery. The same way she attracted her husband sufficiently to marry him as a reward for elevating her beauty through cosmetic surgery, so too would the failure to keep up with additional procedures result in her partnership being stripped away.

These quotes show the valorization of surgically modified faces and bodies as the contingency for securing romantic appeal enough to attract men towards the prospect of marriage. Furthermore, they showcase how marriage itself was rationalized as a tool for liberation from economic as much as cultural anxieties, glimpsing again the dynamical imbrication of competitive edge and normative conformity. But where conformity appeared for the sake of competition in the drive for economic capital, we witness the reverse here in the reach for social capital: how competition is done for the sake of conformity.

Within an imagined romantic/dating market made ever more competitive by a growing cosmetic surgery market that "beautified" more and more competitors, the risk of marital loss and the desire for distinction among interpretive accounts surpassed marital rituals as *a priori* objectives. Instead, there is a focus on the conformity that marriage provides in satisfying

expectations laid unto actors by their families. Hence, the valorization of cosmetic surgery derived from its rationalization as a means for satisfying marital expectations—and avoiding the sanctions that enforced it.

Chung-ah recounts:

> I wanted to be sexier, which would make me more confident. My mom… wants me to be more beautiful as well… and marry a nice guy. If I didn't… my family wouldn't be happy, since everyone I know is getting married already by 30. I know my cousin did not marry for a while [her cousin was 30]. Her mother and mine kept talking about it.

Her account makes visible the sanctions invoked when conformity to marital expectations of a heterosexual, nuclear family in South Korea, circling around the stigmatization as a defective character not only for the individual in question, but for the entire family, who are branded abnormal for raising an "unmarriable" child by kinship ties—a process catalyzed in dense East Asian networks where information spreads quickly (Lai and Wong 2002).

This discussion does not suggest that the normative conformity frame is absent in its manifestation in financial-marital motivations, but that insofar as both these areas are concerned, one frame (conformity) is for the purpose of obtaining the other (competitive edge). As participants explained, conformity was aimed at becoming one of the "privileged" in the interwoven arenas of bodily appearance to distinguish themselves.

DISCUSSION: THE VALUATION OF HUMAN GOODS

This article contributes to the literature on markets by offering a rare glimpse into why people participate in markets of human goods and how this participation is structured and perpetuated in an advanced capitalist society in Asia. Using Goffman's frame analysis, this study

has demonstrated how participants rationalize the decision to purchase cosmetic surgery through two cognitive frames—competitive edge and normative conformity—about financial and marital stability in response to the macro-level economic and cultural anxieties of the South Korean context.

The two frames bridge the macro-level economic and cultural context of South Korea with micro-level cognitive interpretations of cosmetic surgery. Like Durkheim's "precontractual solidarity," the two frames—cognizations of the capital rewards of cosmetic surgery out of rational self-interest—are normative interpretations born of precontractual elements of a moral social order, a prior framework of values that established the rules within which these frames were ideated (Durkheim 1964; Collins 2004:143–144).

In the South Korean context, this framework of values constituted pursuit of financial and marital stability, in response to a unique breed of existential anxiety rooted in economic disenfranchisement due to an unstable labor market and marital precarity with respect to satisfying stringent ritualistic expectations imposed by familial traditions. Though the two frames are not a *bona fide* Durkheimian ritual, the relational encounter with reference groups that is fundamental to their development nonetheless provides "the basis for a situation of social trust and shared symbolic meanings through which economic exchanges can be carried out" (Collins 2004:41). It emerges that the human goods market resembles a material market where the intensity of motivation for capital, financial and marital stability, determined by social motivation thus drives the motivation to consume in the market (Collins 2004:xv; Gimlin 2007; Twigg 2006; Wolkowitz 2006).

These two frames adopt the qualities of Goffman's (1974:22) natural frames that "identify occurrences seen as undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, 'purely physical.'"

Put differently, referents within natural frames are ontologically and morally naturalized as a matter of fact. Torelli and Puddephatt (2022) go further in their qualitative study of caseworkers in a homeless shelter to illustrate the invocation of natural frames as a way to rationalize relational conflicts in their "dirty work." They find that caseworkers excuse aggressive client behavior with the acknowledgment that "it was not 'the caseworker' that the client was upset with, but the 'system,'" (p.324) theorized as the Goffmanian (1974) use of natural frames to justify behavior in place of "social" frames that assign moral responsibility. It is important to recognize that what makes frames natural is not that social conflicts do not exist, but that they reclassify such conflicts and distinctions into natural phenomena and absolve actors of moral blame.

In similar fashion, frames about cosmetic surgery are natural as their latent beauty ideology is naturalized as a universal impulse: that people are naturally attracted to beauty and cosmetic surgery, in providing beauty, will make people more desirable. Moreover, the two frames about cosmetic surgery reflect on social distinctions in relations to naturalize the difference between not having cosmetic surgery and having cosmetic surgery and assigning superior value to the latter as a fact.

The nation's developmental trajectory and its Confucian traditions about marriage combine to exert a sense of insecurity that offer a precontractual cultural scaffolding for micro-level cognizations of cosmetic surgery as an alternative pathway to the pursuit of security (Durkheim 1964; Collins 2004:143–144). The relational nature of this pursuit, bound up in reference groups, provide the "symbolic meanings through which economic exchanges can be carried out" (Collins 2004:41) and an intensity of motivation for instrumental gains and the purchase of cosmetic surgery (Collins 2004:xv; Gimlin 2007; Twigg 2006; Wolkowitz 2006).

Thus, using the cosmetic surgery market in South Korea, this study offers an important launching point for studying participation in markets of human goods in general and advances our sociological understanding of this burgeoning type of market in Asia.

Though South Korea is unique in the massified scale of its cosmetic surgery market and Confucian cultural norms, its underlying macro-level social structures (economic and marital anxieties) that precipitate the two cognitive frames toward cosmetic surgery are not. Catherine Hakim (2021, 2011) predicts in *Erotic Capital* that "as we get richer, things like cosmetic surgery will become more common… in the past, there was a law in Britain that allowed a man to divorce a wife if she used artificial means to make herself more attractive. This was lipstick… today we treat lipstick as a completely standard routine, an obvious bit of makeup, and… in the years to come, cosmetic surgery will be treated in the same way." Complementing Hakim's attention to the economic means (e.g. affordability) as a motivator for cosmetic surgery, the present article shows that economic strains can also motivate it as an alternative vehicle for upward mobility. The case of South Korea—and appreciating the bridge between macro-level social structures and micro-level interpretation through cognitive frames—thus shows that, in an age of growing global inequality, the prominence of economic strains (coupled with growing affordability as Hakim (2021) describes) may be followed by greater interest in cosmetic surgery in countries worldwide as it was in Korea.

The valuation of bodies is distinct from traditional forms of capital for the collective interpretive shift it represents with human goods, following a trajectory that builds upon yet transforms that prominently outlined of markets of human goods by Zelizer (1985) in *Pricing the Priceless Child*. Opposite to what Zelizer (1985) calls *sacralization*, wherein sentimental value is inscribed into "economically useless" entities like children, the popularization of participation in

markets of human goods depicts what I call *instrumentalization*, a category of valuation that transforms objects of sentimental value into measurable quantities of economic value and reconceptualizes their inherent worth in terms of this possibility. The valuation process embodied in instrumentalization asserted here, how human goods gain economic value showcases a socially structured context (a market) where motivation and action are converged towards one outcome (instrumental gain).

This article further contributes to this literature by showing how, thriving on the cognitive frames developed in peer groups, instrumentalization as a shift in the valuation of human goods uniquely replicates a type of market where individuals work towards their own exploitation. Consumers participating in the massifying South Korean cosmetic surgery market cognitively justify financial investment in surgery with potential differences in life chances and social distinctions between who are surgically modified and those who are not. By the same token, cosmetic surgery is a site of class inequality and, more importantly, its reproduction. Indeed, the latent appearance bias reported by participants, to which cosmetic surgery is a complex, institutionalized response, erects another barrier for the low-class who are unable to afford cosmetic surgery, compared to the middle- and upper-classes. Furthermore, for individuals in more financially precarious circumstances, such as Min, the pressure to purchase cosmetic surgery to resolve cultural and economic anxieties is also the decision to divert precious financial resources from attaining other human rights, like education.

This conundrum, more grossly represented among women, is anchored in symbolic gains which, like recent work on self-exploitation in labor markets (Mears 2015), stimulate greater interpersonal evaluations of oneself in hopes of gaining opportunities for upward mobility. For women entering the cosmetic surgery market in South Korea, the significance of these symbolic

gains is pronounced per gendered social risks of ostracization for marital rituals that men are exempt from and for whom these rituals are contingent gateways to lifestyle independence.

This article opens dialogue on the conceptual utility of competitive edge and normative conformity as Goffmanian frames for understanding how people rationalize the pursuit of risky, potentially life-threatening activities. Cosmetic surgery is substantively emblematic of rapidly growing markets of human goods, but defined by a kind of risk-taking that is exhibited in a plethora of social situations, such as poker players (Vines and Linders 2016), disease management in patients (Pilnick and Zayts 2014), and undocumented migrants (Cabaniss and Shay 2020). The frames identified in this study facilitate the cross-comparison of this range of cases within the genre of risky activities in future interactionist research.

Additionally, this article contributes to future interactionist studies by demonstrating the utility of frames for bridging macro-level forces like poor economic development and instability in the labor market and micro-level interpretive mechanisms and interactions in peer groups. Though micro-level work lies at the heart of interactionist analysis, macro-level contexts that scaffold social structures are, as Goffman notes, "core matters of sociology" (1974:xvi). Goffman wrote humbly of his work, that "I personally hold society to be first in every way and any individual's current involvements to be second; this report deals only with matters that are second," (1974:xvi) partly as a way of blunting criticisms that he did not pay much attention to social structures like stratification. In claiming that frames were a way of interrogating only the structure of experience individuals have at moments in their social lives, "current involvements" that were only "second" in importance, he expressed reluctance at the possibility of integrating macro-level phenomena with the micro-order. This study opens dialogue on this possibility and

the ways that it can affect life chances, a connection that future studies may push further than I have in examining various types of risk inherent in different macro-level scenarios.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Lisa-Jo van den Scott, two anonymous reviewers at *Symbolic Interaction*, Angelina Grigoryeva, Elise Paradis, and Sida Liu for comments on earlier versions of this paper. This research was partly funded by Globalinks Research Award from Mitacs (Grant No. IT10594).

BIOGRAPHY

Anson Au is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Department of Applied Social Sciences in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research centers on economic sociology, digitalization, networks, and professions and organizations, with a regional focus on East Asia.

REFERENCES

Ang, Ien. 1985. *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination.* London: Menthuen.

Au, Anson. 2022. "Network Discrimination among LGBTQ Minorities in Taiwan after Same-Sex Marriage Legalization: A Goffmanian Micro-sociological Approach." *Critical Asian Studies* (Online First). DOI: 10.1080/14672715.2022.2100803

Au, Anson. Forthcoming. *Mental Health in East Asia: Cultural Beliefs, Social Networks, and Mental Health Experiences*. London: Routledge.

Beck, Ulrich. 2016. "Varieties of Second Modernity and the Cosmopolitan Vision." *Theory, Culture & Society* 33(7–8):257–270.

Bian, Yanjie, and Ken'ichi Ikeda. 2018. "East Asian Social Networks." Pp. 679-701 in R. Alhajj & J. Rokne (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Social Network Analysis and Mining. 2nd Ed*. New York: Springer.

Block, Fred, and Peter Evans. 2005. "The State and the Economy." Pp.505–26 in N. Smelser and R. Swedberg (eds), *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Blum, Victoria. 2005. *Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Boas, Hagai. 2011. "Where Do Human Organs Come From? Trends of Generalized and Restricted Altruism in Organ Donations." *Social Science & Medicine* 73(9):1378–1385.

Bordo, Susan. 2000. *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private*. London: Macmillan.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. “The Forms of Capital.” Pp.241–58 in J. Richardson (ed). *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Burt, Ronald. 2005. *Brokerage and Closure*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cabaniss, Emily R., and Heather Shay. 2021. “‘We Share Our Stories and Risk Losing It All:’ Activist-Storytelling as Edgework in the Undocumented Youth Movement.” *Symbolic Interaction* 44(2):292–309.

Cairns, Kate, and Josee Johnston. 2015. “Choosing Health: Embodied Neoliberalism, Postfeminism, and the ‘Do-Diet.’” *Theory & Society* 44(2):153–175.

Cao, Yang, and Victor Nee. 2000. “Comment: Controversies and Evidence in the Market Transition Debate.” *American Journal of Sociology* 105(4):1175–1189.

Cech, Erin A., and Tom Waidzunas. 2022. “LGBTQ@ NASA and Beyond: Work Structure and Workplace Inequality among LGBTQ STEM Professionals.” *Work and Occupations* 49(2):187–228.

Chan, Cheris. 2009. “Invigorating the Content in Social Embeddedness: An Ethnography of Life Insurance Transactions in China.” *American Journal of Sociology* 115(3):712–754.

Chang, Kyung-Sup, and Min-Young Song. 2010. “The Stranded Individualizer Under Compressed Modernity: South Korean Women in Individualization Without Individualism.” *British Journal of Sociology* 61(3):540–65.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2001. “Grounded Theory.” Pp.335–52 in R. Emerson (ed.), *Contemporary Field Research*. Prospect Heights: Waveland.

Coleman, James. 1988. “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital.” *American Journal of Sociology* 94:S95–S120.

Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Davis, Kathy. 2003. *Dubious Equalities and Embodied Differences: Cultural Studies on Cosmetic Surgery.* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Durkheim, Emile. 1964[1893]. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Trans. George Simpson. New York: Free Press.

Elfving-Hwang, Joanna. 2016. "Old, Down and Out? Appearance, Body Work and Positive Ageing among Elderly South Korean Women." *Journal of Aging Studies* 38:6–15.

Erickson, Bonnie H. 1996. "Culture, Class, and Connections." *American Journal of Sociology* 102(1):217–251.

Featherstone, Mike. 2010. "Body, Image, and Affect in Consumer Culture." *Body & Society* 16(1):193–221.

Ferree, Myra M. 2003. "Resonance and Radicalism: Feminist Framing in the Abortion Debates of the United States and Germany." *American Journal of Sociology* 109(2):304–344.

Ferree, Myra M., and David A Merill. 2000. "Hot Movements, Cold Cognition: Thinking about Social Movements in Gendered Frames." *Contemporary Sociology* 29(3):454–462.

Ferree, Myra M. 2020. "The Crisis of Masculinity for Gendered Democracies: Before, During, and After Trump." *Sociological Forum* 35:898–917.

Fine, Gary A. 1983. *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fleming, Peter. 2007. "Sexuality, Power and Resistance in the Workplace." *Organization Studies* 28(2):239–256.

Fligstein, Neil, and Luke Dauter. 2007. "The Sociology of Markets." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:105–128.

Franceschet, Susan. 2004. “Explaining Social Movement Outcomes: Collective Action Frames and Strategic Choices in First- and Second-Wave Feminism in Chile.” *Comparative Political Studies* 37(5):499–530.

Gimlin, Debra. 2002. *Body Work: Beauty and Self-Image in American Culture*. Thousand Oaks: University of California Press.

Gimlin, Debra. 2007. “Accounting for Cosmetic Surgery in the USA and Great Britain: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Women.” *Body & Society* 13(1):41–60.

Godart, Frederic, and Ashley Mears. 2009. “How Do Cultural Producers Make Creative Decisions? Lessons from the Catwalk.” *Social Forces* 88(2):671–692.

Goffman, Erving. [1974] 1986. Fr*ame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1979. *Gender Advertisements*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Granovetter, Mark. 1985. “Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness.” *American Journal of Sociology* 91(3):481–510.

Hakim, Catherine. 2011. *Erotic Capital: The Power of Attraction in the Boardroom and the Bedroom*. New York: Basic Books.

Hakim, Catherine. 2018. *Models of the Family in Modern Societies: Ideals and Realities*. London: Routledge.

Hakim, Catherine. 2021. *Erotic Capital*: Interview with Brian Combie [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF1Bbb_QX-s&t=810s&ab_channel=BrianCrombie

Han, Sang-jin. 2001. “Modernization and the Rise of Civil Society: The Role of the Middling Grassroots for Democratization in Korea.” *Human Studies* 24(1–2):113–32.

Han, Sang-jin, and Young-Hee Shim. 2010. “Redefining Second Modernity for East Asia: A Critical Assessment.” *The British Journal of Sociology* 61(3):465–488.

Han, Sang-jin, Young-Hee Shim, and Young-Do Park. 2016. “Cosmopolitan Sociology and Confucian Worldview: Beck’s Theory in East Asia.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 33(7–8):281–290.

Healy, Kieran. 2010. *Last Best Gifts: Altruism and the Market for Human Blood and Organs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Holliday, Ruth et al. 2017. “Trading Faces: The ‘Korean Look’ and Medical Nationalism in South Korean Cosmetic Surgery Tourism.” *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 58(2):190–202.

Holliday, Ruth, and Joanna Elfving-Hwang. 2012. “Gender, Globalization and Aesthetic Surgery in South Korea.” *Body & Society* 18(2):58–81.

International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. 2017. “ISAPS International Survey on Aesthetic/Cosmetic Procedures Performed in 2017.” *International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery*. Retrieved from: https://www.isaps.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ISAPS_2017_International_Study_Cosmetic_Procedures_NEW.pdf

Jin, Dal-Yong. 2007. “Reinterpretation of Cultural Imperialism: Emerging Domestic Market vs. Continuing US Dominance.” *Media, Culture, Society* 29:753–771.

Jeon, Jae-Sik. 2019. “How Housing Market Responds to Greenbelt Relaxation: Case of Seoul Metropolitan Area, South Korea.” *Land Use Policy* 84:328–334.

Johnston, Josee, and Shyon Baumann. 2007. “Democracy versus Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing.” *American Journal of Sociology* 113(1):165–204.

Kmec, Julie, Steve McDonald, and Lindsey Trimble. 2010. "Making Gender Fit and 'Correcting' Gender Misfits: Sex Segregated Employment and the Nonsearch Process." *Gender and Society* 24(2):213–236.

Korean Gallup. 2015. "Survey on Appearance and Cosmetic Surgery: Comparison of 1994/2004/2015." *Gallup*. Retrieved from: http://panel.gallup.co.kr/Contents/GallupReport/%ED%95%9C%EA%B5%AD%EA%B0%A4%EB%9F%BDGallupReport(20150521)_%EC%99%B8%EB%AA%A8%EC%99%80%EC%84%B1%ED%98%95%EC%88%98%EC%88%A0.pdf

Lai, Gina, and Odalia Wong. 2002. "The Tie Effect on Information Dissemination: The Spread of a Commercial Rumor in Hong Kong." *Social Networks* 24(1):49–75.

Lamont, Michele. 2012. "Toward a Comparative Sociology of Valuation and Evaluation." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38:201–221.

Lamont, Michele, Stefan Beljean, and Matthew Clair. 2014. "What is Missing? Cultural Processes and Causal Pathways to Inequality." *Socio-Economic Review* 12(3):573–608.

Lie, John. 1997. "Sociology of Markets." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23(1):341–360.

Lim, Up, Ye Seul Choi, and Heonyoung Lee. 2015. "Occupational Skills and the Gender Wage Gap in Seoul, Korea: A Multilevel Approach." *The Annals of Regional Science* 55(2–3):335–356.

Lin, Nan. 2001. *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Liu, Yan. 2009. "Composite Risks and Composite Management in Transitional Society." Paper presented at a workshop at Kobe University, Japan, Jan.13–14.

Lizardo, Omar. 2017. “Improving Cultural Analysis: Considering Personal Culture in its Declarative and Nondeclarative Modes.” *American Sociological Review* 82(1):88–115.

McAdam, Doug, Sydney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mears, Ashley. 2015. “Working for Free in the VIP: Relational Work and the Production of Consent.” *American Sociological Review* 80(6):1099–1122.

Miller, Jeff, and Yvonne Darlington. 2002. “Who Supports? The Providers of Social Support to Dual-Parent Families Caring for Young Children.” *Journal of Community Psychology* 30(5):461–473.

Oliver, Pamela, and Hank Johnston. 2000. “What a Good Idea! Ideologies and Frames in Social Movement Research.” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 5(1):37–54.

Oyserman, Daphna. 2009. “Identity-Based Motivation: Implications for Action-Readiness, Procedural-Readiness, and Consumer Behavior.” *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 19(3):250–260.

Park, Young-do, and Sangjin Han. 2014. “Another Cosmopolitanism: A Critical Reconstruction of the Neo-Confucian Conception of Tianxiaweigong in the Age of Global Risks.” *Development and Society* 43(2):185–206.

Pilnick, Alison, and Olga Zayts. 2014. “‘It’s just a likelihood:’ Uncertainty as Topic and Resource in Conveying ‘Positive’ Results in an Antenatal Screening Clinic.” *Symbolic Interaction* 37(2):187–208.

Plickert, Gabriela, Rochelle Cote, and Barry Wellman. 2007. “It’s Not Who You Know, It’s How you Know Them: Who Exchanges What with Whom?” *Social Networks* 29:405–429.

Podolny, Joel. 2001. “Networks as the Pipes and Prisms of the Market.” *American Journal of Sociology* 107:33–60.

Rubineau, Brian, and Roberto Fernandez. 2015. “Tipping Points: The Gender Segregating and Desegregating Effects of Network Recruitment.” *Organization Science* 26(6):1646–1664.

Song, Jesook. 2010. “‘A Room of One’s Own:’ The Meaning of Spatial Autonomy for Unmarried Women in Neoliberal South Korea. *Gender, Place, and Culture* 17(2):131–149.

Statistics Korea. 2018. “South Korea Labour Force Participation Rate.” *CEIC Data.* Retrieved from: https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/korea/labour-force-participation-rate

Stubbs, Richard. 2009. “What Ever Happened to the East Asian Developmental State? The Unfolding Debate.” *The Pacific Review* 22(1):1–22.

Tober, Diane. 2001. “Semen as Gift, Semen as Goods: Reproductive Workers and the Market in Altruism.” *Body & Society* 7(2–3):137–160.

Torelli, Julian, and Antony Puddephatt. 2021. “Reframing ‘dirty work:’ The Case of Homeless Shelter Workers." *Symbolic Interaction* 44(2):310–338.

Twigg, Julia. 2006. *The Body in Health and Social Care*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Vines, Marcus, and Annulla Linders. 2016. “The Dirty Work of Poker: Impression Management and Identity.” *Deviant Behavior* 37(9):1064–1076.

Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press.

White, Harrison. 2008. *Identity and Control: How Social Formations Emerge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Wolkowitz, Carol. 2006. *Bodies at Work*. London: Sage.

Zelizer, Viviana. 1985. *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zelizer, Viviana. 2018. "Human Values and the Market: The Case of Life Insurance and Death in 19th-Century America." Pp.125–140 in M. Granovetter and R. Swedberg (eds.), *The Sociology of Economic Life*. New York: Routledge.

Zhang, Guofeng. 2006. "Reflexive Modernization and Risk Society." *Marxism and Reality* 1:130–5.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR(S)

[please insert a 80-100 word bio here. Start with affiliation. You can look at other SI articles for examples.]

[1] Consumption is a theoretically-important form of market participation, since it is how a market becomes interconnected with other markets and institutions in civil society (Holliday et al. 2017; Zelizer 2018).
[2] This is separate from my later discussions of marriage under the social capital section. Marriage under economic capital is a tool for instrumental, financial gains expunged of expressive intentions, whereas marriage under social capital is not.
[3] Ham So-won is a 42-year-old South Korean actress who made headlines in 2018 for marrying a Chinese idol trainee eighteen years her junior.
[4] This is a further reflection of the patriarchal order that defines South Korean Confucian culture and subordinates women to more stringent demands of marriage (Song 2010) and of youthful appearance (Leem 2017). As Catherine Hakim (2017) finds, patriarchal values to do with appearances play a role in shaping women's fertility decisions and marital outcomes (and even employment patterns and occupational segregation), but not that of men. The South Korean context is evocative of cultural beliefs that exacerbate this patriarchal influence on women, of which the human goods market and the cognitive frames identified in the present study are a symptom.