

Lim Ju Gyeong's Social Masks in *True Beauty*

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ABSTRACT

The use of social masks can help a person to meet certain societal standards. In *True Beauty*, the main character, Lim Ju Gyeong uses cosmetics and fashion as her social masks to fulfill Korean beauty and fashion standards. By achieving the standards, Ju Gyeong is being socially accepted and admired. Ju Gyeong's social masks take the roles as her self-protection against her fear and to boost her self-esteem to value her worth. Ju Gyeong is considered to be beautiful and fashionable because she is able to meet the societal standards of beauty and fashion. The meaning of beauty and fashionable are fluids that can be different from one place to the other. The use of social masks brings impact to a wearer's life.

Keywords: social masks; beauty standard; societal standard; webtoon comic

INTRODUCTION

Comic books have become popular literature among the young generation since a long time ago. Throughout the development of technology, nowadays comic books turn into digital-comics and become easier for us to access and read many interesting comics' genres for free. One of the skyrocketing comic-reader applications is Webtoon. Webtoon offers 23 genres including romance, comedy, action, fantasy, and horror, and slice of life. According to The Most Popular Webtoon by Genres chart in English version, Romance is the most popular genre in Webtoon. The 1st rank is *Lore Olympus*, a romance comic, received 41.7 million likes. The 2nd rank, *Let's Play* which is also a romance comic, with 30.4 million likes. The next rank, *Batman: Wayne Family Adventures* which is a slice of life comic with 214.331 likes. Next, *True Beauty*, a romance comic, occupied the 4th rank of Webtoon charts and has gotten 39.8 million likes. Followed by a slice of life comic, *Boysfriends* on the 5th rank with 8.5 million likes (Webtoon, 2021). In this study, the writer chooses to use *True Beauty* as the text of analysis because *True Beauty* has been on top ranking Webtoon's chart. It has a great plot and beautiful-detailed realistic drawing that successfully grab reader's attention.

True Beauty talks about Lim Ju Gyeong, a high school student who is insecure about her looks but has a warm-heart. From a shy girl, she becomes a gorgeous goddess whose social standing skyrockets after mastering the art of makeup via YouTube. She tries to keep her "real face" a secret to protect her elite status in both school and social media. Ju Gyeong hides her bare-faced not only from all of the people, but also from her inner circle such as her friends and boyfriend because she has the trauma from bullying when she was in Junior High School. Why *True Beauty* becomes more interesting to be analyzed is because of the struggle that Lim Ju Gyeong has. She receives different treatment when she does and

does not meet beauty standards. Ju Gyeong hides behind the cosmetics in order to boost her self-confidence. Lim Ju Gyeong feels insecure with her face without applying make-up on. She often scrolls on social media and compares herself with other girls who are considered to meet Korean beauty standards. Ju Gyeong compares herself with the girls who have wide eyes, pointed nose, perfect-shaped eyebrows with smooth and bright faces. This becomes her motivation to be an expert in make-up. Her dependency on cosmetics can be seen through the story line, when she wants to hang out with her friends or go to the school, she always uses makeup and brings her cosmetic bag. When she has to attend school camping night, she wakes up early in the morning to apply the makeup before her friends wake up and sleep late at night to erase her makeup after all of her friends fall asleep. From the storyline, we can see that Ju Gyeong puts so much effort in using cosmetics as her mask to be socially accepted and admired.

In order to analyze Ju Gyeong's reason in using cosmetics and fashion as her social masks and the purposes of Ju Gyeong wearing social masks, I will use the theory of Masquerade. Masquerade has a critical function that masquerading can draw attention to construct the nature of an identity (Tseelon, 2003). Every person puts on different social masks in order to adapt with the role they are supposed to play to meet some societal standards. Societal standard is the accepted standards which are related to society (Goffman, 2013, p.490). The use of masks could be developed as a social mask containing the urges, impulses, and emotions that are not considered acceptable (Jung, 1981). Ju Gyeong uses cosmetics to create a new identity as the Goddess. The dependency of cosmetics has been discovered in a study examining the role of cosmetics in social perception that make-up is associated with positive evaluation of a woman (Nash, Fieldman, Hussey, Lévêque, & Pineau, 2006). Workman and Johnson (1991) observed that women's cosmetics significantly enhanced the impression of attractiveness and femininity (p. 63-67). Lim Ju Gyeong practices an extreme dependency on cosmetics and fashion as her social mask. Social mask is something that a person wears to interact with society in order to achieve a certain goal (Barker, 2013). By masquerading with cosmetics and fashion as her social masks, it helps Ju Gyeong to meet societal standards because of the urge of being socially acceptable. Through those theories, I will discuss Ju Gyeong's use of cosmetics and fashion as her social masks and Ju Gyeong's purposes in wearing social masks.

ANALYSIS

A social mask is something that is worn in someone's daily life to achieve certain goals (Barker, 2013, p.490). In *True Beauty*, Ju Gyeong does a lot of effort to meet the beauty and fashion standards set by her society. In order to make a big transformation in her look, she uses cosmetics and fashion as her social masks.

Ju Gyeong's Use of Cosmetics to Meet The Korean Beauty Standards

Each society sets their own societal standard of beauty. Imagine if there is a circle, people who stand inside the circle are the one who meet this beauty standard. Meanwhile, people who do not meet the beauty standard will stand outside the circle. In South Korea, women can be considered as beautiful if they fulfill the Korean beauty standard. If they do not meet the standards, they will be considered as ugly. As cited from a beauty expert and government licensed medical tourism agency in Seoul, South Korea, Seoul Cosmetic Surgery (n.d.), Korean Beauty standards refers to slim figure, small face with V-shaped jaw, straight eyebrows, double eyelids, pointed nose, flawless skin, and large eyes. Ju Gyeong's face fails to meet the standard because she has thin eyebrows, small eyes without eyelids.

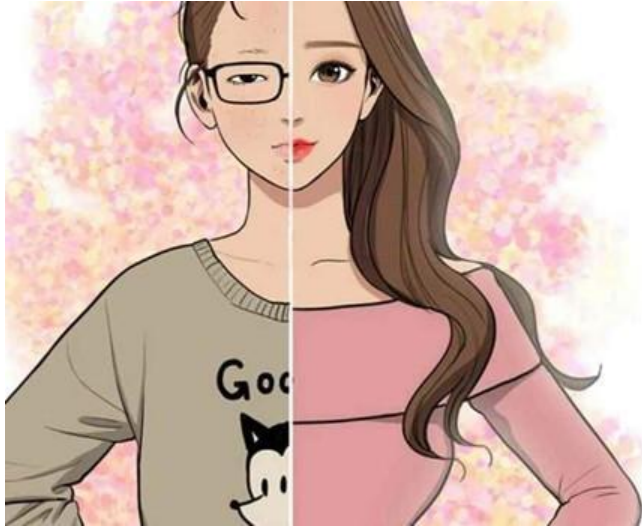


Figure 1 Ju Gyeong before and after using makeup

Ju Gyeong's use of makeup makes a big transformation of her face. For example, she does eye make-up. She makes her eyes look bigger with the straight eyebrows and double eyelids as the standard of Korean beauty. She starts her makeup by trimming her eyebrows and drawing her eyebrows. Ju Gyeong's thick and messy eyebrows turn into well-shaped and colored eyebrows. She also uses double eyelid glue and eyelash curler to have double eyelids and long thick eyelashes. As a result, she gets bigger eyes. She also uses contact lenses instead of her glasses. Not only does the eye makeup, Ju Gyeong also applies makeup on her face. She adds cushion, eye shadow, eyeliner, blush, and lip tint to support her transformation as her social mask. She uses a cushion to cover her pimples. She combines the color of both her eye shadows, blush, and lip tint to make her makeup look flawless.

The way Ju Gyeong applies the cosmetics approach to the Korean Beauty Standards. Based on Seoul Cosmetic Surgery, a woman will be considered as beautiful if she has big eyes, well-shaped eyebrows, long eyelashes, flawless and smooth skin (n.d.). In her journey while learning makeup, Ju Gyeong makes Korean Beauty Standard as her 'societal standard' and as Goffman stated, a person puts social masks to adapt with the role they are supposed to play to meet some societal standards (Barker, 2013, p.490). In order to meet societal standards in South Korea, Ju Gyeong uses cosmetics as one of her social masks.

Ju Gyeong's Use of Fashion to Meet Korean Fashion Standard

Fashion has always been a part of Korean culture since South Korea has powerful industries in both beauty and fashion. According to *90daykorean*, Korean society focuses on taking care of their appearance from head to toe. Women tend to act and look pure, but still classy. They rarely show shoulders, chest, and stomach or backless clothes. Women also like to reveal their legs and do a mix and match of what they wear (2022). Wearing miniskirts, short shorts, and mini dresses has absolutely been one of the most common Korean fashion trends. Fashion is not only about the clothing style, but also includes hairstyle, accessories, and shoes. In order to meet the Korean Fashion look, Ju Gyeong is willing to transform her fashion style. In *Fashion as Masquerade*,

Tseëlon stated that the practice of fashion has often been thought of as a kind of mask, hiding the wearer's true identity (2014). From a girl who has never been the center of attention, Ju Gyeong likes to go out with casual clothes. Casual means you can wear whatever you like, as long as it is appropriate (Hauser, 2019). Casual also means relaxed and unconcerned. Ju Gyeong's casual looks are comfortable for herself. Usually, she likes to go outside with casual clothes like hoodie, jacket, shirt with the training pants and backpack. She always ties her hair and uses glasses. She never pays attention to how she dresses and wears whatever she wants. In order to meet Korean fashion standards, Ju Gyeong transformed the way she dresses. She starts to pay a lot of attention to what she wears from head to toe. She is wearing something fit with her bust and waist, such as a body fitted blouse, mini skirt, and heels. She also lets her hair down or curls her hair and changes the glasses with contact lenses.

A person who is wearing a mask will also wear a costume to help complete the disguise of that person or complete the new identity (Subbiah, 2013, p.22). The changing of Ju Gyeong's look into feminine, helps her to complete her new identity as the Goddess. In the beginning, Ju Gyeong likes wearing casual clothes which are unisex, it can be worn by male and female. Then, Ju Gyeong uses the feminine look as her costume for her daily life. Korean fashion standard refers to simple, but still classy. In order to achieve this societal standard, people who live in Korea like to mix and match their clothes and wear something mini or short to show their legs. Korean fashion is often considered fashionable, since Koreans like to follow the current popular style. Ju Gyeong's transformation from nerd look into a fashionable woman, makes Ju Gyeong meet the standard of Korean fashion style.

Behind Ju Gyeong's practices of social mask, there are some meanings of social mask worn by her. The writer identifies two purposes of Ju Gyeong using social masks to create a new identity. There are masks as a self-protection to her fear and as a tool to boost her self-esteem.

Mask as a Self-Protection to Ju Gyeong's Fear

The first reason for Ju Gyeong's social mask is as a self-protection to her fear. Having a trauma from her past experience, makes Ju Gyeong have fear of being bullied and feeling lonely again, especially because she is going to go to senior high school at that time. Masquerade has a critical function that masquerading can draw attention to construct the nature of an identity. The use of social masks can conceal and reveal other identities and perform the wearer's desire and fear (Tseëlon, 2003, p.2). Along with Ju Gyeong's practices using her social masks as a self-protection, it shows both of her fear of being lonely and bullied and her desire to be socially accepted.

Ju Gyeong uses her social mask to protect her from the fear of being bullied. Ju Gyeong was not respected by her classmates and asked her to do something that her classmates asked for. The two girls who are her classmates, order Ju Gyeong to buy them some dumplings. Her classmates also do not call Ju Gyeong by her name. Instead, they kick the table. Ju Gyeong is also not respected at all. As we can see in the pictures above, her classmates who bullied Ju Gyeong have better physical appearance than Ju Gyeong.

They have smooth and fair skin, well-shaped eyebrows, pointed nose, and use makeup such as lipstick. It means that people who meet certain standards will consider themselves as if they have power over someone who does not meet that standard. They can easily get what they want without effort and order others around to do their wishes as in the pictures above. While Ju Gyeong has no power since she is being bullied and obeyed by her classmates when she is asked to buy dumplings.

Ju Gyeong does not want to stay outside the circle as someone who did not achieve the standard. So, in order to go inside the circle as a part of people who fulfill the standards, Ju Gyeong is trying to put on her social mask.

The social masks that do not achieve societal standards will not work as self-protection. As a first learner, Ju Gyeong did not use cosmetics well in her first trial. Since the previous mask that she wears did not work well, she tries to change her mask by improving her makeup skill. When Ju Gyeong wears social masks that meet societal standards, it works as her self-protection since she is not being bullied anymore. She is also being accepted socially and admired by people around her.

Her social masks helped her to build a new identity as a gorgeous goddess. When she wears the mask, she feels secure and gets self-protection because she is not lonely anymore. She becomes surrounded by a lot of friends. Because cosmetics have been her daily self-protection, she never takes off her social mask in front of others. Ju Gyeong is afraid that if she takes off her social mask, nobody would want to be her friend and the worst scenario is she would be bullied again. The following picture presents Ju Gyeong's fear if her classmates in senior high school would find out her face without makeup.

She becomes overthinking if her friends know Ju Gyeong's real face without makeup, nobody would want to be her friend. Ju Gyeong is afraid of being looked down upon by her friends if they know her real face which is very different from her face with makeup. Everyone influences how we would see ourselves (RMIT University, 2009, p.5). When she uses her social masks that meet the societal standards of beauty and being fashionable, her fear of being lonely and bullied are gone. As we can see on *Picture 2.12*, she has a lot of friends at high school and many people like and admire Ju Gyeong as a very beautiful girl.

Her social mask successfully protects her against her fear because it hides her real face. Her social masks also change her life from being ignored and bullied into being admired and surrounded by many friends. As a result, Ju Gyeong becomes dependent on cosmetics and fashion as her social masks.

Mask as a Tool to Boost her Self-esteem

Self-esteem can be measured on how someone values herself. It is formed from all of the experiences and interpersonal relationships. Self-esteem can be defined as confidence in one's worth or abilities. How a person thinks and feels about their own qualities and characteristics can be divided into high or low self-esteem. Before Lim Ju Gyeong used her social mask, she often compared herself to others, especially based on the face. She also does negative self-talk and feels insecure because of her bare-faced as we can see in the following picture.

Having negative self-talk shows that Ju Gyeong has low self-esteem without her social mask. Ju Gyeong thinks that she is ugly and no one would like a woman like Ju Gyeong. Ju Gyeong sees and values herself with low standards. She is also afraid of showing her bare-faced in front of her senior high school's friends. Being shy and anxious around other people and criticizing herself harshly presents that a person is having low self-esteem. When she was walking outside without her cosmetics and fashion as her social mask, then suddenly she met her classmate in high school, she immediately ran away without showing her real face.

After the transformation, Ju Gyeong's self-esteem was built. She praises and gives compliments to herself by taking selfies then she posts the photos on social media. Ju Gyeong has

high self-esteem when she wears her social masks in front of society. Because the social masks have fulfilled Korean beauty standards and Korean fashion standards, she is being admired by society. Her negative self-talk habits turn into positives. She often gives compliments to herself and starts to post selfies on social media. The level of self-esteem influences the way Ju Gyeong sees herself.

Fashion can elevate a person's self-esteem (Ana, 2019). A study from RMIT Counseling Service defined self-esteem as the perception of our value as a person, particularly regarding to the work we do, our status, achievements, purpose in life, our perceived place in the social order, our potential for success, strengths and weaknesses; how we relate to others and our ability to stand on our own terms (2009, p. 3). In *True Beauty*, we can see the changing of her self-esteem, between her-self before wearing her social mask and after she uses her social mask. Before the transformation, Ju Gyeong's self-esteem was destroyed. It is proven when she is often pessimistic and has negative self-talk stating that she is ugly. Her negative self-talk shows that Ju Gyeong feels not worthy. But after the transformation, she likes taking photos and being an active user of social media. Her self-esteem was built from how she sees herself in the mirror after using makeup. She also finds her purpose in life by improving her skills in make-up by going to the Beauty Academy instead of going to college and wants to be a professional makeup artist.

The purposes come from both internal and external sides. By transforming herself with her social mask, Ju Gyeong got her self-protection against her external track. External track comes from society that makes her afraid of being bullied and lonely. In addition, she also experiences the changing of her self-esteem, which is building her internal sides. Her social mask boosts her self-esteem more than before. The effects of higher self-esteem also can be seen through Ju Gyeong's attitude that she likes to spend her leisure time with her friends. Meanwhile, when she has not worn her social mask, she often spends most of her time alone.

CONCLUSION

Through this analysis, it proves that through the use of social masks, Ju Gyeong is able to meet societal standards that can be different from one another based on the places a person lived. By wearing social masks, Ju Gyeong is able to meet Korean beauty and fashion standards. Ju Gyeong also uses her social masks as her self-protection against her fear of being bullied and feeling lonely, also to boost her self-esteem by creating a new identity as a goddess. To conclude, the beauty standard is something fluid among society. Being beautiful is determined from whether someone is able to meet the societal standard or not. The definition of beauty also may be different from one place to another. In this case, the beauty standard of Korea might be different from the beauty standard of other societies. The use of social masks will also bring impact to the wearer's life. It successfully changes Ju Gyeong's life because she becomes socially acceptable and admired after wearing her social mask and fulfilling societal standards.

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