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Behind the Ullzang Mask

 Ullzang is a subculture that originates from the Korean words: face – pronounced like “Ull,” and best – pronounced like “Zang” or “Jjang.” The subculture’s main purpose is to appear natural, cute, and innocent looking from the inside-out. This subculture seems to be a focused and open way of expressing South Korea’s *real* idea of beauty. We’ll call them Ullzangers.

Looking as naturally beautiful as possible is the key. The first steps to joining the Ullzang culture would be the make-up. One would first need to purchase the eyeliner to get that dark winged look right above your lids that give the appearance of making your eyes look more defined and larger. Next, one must buy the white eyeliner for their under eyelids in order to enhance the large appearance and make your eyes appear more brighter and more awake (also helps give the innocent appearance). Then come the false eyelashes and circle lens, which are one of the biggest appearance alterations involved in the Ullzang Mask. Your skin must be pale (currently in the process of changing, but still true for the most part) and clear of any blemishes what so ever. If not achieved by make-up alone, this look is often provided by the Photoshop alterations that Ullzangers usually invest in. The pale-skinned look is currently changing as the Ullzang subculture spreads to Westerners. Along with the goal of looking naturally beautiful, nude lips colors are usually preferred. Ullzangers are generally aged from middle school to late college (12-25), and appearing aged higher than this is unacceptable. Adding cute headbands, or hair clips to go along with casual (but cute) clothing is a must.

Just looking like an Ullzanger isn’t enough to join the subculture. One must partake in the selfie-lifestyle. Knowing all the good angles for a picture is just the beginning to taking good Ullzang photos. For example, taking a picture from a bird’s eye view with one’s eyes open wide is said to give the eyes a huge, doll-like look. Ullzangers use photo-editing programs to not only edit their overall appearance, but to add cute little swirls, whiskers, or borders to then flaunt their innocent look. Ullzangers have been known to possess the ability to even transform their facial structures in photos to give them completely different looks. For example, in the popular TV series based on this subculture called Ullzang Generation where they admire each other’s Ullzang attributes, the host mentions that one of the guys face is different than his photos. The guy then goes on to admit that she morphs the look of his cheekbones in his photos with Photoshop to make them appear smaller (Nadiah, F). In addition to the photo-editing to change appearances, a popular trend found in Ullzang pictures is hand gestures. A common feature found in Ullzang photos are peace signs held near the chin to give the chin a better “V” shape (with the use of angles, as well). Facial expressions, too, can play a big role in Ullzang photos; such as: puffing of the cheeks to make one’s cheeks appear to be fluffy or pinch-able (like a stuffed animal).

Successful or popular Ullzangers often go on to become professional magazine models, or even K-pop stars – which is the goal of many – just for the sake of the individual’s ability to appear cute and innocent.

Is the Ullzang subculture all it’s cracked up to be? It might be just that for successful Ullzangers; but, what is it doing to the unsuccessful ones? The Ullzang community is great for a confidence boost – that is, if you are doing it right. Because of the Ullzang community’s existence, discriminatory behaviors in South Korea will flourish for the non-Ullzangers. People in the Ullzang subculture often go on to become fashion magazine models, which means they become role models for young South Koreans. What if one doesn’t look like them?

So a young Korean student is looking in a magazine. There is “so and so” and they are just so pretty. Of course, they were naturally born that way – with huge eyes, a perfect nose, and pale (clear) skin. In reality, they are only a professional Ullzanger with make-up and angles used to enlarge their eyes, whiten their skin, and make them seem as naturally beautiful as possible. Surely, teenagers don’t think like this. So, what do they turn to? Plastic surgery is a likely outlet for this situation. In an article called, “*Cross-Cultural Examination of Women's Fashion and Beauty Magazine Advertisements in the United States and South Korea*,” Jaehee Jung and Yoon-Jung Lee state that “the increasing number of plastic surgery procedures, such as nose and double eyelid jobs, among Koreans, including teenage girls, may be attributed to the desire to be like the celebrities and models in magazines”(4).The Ullzang subculture does nothing but put more emphasis on change from a younger age (and less-professionally). The Ullzang subculture becomes almost an alternative way of fitting into society as a whole. It is just a stepping stone into a world that has too much emphasis on the appearance and image of a person, rather than who they really are.

Students who lack the financially capabilities of the Ullzang lifestyle are also at risk of drowning amongst the Ullzangers. Ullzangers often spend lots of money on photo-editing programs (with Photoshop being the most expensive), cameras that will enhance the quality of their photos, high-quality make-up products, high fashion items and accessories, and even plastic surgery. Cosmetic surgery is becoming a popular high school graduation gift in South Korea; with double-eye lid surgery (surgery to make the eyes appear larger) being the most popular one. Most of the cosmetic surgery is to enhance one’s Ullzang image. It’s not necessarily cheap to be an Ullzanger. These financially incapable students are at risk of feeling unaccepted by their peers and are subject to bullying just for their appearance. While Ullzang may be a subculture for adults, it might as well be a lifestyle for students – leaving the students who do not partake in this subculture at high risk.

Conclusively, while the subculture’s purpose, to look naturally pretty and innocent, may be a harmless practice, the downfall of this subculture is the cause it has on people who are unable to partake in this young-adult subculture. From smaller eyes to thinner lips, students who do not possess the Ullzang qualities (and are unable to get them via cosmetic surgery) are at risk because the Ullzang subculture exists and thrives in the South Korean community. The Ullzang subculture is just a mask for the necessity to have a good, pretty, and pure image in South Korea and it plays a huge part in students’ emotional and physical inequalities; therefore, has an overall negative impact.

Works Cited

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