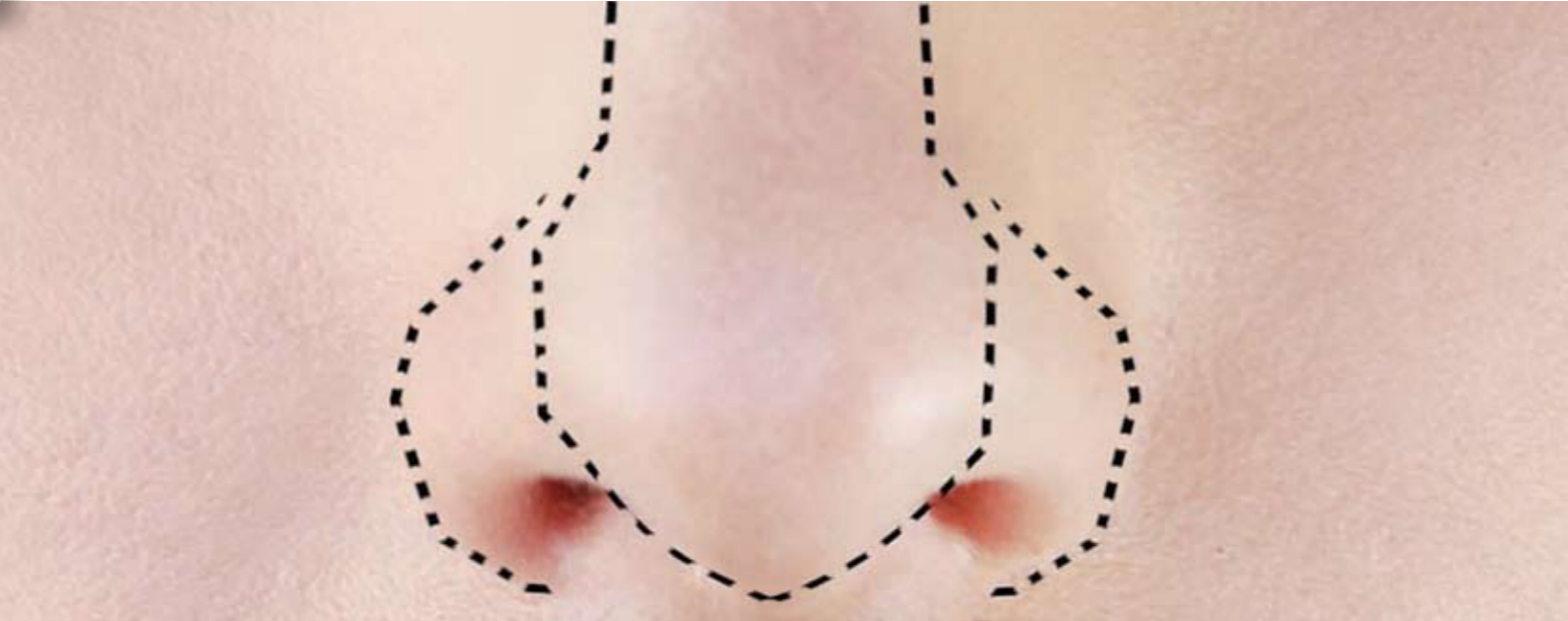




SHOPS

TUCK



With cosmetic surgery clinics getting busier by the day, is the 'true you' just a nip and a tuck away?



I was still at school when my mother first suggested I should get a nose job. Convinced that neither of us had inherited her looks, she said the same thing to my sister..." This was the somewhat rude introduction to the world of cosmetic surgery experienced by Samantha, a Filipino-American, now aged 29 and embarking on her own medical career.

Some seven years ago, Samantha went under the knife for the first time, signing up for both a rhinoplasty (nose re-contouring) and an alarplasty (nostril width reduction). Satisfied with the results, she says, "It has really helped with both my self-confidence and self-esteem."

At first glance, she is an unlikely recruit to the ranks of cosmetic surgery aficionados. Traditionally, such procedures have been the preserve of frivolous cash-rich socialites who wanted to dispense with a chin or two, or cellulited celebrities desperate to turn back time.

By contrast, Samantha is down-to-earth and dedicated, her working day spent delivering babies and applying post-surgical sutures. In reality, though, she is typical of

Cosmetic surgery is not just for the idle few cash-rich socialites looking to dispense with a chin or two

a new generation – of both men and women – who are happy to tactically employ plastic surgery as a means of self-improvement, while refusing to become obsessed with it.

Addressing her own experience, she says, "I think the stigma associated with cosmetic surgery is a thing of the past. It's also becoming more routine. While I didn't hide the fact I'd had it done, it wasn't a huge event."

Indeed, it could be this very normalisation that has seen the demand for such procedures – in the words of the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS) – "continue to skyrocket". Overall, the organisation, the global trade body for cosmetic surgery practitioners, maintains that five countries continue to lead demand in the sector: the US, Brazil, Japan, Italy and Mexico.

Explaining the glaring omission of South Korea from this league of lipoplasty lovers, Julie Guest, ISAPS' Chief Marketing Officer, said, "Sadly, we did not receive enough feedback from South Korean plastic surgeons to rank them overall, although the responses we did receive have been incorporated into our general findings."

And what findings they are. According to ISAPS's 2016 figures, demand for labiaplasties – vaginal rejuvenation – has grown the fastest, notching up a mammoth 45 percent year-on-year rise. Despite this, breast augmentation continues to be the most sought out surgery in the sector, accounting for 15.8 percent of all elective cosmetic procedures. In second place overall was liposuction (14 percent), followed by eyelid surgery (12.9 percent) and rhinoplasty (7.6 percent).

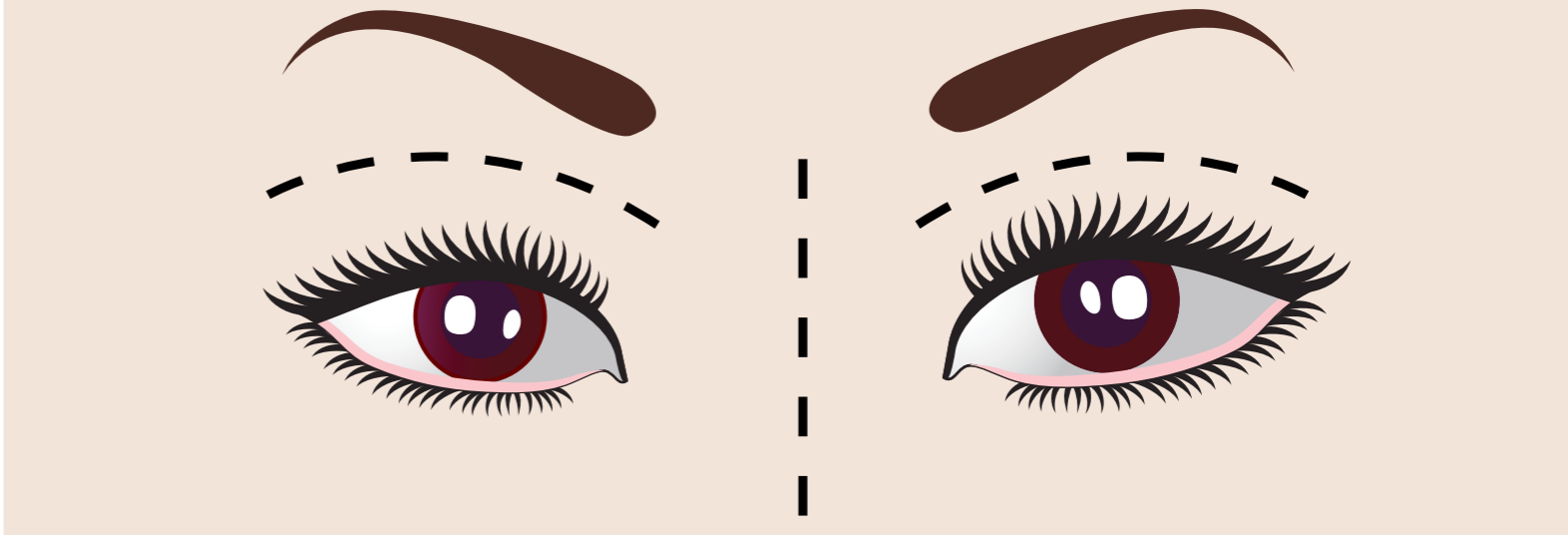
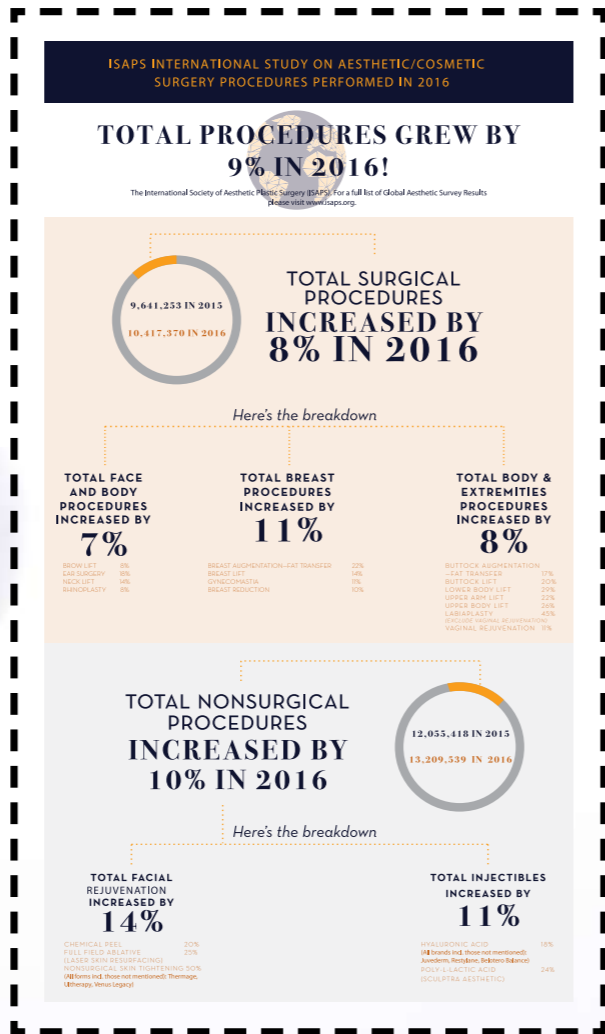
Commenting on the findings, Dr Renato Saltz, the President of ISAPS, said, "Demand is stronger than ever. Record numbers of patients now want to take advantage of the latest surgical innovations in order to look and feel better about themselves."

While some have attributed the 9 percent global surge in cosmetic surgery procedures to rising population levels, many psychologists and surgeons cite a different factor for this upturn: social media. With the likes of Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat placing the human form under greater – and more immediate – scrutiny than ever before, it is not hard to believe that the litany of photographically-exposed flaws has led many to sign a cosmetic surgery consent form.

Acknowledging the key role also played by the global celebrity culture, Saltz said, "Many possessors of ordinary small butts, for instance, are now asking if their derrieres can be



“Many possessors of ordinary butts now dream of augmented derrieres of Kim Kardashian proportions”



procedures conducted in the country to double within the next three years. In part, this is being driven by a range of popular Chinese smartphone apps – notably *Photo Wonder*, *BeautyPlus*, *GengMei* (“Prettier”) and *Meiren Xiangji* (“Beautiful People Camera”).

All these apps allow users to become virtual plastic surgeons, giving them the facility to enhance their selfies with exaggerated eyelashes, widened eyes, fuller lips or narrowed jawlines. In the case of *GengMei*, it can even match users with local clinics which can then make their online makeovers an offline reality.

Inevitably, the ubiquity of such apps has triggered alarm in certain quarters. Jerf Yeung Wai-keung, an assistant professor at the City University of Hong Kong and a specialist in the field of children’s mental health, says, “From a very early age, children are made to feel that they need to alter their appearance in order to be successful. This is taking the focus away from the benefits of working hard or nurturing positive character traits.”

In certain markets – most notably South Korea, supposedly the world’s plastic surgery capital – it’s a battle that already seems lost. Indeed, a parent-funded nose job or blepharoplasty (double-eyelid surgery) is now a standard high school graduation gift.

Explaining the enthusiasm for undergoing such procedures at the earliest possible opportunity, one South Korean student said, “If you are going to do it, it is best to do it straight away, so you can have your new face longer. If your friends all have surgery and you don’t, they look great when they go to college and start work, while you get left behind.”

Is cosmetic surgery really such a panacea? While surgeons in the sector boast of the self-esteem boost bequeathed by such procedures, even those who have themselves gone under the knife don’t seem to be entirely convinced. Samantha, once a girl found lacking in the looks department by her own mother and now a qualified surgeon in her own right, cautions others not to expect too much. She says, “The perfection you seek can’t always be delivered, and then it’s a question of whether you can be happy if you still fall short of the ideal you.”

augmented so that they more closely match those of Jennifer Lopez or Kim Kardashian.”

While a desire to emulate the hind quarters of reality stars or pop princesses is pretty much solely a female phenomenon, men are far from exempt from the wider allure of aesthetically-led alterations. Indeed, of late, the proportion of male patients in the sector has jumped from 12.8 percent in 2013 to 13.8 percent last year. This, of course, still leaves women accounting for a massive 86.2 percent of all procedures. There are signs in certain markets, however, that this may well be changing.

Perhaps surprisingly, it is not the vanity of the US male or the ambiguity of the Thai *katoey* that is

set to upset the gender balance among cosmetic surgery alumni. Instead, it’s the macho mainland male archetype who is now signing up to have his eyes enlarged. In fact, in 2016, some 21 percent of all cosmetic procedures conducted in mainland China involved male patients, a four percent rise on the previous year.

Inevitably, men have quite different priorities when it comes to going under the knife, particularly with regard to chest fat reduction and balding solutions. Globally, then, the top three procedures sought out by male patients are eyelid surgery, gynecomastia (reducing the prominence of ‘manboobs’) and rhinoplasties.

Males aside, it is the overall mainland cosmetic surgery market that is seen as having particularly high growth potential, with some industry insiders expecting the annual number of

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