

South Korean Popular Music Industry: Globalization of Identity and Exploitation

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By

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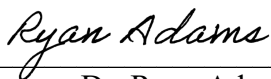
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Introduction

With the advancements of technology and transportation that connect the globe, people are interacting with cultures from all across the world. This extends into different aspects of cultures, resulting in diverse music, foods, fashion, and other facets of cultural identity. Even in today's popular music, artists include musical styles from a variety of cultures, creating a culturally plural music industry. In South Korea's popular music industry (K-pop), this holds true as well. The people working in this industry come from numerous countries and cultures, each bringing differing levels of personal influence into what the industry produces. K-Pop music is continuously evolving, incorporating outside influences into its production. Even though songs within the genre primarily contain Korean lyrics, many now also contain lyrics in additional languages. For example, the song "From Home" by NCT U contains Korean, English, Mandarin, and Japanese lyrics, reflecting the first languages of the diverse group members ("From Home" 2020). This project explores how people and ideas from multiple cultures come together to create not only K-Pop music, but its associated global movement (Hallyu) as well.

I first came across K-Pop when the song Gangnam Style by Psy became popular on US radio. The song's music video also became widely popular, holding the record for the most views on YouTube for almost five years (Respers France 2017). However, I did not garner an interest in the industry until the summer of 2015 after viewing a video of YouTube creators reacting to K-Pop music videos (Fine and Fine 2015). I began listening to the genre's popular artists (referred to as idols and idol groups) on Spotify and eventually became interested in learning more about the genre, its participants, and Korean culture. Even in the five years since I became a fan, the industry has become more diverse, with K-Pop further expanding into markets outside of Asia, idols, being the first to debut from their home country, and elements of other

cultures appearing in music and performances. During my college career, I incorporated this interest into my studies, conducting my own research on different facets of K-Pop. In the past decade, more and more scholars have taken an interest in K-Pop, making it a viable area of scholarly inquiry. Through this research, I explore the inner workings of the K-Pop industry as well as the industry's cultural diversity, which will allow a deeper understanding of the role one's identity plays in K-Pop.

Throughout each chapter, I focus on an individual piece of the puzzle explaining K-Pop's globalization. In the first chapter, I provide the necessary background and historical context of K-Pop, and introduce the theoretical perspective used in the rest of the project. This perspective focuses on globalization, stemming from Appadurai's theories on the subject (Appadurai 1996). The second chapter explores the economic aspect of the industry and the relevance of Karl Marx's theories of labor to how K-Pop artists are often treated (Marx 1977). Not only does this look at the labor aspect of the artists as they are active in the industry, but during what is known as a "trainee period" in preparation for becoming a K-Pop artist. The third chapter focuses on the identities and images of the K-Pop idols with specific reference to a case study that examines the multicultural group NCT and how the members' identities play a role in the group's marketing. It also discusses consumption as it relates to both fans and idols. Finally, the fourth chapter focuses on the K-Pop fan community, incorporating my undergraduate capstone research on fans' identity. This will look at the diversity within the fan community, which can also influence production and marketing in the K-Pop industry. Combined, these five dimensions of K-Pop are important to understanding the role of identity and how the industry functions, allowing me to come to a conclusion on how they all work together, creating K-Pop music. Through influences

in both the industry and in idols' personal lives, idols reconstruct and negotiate aspects of their identity to fit in with fans and companies' expectations of them.

Chapter 1: How Did We Get Here?

Before exploring the different dimensions of K-Pop and identity's impact, I use this chapter to delve into the theoretical perspectives I employ in this research and provide a brief history of the K-Pop industry.

Theoretical Background

In modern anthropological studies, globalization is a dominant theme in many scholars' research. While scholars have prepared their own theories for analyzing globalization, several aspects of Appadurai's theories on globalization apply to studying K-Pop and its global spread. In his work *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai (1996) analyzes globalization through five different lenses: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples. Appadurai defines each of the scapes, with ethnoscaples referring to the movement of people (such as refugees and immigrants), mediascaples referring to the capability to spread images, technoscaples referring to the global spread and evolution of technology, financescaples referring to the movement of capital and the risk associated with it, and ideoscaples referring to using images to spread ideologies (often political in nature). These different scapes are used as building blocks to form what Appadurai calls "imagined worlds," which refers to "the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (Appadurai 1996: 33). With globalization, the imagination has taken on a new meaning and has become accessible to people from all walks of life. To help define this concept, Appadurai uses the Quebecois as an example of an imagined world. While those who consider themselves Quebecois live in Canada, they see themselves as a separate culture from that promoted by the Canadian government. Essentially, imagined worlds are a type of subculture within a larger national culture, without physical boundaries tying them to a specific location.

These different scapes and the concept of imagined worlds are useful in studying K-Pop in several ways. As discussed previously, more and more foreign idols have debuted in groups, which falls under ethnoscapes, further discussed in the third chapter. They immigrate to South Korea, bringing their labor with them. These idols connect their own culture to K-Pop, influencing how and if a group is marketed towards another country. However, recruiting these idols involves a degree of risk, shown through financescapes. In recent years, dozens of groups debut each year, making it harder to find success in a saturated industry. Also, mediascapes, ideoscapes and technoscapes work together to create a certain image of K-Pop and the genre's artists, spread across online platforms. Companies' marketing of their idols plays an important role in their success, creating content to create and hold fans' interest. As for imagined worlds, it plays an important role in spreading K-Pop outside of Korea. For some South Korean immigrants, K-Pop gives them a chance to interact with their culture, despite being in a different country. It applies to the K-Pop fan community as well. The fan community does not exist as a physical entity, but fans feel that they are a part of this imagined entity, making it an imagined world when looked at from the outside. Social media plays a key role in this, providing fans with a space to connect over their interests and create a community around it. Also, K-Pop itself, as well as its fan community, is a global industry, making it impossible to discuss its current state without including some aspect of globalization. The fan community does not exist just in South Korea, but across the globe on every continent.

Throughout the next few chapters, the different scapes will come into play as they apply to each chapter's focus. The chapter focusing on economics shows how financescapes applies to the labor side of the K-Pop industry, the chapter on idols' identities and consumption features

ethnoscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes, and the chapter on the fan community incorporates technoscapes, as well as multiple of the other scapes mentioned.

K-Pop's Beginnings

Throughout the 20th century, South Korea often found itself caught up in various political turmoil. Up until the end of World War II, Japan held Korea as a colony, thus controlling the country and its recording industry (Howard 2014). Many of the recording companies active during this period were subsidiaries, with their headquarters located in Japan. This left the music that Koreans could listen to in the hands of their colonizers, which selectively censored certain styles or recordings throughout this time period. Japan would ban one recording of a song, but allow another, such as in the case of *Arirang*, which acted as a song of resistance against the Japanese (Howard 2014). During the war, Japan also banned music associated with Allied powers since it was the “music of the enemy” (Fuhr 2015). Following decolonialization, and eventually the Korean War, South Korea attempted to distance itself from its colonial past. Foreign music companies were not allowed to operate in South Korea, and it banned all Japanese cultural imports (Choi and Maliangkay 2014). The militarized government also heavily censored the music Koreans listened to (Howard 2014). Songs that sounded similar to Japanese songs or contained lyrics seen as unfit, such as those deemed too depressing, too violent, or a threat to national security were restricted. This held true until the South Korean government transitioned into a democracy at the end of the 20th century, allowing people to embrace outside cultures.

During this period of democratization, the younger generation (the *sinsedae*) became more interested in international pop culture brought in through trade, tourism, and international studies (Fuhr 2015). While they consumed American media, they also yearned for a Korean act that fit with these new trends. In 1992, Seo Taiji and the Boys emerged as the first act associated

with the term K-Pop (Fuhr 2015). Their hip-hop music style and fashion appealed to the audience, with their first performance featuring the group members wearing “oversized clothes with tags showing, sunglasses, and baseball hats on backwards” (Jung 2006: 112). The music featured elements of rap and metal, which the past military government often censored. However, the South Korean public and government did not immediately condone the music and performances Seo Taiji and the Boys put out.

At this period of time, a cultural divide emerged between South Korea’s older and younger generations due to the differences in the society they grew up in. Those in the older generation grew up during times of war and colonialization, while those in the younger generation grew up after the Korean War. Older Koreans criticized the fashion of early K-Pop groups, as well as songs that were critical of society. One example of this was Seo Taiji and the Boy’s song “Classroom Ideology” that criticized South Korea’s educational system. The lyrics of “Classroom Ideology” explicitly show Seo’s criticism:

“Enough. Enough. Enough. Enough.
Enough of that kind of teaching. Enough.
Already enough. Enough. Already enough. Enough.
Every morning by 7:30, you put us into a small classroom.
And force the same things into all nine million children’s heads.
These dark closed classroom walls are swallowing us up.
My life is too precious to be wasted here.” (Jung 2006: 115)

“Classroom Ideology” came directly from Seo’s experience in the South Korean education system. The critical nature of the song’s lyrics caused a public uproar, leading to its eventual banning from radio and television (Jung 2006). However, as the group and critical songs became more popular with youth, censorship transitioned from the songs to the images of the groups (Howard 2014). Television stations controlled what appeared on their programs, therefore controlling the images of K-Pop idols appearing on the network. For example, one of the major

public television networks, KBS, “banned male pop stars having earrings, dyed hair, tattoos, or exposing their navels” (Howard 2014: 403). This attempted to keep artists in line with societal expectations and prevent the emergence of this new youth culture.

Despite these attempts to censor K-Pop during its early stages, the genre still gained popularity with the younger generation. The 2012 drama program *Answer Me 1997* demonstrates the fervor surrounding K-Pop during the late 1990s (Cho 2017). In her article discussing the drama, Cho writes “hallyu is a compensatory post-IMF phenomenon that triggered an appetite for pop culture escapism that then laid a foundation for the future success of K-Pop industries” (2017: 2324) in reference to the program. Many youths gravitated towards K-Pop, allowing it to become a successful cultural phenomenon. The drama follows the life of Shi-won Sung, an avid fan of the group H.O.T. during the 1990s (Shin 2012). Her dedication to the group creates tension with her father and some friends, but it can also be seen as a form of escape from her personal life. Sung does not do well in school nor does she have the best relationship with her father, but her involvement in fandom brings joy into her life. As portrayed in the drama, different forms of pop culture, such as K-Pop, can act as an escape from reality for fans, providing them something to look forward to, even if they may not be in the best situation in real life.

As this new style of music and performance gained traction, entrepreneurs founded entertainment companies to manage K-Pop artists. The first company of this type was SM Entertainment (SME), founded in 1995 by Lee Sooman (Howard 2014). This company became one of the “Big Three” companies of K-Pop alongside YG Entertainment (YGE) and JYP Entertainment (JYPE), founded in 1996 and 1997. From their founding, these companies grew to manage every aspect of a K-Pop group or soloist, including casting, training, production,

licensing, marketing, and other areas involved in the release of an album (Fuhr 2015). This also led to the creation of K-Pop's idol trainee system. Here stars are created, not born. After trainees pass an audition and sign a contract with a company, they must learn to sing, dance, act, rap, and speak multiple foreign languages (Choi and Maliangkay 2014). The system originated under SME but became standard throughout the K-Pop industry. In an interview, a former idol under Jackie Chan Group Korea described his typical day as a trainee:

“On a normal day I'd get up at 5.30am and we'd have to go out to run... we'd run 13 kilometres then have a shower, get dressed and go to the dance studio right away. Haven't eaten anything yet. Our first meal is at 12pm, so we dance till 12pm... we eat and after that is when we have a little bit of rest. Then at 1.30pm we have vocal classes and rap classes, stuff like that during that period of time in the afternoon. After that, for me that was my time to learn Korean. Then after that it was dinner time, then back to the dance studio and we'd dance till 1am or 2am.” (“Prince Mak” 2016).

While Mak's experience only shows one example of the trainee experience, this intensive experience is common across the industry. It is just viewed as part of the path a prospective idol must take on their road to success (Yim 2019). After debut, depending on the group's success, idols still may undergo intense daily schedules filled with performances, television appearances, photoshoots, and other promotional activities. Making it as a K-Pop idol takes dedication, especially under the management of these entertainment companies.

Following SM Entertainment's establishment came the company's first idol group, H.O.T. (High Five of Teenagers) in 1996 (Fuhr 2015). After being selected through auditions and castings, the members went through the trainee system, eventually debuting and becoming the model for future idol groups. This formula for creating idol groups would prove itself successful, with SME creating many more groups. Eventually, Lee Sooman would dub this formula for creating and marketing idols as CT, “culture technology” (Fuhr 2015). Through CT, Lee formed a system of development: “the first step is to ‘export a cultural product, second step

is to expand its presence in the market there through teaming up with local entertainment companies and singers, and finally to create a joint venture with local companies to share with them the know-how of CT and the added value generated from it” (Chung 2011 in Fuhr 2015: 135). This statement summarizes the company’s strategy and how it has incorporated culture technology into its business model. However, its incorporation of CT was not just limited to its strategies but applies to its newest male idol group as well. In 2016, the group NCT (Neo Culture Technology) debuted under SME (Son 2016). This group’s concept and format are much more complex in comparison to others under the same agency and is further analyzed through a case study in Chapter 3.

K-Pop’s Global Expansion

When K-Pop first began expanding into international markets, companies directed their efforts towards Korea’s next-door neighbor, Japan. BoA, a female soloist under SM Entertainment, debuted in Japan in 2002, becoming a successful Japanese Pop (J-Pop) singer (Jung 2014). Her Japanese debut coincided with the implementation of South Korea’s Open-Door policy, allowing the flow of cultural products between the two countries. This new policy as well as her marketing as a typical J-Pop star helped her gain recognition from the Japanese public. Following BoA’s success, SM Entertainment prepared to debut one of their male idol groups, TVXQ, to debut in Japan as well. The company invested heavily in this debut, spending a large amount of its budget to ensure the groups success (Kim 2014). After a few years, the group became extremely successful, even becoming a standard for idol groups in Japan. This success came through the CT strategy established by Lee Sooman. As TVXQ expanded into the Japanese market, they tailored their music, choreographies, and performances towards the local audience, rather than replicating what they did in South Korea. However, they did not

completely replicate other male Japanese idol groups either, having a more masculine and powerful appearance (Jung 2014). Both BoA's and TVXQ's success paved the way for future K-Pop artists to expand into Japan and find their own success, as demonstrated through Oricon News charts, tracking music sales in the country ("2021 年 02 月 22 日" 2021). Aside from Japan, K-Pop idols found success in other markets as well.

SM Entertainment groups also found success in China, beginning with H.O.T. in 2000 (Fuhr 2015). The group (and individual members following the group's disbandment) sold hundreds of thousands of albums and performed to large crowds in the country (Pease 2006). In contrast to BoA and TVXQ's Japanese careers, SM Entertainment did not alter H.O.T.'s music or performances to appeal Chinese audiences. However, as Pease (2006) notes, interest in K-Pop died down within a couple years of the group's disbandment. It took a few years before another group reached this level of success in China. Super Junior-M, a sub-unit of SM Entertainment's male group Super Junior, specifically targeted the Chinese market, releasing music exclusively in Mandarin and including members of Chinese descent (Kim 2009). SM Entertainment continued this trend with its later groups EXO and NCT having their own Mandarin focused subunits, EXO-M and WayV respectively (Howard 2014). However, efforts to expand into China stalled again with South Korea's implementation of its Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense system, protecting against missiles, causing China to retaliate in the form of trade and travel restrictions (Lee and Bodeen 2017). This made promotion in China difficult over the past few years, but companies did not give up on expanding into China. Many companies also began to include Chinese members in their groups, as well as members from other countries, such as Japan, Thailand, Australia, Canada, and the United States. Including international idols, or idols who speak languages other than Korean allows companies to market their groups to foreign

audiences. In the early 2010s, SM Entertainment and JYP Entertainment both attempted to push their leading girl groups, Girls' Generation and the Wonder Girls, respectively, into Western markets (Epstein 2014; Fuhr 2015). While SM Entertainment branched out into Japan with their artists first, JYP Entertainment directly attempted to enter the United States market. Both groups found initial success and were able to appear on US television shows thanks to having an English-speaking member, but their success would eventually dwindle as contracts ended and member line ups changed.

Over the past few years, K-Pop has become an international phenomenon, as shown through BTS (*Bangtan Sonyeondan*) and other groups with large followings. Entertainment companies took notice of the marketing value of social networking platforms, which allowed people from all over the world to have access to K-Pop. These companies and their artists utilize social media as an essential marketing tool, as it gives fans access to the “everyday lives” of their favorite idols (Shin 2018). However, companies monitor these social media accounts, even to the degree of not allowing idols to have their own personal accounts. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, groups toured in countries across most major continents and charted in multiple countries, such as the United States' Billboard music charts (Chiu 2018). The different languages K-Pop artists release songs in has grown as well, including, but not limited to, English, Spanish, Thai, Arabic, Japanese, and Chinese (“#TWICE” 2017; “Present” 2018; “Baby Don't” 2018; “Illusion” 2019). Despite originating in South Korea, K-Pop has clearly become a global form of music.

Chapter 2: Isn't It All Manufactured?

Aside from Appadurai's globalization theories, Karl Marx's labor related theories have significant connections to the K-Pop industry's economic system. During Marx's time, he wrote insightful ideas on the innerworkings of capitalism, many of which are still relevant today. These include the multiple types of labor, and the value of labor and the products it produces.

Understanding Marx's theoretical perspectives provides a deeper insight on the economics of K-Pop as well as the training that goes into creating a K-Pop idol.

Economics and Labor in the K-Pop Industry

As explained in the previous chapter, before debuting in a group or as a soloist, idols undergo a training period to extensively prepare them for debut. An idol's journey begins with their audition at a company, which is either successful, making them a trainee there, or unsuccessful, meaning they may audition at the same company again or audition at a different one. Companies hold many auditions throughout the year, ranging from weekly to biannually (Fuhr 2015). Some companies also constantly recruit for these auditions, including information on how to sign up inside of albums (typically only in versions distributed in South Korea) and having sign up forms on their website ("AUDITION" n.d.). After landing a spot in a company, idol hopefuls begin their trainee journey, but are not guaranteed to debut. Some idols train for only a few days, while others train for years before making their debut (Fuhr 2015; SBS PopAsia HQ 2018a). Companies typically fund the whole training process, unless a trainee break the contract they initially sign after passing the audition. As a trainee, companies not only expect them to learn how to sing, dance, and rap, but also how to act and speak multiple foreign languages, such as English, Japanese, and Chinese (Kang 2014). This hard work the trainees put in may lead to a debut, but many trainees never make it to that point. In a newspaper article on

the trainee process, Hyun-su Yim (2019) interviewed Jong-im Lee who has done extensive research on it, and describes the likelihood of trainees reaching stardom: “The media continue to perpetuate the narrative that a star is born by chance, and many people still believe that. But I realized the opposite is true,’ she said. “Instead of (stardom happening by) mere coincidence, there is tough competition and a great deal of investment.” Throughout the trainee process, companies hold periodic evaluations of their trainees, encouraging competition to improve themselves. When a company plans to debut a new group, trainees compete against each other to earn a spot in the final line up. A company may have dozens of trainees, but the group they plan to debut will have a limited number of spots. During their training, idol hopefuls constantly face competition amongst their peers, but this competition does not end when they debut.

Once idols debut, their entertainment company signs them under an exclusive contract, varying in time length based on the company’s policies. Outsiders have heavily criticized the restrictions these contracts place on the artists, dubbing them as “slave contracts” (Howard 2014). Depending on the company, these contracts contain various restrictions, such as dating bans, limited profits for the idol, dieting practices, limited contact with outsiders, and technology bans, to name a few (Seabrook 2012). In groups from the early 2000s, some idols had 13-year contracts benefiting the entertainment companies more than the groups. In 2009, three members of the group TVXQ took SM Entertainment to court over their contracts being too long. The court ruled in favor of the TVXQ members, leading to legal restrictions on contract lengths and contents (Howard 2014). Also, an idol group’s debut does not always equate to automatic success. Multiple factors can determine a group’s success, including their entertainment company, concept for the group, performance abilities, and the group’s overall marketability. Every year, dozens of K-Pop groups and soloists debut, swamping the market with new releases.

When a group debuts, the competition with those among their agency for a spot in the group transforms into competition between all existing groups to sell records and do well.

Marx's Theories on Labor

During the 19th century, Marx emerged as a major social theorist who impacted many fields, including economics. While his writing touched upon many different areas of the field, his different theories on labor strongly connect to labor in the K-Pop industry. These different theories apply to multiple players in the industry, including the entertainment companies, K-Pop idols, and idol trainees.

In one of his manuscripts, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx goes into detail on the different types of labor. To create these different types, he analyzes the type of commodity the labor creates. One of these types of labor is called unproductive labor, which he uses a singer to describe it. In the case of the singer, when contracted to put on a performance, they become productive for that period of work. However, a singer's performance cannot exist without them and they produce an intangible commodity. This commodity exists as long as the singer performs but ceases to exist as soon as they stop. In Marx's original writing, it did not account for the developments of technology that allows us to listen to music anywhere at any time, as well as recordings of concerts and performances. However, unproductive labor became relevant again through the COVID-19 pandemic. Since events could no longer occur in person, artists performed online, holding live streamed concerts.

In terms of unproductive labor, the singer example creates an obvious connection to K-Pop. However, his reasoning for the singer being an example is outdated, as it does not account for music technology advancements. With traditional performances, a patron's enjoyment of the music would end after the performance, but the invention and popularity of music streaming

services makes music accessible at any time. Also, companies release official recordings of concerts and fans upload their own videos as well. While the actual performance may end, recordings allow the performance to continue for fans at any time. Even though music and performances have become more accessible, it does not completely recreate the experience of attending a concert in person. When attending a concert, the crowd and interactions between the artists and fans create an atmosphere and experience not replicable outside of the concert. In November 2018, I attended a concert for the group Day6. At the end of the concert, the group members came into the crowd and interacted with the fans. Interactions occurred after the concert as well for those who had purchased higher ticket tiers, resulting in either a group photo or participating in a “high-touch” event (how this event works varies on the tour company and artist’s management, but it involves fans high-fiving each member of the group). Outside of the concert setting, these types of interactions cannot be replicated. Recently, as mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic altered this. Performances no longer occur in person, forcing groups to use digital means to continue performing, such as with live streamed online concerts. While the audience cannot attend in person, they often pay to experience the concert from home.

In this same manuscript, Marx also discusses the values of both products and labor. In comparison to a product, the labor used to produce it has less value. This difference in value gives the product a surplus value, alluding to his manuscript title and its main focus. For the company contracting these workers, this value provides them with a profit. The labor a worker provides correlates with the value of their wages, but these wages are nowhere near the profit the company makes. Also, the amount of surplus value a product creates depends on multiple factors, including the country, the time period, and specific environments within a country.

Marx's discussion of product value and wages also relates to the contracts that idols have with their companies. Contracts vary on a group-by-group basis (and sometimes within the group itself), but typically benefit the entertainment company over the idols. In many cases, once an idol debuts, they have to repay the costs of their training until they break even, which will then allow them to start earning money (SBS PopAsia HQ 2018b). Companies profit off of their idols, but the idols sometime struggle to earn any money, which can take years, based on their success. Once idols do start to make money, that money is divided among different staff in their entertainment company, then the money that goes to the group gets divided up among the members. If a group becomes more successful, some, or even all members, may get solo activities, such as releasing solo music, acting, and appearing in advertisements, allowing them to earn money that goes specifically to them rather than the whole group. While companies do not often publicly post their profits, South Korea's main music chart, Gaon, releases a year end chart with the total number of sales the best-selling albums achieved that year. On the 2020 chart, BTS's *Map of the Soul 7* topped the chart, selling 4,376,975 copies, and GFriend's *🌀 Labyrinth* rounded out the chart, selling 82,760 copies ("2020 년" 2020). Depending on the store and shipping prices, these albums typically fall in the price range of \$20 - \$40 each. Based on album sales alone, companies can bring in a significant amount of revenue from their artists.

Finally, Marx expands even more on his labor theories in his work *Capital*. In this writing, he describes the selling of labor. He describes labor power as "the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description" (Marx 1977: 451). Workers own their labor and sell it to others interested in utilizing it. However, Marx recommends selling it for definite periods in

order to keep their ownership over it. If a worker does not, such as in slavery, they lose ownership over their labor and it no longer exists as a commodity they can sell.

The selling of labor directly ties in with the contracts binding idols to their group and entertainment agencies. As Marx discussed, workers should sell their labor for a definite period of time, which these idols do with their contract. After a contract expires, idols have the option to renew it or leave the agency, allowing them to take their labor elsewhere if they do not like the way their current company utilizes it. Others simply leave the industry all together or take a new career path. However, in some cases, idols chose to break this contract and relinquish the company's ownership of their labor, but this can lead to consequences for the idol. Companies will sue the idol for breaking the contract, leading the court to declare payment of reparations or forcing the idol to stay in that contract. In 2014, two Chinese members of the group EXO sued SME over unfair contracts, but the court declared these contracts as valid, prohibiting these two members from signing with other Korean companies, but allowing them to establish solo careers in China (Lee 2016). As shown here, by contracting one's labor, one is also obligated to uphold their end of that contract.

As a whole, the financescapes of the K-Pop industry are very complex and rely on multiple factors to continue operating. Entertainment companies and idols have a mutual relationship, one not being able to exist without the other. However, some do not always see this relationship in a positive light, viewing the K-Pop industry as an exploitative one. Multiple companies have come under fire more mistreating or not protecting their artists, making it a controversial labor system (Campbell and Kim 2019). As K-Pop continues to grow on a global scale and artists receive more international opportunities, companies may have to rethink this labor system that has been in place for so long and it may be time to reinvent it.

Chapter 3: Why Do They All Look the Same?

When it comes to creating and marketing a K-Pop idol group, each member's personal identities play an important role. This can include their personalities, country of origin or national identity, gender, appearance, age, and other factors. In this chapter, I will discuss the role identity plays in K-Pop and how K-Pop can also shape one's identity, showing a recursive relationship between idols and the industry.

Multiple Facets of Identity

As discussed in the first chapter, as the K-Pop industry globalized, K-Pop groups began to incorporate more foreign idols and groups began releasing music in multiple languages. Today, many idol groups contain members originating from abroad or who have lived abroad for an extended period of time. Ethnoscapes lay the groundwork for this form of globalization, as these idols immigrate to South Korea for their careers. Examples of such groups include TWICE (Japan and Taiwan), GOT7 (America, Hong Kong, and Thailand), Blackpink (Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand), EXO (Canada and China), Stray Kids (America, Australia, and Malaysia), UNIQ (Brazil and China), and NCT (America, Canada, China, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, and Thailand). This non exhaustive list shows the truly global extent to which K-Pop idols represent. By having members that speak multiple languages, companies can expand the demographics the group targets to countries where those languages are spoken. This benefits the group when promoting music abroad as well, as they can appear on television and radio programs and successfully communicate with the hosts and audience.

On the other hand, companies must also figure out how they want to depict local idols' Koreanness. In Sun Jung's (2011) book on Korean masculinities, she describes two different methods of doing this. The first, *mugukjeok*, has idols projecting a more globalized persona and

play down their Koreanness, creating the image of non-nationality. To create this, South Korean culture is deconstructed then reconstructed in a global context. This allows popular culture, such as K-Pop, to transcend borders because cultural hybridity is an inherent part of it (Jung 2011). *Mugukjeok*, in this instance, refers to male idols' masculinity and how they portray it. According to Manietta's (2015) further analysis and application of *mugukjeok*, male idols combine South Korean "soft masculinity," more feminine traits, with more global "tough" and "cool" masculinities. When idol groups hold online live streams, fans will ask them to perform different actions, such as doing *aegyo* (acting cute) or acting sexy. Fans have come to expect idols to embody these multiple forms of masculinity, creating a global appeal. Through this method of altering one's masculinity, it pushes K-Pop to being a more global genre but begins to remove the Korean aspect of it. The second method, *chogukjeok*, has idols incorporating their national identity into their global image, creating a trans-national image. Unlike *mugukjeok*, South Korean cultural elements mix with global elements to market idols. Manietta (2015) refers to this as existing on a group scale, with the different forms of masculinity each group member portrays combining to create one hybrid masculinity. *Chogukjeok* reflects a larger scale, incorporating multiple members versions of masculinity, but *mugukjeok* reflects masculinity on an individual scale.

When forming a group, companies must carefully consider the member's own personalities as well as the image they intend to create for the group. Companies will also force their idols to change or conceal their personality. In 2019, the group Seventeen appeared on the program *Knowing Brothers (Aneun Hyungnim)*, where member Seungkwan discussed how fellow member Mingyu has a similar personality to him, but the company forces Mingyu to alter it: "He really talks a lot. He is as talkative as I am. But he gets restrictions from the company.

He's supposed to be the handsome guy, so he can't talk a lot" (Yoo 2019). Within Seventeen, Mingyu has the role of being "the visual" of the group, meaning he is considered the best-looking member and should not act in a manner that detracts from that. However, when idols break from their expected personalities, they can face backlash from their fans, the public, and/or their company over their actions. Towards the end of 2020, Red Velvet member Irene (Joohyun Bae) came under scrutiny after verbally abusing a fashion editor she worked with (Rowley 2020). She released a public apology on Instagram, but people did not feel satisfied and demanded for her to leave the group. As Red Velvet's leader, Irene is expected to act as a role model for the rest of the group and serve as a communicator between staff and the group and acting this way goes against these expectations. While Irene has only been an idol for five years, idols can hide their full personality for years, possibly never revealing it to the public. Recently, U-Know Yunho, a member of previously discussed veteran group TVXQ, hit a career disaster after being caught violating COVID-19 protocols at an illegal adult entertainment facility and evading police capture (J. Park 2021). Fans previously considered him as a "golden boy" of K-Pop, never having a major scandal during his eighteen years as a K-Pop idol, but this incident shows no matter how long an idol is in the spotlight, fans may never know their full/true personality. However, personality is just one aspect of an idol's identity and other aspects also play a role in creating an idol's image.

Case Study: NCT

Within K-Pop, the boy group NCT and its multi-unit concept exemplify multiculturalism in the industry. The group contains members from multiple countries and backgrounds, bringing a diverse presence to K-Pop. Through this case study, I show the degree to which multiculturalism effects the group's image and dictates how the different sub-units operate.

Before getting into this, it is important to understand the group’s background and structure, as it differs from most K-Pop groups. NCT debuted under SM Entertainment in the first half of 2016 with the subunit NCT U (S. Kim 2020). In K-Pop, a subunit acts as a way for members of the same group, or sometimes multiple groups, to come together and release music, differing from the main concept of the original group. The group currently has four subunits: NCT U, NCT 127, NCT Dream, and WayV, each with a different purpose. NCT U allows for any combination of the members to release music together, so each individual release by the subunit will contain differing member combinations. NCT 127 focuses on Seoul (the subunit name references the city’s longitude coordinate). NCT Dream originally contained members under the age of twenty, with members graduating when they reached this age. However, SME announced that the subunit no longer uses this graduation system (D. Kim 2020). WayV targets the group’s Mandarin speaking audience, primarily releasing Mandarin tracks (“WayV”). Occasionally, all of the NCT members have come together to release an album, but the subunits typically function independently from one another. Also, as of early 2021, the group has a total of 23 members, with the potential of more being added in the future. As described by Lee Sooman, the group’s uniqueness is its expandability, with no set limit on the number of members that can join NCT (S. Kim 2020). This creates the possibility of new subunits being created as well, targeting even more areas of the world.

Amongst the group’s 23 members, over half of them originate from outside South Korea. Below, I include a list of the different countries represented in NCT and which members originate from those countries. Full names are listed with the surname last and the member’s stage name, when applicable, in parentheses.

Country	Member(s)
America (1)	Johnny Suh

Canada (1)	Mark Lee
China (5)	Kun Qian, Sicheng Dong (WinWin), Dejun Xiao (Xiaojun), Renjun Huang, Chenle Zhong
Germany (1)	YangYang Liu
Hong Kong (1)	Yukhei Wong (Lucas)
Japan (2)	Yuta Nakamoto, Shotaro Osaki
Macau (1)	Guanheng Huang (Hendery)
Thailand (1)	Chittaphon Leechaiyapornkul (Ten)

Having members from multiple countries also increases the group’s linguistic abilities and cultural reach. Since debut, the group has release different versions of their songs in multiple languages, including Mandarin, English, Japanese, and Thai. With the group’s multiple language skills, they are able to promote themselves as a global group. They show their aspiration for this through their group greeting: “To the world, NCT!” (“[MV Commentary]” 2016). While NCT does have a large number of members, SME uses this to their advantage to project a multicultural group to draw in a multicultural fan base. Therefore, on different social media platforms, group members can communicate with a larger audience speaking multiple languages.

Consuming Idols and K-Pop

In King-O’Riain’s (2020) work on online authenticity and K-Pop, she introduces the idea of lifestyle consumption and liveness. She describes this liveness as something that “can facilitate a consistent community (of fans and idols), which structures affect and emotional investment and always presents the possibility of seeing the ‘real idols’ in a less scripted setting” (2020: 3). As the use of technology and social media grows, fans gain more access to the lives of their favorite idols. In some cases, different types of social platforms exist exclusively for idols to communicate with their fans, such as V Live, Weverse, Daum Fan Café, and Lysn. On sites like these, idols create posts of mundane activities or live stream themselves to communicate with fans. As mentioned in the first chapter, companies have varying degrees of control over

idols' social media accounts. Some groups or soloists only have an official account completely monitored by their company's staff, while others may receive more independence and have personal accounts less strictly monitored. This depends on numerous factors, such as the company itself, contract restrictions, the group's age in the industry, and member's behavior. Also, idols can have their social media privileges revoked, such as in the case of the group Day6's members deactivating their social media after their company, JYP Entertainment, removed a member from the group after violating their contract and dating a fan they met on social media (K. Z 2019). Whether or not these applications allow fans to see the true "everyday lives" of their idols, they make fans feel more connected with their idols. Essentially, these posts and videos allow fans to consume the liveness of idols, turning the idols themselves into objects of desire. In contrast to more "personal" online content, idols also often appear on reality shows focusing on their group, which companies also create to provide glimpses into their "everyday lives." However, some criticize how scripted these programs actually are and if idols just portray the "characters" companies assign them to (Jung 2011). No matter the level of planning companies put into these shows, fans will still consume them, hoping to gain more familiarity with their favorite idols.

Not only do fans consume their favorite idol's lifestyle just through watching them on social media, but they also attempt to recreate it by purchasing the same products they see idols using. This can happen both intentionally and unintentionally. On the intentional side, idols can become models or spokespersons for different brands, giving fans reason to purchase that brand's products. Going back to NCT, the group's subunit NCT 127 is currently the brand model for South Korean skincare and cosmetics company Nature Republic. As a part of this brand deal, the company releases merchandise featuring the group, such as posters, stickers, photobooks, etc.

Depending on the store, they use this merchandise to incentivize fans to buy their products. Currently at the company's Irvine, California location, when a fan spends \$75 or more, they will receive a griptok featuring one of the group members ("Event" 2021). Fans can only collect these items through promotions like this, so Nature Republic uses the images of the members as a marketing tool for their own products. On the unintentional side, fans will sometimes purchase items or clothing that idols use, even causing products to sell out (S. Park 2019). In 2019, a fan on social media asked a member of BTS, Jungkook, what type of laundry products the idol used. After replying with Downy Adorable fabric softener, the product sold out to the point where Jungkook could not purchase the product. Even though Jungkook has no direct connection with the Downy brand, fans will still go after products simply because an idol uses it, showing how fans attempt replicate idols' lifestyles.

The Role of Entertainment Companies

As touched upon briefly in previous sections, an idol/idol group's entertainment company plays a large influence over their image and how they project their identity to the public. This occurs not only on a personal level, but in the music that groups release as well. The longer an idol or group's career lasts, the more freedoms the company may give them, but starting out, companies limit the personal and creative freedoms of idols. For example, SM Entertainment created a sublabel in 2015 for their boy group Super Junior, named Label SJ (K. Z 2015). This gave the group more freedoms, as this label exclusively manages Super Junior and its members. They now have much more choice in their music, fashion, choreographies, and other aspects of music videos and performances. In other cases, some groups leave their entertainment companies altogether to establish their own agencies or find new agencies that offer them better contract terms.

Companies also determine what type of career opportunities idols accept and venture into, outside of music. Some idols receive the opportunity to appear in drama or variety programs, but it is up to the company to decide if the idol will accept this offer. Companies will typically choose certain members to push as actors, models, or other secondary career paths, possibly restricting other members from also venturing into those fields.

While some may consider talent as a marker for one's success in the K-Pop industry, an idol's identity and image also plays a large role in their career. It factors into their ability to promote themselves on entertainment programs, how their fans perceive them, and their ability to gain additional opportunities outside of just being an idol. It may seem superficial, but an idol's identity can make or break their career.

Chapter 4: Do You Even Know These People?

Within fan communities, a number of complex interactions occur between fans, influenced by various factors relating to a person's identity, including age, race, sexuality, gender, and location. Through my own survey, use of theory on globalization, and analysis of previous work done on the K-Pop fan community, I explore how identity relates to the experiences a person has and what shapes their identity. From the survey results, four different themes emerged: globalization, aspects of identity, consumption, and activism. In this chapter, I argue that these aspects of identity influence how someone experiences K-Pop fandom, both in positive and negative ways, as well as how they chose to interact with the fan community.

Fandom's Historical Role in Pop Culture

Typically, being a fan of something involves a level of directed engagement with an object of pop culture, such as celebrities, books, or sports teams, to name a few examples. This goes beyond just simply enjoying something, it extends to actions directed towards or caused by a particular pop cultural object. In Hinck's (2019) work on fandom activism, she frames belonging to a fan community as a type of citizenship. She understands citizenship as a "mode of public engagement – that is, a process of engaging others" (Hinck 2019: 4). Through this, she extends it to how people perform citizenship, which ties it into ideas of power and identity. When being involved in fandom, people express different aspects of their identity, whether it is by being a part of the fandom or within a fandom itself. As for the growth of fandom, technology played a large role in connecting online communities across the world. In the past, fan communities interacted via the postal service and in-person activities, such as club meetings and conventions. These methods relied on word of mouth and kept things restricted to groups in close proximity with one another (Hinck 2019). With the introduction of the internet, fans could

interact and share ideas online and no longer faced either of those restrictions. Online, people could organize themselves into collected communities, creating a space for people to participate in relation to their interests as a fan. Therefore, this creates one of Appadurai's imagined worlds, a community of similar interests and ideas based on the internet, rather than a physical location.

Methodology

In multiple studies involving the K-Pop fan communities, scholars use interviews and surveys as a primary method of data collection (Abd-Rahim 2019; Han 2017; Herbrink 2020; King-O'Riain 2020; Zhang and Negus 2020). As an effective way to gather information directly from the fan community, I also created a structured survey to learn more about the K-Pop fan community from a variety of perspectives and the hope of gaining a diverse set of responses.

Structured Survey

Through Microsoft Forms, I created a questionnaire featuring multiple choice and open-ended questions. This included demographic questions focusing on age, race, continent, sexuality, gender, sexuality, and language(s) spoken. The other questions focused specifically on K-Pop and its fan community, focusing on topics such as: reasons for being a fan, methods and length of participation in fandom, the identities of other fans, discrimination, and political activism.

To promote the survey, I posted information about it on my various social media accounts. After making these posts, I reached out to friends and fellow fans I had interacted with on social media, asking them to share this survey with their friends. Also, I attempted to reach out to other users with followings in the thousands or who were internationally based to garner a wider scope of responses. While not all users I reached out to responded, some did, which helped

spread the survey to a wide audience beyond people I already know. Doing this assisted in reaching a large diverse participant group for the survey.

Since the survey was on social media, anyone could see it and leave comments directly on social media about the survey. I did receive a response via Twitter, leaving constructive criticism on the demographic question related to gender: “on the gender question, you differentiate between male, female, non-binary and transgender - that wording makes it seem like binary trans people aren't male or female” (Twitter message to author, September 22, 2020). While I did provide an explanation to them in response, I also mentioned I would touch upon this in my write up of the survey results. For the demographic questions, the choices I listed reflected my own knowledge on each area, making it possible I did not list every option someone may identify as. For all demographic questions, aside from the one focusing on continents, I included an ‘other’ open-ended option, allowing respondents to elaborate on their identities or include personal labels I did not include in my multiple-choice options, as I may not have knowledge on every label one identifies with.

Summary of Survey Responses

In total, I received 1,007 responses, largely attributed to the social media campaign I created for the survey. However, a few responses were eliminated from the results I analyzed as they did not answer any questions or stated in one of the questions related to fandom participation that they were not a fan of K-Pop. Since this study is focusing specifically on the K-Pop fan community, it would not make sense to include the responses of people who clearly state they are not members of this community.

In the different demographics I focused on in the survey, I received a response from at least one person in all of the different options presented for each demographic. Most fans who

responded to my survey are between the ages of 18 and 30 (*Figure 1*). This may be due to the survey's promotion through social media, as younger people typically have a greater presence there, or it could be a true reflection of the fan community. Next, I inquired on race/ethnicity, but did not include a chart of that, as respondents were allowed to select multiple options, making it difficult to accurately represent the diversity of racial/ethnic identities. However, this is still an important aspect of fans' identity, as it comes up in multiple responses to short answer questions in the survey. Most fans did identify as white, but multiple racial identities and combinations were represented in the results. Interestingly, half the respondents come from outside of North America (*Figure 2*). While this does not provide direct evidence of how their specific culture influences their experiences, it shows there is a distribution of K-Pop fans across the globe, making it a global community. For gender (*Figure 3*), most respondents identified themselves as female. Unlike the other demographic areas, sexuality greatly varied between respondents without one clear majority (*Figure 4*). While heterosexual was the most identified sexuality, no specific sexuality had a large majority over the other. I also used language as a demographic question (*Figure 5*), but I left this as an open-ended response. While a quarter of respondents only speak English, the rest speak more than one language.

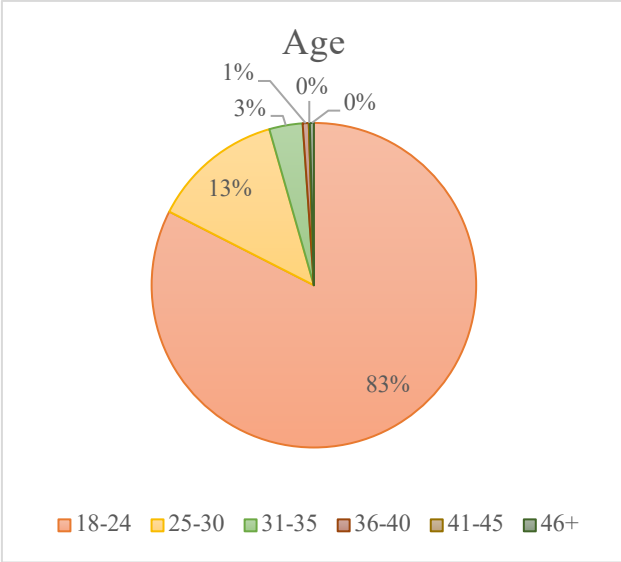


Figure 1

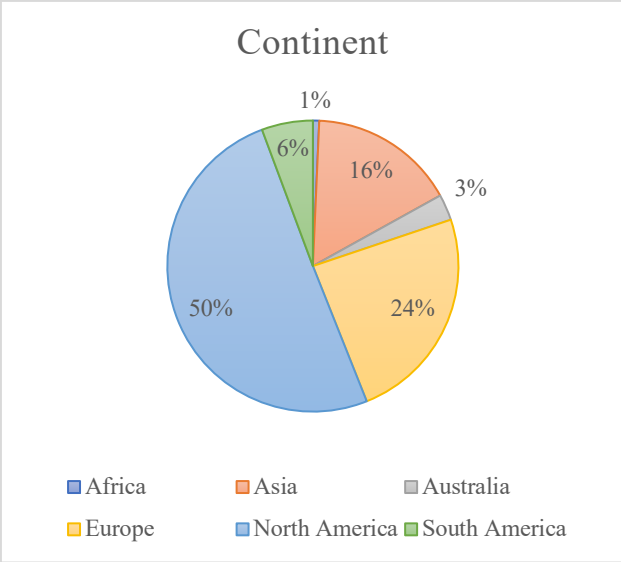


Figure 2

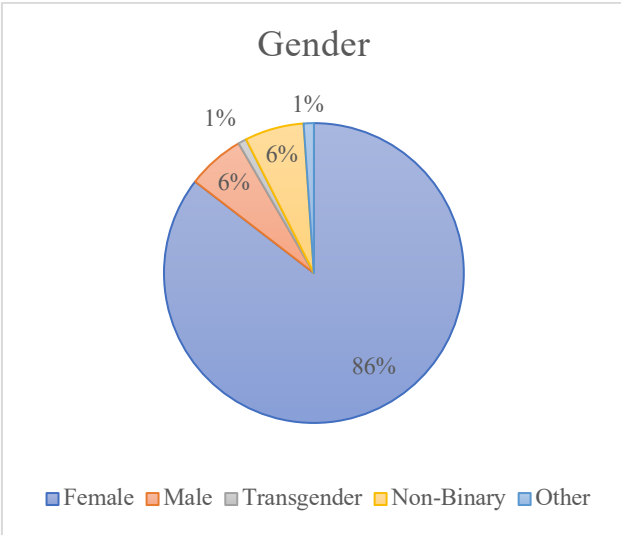


Figure 3

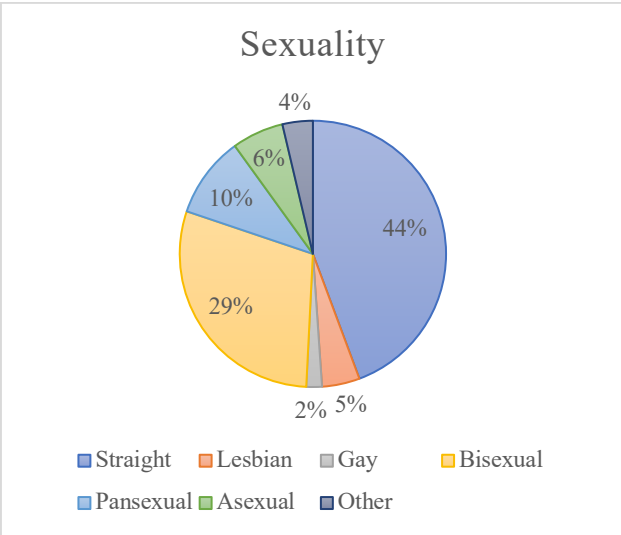


Figure 4

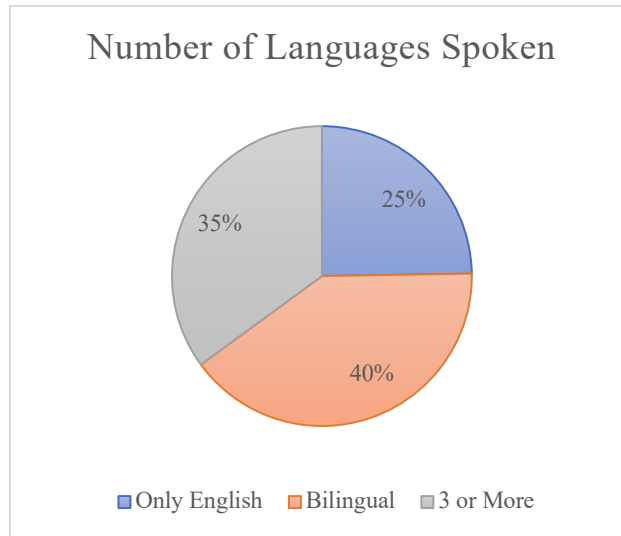


Figure 5

After these demographic questions the more qualitative responses followed. Compared to the demographic questions, respondents typically only answered these if the question applied to them, such as the ones on discrimination and political activism. These require a more extensive level of analysis, which I will cover in the next section.

Putting the Responses into Context

With such a large number of responses, trying to summarize all of the data at once would provide a too generalized picture, as well as deviate from this chapter's focus. Instead, I looked for specific key words in the qualitative responses and sorted the results into filtered groups using Excel. This allowed for comparison between different identities, which can be aligned with fans' experiences in the community. Based on the responses, I decided to focus on four different themes relevant to participation in fan culture: globalization, identity, consumption, and activism. When examining the open-ended responses, multiple respondents referred to these four themes. Each of these aspects constitute how people participate, tying back to their identities.

Globalization

As mentioned in the summary of survey responses, I received answers from all continents, excluding Antarctica. This shows K-Pop has a global reach, but also reveals how people around the world view K-Pop. In multiple cases, being a fan of K-Pop has caused people to become more aware of global ideas and cultures. In one of the survey questions, I asked respondents if participation in the K-Pop fan community affected how they view people who are different from them. This was proposed as a 'yes' or 'no' questions, with 65% of respondents who answered this question choosing 'yes.' As the different demographic results show, people from a variety of backgrounds consider themselves a fan of K-Pop, making it extremely likely that a fan will meet someone that does not have the exact same identity as them. In a response to the question on political activism, one respondent wrote: "By being exposed to another culture, you're in a way made to stop and listen to what is considered respectful and proper etiquette within that culture. You are able to see how one culture goes about their life, and you have the option to respect it whether or not you disagree. This tolerance and respect can be translated across anywhere." In this response, the person applies an anthropological viewpoint to cultural globalization. For those who are not Korean, opening oneself up to another culture through K-Pop exposes fans to new realities and ideas they may not have previously encountered in their own lives.

Identity

In responses to multiple open-ended questions, people brought up specific aspects of their identity and its influence on their experiences with K-Pop. People's identities gave them positive reasons for interacting with the fan community in some cases, while other cases cited have a negative experience due to their identity. When it came to people who identified as Asian, but did not live in Asia, multiple people indicated that K-Pop allowed them to connect with their

culture. This ties back to Appadurai's scapes theory and ethnoscaapes, as one method of globalization occurs when immigrants interact with their home culture from abroad.

When respondents mentioned their sexuality in open-ended responses, some had positive interactions related to the sexuality, while others faced discrimination over it. For the positive interactions, some fans mentioned the community acting as a space where they could openly express this identity. Within the general K-Pop fan community and in specific groups'/artists' fan community, LGBT+ fans create semi-exclusive spaces for themselves where they can freely express their identities. On the other hand, some fans mentioned facing discrimination within the community due to their sexuality, often having others attempt to invalidate their sexuality for a variety of reasons. "Fandom Wars," or public online disagreements between fans of different groups, often lead to invalidations of not only one's sexuality, but other aspects of their identity:

"I've seen 'fandom-wars' getting out of hand and arguments that started out as 'my group is better than yours' turn into 'I'm a better fan because I'm Asian/White/Black/etc.' or 'You're not a real fan because you're not 'enter ethnic group'. And I often see posts that go something along the lines of 'girls that only like boy groups are just as awful as rapists' or 'if you don't like girl groups, you're a hateful scumbag'. And strangely, at least to me it's strange, there are quite a few people who discriminate themselves because of their heritage. I saw people arguing that their Idol will never love them because they have a certain skin color or sexuality."

In this case, choosing to express one's sexuality can cause people to enjoy their experience in the fan community, but can also cause people to turn away from it. Also, multiple aspects of people's identity intersect, impacting their experiences. One respondent mentioned not only experiencing microaggressions related to their sexuality (asexual), but also their race (Asian).

In responses from Asia, Europe, and North America, multiple people brought up cultural appropriation by K-Pop idols and its defense by fellow fans. In North America, mentions of cultural appropriation largely came from people who identified as African American/Black, while elsewhere it came from people identifying themselves as hailing from South or South East

Asia. Since K-Pop's beginnings, artists have incorporated many aspects of hip-hop and rap, with some drawing backlash for their actions outside of South Korea. This includes instances involving blackface, traditionally African American hairstyles, religious symbols, and clothing choices. Within that artist's following, there is always a divide between fans on whether or not the artists should be "canceled" for their actions. However, this type of controversy predominantly occurs in the portion of the community that speaks English. A respondent from Africa mentioned that issues in the K-Pop community are often Americanized and framed in terms of American culture. Based on the responses my survey received, the majority of fans come from North America, but fans do hail from across the globe. From my own experiences on Twitter, issues relating to cultural appropriation of African American culture become hot topics in K-Pop, but issues involving cultural appropriation from other areas, such as India, do not receive the same level of attention. This may be because English language Twitter is typically dominated by people hailing from North America, tying back to the response about the community being Americanized.

Consumption

When analyzing levels of participation in fandom, consumption reveals the intensity of participation and demonstrates different levels of economic capabilities within it. In one of the survey questions, I inquired how people participate in fandom, allowing them to select from a list as well as describe their own modes of participation not included in the provided options. These methods of participation include monetized (purchasing albums/fan goods, attending concerts, and traveling to South Korea in relation to K-Pop) and non-monetized (listening to K-Pop, running a fan account, watching K-Pop related programs, and creating content). While all

respondents selected at least one of the non-monetized options, fewer respondents selected one of the monetized options.

This directly correlates with their identities, which shape fans' means to consume K-Pop. In many circumstances, a fan's location plays a large role in their level of participation. K-Pop tours and merchandise can often be restricted to select locations, making it hard for fans outside of a group's marketing range to consume physical goods. While it is possible to have items shipped outside of South Korea, the farther away the destination, the more expensive shipping becomes. Financial means are also influenced by other factors of one's identity, such as their gender, race, and sexuality. In many countries, discrimination in the workplace is directly reflected in wages, hiring practices, and structural violence.

Activism

In recent months, K-Pop fans have become a force of political activism on social media, going against conservative and racist ideologies. President Donald Trump held a rally in Oklahoma in June 2020, claiming to have received over a million requests for tickets. However, a little over 6,000 people actually attended (Bruner 2020). Media outlets largely attributed this to K-Pop fans creating a campaign for people to request tickets with no intention of attending. However, survey responses on K-Pop's influence on political participation mainly came from people located in North America. For many here, becoming a K-Pop fan caused them to become more outspoken and active against injustices linked to politics. One respondent specifically links the fandom with their interest in these types of movements, saying "it's allowed me to broaden my perspective in talking to so many people and their own troubles such as BLM, the issues with the LGBTQ community, and more...makes me want to actively help fight these social

injustices.” Outside of North America, respondents mostly either did not answer the question or stated that K-Pop has not influenced political participation.

Activism demonstrated by K-Pop fans does not just apply to politics, but other causes and movements as well. In multiple responses to the questions on politics, fans mentioned that they take notice when idols use their platforms to bring attention issues going on in South Korea and globally. As the Black Lives Matter Movement gained global attention during the spring and summer of 2020, multiple idols posted about and contributed to it. BTS in particular donated \$1 million to the movement, with their fan following, known as ARMY, raising enough in donations to match this (Bruner 2020). On social media, fans used their presence in support of the movement. Racists attempted to create an uproar on Twitter by making posts using the hashtag “WhiteLivesMatter,” but failed as K-Pop fans overtook this hashtag. Instead of posting racist comments, fans posted memes and fan cams to overshadow those who did post racist messages. A few respondents brought this up in their answers, saying they enjoyed participating in anti-racist activities.

Fans also utilize the K-Pop community to contribute to and advocate for multiple charitable cause.s This can come from simply donating money under an idol or group’s name, to creating a bigger campaign for a cause. In 2019, idol BM of the group KARD went viral for jokingly creating what would become known as the “Big Tiddie Gang,” comprised of male idols with toned chest muscles. This started as a joke, but changed when BM mentioned Breast Cancer Awareness Month that October (Morin 2020). Fans began sharing stories of their fights against breast cancer, including a fan BM met during a tour. He recounts, “She was tearing up and saying how it meant a lot to her that we had acknowledged Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and something clicked in my head,” (Morin 2020). In response, BM began selling clothing featuring

the Big Tiddie Gang logo, with part of the proceeds benefiting breast cancer research and awareness. Within the first two months of this, BM and fans raised over \$20,000, donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (Morin 2020). Not only did BM use his platform to bring awareness to this issue, but his fans took the initiative that would allow them to take it a step further, benefiting those affected by breast cancer.

Making Connections

As shown through these themes, not only does one's identity influence how they experience the K-Pop fan community but being a K-Pop fan also influences how a fan chooses to shape their own identity. The more a fan involves themselves in the community, the greater it influences them. Connecting back to Appadurai (1996), these fans create imagined realities for themselves. Their consumption of K-Pop and Korean culture brings them closer to their idols, possibly altering the future fans imagine for themselves. However, the identity society expects of them may cause fans to keep their interest in K-Pop hidden. While I did not expect to gain a straightforward answer to my research question on how identity effects fans interactions experiences, reading more into fandom studies and analyzing the survey results expressed how complex identity actually is. It has many layers created through a mixture of one's own cultural influences as well as through the media they consume. The identity people express in the fan community may be completely different from the one the express around family, friends, and the public. There is no way of knowing how these respondents express their identity while interacting with the fan community, but it does factor into their method of interaction.

As seen through the survey results and the patterns they present, a person's identity has a large influence on how they experience the K-Pop fan community and how they chose to interact with it. However, it goes deeper than simple interactions and extends into participation in fan

related activities, such as consumption and activism. With fans coming from so many different backgrounds, identity cannot be ignored, as aspects of identity are items of contention across the globe. The different sides of the K-Pop industry are extremely complex, yet still partially untouched. There is no industry in the world exactly like the South Korean music industry, making it a unique way to analyze Korean culture.

Conclusion

As seen through these varied dimensions of the K-Pop industry, identity plays a large role in shaping how companies market K-Pop idols as well as how they experience working in the industry. While K-Pop began as a local youth subculture, entertainment companies overtook it to make a profit. This transformed K-Pop into a global identity, not linked with any particular culture. Through recruiting foreign trainees, releasing music in languages outside of Korean, and incorporating a variety of global aspects into idols' personalities, K-Pop extends beyond South Korea into the wider world. Using Appadurai's scapes theory and imagined worlds helps demonstrate how globalization flows and how subcultures form around certain shared identities. Ethnoscapes show through in the immigration of foreign trainees to South Korea with hopes of becoming K-Pop idols; technoscapes reflects the advancement of technology that allows fans to have more access to their favorite idols and social media as a marketing tool; financescapes illustrate the risks associated with forming and marketing K-Pop groups globally; mediascapes also involve social media, but through the visual aspects of K-Pop such as pictures and videos; and ideoscapes come into play with the images companies create of the K-Pop industry and how consumers should view it. An imagined world forms as a result of fandom, having the shared identity of enjoying K-Pop as a whole or a specific group, allowing communities to form around the topic. Multiple factors play into K-Pop's global presence, working together to allow K-Pop to continue to expand.

Identity also effects how companies chose to utilize and market their idols. Having foreign members in a group allows companies to reach a broader audience, incorporating members' language skills to communicate with fans. It also affects the characteristics a group portrays in each music video release, such as being cute, students, bad boys/girls, sci-fi, sexy,

among other traits. Some groups fit better with certain characteristics based on their appearance and personality, attracting fans who enjoy those traits. Identity also effects how people view idols and the group they belong to, making individual identity just as important as the group's identity.

Through further research, I plan to continue to add onto discussions of identity in K-Pop, especially as the industry continues to grow and change. Despite the challenges that companies and the industry face with globalization, K-Pop has only become more diverse over the time I have considered myself a fan and I am sure it will continue to diversify in the future.

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