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Gender, Labor, and the Commodification of Intimacy in K-pop

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by

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ABSTRACT

Gender, Labor, and the Commodification of Intimacy in K-pop

by

Stephanie Jiyun Choi

This dissertation is an ethnography of intimacy as it is transacted in the political economy and commodity culture of K-pop. I view both K-pop singers and fans as intimate laborers in the affective economy of global K-pop and explore how intimacy is commodified as a product in digital media. Popular music studies have often defined fan activities in the pop music sector as domestic, and thus feminine. However, female K-pop fans' activities complicate the conventional dichotomies of domestic versus public, and feminine versus masculine, as their relationships with K-pop idols—male singers in particular—are built upon female dominance acquired through digital surveillance and fetishization of idol bodies. These activities have long been deemed abnormal, hysterical, irrational, and unintelligent; however, I see K-pop fans as active consumers who seek intimate solidarity through purchased feelings of pleasure, power, and ascendancy.

K-pop fandom is not phenomenal—it is performative.

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Introduction

> Everything is absurd, from A to Z. People have been constructing a tower with eggs since the beginning of K-pop. It's like a sandcastle. Everything is contradicting but those contradictions establish a single structure. Isn't it funny? This fandom doesn't make sense either. [Fans'] invisible sensitivity cannot be evaluated by our world's laws and morals. No one ever problematizes this absurdity because it forms the structures of the industry, syndrome, and sensation. It even became a huge, global culture. I have mixed emotions when I look at it. I'm part of this absurdity and perform absurdity. But I, as an idol, also fight against myself, all the time. (Moonsung, personal interview, August 21, 2015)

A. Entering the Scene

One night in April 2016, my sister-in-law and I attended Group G's pre-recording session at a music chart show for my research. One session was closed to the public; the other was open to fans that Group G's company had selected. We arrived at the studio around 10 p.m. when the idols and staff were pre-recording the closed session. The idols were revising the choreography, company directors and stylists were on standby, the stage production team was busily moving props and arranging the set, and a bodyguard was checking security. Group G was filming their performance in a cube, and my sister-in-law and I watched them perform through a monitor outside the cube while standing awkwardly right next to Group G's staff.

Although a stage director—my sister-in-law's former co-worker—had invited us to the studio, the staff definitely did not want us there. Group G's company director glanced at me and muttered, "Have we ever hired a new staff member? Maybe not? I wonder who this is…" It was a way of telling me that he already knew I wasn't working for him and that he didn't expect an answer from me. I smiled uncomfortably, tried to focus on my "work" and took a couple of photos of the monitor and outside of the cube. A bodyguard then gave me a warning. "The stage director invited you, right? Then you know that you do not belong here, right? That means, you shouldn't take pictures like that. Be careful, please!" A minute later, a

staffer from the stage production team apologized to me for the bodyguard's rude behavior, but reminded me again not to take photos during the session. My sister-in-law then apologized to me, blaming herself for not telling me that photos were prohibited. As outsiders, we were under careful observation by everyone in the studio. The tense atmosphere made me nervous. I wanted to tell everyone that we were not random "fangirls" who had taken advantage of some privileged connection just to lay eyes on the idols, but we had no way to defend ourselves against the surveillance. I looked at Group G member Moonsung who was about thirty feet away, hoping that he would recognize me. I had told him in advance that I would be there, but there was no way for me to get his attention. People from his company weren't supposed to know that we knew each other.

When I met him for the first time in 2015, Moonsung snuck out of the dorm that his company had provided for him and his group members. Neither of us had obtained permission for the interview—we just knew that the company wouldn't allow it. He had mentioned that his CEO would let him to go out but that his managers imposed a curfew because, "It's their job to surveil us." It was 2 a.m. and the streets were empty, but Moonsung was extremely afraid of being seen with me. We kept about ten feet apart, just in case paparazzi or his fans saw him. I followed him into a taxi, only after he got in first. When we arrived at a coffeeshop, he ordered a coffee for me while I waited upstairs while I reserved a table far from the window. I wanted to tell anyone who might be watching us that I was not his girlfriend. "Do we really have to do this?" I complained. "Sorry, our group is famous for being women-free." Moonsung and his company did not want any hint of a rumor that he might be dating someone.

Back at the studio, I was distracted as the group tediously recorded the same performance over and over again until my sister-in-law shouted, "He's coming!" Then came

the sudden flash of a camera. Although I could only see his silhouette I knew that it was Moonsung. We looked at each other, but avoided eye contact. Instead of saying hello, he circled around me, pretending to rehearse his song. I gazed at the floor until he left. That was the safest way for us to say hello.

The second session, this time open to a select group of fans, began at 3:30 a.m. The fans had been waiting since 10 p.m., but since it had taken several hours to change the stage set, they ended up waiting for five and a half hours. As the privileged ethnographer, I had entered the new set along with the staff and positioned myself outside of the area where fans were admitted. When three hundred fans had filled the room, the bodyguard barricaded them inside. I was relieved to have left the closed set, with the staff staring at me. For a little while it felt much better to be part of the mass group of fans. But this comforting illusion didn't last long.

The first take ended at four in the morning. My sister-in-law had an appointment in a few hours and we were tired, so we decided to leave. I then realized that I was *not* part of the fan group—dozens of fans who saw us standing outside of the barricade began swearing at us. My sister-in-law and I rushed from the studio without looking back. The unexpected reaction from the fans was a shock, but we knew what it meant. We had entered the pre-recording session without proper credentials, but only with a pass from some acquaintances in the media industry who let us sneak into these sessions (later I learned that fans described privileged fangirls like us as "*ppaeksuni*"). Unlike them, we were not "hardworking," having invested time, money, and labor to get admission to these sessions.

To attend these pre-recording sessions, fans must sign up for the event and hope to be selected by the company on a first-come, first-served basis. Once selected, fans must prove that they are "real" fans, by bringing all of their versions of the group's most recent album,

receipts for the purchase, the official light stick that they must use during the pre-recording session, and the fan club membership card that can only be purchased at a designated time at the beginning of each year.

As soon as I was away from the studio, I searched the name of the show on Twitter to see if anyone on the site had mentioned us; no one had. The fans who commented seemed exhausted from their all-nighter: they were cursing the show producer for delaying the pre-recording session, which had not ended until 6 a.m. Because it had been recorded after midnight, only adults had been allowed to attend, and many of them who were workers and college students were worried about getting through the next day at work or in school.

B. Transactions of Intimacy in the K-pop Market

After several similar experiences, I realized that a young female's physical and/or emotional proximity to a male idol posed a threat for other female fans and to K-pop fandom. To the fans, my visit to the pre-recording session was an unfair attempt to gain an exclusive access to K-pop idols without having paid my dues. I was not among the fans who stood behind the barricade, whose individualities had been replaced with the collective—and thus legitimized—identity of the "fan club," sanctioned to be coupled with their idol group. The only way for fans to meet BLACKPINK was to join BLINK, BLACKPINK's official fan club. The only acceptable way to meet EXO, MAMAMOO, or BTS was to meet them as their fan club members—i.e., EXO-Ls, MOOMOOs, or ARMYs—at their officially scheduled events.

My exclusive access to idols at the studio—even as a professional ethnographer—was, apparently, not acceptable to staffers or to fans. The fans did not know and did not have to know who I was. To them, I was just another fan, undeserving of special access. Music

video director Sofia, who had worked for the music chart show M Countdown as an intern in Seoul, talks about her own ordeal at the hands of on-site fans:

> I used to work for M Countdown, and I was told not to be seen. Apparently, [Korean] fangirls complained to the guard, "[Who] is that foreign girl doing [next to] the artist?" *They pay, they decide*. They demanded that I hide . . . They pointed [at me and said,] "What is she doing here?" and [the company was] like, "We're sorry but you shouldn't be seen." It's so funny because . . . I don't interact with your idol. I'm just doing my work right here, so trust me, [the idols] are safe. (Sofia, personal interview, May 19, 2016; emphasis mine)[1]

Because she was not Korean, Sofia was readily noticeable to Korean fans, who assumed that she had flown all the way to Seoul to work for K-pop idols.

Sofia's experience reveals several characteristics of the idol-fan relationship in K-pop that I explore throughout my dissertation. First, the fans' demand to remove Sofia from the workplace and M Countdown's compliance exemplify fans' power as decision makers in the K-pop production processes. Even though the request was irrelevant to the material outcome of K-pop, and even though it was made behind the scenes, making such complaints was deemed normal and legitimate enough for the company to accept it. Both the company and fans believed that fans were entitled to make decisions about an idol's sexuality and restrict had flown interactions at the workplace. For fans, Sofia was a heterosexual female fan who flew all the way to South Korea and worked at a television station only to see male idols. Fans' interventions in the production process were deemed as part of the consumers' rights, gendered by the collective body of the fans. As Sofia states, "They pay, they decide."

Previous audience studies by the Frankfurt and Birmingham Schools compartmentalized the industry and audiences as two monolithic structures with fixed roles and predictable binary relationships (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002; Adorno 1975;

[1] The interview was conducted in English. All of other interviews in this dissertation were conducted in Korean.

Hall 1980), But here I find the identifications and interactions between the K-pop industry and its fandom to be fluid and overlapping. The agential roles of fans and industry actors are not so separate. After all, the media industry consists of stakeholders who may also be fans of mass media along the spectrum of entertainment, from sports to cinema, music, fashion, and online games, and thus the boundaries between entertainment industry workers and fans are fluid, multilayered, and multidirectional. Not surprisingly, many K-pop industry workers are fans of idols. The fans at the M Countdown studio were partly right—although Sofia did not interact personally with idols and maintained her professionalism at her workplace, she informed me that she *was* a fan of SHINee and other idols. Calling her out was, then, a smart tactic for fans, who used this censoring action to reaffirm the K-pop fandom's affective capitalist order, that fans meet their idols only through the fan club. To these fans, Sofia was not part of the production team, but a privileged fan who had gained individual access to idols through her job. Moonho from Group B also attests to the blurry borderline between fans and industry workers:

> Managers of Group H [a girl group of Group B's company] are all male fans, while our group's hair and makeup artists, stylists, and all of the female workers in our company, especially Fan Department managers, are idol fans. Even if they are not our fans, they are at least fans of other idols, but they eventually become fans of ours while they work with us. But that doesn't last more than a month. In the beginning, everything goes fine. We [the members of Group B] all look good, we are celebrities, so the workers like us. But once we point out their mistakes, let's say, I ask [a worker] to buy something again when she buys a wrong one. I would casually ask, "Why did you buy this?" But that would screw up our relationship, because she expects some kind of fan service [and be nice to her]. So there are idols who are good at controlling fan-minded workers and take advantage of them. For example, if the idol's stylist is his fan, then the idol would be kind to her. Then she would bring nicer costumes for him. (Moonho, personal interview, August 17, 2017)

Moonho complains that his female workers expect him to perform "fan service," a core structure of K-pop's affective labor, in which idols demonstrate care, support, and affection for fans through docile and subordinate behaviors.

"Fan service" [*p'aensŏbisŭ*] refers to any form of labor that celebrities offer to their fans. A celebrity can perform fan service verbally (e.g., by saying "I love you" to their fans), physically (e.g., by hugging their fans), and/or musically (e.g., by singing a love song to their fans). Celebrities may voluntarily perform fan service, but very often fans ask their celebrities to perform specific behaviors for their pleasure. Among Korean entertainers (e.g., musicians, actors, comedians, show hosts, and fashion models), K-pop idols are governed the most by the idea of fan service: *K-pop idols are service workers who are expected to please their fans*. Their great wealth is a result of fans' support, and thus idols must appreciate what fans have given them and present docility, humility, and obedience through fan service labor. Fan service is no longer a supplementary work; it has become part of the profession.

Moonho's account also reveals the surveillance that permeates the idol-fan relationship in K-pop. There is extremely little *de facto* behind-the-curtain space for idols as noncommodified humans. They are compelled to embody and perform their personae even when they are off stage and off camera, because they do not know when they might encounter a fan. As a result, their private space is determined not by physically perceived spaces but by the people who see them and with whom they are seen. After all, a private space for idols is fan-free, and thus free from constant, collective surveillance. Because one's fan status is invisible, the idol must assume that a fan can be anywhere. Whether the idol is sitting in a car or taking a break at a park, she must be aware that someone may be watching her. Even when the idol is staying in her dorm, she must be ready to appear on camera as soon as live streaming for her fans begins.

In this sense, idols must embody their media personae anytime and anywhere, because they do not know when fans or paparazzi will expose every moment of their lives to the public. Today, spaces of surveillance encompass the physical and the virtual. Millions of

fans keep an eye on idols' social media accounts and capture everything that the idols do online. The public and the private are not compartmentalized by the physicality of space, due to the portable, and thus invasive, nature of cellphone cameras that are livestreamed in domestic spaces, such as the idol's dorm or parents' house. It is not difficult to find screenshots of idols' houses captured from livestreams, opening to fans a place normally presumed to be private. Through these images, fans investigate the idol's belongings and speculate about his musical tastes, reading habits, favorite sports, daily activities, and love life. Then an off-camera moment or more precisely, a fan-free moment would be truly deemed an idol's private space. An idol's world becomes a panopticon with countless spectators: this constant surveillance exerts its power through the commodification of idol bodies. Transactions of intimacy are not new in celebrity culture studies, but what makes K-pop fans unique is how the industry sanctions and co-produces fans' surveillance of idols, explicitly acknowledging the commodification of the idol body, instead of problematizing the invasion of privacy. The act of surveillance is systematized in the form of fan clubs that serve a variety of functions, from a supporters' group to an association for consumer rights and a (fan) labor union.

This shared intimacy is transacted within the political economy and commodity culture of K-pop. Discourses of authenticity often allow music fandom to appear apolitical, as a form of pure affect and abstracted emotional reflection. However, as popular music scholars such as George Lipsitz (1994) and Tim Taylor (2012) have argued, the affective forms of love and sincerity represented by fandom—and by extension, identity politics and social movements of musicians and audiences—are produced within, and help to reproduce, the commodity culture of transnational capitalism. The K-pop business provides a critical site to explore gendered forms of economic power as they fold into context of global citizenship

and consumerism. As the idols provide music production and fan service, fans support them through financially tinged activities like voting, online streaming, purchasing albums, and making public donations in idols' names, as well as through emotional and physical labor, such as writing fan letters, attending pre-recording sessions, shouting fan chants at live performances, and sending support messages via social media.

In this context, music is one of a primary means of cultivating affect in global capitalism, and also a marketing tool that demonstrates and promotes such intimate relationships to the general public. New songs and music videos provide entertainment to fans, but also create a metatext that contextualizes their relationship with the idols. In this sense, K-pop not only sells music but also attempts to create markets for (1) the idol body (often as media texts); (2) intimacy between the idols and fans; and lastly, (3) fandom as a media spectacle. The fans at M Countdown were able to demand Sofia's removal, not as consumers of music production but as purchasers of intimacy and proximity to their idols. To them, Sofia belonged to fandom as much as to the industry—her work in the studio was seen as only a privileged and possibly unethical means of access to the idols.

In my research, I have investigated the relationship between Korean female fans and male idols. This is not simply because female fans of boy groups are the most powerful group in the K-pop fandom—both in number and consumer power—but also because this fandom constantly explores and even subverts patriarchal gender hierarchies.[2] K-pop is both eye candy and a powerful medium that allows its fans to defend their cultural and political beliefs. Unpacking the gender dynamics between female fans and their boy bands provides a

[2] Another reason derives from my own capacity of access and engagement to the fandom as a heterosexual female in her thirties, which I explain at the end of the introduction chapter.

view of the changing atmosphere of gender politics, new governing practices of digitized surveillance, and commodification of intimacy in the South Korean popular culture.

C. Shifting from the Pathology of Fandom to the Agency of Fanhood

In South Korea, as in many other sites of the celebrity-fan relationship in popular culture, fans have been long-treated as abnormal, hysterical, irrational, and unintelligent. Joli Jenson, in her discussion of fandom as pathology, argues that the elitist and disrespectful projection pervading scholarship invoking two types of fans—the "mass man" and "frenzied crowd"—are embodiments of modernity, which places emphasis on the properties of alienation, atomization, vulnerability, and irrationality (1992). She explains that such characters give us a romanticized perception of pre-modern society fueled by a critical gaze on the "social, cultural, and moral decay" of modern society rather than describing actual fan-celebrity relations (ibid., 14). Three premises articulate fandom pathology: (1) a fan is a response to the celebrity-fantasy manipulated by the mass media; (2) fans as a crowd are violent and irrational; and (3) fandom is a deviant phenomenon that is not part of our normal, daily lives but is "psychological symptom of a presumed social dysfunction" (Jenson 1992:9). Defining fans in pathological terms is, after all, a discriminatory othering project that gives non-fans a sense of normalcy through differentiation of class and status.

Fandom pathology is also gendered in a variety of dimensions. The term "fangirls" dismisses the physical age and psychological maturity of female fans, and connotes silliness, obsession, and hysterical frenzy. In popular culture studies, female youth have either been largely neglected as a passing reference or depicted as voiceless, sexual objects for males. In their pioneering article "Girls and Subcultures," Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber argue that girls' subcultures may have become invisible because "the very term 'subculture' has acquired such strong masculine overtones" ([1977] 2005:106). Mary Celeste Kearney asserts

that stereotypes of girlhood and girls' culture have ignored the productive cultural practices of young females and have perpetuated "conservative ideologies of sex and gender that link females and femininity to the practices of consumerism and males and masculinity to the practices of production" (2006:4). Patriarchal ideologies likewise prevail in the discourses on consumerism. In her study of MTV and its youth audience, Lisa Lewis stresses that "leisure practices that involve public space are often considered to be inappropriate for girls" (1990:37), because girls are expected to assume the role of invisible laborers at home, not to experiment with social norms outside of parental surveillance.

Similarly in South Korea, female K-pop fans are denigrated as "*ppasuni*." Popular culture scholars Kim Ki-ran and Choi Ki-ho defines *ppasuni* as:

> An abbreviation of "*oppa suni*." It refers to "a young girl who is into *oppa*." It is a deprecating term that refers to a zealous fan of entertainers or sports players. As it is recognizable from the suffix, "-*suni*," it is a group that especially consists of girls in their teens. The age group of *ppasuni* is younger than the previous generation's *oppa pudae* ["*oppa*'s troop," a term that refers to fangirls in the 1980s], and they feature a more aggressive and uncritical attitude toward the subject/object they like. (Kim and Choi 2009: 260-262)

"*Oppa*" is a nomenclature used by a female when she calls or refers to her older brother or an older male in her peer group. Although the demographics of K-pop fans show a wide age range, the origin of the term "*ppasuni*" infantilizes female fans. Columnist Yi Chin-song points out that the "*ppasunip'obia*" (fangirl-phobia) is misogynistic:

> *Ppasuni* work like ants to collect idol photo cards, win a fan sign event ticket, go to a concert, and buy merchandise. [The money *ppasuni* spend on their fan activities] solely becomes the source of income not only for idols but also for the industry workers . . . But what is the reality of *ppasuni*? As soon as saying goodbye to "*oppa*" after the shooting, [*ppasuni*] are scorned by the broadcast company staff. Even the event hosts threaten *ppasuni*, telling them that their "*oppa*" won't show up if they don't obey [their command] . . . Bodyguards look at [*ppasuni*] as if they are vermin, while broadcast company workers make sarcastic remarks, "It seems like you really have nothing to do [other than the fan activity]." Of course, it is difficult to control a mass of audience [like *ppasuni*] . . . But in these moments of "excessive suppression,"

> one raises a question: "Why don't the staff—who are yelling at me right now—say anything to that fanboy over there?"[3]

Yi concludes by arguing that even though fanboys do not outnumber *ppasuni*, they are not considered a marginalized group because bodyguards or staffers treat them with respect. After all, "It is *ppasuni* who are beaten up even when they behave the same [as fanboys do], because a 'young girl' is a pushover."[4]

Ppasuni are treated similarly by the general public. The comment section under a sports news article is secured by "masculine" sports fans who discuss game results and evaluate cheerleaders' "hot and sexy bodies"; however, comments under an idol's news piece is always a site of contestation between fans who support their idols and the general public or non-fans who degrade and criticize idols and fans alike. It is not difficult to find caustic comments like, "Stop wasting your parents' money [on fan activities]. Your idol doesn't even know you!" Sociologists Kang Chun-man and Kang Chi-wŏn explain that *ppasuni*'s gender and age as young girls contribute to such criticism (Kang and Kang 2016:43-44). Regardless of their age, K-pop female fans are infantilized as "fangirls," who are neither financially independent not productive.

According to Viviana A. Zelizer, criticism of female fandom also derives from the "twinned beliefs that intimacy corrupts the economy and the economy corrupts intimacy" (2005:1). For instance, watching baseball is considered a rational form of leisure because a baseball fan does not expect any intimate outcome from baseball games. Meanwhile, K-pop fans are considered irrational because they expect affective responses from their idols.

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[3] Yi Chin-song, "*Ppasuni Palo Ch'aji Mara: Nŏnŭn Nuguege Han Pŏnirado Jjindŭkhan Saramiŏtnŭnya* [Do Not Kick the Fangirls: Have You Ever Been a Passionate Person to Someone At Least Once]," Quoted in Kang and Kang 2016.

[4] Ibid.

Instead of depicting female fans as members of an irrational, frenzied crowd, I borrow Lauren Berlant's concept and view the fans as an "intimate public" who share their personal experiences as women through universalized terms in the transnational community of K-pop, as they "already share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience" (2008:viii). Berlant explains,

> A certain circularity structures an intimate public, therefore: its consumer participants are perceived to be marked by a commonly lived history; its narratives and things are deemed expressive of that history while also shaping its conventions of belonging; and, expressing the sensational, embodied experience of living as a certain kind of being in the world, it promises also to provide a better experience of social belonging—partly through participation in the relevant commodity culture, and partly because of its revelations about how people can live. So if, from a theoretical standpoint, an intimate public is a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general, what's salient for its consumers is that it is a place of recognition and reflection. (Berlant 2008:viii)

By understanding fans as intimate publics, I view the element of sentimentality in K-pop fandom not as synonymous with irrationality but rather as a force that confers a sense of belonging through a reflection of gendered experiences that are perceived as "universal" for a woman.

I use the term "fanhood" to refer to the performative connections among fans, more specifically, a sense of belonging, community building, and intimate solidarity in the fandom. Unlike "fandom," "the state or condition of being a fan of someone or something" or "the fans of a particular person, team, fictional series, etc. regarded collectively as a community or subculture," I argue that "fanhood" stresses the intimate solidarity that fans *perform* through particular ways of identification, stylization, and exclusion of outsiders.[5] Fanhood, in this sense, presents fans as actors who exchange mutual support and who bond with each other to

[5] "Fandom," *Oxford Dictionaries*, Oxford University Press. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fandom

secure their fan activities through the social and cultural values and generate shared political ideologies.

Fans reinforce their fanhood by closing ranks and prohibiting the incursion of outsiders. For example, fans reserve concert tickets for other fans—not their friends or acquaintances but total strangers—to avoid brokers who resell tickets above face value. Once fans buy the tickets, they announce on Twitter that they have extra tickets, stipulating that people who wish to purchase the tickets must provide proof of their fan status. The prospective buyer usually provides photos of her fan club membership card, the fan club's official light stick, and/or a pile of the idol group's albums. The buyer's activities on her fan account—such as the registration year and the number of tweets and followers—are additional proof of her fan status. Fanhood is also manifested when fans express their opinions of their idol's behavior or industry decisions. When their idol commits a crime or the company hires a misogynist lyricist, for instance, fans often release a statement of "withdrawal of support" and flood the company with mails, emails, fax, phone calls, and online posts on social media. In this way they reaffirm their rights as consumers who have purchased pleasure, intimacy, power, and ascendancy.

Fanhood connects K-pop fan communities through shared activities. During the 2018 Bangladesh road-safety protests, BTS fans or "Armys"—both Bangladeshi and non-Bangladeshi—spread the hashtag #WeWantJustice on Twitter to protest the Bangladeshi government's domestic media censorship of stories about police brutality against the protesters. ABC7's reporter George Pennacchio stated "#BTSARMY is jumping into what's happening in Bangladesh. The hashtag #WeWantJustice is #BTS fans' way of creating more attention on the issue. Here's a report on the situation," and added a link of the related news

reported by ABC News.[6] Although the issue is irrelevant to BTS or Armys fan activities, Armys use their fanhood to create a powerful voice for global justice. In this case, the hashtag trending movement was not a snowball effect like the popularity of Psy's "Gangnam Style"; it was an organized movement by people who strategically used existing media networks for political mobilization.

The difference between fandom and fanhood hinges upon whether it is phenomenal or performative. Fanhood can give fans gaining an independent identity, stance, and ideology separate from those of their idol. When a male idol is accused of soliciting sex workers, for example, his fans—females who reject the sexual objectification of women and illegal prostitution—will publicly announce their withdrawal of support in a display of self-respect as Korean women. Fanhood is more closely associated with sisterhood than brotherhood in K-pop: female fans often use sisterhood as a political tool to educate the industry on feminism and communicate their "ideal" male idol-female fan relationship.

D. Fan Activities as Intimate Labors

One of my main goals in this project is to complicate the perceived notion of "fangirls." Throughout the dissertation, I describe how K-pop female fans are willingly manipulated by the media industry by effectively using the illusory nature of mass media. Previous popular culture studies have pathologized female fans' reaction to the mass media; however, I demonstrate how fans claim their affective outcome co-produced with idols as a

[6] George Pennacchio (@abc7george), https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/scores-injured-traffic-protests-bangladesh-capital-57030231," Twitter, August 5, 2018, 8:37 a.m., https://twitter.com/abc7george/status/1025888565048365056. The link attached on his tweet is broken.

legitimate form of commodity. K-pop female fans voluntarily yet systematically act both as promoters of their idols and as a labor union against their idols by setting the price of the intimate relationship they have built around and with idols. Finally, they incorporate fan activities into their daily lives but also use fanhood to critique gender and racial inequalities.

The literature on intimate economies centers on the provision of sex, care, and domestic work (e.g., Pateman 1988; Allison 1994; Barry 1995; Meyer ed., 2000; Hochschild [1983] 2003; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, eds., 2004; Dorais 2005; Morrison and Whitehead eds., 2007; Padilla 2007; Kang 2010; Boris and Parreñas eds., 2010; Sharpless 2010; Minichiello and Scott eds., 2014; Laing, Pilcher, and Smith eds., 2015; Alcano 2016; Logan 2017; Özbay 2017). By investigating K-pop idols as service workers who perform intimate labor for their fans, I illustrate how one's incomplete body and feelings can be transacted as commodities in the transnational context of neoliberal capitalism. Fandom is a space in which the laborer and consumer negotiate standards of affective labor and normalize certain affective interactions. I investigate male idols as celebrity figures but also as service workers who sell intimacy to and construct unique social relations with female consumers. Their status as idols complicates conventional gender and class hierarchies—to maintain the celebrity status, male idols must surrender their privacy and self-construction of personae and be subservient to their female fans. The economic status of a male idol as a product, laborer, and capitalist entrepreneur varies according to the fandom capital that he has accumulated during his career.

Circulation, presentation, and representation of media texts are forms of virtual capital that is deeply intertwined with fanhood and consumer power that eventually provide personal agency and economic capital within fandom. Let me go back to the buyer-fan who wishes to purchase concert tickets at face value from a reseller-fan. The photos of a fan club

membership card, the fan club's official light stick, and/or albums of the idol group that the buyer-fan provides to the reseller-fan are evidence of the buyer-fan's fandom capital. I use the term "fandom capital" to refer to the media text-based assets, such as photos, fan fiction, memes, and messages that facilitate a fan's access to idols, accumulation of followers on social media, visibility and publicity in the online fan communities, and financial capital, all of which demonstrate a fan's social status and competence within a fan community. Anyone in this economy—including the celebrity, the celebrity's company, and fans—can accumulate fandom capital through affective labor.

My dissertation contributes to the literature on global affective economies (Zimmerman, Litt, and Bose eds., 2006; Parreñas 2008; Vora 2010; Emiko and Kaoru, eds., 2014; Mai 2018) while contributing to the small literature on online/virtual intimate labors (e.g., Walby 2012; Sanders et al., 2018). I view both K-pop idols and fans as intimate laborers and the K-pop industry and market as sites of global affective economy. I ask the following questions: How do fans claim their rights as laborers at the same time as consumers, through economic activities that are publicly defined as "leisure"? How is intimacy enacted via digital media technologies? Who determines whether intimacy, as a commodity, is satisfying? The literature on popular music has often defined fan activities in the pop music sector as domestic and feminine, but how do K-pop female fans' online activities complicate the dichotomies of domestic versus public and feminine versus masculine? I explore K-pop not merely as a music business but also as a critical site in which human interactions reestablish the social strata of nationality, sexuality, and gender and create multidirectional dialogues on the global mediasphere.

E. Reflexivity in the Fieldwork

I entered the K-pop scene in 2012 when I applied for an internship at the SOUND Lab, a private institution that released semi-academic magazines about Korean popular music. As a researcher of the SOUND Lab researcher, I met entertainment company CEOs, A&R directors, and government officials, but the interviews were designed for the Lab's magazine release. There I met the A&R director of ChungChun Entertainment and the executive manager of Zandari Festa, one of the biggest indie music festivals in South Korea. Those two opened up a web of connections for me in the K-pop industry, and I was able to interview and have conversations with K-pop idols, idol managers, casting division directors, A&R directors, music video directors and staff, television show producers, and news media reporters. At the same time, I was invited to closed media events and showcases as a reporter of Australian media outlet *Hello Asia*.

I occasionally attended K-pop events in Los Angeles and New York and spent the summers of 2015, 2017, and 2018 and ten months in 2016 in Seoul. Traditionally, fieldworkers are "urged . . . to plan for a full year in the field so that we could document every calendrical rite and its associated music making" (Stock and Chiener 2008:109), although this was no longer a pertinent issue for a researcher like me for several reasons. First, although I was not an avid fan of K-pop idol music, I did grow up with it. As a native Korean, I was already familiar with Korean society inside and outside of the K-pop world. Moreover, online spaces were primary sites where scandals, controversies, and other issues were brought up and resolved, so I did not have to be present in South Korea or in any other physical spaces to learn more about the communal practices of the global K-pop culture. Lastly, many K-pop events were not always scheduled annually. In fieldwork classes, I was told to be on the fieldwork site for at least twelve consecutive months to participate in all of

the seasonal rituals. Some K-pop events, like annual award shows or government-sponsored events, were held annually. But most of the events were arbitrarily scheduled, and promotional cycles were never based on the calendar. For this reason, idols I met for interviews were either extremely busy or had no schedule at all, based on their popularity or their company's situation.

In my fieldwork, I interviewed several idols, whom I contacted through my personal network. I contacted a couple of companies, but they never responded. My interlocutors in the industry then arranged interviews with the idols outside the presence of managers or other company personnel. This meant that the interview was completely private. I was able to meet female idols causally at an Apgujeong coffeeshop during the daytime; but meeting a male idol without a manager made me a prospective threat to the idol, his company, and his female fans. Meeting a male idol came with restrictions, such as meeting him in a windowless room, or walking behind him in the street, to prevent fans or paparazzi from taking photos and posting them online. We entered and left the coffeeshop at least five minutes apart. Idols always wore hats and masks. Because of my positionality as a woman in her early thirties who could be seen as a potential threat to female fans, my role as an ethnographer was structured by these regulations, which gave me a look into an idol's private life and its restrictions.

One of my invaluable experiences as an ethnographer was my close contact with Moonho. I was supposed to meet him for a one-time interview, although he seemed extremely reluctant. Later I found out that he was in the midst of leaving his group—he had notified the company, but since the company refused to make a public announcement he could not search for a new company. I had met him five days a week for a couple of months, helping him with: how to communicate with his previous company; how to contact the new

company; how to discreetly inform his fans on social media about his contract situation; and how to write the formal announcement of his departure from his group and the company. I also helped Moonho to select his cover songs; make a video clip for his song cover; teach English and correct his English pronunciation when he sang; design his new music video; review lyrics; and sort tracks for his upcoming album. After he joined the new company, I stopped advising him. This experience revealed to me the complicated (yet disorganized) system of the entertainment industry and how personal connections and affective relationships influenced the outcome of idol production.

I also met dozens of fans in their online communities or at concerts. I was an official member of EXO, BTS, and Shinhwa fan clubs and attended numerous K-pop and K-hip hop events in Seoul, Changwon, Los Angeles, and New York. Among them were:

(1) pre-recording sessions at M Countdown and Music Core,

(2) K-pop festivals including the KCON LA, the KCON NY, the Korea Times Music Festival, and K-pop World Festival,

(3) an idol fancon called the Royal Flush,

(4) fanmeets of Boyfriend, SHINee Key, and Super Junior Lee Teuk,

(5) a birthday party for Girls' Generation Seohyun,

(6) a busking event of SHINee Jonghyun,

(7) exhibitions of Beenzino's I.A.B and BTS's "24/7=Serendipity,"

(8) concerts of Beenzino, Big Bang, BTS, EXO, Girls' Generation Taeyeon, Girls' Generation Tiffany, Huckleberry P, Jay Park, MAMAMOO, SHINee, SHINee Jonghyun, Shinhwa, Zion. T, SM TOWN, and JYP Nation,

(9) album showcases of Dean, GWSN, Infinite, Pentagon, Secret Song Ji-eun, SF9, and SHINee,

(10) a musical starring Lee Howon (Hoya),
(11) live concert screenings of f(x), Girls' Generation, Super Junior, TVXQ, and SM TOWN,
(12) K-pop idol-related venues such as the COEX Artium and Kamong Café.
I wished to attend fansign events—by buying an album, a fan can gain a chance to apply for a lottery ticket to the fansign event, where idols have a one-on-one talk with each fan while they sign an autograph. Even though I spent about 250,000 won for one ticket, I failed. Since then I didn't dare to try.

I was in contact with non-native Korean fans in North America, the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Europe, who gladly agreed to share their stories for my dissertation. They used words like "magical" and "catchy" to describe the idols and the K-pop sound. They had either visited South Korea or hoped to. Sometimes they spoke critically of cultural appropriation, misogyny, and/or racism in K-pop, but only when I asked them. These topics were rarely came up by themselves, especially in our first encounter.

However, when I contacted Korean fans on Twitter to request an interview, most of them rejected or ignored me. To meet them in person, I began buying extra concert tickets to sell at face value to them through my fan account. When I was finally able to meet them to give them the tickets, I explained who I was and asked them for an interview. They were more cooperative when I invited them to pre-recording sessions of music television shows or offered them free merchandise that I received as a reporter from press showcases (most of the entertainment companies offered an autographed album and other merchandise to the reporters before the show).

Most of my conversations with the fans pertained to the quality of the production. They often talked about their idol's off-stage and off-camera behavior, but also eagerly expressed their opinions of the entertainment company's public relations, idol management,

fan management, and music productions, the idols' contract years and career plans, fans' effort to get the idols ranked higher on music charts, and lastly, fans' special interest in feminism as they encounter bodyguards and/or staff who were "rude and violent especially to female fans." During the conversation, they often used the term "*hwanmyŏl*" (disillusion) to express their exhaustion and emotional stress after hard work or the "fandom wars": disputes or conflicts between fans from different fan clubs.

One of the biggest differences between native and non-native Korean fans was their perceived relationships with the idols. Thanks to the linguistic, cultural (and thus emotional), and physical proximity, Korean fans had much more contact with and emotional and economic influence on idols. This was evident in the ways fans explained their relationship with the idols or their affective investment in the industry. Non-native Korean fans avoided mentioning any criticism of their idols, such as idols' limited agency in the industry. One fan told me that she was reluctant to talk about such topics because international fans are not as well-informed about production processes and are worried about being expelled from a fan group if they criticized their idol.

In contrast, Korean fans did not hide their knowledge of idols' lack of agency in the industry, especially in the debut years. Korean fans' were exhausted after protecting idols who lack autonomy from the "incompetent and often evil" entertainment companies, so they have actively engaged in the production, promotion, and management processes to maximize their satisfaction with the product they consumed. When their idol's company "did not do well," fans often said they were "disillusioned," because their hard work was frustrated by the company's incompetence. For example, my interviewee, a fan of Dream Catcher, stated that she left the fandom because of the company: "You know you have to prioritize Korean fans first, because they are the main consumers. But the company always made the group

perform overseas, [so that's why I left]" (Sunjung, personal interview, October 8, 2018). She is now a fan of GWSN, follows every performance, takes quality photos of them, distributes the photos online to share them with other fans, and promotes the group.

My experience and positionality in the field site eventually allowed me to write about male idols and female fans. On the one hand, I was able to delve into female fans' community building and active engagement in male idol production as a heterosexual female in her early thirties. On the other hand, male idols—especially native Korean idols—also assumed the Korean (female) fans were their main business partners and mentioned non-Korean fans only when I asked about them. The stronger bond between Korean fans and idols implied the greater consumer power and control that Korean fans had over the idols.

Male idols' interest and participation in my project was another reason why female fans and male idols became the major interlocutors and subjects of my research. Male idols seemed to be more eager to talk about their successful careers in the industry; with the same set of interview questions, they spent five to seven hours telling their stories. In contrast, female idols seemed less interested in my research and answered to all of my questions within a couple of hours. My status as a young single woman seemed to influence my interaction with the male idols and the outcome of my fieldwork. Given that male idols eschew staying with young women in public and are most likely to be free late at night, it would have been impossible for me to meet them at their home or chat via messenger after midnight for hours if I were married. Participant observation is not necessarily about doing something visibly productive but mostly entails spending spare time and chatting with the informants—which husband would be happy with his wife spending hours with a handsome young man at his house for months, with no specific task to be done, while children are waiting at home for their mother to return from "(field)work"? While this is an extreme

example of heteronormative imagination, it is also in line with the expected sex roles of myself as a female aca-fan in the heteronormative K-pop fandom.

F. Aca Fan and Online Ethnography

During the first three years of my preliminary fieldwork (2012-14), I was rsearching several idol groups. I was not a fan of any specific group and thought it would be more productive to conduct a survey analysis of the K-pop scene in general. The result was endless rejections by fan communities or fan club membership registrations. I had to answer registration questions to qualify for membership, but since I had no knowledge of the history of the group or the relationship between the idols and fans, I could not answer them. I sensed some micro-scandals between idols and fans, but I couldn't quite understand them, because they happened in closed communities. The news outlets would never report them (and I later realized that one of the roles of gatekeepers in the fan club was to keep the fan club website inaccessible to the press). Fans refused to share screenshots with me, suspecting that as an outsider I would present the incident and the reputation of the idol and fans in an unflattering light. Moreover, these micro-scandals broke out and just as quickly resolved, usually within twenty-four hours. Fans who circulated the information outside of the community also removed their posts as soon as the incident was resolved. Online fieldwork meant that I reside in specific online spaces, share the information, values, and ideas of the community, and conduct participant observation of a culture, a group of people, or a series of events. The internet is no longer just a communication tool between the ethnographer and her interlocutors, but has become a site in which the ethnographer and her interlocutors reside and form a culture in a specific space and time.

One of the most heated debates in fandom studies is whether a researcher can rationally conduct her research while being a fan. From my preliminary fieldwork, I learned that I needed to a fan to conduct the field research, but there was no way to force myself to become a fan of an idol group. Fans told me that a moment of "*tŏkt'ongsago*"—a combined word of "*tŏkhu*" (fan) and "*kyot'ongsago*" (car accident)—would hit me like a car accident.[7] I just had to wait to fall in love with the right group. Then one day, I found my "bias"—my favorite idol member of a group—Kai in EXO while watching the "Call Me Baby" music video. I will not go further and embarrass myself by describing how hot he is. I started collecting his photos, opened a social media account solely dedicated to him, and started to communicate with other fans about him. I was searching his name and photos 24/7 on the internet. Only after I had become a fan myself did I understand why fans had refused my interview requests. They—and now, "we"—have been battling mass media and academia that stigmatized and pathologized fans—especially female fans.[8] The Korean version of "Get a life!" was "Stop wasting your parents' money!" or "Spend that money on your parents!" under the presumption that K-pop fan activities are financially and emotionally unproductive. I was invited to music chart show recording sessions as an ethnographer, to showcases as a journalist, and to concerts as a friend of idols; but most of the time, I went to the events as a fan. In other words, I paid my dues through required affective labor, for instance, by buying

[7] The term "*tŏkhu*" derives from Japanese word "*otakku*," although unlike the original Japanese term, *tŏkhu* simply refers to someone who loves and is obsessed with a particular aspect of popular culture *not* to the point of losing one's sociality because of the obsession. Thus in a neutral sense, people refer to themselves as *tŏkhu* when they are obsessed not only to anime or idols but to cooking, sports, media technologies, or cosmetics.

[8] This doesn't mean that Korean male fans are not pathologized. Perhaps they face even more prejudice. However, Korean male fans, especially adult males, were the most difficult ones to approach, because they lacked presence and solidarity online and were also afraid of being labeled as "not cool, nerdy, and/or abnormal" men who chase girl groups.

tickets after waiting hours on the computer and then waiting again in line at the concert venue. When I was invited as an ethnographer, journalist, or a friend of idols, I did not need to go these lengths. I simply called the manager or the person in charge and gained access.

From the 1990s, fandom scholars have reflected on their status and ethics in the fandom through the discussions of aca-fan, "a hybrid creature which is part fan and part academic."[9] Two goals of manifesting oneself as an aca-fan was to (1) acknowledge popular culture as a valuable subject of study and (2) open up a space for public engagement in the participatory culture. Fans have long been pathologized emotional and irrational, and the two worlds of fandom and academia seemed to be antithetical. Coming out as an "aca-fan" has thus been a political statement of empowering fans. Fandom scholars have relied on two empowerment narratives: One treats fans as smart and productive actors of a community; the other questions the popular image of scholars by "jettisoning conformity to traditional ideals of the researcher as rational subject" (Roach 2014:38). As Jenkins et al. argue, "If 'immediacy' is what, according to Pierre Bourdieu, distinguishes the popular from the bourgeois aesthetic, then we should be suspicious of attempts to write about popular culture from a distance" (2002:6). The early concerns have centered on how a fandom scholar occupies "a position of power, able to influence public perception and select which semiprivate utterances get more attention and validation" (Larsen and Zubernis 2012:6).

By the early 2010s, aca-fan has become a normative form of academic identity (Hills 2012), but instead new concerns have emerged in fandom studies. Certain fan practices have become "over-valued and rendered canonical" by the fandom scholarship that is predominantly Anglo-American while the rest are "othered" (Larsen and Zubernis 2012:4).

[9] Henry Jenkins, "About Me," last modified June 19, 2006, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2006/06/who_the_is_henry_jenkins.html.

As a native Korean aca-fan, I offer an in-depth study of Korean fans in the K-pop fandom, not as a marginalized people of color but as the mainstream consumer population in the global market of K-pop. My fieldwork will offer new perspectives on fan activities that the Western fandom studies have considered as norms and conventions.

The idea of academia and fandom as separate entities is also challenged because "scholarly and fannish identities can now be lived and experienced as continuous" (Hills 2012:15). Fandom scholars Vivien Burr (2005) and Catherine M. Roach (2014) have discussed how academic and fan identities are not just objects but are always "performative"; however, they only describe situations of aca-fans within the aca-fandom of an academic situation (e.g., conference) in which scholars perform fannish behaviors. They do not discuss how aca-fans interact with non aca-fans beyond the aca-fandom.

To become a reliable aca-fan was to become identifiable on social media as a fan. As a "fan," I created Twitter and Instagram accounts with a username related to the fandom, updated photos of my favorite idols, retweeted idol-related jokes and memes, praised fashion styles in their new music videos, talked about my excitement over newly announced concert tours, promoted idols' and fans' philanthropy, and joined online protests against the company's "wrong" decisions and policies affecting idols' career. I invested time, money, and energy in these activities, and as this labor accumulated on my social media account, I started gaining followers. The numbers of my followers, retweets, and likes contributed to more voice, power, and supporters, and to my fandom capital. When I contacted fans for an interview after gaining and presenting fandom capital on my Twitter account, their attitude toward my research was much more favorable. Apart from my "ordinary" fan account that did not reveal my personal information, I also made an "aca-fan account," revealed my real name, academic status, and fan status. Fans often retweeted my remarks on certain idols as a

way of promoting their idols and readily participated in my project when I asked for surveys and/or interviews. Being a fan as a scholar was an unavoidable choice for a K-pop ethnographer.

G. Chapter Introduction

I begin by exploring the history and mechanism of how K-pop fans and idols perform intimate laborer to provide the context of how the K-pop industry is operated through the affective labor of two parties. Chapter 1, "The History of Fans and Fandom in Korean Popular Music," delineates the historical context of what has made today's intimate labor system in K-pop. Instead of following structural changes of the Korean popular music industry, I focus on the history of popular music fans' communal activities that have shaped today's global culture of K-pop fandom. The history of fandom is not distinct from the history of the industry, but provides a context of how the past fan activities have laid a foundation of today's intimate labor system of K-pop.

Chapter 2, "'But At Least They Try': Transacting Theatrical Interconnectedness in the Korean K-pop Fandom," explores how Korean female fans understand the mechanism of parasocial interactions and relationships and endorse intimacy as a major product in their trade with the K-pop industry. In the fields of anthropology, communications, and psychology, scholars have treated the celebrity-fan relationship as one-sided and illusive. In this framework, fans long for parasocial relationships in which their idols are surrogates for their family and friends. I demonstrate how the K-pop industry and fans refute this assumption by enhancing the sustainability of celebrity-fan relationships through various fan management tactics and transforming fans' engagement from a parasocial illusion to an economic activity. I introduce the concept of "theatrical interconnectedness" to explain how

K-pop fans understand idols' expressions of love and gratitude as theatrical, while appreciating idols' effort to learn and internalize such theatrics.

Chapter 3, "K-pop Industry: Producing Intimate Laborers," investigates the social structure, legislation, and modes of production that governs labor forces in the K-pop industry. After discussing the social relations between the K-pop industry and its fandom in Chapter 2, here I refute the conventional binaries of the media industry as the provider/creator of culture and audiences as its recipients/consumers, whose role is restricted to interpreting or "decoding" the meanings of production or creating their own participatory culture that hardly influence the industry (Jenkins 1992; Hall 1993). By tracing the K-pop industry workers' social interactions and professional outcomes, fans' investigation of and intervention in the government's culture industry-related legislation, fans' entrance to the industry as workers, and their effort to humanize and dehumanize idols who are considered the industry products, I analyze the culture industry as a group of agents who are sensitive to trends, driven emotionally by personal relationships, and thus very often, extremely disorganized and arbitrary in their corporate decisions.

The next chapter, "'Feminism Brings Money': Claiming Hegemonic Femininity in the K-popsphere," offers an extended view of Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas's concept of "intimate labor" (2010). Boris and Parreñas explain that intimate labor encompasses a wide range of activities that entail touch, bodily or emotional closeness or personal familiarity, close observation of another, and knowledge of personal information to provide service and caring labor (2010:2). Intimate labor includes "nail manicuring, bill collection, street prostitution, and sperm donation," which require brief encounters between employers and employees and "various forms of sex works, such as bar hostessing and escort service; child and elderly care; domestic work; and various forms of and health care" that

entail durable relations between customers and providers (ibid., 3). While Boris and Parreñas argue that most intimate labor is non-market or low-paid activities by women, members of the lower classes, and/or racial outsiders (ibid.), I present a new case study of how male singers, whose economic status and gender identity represent their dominant position in the South Korean society, are obligated to perform service and caring labor called "fan service," thereby providing a space for female consumers to perform a hegemonic femininity in the K-popsphere. Exploring intimate labor and gender relations of K-pop male idols and female fans will manifest the current state of Korean patriarchy.

Chapter 5, "Media Labors and Fandom Capital in the Online Moral Economy," applies the concept of moral economy to K-pop, by featuring fans' violation of copyright and the K-pop industry's tacit permission for such fandom-based creations. This chapter explains how both the industry and fans accumulate fandom capital through social media activities and commodify fandom as another promotional tool of the industry. This allows us to look at the ways in which fans gain entitlement as "fans" through media-based fan labor and accumulation of fandom capital in the K-pop scene.

H. Nomenclature, Romanization, and Identification of Informants

This dissertation presents my discussions of and with K-pop idols who are currently active in the field. I am extremely grateful to their candid opinions of their experiences in the industry and with their fans. The only drawback of their honesty was it potentially jeopardized their careers. For this reason, I urged the idols to remain anonymous, and they agreed. Anonymity was, however, not enough to protect my informants. I know how good K-pop fans are at combining through data and analyzing information about their idols. Each of my idol interviewees' stories was so unique that their fans could easily identify them from

my dissertation interviews. I interviewed six idols, although I have endowed multiple identities to each. As a result, more than six idol interviewees are featured in this dissertation. I falsified the dates to make it impossible for the readers to cross-check the dates against the idols' official schedules. All interviews, however, were conducted between 2015 and 2018.

I assigns pseudonyms to all of my interviewees. For idols, I use pseudonyms that begin with "Moon" (e.g., Moonho, Moonsung, and Moonyoung); for fans, "Sun" (e.g., Sunjung, Sunyoung, and Sunjin); and for industry workers, "So" (e.g., Sofia, Soyoung, and Sojin) with a hint of their gender and cultural background. For Korean names and references, I use the McCune-Reischauer Romanization. For Korean celebrities, I spell their names in their preferred romanization. I also spell Korean scholars' names in their own preferred romanization listed in their English abstracts; otherwise I spell their names in the McCune-Reischauer Romanization. Korean scholars from Korean references are listed in the original order by writing the family name first (e.g., Choi Stephanie); otherwise their names from English publications are listed with given names first (e.g., Stephanie Choi).

I. The History of Fans and Fandom in Korean Popular Music

If we define popular music in the socioeconomic context of mass production and mass consumption, we must understand the history of Korean popular music within the intertwining histories of colonial powers, military occupation, development of sound technologies, and the rise of the nation-state and neoliberal markets. For this reason, previous literature on South Korean popular music is predominantly focused on foreign powers and colonial policies, economic developments in music recording industries, cultural and political changes in Korean music in relation to the global music industry, biographies of individual musicians, as well as contemporary histories of *Hallyu*, the "Korean Wave"—the global popularity of Korean popular culture in the 1990s and onwards (Yi and Son 2003; Park et al., 2011; Lie 2014; Chang and Sŏ 2015; Fuhr 2016; Kim 2018).

While Korean popular music historians have discussed transcultural influences, social structures of entertainment industries, and musical changes in Korean popular music, they have rarely focused on the ways that the music was received by different groups of listeners. Research on music listeners is important because listeners enliven the musical world by actively adopting, transmuting, subverting, and creating new forms of lifestyles, consumption activities, popular ideologies, and social relations, eventually contributing to the sociopolitical dynamics of a music culture. For instance, the global proliferation of K-pop is not only attributed to the visual spectacle and choreography-centered production of the Korean music industry but also to the media circulation actively performed by fans all over the world. Although some K-pop historians often cite Seo Taiji and Boys as the beginning of K-pop as a musical style, due to their innovative production style combining vocal, rap, and dance (e.g., Shin 2018), I argue that the culture of the fan club, established and institutionalized in the 1960s and 70s in South Korea, was essential in producing K-pop as a

sociocultural phenomenon. I am not claiming that we should consider the 1960s and 70s as the beginning of K-pop. Instead, I argue that a particular social structure of fandom, now evident in K-pop, was slowly established throughout the 20th century Korean pop music history and that its development should not be attributed solely to stages of musical style. For this reason, I incorporate the history of audiences, fans, and fandom in South Korea alongside more recognized narratives of institutional developments and musicians' achievements in Korean popular music. Examining the target audiences, public reactions to popular music in Korea, social organizations and institutionalizations of listeners, and fans' interactions with artists will ground the Korean cultural roots of K-pop fandom as well as pointing to its later development in global relations between South Korea and the world.

In doing so, I offer a couple of additional orientations in this chapter. One is to provide a historical narrative of Korea's pop music fans, and more specifically, its female fans who have dominated K-pop fanhood, both in South Korea and globally. Many recent academic works have focused on destigmatizing and depathologizing female fans from misogynistic depictions as delusional, infantile "fangirls," by focusing on "produserly" activities (Bruns 2006), such as fan fiction writing (Xu and Yang 2013; Eate 2015; Kim and Seok 2017; Martin 2017). Western pop music scholars have also explored sociopolitical contexts and empowerment discourses of female fans, by describing fan activities as revolutionary and/or culturally subversive (Wise 1990; Whiteley 2006; Anderson 2012; O'Toole 2016). Korean music scholars also have critically discussed subjectivities and social agencies of Korean female fans (Kim and Bae 2013; Kim 2017; Ko and Yang 2017), although the discussions are heavily focused on 21st century K-pop fandom. Following the traces of female fans' participatory and even entrepreneurial activities, my goal is to provide a historical narrative of how Korean music fandom was established and institutionalized, and

how Korean female fans have performed fanhood in 20th century South Korea before K-pop expanded into the global phenomenon it is today. Moreover, my research will also serve as a counterargument against Western media that perpetuate neocolonial descriptions of K-pop idols and fans as infantile, irrational, and uneducated outcasts disconnected from Western society.[10] As K-pop became a global phenomenon from the 1990s, the Korean music industry and fan cultures increasingly incorporated transnational interactions with global music industries/fans outside of South Korea into the local production of Korean popular music, in ways that enabled the success of groups like BTS.

A second goal is to document an untold history of Korean fans of popular music during the post-Korean War era. Compared to the flourishing literature on American and British music fans (e.g., McRobbie 1991; Ehrenreich et al., 1992; Kapurch 2016) and Japanese fan club cultures (e.g., Yano 1997; Robertson 1998) during the Cold War era, there are comparatively few works that document fan subjectivities in Korea during this era (e.g., Kim 2010). On the one hand, South Korea during the Cold War period, especially after the Korean War, has often been depicted in Western academia as a completely destroyed land that required immediate international humanitarian assistance and a realization of industrialization and modernization under totalitarian regimes, offering little space to imagine women's musicking activities and socializing events.

On the other hand, the majority of Korean literature on Korean music history makes only passing reference to pre-K-pop era fan clubs in favor of attending to pop stars' publicity and their historical significance. I argue that such tendencies in the scholarship are also

[10] See Stephanie Choi and Thomas Baudinette, "Why are BTS Fans Always Dismissed as 'Hysterical Teenage Girls'?" *Hello Asia*, June 21, 2019, https://www.helloasia.com.au/news/why-are-bts-fans-always-dismissed-as-hysterical-teenage-girls/.

gendered. Male musicians' social and physical mobilities have enabled them to stand out as visible leaders that embody advances in pop music history, while women's social (including musical) activities, limited in terms of spaces and activities under the patriarchal family system and social relations, are sidelined and ignored. Documenting Korean female fan activities during the post-Korean War era—as a systematic development, not a personal project—will showcase Korean females' social leadership during that era in ways that decenter the male-dominant narrative enacted in most Korean popular music histories. Before I get into the historical staging of fan culture in Korean popular music that led the contemporary fanhood of K-pop, I begin with some of the industrial models that existed prior to and influenced K-pop productions, particularly from American, British, and Japanese media contexts. While the K-pop industry developed in unique ways, its development paralleled industrial formations that circulated transnationally alongside the global emergence of youth culture in the 20th century.

A. Global Influences: The "Hit Factory" and the "Idol System"

In the United States, Motown Records was one of the early models of a teen idol factory in the 1960s and 70s. The company managed a number of teen idol groups, including the Supremes, the Four Tops, Martha and the Vandellas, the Temptations, the Jackson 5, the Marvelettes, and the Miracles, who altogether established the so-called "Motown Sound" under the musical direction of the in-house production teams of Holland-Dozier-Holland and the Funk Brothers. Motown's president Berry Gordy states,

> . . . my own dream for a hit factory was quickly taking form, a concept that had been shaped by principles I had learned on the Lincoln-Mercury assembly line. At the plant the cars started out as just a frame, pulled along on conveyor belts until they emerged at the end of the line—brand spanking new cars rolling off the line. I wanted the same concept for my company, only with artists and songs and records. I wanted a place

> where a kid off the street could walk in one door an unknown and come out another a recording artist—a star. (Gordy [1994] 2013:140)

Gordy continues, "But I knew, unlike cars, each person was unique, with his or her own talents, dreams and ambitions" (ibid.). But because Gordy had no formal business training, he figured out his own methods by breaking down the operation into three functions: create (i.e., writing, producing, and recording), make (i.e., manufacturing and pressing of the records), sell (i.e., placing records with distributors, getting airplay, marketing, and advertising) (ibid.).

While controlling the overall quality of the music production, Motown placed a great emphasis on visual media productions to cross-promote its music, as television and film were significant youth-oriented markets. Its Artist Development division established connections with the film industry for movie appearances and soundtrack recordings and arranged many television appearances on lip-synch dance-oriented programs, interviews on fashion, and appearances on variety shows. Music historian Andrew Flory argues that "these performance elements had no 'sound,' so to speak, but they nevertheless became an important part of the Motown Sound" (2017:136).

Motown's assembly line further touched on the persona making of its musical acts. Maxine Powell, the etiquette consultant of the label taught the artists how to present themselves in public. Powell recalls, "They did come from humble beginnings, some of them from the projects, some of them were using street language, some were rude and crude."[11] According to Powell, once kids entered Motown's assembly line, they learned:

[11] Gene Demby, "Remembering The Woman Who Gave Motown Its Charm," *NPR*, October 15, 2013, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/10/15/234738593/remembering-the-woman-who-gave-motown-its-charm.

> Body language. Everybody walks, but I teach how to glide. If your slip comes down around your feet, how to stand in the basic standing position and step out of it smiling, with your hip bones pushed forward and the buttocks pushed under. You never, never protrude the buttocks because it means an ugly gesture, you see? I was turned loose to do whatever was necessary to make the artist look first-class . . . Everybody doesn't have class, but you can develop style and then refinement.[12]

Although not corporatized, the Beatles were in a similar situation in terms of their persona-making by the group's manager, Brian Epstein. Epstein constructed the Beatles' "casual, accessible and playful image" through his decisions about the group's album covers, media photography, and appearances in movies (Inglis 2001:86). The Beatles' producer George Martin recalls,

> . . . [The Beatles] were prepared to go along with Brian [Epstein] if he could bring them results. So they did listen to him. When he told them to tidy up their appearance and do their hair in a different way and put on different suits later on, they obeyed. They did what he said. (Geller 2000:45)

Epstein's control did not end with the visual image of the group. John Lennon stated that the Beatles eschewed recording antiwar songs because their manager Brian Epstein "stopped us from saying anything about Vietnam or the war" and prohibited press questions about it, preventing any possible controversies over the group's remarks (Sheff [1981] 2010). As they developed their careers on their own, they subsequently gained more freedom of speech in public, making political remarks on world peace.

North American and British pop music industries continued to produce girl groups and boy bands including the Bobbettes, the Chantels, the Shirelles, the Supremes, the Ronettes, and the Beatles in the 1950s and 60s; the Emotions, Jackson 5, the Osmonds, and Sister Sledge in the late 1960s and 70s; New Edition, Boyz II Men, New Kids on the Block, Spice Girls, Backstreet Boys, Destiny's Child, 'N Sync, TLC, and Britney Spears in the

[12] Rebecca Roberts, "Looking Back At 50 Years Of Motown Records," *NPR*, January 10, 2009, https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=99214566.

1980s and 90s; Justine Bieber, Selena Gomez, Miley Cyrus, One Direction, Fifth Harmony, PRETTYMUCH, Why Don't We, and Saving Forever in the 2000s and 2010s. Puerto Rican group Menudo also joined the teen idol market, as the manager Edgardo Diaz scouted the five boys, polished their image, and succeeding in having gold and platinum records. Menudo's fandom was compared with the Beatlemania and was named "Menudomania." Targeting the youth-oriented market, Diaz adopted a system of "'graduating older members who outgrew the Menudo sound and image" so that the boys could retain their "sweet-voiced appeal to the preteen bubblegum crowd."[13]

Yet it is also part of the industry's job to deliver the appearance of authentic vibe and sincerity. Joey Arbagey, executive vice president of A&R at Epic Records states, "I don't feel like people want to see the typical 'these guys were put together and given songs.'"[14] One Direction's song writer Savan Kotecha agrees: "Fans are too smart. They see through anything that's super manufactured." The platform of social media makes the industry's secrets all too transparent. Dinah Jane Hansen, a member of Fifth Harmony, stated in a 2016 Billboard interview, "I love touring, but the schedule traumatized me, I was like, 'What kind of job are we doing?' I watched my great-grandmother be buried on FaceTime."[15] A few months later, a tape with the voice of a woman who was allegedly Lauren Jauregui, a member of Fifth Harmony, was leaked: "They are making decisions on a regular basis to

[13] Judy Hevrdejs, "MENUDOMANIA," *Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1988, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1988-10-21-8802090821-story.html.

[14] Nolan Feeney, "The Race to Find the Next One Direction," *Entertainment Weekly*, August 16, 2017, https://ew.com/music/2017/08/16/next-one-direction-boy-band-craze/.

[15] Chris Martins, "Billboard Cover: Fifth Harmony on Surviving Pop-Star Fame and 'Finally Having a Damn Voice," *Billboard*, May 5, 2016, https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/cover-story/7356880/fifth-harmony-billboard-cover-story-fame-challenges-new-album-the-x-factor.

fuck us over, to make us literal slaves, like literally slaves."[16] Later Jauregui stated, "I don't know where that [audio] came from, but that's what the game does you sometimes: runs you dry," while other members reassured their fans, claiming that "Honestly, in this very moment, we could not be happier."[17]

A similar idol training system was found as early as 1913 in Japan. Kobayashi Ichizō, the Hankyū railroad and department store tycoon, impresario, and two-time cabinet minister, founded the all-female Takarazuka Revue by recruiting girls, training them to sing and dance, setting performance schedules, and building theaters exclusively for them (Robertson 1998). Later he also established the Takarazuka Music Academy, at which the actors learn not only singing and dancing but also "a life of discipline and hierarchical relationships" by cleaning the dorms, classrooms, and rehearsal studios which would help the actors build character, ensure humility, and boost stamina in their young charges (ibid., 11).

The *aidoru* system in the Japanese popular music industry emerged in the late 1960s. *Aidoru* refers to "life-sized" [*tōshindai*], "fairly standard" singers whose singing and acting remain on an amateurish level: "Their appearance and ability are above average, yet not so much so as to alienate or offend the audience" (Aoyagi 2000:311). From the 1990s, male idol

[16] Amy Zimmerman, "The hell of being in Fifth Harmony: They treat us 'Like literally slaves,'" *The Daily Beast*, December 20, 2016, https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-hell-of-being-in-fifth-harmony-they-treat-us-like-literally-slaves.

[17] Chris Martins, "How Fifth Harmony moved on and took control of their music: 'The fans are our fifth member,'" *Billboard*, July 12, 2017, https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/magazine-feature/7865161/fifth-harmony-2017-billboard-cover-story.

group Sports Music Assemble People, or SMAP, reestablished the idea of idols as all-around entertainers who are "able to do comedy, act, sing, dance."[18]

In addition to their various media activities, Japanese *aidoru* hold intimacy-cultivating activities, such as handshaking ceremonies [*akushu-kai*], which accompany stage performances; get-togethers with fans [*fan no tsudoi*], where fans can talk and play games with their favorite idol; public photoshoots [*satsuei-kai*], where idols strike poses for amateur photographers (known as "camera kids"); and correspondence with fans by letter; autograph ceremonies [*sign-kai*], held for buyers at retail outlets; idol "hot-lines" for fans wishing to hear recorded idol messages or learn about upcoming events; and webpages where one can find out about an idol's place and date of birth, blood type, hobbies, and thoughts (ibid., 312). Anthropologist Hiroshi Aoyagi states, "Going through a difficult period of physical and emotional development themselves, adolescent fans can easily empathize with [J-pop] idols who are embarking on their own growth journey: from inexperienced debutantes to experienced public figures and performers" (ibid., 313).

By the mid-1980s, the Japanese idol prototype spread out to pop music industries in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. Koichi Iwabuchi explains that contemporary Japanese popular culture had barely crossed the Japanese border when it was exported to other Asian countries due to its "high cultural discount and the history of Japanese imperialism" (1995:95). Anime had gained exceptional popularity overseas as "racial or ethnic differences [were] erased or subdued" and thus remained "culturally odorless" (ibid., 97). South Korea had banned direct import of Japanese popular culture until the late 1990s when the Kim Dae-jung administration declared South Korea's opening to Japanese cultural

[18] Naomi Gingold, "Why the blueprint for K-Pop actually came from Japan," *NPR*, January 8, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/01/08/683339743/why-the-blueprint-for-k-pop-actually-came-from-japan.

imports including manga, movies, music, anime, games, and television programs gradually in 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2004.[19] The South Korean government's ban on Japanese popular culture had helped the Korean music industry to present a localized form of idol production of its own with no political baggage of Japanese imperialism.

B. 1907-1945: The Exotic Other and Mass Production/Consumption during the Japanese Occupation Era

In the late 19th century, the Chosŏn dynasty was in a troubling situation regarding the securing of its sovereignty. Internationally, the foreign powers, including Japan, China, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, and France, relentlessly adjured the Korean peninsula to open up its ports by signing unequal treaties. Domestically, peasants who suffered from poverty and excessive taxation supported the Tonghak Movement and attacked government offices while scholars who accepted Catholicism as an academic subject rejected Confucian ideologies that undergirded royal authority. Government officials and elites were also divided into anti-foreign seclusionist, pro-Qing, and pro-Japanese factions and failed to find common ground on how to autonomously seek "*kaehwa*" (a direct translation of the "civilization" of the West). What the government officials and elites agreed upon was the need for institutional, technological, and industrial modernization. Subsequent social changes, such as the abolition of the old class system, occupational diversification, and influx of foreign capital and culture laid the foundation for the emergence of a mass audience of popular music.

[19] Yu-jin Ch'oe, "*Ilbontaejungmunhwagaebang*" [Opening to the Japanese popular cultural imports], The National Archives of Korea, http://theme.archives.go.kr/next/koreaOfRecord/cultureofJapan.do.

A few notable changes that took place in the music scene during the colonial period were the changes in the social mobility of music and musicians between the high and the low. Court music also went through a major structural change under the mass media system. The Victor Talking Machine Company of Japan recorded *a-ak* (Korean court music) in 1928, and Iwangjik Aakpu (The Court Music Department of Yi [Chosŏn] Dynasty) opened *a-ak* to the public for the first time via the Kyŏngsŏng Radio Station in the same year. These events implied *a-ak*'s loss of aura as a divine performance but instead signaled mass production and mass consumption of the music as a reproducible and expendable commodity.

At the same time, low-class entertainers gained opportunities of becoming popular celebrities in the recording industry. *Kisaeng* (female entertainers) started to form *kisaeng chohapso* or private associations from 1908 without court affiliations or sponsorships from the *yangban* (noble) class (Kim 2006). With the increasing presence of Japanese colonial forces during the 1930s and early 40s, *kisaeng* signed with record companies, debuted as professional singers, and became super stars of popular music genres such as *shinminyo* (new folk song), *yuhaengga* ("popular song," which was later called *t'ŭrot'ŭ* or trot), *manyo* (comic/satire song), and jazz. Wang Su-bok, one of the popular *kisaeng* singers, sold 1.2 million copies of her song, "Kodo-ŭi Chung'han" (Love and Sorrow of a Lonely Island) in 1933. The press also contributed to her stardom. The magazine *Samchŏlli* published a popularity vote chart of the record singers [*rek'odŭ kasu inkit'up'yo kyŏlsŏn palp'yo*], in which Wang Su-bok topped the female singers chart in October 1935 (Chang and Sŏ 2015:129).

From the 1930s, a few Korean singers started to gain overseas popularity in Japan. In 1937, Wang Su-bok, the "Queen of Pop Song" [*yuhaengga-ŭi yŏwang*], decided to study in Tokyo and soon became one of the most renowned Korean singers in Japan. Wang was not

alone in this transcultural phenomenon during the colonial era—as historian E. Taylor Atkins explains, "Extolled as 'whispering flowers' (*haeŏhwa; kaigoso hana*), *kisaeng* were durable emblems of a refined 'exotic erotic,' whose popularity as an object of Japanese fascination remained steady throughout the colonial period" (2010:149). Performance troupes, such as Okegŭraendŭ Shodan (Okeh Records Band) that consisted of a number of teams including the Chŏgori Sisters and the Arirang Boys, also toured in Japan and China. Before the 1939 Japan tour, the Japanese promotion agency Yoshimoto requested the band to change its name to Chosŏn Akgŭkdan (Chosŏn Musical Troupe) to stress the exotic sentiment of colonial Korea (Lee 2017:113).[20] *Kisaeng*'s popularity in Japan and Okeh Records Band's renaming for the Japan tour reflected the ambivalent identity politics of *kisaeng*—as low-class entertainers, *kisaeng* gained transnational mobility, yet they did so as the exoticized Other. Japan's gendered fascination with Korean entertainers continues to reconstruct and reevaluate the complex identities of Korean performers in the 21st century Korean Wave. The "national erotics" of K-pop idols provide multipronged perspectives, from neocolonial images to national power and the growing strength and maturity of today's South Korea (Epstein and Joo 2012).

The imperial Japanese regime, threatened by the general popularity of Korean music among Koreans and Japanese audiences, began censoring records in June 1933. "Sŏul Norae" ("Seoul Song"), for example, was banned in April 1934 due to its alleged "disturbance of public order" and was published in 1936 only after the lyrics were revised twice. Starting in 1940, Japan required Korean entertainers from all fields—from cinema to theater, popular music, and traditional music—to receive an artistry certificate [*kiyejŭngmyŏngsŏ*]. The

[20] See Atkin (2010)'s Chapter 4 for further discussions on the "Arirang craze" in imperial Japan.

examination for the artistry certificate was conducted twice a year and required a written statement of the entertainers' resolution as a loyal subject of the Japanese empire in war (Chang and Sŏ 2015:136). The handful of major record companies that survived between 1942 and 1945 produced militarist songs only.

C. 1945-1964: Reestablishment of Public Spheres in the Entertainment Industry and Social Formation of Fandom

After Korea gained its independence on August 15, 1945, all Japanese record companies retreated from the colony. The first Korean record company was Chosŏn Records established in December 1946, and Koryŏ Records released the first Korean album in August 1947. Themes of freedom, "the Reds" [*ppalgaeng-i*], cynicism, parochialism, and Yankeeism dominated the publishing and entertainment industries during the era of the "Emancipation Space" [*haebang konggan*], or the period from Korea's liberation in 1945 (or the establishment of two Koreas in 1948) until the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950 (Joo 2009).[21] Musicologist Chang Yu-jŏng and Sŏ Pyŏng-gi explain that popular songs during this era maintained the previous musical forms of *shinminyo*, trot, *manyo*, and jazz of the colonial period, although lyrical themes reflected the then social atmosphere, such as a longing for hometown, tragedy of the nation's division, emancipation of oneself, national tradition, love for nature, meditative mysticism, and exoticism (2015). Until the late 1950s, album sales did not exceed fifty thousand copies. During the colonial era, the recording

[21] Communication theorist Joo Chang Yun describes the then sentiment as "Yankeeism" rather than Americanization, to refer to South Koreans' affective experiences rather than the American influence on the social structure of the Korean society. Joo explains that Koreans experienced the United States as a savior during the late Chosŏn era through American missionaries' establishments of churches, schools, and hospitals and through symbolic systems such as American cinema and music, whereas the Korean public during the Emancipation Space era experienced the United States on a daily basis through direct contacts with American soldiers and imported goods (Joo 2009).

industry expanded its market as far as Japan and China; the size of the market after the independence reduced to the domestic population whose main concern was economic restoration of the nation after the Korean War (ibid., 189).

Yŏsŏng kukgŭk (women's national drama), established in 1948 by Yŏsŏng Kugak Tonghohoe (Women's Korean National Music Club), was one of the few performance genres that had enjoyed extreme popularity throughout the 1950s, even during the Korean War (1950-53). It was an all-female theater inspired by Japan's Takarazuka Revue, although its orientation, musical style, and theme were far from those of Takarazuka. Unlike Takarazuka that was founded by male entrepreneur Ichizō Kobayashi, *yŏsŏng kukgŭk* was established by a few dozens of female musicians—including renowned *p'ansori* singers Pak Nok-ju, Kim So-hi, Pak Kwi-hi, and Im Ch'un-aeng—who were passionate about resolving gender inequality that female artists experienced at their workplace. Based on *p'ansori* singing, the performers made dramas based on old tales, legends, and historical stories of Korea. By 1955, about twelve troupes were actively performing, although *yŏsŏng kukgŭk* lost its popularity very soon in the 1960s, due to the popularization of television and the government support of Korean cinema.

Kim Jihye, who researched *yŏsŏng kukgŭk* as an intimate space among female performers and fans, explains that women had gained economic power as laborers and homosocial experiences as consumers (2010:99). The *yŏsŏng kukgŭk* performers whom Kim interviewed were comparatively free from their families' patriarchal control (for instance, their fathers were deceased or were financially incompetent) when they joined the troupe in their late teens or early twenties. At the same time, the same-sex troupe was perceived as a safe space for the young female performers; Pak Chŏng-ok recalls that she became a *yŏsŏng kukgŭk* performer, "because it would be a disaster for my family if I go to a *hagwon*

[*kwonbŏn* or a *kisaeng* school] and become a *kisaeng*" (ibid., 105). In the meantime, going to a play was prohibited for middle and high school students in the 1950s, although they were allowed to watch the all-female theater with other female friends (ibid., 108).

Yŏsŏng kukgŭk was popular among both women and men, although due to the patriarchal ideology of separate spheres, direct contacts between the performers and audience always occurred between females only. Female fans gave presents such as cosmetics, clothes, socks, stockings, expensive jewelry, money, and even love letters written with blood to the performers, and married fans sought friendship by visiting waiting rooms or dorms to personally meet the performers (Pan and Kim 2002, in Kim 2010). Some fans sought a romantic or sexual relationship with the performers as well. Male-role performer Cho Kŭm-aeng remembers a married woman who asked her to take a wedding photo with her, and Cho accepted her request as part of "fan service" (Kim 2010:118). *Kisaeng* (who were by then stigmatized as courtesans than entertainers) and sex workers also considered the *yŏsŏng kukgŭk* theater a safe space with no hatred or disdain against them. *Yŏsŏng kukgŭk* provided a socializing site in which both female performers and fans explored their sexual desires and imagination within and outside of the domestic spaces and patriarchal ideologies of South Korea.

In the meantime, the Western popular music scene was emerging from the Eighth Army, or the commanding formation of all United States Army forces in South Korea, first activated in 1944. The Eighth U.S. Army show [*mipalgunsho*] was one of the emerging music scenes in Seoul with variety shows and dance halls during the post-Korean War period. The Eighth U.S. Armys show served American soldiers based in South Korea, but also functioned as a hub that popularized American popular culture to the South Korean general public, both directly and indirectly through the distribution of American music

records and sound technologies and the cultivation of popular musicians by a nascent local music industry. Agencies such as Hwayang Hŭng-ŏp and Universal retained seventy bands, twenty-two show teams, and more than one thousand entertainers, who presented singing, dancing, comedy, and magic performances four hundred times a month (Chang and Sŏ 2015:193). Former members of record companies during the colonial era also actively performed at the Eighth U.S. Military shows. Yi Nan-yŏng, a former member of Okeh Records and the former leader of the Chŏgori Sisters, was still active as a performer but also trained her two daughters and niece into a professional group called the Kim Sisters, while her husband Kim Hae-song, also a former member of Okeh Records and the former leader of the Arirang Boys, formed the K.P.K Troupe that performed for the U.S. military. The Kim Sisters, after attaining immense popularity from the Eighth U.S. Military shows, made their American debut in Las Vegas in 1959, for the first time an Asian girl group performed in the United States. After the members migrated to the U.S., the Kim Sisters recorded several albums, performed nationwide, and made regular appearances on major television shows in the U.S., including the Ed Sullivan Show where the group appeared twenty-two times.[22]

The Eighth U.S. Military shows demanded Korean musicians to perform a variety of American music genres from Tin Pan Alley-style pop song to rock 'n' roll, and "[w]ithout sheet music available, the only way to do this was to record the AFKN (American Forces Korea Network) broadcast on tape, transcribe each instrumental part, and then practice it day and night in the management company warehouse" (Kim and Shin 2010:204-5). The Eighth U.S. Military show musicians eventually gained opportunities to perform as popular musicians before the general public from the 1960s on when the Park Chung Hee regime

[22] Kyŏng-won Min, "*Kim Sisŭt'ŏjŭ asinayo, 50 nyŏndae Han-guk ch'oech'o-ŭi kŏlgŭrup*" [Do you know the Kim Sisters, the first Korean girl group in the 50s], *Joongang Ilbo*, January 23, 2017, https://news.joins.com/article/21161704.

dissolved all cultural organizations and established the Korea Entertainers Association [Han-guk Yŏn-ye Hyŏp-hoe; later Han-guk Yŏnye Yesurin Ch'ong-yonhaphoe], incorporating the performers from the public stage [*ilban mudae*] and from the Eighth U.S. Army shows [*migun mudae*] into one organization.

The American Forces Korea Network (AFKN) served as a primary source for popular musicians to learn up-to-date music trends in the U.S., while a few radio programs from the state-controlled Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) heavily aired "*kugminkayo*" (citizen's pop song), promoted by the Rhee Syngman administration that attempted to "cultivate national consciousness and instill patriotism" (Chang and Sŏ 2015:195). Commercial radio networks, such as MBC (established in 1961), DBS (1963), and Radio Seoul (later Dongyang, 1964), were established in the 1960s and organized several participatory programs for the audience, such as song request programs, singing contests, and live shows. Television networks (KBS TV established in 1961; TBC TV in 1964; and MBC TV in 1969) were also founded and launched music variety shows.

By the mid-1960s, music listening became a daily experience as LP albums (that replaced SP albums), television, and radio were popularized and as nightclubs and music salons [*ŭmak kamsangsil*] provided public spaces in which the general audience could listen to Western popular music. In 1968, more than seventy private music institutes [*hagwon*] taught guitar in Seoul and published textbooks for guitar techniques and Western music theories, resulting in a nationwide popularity of the guitar in the 1970s (ibid., 210). Global politics and American cultural trends also impacted the then Korean popular culture. Greatly influenced by the anti-Vietnam war movements and counterculture, American folk music with the acoustic guitar drew great popularity among college students. Hollywood movies

were popular as well, and British singer and film actor Cliff Richard's Korean fans eventually made the first fan club in South Korea in the 1960s.

D. 1965-1969: South Korea's the First Fan Club, the Cliff Fan Club

The term "fan" [*p'aen*] appeared in Korean mass media as early as the 1920s, as a reference to Hollywood movie fans in South Korea. A column in *DongA Ilbo* in 1930 described how cinema fans' taste had changed. The columnist used the term "*ilbankwanjung*" (general audience) to refer to the audience members who contributed to the popularity of a film and requested screenings of certain movies; "*yŏng-hwap'aendŭl*" (cinema fans) to explain how the fan demographics had changed from (ordinary) students who simply loved entertaining spectacles to a new group of students who possessed high intelligence; "*kogaek*" (customer) when discussing movie fans' needs or satisfaction; and "*taejung*" (the public) to refer to the general audience as a target group of cinema.[23] The term "fan" was also used occasionally to explain the popularity of Chosŏn's sports teams or the stardom of Hollywood movie stars during the colonial period. Cliff Richard's fan club in the 1960s, however, was the first group of fans who systematically organized a fan club, establishing a fandom culture in South Korea.

British entertainer Cliff Richard, who starred in *The Young Ones* (released in 1964 in South Korea with a new title, *Teenager Story* [*T'ineijŏ Sŭt'ori*]), drew great popularity among high school girls. Seven girls from five high schools—Kyunggi, Ewha, Sookmyung,

[23] *DongA Ilbo*, "*Pyŏnch'ŏndo hyŏnghyŏngsaeksaek sipnyŏn-ganyuhaengoak*" [Diverse changes in the five entertainment trends in the last ten years], April 6, 1930, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1930040600209211001&editNo=1&printCount=1&publishDate=1930-04-06&officeId=00020&pageNo=11&printNo=3463&publishType=00020.

Jinmyeong, and Chungshin—were not satisfied with simply collecting Richard's pirated albums [*ppaekp'an*] from the Mimi Records at Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn 5-ga, Seoul. They eventually established a fan club called the CFC, or the "Cliff Fan Club," in 1965. More than two thousand girls joined the fan club and met every Saturday to share information about Cliff Richard. The teenagers were worried if they would give a negative impression as crazy fangirls to the adults. In order to build a "wholesome" image, the girls wore school uniforms every time they hung out in public.[24]

The CFC did not simply enjoy Richard's movies and songs as passive consumers but dreamed big enough to invite Richard to South Korea in 1969. There were several strategic missions the fan club members had carried out. First, due to the difficulty of acquiring official albums, the CFC sent a letter to the chief editor of the Japanese music magazine, *Music Life*, requesting the magazine to be a mediator between the fan club and other Richard fans around the world and eventually collected Richard's official albums. Next, the fan club members brought the official albums that they finally received from the non-Korean fans to radio producers and asked them to play Richard's music on national radio programs at the MBC and Dong-a networks. Lastly, when the singer's 1969 Japan tour was confirmed, the girls persuaded the newspaper company *Hanguk Ilbo* to arrange a South Korea tour.

The girls' plan was a huge success. When Richard's Korea tour was announced, the girls decided to wear *hanbok* (Korean traditional dress) and brought photos and slogans to the Gimpo International Airport. As welcome gifts, the girls prepared a flower bouquet, Richard's birthday present, a gold medal, a Korean traditional patterned eyeglass case, the

[24] Min-u Ch'oe, "[*week& cover story*] *69nyŏn K'ŭlip'ŭ Rich'ŏdŭ naehan kongyŏnsŏ 'oppabudae' kkumt'ŭl*" [[week& cover story] 'Oppabudae' was burgeoning at Cliff Richard's 1969 South Korean concert], *Joongang Ilbo*, March 17, 2005, https://news.joins.com/article/461975.

CFC's membership badge and ID card, dolls, and albums for Cliff Richard and his band mates.[25] About five hundred fans greeted Richard at the airport, and the three-day concerts were all sold out despite the expensive cost of two thousand won (at a time when movie tickets cost fifty won). The second concert was broadcast live by MBC. Yun Suk-kyŏng, then a member of the CFC, recalls that every time the theaters screened Richard's movies, the fan club sold fanmade merchandise, such as photos and necklaces, at a corner of Adene Kŭkjang (Athens Theater) and Myŏngdong Kŭkjang (Myŏngdong Theater) in Seoul, and donated the profits to a nursing house in Suwon and an orphanage in Apgujeong, Seoul, to give a wholesome image to the general public.[26] Yun was one of the fan club members who visited and made song requests to the radio stations to promote Richard's music.

The news media made sensational reports after the tour, stating that the Korean fangirls threw bras and panties at Richard during the show. However, Yun states, "Because I watched all three-day concerts on the front row, [I know that] it is not true at all. Back then, there were handkerchiefs that were frilled on the edge. It looked like underwear in a flash. Maybe the reporters either misunderstood or were jealous!"[27] Richard also states that he received handkerchiefs but not underwear, although he recalls that the then Korean audience

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[25] Hyŏng-ch'an Kim, "<*Muntŭk torabon 'kŭttae kŭgot'*> *Idea kongyŏn 'sakŏn'dŭl… K'ŭlip'ŭ Rich'ŏdŭ naehan, yŏgosaeng p'aenk'ŭllŏp aidiŏro sijak*" [<Looking back on 'back then, back there'> Ewha University concerts' 'accidents'…Cliff Richard's South Korean concert began with an idea by the fan club of high school girls], *Munhwa Ilbo,* April 12, 2013, https://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=103&oid=021&aid=0002151240.

[26] *XtvN*, "*Tŏgŏbilch'i! Sŏnggong-han tŏkhu kkŭtp'anwang 19*" [My profession is to be a fan! 19 most successful fans]. *Free 19*, episode 37, January 17, 2017, https://www.ondemandkorea.com/free-19-e37.html.

[27] Ibid.

was the "loudest audience than any other fans in the world."[28] The adult generation was threatened by Richard's tour, and the girls' high schools in Seoul intentionally set an exam week throughout Richard's tour dates. Three years later, Richard planned his second tour to South Korea, although the Park Chung Hee administration banned his visit for his violation of the "Minor Offenses Act," which banned men from having long hair.

As the first fan club in South Korea, the CFC's history demonstrates the processes of how young female fans are stereotyped and viewed as prone to juvenile delinquency. But it also tells us how these female fans, in return, attempted to improve not only the public image of their idol but also their own public reputation as fans. The CFC's fan activities—such as promoting their idol to radio/television networks, selling fanmade merchandise, and trying to build a wholesome image through charitable donations—diversified their roles as promoters and marketers of their idol. Such activities have become a typical pattern in today's fan activities in K-pop. Fans' roles as promoters and marketers of their idol may signify fans' active participation in the industry, but this ironically reflects the remaining prejudice against the female fans of pop music today. Unlike fans of "masculine" genres like sport games or "gender-neutral" genres like movies, K-pop fans are still compelled to prove their normalcy and adaptability to the world, by boosting up the idol's popularity and showcasing their productivity and positive influence to the society as "normal" and/or "model" citizens.

[28] Chi-ŭn Yi, "*34nyŏn mane tubŏnjjae naehankong-yŏn kannŭn Yŏngkuk-ŭi pap kasu K'ŭllip'ŭ Rich'ŏdŭ*" [British pop singer Cliff Richard who holds the second Korean concert in 34 years], *W Dong-A*, March 6, 2003, https://woman.donga.com/Library/3/all/12/129267/1?comm.

E. 1970-1986: The Emergence of Youth Culture

In the 1970s, Park Chung Hee's authoritarian regime provided a political impetus to the Korean folk music scene. Pop music columnists Yi Hye-suk and Son Wu-sŏk define the 1970s as the "beginning of youth culture," in which "the desire of the youth that had been suppressed due to the economic development [of South Korea in the 1960s] finally erupted" (2003:17). Folk [*p'ok'ŭ*] musicians—including Kim Min-ki, Yang Hi-ŭn, Song Ch'ang-sik, Cho Yŏng-nam, Yun Hyŏng-ju, Sŏ Yu-sŏk, Kim Se-hwan, Kim To-hyang—made their debuts and performed primarily at music salons or music appreciation cafés, such as C'est si bon and OB's Cabin.[29] Under the Park administration, these salons provided a publicsphere of music appreciation and public discussions for university students, amateur musicians, poets, and other artists who were "opposed [to] the principle of supervision" (Habermas 1974:52). High school students also formed their own music listening spaces at street food restaurants [*punsikjip*]. Some restaurants near private educational institutions [*hagwon*] in Jongno, Seoul, offered a small DJ booth so that the students could imitate DJs and play music in the restaurants.[30]

Meanwhile, the television industry was developing music variety shows with its own television show-dedicated dance groups. The private broadcasting corporation TBC-TV's *Sho Sho Sho* (Show Show Show) (1964-1983) was one of the most popular music variety shows in the 1970s. Performers who signed a contract exclusively with TBC-TV were the

[29] In this chapter, use the term "folk" to refer to the popular music genre that emerged from the American South, not the general meaning of traditional, grassroots music.

[30] Hyŏng-ch'an, Kim, "*Kim Hyŏngch'an-ŭi taejung-ŭmak iyagi <34> Ch'ŏngnyŏndŭrŭi pam haebanggu simya-ŭmakp'ŭro sijakdoeda(chung)*" [Kim Hyung-chan's popular music story <34> Youth's night outlet, night music radio program begins], *Kookje Shinmun*, September 12, 2016, https://www.kookje.co.kr/news2011/asp/news_print.asp?code=0500&key=20160913.22025184916.

Eighth U.S. Military show singers—e.g., Ch'oe Hi-jun, Nam Il-hae, Yu Chu-yong, Hyŏn Mi, Han Myŏng-suk, Pak Chae-ran, and Yi Kŭm-hi—primarily because their performances visually stood out than other performers on the television (Park 2014:56). TBC also recruited an in-house dance group. Among 165 applicants, fourteen dancers were selected and performed for music variety shows, including *Sho Sho Sho* (Show Show Show), *TBC Hit Pŏreidŭ* (TBC Hit Parade), *7dae Kasusho* (The 7 Singers Show), and *Kayo Kwankwang* (Popular Music Tourism).[31] There were several challenges in adopting dance as a visual element for a television show. The company first hired professional dancers who worked for nightclubs and other adult entertainment services, however their public appearance on television received criticisms for being "vulgar."[32] Eventually, Han Ik-p'yŏng, who was in charge of the dance in *Sho Sho Sho*, created a new type of choreography of which the movements were less curvy but more linear, similar to that of the government-sanctioned exercise [*chaekŏn ch'ejo*].[33] Such perfectly-synchronized dance form later becomes one of the important characteristics of K-pop group dance called "*kalgunmu*" (perfectly-synchronized group dance).

[31] *JoongAng Ilbo*, "*TBC chŏnsokmuyongdan 14 myŏng ch'oejong-hapkyŏkbalp'yo*" [14 finalists admitted to the TBC dance group], February 21, 1974, https://news.joins.com/article/1369871.

[32] Hyŏng-ch'an Kim, "*Kim Hyŏngch'an-ŭi taejung-ŭmak iyagi <7> 'Sho Sho Sho' TV muyong-ŭl ch'ang-anhada*" [Kim Hyung-chan's popular music story <7> 'Show Show Show' creates the TV dance], *Kookje Shinmun*, February 22, 2016, http://www.kookje.co.kr/news2011/asp/newsbody.asp?code=0500&key=20160223.22023185700.

[33] *Chaekŏn ch'ejo*, established in 1961, was a mandatory exercise for all citizens under the purpose of "uniting the national spirit and increasing physical strength of the citizens." See National Archives of Korea, http://theme.archives.go.kr/next/koreaOfRecord/gymnastics.do.

Fan clubs began to flourish in the 1970s for musicians and nighttime music radio programs. Donga Broadcasting System's fan club, DBS Pop Family, was the first fan club formed in May 1971, acquiring four thousand members. MBC's radio program "Pyŏri Pinnanŭn Pame" (Starry Night) had its fan club, Pyŏlbam Kŭllŏp (Starry Night Club), with more than ten thousand members. Under the support of each broadcasting corporation, these fan clubs hosted various events, including music listening gatherings, concerts, and excursions (such as a hiking or train trip) with singers. Similar to today's K-pop fans, there were anti-fans who called the rival DJ and started a heated debate on air. (Male) DJs were intimately connected more with female listeners than with male listeners, due to the female listeners' level of devotion—often expressed with letters and presents—to the DJs.[34]

Trot singer Nam Jin [Nam Chin]'s fan club was more systematized. It was established on June 18, 1972 with one thousand members. The registration fee was five hundred won with monthly fee of one hundred won (when a bus ticket cost twenty won), yet the number of members increased to as many as ten thousand. The fan club's role was extremely similar to today's K-pop fan clubs: (1) to promote the idol by requesting radio networks to play the singer's song when his new album is released; (2) to collectively vote for the year-end awards via postcards (today, via online voting system); and (3) applaud as loud as possible at concerts (today, this has changed to fan chants).[35] In response, Nam Jin invited his fans to the

[34] Ibid.

[35] Hyŏng-ch'an Kim, "*Kim Hyŏngch'an-ŭi taejung-ŭmak iyagi <26> Nam Chin, Na Huna sukmyŏng-ŭi raibŏl(ha)*" [Kim Hyung-chan's popular music story <26> Nam Jin, Na Hoona's destined rivalry], *Kookje Shinmun*, July 18, 2016, http://www.kookje.co.kr/news2011/asp/newsbody.asp?code=0500&key=20160719.22023183358.

Namisum Island and hosted a mini-concert with a live band and a number of other entertainers.[36]

Nam Jin and Na Hoona [Na Hun-a] were the most competitive rivals of the time. When they were invited to star in the movie, *Kirŏgi Nammae* (Wild Geese Siblings), together in 1971, the singers accepted only after the script was revised and allotted exactly fifty-six scenes for each of them. They sang the same number of theme songs and appeared on the poster in the same size with the same vertical subtitles, instead of one's subtitle showing on the upper side and the other showing on the lower side of the screen.[37] The fan clubs' competition was fierce as well. The singers' fans interrupted each other's concerts by playing music or swearing during the rival singer's concert.[38] Eventually in 1975, the executives of both fan clubs held a meeting together and decided to disband both fan clubs to assuage the zealous competition.[39]

At the same time, the fan clubs put a good amount of emphasis on maintaining a wholesome image through donation activities. Nam Jin's fan club representatives, for instance, donated four thousand won to a flooding damage relief project and the donation

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] *DongA Ilbo*, "*Myŏngdaegyŏl <75> Na Hunawa Nam Chin (1)*" [Historical rivalry <75> Na Hoona and Nam Jin (1)], April 2, 1982, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1982042000209207013&editNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1982-04-20&officeId=00020&pageNo=7&printNo=18628&publishType=00020.

[39] Yŏsu Yun, "S*ŭt'a, kŭttae-ŭi onŭl: 1975 nyŏn kasu p'aenkŭllŏpgan sinsahyŏpjŏng*" [Star back then: The 1975 gentlemen's agreement between the singers' fan clubs], *Sports DongA*, June 7, 2011, http://www.donga.com/news/article/all/20110607/37817793/5.

was reported in a newspaper in the name of "Nam Jin's Fan Club."[40] Other fan clubs also promoted their donation activities via newspapers. Along with the singer Kim Sang-jin's profile photo in the middle, a 1974 news article reported the fan club's donation:

> The Seoul members of singer Kim Sang-jin's Fan Club donated a national defense fund of twenty thousand won to Han-guk Munhwa Pangsongguk (Korea Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation) at 5 p.m. on the 8th. Mr. Kim's fan club has about two hundred members all over the country, and this is the second time they donated since the Daegu members donated a national defense fund of fifty thousand won to Daegu Kidokkyo Pangsongguk (Daegu Christian Broadcasting System) last June.[41]

Today, donations, along with voluntary activities, have become one of the most common strategies to promote and give a positive image to the singers and their fan clubs. On special occasions, such as the singer's birthday, K-pop fans make a donation in the name of the singer, just like pop music fans did in the 1970s.

In the early 1980s, fan clubs revived but were also corporatized as a marketing strategy for album sales. The recording industry was facing "the worst recession since 1973," due to the ban of managers' promotional visit to television and radio stations, the limited airing time of each song, rampant black markets, and the "purification of popular music scene" by the authoritarian regime.[42] Establishing a fan club was one of the marketing

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[40] *DongA Ilbo*, "*31 il ojŏn sujaemin kuhomulp'um chŏpsu*" [Relief funds for flooding damage received on the 31st morning], August 31, 1972, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1972083100209206006&editNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1972-08-31&officeId=00020&pageNo=6&printNo=15665&publishType=00020.

[41] *Kyunghyang*, "*Pang-wisŏnggŭm 2 manwon Kim Sang-chin p'aenkŭllŏpsŏ*" [National defense fund of 20,000 won donated by Kim Sang-jin's fan club], August 8, 1974, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1974080800329208021&editNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1974-08-08&officeId=00032&pageNo=8&printNo=8882&publishType=00020.

[42] *DongA Ilbo*, "*Hwich'ŏnggŏrinŭn rek'odŭ-ŏpgye p'anch'ok myobang manbal*" [Recession in the record industry, thriving marketing strategies for album sales], May 26, 1982, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1982052600209212014&editNo=

strategies for the record companies and musicians. Cho Yong-pil [Cho Yong-p'il], for instance, recruited fan club members after he released his fourth album in 1982 and planned to provide a membership card and a medal engraved with a red dragonfly symbol that represented the singer.[43] Japanese female fans also formed a fan club in Japan and volunteered to be ushers for Cho's first Japan tour in the next year.[44] A 1984 newspaper article stated that there was a "huge South Korean pop song boom in Japan" and that Japanese mass media also featured Korean singers' visit to Japan with headlines such as "Korean pop song's power explodes" or "Korean pop songs are sweeping [Japan]."[45] The article quoted Japanese pop music critic Mihashi Kazuo, stating, "Until recently, one could not become a star with a Korean name in Japan, so even Korean Japanese made their debut in Japanese names, but this is not the case anymore" while referring to Cho Yong-pil, Mun Chu-ran, and Yi Sŏng-ae's success in Japan.[46] This implies that Japanese fans were in the process of de-Othering their idols who came from the country that Japan once colonized.

2&printCount=1&publishDate=1982-05-26&officeId=00020&pageNo=12&printNo=18658&publishType=00020.

[43] Ibid.

[44] *Kyunghyang*, "*Cho Yong-pil Ilbon sunhoegongyŏnsŏ kalch'aebada*" [Cho Yong-pil draws acclamation at his Japan tour], May 27, 1983, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1983052700329212006&editNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1983-05-27&officeId=00032&pageNo=12&printNo=11587&publishType=00020.

[45] Chŏng-nang Chang, "*Ilbon hwipssŭnŭn Han-gukgayo tolp'ung*" [Korean pop boom that sweeps Japan], *Kyunghyang*, January 26, 1984, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1984012600329211034&editNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1984-01-26&officeId=00032&pageNo=11&printNo=11793&publishType=00020.

[46] Ibid.

By the mid-1980s, fan club organization was understood as a serious "juvenile problem" of the society. In a 1986 news article that described "teenage fangirls' pandemic-like 'star idolizing illness,'" fan clubs were described as a cause of fangirls' craze for pop singers. Middle and high school teachers were worried that "students who are registered in a particular fan club only hang out with themselves, jeer at the rival fans at concert venues, and have group fights."[47] Most of the fan club members were middle and high school students, and it was presumed that most of the singers had five thousand to six thousand members—ad as many as twenty thousand members for top stars—in Seoul alone.[48] Fan clubs of teenage girls in the 1980s foreshadowed the explosive popularity and more systematized fan club organizations of K-pop idols in the 1990s.

F. 1987-1995: The Emergence of Teen Pop Idol Culture

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, South Korea was taking its big step from the military authoritarian regimes (1961-1986) to Roh Tae-woo's democratized administration (1987-1992) and Kim Young-sam's first civilian regime (1993-1997). The youth in the 1990s, or the "s*insaedae*" (New Generation), did not experience economic poverty or oppression of free speech like their parents' generation did. The socioeconomic milieu of popular culture had changed from that of ideological repression, modernization and industrialization of the nation, and pro-democracy movements, to that of individualism,

[47] Yo-sŏp Chŏng, "*Yŏpso pyŏngp'ungjong-i hakch'onmari myŏtmyŏt t'opkasuenŭn hoewon 2 manyŏmyŏngssik*" [Some top singers have 20,000 fan club members (who send) postcard walls and one thousand origami birds], *Kyunghyang*, May 2, 1986, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1986050200329207002&editNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1986-05-02&officeId=00032&pageNo=7&printNo=12491&publishType=00020.

[48] Ibid.

leisure and entertainment, and neoliberal consumerism. Sociologist Kang Chun-man states that the teenagers in the 1990s were different from the past generations. As the number of children per household declined, the teenagers gained more consumer power; in 1992, 26.7% of the entire population of South Korea consisted of students, and half of them were middle and high school students (Kang 2006:242). About 90% of the studio audiences of national television shows were teenagers, and television networks produced more programs that would target teenagers based on the demographics of the studio audiences (ibid.).

The cinema industry relied on teenage consumers as well. RoboCop 2 (1990), for instance, was R-rated in the United States, while middle schoolers and above were admitted in South Korea after the importer and the Korea Media Rating Board removed a few violent scenes (ibid., 244). Publishing, electronic products, video games, and comic book industries began targeting teenage consumers, but above all, the music industry showed a salient knowledge of the consumer power of teenagers, as they contributed to 70% of the overall sales (ibid., 244-245). Kang explains that the difference between the New Generation and the parent generation could be explained with the difference between "desire" and "need": "If labors and productive activities were necessary for the previous generation to maintain subsistence, the 1990s generation chose labors and productive activities for artistic, cultural consumption" (Munhwaironyŏnguhoe 1994:292; quoted in Kang 2006:355).

Dance pop artists had gained national popularity from the late 1980s. Chang Yu-jŏng considers Sobangcha (Fire Truck), a male dance pop trio debuted in January 1987 as the outset of the Korean idol dance group. Although Sobangcha's formation (consisting of three male dance singers), acrobatic choreographies, and dance music resemble today's K-pop idol groups, however, Sobangcha's member Kim Tae-hyŏng states, "We [the members Kim Tae-hyŏng, Yi Sang-won, and Chŏng Won-kwan] made the group [Sobangcha] after we joined

tchak-kkung [the backup dancer team of the KBS show, *Chŏlmŭmŭi Haengjin* (The March of Youth)]. We were not a team that was trained by an entertainment company like [K-pop idol groups] today . . . Under [another Sobangcha member] Lee Sang-won's leadership, we made the choreographies and chose our own costumes."[49]

Sobangcha's production outcome looks similar to today's idol groups, however the overall production system of the current entertainment companies—e.g., scouting and training systems, artist management, the hierarchical relationship between producers and artists, and the idea of musical performance as a type of service labor—can rather be traced back from a lineage of the girl groups—the Kim Sisters in the 1950s, Korea Kittens in the 1960s, and the Hee Sisters and the Happy Dolls in the 1970s—who performed at morale-boosting military concerts than from the male group Sobangcha. Top dance singer Kim Wan-sun [Kim Wan-sŏn]'s aunt, Han Paek-hi, was especially notorious for training Kim to an abusive level. Han was a former Eighth U.S. Military show singer and manager of the Hee Sisters in the 1970s before she managed Kim. Kim was locked up in Han's house and practiced singing and dancing day and night for seven years and finally made her debut at the age of seventeen in 1986. Yet, Han forced Kim to starve and rarely provided rice or noodle during her thirteen years of management: "When I was too lethargic, the manager handed me ice cream. I was able to become energetic just for the performance and then became [lethargic] again."[50] Kang Su-ji, another pop star of the time, recalls that every time she ran

[49] Ŭn-jŏng Yi, "*Sobangcha 'Ŭngdapara 1988' ŭrisedae munhwa hwalsŏnghwadoel kip'okje doegil*" [Sobangcha hopes 'Reply 1988' to be a catalyst for the culture of its generation], *Yonhap News*, November 19, 2015, https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20151119107600005.

[50] MBCentertainment, "[*HOT*] *Pyŏlbaragi – '13nyŏn-gan pap anmŏgŏtta!' Kim Wan-sun, ch'unggyŏgŭi kŭkdanjŏk taiŏt'ŭ! 20140807*" [[HOT] Star Follower – 'I didn't eat rice for 13 years!' Kim Wan-sun's shocking, extreme diet plan! 20140807], https://youtu.be/I3PwfP6fcIU.

into Kim, she was unable to carry a further conversation with Kim because of Han's surveillance.[51] Kim Wan-sun became one of the top dance pop stars in the 1980s, although she did not receive any revenues from Han.

By the early 1990s, rap was introduced in a more commercialized-yet-localized genre called "rap dance" [*raep taensŭ*], which was a combination of singing, dancing, and rapping. Two iconic groups, Seo Taiji and Boys [Sŏ T'ae-ji wa Aidŭl] and the Hyun Jinyoung and Wa Wa [Hyŏn Chin-yŏng kwa Wa Wa], in particular, were systematically different. Seo Taiji, who was originally a bass player in the heavy metal band *Sinawi*, learned dance moves from dancers at the Itaewon nightclub Moon Night [Mun Nait'ŭ]—Lee Juno [Yi Chu-no] and Yang Hyunsuk [Yang Hyŏn-sŏk]—whom he recruited as the "Boys" and made their debut as a rap dance group. Meanwhile, Hyun Jinyoung was scouted and trained by producer Lee Soo-man [Yi Su-man] for his mainstream debut with his back dancers Wa Wa.

Lee Soo-man, a pop ballad singer who had witnessed the establishment of MTV during his time studying in the United States, analyzed various idol management systems, including Han Paek-hi and Kim Wan-sun's family business, Japan's Johnny & Associates, and the U.S.'s Jive Records.[52] Lee established SM Kihoek (SM Production) and scouted Hyun Jinyoung. Lee was searching for a dancer who could perform the Running Man dance popularized by Bobby Brown and Milli Vanilli, and one day he found Hyun at the nightclub

[51] *Joongang Ilbo*, "*Kang Suji 'Kim Wansŏn imo ttaemune chŏpkŭn pulga'…Han Baekheega nugugilae?*" [Kang Suji says, "I was unable to approach Kim Wansun because of her aunt Han Baekhee,"…Who is Han Baekhee?], August 4, 2014, https://news.joins.com/article/15444707.

[52] U-in Yi, "'*1 tae 100' Kim Wan-sŏn 'Yi Suman, SM ch'arigi chon chamunkuhaewa*" [1 Versus 100's Kim Wansun States, "Lee Soo-man consulted with me before he established SM Entertianment], *TV Report,* April 5, 2016, https://www.tvreport.co.kr/882392. Also see Hye-suk Kwon, "*Munhwa-wa sanŏbi manalttae: Ŭmbankihoekja Yi Sumanssi*" [When culture meets industry: Music producer Lee Soo-man], *Kukmin Ilbo*, May 10, 2000, https://entertain.naver.com/read?oid=005&aid=0000000229.

Moon Night at Itaewon, a district where the U.S. military base was located. Lee trained sixteen-year-old Hyun by hiring an American hip hop dancer and rapper and instructed him to hang out with American friends at the Itaewon nightclub (An and Kong 2012:270). Hyun recalls,

> [Lee Soo-man's] teaching was unique. He didn't tell me to practice in a practice room: "If you want to perform this dance, you should know the culture of the people who perform it. I have scouted black dancers and [American] soldiers for you, so go hang out with them." I was excited. [The night club was] where I used to hang out, so it was exciting for me [to hang out there instead of practicing in a room]. So I started to say things like "yeah, yeah," [in English] and saw how [American] kids would do the same choreography in a certain way while I was doing the other way. Teacher [Lee Soo-man] occasionally dropped by and checked how I was doing.[53]

As Hyun states, Lee provided an environment (although artificial) for Hyun to learn and absorb American popular culture through a direct interaction with black American youth. Later, Lee told Hyun that he scouted Hyun instead of Lee Juno (who later became a member of Seo Taiji and Boys), because "[Hyun] had a raspy voice that black people had, not because [he] knew how to perform the Running Man dance."[54] This shows what elements Lee prioritized in scouting an artist—he sought a dancer rather than an established singer only if the dancer retained a voice material apt for black (American) music. Hyun Jinyoung's debut attracted Korean teenagers by incorporating fashion as an element of the pop music culture.

> When I performed "Hŭrinkiŏk-ŭi Kŭdae" [You in My Vague Memory], I sagged my pants. [Then] all teenagers in the entire country sagged their pants. Teacher [Lee Soo-man] said, "You should do this. In the U.S., this is popular because prisoners sag their pants as they do not have belts. So you should try it." Then when I released the next album *Tugŭn Tugŭn K'ung K'ung* [*Pit-a-Pat Stomp Stomp*], he suggested, "Hey, raise your underwear upon your pants so that people can see the band of the boxers." On the premier day, I was so embarrassed to show my underwear so I zipped up my hoodie [to hide the band]. Then [Lee] came to me and said, "Jinyoung, you should [show] your underwear, why did you zip up your hoodie? Unzip when you perform." When the song came out, I went to the stage, unzipping [the hoodie] . . . On the next day, I was banned from performing at television shows. I was banned from all three

[53] Jinyoung Hyun, "Kang Simjang" [Strong Heart Show], October 4, 2011.

[54] Ibid.

> [national public] TV networks. [Lee Soo-man] said I did well though. He said other singers will start showing their underwear from now on.[55]

Lee also suggested Hyun to sample Korean funk songs, "Mi-in" (Beauty) and "Handong-an Ttŭmhaessŏjji" (It's Been a While) as a way of adopting hip hop's sampling technique.[56] Lee's omnidirectional production style that touched upon music, dance, fashion, and lifestyle laid foundation for today's K-pop idol management.

After Hyun's drug scandals, however, SM Kihoek nearly faced bankruptcy. Hyun's recurrent drug use interrupted promotional activities, and Lee eventually sought out new acts, this time with new criteria that included *insŏng*, or ethical morality (An and Kong 2012:297). *Insŏng* since then has become one of the utmost qualification for an idol singer, in order to maintain diligence in the harsh course of training and dietary restrictions, demonstrate obedience to the company executives, media industry workers, and fans, and become an exemplary citizen by observing conventional norms before the general audience and fans, thereby developing a wholesome public image. Later in 1995, Lee established SM Entertainment and produced South Korea's first K-pop idol group, H.O.T, when Hyun was imprisoned for drug use for the second time.

In the meantime, Seo Taiji and Boys swept the popular music scene in a short period of three years, between 1992 and 1995. The band introduced various new American music genres and mixed them with unique Korean sounds, wrote socially-conscious lyrics, and brought a great influx of teenage audience to the popular music market. Seo Taiji and Boys'

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Pong-hyŏn Kim, "*Urinara Hiphap Chakbŏp-ŭi Sŏnkujŏk Sidonŭn?*" [What were the Pioneering Attempts in Korean Hip Hop?], The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, October 17, 2018, http://www.korea.kr/news/cultureColumnView.do?newsId=148854671&pWise=sub&pWiseSub=B12.

debut song, “Nan Arayo” (I Know) (1992) demonstrated a mix of the Running Man dance with turntabling and heavy metal sounds. The group’s popularity was phenomenal; their first album sold 1.7 million; the second album 2.2 million; the third album 1.5 million; the last album 1.5 million. The numbers, of course, do not justly reflect Seo Taiji’s contribution to the Korean popular music scene of the 1990s. By incorporating global music trends in his music, Seo introduced a number of new genres, including hip hop. The fast-paced dance music with trendy fashion style and social criticism in Seo Taiji and Boys’ lyrics drew the young generation as active consumers.

The group’s actions against the government censorship also exemplified the New Generation’s resistance against their parent’s generation. When the group released their last single, “*Sidaeyugam*” (The Regret of the Time) (1995), the Korea Media Rating Board [Kongyŏnyulliwiwonhoe; now Yŏngsangmuldŭnggupwiwonhoe] demanded a revision of three phrases, “The era for sincere people is over,” “I wish to have a new world where everything is subverted,” and “I hope you could resolve your anger that you have in your heart today.” However, Seo removed not only the three phrases but the entire lyrics and submitted an instrumental version of the song as a display of resistance. This contributed to the then ongoing controversy and resistance against the Pre-Censorship System of Music Recordings [*ŭmbansajŏnsimŭije*]. Eventually, pre-censorship was abolished in the next year, although Seo Taiji and Boys suddenly retired in January 1996. Seo Taiji and Boys’ music suggested the New Generation possessed an idea of consuming music as part of a cultural lifestyle and youth resistance.

Lee Soo-man and Seo Taeji are credited as the most influential trendsetters of 1990s Korean pop music. On the one hand, they led the mainstream pop music industry by introducing diverse music genres, commercializing music as a symbol of cultural lifestyle,

and introducing youth audiences as a major consumer population to the popular music market. Lee Soo-man, in particular, has led the K-pop industry up until today, providing new business models for idol music industries around the world. During the 1990s, Lee was in the midst of setting the scene with foreign references, primarily from Japanese and American pop music scenes. As a music producer, Lee Soo-man contributed to the development of rap dance, a unique music genre that we now call "idol music" [*aidol ŭmak*] or "K-pop," i.e., a music production formula that combines singing, rapping, and dancing by allocating roles to each group member. As a businessman, Lee incorporated Japanese "*aidoru*" [idol] and American teen pop artist systems into the Korean pop industry. Subsequently, other music producers established their own entertainment companies that were modeled after SM Kihoek (today's SM Entertainment).

Lee Soo-man's SM Entertainment has opened the K-pop era since 1995 and SM Entertainment is still leading the Korean popular music industry. The next three sections of this chapter describe what we now call "K-pop." Scholars and fans categorize the idol generation into three; each generation spans about seven years, because the company-idol contract lasts for seven years in average. I have set the beginning of first generation with H.O.T's debut in 1996; the second generation with TVXQ's in 2004; and the third generation with EXO's in 2012. Although not all groups are strictly classified into these three, each generation has its own characteristics in terms of the production systems, idol-fan relationships, fan club organizations, and etymological discourses on K-pop.

G. 1996-2003 (K-pop 1.0): Establishment of the Idol System

The year of 1996 marked a popularity shift from Seo Taiji and Boys to H.O.T. Seo Taiji and Boys announced their retirement in January, and Korea's first "*aidol kŭrup*" (idol

group) H.O.T (High-five of Teenagers) soon made their debut in September. As SM Entertainment Lee Soo-man's next project after Hyun Jinyoung, five male members of H.O.T made countless records of historical significance. The group released four million-copy albums (the first album 1 million copies, the second 1.5 million, the third 1.1 million, and the fourth 1.38 million); published an autobiography that sold two hundred thousand copies; became the first Korean artists to perform at the Seoul Olympic Stadium where only foreign artists used to perform; and held a solo concert in Beijing, China for the first time Korean singers did so. Their popularity was phenomenal; all of my school friends during my (pre)teen years were "wives" of H.O.T members—I was Tony's "wife." As the nickname implies, becoming one's wife was the most ideal achievement that one could imagine in a romantic relationship in the 1990s; it was a norm to imagine the idol-fan relationship under Korean heteropatriarchy.

Targeting teenage girls, H.O.T's songs were either about love and happiness or youth resistance against the adult generation. For the former image, H.O.T members wore colorful, fluffy costumes and sang dance pop; for the latter, the idols maintained an aggressive warrior image with dark or black/white costumes, using aggressive hip hop beats. Such theatrics have developed into what we now call a "concept" [*k'ŏnsep*]. In K-pop, the term "concept" is used to refer to various theatrical images, including those of the idol group, each idol member, an album or a song. The concept of BTS, for instance, is an underdog struggle, and their album concepts include soul-searching themes such as "Love Yourself" or "Map of the Soul." EXO's concept illustrates the members as "aliens who came to the earth from the EXO planet," and their albums and performances follow the storylines of aliens with supernatural powers falling in love with a human girl. Each member of H.O.T also had "concepts": Heejun was the "witty guy," Kang Ta the "sexy guy," Tony the "moody guy," Woohyuk the

"wild guy," and Jaewon the "shy guy." Soon after H.O.T's debut, DSP Media's Sechs Kies debuted as a rival, and subsequently SM Entertainment's S.E.S and DSP Media's Fin.K.L competed as girl group rivals. The idol market flourished as JYP Entertainment and YG Entertainment joined the industry, eventually forming the three-cornered competition of the so-called "Big 3" in the idol industry with the front-runner being SM Entertainment.

"Entertainment companies" [*ent'ŏt'einmŏnt'ŭ hoesa*] that emerged in the 1990s were structurally different from the conventional "record labels" [*rek'odŭsa*]. If a record label found talented, yet unknown singers and produced and promoted their music, an entertainment company planned the concept of the group first and recruited idol candidates who could fit into the designated roles (e.g., singers, dancers, and/or rappers). Then the company trained the members into musically-talented, affectively-intimate, and visually-excellent personality materials and promoted them as charming figures via music shows, commercials, talk/variety shows, dramas, and movies. For this reason, the music production from entertainment companies are now called "idol music" [*aidol ŭmak*], because idols perform various kinds of music genres based on the given concept. Similar to J-pop idols who became a business model for the Korean idol system, "[t]he intimacy of celebrity is not reducible to any particular genre or platform, but is rather a function of the complex intertextuality" of the larger media system (Galbraith and Karlin 2012:10). The idol music system has placed intimacy as the main product of the K-pop entertainment companies, and subsequent fan club activities have been tied to this idea of intimacy as a commodity.

The type of intimacy, however, had changed over time. One of the popular concepts for the idols of the time was "*sinbijuŭi*" [mysticism]; later the first generation idols have confessed that they rarely had food before staff members and eschewed going to the restroom

at television stations to give an impression that they are not real humans.[57] As the idol music market became saturated, idol groups took shorter breaks and increased media exposures, and changed their marketing strategy of selling intimacy through friendly images.

In May 1997, thirty-four regional fan clubs established a united fan club called "Club H.O.T" and held its inauguration ceremony in September as H.O.T's official fan club. The fan club was run by fans, with financial assistance of Star World, a fan management company that was run by Lee Soo-man's brother. Club H.O.T established many of the norms of today's fan club culture in K-pop. The fan club members brought white balloons to concerts to show the fandom power, used slogans and placards, and distributed the "Ten Commandments" [*sipgyemyŏng*] that fans must follow to develop a wholesome fandom culture. Other idol fan clubs eventually used different colors of balloons to identify themselves at concerts where they competed with other fan clubs. From the second generation, entertainment companies started selling light sticks unique to each fan club.

[57] Moon, Heejun, "Come and Play, ep.210," MBC, September 1, 2008, https://tv.zum.com/play/610727.

Figure 1. SHINee's official light stick. Photo by Stephanie Choi.

Club H.O.T was also the first Internet-based fan club and was one of the first fan fiction communities in South Korea. The online communities—Unitel's K'aendi Ma-ŭl (Candy Village), Chollian's Ri-ot (Riot), Naunuri's T'i-ae-i-jŏ (Teenager), Hitel's Obangjanggun (Five Generals), and Netsgo's Kŭri-e-i-t'ŏ (Creator)—were initial ones established in the telecommunication era before the advent of World Wide Web. Fan fiction writing was active in these communities from the beginning. Because some communities, such as Ri-ot, banned same-sex fan fictions, a few fans made a closed fan fiction club called Chamsuham (Submarine). However, fan fiction did not always remain as an underground culture. In 2006, SM Entertainment held its first fan fiction contest for TVXQ fans, in order to "spend networking time with fans and promote wholesome creative activities for fans."

The prize money of 1 million won and a "special date with the TVXQ members" were presented to the final winner.[58]

K-pop was also spreading outside of the domestic market as part of the Korean Wave from the late 1990s. Hong Kong cinema and J-pop had gained great popularity throughout Asia in the 1980s and 90s, although low-price cultural products from South Korea with the government support and conglomerate investment started to replace the consumer needs of the trans-Asia cultural market after the IMF crisis in the late 1990s (Shim 2008; Jang 2011). The popularity of Korean drama became more visible in China from 1997, and subsequently H.O.T made a huge success by selling tens of thousands of copies and holding the first solo concert in Beijing by a Korean group in 2000. Lee Soo-man stated, "Although the U.S. has a big market, the [audience] has such a different sentimentality, and there's a racial limitation as well. So we have geared toward Northeast Asia. The size of the market [population] exceeds 1.5 billion just in Korea, China, and Japan. I envision our future from the Chinese market. In the future, No.1 in Asia will become No.1 in the world."[59]

The Chinese market in the early 2000s, however, suffered from rampant illegal music downloads while the Japanese industry welcomed K-pop productions with strict copyright laws and devoted fans. For the 14-year-old solo artist BoA, Lee Soo-man invested three billion won for her international debut in South Korea and Japan. SM Entertainment promoted BoA as a "culturally odorless" J-pop singer to avoid the domestic discrimination

[58] Su-jin Kang, "*Tongbangsinki 'p'aenp'ic kongmojŏn' yŏnda*" [TVXQ will hold a "fanfic contest"], *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, February 3, 2006, http://sports.khan.co.kr/entertainment/sk_index.html?art_id=200602031330193&sec_id=540201.

[59] Tong-uk Yun, "*K-POP ŭn in*t'*ŏnaeshŏnŏlhada*" [K-POP is international], *Hankyoreh21*, October 13, 2004, https://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=114&oid=036&aid=0000006335.

that Zainichi (Korean residents in Japan) communities and Zainichi entertainers experienced in Japan. BoA did not hide her nationality, nor did she stress it in her media presence. SM Entertainment trained BoA to speak Japanese to a native level and coordinated her look based on the then fashion trend in Japan. Within a couple of years after her Japanese debut, BoA won No.1 on the Oricon single chart in 2001 for the first time as a Korean singer. In 2002, her second album *VALENTI* became a million-selling album in Japan, paving a way to the Japanese music market for other K-pop singers. The South Korean government also actively provided support for the Korean Wave. Culture and Tourism minister Kim Han-gil explained that "the entertainment industry is well-suited for South Korea that lacks material resources but possesses human resources" and argued that "play will become a medium that will enrich both daily lives and economic activities, as production and consumption sectors will not be separated in the era of digital media and technologies."[60]

H. 2004-2011 (K-pop 2.0): Idols as Intimate Laborers

If the first generation of idols targeted teenage girls with mysterious, surreal personae, the second generation of idols extended their target audience to older listeners, labeled as "*Imo p'aen*" (aunt fan) and "*samch'on p'aen*" (uncle fan). Aunt fans of YG Entertainment's new boy band Big Bang were, in fact, not new to the idol culture; they were the first generation fans who were already familiar with the idol culture in their adolescent period. A 2006 news article explains, "Many of the [aunt fans] of Big Bang used to be ardent fans of

[60] Kyŏng-dŏk Chang, "*Ent'ŏt'einmŏnt'ŭ: 21C K'iwŏdŭnŭn 'munhwa'*" [Entertainment: The 21st century's keyword is "culture"], *Maeil Business News*, January 10, 2001, https://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=101&oid=009&aid=0000083203.

Yang Hyun-suk [founder of Big Bang's company, YG Entertainment] when he was the member of Seo Taiji and Boys."[61]

Although the ideas of aunt fans and uncle fans seemed new, the demographics included fans from the first generation—aunt fans in particular—who were already familiar with the idol culture. Thus, the terminologies did not necessarily refer to the emergence of new fan groups but to a new relationship between the younger idols and older fans. SM Entertainment's main producer Lee Soo-man also explained the new girl group Girls' Generation's main target group was men in their thirties and forties who spent their youth in the 1980s and 1990s.[62] The extensive press coverage and interviews by academic authorities and entertainment companies expressed a strong optimism on aunt and uncle fans and assured that the middle-aged fans' activities were a "wholesome leisure" [*kŏnkanghan yŏgasaenghwal*], "a culture that brings satisfaction and energy to the middle-aged female fans' lives," and "a desirable phenomenon in a sense that old people can also actively consume cultural [products]."[63] SM Entertainment's promotion manager Kim Ŭn-a also stated that "middle-aged people in their thirties and forties became important consumer agents in popular culture . . . people wouldn't be surprised or feel awkward today when a middle-age man or woman says, 'I am a fan of Girls' Generation.'"[64]

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[61] Sun-hi Yun, "*'Imo p'aen' tŭri yŏlgwang handa*" ['Aunt fans' go wild], *Chugan Hankook Ilbo*, September 11, 2007, http://weekly.hankooki.com/lpage/culture/200709/wk2007091113380837140.htm.

[62] *Chosun Ilbo*, "Who Is the Real Midas in Korean Showbiz?" November 5, 2008, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2008/11/05/2008110561003.html.

[63] Sun-hi Yun, "*'Imo p'aen' tŭri yŏlgwang handa*" ['Aunt fans' go wild], *Chugan Hankook*, September 11, 2007; Sŏ, Pyŏng-gi. "*Sŏng-in p'aendŏm hwaksan ŭi ŭiminŭn*?" [What does the expansion of adult fandom tell us?], *Herald*, April 3, 2010,

[64] Hyŏk-chun Chŏng, "*Hallyu t'ago Asia ro, ŭmban ttuiŏ pilbodŭro*" [Toward Asia via Korean Wave, toward Billboard via albums], *Hankyoreh 21*, February 13, 2009, http://h21.hani.co.kr/arti/economy/economy_general/24330.html.

The second-generation idols in their late teen attracted older fans in their thirties and even forties, for instance, by releasing a remake version of 1980s-1990s songs or by singing love songs for "*oppa*" (a noun used by a younger female to refer to an older male in a peer group) or "*nuna*" (a noun used by a younger male to refer to an older female in a peer group). However, the terminologies "aunt fan" and "uncle fan" were short-lived and did not survive in the next generation. Although the initial idea of the nomenclature "uncle" was to secure the middle-aged men from being publicly accused for liking teenage girls, they were still stigmatized by the public as pedophiles while the female-dominant fandom marginalized them from communal experiences. The term "aunt fan" also died out for several reasons. First, coupled with the term "uncle fan," the term "aunt fan" served as part of the marketing strategies that attempted normalizing middle-aged fans in the idol fandom. However, aunt fans' sexual desire toward teenage males was less threatening to the society than the opposite case of uncle fans, and thus the term did not serve more than assisting the normalization of uncle fans. Second, the term "aunt" rather discouraged female fans from maintaining the fandom as an active space in which females express their sexual desires. Eventually, many preferred "*nuna*" to "aunt." Lastly, as adult female fans in their late twenties and thirties had become the most financially-powerful fan group, the term "aunt fan" had again lost its main function of normalizing the middle-aged female fans.

The influx of older fans brought about ideological and structural changes in fan activities. The changes can be encapsulated into three aspects. First, fans no longer remained as mere worshippers but became financial investors and emotional supporters of their idols. Unlike teenage fans who gave fan letters and teddy bears at best, the adult fans readily spent money on albums, concerts, and other paid content and supported their idols with high end fashion brand gifts, lunchboxes for the idol's staff members, voluntary advertisements on

public billboards, and donations under the idol's name. Some fans took the role of marketers by taking photos and videos of performing idols with high-end DSLR cameras and uploading them online. These photographer fans were called "*taep'o yŏsin*" ("goddess of cannon," because a cannon looks similar to a DSLR camera), "*tchikdŏk*" (photographer fan), and later "*homma*" ("home master," because they upload photos on their homepage) for capturing idols' off-camera moments at live shows that are not aired on mass media. Soon the photography practice coalesced as a significant part of the K-pop fandom. Photographer fans did not simply remain media providers but have acquired great power as a representative voice of the fandom as they gained hundreds of thousands of followers.

The second aspect of the change was the position of idols and the overall relationship between the idols and fans. Idol production was seen as a high-risk, high-return business, and dozens of idols made their debut every year yet most failed to survive more than a year. The more the idol market was saturated, the more the idols relied on fan support. This idol-fan relationship changed the idol personae from distant-yet-mysterious to friendly-and-submissive. The two major gimmicks utilized in the idol-fan relationship were pseudo-parent-child and pseudo-lovers, and idols developed the so-called "fan service"—a musical and non-musical performances that satisfy the needs and desires in the parasocial relationship between idols and fans.

Third, the more fans supported their idols, the more control and power they exerted over their idols. Fans utilized various forms of surveillance and evaluation of their idols to overcome the irrational and immature image of pop music fans. One of the most common discourses in the K-pop fandom had been the debate over the "idol versus artist" dichotomy. It was oft-cited by hip hop artists who claimed their music authenticity by attacking idols.

Hip Hop duo Drunken Tiger, for instance, proclaimed hip hop authenticity in their song "Do You Know Hip Hop" (1999):

> . . . Yo! All of you are puppets that are dangled altogether on the same string
> They are sad dancing clowns, we can't just head to the sad future
> Two drunken tigers, we be coming from ghetto
> We are the street poets who only speak the truth

The lyrics targeted idols and criticize them as "puppets" and "sad dancing clowns" manipulated by the commercialized, mainstream music industry. The myth of "idol versus artist" continues to last until the third generation. Some scholars and journalists also criticized K-pop for its lack of authenticity. In his 2012 writing, cultural theorist Lee Dong-yeon defined K-pop as a representative form of "cultural Americanization," assuming that K-pop strives to imitate but fails to grasp the authentic gist of American hip hop:

> It is hard to say that [K-pop's] music trend, vocal style, digital sampling, and auto tune technique are all based on the indigenous Korean sentiment . . . It is clear that black music is an essential element in K-pop's musical form and musical style. But it is also clear that no matter how much K-pop refers to black music, it cannot become black music . . . While authentic hip hop musicians are working on their own to seek for Korean hip hop, hip hop is just a decoration in K-pop that is dominated by idol groups.[65]

Lee presumed that K-pop failed to achieve authenticity and remained at a level of imitation. A news article that reported Big Bang's G-Dragon's performance at one of the world's biggest electronic music festivals *Global Gathering Korea* also dismissed G-Dragon's musical competence. Borrowing electronic music fans' comments, the journalist argued that G-Dragon's participation in the global music festival would be an "international shame."[66]

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[65] Tong-yŏn Yi, "*K'aeip'abŭi pollyunŭn hŭginŭmak, majŭlkka?*" [Is the main origin of K-pop black music?], *Pressian*, February 16, 2012, http://www.pressian.com/news/article/?no=38109#09T0

[66] Hyŏn-u Yi, "'*Kŭllobŏlgaedŏring Chidŭraegon-2NE1 ch'uryŏnŭn kukjejŏk mangsin'? Pulman p'okju*" ['G-Dragon and 2NE1's appearances on the Global Gathering is an international shame'? Complaints flood], *Maeil Business Newspaper*, August 28, 2009, https://www.mk.co.kr/news/culture/view/2009/08/454754/.

Reacting to such criticisms, idol fans began evaluating their own idols' musical competence rather to prove how (musically) talented they were. One popular way of evaluating their musical talent was to extract the idol's voice from a live performance to prove how great singer the idol was—this became a popular reaction video style called "MR *chegŏ*" (music-record removed). Very often the comment section under the video would become a battleground between fans who wished to claim their idols' musical superiority. As a countermeasure to the fans' evaluation, the industry started to use AR ("all recorded," or a pre-recorded track that includes the vocal) for live performances, presenting a mixed version of pre-recorded and live music. Because a pre-recorded version of live singing has become a trend as well, fans who are not aware of such gimmicks have continued to extract the already pre-recorded version of live singing as a proof of their idol's vocal competence.

Lastly, fans actively made demands to the industry by utilizing online platforms. Fans used various media to deliver their voices, but among many others, online protest became the most efficient form. Korean portal site Daum's political discussion plaza Agora served as the main site in which K-pop fans petitioned to make their voice heard. A few famous cases include fans urging: the idol group T-ara's disbandment after the bullying scandal; BTS's company Big Hit to improve the labor environment of BTS; and Kang In to leave his group Super Junior for committing hit-and-run accidents. Exploitative workload, meticulously-crafted media personae, and unfair treatment of idol groups had remained as chronic problems of the K-pop industry, which can make the idols seek fans' intervention at a desperate moment. The split of TVXQ into two groups—Yunho and Changmin as TVXQ and Junsu, Yoochun, and Jaejoong as JYJ—marked a watershed in the abusive history of idol labor, as Junsu, Yoochun, and Jaejoong left the most popular group of the time, claiming an unfairness in the distribution of profit shares with their company, SM Entertainment. It is

known that SM Entertainment contacted the fan club and asked fans to persuade the three members who seceded from TVXQ to return (Lee 2013:79). However, 120,000 fans of Junsu, Yoochun, and Jaejoong reviewed the previous contract and agreed upon the unfairness of the profit share and supported JYJ by publicizing their mistreatment via newspaper advertisements while submitting petitions and reports to the Seoul Central District Court, the National Human Rights Commission, and the Fair Trade Commission against SM Entertainment's unfair contract (ibid.). After a long legal dispute, SM Entertainment and JYJ came to an agreement, however the outcome was more fruitful to the K-pop industry in general. The Fair Trade Commission announced a revised standard contract for the music industry [*p'yojun chŏnsok kyeyaksŏ*], changing a number of items, such as reducing the contract years from thirteen to seven, revising the penalty for breach of contract to a reasonable amount, and allowing the artist to refuse unwanted schedules.

Meanwhile, the international fandom was expanding tremendously beyond Asia. Depending on the political and/or historical relations between Korea and its neighboring countries, the Korean Wave often faced local anti-Korean Wave movements. However this only proved the increased popularity of Korean popular culture. The "Big 3" companies—SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment—generated the highest revenue in corporate history in 2010. Among them, SM Entertainment reported the largest overseas sales of 39.3 billion won—which comprised 63% of the total—with the annual growth of 182%.[67] Overseas tourists greatly increased, the South Korean government launched "Visit Korea Years" from 2010 to 2012, expecting to attract ten million tourists. By

[67] Chae-hyŏk Yu, "*K-POP-ŭn kihoekbut'ŏ kŭlloboŏl kyŏnyang…SM hae-woe maech'ul kkŏngch'ung*" [K-POP targets the globe from the production stage…SM's overseas sales soars up to 182%], *Hankyung*, February 28, 2011, https://www.hankyung.com/it/article/2011022893841.

the end of 2012, the number of tourists exceeded eleven million; in 2013, twelve million; in 2014, fourteen million, attaining the highest annual tourism revenue of 17.5 billion USD in history.[68] Foreign fans also aspired to become K-pop singers; by 2011, ten out of thirty trainees in SM Entertainment were non-Koreans.[69]

From the second generation, foreign fans started using the term "K-pop" to refer to Korean idol music. It is not clear with who first coined the term "K-pop"—some argue that Channel [V] International in Hong Kong used the term for the first time in the late 1990s by naming one of its television programs "K-pop Station"; others argue that it was first employed by a Japanese disk jockey, also in the late 1990s (Lee 2013; Lie 2014). The term was first circulated among foreign media and fans in the late 1990s when the Korean media and audience still used the term "*kayo*" (pop songs) to refer to Korean popular music (Shin 2013; Fuhr 2016). Only after 2004 the Korean media started introducing term "K-pop" to explain the Korean pop music boom in Japan and elsewhere outside of South Korea.[70]

If Korean dramas led the international boom of Korean popular music via television networks by attracting housewives primarily in Asian and Middle Eastern countries in the

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[68] Sŭng-chin Yang, "*Py'ŏn Ch'u-sŏk sajang 'Oerekwankwanggaek yuch'inŭn 3danttwigiwa kata*" [President Py'ŏn Ch'u-sŏk states, "attracting overseas tourists is the same as a triple jump], *AsiaToday*, December 29, 2014, http://www.asiatoday.co.kr/view.php?key=20141229010016365.

[69] Chae-hyŏk Yu, "*K-POP-ŭn kihoekbut'ŏ kŭlloboˇl kyŏnyang…SM hae-woe maech'ul kkŏngch'ung*" [K-POP targets the globe from the production stage…SM's overseas sales soars up to 182%], *Hankyung*, February 28, 2011, https://www.hankyung.com/it/article/2011022893841.

[70] There was a group called "K-pop" in the early 2000s, although the term was not used elsewhere in the Korean media to refer to the international boom of the music by then. Also see Chin Yun, "*Pae Yongjun choahada Han-guge ppajŏssŏyo*" [I fell in love with South Korea after I fell in love with Bae Yongjoon], *Hankyoreh*, March 22, 2004, https://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=103&oid=028&aid=0000051223.

1990s and early 2000s, K-pop became the leader of the second Korean Wave through global youths' participatory social media activities from the late 2000s, expanding its listenership to Latin America and some parts of Europe. Several K-pop idols made their U.S. debuts by collaborating with American producers and artists: BoA made her debut in 2008; the Wonder Girls, 2009; SE7EN, 2009; and Girls' Generation, 2011. The American media industry's systematic racism and Orientalist depictions made K-pop artists have difficulties in taking a seminal role in a production or even gaining mass media exposure beyond Asian American communities. SM Entertainment released two music videos for BoA's "Eat You Up," one made by Korean director Cha Ŭn-t'aek and the other by American director Diane Martel, who had also worked as a music video director for global super stars, including Ciara, Alicia Keys, Beyoncé, Justin Timberlake, Jennifer Lopez, and more. Unlike Cha's music video that depicted BoA as a street dancer heading to an audition with her crew members, Martel's music video displayed BoA in a black leather dress, suggesting a sexual relationship with a white male act; the overall quality of the video was also poor enough to scrap the piece. Rain was another example of a dance pop star serving a stereotypical role in the American culture industry. Impressed by his diligence and potential when starring as a supporting role in *Speed Racer*, the Wachowskis gave Rain the lead role in *Ninja Assassin* (2009). Although he played numerous contemporary characters with diverse personalities in Korean dramas, his role in *Ninja Assassin* reduced his character into an Oriental ninja (assassin) whose main task was to provide martial art scenes with minimal spoken lines. Psy's global success of "Gangnam Style"(2012) was understood in the same vein by the *Guardian* columnist Arwa Mahdawi, who pointed out that Psy was welcomed by the Western media not simply because of his

catchy tune but also because of the racist tendency of the West that "doesn't tend to take east Asian men seriously."[71]

Despite the poor reception of K-pop by the Western mainstream media, K-pop and Korean popular culture-focused English-language media outlets—e.g., Soompi (founded in 1998), Allkpop (2007), Daily K-pop News (2009), HELLOKPOP (2010), KpopStarz (2011), Koreaboo (2014)—started to thrive, and English-speaking YouTube vloggers with K-pop reaction videos had gained extreme popularity as microcelebrities. Unlike domestic fan clubs that competed with each other for each idol group's survival and success, English-speaking fans celebrated "K-pop" as a marginalized genre in the West, appreciating all kinds of Korean idol groups and fighting against the Western media's racist reportage on K-pop idols.

The K-pop style was not simply appreciated by international audiences but was seen as a profitable resource by foreign entrepreneurs. Some Asian groups produced copycat idol groups that imitated the concepts of popular K-pop groups—for instance, Chinese group OK-Bang was modeled after Big Bang; Thai group Candy Mafia after 2NE1; Vietnamese group HKT ft HKT M after B2ST and Japan's E-Girls after Girls' Generation. Chad Future, a white American male artist from Detroit, also produced several "AK-pop (American K-pop)" songs, featuring a few Korean K-pop artists. He successfully received media attention and was occasionally invited to K-pop overseas festivals, although the fandom rarely welcomed him because of the low quality of his productions and for the potential of having a white American appropriating Korean popular music culture.

[71] Arwa Mahdawi, "What's so funny about Gangnam Style?" *The Guardian*, September 24, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/sep/24/gangnam-style-south-korean-pop.

I. 2012-2019 (K-pop 3.0): Global Fandom on Social Media

By the 2000s, intimacy had become the most important value and commodity in the K-pop industry. Almost all entertainment companies had their own fan management division and fan manager who were in charge of mediating between the idols and fans and organizing fan events. Fans still ran their own fan communities, although they no longer gained power as they did in the past when they ran the fan club by themselves. Now everyone was under the same rule—the more you pay, the more opportunities you get to see your idols. The fan club president or committee had disappeared; instead, those who earned more fandom traffic on social media—for instance, photographer fans (*homma*), fanart artists, and translator fans—gained bigger voices and visibility in the fandom.

The contact between idols and fans became direct and instant. Idols, especially from smaller companies that had little connection with television and radio networks, no longer had to desperately rely on their scarce appearance on mainstream media. Instead, they opened their own YouTube channels, and Twitter/Instagram accounts, produced their own content, and communicated with their fans. What became more active and visible on social media were not only the communication between idols and fans, but also the conversations between fans of the same fan club and online conflicts between two or more fan clubs. From 2017 when the global popularity of BTS, from the small company Big Hit Entertainment, started catching up with that of the No.1 group EXO from SM Entertainment, foreign fans also began supporting one specific group, rejecting the so-called "multi-fans" who supported all kinds of K-pop groups.

Social media networks have also encouraged vibrant discussions among international fans and various discourses have reorganized fans into multiple groups. Social media discussions in the K-pop fandom are often compartmentalized linguistically (e.g., Korean,

English, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, and more), divided geographically (e.g., Korean versus non-Korean fans), and bring about conflicts ideologically (e.g., whether you support just one member or all members of the group, whether you consume same-sex shipping or not, and etc). Most of the discussion topics stem from the K-pop industry and Korean fans, although the non-Korean fandom occasionally bring up concerns of their own—such as "Is BTS K-pop," questioning the previous generation's Othering gaze on K-pop—that are not recognized or concerned with the same gravity by domestic fans and the industry.

Unlike the second-generation idols whose U.S. debuts were planned and managed by entertainment companies, BTS's successful U.S. debut was realized solely by their fan club's effort. The Billboard Music Awards recognized the power of BTS fans on social media and nominated BTS for the Top Social Artist Award that was awarded to the most popular artist on social media. Justin Bieber was the winner six years in a row since the award was launched in 2011, however BTS received the award by winning 320 million votes. Since then, BTS has easily made a television appearance in the U.S., although local fans continued to support them by making visits to award shows and television studios. Foreign fans actively adopted the domestic fandom culture, such as "*ibent'ŭ*" (a surprise event arranged by fans for the idols during the concert under the company's permission) or fan chants (chants that are distributed by the company and are performed by fans during the idol performance).

Since the 2.0 era, the domestic K-pop industry continued to produce multinational and multiracial idols, such as Super Junior's Han Geng from China, 2PM's Nichkhun and GOT7's BamBam from from Thailand, f(x)'s Taiwanese American member Amber, GOT7's Jackson from Hong Kong, TWICE's Sana, Mina, and Momo from Japan, BP Rania's African American member Alex Reid, and OMYJEWEL's Russian member Sofi. As more and more non-Korean idols joined the industry, the idols' political remarks and behaviors often brought

about international tensions. TWICE's Taiwanese member Tzuyu, for instance, was severely criticized by PRC fans for holding a Taiwanese national flag at a Korean variety show. Her company JYP Entertainment uploaded a videotaped apology of Tzuyu stating, "I have always felt proud to be Chinese." In contrast, many Korean fans expressed their disappointment when their favorite Chinese K-pop idols supported the One-China policy and the Chinese government's repression against Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement.

Following the culturally diversifying trends in the domestic K-pop industry, the infrastructure departed South Korea and brought about a global circulation of the idol system. The global music industry moved beyond the phase of directly imitating existing K-pop groups and started producing idols of their own. Actor and entrepreneur Jackie Chan produced a K-pop group called JJCC in 2014, while Chinese entrepreneurs developed the C-pop style similar to the idol systems of K-pop and J-pop. American K-pop group EXP Edition and British K-pop group KAACHI also made their debuts in 2017 and 2020 respectively. Both received severe criticism for their lack of talent and low production quality, although their appearance recast the ontological question of what K-pop is.

J. Conclusion

Then, what do I mean by "K-pop"? First, I use the term to refer to the Korean popular music genre that is performed primarily by artists called "idols" (*aidol*) who are trained, managed, and promoted by agencies called "entertainment companies" (*ent'ŏt'einmŏnt'ŭ hoesa*).[72] During the last three decades, this music has been called "idol music" (*aidol ŭmak*)

[72] Although I refer to K-pop as a music genre that is performed by idol groups, I consider solo singers, such as IU, as K-pop singers. Although IU did not debut as a member of a dance group but rather as a singer-songwriter who plays an acoustic guitar, she still had a trainee experience, gained popularity with a dance song, promoted herself through sexualized

in South Korea, although it has gained a new brand name as "K-pop" for outsiders, i.e., the global youth audiences beyond Korean diasporic communities that started to recognize and appreciate the genre outside of Korea, starting in the mid-2000s. Shin Hyunjoon states that K-pop is "popular music made in Korea for non-Korea" in the context of an export-driven cultural economy because music that is exported overseas can only be labeled as K-pop (2013:31). Suk-Young Kim also explains, "as the etymology attests, K-pop is a music scene whose Korean origin and global destination constantly vie to define its identity" (2017:8). In this sense, K-pop, as a music genre, is not simply defined by musical characteristics but by the performers and their interactions with the Korean and non-Korean audiences in the global affective economy. Second, I use "K-pop" to refer to the global cultural phenomenon that exhibits and circulates media productions, discourses, and fandoms of the Korean idol music. Lastly, "K-pop" in this dissertation involves a component of the laboring system in which participants of the industry and fandom produce and consume commodities, construct and subvert social relations, navigate power dynamics, and explore selfhood in this global music business through transactions that involve intimacy.

Overall, K-pop serves as (1) an entrance to the "magical world" of K-pop; (2) a sensorial apparatus that allows fans to perform and enhance a collective identity at live concerts; (3) a symbolic account that provides fans a play of deciphering and constructing a meta-narrative of the alternative universe; (4) an economic indicator of the intimate relationship between the singers and listeners as "idols and fans" who share musical tastes and emotional closeness but also as "sellers and consumers" who constantly evaluate and censor the quality of intimacy through that of music production and fan service. In other

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fantasies of Lolita, and by doing so maintained an intimate relationship with her fan club. Such marketing strategies and persona making are typical part of the K-pop system.

words, communications and relationships between idols and fans have become indispensable elements when discussing K-pop. In the next chapter, I explore the third generation more in detail by investigating how the parasocial relationships between idols and fans have changed, how fans utilize the mechanism of the parasociality, and how this signals the new social relations developed in the era of social media.

II. "But At Least They Try": Transacting Theatrical Interconnectedness in the Korean K-pop Fandom

> "Professionals must always smile
> Get judged to earn popularity
> How can a product have privacy?
> Consumers are kings here
> Keep your character in check, hide your emotions
> That is the reason why you wear hats and masks…"
> — Zico, lyrics from "Anti" (2017)

On June 10, 2017, Super Junior Gallery, one of the biggest fan communities of the K-pop group Super Junior, announced its official boycott of Super Junior member Sungmin. In a statement entitled, "A Request for the Suspension of Super Junior Sungmin's Activities" [Shup'ŏ Chuniŏ Sŏngmin Hwaldongjungji Yogu Sŏngmyŏngsŏ Ponmun Mit Purok], the fan community declared, "We—the DC Inside's Super Junior Gallery—as a fan community of Super Junior, found that Super Junior member Sungmin's disrespectful behaviors toward his fans will clearly damage Super Junior's [reputation] as a group. Therefore we think that it is unjust for Sungmin to remain active as a member of Super Junior and express our opinions via this statement."[73] The statement further criticized Sungmin for missing rehearsals due to his wedding ceremony that was held in the midst of the group's Japan tour. Several weeks later, Sungmin apologized for disappointing his fans and announced that he would withdraw from the group's promotional activities for the upcoming album and concert tours.

The combination of trendy pop production, synchronized group dance, and high-tech visual artistry has made K-pop a worldwide phenomenon among youth, especially on social media. However, K-pop's social and cultural power cannot be attributed merely to its sonic and visual innovations; it owes much to the communication skills, online community-

[73] Shup'ŏ Chuniŏ Kaelŏri [Super Junior Gallery], "*Shup'ŏ Chuniŏ Sŏngmin hwaltong chungji yogu sŏngmyŏngsŏ ponmun mit purok*" [A Request for Super Junior Sungmin's Suspension of Activity], DC Inside, June 10, 2017, http://gall.dcinside.com/board/view/?id=superj&no=1160336.

building, and the intimate relationships between K-pop idols and their fans. The case of fans expelling their idol Sungmin challenges the conventional ideas of fans as blindly adoring, unconditional worshippers who are deceived by the illusion of mediated intimacy. How should we understand Super Junior fans' decision-making regarding an idol's career and his company's compliance with the fans' decisions? What are the expected roles of idols and fans, and through which process are these expectations and roles established?

This chapter investigates the flexibility and paradigmatic shifts of agential roles in the communication system of production and consumption sectors in service industries. Michael Hardt explains that, unlike factory labor systems—such as the Fordist or Toyotist model that had either a relatively "mute" relationship or a constant and immediate relationship between production and consumption—the immaterial labor system functions like a computer that can "continually modify its own operation through its use" and "expand and perfect its operation based on interaction with its user and its environment" (1999:94). I investigate K-pop as a type of immaterial labor in which idols as service workers provide mediated intimacy to their fans. I further ask: What kind of immaterial labor or "service" do idols provide to their fans? How do fans understand and evaluate the price of the product, i.e., their intimate relationship with their idols? How do fans determine whether the product is defective or not? If the product is found defective, how do fans get a refund? I explore the ways in which K-pop fans in South Korea comprehend and utilize the manipulative mechanism of mediated intimacy, materialize the transacted intimacy into a commodity, and set the price of their fan labors by claiming co-ownership of their idol's career success.

The literature on parasocial interactions and parasocial relationships has been primarily discussed in the fields of psychology, communications, and anthropology, postulating parasocial relationships between a media celebrity and fans as a supplement or

extension of "real" social relationships that provide an illusion of intimacy and fulfillment of emotional needs. Despite various theories and methodologies, an unchanging premise is the hegemonic relationship that positions the celebrity as a provider of illusion and profit-maker and the audience as manipulated receivers of illusion with no power in the production system. This chapter, however, demonstrates a more complicated model in which fans become manipulators who urge the celebrity to provide a specific type of illusion and wield economic power over the celebrity.

Among various idol-fan relationships, I particularly investigate the heterosexual relationship between male idols and their female fans to discuss how these female fans develop and expand their gender relations into power games in the political economy of K-pop. Female fans of boy bands are known as the most supportive and largest group among K-pop fandom. Sunjoo, a female fan of BTS in her thirties, argues,

> Male fans are seriously bad at supporting their singer, because they have their own imagined persona of her. For example, they go to *Daiso* [a one-dollar store] to buy presents for their singer. Why? Because in their own imagined world, their singer is humble! So they would buy bunch of rubbish like cheap socks for her. Seriously, they don't care what the singer really wants. Meanwhile, female fans observe their singer, keeping in mind what he needs, and buy things like musical instruments or a scooter that he has been recently interested in. (Sunjoo, personal interview, August 25, 2016)

Male fans have also stated that it is mostly female fans who conduct the "support" [*sŏp'ot'ŭ*], or fans' voluntary promotion of idols via public advertisement or donations. They have further explained that they are reluctant to participate in online fan communities or share their interest in idols with their male friends, because being an idol fan would be considered "abnormal," especially among adult males. A thirty-four-year-old male fan of Ha Sungwoon states, "Although I am an idol fan myself, I find it very weird to see my [male] fans chasing after girl groups and promoting their [idols'] songs to me. I don't want to

become one of them" (Sunki, personal interview, August 30, 2018). A twenty-three-year-old male fan of LOONA adds,

> I also think that [an idol group can succeed] when they have more female fans [than male fans]. Because female fans conduct more "support" and spend more time on promoting their idols on the internet and whatnot. Also there are way more female fans who spend their own money on making merchandise products and distributing them for free at concert venues. For many males, idols are just one-time consumption. (Sunwoo, personal interview, August 19, 2018)

Unlike female fans who categorized themselves as "*anbangsuni*" (fangirls who watch idols at home), "*kongbangsuni*" (fangirls who follow idols' scheduled events, "*k'o-ŏ p'aen*" (hardcore fans), "*lait'ŭ p'aen*" ("light fans," or lighthearted fans opposed to hardcore fans) and "*chapdŏk*" (multifans, or fans who like multiple idol groups), based on their online/offline activities and the level of dedication to idols, male fans did not hesitate to call themselves "*p'aen*" (fans) when they simply had an idol's song in their cellphone playlists but had no involvement in the mediated intimacy or collective fan activities. As I will describe later, female fans' categorization of fan dedication is linked to the commodification of intimate relationships with their idols.

For the same reason, I explore Korean female fans in particular. In contrast with international fans who primarily rely on the idols' mass media presence and translation of idols' social media activities mediated by fellow Korean fans, Korean fans have greater benefits of having in-person contact or direct conversations with the idols. This physical, linguistic, and cultural proximity features two elements that originate from the Korean fandom: (1) diverse levels of engagement in the parasocial interaction and relationship with the idols; and (2) moral codes and obligations in the pursuit of parasocial relationships. While investigating the parasocial interactions between K-pop idols and Korean female fans, I propose a new paradigm of parasocial relationships in today's media convergence culture.

A. Theatrical Interconnectedness: Consuming the Mechanism of Parasocial Interactions

K-pop fans have built intercommunicative relationships with their idols as well as with other fans through various media platforms. Such convergence culture enables fans to construct intertextual personae of idols as fans recontextualize given media texts that feature personal information of the idols. Sunjoo, for instance, will watch all the behind-the-scenes episodes from BTS's YouTube channel, or BANGTAN TV, as well as television shows that feature the BTS members. Recently she watched a television show called "Hello Counselor," because her favorite idol group BTS's members Jimin and Jin were appearing on the episode. Jin seemed to get along well with the hosts, although Jimin appeared to be a bit shy and nervous. Sunjoo could tell the difference because she knew his "real" personality—Jimin, according to Sunjoo, is way more mischievous and active when he hangs out with his group members. Sunjoo explains that video clips from BANGTAN TV are "not scripted," and thus they present somewhat "natural" personalities of the members. The videos might be tedious for non-fans to watch, because the members "basically do nothing special," but Sunjoo enjoys watching the members hanging out during concert rehearsals and waiting rooms (Sunjoo, personal interview, May 12, 2016). Psychologists Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl refer to this "seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer" as a parasocial relationship (1956:215).

Sunjoo especially loves to watch videos that the BTS members recorded in their hotel rooms, because then she "know[s] how the members spend their time when their official schedule is over" (Sunjoo, personal interview, May 12, 2016). After all, what Sunjoo loves about Jimin is not simply his splendid appearance or spectacle performance but his transmedia-intertextual persona. She appreciates and constructs it through her transmedia engagement from the "kaleidoscopic convergence of various media platforms (TV, YouTube,

live performance, virtual reality)" (Kim 2018:9). Sunjoo's experience will later transform into a coherent narrative once she joins online conversations about Jimin with other fans. Fellow fans' short commentaries with memes of Jimin will circulate on Twitter, and the most tweeted comments will signal the general sentiment of the fandom. This media convergence becomes a determinant source for the current condition and mood of the idol-fan relationship.

When an idol posts a written message for fans, tens of thousands of fans will simultaneously reply to the post. However, fans' self-regulated manners will allow them to create a consistent flow of conversation with the idol. For instance, when Sunjoo receives Jimin's message that says, "It must be late at night over there? Because I'm in the exact opposite time zone," Sunjoo will reply, "It's almost 1 a.m. here, what are you doing now?" The conversation will continue as,

> Jimin: I just had lunch. But you have to go to bed now.
> Sunjoo: It's okay, I was waiting for you.
> Jimin: We will now go to the rehearsal. Sleep tight!
> Sunjoo: Good luck with your concert, I'll see you soon in Korea!

Although tens of thousands of fans will reply to his message, Jimin can simplify the conversation by personifying his fans into a single individual. In fact, Jimin and other BTS members call their fans "Army," the name of BTS's official fan club managed by Big Hit Entertainment. The parasocial relationship is intensified when BTS conceives millions of fans as an individual named "Army." Such an abstraction of the singers' and fans' identities into a pair of personalities—BTS and Army—provides the singers and fans a space in which both parties envision an intimate, one-on-one relationship. Thus, to Jimin, the conversation with Sunjoo is understood as:

> Jimin: I just had lunch. But you have to go to bed now.
> Army: It's okay, I was waiting for you.
> Jimin: We will now go to the rehearsal. Sleep tight!
> Army: Good luck with your concert, I'll see you soon in Korea!

Through the conceptualization of the fan club, thousands of fans can be recontextualized as a single response that the website manager can censor. If one leaves a hostile comment that goes against the general sentiment of the conversation, the website manager removes the comment and informs the commentator via a direct message. Other fans will interrupt as well, urging the commentator to remove the comment before the idol reads it. After all, fans will rarely feel alienated in the loop of this conversation, because thousands of other messages will have a common tone, and also because they understand Jimin's response as members of an imagined community that is personified into "Army(s)."

The digital media technologies have enabled intercommunicative interaction between idols and fans. Yet this does not imply that every individual fan can acquire equal opportunities or qualities of intimate relationships with their idols. The mutual communication is still established upon parasociality, and only a few hundred fans will acquire more opportunities of receiving direct replies from idols or meeting them in person, either by chance or by investing more money and time than others in their fan activities. These fans purchase a few hundred copies of their idol's new album, because each album purchase serves as a lottery ticket to a fansign event, an event where fans receive an autograph on the CD from their idols in person. For a popular group like BTS, fans buy as many as three to four hundred copies to get tickets for fansign events. These fans find the opportunity significant, not because of the autograph but because of the one-hour fanmeet that comes with a one-on-one talk each fan can have with the idols for about a minute.

One-on-one conversations may seem personal and intimate, however, the majority of fans consider it a fandom asset that can enhance the idol-fan relationship and attract more people to the fandom. At a fansign event, an idol will perform fan service, so that the on-site fans can capture *ttŏkbap*—a spreadable media source that can be reused, circulated, and

appreciated as a promotional spectacle by other fans.[74] Armys who have met the BTS members at fansign events will actively share their experience via written texts, photos, and videos on the internet, so that the rest of the fandom can appreciate the ways BTS members treat Armys and internalize those intimate moments as a collective memory of the fandom. Psychologist David C. Giles poses a reasonable doubt on the status of parasocial relationships as *relationships*, referring to psychologist Robert A. Hinde's argument that "a relationship exists only when the probably course of future interactions between the participants differs from that between strangers" (Hinde 1979:16, quoted in Giles 2002:284). The process in which the K-pop fandom internalizing individual experiences as a collective memory develops the parasocial interactions between the idol and fans into a *relationship*. In other words, the intimate relationship between the idol and fans is constructed and maintained through collective memories, sanctioned by the fandom's massive circulations of idol-related episodes. Fans who had unpleasant interactions with their idol during a fanmeet informed me that they usually keep it to themselves.

The Instagram Live service and V LIVE app (a Korean live video chat service exclusively for celebrities) further strengthen intimate relationships between idols and fans. Unlike television programs that are scheduled, filmed, and edited in advance, and announced beforehand, idols often start a livestream chat without notice, and such spontaneity intensifies the intimacy between idols and fans by implying the lack of gatekeeping by a third party. There is no on-site "coaching of attitudes" (Horton and Wohl 1956)—a provision of a "correct" audience reaction demonstrated by a studio audience for the home audience—during the live chat on social media, although both idols and fans must exercise discipline in

[74] The literal meaning of *ttŏkbap* is paste bait. The slang today refers to spreadable media content that can generate online discussions, memes, inside jokes, hidden messages, and/or spoilers of the upcoming content.

reacting to each other. Just as fans regulate other fans during the idol-fan interactions on the official fan club websites, idols also regulate each other or self-regulate during their live video streaming on social media to maintain their personae and/or meet fan expectations. During his Instagram livestream, EXO Chanyeol, for instance, makes a sudden video call to Suho, another member of EXO. After a short conversation, Chanyeol asks Suho to say hello to their fans. Only then does Suho realize that their conversation is broadcast on Instagram. Suho states, "Ah, is this Instagram Live? What were you gonna do if I spit out some swear words or slang?" Later, Chanyeol makes another phone call to Baekhyun, another member of EXO. This time, he follows Suho's advice and shouts, "Do not swear!" as soon as Baekhyun gets on his phone.[75]

Idols' display of self-restraint on live streaming reflects a couple of aspects in the cultivation of mediated intimacy. First, regardless of the situation, idols are expected to remain polite, humble, and controversy-free—i.e., to reassure their status as an invariable product and thus to promise the stability of their potential market value—to their current and future investors, including advertisers and fans. In this sense, demonstrating a high level of disciplined self-restraint is a way for idols to promote the stability of their commercial values. Second, idols' demonstration of their attitude coaching is both theatrical *and* intimate. Traditionally, the main purpose and agenda for the coaching of attitudes during a television show are supposed to be kept entirely confidential within the studio, because the ultimate goal is to provide illusion and fantasy to the home audience. In the EXO members' live streaming, however, the idols' struggle to meet their fans' expectations is thoroughly exposed. Fans witness the entire process of how the idols censor each other as public

[75] Mikko, "*190203 Ekso Ch'anyŏl Insŭt'alaibŭ (Kesŭt'ŭ Suho, Paekhyun)*" [190203 EXO Chanyeol's Instagram Live (Guests Suho, Baekhyun)], YouTube, February 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkT5HuGo8FI.

personae, although such a display of struggle is what fans appreciate and helps them further cultivate intimacy with the idols. As one of the fans states, "They're not perfect, but at least they try." Sunmee recalls,

> Once [BTS] Namjoon said, "It's been a while" to my friend at a fansign event, but my friend said, "This is the first time I came to a fansign event." It was hilarious, but it's okay because he's still trying. And he is actually famous for remembering every fan who comes to the fansign events. (Sunmee, personal interview, May 5, 2016)

Namjoon's presentation was theatrical, but what Sunmee and her friend appreciate is Namjoon's theatrical effort to provide the illusion of intimacy, not the illusion of intimacy itself.

The initial idea of parasocial interaction theory considered commercial theatrics and reciprocal (and thus "real") intimacy as incompatible, positioning the industry as a powerful controller that provides the illusion of intimacy for its manipulated audience. Horton and Wohl explained a parasocial interaction as "one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development," being predominantly manipulated by the media persona and the industry workers (Horton and Wohl 1956:215). Early functionalist studies attributed the parasocial attachment to the audience's environmental conditions and personality factors, often presuming that television viewers reply on mass media as "functional alternatives" to the "actual" interactions (Rosengren and Windahl 1972; Nordlund 1978; Miyazaki 1981; Rubin and Rubin 1985).[76] According to communication scholar Jinshi Tsao, Horton and Wohl's compensatory framework, namely, the "Deficiency paradigm," assumes

[76] However, this presumption was not necessarily supported by the collected data. Nordlund (1978), for instance, concludes that "The underlying supposition is that a neurotic disposition, limited opportunities for social interaction, and limited leisure activity would lead to greater usage of the mass media, often for compensatory purposes. In fact the anticipated associations do occur, but they are neither particularly strong nor research customary levels of statistical significances" (159-160). Also see Cohen, 2009.

> parasocial interaction acts as "a surrogate for face-to-face interpersonal relationships and sees it as catering to individuals who, because of environmental or psychological limitations, lack such relationships. The Global-Use paradigm, on the other hand, assumes that parasocial interaction is a more universal experience in which all individuals may readily engage, regardless of whether they are satisfied with their orthosocial relationships. (Tsao 1996:89)

Using various theoretical apparatuses—such as uncertainty reduction theory, personal construct theory, and uses and gratifications approach—subsequent media studies have focused on identity formation and relationship development of television viewers and their media interactions in comparison to orthosocial relationships (Rubin and Perse 1987; Rubin and McHugh 1987; Perse and Rubin 1989; Turner 1993; Cohen 1997; Cole and Leets 1999; Boon and Lomore 2001). By analyzing television viewers' level of attachment and investment in media persona, scholars have attempted to reject the perception of parasocial relationship as "nonreal" and rather as "an extension of viewers' social relationships" (Cohen 2004:198). Although the theatrical aspects of parasocial relationship have been a critical element that hinders scholars from accepting it as an extension of a "real" social relationship, K-pop fans' appreciation of intimate relationships through their recognition of the theatrical setting tells us that parasocial relations have become part of our normal, daily lives but also retain properties that are distinct from "orthosocial" relationships that people cultivate with their family and peers.

One may argue that parasocial relationships are "based on the belief that a media personality is like other people in the viewer's social circle" and reflect one's social interaction (Ballantine and Martin 2005:199). However, this is not necessarily the case for K-pop fans. Parasocial relationships have become a commodified play, exclusive to the idol-fan relationship. To join the game, fans must learn the moral codes that are exclusively constructed and observed between the idol and fans for the transaction of intimacy, instead of understanding the idol as an extended or surrogate version of their families or peers. In other

words, a question such as "Can online interaction be regarded as functionally equivalent to face-to-face social interaction?" is not applicable to K-pop fans, because what fans pursue in the idol-fan relationship is not the realization of a face-to-face social interaction per se but the idol's demonstration of his labor for the sustainable idol-fan relationship.

A face-to-face interaction is very often desired. In order to maintain fan status, however, one must engage in a face-to-face interaction with the idol only within a commercial setting set up by the industry—for instance, a fansign event in which idols clearly perceive each individual as a fan, and fans, who paid for and acquired the admission opportunity, interact with their idols under the fan manager's supervision. One who seeks realization of face-to-face social interaction outside of the moral economy of the fandom will be deemed a delusional stalker, or *sasaeng*, in the fandom. Refusing to learn or accept the moral codes of the fandom—e.g., to what extent it is acceptable and normal to express a personal desire toward the "imaginary" or "pseudo-social" relationship with the idol—will result in one's expulsion from the fandom and the official fan club, and even a lawsuit in the worst-case scenario.

Idols are equally expected to maintain the realness of parasocial relations and a proper idol-fan distance for a wholesome relationship. For example, when EXO Chanyeol and Sehun started an Instagram livestream while they were drinking at a restaurant with Gaeko from Dynamic Duo, the most popular comment, according to Sehun, was "Are you drunk?"[77] When Sehun once again delivered fans' comments, "They tell us not to go live while we drink," the conversation between Chanyeol and fans—delivered by Sehun—continues:

[77] KimMoon, "200305 SEHUN EXO INSTALIVE," YouTube, March 5, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tW4MRFNI_U.

> Chanyeol: But, think about whether you want a formulaic livestream as usual or a relaxed one after we drink and show you our daily lives. I hope you to ask yourself. Anyways . . .
> Sehun: They say, "Don't do it while you're drunk."
> Chanyeol: I'm not drunk.
> Sehun: They say, "You, sober up!"
> Chanyeol: But I am mostly sober . . .
> Gaeko: What is it? [Chanyeol picks up the phone and shows it to Gaeko.]
> Chanyeol: Anyways, I'll do my best, everyone. I just wanted to say that we should gather our energy together.
> Gaeko: Chanyeol is working hard on making songs these days . . . [Gaeko continues to explain how hardworking Chanyeol is.]
> Sehun: Everyone's asking how much we drank. I'm sorry but we didn't drink that much. We didn't drink that much. We didn't drink that much . . . I'll turn it off now. Bye.[78]

A minute after the majority of fans urged them to turn off the livestream, Sehun turned it off, following his fans' advice. Fans were urging Sehun and Chanyeol not to go live while they drink. The issue became sensitive when VIXX's Hongbin, who was drunk during his livestream, made a "huge mistake" (e.g., insulting other idols) a few days before. Some criticized the fans for censoring the idols too much, claiming that their managers were present as well.[79] Although the fans debated over whether it was appropriate for them to censor the idols, all agreed on the premise that a livestream requires a refinement through censorship, either by the fans or the managers. In other words, fans prioritize a censored demonstration over a reality of their idol.

Today, parasocial interaction is widely explored with different groups of actors, including product consumers, fictional characters, avatar players, YouTube vloggers, global

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[78] Ibid.

[79] 큥이길'ㅅ' <3 룸빛 (@BlinD_for_LUV), "*Kedaga yŏp'e maenijŏ hyŏngdŭl ta ittanŭn yegi an tŭrŏssŭm? Sul kkwala doesŏ hŏtsori hal chŏngdoro mashŏssŭmyŏn laibŭ k'yŏtgennya manijŏdo yŏp'eittanŭnde…ŭhyu…*" [Did you guys not hear that even all the managers were next to them? Do you think they would turn on the livestream if they entirely went drunk to say bullshit? Even managers were next to them… Sigh…], Twitter, March 5, 2020, 11:35 p.m., https://twitter.com/BlinD_for_LUV/status/1235574550215024640.

stars and international fans, celebrity microbloggers, sports viewers and athletes, and users of online travel communities (Russell and Stern 2006; Schmid and Klimmt 2011; Banks and Bowman 2016; Lee and Watkins 2016; Escalas and Bettman 2017; Chung and Cho 2017; Gong and Li 2017; Pan and Zeng 2018; Choi et al., 2019). It occurs in various domains of media, such as social networking sites, online video sharing platforms, social TV, and e-commerce platforms (Thomas 2014; Tsiotsou 2015; Singh 2016; Shin 2016; Xiang et al., 2016). The system of parasocial interaction has extended to virtual interactions among various actors; however, a lingering question for celebrity studies would be affective and structural changes in the parasocial interactions between celebrities and fans.

Anthropologist Crystal Abidin (2015) provides a chart of seven factors that compare the paradigmatic changes in parasocial relations between TV/radio and social media platforms: medium (where communication takes place), primary strategy (how communication mainly is achieved), origin of strategy (who controls the primary strategy), organization of actors (how producers and audiences relate to each other), authority of dissemination (who controls communication), and flow of dialogue (how communication is configured among producers and audiences). In her case study on social media influencers, she describes the parasocial relations between social media influencers and their followers with the concept of "perceived interconnectedness" that is aided by "a more *democratic and equalizing* infrastructure of social media platforms, which stimulate a *flat* organization of actors where influencers and followers *co-produce* and shape the conversation" (ibid., emphasis mine). Social media influencers have indeed benefited from a "more democratic and equalizing infrastructure" of online networking platforms. However, an in-depth discussion is needed in regards to the relatively invisible gatekeeping processes, such as business policies of social media services and digital influencer marketing agencies. Both

serve as critical factors affecting the changes in the power dynamics and affective effects of parasocial interactions.

Another issue to be further discussed is how media figures actively utilize both television/radio and social media platforms today, rather than refining their performing platforms to either one of them. For instance, the internationally-popular *mukbang* culture on YouTube led to mainstream television appearances by *mukbang* YouTubers such as Ipjjalbeun Haetnim [Picky Sunny] and Banzz. K-pop idol group BTS, who debuted from a considerably small company with insufficient connections with the television/radio industries, effectively used YouTube and Twitter as its major communication platforms and became the most popular K-pop group in the world. Analyzing the transmedia activities of media figures is important because it explains today's postmodern categorizations of mass media acts and microcelebrities and further provides a new paradigm shift on the parasocial interactions. To describe the celebrities in today's convergence culture, I suggest a concept of what I call "theatrical interconnectedness":

Table 1. Comparison of parasocial relations, perceived interconnectedness, and theatrical interconnectedness.

Element	Parasocial Relations	Perceived Interconnectedness	Theatrical Interconnectedness
Medium	TV/radio platforms	Social media platforms	Multiple media platforms
Primary strategy	Theatrics	Intimacies	Theatrics & intimacies
Origin of strategy	Constructed by producer	Co-constructed by producer and audience	Co-constructed by and co-evaluated by producer and audience
Organization of actors	Hierarchical	Flat	Contextual and situational
Authority of dissemination	Broadcast	Interactive	Theatrically interactive
Flow of dialogue	Unidirectional	Bi-directional	Multidirectional
Conversational structure	One-to-many	One-to-many, one-to-one	One persona-to-one persona

While Horton and Wohl's parasocial relations is mediated via TV and radio platforms and Abidin's perceived interconnectedness takes place on social media platforms, theatrical interconnectedness is mediated via multiple media platforms that enable transmedia storytelling, which would eventually shape a multifaceted persona of the celebrity. The celebrity's transmedia activities on television/radio *and* social media will display both theatrics and intimacies. The communication on social media is co-constructed by the celebrity and fans, although the celebrity's television/radio appearance will be often followed by co-evaluation. In other words, the celebrity will inform the fans about backstage moments, personal feelings about the show, and/or self-evaluation of the appearance, and fans will give feedback on the appearance, replay the program and fetishize specific moments, make memes, and/or criticize certain aspects if necessary.

When criticism dominates the fandom reaction, the celebrity may or may not attempt to resolve the issue, based on the type of problem, other correlated public figures, a possible aftermath of the resolution, discrepancy between the public and fandom opinions, influence on overall profit, and so on. For instance, during a V Live video chat, BTS J-Hope states,

> These days, I've been trying various fashion styles because I like clothes so much, but then at a fansign event, a fan said, "Hope, please bring your previous fashion style back." I realized that [my current style] is a bit weird. So I am wearing more comfy styles these days.[80]

In this case, the fan feels as though she is entitled to point out J-Hope's fashion style, and J-Hope readily accepts her advice. Of course, such light level of criticism can be easily dismissed, although J-Hope's consideration makes his fans feel as though he cares about their opinions. As such, a media figure's transmedia activities reflect different power relations between the media figure and fans based on the context and situation. Comprehending the

[80] J-Hope, "BTS Live : Jjei~Ho~~~~op~~!" [BTS Live : J~Ho~~~~ope~~!], VLIVE, September 8, 2018, https://www.vlive.tv/video/88145?channelCode=FE619.

most dominant opinion of the fandom is thus important for the celebrity, because fans shall not be understood as a group of different individuals but as a single persona—as a fan club or "my fans"—that implies a special, exclusive connection with the celebrity. In this sense, the conversational structure is not one-to-many but one-to-one—more specifically, one persona-to-one persona.

The flow of dialogue in this transmedia milieu is multidirectional. In the process of co-evaluating, for example, both the celebrity and fans discuss and communicate with other actors, such as television show producers, public viewers (who are considered either haters, non-fan spectators, or potential fans), anti-fans and haters, and/or fans of other celebrities. In the multidirectional and multilayered flow of conversations, both the celebrity and fans are expected to observe moral codes, fandom rules, and presentational styles unique to the celebrity-fan relationship. In other words, they will present a theatrical mode of conversational style to each other, for the construction and maintenance of "theatrical interconnectedness."

Two popular types of theatrical interconnectedness in K-pop are "pseudo-romance" [*yusayŏnae*] and "pseudo-maternal bond" [*yusamosŏng-ae*]. Following the logics of pseudo-romance and pseudo-maternal bond, both idols and fans act as though they are heterosexual lovers or a mother and her child. At a fansign, for instance, a fan may ask her idol to perform *aegyo* (a cute behavior with an affectionate-yet-submissive attitude that one performs to flatter the other) or to play with children's toys that she brought for him, as if the idol is her child. Once the idol learns and internalizes the manners of pseudo-romance and pseudo-maternal bond, he would voluntarily perform theatrical interconnectedness by caressing his fan's face and hand, yet only at fansign events where such intimate touching is accepted and encouraged by other fans.

As purchasers of theatrical interconnectedness, fans are entitled to request fan service such as *aegyo* during a public event. BTS J-Hope, for instance, suddenly winks in the midst of his V LIVE conversation with his fans about a sandwich:

> Have you tried the Inkigayo sandwich? Hahaha, is the Inkigayo sandwich popular these days? But that sandwich is provided only for the staff and artists in the company building, so you guys can't get it. How do you guys know that, by the way? Oh, so you can buy it at a convenient store? Is it also called the "Inkigayo sandwich"? Really? *Wink three times in a row.* [J-Hope winks three times.] Oh, now you can buy it at a convenient store? Wow.[81] (emphasis mine)

In the middle of the conversation, J-Hope suddenly reads a comment that orders him to wink three times. J-Hope immediately winks three times at the camera and continues his conversation about the sandwich. Such presentation of obedience is part of the idol's service work. However, if one understands this relationship as a surrogate of face-to-face relationships outside of theatrical interconnectedness, she will be blamed as "*mangbung*" (a "delulu" or delusional fan) who fails to construct a wholesome idol-fan relationship.

B. Leisure Becomes Labor

The theatrical interconnectedness developed via both mass media and digital media platforms reflects the new trends of social relations in the global media industries. More in-depth insights are required regarding the type of intimacy that K-pop celebrities and fans develop in the domestic context of the K-pop industry. By the mid-2010s, the relationship between K-pop idols and fans had evolved, as the first-generation fans had become career women in their twenties and thirties. By that time, the third-generation idols such as BTS or EXO were making their debut. Moonjoon explains that he fills the role of a child for his fans:

[81] Ibid.

> I always feel like [my fans] are my mom. They treat me like a baby. I'm not saying that they treat me like an immature person, but they are overly happy with whatever I do. For example, let's say my mom has a puppy and she teaches him how to sit. And then she finds out that he learned how to sit. Then she thinks the puppy is a genius and decides to enter it in a dog contest. It's something like that. (Moonjoon, personal interview, July 9, 2015)

These fans, in their twenties and thirties, call EXO or BTS members, "*nae saekki*" (my child), "*uraegi*" (my baby), or "*aedŭl*" (kids). Teenage fans also use these terminologies to refer to their idols even when the idols are older than them. Such an appellation serves as a signifier of the consumer power and dominance of the older fans in their twenties and thirties over the cultural practices in K-pop fandom. Fans' emotional and financial support became indispensable for the third-generation idols in order to pay their training expenses to their companies, survive in the idol-saturated music market, and sustain their careers as successful artists in the K-pop industry. By 2014, there were 765 idol trainees who officially signed with entertainment companies; less than half of them (324 trainees) made their debuts in 2015, and the number of trainees increased to 1,079 in 2016.[82]

In the first three or four years of their career, idols—especially those who made their debut with small companies—must "work hard" to pay back their debt, i.e., the company's investment in training, management, and promotion during the debut years. It is known that the investment, or the "debt," amounts to 100-150 million won at the very least in the first two years.[83] A typical cycle of promotion activities would include: one or two album releases in a year, performances at domestic and international festivals and concerts, appearances on

[82] See Korea Creative Content Agency 2015; Idology 2016; Korea Creative Content Agency 2018.

[83] Chi-sŏk Yi, "'*Kayo chejakja-ege tŭnnŭnda, 'aidol kŭrup chŏngsan kwajŏng' chŏnkyŏk haebu*" [A thorough analysis of "the payment process of an idol group" according to producers], *Sportsseoul*, September 26, 2014, http://www.sportsseoul.com/news/read/113007.

TV and radio programs, occasional fan service events such as fansign and fanmeet, and virtual communications with fans via social media on a daily basis. Idols' non-stop promotion cycle has been at the core of cultivating intimacy in idol-fan relations through the contradicting narratives of "abusive labor practices versus hard work ethics"—the former induces sympathy from fans and eventually motivates them to help and support their idols, while the latter makes them appreciate more of what the idols present on and offstage, because those performances are a result of the idols' hard work. Either way, the non-stop promotion cycle becomes a catalyst for fans to appreciate what idols provide them and offer greater support in return.

Music chart shows have served as one of the most important measures that gauge the idol group's fan power—and eventually the group's publicity—as fans must collectively make an effort to place their idols on a higher rank on the chart. Music Bank, Music Core, M Countdown and Inkigayo are music chart shows where idols perform live and receive a trophy if they top the weekly chart, and songs are ranked based on scores which are determined by album sales, online streaming, YouTube view counts, audience votes, and/or appearances on television and radio shows. As a result, idols must rely on diligent fans who purchase multiple copies of the same album and play songs multiple times on online streaming websites in order to help place the songs on top of the chart.

"*P'aenssainhoe*," or "fansign" events, are also important to fans, as they present an opportunity to have a one-on-one talk with their idols in person for a few seconds or a minute. Fans wait in line to receive the idol's autographs, and during the moment the idol signs the album, the fan can ask him to offer "fan service" to her for a minute—for instance, the idol and fan perform a role-play as two lovers, caress each other's hands or faces, or have a personal conversation about their daily lives. Sunhae goes to fansign events because

> It happens for a short time, but you can talk to them and look into each other's eyes. You can ask things that you really wanted to ask, and say things that you really wanted to say. I think meeting [the BTS members] in person is really worthy, not because it's them but because there are non-verbal languages and expressions going on when you meet someone in person. (Sunhae, personal interview, August 23, 2016)

Another BTS fan Sunmee also spend a good amount of time and money during BTS's album promotion period to attend their pre-recording sessions and fansign events. When BTS released *The Most Beautiful Moments in Life: Young Forever* in May 2016, Sunmee bought thirty album copies to win a fansign ticket and attended more than half of their promotional events. Fans also spend money on promoting their idols via billboard advertisements.

Table 2. BTS's album promotion schedule for *The Most Beautiful Moments in Life: Young Forever* (2015)

7PM-9PM, May 11	Fansign event at Chungdam Ilji Art Hall
10PM, May 11-6AM, May 12	Pre-recording session at M Countdown
2PM-3PM, May 12	Cultwo radio show
6PM-7:30PM, May 12	Recording session and fanmeet at M Countdown
9PM-11PM, May 12	Fansign event at Mapo Jeila Art Hall
10:30AM-12:30PM, May 13	Pre-recording session at Music Bank
5PM-6PM, May 13	Live recording session at Music Bank
8PM-10PM, May 13	Fansign event at Shinchon Jade Hall
9:40AM-11:30AM, May 14	First pre-recording session at Music Core
11:30AM-1:30PM, May 14	Second pre-recording session at Music Core
3:30PM-5:30PM, May 14	Live recording session at Music Core
7PM-9PM, May 14	Fansign event at Yongsan Dongja Art Hall
5:30AM-7:30AM, May 15	First pre-recording session at Inkigayo
12PM-2PM, May 15	Second pre-recording session at Inkigayo
3:30PM-5:30PM, May 15	Live recording session at Inkigayo

Figure 2. A billboard on a bus stop by fans celebrating BTS member Jungkook's birthday. Photo by Stephanie Choi.

Figure 3. A bus with the advertisement of BTS's new album release by BTS Jungkook's fans. Photo by Stephanie Choi.

BTS members, in return, express their gratitude by posting a video message to their fans on YouTube:

> J-Hope: Isn't this the first time for us to win the first place [at music chart shows] two weeks in a row?
> RM: You [fans] accomplished this result, so we really appreciate it. Thank you so much. What else can I say? I will work harder. I love you.
> Jungkook: I was so surprised when we won the first place for two weeks in a row. We were able to win the trophy because Armys [BTS's fan club] put so much effort into it, so thank you so much. When I looked at the score, I could feel Armys' effort, sincerity, and hardship . . . Armys, you've worked so hard. Thank you.[84]

It is also common for idols to explicitly announce their next career goals to their fans so that fans can collectively focus on the aforementioned goal. BTS members, for example, have continuously announced their next career goals to their fans by making statements such as, "Our next goal is to receive the Grand Prize from the major three music awards in Korea," or "Our next goal is to place our songs on the Billboard TOP 100."[85] When I asked Sunmee why she supports BTS, she answered, "It's competitive out there, and you feel like you should help them out because they work so hard. Also, they care about us. They always think about us and wonder what we are doing" (Sunmee, personal interview, May 5, 2016).

Maintaining the intimate relationship with their idols is a time-, money-, and energy-consuming task for fans. When they wish to attend a music chart show, fans must memorize fan chants and submit an application to the entertainment company. Once they win a spot, fans must bring the fan club's official light stick that cost approximately thirty thousand won, along with receipts of album purchase and a proof of online streaming to the venue. The

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[84] BANGTANTV, "[BANGTAN BOMB] 'Blood Sweat & Tears 2nd Win @ Music Bank - BTS," YouTube, December 20, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bQdiZvhOCg.

[85] TongTongTv, "BTS, 'Billboard Awards' press conference," YouTube, May 28, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw-PXaafuXg.

show producer will ask the on-site fans to hold the light sticks as high as they could and shout out loudly. Fans often participate enthusiastically during the recording, although they often stay in silence when the camera is off.

During the break, the idols will express their gratitude for "working hard" and encourage their fans to "cheer up" for the rest of the recording session. After several visits to music chart show recordings, I have realized that the "fanatic" atmosphere of energetic idols and screaming fans was crafted by the idols' and fans' "hard work" for the television viewers. In this case, the general audience will only recognize the "fanatic" moment of the performance, whereas fans, who are connected with each other through personal and social media networks, will gain additional information about the behind the scenes—from the broadcasting network company's treatment of on-site fans to small talk with the idols during the break, trivial episodes during the recording, and exhaustive fan labor of several hours. Such information will not remain as a mere episode; instead, Armys at home will internalize the secondhand experience as "our [Armys']" experience and historicize it as part of the intimate relationship between them and BTS.

Fans' hard work continues on the online media platforms. A closed online community as a space in which intimacy serves as a vehicle for inequality provokes fans' desire to share intimate knowledge such as "shared secrets, interpersonal rituals, bodily information, awareness of personal vulnerability and shared memory of embarrassing situations" with their idols (Zelizer 2005:14). For instance, Jimin's message to Sunmee and other fans is uploaded on BTS's official fan club website called "*kongk'a*" (official fan club website), which is a closed online community. In order to join the website, fans must join the "BTS Official Fan Cafe" and become "regular" members of the cafe. In order to become a regular member, fans must answer to a set of questions such as:

1) Write down the birth date (YYMMDD) of the member who wore blue shoes in the video "BTS 'DNA' Dance Practice."
2) What is the gift that Suga prepared for his fans in the video "BTS SUGA B-day Present for Fans"?
3) During the V LIVE show, "BTS Live: Please Take Care of SOPE's Honey-Like Skin," how long did SOPE wear the facial masks?
4) Attach the proof of online streaming of "DNA" on the (designated) digital music service websites.
5) After watching the "DNA" music video, "like" the video on IBIGHIT YouTube channel, take a screenshot, and attach the screenshot in the application form.[86]

When I asked Sunhyung, a fan of BTS, how many times she had attempted to provide the correct answers to these questions, she replied,

> I think six or seven times. I thought I knew them very well, but then it was really frustrating to find out how much I was ignorant about them. But I understand why they set up the questions, because you'll never know the answers unless you become a real fan. (Sunhyung, personal interview, October 7, 2016)

Such exclusivity and privilege not only intensify the level of intimacy but also validate the fan's sincerity toward the idols. In other words, idols are not the only ones who produce intimacy; nor do they sell it to anyone. Fans are also required to provide a specific type of affective sources—e.g., attention, passion, and patience—to be qualified as a partner who could acquire the desired product—i.e., an intimate relationship with the idols.

Scholars have portrayed consumers' labor activities, such as fan labor or DIY activities, as a post-Fordist production that breaks down the boundaries between production and consumption (Toffler 1980; Bruns 2006). The user-led activities are deemed creative, agency-oriented, and value-generating, but also cheap, flexible, and amateur (Leadbeater and Miller 2004; Busse 2009; Mōri 2009; Wolf 2011; Luvaas 2012). Media fandom studies, in particular, have articulated fan labor as participatory and co-creative as a way of debunking the mass media-oriented images of audiences as passive and delusional receivers of mass

[86] BTS Official Fan Cafe, Daum Café, September 12, 2017, http://cafe.daum.net/BANGTAN.

media ideologies (Banks and Deuze 2009; Bird 2011; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). The productivity of fan labor has served to empower fan communities, and media fandom scholars have asserted rationality and agency of fans through the productivity of fan labor that is acknowledged by the media industry in various forms of reactions, including co-optation, exploitation, litigation, or cease-and-desist orders (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013; Busse 2015; Stanfill 2019). The literature demonstrates how fans, academia, and media industries understand fan labor as a production practice.

In contrast, K-pop demonstrates how consumption practices are understood as fan labors and vice versa. I am not arguing that fan labor in K-pop does not entail a production practice. K-pop fans, just like other fans, participate in fan production activities that are grounded on textual and physical materials, such as fan fiction and fan-made merchandise. What I wish to point out is that both the K-pop industry and fans understand the activities that were conventionally understood as consumption—e.g., buying multiple album copies, memorizing fan chants, waiting in line for hours to get into a show, going to fanmeets and fansigns, and listening to music on online streaming websites—as fan labors that create and maintain an intimate relationship with idols.[87] Producing intimacy and maintaining an intimate relationship require emotional, physical, and sometimes, monetary efforts from (at least) two parties. This means that not only idols but fans take part in the immaterial labor for the production of intimacy. Conventional fan labors and "produserly" activities have been *voluntarily* conducted outside of the communication system between the production and consumption sectors. However, *consumption activities become labors* in K-pop. This implies a paradigm shift in fans' perception and attitudes toward their fan object: First, fans

[87] Even with fan productions with textual and physical resources, the industry and fans' commercial decisions and discourses, such as production copyrights and consumer rights, reflects their understanding of fan labor as a consumption activity.

understand a celebrity's publicity not as a phenomenal result of virality or the "epidemic process" of information dissemination (see Lerman and Ghosh 2010; Weng and et al., 2012), but instead as a capitalist accumulation of immaterial labor. And the source of this immaterial labor, as well as the agential role in and contribution to the celebrity's accumulation of capital, are what fans claim as their contribution.

C. Claiming Fair Trade and Consumer Rights in the Transaction of Intimacy

Despite the public stereotype of fangirls as irrational and hysterical people who are intoxicated by mass media, Korean K-pop fans, as I have described above, are very aware of the capitalist logic behind the "mass deception" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002) and the theatric nature of their interactions with idols. Subsequently, these fans are able to readjust their stances and activities in various ways that are advantageous for themselves. Sunji, a fan of EXO Kai, recently applied for a job at an entertainment company that was not EXO's company, SM Entertainment. When I asked Sunji why she didn't apply to SM Entertainment, she answered,

> I once saw Kai while I was working at SBS [broadcast company]. I was so excited to see him at first, but I was soon shocked to see how he was smiling so brightly in front of the camera and then collapsed right away after the camera went off. It was a heartbreaking moment, so I decided not to work too closely with him. I only want to see him smiling. (Sunji, personal interview, February 24, 2016)

Although fans seem to be devoted unconditionally to their idols, Sunji's comment reveals her effort to protect herself—rather than Kai—from any unwanted, if not unexpected, affective outcome (i.e., a negative emotions, such as shock, disappointment, distress, and so on) after she purchases intimacy from Kai. While her statement postulates herself as a consumer, Kai becomes a laborer who is alienated from his product—i.e., an intimate relationship—and is dehumanized after his labor is performed. The theatrical interconnectedness is expected to be

fun, exciting, and desirable enough to invest time, effort, and money in the relationship, although the outcome may not always be positive. For this reason, fans adjust the level of investment based on their consumption values and situations. After all, the fan categorization (e.g., *anbangsuni*, *kongbangsuni*, *k'o-ŏ p'aen*, *lait'ŭ p'aen*, and *chapdŏk*) not only indicates the purview of fan activities but also implies the level of investment in the idol-fan relationship.

Paradoxically, Sunji is rightly disciplined to maintain a "proper" emotional and physical distance from her idol. If she pursues the idol-fan relationship with Kai as an extension of a "real," "orthosocial" relationship, she may consider it wholesome and humane to approach him and provide emotional and professional support at the moment she witnesses his struggle. Yet, because she is his "fan," such attempt will only make her a *sasaeng* [stalker] and provide an insecure workplace for Kai. For this reason, one may argue that she is properly observing the idol-fan distance and thereby respecting Kai as a professional idol.

In explaining the fandom phrase, "*ŏdŏk haengdŏk*" (Be a happy fan if you are going to be an idol fan anyways), Sunmee states, "You become an idol fan to be happy, not to torture yourself, right? Then you shouldn't get obsessed with every rumor that you hear. You should simply enjoy your fan activities with things that idols provide you in public" (Sunmee, personal interview, April 26, 2016). According to Sunmee, illusion is not a negative consequence of mass deception but a necessary prerequisite for her fan activity—idols are obliged to fulfill the specific illusion that is imposed on them through theatrics. For K-pop fans, truth is less important than theatrical interconnectedness, constructed through the idol's predictable, standardized form of affective (re)presentation. Fans expect their idols to remain humble, stay cute, hide anger and smile to fans, refrain from political statements, show that they care about their fans, work hard, comply with fans' requests, maintain a good

relationship with other members of the group, keep a good figure, and stay in touch with fans on a regular basis. They also expect idols not to swear, smoke cigarettes, cause trouble, meet lovers or opposite-sex friends in public, show interests in opposite-sex celebrities, nor to pursue a career path in contradiction to fans' expectations.

Ideally, fans expect their idol to display his theatrical self whenever he is in public. Realistically, however, a split between the public and the private is defined not by space or time, but by the theatrical interconnectedness between the idol and his fans. In other words, the idol's private life refers not to an off-stage space nor an off-camera moment, but a fan-free space and time during which the idol is not watched by his fans. The pitfall of this expectation is that, even in a conventionally "private" moment, e.g., in a family gathering at a restaurant, the idol does not know at any moment when he will be watched by his fans and which people he encounters will be his fans. As a result, he must be disciplined to manage his life (both public and private) in the panopticon (see Foucault 1975), observed by fans who are invisible, unless they reveal their identity by themselves.

Borrowing Stanislavski's Method acting methodologies, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild explains that the "deep acting" skills, or the acting techniques that are often required in emotional labors, are enacted when "my conscious mental work…keeps the feeling that I conjure up from being part of 'myself'" ([1983] 2003:36). However, "emotive dissonance," or a conflict between feeling and feigning, occurs during a service work that requires emotion management, because "a separation of display and feeling is hard to keep up over long periods" (ibid., 90). An idol's dating scandal is considered as an outbreak of emotive dissonance and a failure of deep acting, because the scandal officially prevents the idol and fans from playing the "*yusayŏnae*" (pseudo-romantic) relationship, which is supposed to be part of the idol's professional work. The dating scandal of Kai and Krystal

exemplifies the ways in which fans incorporate the "deep acting" skills into the criteria of professionalism.

In April 2016, EXO's member Kai was spotted by paparazzi one night in Gangnam, Seoul, when he was dating f(x)'s member Krystal. When the couple officially acknowledged their relationship, fans seemed to congratulate the new couple at first, as photos and rumors spread throughout the internet over the following day. According to updated photos and rumors, the couple was seen on dates at ski resorts, restaurants and hotels. Fans became upset at Kai and Krystal for the following reasons: (1) they did not wear face masks nor try their best to hide their relationship during their date in the crowded Gangnam district; (2) they dated in South Korea where fans could easily recognize them; and (3) Kai broke his leg while skiing with Krystal and was unable to perform in the concert tour that followed. Kai's fan Sunji states,

> I felt betrayed when I heard the news. I felt betrayed not because he was dating another girl. *Of course I knew that he would eventually date someone else, not me*. But how can he inattentively date her in the middle of Seoul, where everyone can find them? *He's an idol! He should've at least tried* to wear a face mask. I also felt betrayed when I found out that he broke his leg after skiing with Krystal, because I was so worried about his injury! I've bought three tickets only to see him absent from the concert. *It's so unprofessional of him*. I didn't spend my money to be treated like this. (Sunji, personal interview, April 20, 2016; emphasis mine)

According to their fans, Kai deserves the blame because he did not "try his best" to perform deep acting as a "professional" idol. Moonjoon, who also announced his dating relationship in a similar way, recalls,

> [After the paparazzi caught us dating,] my company asked me what I would like to do. So I just told them to announce our [dating] relationship. But if that happens again, I will never acknowledge it. Many people around me got hurt after the announcement, including my fans and the ones I loved. To my fans, I was their boyfriend who cheated on them. (Moonjoon, personal interview, July 9, 2015)

Most of the fans I have interviewed, however, insisted that it would be "foolish" to conceive of idols as their potential date. Rather, they claimed that maintaining the illusion of

an intimate relationship is part of the professionalism that idols must attain. In other words, the problem lies in the idol's "unprofessional" theatrics when he gets caught by paparazzi due to his lack of caution, not in his dating relationship per se: "I don't care if he has a girlfriend or not. But I spend money on him to see what I want to see, and I didn't pay him to see him dating" (Sunhwa, personal interview, May 25, 2016). Even when the idol's dating relationship seems obvious to fans, they still urge the idol to publicly deny the relationship, because the denial of the relationship, regardless of the truth, would reflect the idol's utmost efforts of deep acting for the theatrical interconnectedness. Once a dating scandal breaks out, fans examine the idol's follow-up response to see if the idol is still subordinate to them. In many cases, the idol will respond to his fans directly, apologizing for "disappointing" them. However, if the idol refuses to apologize or demonstrates less sincerity in his apology, fans will find the current state of idol-fan relationship an unfair trade and will deem their relationship defective.

In many cases, idols will response to their fans directly, apologizing for "disappointing" them for being "unprofessional." When Taeyeon from Girls' Generation and Baekhyun from EXO were caught dating and officially admitted their relationship in June 2014, fans who were already aware of their relationship claimed that the couple was "deceiving" fans, as the messages that Taeyeon and Baekhyun posted on their Instagram accounts for fans were actually directed toward each other. Baekhyun later apologized:

> Hello, this is Baekhyun. I am a lot late but I am leaving this post to tell you that I am sorry… I also think such words may be meaningless by now … I am concerned if you will be upset again, so I'm worried if I will regret posting this. But I'm writing this to convey my heart no matter what. I am so sorry to hurt my fans who are always precious [to me].[88]

[88] *ChoongAng Ilbo*, "*Ekso Paekhyŏn, Taeyŏnkwa-ŭi yŏraesŏre taehae sagwagŭl…Kŭrigo toryŏn sakje*" [EXO Baekhyun writes an apology about his dating rumor with Taeyeon… And suddenly removes it], July 17, 2014, https://news.joins.com/article/15288952.

Despite his apology, Baekhyun's fan kept claiming that Baekhyun and Taeyeon used their official social media accounts to exchange secret messages and fan gifts.[89] As a follow-up, another fan summarized the "Misdeeds conducted by Baekhyun," expressing several unflattering moments and rumors about Baekhyun, such as his remark disparaging autism and photos of him drinking and smoking when he was a minor.[90] Even though the "misdeeds" were irrelevant to his scandal, it was one way for the fan to get a refund on her investment by defaming Baekhyun and thus taking his cultural capital of fame and popularity away from him.

When fans feel as though the current state of idol-fan relationship is not a fair trade, they question the idol's professionalism and request feedback from him and/or his company. If the request is denied or the feedback is not sufficient, fans announce a boycott or attempt to stain the idol's reputation by exposing unrevealed aspects of the idol. Declaration of the withdrawal of support is one of the popular ways for fans to request a refund for this "defective product," by officially announcing the idol's wrongdoings to the general public. When Moon Heejun from H.O.T announced his marriage to another idol in November 2016, one of his fan clubs announced its "Withdrawal of Support" for five reasons: (1) The way he treated his fans was insincere; (2) he lied to his fans and the public; (3) his concert performances were insincere and the quality was low; (4) he made inappropriate remarks about other members of the group; and (5) he engaged in illegal merchandise sales. The statement shows fans' attempt to legitimize their consumer rights as purchasers of the unofficial product, i.e., intimate relationships, in several ways. First, they lump his marriage

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[89] ㅇㅇ, "*Taeyŏn Paekhyŏn ttŏkbap ch'ongjŏngni*" [A summary of Taeyeon and Baekhyun], Nate Pann, June 20, 2014, http://pann.nate.com/talk/323080349.

[90] 00, "*Chigeumkkaji Paekhyŏn manhaeng ch'ongjŏngni*" [A summary of Baekhyun's misdeed], Nate Pann, June 19, 2014, http://pann.nate.com/talk/323073877.

in with other aspects of his career and evaluate them as one. By doing so, fans attempt to avoid any criticism that they might receive as "deceived fangirls" who are captivated by illusion provided by the industry. Instead, they claim themselves as critical consumers who justly assert their consumer rights, not only because of Moon's private life, but mainly because of his professionalism. For instance, in Item 2, the fan club argues, "After the marriage was announced, several fans criticized Heejun's girlfriend for causing a disturbance at his concert. However, he treated fans like narrow-minded, jealous people. We are announcing our withdrawal of support not because of his marriage but because of his inappropriate behaviors. We are not an ATM."[91]

"We are not an ATM" is an idiom that fans commonly use when they feel as though their idol is treating his fans like automated teller machines from which the idol can withdraw money at any time. In other words, the intimate relationship between idols and fans can be sustainable only when one of the parties is dehumanized; either the idol must become a commodity, or the fans must become automated teller machines. Sunmee argues,

> They earn money by acting like my boyfriend, right? Then they have to be responsible for their behaviors and that is the nature of idol. They are around my age but have earned tremendous amount of money that I can never own in my life. There's nothing free in this world. If they can't handle it, they should quit the job. (Sunmee, personal interview, May 5, 2016)

To these fans in their twenties and thirties who share frustration at the chronic unemployment, rigidity of class structure, unequal distribution of wealth, and lack of social mobility as common generational sentiments, idols—especially those who have gained celebrity status—are not only remote superstars but are agemates who are located at the top

[91] H.O.T. Gallery, "*Mun Hijun chiji ch'ŏlhoe sŏngmyŏngsŏ*" [Withdrawal of support for Moon Heejun], DC Inside, http://gall.dcinside.com/mgallery/board/view/?id=highfiveofteenager&no=48914&page=1. The fan club removed the original file and link of the Withdrawal of Support on March 24, 2018 when the five members of H.O.T. announced their reunion.

of the economic pyramid, owing to the wealth they accumulated through fans' labors and expenses. The contradicting position of an idol as an inhumane commodity (that forgoes its own privacy for the fan service work) but also as a wealthy capitalist (who owns the property, wealth, and production capacities) brings about confusion to fans' affective consumption. Sunmee further states,

> I knew this would have happened. It's pathetic because fans use money on this useless fantasy. You know, there are fans who only follow rookies, because rookies are more desperate for fan support. When the rookies become superstars, those fans leave the fan club and search for other rookies. They do it because they don't want to feel this sense of loss that I'm feeling right now. I should seriously stop doing this someday. (ibid.)

As consumers of theatrical interconnectedness, female fans will seek another idol on which they can impose subordination. Rookies, in particular, are more submissive to their fans, not only because they are young but also because they must heavily rely on the fan labors that will help them gain more publicity and popularity. While boy bands come and go, female fans remain in the scene and maintain the dominant position over their new boy band.

Some fans embrace their idol's marriage as a way of showing respect to the idol's hard work. TVXQ Max Changmin's fans, for instance, accepted and congratulated his marriage because (1) he worked hard for a long time (seventeen years) with no controversial scandals; (2) he kept his dating relationship completely confidential until he made it public; and (3) he had no dating scandals at all throughout his seventeen-year career as an idol until he announced his marriage.[92] In other words, Max Changmin tried his best to maintain theatrical interconnectedness without burdening his fans with extra efforts to maintain it—no scandal meant that fans were not burdened to deal with any controversies and fanwars

[92] Mumyŏng-ŭi Tŏku, "*SM Yubunam set kyŏron panŭng-i tarŭl su pakke ŏmnŭn iyu*" [The reason why fans respond differently to the three married male idols of SM Entertainment], The Qoo, June 12, 2020, https://theqoo.net/square/1467080762.

surrounding him. After all, an idol's full commitment to his career is equivalent to his full commitment to his fans—in this respect, Max Changmin's fans, as well as other K-pop fans, were convinced of his marriage and believed that he deserved it.

D. Conclusion

For female fans, fan labor is not free labor but a way of accumulating fandom capital that would later provide them a bigger voice in the industry and even in South Korean society. Idols who take the fan labor for granted or appropriate it will soon face career collapse through various types of refund requests, including the withdrawal of support, boycotts, electronic sabotage, and spread of rumors by former fans who refuse to transfer their fandom capital to their idols but rather destroy it before they defect.

Previous studies of parasocial interactions and parasocial relationships described the celebrity-fan relationship as the manipulator and the manipulated. However, K-pop fans play with the logistics of parasocial interactions and parasocial relationships by setting the scene and directing the celebrity's behaviors. This means that K-pop has become a service labor in which the consumers perceive the illusive nature of mass media and epistemologically transform it into a commercial play of theatrical interconnectedness. In this labor system, intimacy becomes an unofficial commodity transacted in the K-pop business, putting both idols and fans at risk of determining the price of the product by themselves.

While idols are urged to perform deep acting and provide illusion with extremely little space for privacy, fans often feel exploited by the labor system in which their consumption practice automatically becomes fan labor. This further casts doubt on the popular premise of "fan labor as creative and empowering"—as the K-pop fans' case demonstrates, simply participating in co-creative labor does not necessarily transform fans

into empowered participants in consumer culture. As I have demonstrated in the volatile relationships between K-pop fans and their idols, empowerment and objectification are not opposite or incompatible conditions; they co-exist in the immaterial labor system, maintaining a balance of the power relationships between the celebrities and their fans.

III. K-pop Industry: Producing Intimate Laborers

The Korean music industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. By 2018, South Korea had the sixth largest music market in the world.[93] Unlike other global music markets that have faced a consistent decrease in album sales, the South Korean market has seen gradual increase in sales since 2014, thanks to the K-pop fandom that has been strategically and competitively consuming their idols' music—album sales in South Korea exceeded ten million copies in 2016; 16,930,491 in 2017; 22,822,245 in 2018; and 25,095,679 in 2019.[94] South Korea's ten best-selling albums in 2019 were those of K-pop idols—i.e., BTS, SEVENTEEN, EXO, X1, Baekhyun, Kang Daniel, Super Junior, and TWICE.[95] Further, K-pop groups have been dominating the international music charts—TWICE's "MORE & MORE" ranked No. 1 on the iTunes charts in thirty countries; BLACKPINK's "How You Like That" was No.1 in sixty nations; and EXO Baekhyun's Delight was No.1 in sixty-nine nations. In 2020, BTS released four No.1 albums faster than any group since the Beatles, and their song "Black Swan" reached No.1 on iTunes in 103 countries—more countries than any song in history.[96] In 2019, the market capitalization of Big Hit Entertainment was three trillion won; SM Entertainment, 609.7 billion won; JYP

[93] The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and Korea Creative Content Agency. 2019. *2019 Music Industry White Paper*. Sejong: Kyungsung Media.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Chin-u Kim, "2019 Annual chart review," Gaon Music Chart, January 13, 2020, http://www.gaonchart.co.kr/main/section/article/m.view.gaon?idx=16313.

[96] Hugh McIntyre, "BTS Has Charted Four No.1 Albums Faster Than Any Group Since the Beatles," *Forbes*, March 6, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/hughmcintyre/2020/03/06/bts-has-charted-four-no-1-albums-faster-than-any-group-since-the-beatles/#4880d6cf4711. Also see Bryan Rolli, "BTS Just Shattered A Major iTunes Record Formerly Held By Adele," *Forbes*, July 6, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrolli/2020/07/06/bts-black-swan-itunes-record-no-1-adele/#3fc790152d57.

Entertainment, 811.1 billion won; and YG Entertainment, 538.8 billion won.[97] By the end of the 2010s, the K-pop industry became ever more saturated with millions of idol wannabes who wished to become the next BoA and BTS.

If idol wannabes were inspired by the underdog success stories of BoA and BTS, numerous business investors also saw them as a one-time jackpot. The influx of reckless investments in wannabe K-pop groups has resulted in small companies blindly investing in producing the same style of idol groups, going into the financial peril, and disbanding the groups after just a few years. Numerous idol groups debut and soon disappear. These companies are often denigrated as "idol factories," in which teenagers are forced to: conform to a prescribed mold in their looks, behaviors, and manners to be all-around entertainers; forgo their private lives, including education, living with family, having contacts with friends or going on dates; and learn how to maintain intimate relationships with their fans.[98] Western media, in particular, has continued to describe K-pop stars' limited agency in the industry as "the dark side of K-pop."[99] However, popular musicians in the West also suffer from chronic

[97] Hyŏn-kyŏng Ki, "*Ent'ŏju samgugji p'an kkaejinda…BTS-ŭi pikhit'ŭ 'ent'ŏju chŏnbuboda k'ŭn hana' yego*" [The era of three kingdoms of entertainment companies stocks is over…BTS's Big Hit expected to be the most promising stock], *Herald Biz*, June 1, 2020, http://biz.heraldcorp.com/view.php?ud=20200601000154&cpv=1.

[98] For an example of the global (especially Western) media degrading K-pop as "idol factories," see John Seabrook, "Factory Girls: Cultural technology and the making of K-pop," *New Yorker*, October 1, 2012, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/08/factory-girls-2. Also see Donald Macintyre, "Flying Too High?" *TIME*, July 29, 2002, http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2056115,00.html. Some scholars also introduce K-pop as a standardized and homogenized genre. See Jin and Ryoo 2014.

[99] Campbell, Matthew and Sohee Kim, "The Dark Side of K-Pop: Assault, Prostitution, Suicide, and Spycams," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, November 6, 2019, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2019-11-06/k-pop-s-dark-side-assault-prostitution-suicide-and-spycams.

structural problems of unequal contracts, child sexual abuse, and limited agency behind the commercial myth of musical authenticity. As far back as entrepreneur Brian Epstein's image-molding of the Beatles to Michael Jackson's abusive childhood, Ke$ha's sexual assault lawsuit against her producer Dr. Luke, Lauren Jauregui's leaked audio that described her group Fifth Harmony as "literal slaves," and Scooter Braun's legal ownership over Taylor Swift's music catalog, music artists have suffered. The problem with artists' agency is, after all, a structural problem in the music industries throughout the world.[100]

The goal of this chapter, however, is not to perpetuate biased myths about K-pop as either "magical" or "abusive," but to illustrate the complexity and fluidity of human relations in the popular music industry. This chapter explores the methods by which entertainment companies produce these idols as incomplete commodities and intimate laborers through rigorous training, surveillance, and regulation of ideological and physical expressions. In an industry in which an idol's body becomes a product through mediated presentations and representations, how do entertainment companies produce idols at the most complete level? How do the companies claim copyrights of affective outcomes that cannot be quantified or documented on a contract? How do these young idols cope with their multiple roles and the expectations placed upon them as producers, laborers, and commodities of intimacy?

In discussing the production system of the K-pop industry, I define idols as products, laborers, and/or capitalists based on each stage of their careers. During their early career period, the idols become *media products* with extremely limited agency over the construction of their persona, fashion style, music production, scheduling, privacy, and overall life choices, while their companies make these decisions for them. Throughout their careers, the idols also serve as intimate laborers, whose work involves the maintenance of an affective

[100] For more detailed account on the artists' agency in the U.S., see Stahl 2013.

bond with their fans. In the case of fansign events at which idols greet their fans one by one, hold each other's hands and faces, and share conversations about daily lives, we see how the work of the idols entails bodily touch, emotional closeness, and knowledge of personal information at a closed public event that provides a shared private moment. Expressions of caring, such as verbal communication and bodily touch, become desirable commodities, although in many circumstances, idols are often alienated from the product of their intimacy. Marxist understanding of capitalism is that laborers become alienated from their products, however, K-pop idols' strong bond with their fans and subsequent popularity become idols' fandom capital, which enables them to gain social mobility and agency in the industry.

Common to the global music industries' idol systems has been the hegemonic relationship between the adult (mostly middle-aged male) producers/managers and the teenage artists who lack voice and agency in the decision-making process of the music companies. In K-pop, most idols begin their traineeship in their teenage years, while their parents are discouraged to intervene in the training system. This chapter, however, is not on pointing out the idols' lack of agency, but rather, the opposite—an idol's position, power, and relationships with the industry are not static but always changing. Therefore, I examine the K-pop industry as a culture in which the participants' social statuses and human relations shift along with their career developments.

Keith Negus, in his study of genre cultures in the British music business of the 1970s and early 80s, is critical of defining culture industries in Fordist terms, since it ignores the historical specificities which contextualize the development of the music business (1999:17). He also points out the impossibility of theorizing cultural production in generalized terms due to differences in the "aesthetic form, content, working practices, means of financing and modes of reception and consumption" in each industry, because "all industries are cultural"

(ibid., 22-23). The K-pop industry should be approached not as a standardized culture of "idol factories" or the "K-pop machine" built upon a Fordist business model of mass production but as a critical site in which diverse social relations are created, contested, and negotiated in the process of a K-pop production. The industry's production and idol training are focused on disciplining idols' bodies so that they could become media products that are manageable, predictable, and available to any general audience.

A. Idol Recruitment

The common idea of viewing idols as "puppets" of the industry is derived from idols' limited agency during their pre-debut and debut years. Idols are not just musicians but intimate laborers who perform "fan service" (i.e., verbal, physical, textual, and/or musical performances that offer pleasure) and demonstrate a constant effort to maintain this intimate relationship with their fans. For this reason, entertainment companies select idol materials based on several factors: appearance, *kki* (stage presence, including charming/charismatic persona and flirting abilities), performing skills (singing, dancing, and/or rapping), *insŏng* (personality with politeness, kindness, and sincerity), and teamwork, to name a few. Idol wannabes must acquire an extraordinary level of appearance, performing skills, or *kki* to pass the audition. After the company selects them as trainees, they are expected to demonstrate *insŏng* and cooperative teamwork throughout their traineeship and survive until they join a debut team. In general, a company holds weekly auditions at the company building, while talent scouts go on an audition tour in and outside of Korea. Some private institutes (*hagwon*) for vocal and dance training partner with entertainment companies and send their students to company auditions, while other idol wannabes make their debuts as idols through public television audition shows. Talent scouts often go to middle and high schools, singing and

dancing contests, and K-pop festivals to discover good-looking and/or seemingly talented teenagers. Soyoung, who works at an entertainment company, explains the process of selecting potential idols:

> We just go outside. We usually search for them at festival events. If it's a song festival, we find kids who are good at singing. There are also a lot of dance festivals out there, so we first search dance festivals on the internet, then go to the festival and sit there like an *amhaeng-ŏsa* [a royal officer in the Chosŏn Dynasty who monitored provincial administration and living situations of the people by secretly investigating the region in person]. If we find enjoyable ones, we get their phone numbers, tell them to visit the company, and open an audition for them. After monitoring the audition, we sort out the kids from the first audition and make them practice for a second audition. They really have to audition several times. After that, some may become trainees, but if they are [extremely good], then [the company] signs a contract right away. [The company] signed with [Red Velvet's] Yeri right after her first audition. She was a fifth-grader—she was a baby—but she looked very smart and sang quite well. [The company] signed the contract also because she seemed to grow up looking pretty. (Soyoung, personal interview, September 26, 2016)

As Soyoung explains, companies occasionally recruit trainees solely based on their appearance. In a video entitled, "KPOP Audition Tips," YouTuber and former idol trainee Jessica Lee talks about her experience passing an audition without exhibiting good vocal skills:

> A lot of people would ask me questions if I was a dancing machine or if I sang like Beyoncé or something—but, no. I didn't know how to sing . . . but I unexpectedly started singing because of the audition. That was quite challenging for me, I guess because I did not have any idea. Dancing was even worse. I was pretty similar to a flabby squid rolling around, but I just had a simple will and greed to pass the audition. But, of course, *my skills were developed after I got in*, so don't give yourself too hard. There's no pressure when it comes to ability and skills, because *that's what the company is going to prepare for you when you get in*.[101] (emphasis mine)

Jessica further explains that because there is always a member who is designated as the main vocalist in the group, there is no need for all of the members to sing well.[102] Talent scout Sojung also states that she found Moonhyun at a university entrance exam site, although she

[101] Jessica Lee, "KPOP Audition Tips," YouTube, January 8, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxd7iKCrECs.

had no idea whether he was a good singer until he visited the company for an audition. The company had been planning on debuting a group in the next few months, so the recruiting team was urgently looking for a "kid who could fill in the vocalist role," although all Sojung saw at the exam site was Moonhyun "warming up his throat, vocalizing 'brrrrrrr'" near the waiting room (Sojung, personal interview, September 15, 2016).

Some companies open a beauty pageant for preteens so that they can trace the growth of idol candidates over several years for more efficient recruitment. Sohyun, who worked at the New Artist Development Department at an entertainment company, explains that, if the wannabes are too young, each talent scout would maintain contact with these preteens without signing them to a trainee contract. Even though the preteens are not under contract, the talent scouts give the impression that their company is interested in them, by regularly contacting and asking them to inform the company if they get an offer from another company (Sohyun, personal interview, September 28, 2016). However, once a company decides to sign a trainee contract with teenagers, it takes care to determine how their appearances may change as they mature. A mother who followed her son to a company audition was shocked when a staff member asked for her height and that of her husband to help figure out how tall her son might grow up to be (Anonymous, personal conversation, November 13, 2018). Sohyun explains how her company takes profile pictures of audition applicants:

> We take photos of the entire body, then divide the parts into knees, the waist, then the bust. Next, a full shot of the face. Then we divide the face into the forehead and the nose. Then we tell them to show their teeth and say "ee," and take photos of their teeth. Then we take photos of their profile and repeat the same process. Next, we tell them to uncover their ears and take photos of their ears. Then we take another photo, from the ears to the forehead. After that, we tell them to turn around while saying "ee" to check the dental interlocking, because as kids grow up, their bones grow as well. There are possibilities that their face will become asymmetrical. Especially in the case of boys, their chin and cheekbone will grow, so if they have a light asymmetrical [face] then they have to correct their habits or have orthodontics. After

[102] Ibid.

> taking all the photos, we tell them to sing, and then tell them to pose. When we report [the result to the upper division], we also report which parts they should modify and supplement—for instance, if [the applicant's] jaw is too sharp, then we report that [the applicant] needs to reshape the jawlines [through plastic surgery], or that he needs to cut off his cheekbone, or that he needs an eye-length extension surgery. Correcting body shape is nearly impossible. You just have to make them exercise, but there's no way to fix it. O-type legs may be fixed but it takes a long time. There's a kid who already debuted, but his pelvis was really small. Still, he was super handsome and had wide shoulders. But because of his narrow pelvis and short legs, his general impression wasn't classy. So we just eliminated him right away. Later he debuted from another company. (Sohyun, personal interview, September 28, 2016)

Both female and male idols are under pressure to look attractive through dieting and plastic surgery, although it is more common for female idols to be compelled to lose weight and maintain slim bodies. For example, following four years of rigorous training, JinE made her debut in 2015 as a member of the girl group Oh My Girl. Soon after, however, she went on hiatus for a year due to extreme weight loss, suffering from anorexia nervosa, amenorrhea, hypothermia, and hypotension, eventually leaving the group in 2017. Idols often share their diets with the public, whether female or male. BTS's Jin states that he was once on an extreme diet, and for an entire year he only ate two packs of chicken breast per day: "I was told to take vitamins, but I refused to do so to lose more weight, so I eventually suffered from malnutrition."[103] Another BTS member Jimin recalls a ten-day period in which he had only one meal to lose weight before an album release.[104] Female idol Moonjung states that the most common surgery for female idols is liposuction to maintain slim body shapes—the pressure comes from both the company and their audience, and the idols eventually incorporate such diet plans in their daily lives. Moonjung explains that an idol with a height of 160 centimeters must maintain a weight of 40 kilograms (Moonjung, personal interview,

[103] Jin, "*Naengjanggorŭl put'akhae*" [Please Take Care of My Refrigerator Ep. 153], YouTube, October 30, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6j0OUjmCuZI.

[104] Ibid.

November 29, 2017). Male idol Moonsung notes that, in his debut years, he was 180 centimeters tall and weighed 60 kilograms, having "tuna sandwiches and chicken breasts every day [because] the company told us to do so. We were told to do whatever was ordered, so I just did whatever [the company] wanted me to do" (Moonsung, personal interview, August 21, 2015).

Fans and general audiences do not hesitate to advise idols to lose weight or get plastic surgery based on their personal taste. Moonsung recalls the online comments that he received in the early years of his career:

> Moonsung: Now I don't get hurt by people saying that I'm ugly. But back then, it was so hurtful. They said I was ugly, they also pointed out my hairstyle [and commented,] "How dare you debut as an idol [with such an appearance]?"
> Me: Did you hear that from your fans?
> Moonsung: There were definitely lots of our fans among those who criticized my appearance. Perhaps some of them were those who accidentally saw me on the television. Back then, I didn't know how to control my mind, so I read every single comment about me. (Moonsung, personal interview, August 21, 2015)

Because the popularity of an idol's group is often linked to the appearances of its members, there are always a couple of members whose appearance draws extra public attention. Most of the idols with favorable appearances serve as "*ipdŏk yojŏng*," or "fairies who lead people to fandom." ZEA's Kwanghee gained public attention after appearing on television to discuss his plastic surgery, stating that "After changing all parts [of my face], I was hospitalized for a year . . . It is hard to survive without confessing to the plastic surgery [experience]. I'm not good at singing or dancing, so I have to survive with my face."[105] This perception applies in reverse as well: The popular joke, "S/he looks like a great singer/dancer, " implies that since

[105] Yun-sŏn Cho, "*Kwanghee 'Sŏng-hyŏng-hago pyŏng-wone 1 nyŏn-gan ibwon' song-hyŏngjŏn mosŭp konggae*" [Kwanghee says, "I was hospitalized for a year after the plastic surgery," and reveals his photo before the surgery], *DongA*, October 27, 2010, http://sports.donga.com/3/02/20101027/32153870/2?adtbrdg=e#_adtReady.

an idol is not good-looking, s/he must have become an idol because s/he is good at either singing or dancing.

Along with appearance, flirting aura, or "*kki*," is considered a significant asset for an idol. Sojung states that Moonhyun, whom she scouted for his "cute" appearance, had flirting skills:

> [Moonhyun] was an annoying kid even when I was setting up the audition schedule for him. He didn't arrive on time, asked irrelevant questions, and kept saying things like, "I can't go today." But later I realized that those annoying kids are often good at flirting with their fans. (Sojung, personal interview, September 15, 2016)

Appearance and flirting skills are important, although performing techniques need to reach an acceptable level before trainees are released to the market as attractive idols. As a former trainee, Jessica states, "You don't have to sing well at all, but obviously you need to have room to improve your skills once you join [the company as a trainee]."[106] As soon as the trainees are recruited, entertainment companies provide lessons for singing, dancing, foreign languages, etiquette, and more. Based on each trainee's personality or talents, the company assigns them a role as a vocalist, rapper, or dancer. Trainees may be named as, for example, a rapper if they are not good at singing, or vice versa. Dancers are often assigned to be rappers since rapping is "easier to learn" than singing, although the producer may or may not assign a single phrase of the song to them. The member, in such a case, may remain on the team as a dancer without singing the song.

Lastly, *insŏng* and teamwork are important factors when sorting out quality idol material. Entertainment company worker Sojung explains that it is possible to check trainees' attitudes or *insŏng* during the traineeship period:

[106] Jessica Lee, "KPOP Audition Tips," YouTube, January 8, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxd7iKCrECs.

> Some kids are kicked out just because of their *insŏng*. There are kids who drive a wedge between trainees and cause a drama, or date with other trainees and get caught after taking weird photos. There is lots of drama happening here. (Sojung, personal interview, September 15, 2016)

At the same time, vocal trainer Kim Sung Eun argues that idols are not mere commodities but also human beings, and stresses her role as a life mentor:

> It's not just about singing; you keep an eye on how the trainees' personalities and potential are shaped as individuals, because you never know how this affects one's growth. Just like [BTS] Seokjin. I never knew Seokjin would listen to and study music to such a deep level . . . If we build a good foundation for [idols], they'll perceive themselves as singers and will study by themselves. How meaningful and fun would that be? (Park 2019:45)

To prevent these idols from being appropriated as disposable commodities, Kim argues, "One's retirement as an idol shouldn't be one's retirement as a singer. Even after they retire as an idol, you should make them survive as a musician" (Park 2019:53).

Among dozens of trainees, the company organizes the so-called "debut team," a group of trainees who are selected for the debut, and the competition among the potential members reaches its peak during this period. Often, companies reveal their new idol candidates via audition programs on television—e.g., YG Entertainment's MIX & MATCH, JYP Entertainment's Sixteen, and Big Hit Entertainment's I-LAND—so that the idol candidates can have the opportunity to attract fans before their official debut.

In the meantime, the CEO and in-house producers would assign the group's overall persona called "*k'ŏnsep*" (concept), along with a "*segyegwan*" (worldview), or an alternative universe that undergirds the group's concept. For example, EXO's concept and worldview have been "aliens with supernatural powers who came from the exoplanet"; BTS's concept during their debut years was "hip hop-dol (i.e., idols who pursue hip hop)," whose worldview was to "secure their music and values from the social prejudice and suppression for those in their teens and twenties"; SHINee's concept has been that of a "contemporary band," who

would attempt all kinds of experimental sounds in their songs and cutting-edge technologies in their media productions. Sometimes, idols engage in selecting the album concept and tracks while they build their careers, although it differs for each group. Bumzu, who worked as a music producer for SEVENTEEN and NU'EST, states that he was told to perform different tasks for the two groups:

> For NU'EST, I participated at the very beginning of the process and selected the concept. That's because officially I'm an album producer. I even [chose] album covers, along with the A&R task. So I had meetings with a lot of outside producers and composers and work with them. But SEVENTEEN has Woozi [as their producer], so I only work as a co-producer [for SEVENTEEN]. Their concept is determined by the company, and the members and I only make trivial additions . . . When I work with SEVENTEEN, I only need to work on the music in my studio, but for NU'EST, I need to go out and schedule the meetings, get what I want; if not, I need to make it for myself . . But all these processes are exciting and great fun. Because I enjoy it, [the idols] also write lyrics all night long and look for other stuff to do . . . The worldviews or album-making procedures are different between NU'EST and SEVENTEEN. [But] the most important thing is to keep them in shape and check out what kind of thoughts they have while they work on the music or other processes, what kind of mood they're in these days, and what kind of lives they are living.[107]

Due to the lack of debut opportunities, trainees often make their debut with a concept or worldview that does not consider their musical taste and artistic preference. Moonho, who eventually left his group, states,

> I told you, my company had no organized system because it was the first time [people in the company] produced an idol group. They wanted to make an idol version of a hip hop crew. I liked hip hop and black music as well, so their plan sounded good to me, but they worked without a plan. Eventually, the orientation of the group changed after they received random tracks through acquaintances. Because they thoughtlessly received songs from either friends or famous people, our group's music eventually became similar to Japanese rock, rather than hip hop. Consequently, our fashion style also changed to something like prince-looking costumes. I didn't like my group from the beginning, but I had no choice but to join it because I had not been selected by the Top 3 entertainment companies [SM, YG, and JYP]. (Moonho, personal interview, August 10, 2017)

[107] Hi-a Pak, "*Aidolmeik'ŏ: #3 Chakkokka kyŏm p'ŭrodyusŏ Pŏmju*" [Idol maker: #3 composer and producer Bumzu], *Idology*, December 23, 2016, http://idology.kr/8198.

Big companies with multiple groups assign different concepts to each group to maintain the overall diversity of concepts, draw the broadest range of audiences, and maximize the company's profits. Small companies that lack big budgets, however, occasionally will alter a group's concept based on the CEO's connection with particular producers and composers or other circumstances in the process of idol production. These small companies also introduce or exchange trainees with each other. Moonsung recalls,

> I got a connection with Rapper A after I performed at a rap contest held by Jungle Radio [a hip hop community website where amateur rappers uploaded their mixtapes]. I thought Rapper A sent me to Producer B because he liked me, but apparently he contacted Idol K as well—[Idol K] was one of the best in the Jungle Radio community. So Rapper A sent me to his friend's company and brought Idol K to his company, because he thought Idol K was more handsome and had more potential as a celebrity than I did. That's how I came to this company. (Moonsung, personal interview, August 21, 2015)

Additionally, trainees often leave the company that originally signed them when they do not fit into the concept of the group and move to another. For example, trainees Seungjun and Inseong left Big Hit Entertainment because their personas did not match with the new group that Big Hit was producing.[108] After they left Big Hit, Seungjun joined JYP Entertainment while Inseong joined FNC Entertainment. Eventually, the two debuted as KNK from YNB Entertainment while the trainees who remained with Big Hit debuted as BTS.[109]

Occasionally, companies will change a group's concept when they find the previous concept was not profitable nor appealing enough to the public. In the worst cases, girl groups, in particular, were made to pursue explicitly sexual images in order to draw public attention,

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[108] Seungjoon later changed his name to Seoham.

[109] Hyejin Hwang, "*K'ŭnakŭn Sŭngjun 'Hamkke yŏnsŭphadŏn Pangt'ansonyŏndan sŏngkong, an purŏpdamyŏn kŏjitmarijo*" [KNK Seungjun, 'It would be a lie if I say I'm not jealous of the success of BTS whom I practiced together], *Newsen*, May 31, 2016, http://www.newsen.com/news_view.php?uid=201605301623110410.

often under the company's direct coercion. Gayoung, who was a member of the girl group Stellar for seven years, recalls,

> In our debut years, we [projected] more of a cute concept . . . But after we had released about three albums, the [profit] wasn't good, so the company [financially] struggled. There was a time when there were only the CEO and a manager [in the company] . . . We were unpopular for about three years, and then started to receive attention with the song called "Marionette" in 2014 . . . because the concept was so provocative. There was a scene where [one of the members was] spilling milk. [The script] said, "She misses her ex-lover. She tosses and turns in bed. She drinks milk when she wakes up in the morning." So she did shoot the milk-drinking scene, but [the director] told her to spill the milk [over her body]. Later she was shocked to learn from online comments that the scene could provoke [sexual] imaginations. She was only twenty years old back then, and [although seven years have passed,] she still cannot drink white milk because of the trauma; none of us knew what [the concept] meant. During [the photo shoot] for "Vibrato," [the company staff] told us to wear this [highly sexual] costume. [We responded,] "We can't dance [while undressed] like this." [But the company staff said,] "Just try it, how do you guys say no without trying?" So we took only five shots and said, "See, this is going too far." Then [they told us,] "Okay, then change your clothes." Nevertheless, [the company staff] used those photos [from the initial session]. Because we were under the contract with the company as subordinates, when we said, "Uh, we don't want to do this," [the company executives] were like, "You better consider your contract with the company." So I think I was frightened at a young age. I was frightened and thought, "If I disagree with this and don't do it, I will have to pay a penalty."[110]

As Gayoung explains, because idols sign contracts and begin working at a company in their teenage years, both idols and trainees become subordinates in this ageist industry. Furthermore, they are often exposed to violence and abusive relationships with adults who hold power in the company. Moonjin talks about his experience of contract:

> Moonjin: The contract was about this thick [indicates about one inch of space with his fingers]. That was when I was nineteen years old, so honestly, I couldn't understand the jargon when I read it, but still I had to pretend as if I was reading it. But then the [company executive] said, "Do you even know what it means when you read it?"
> Me: Didn't you go there with your parents?
> Moonjin: Yes, I was there with my mom. She was reading it as well, but while I turned the first couple of pages, [the executive] said, "Do you even understand what it says? Don't you trust us?" So I said, "I apologize," and signed the contract.

[110] *Insight*, "'*1 bak 2 il gugakgo sonyŏ Stella Gayoung-i p'agyŏk nochurŭl haeyaman haettŏn sayŏn*" [The story behind 'One Night Two Days Gugak High School girl' Stellar Gayoung's shocking body exposure], December 17, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nwoQEyihhw.

> Me: You didn't let your lawyer check the contract?
> Moonjin: I didn't know such things at all. I knew that I had to be careful, but after failing dozens of auditions and with their overbearing attitudes, I didn't want to miss the chance. (Moonjin, personal interview, July 15, 2017)

Moonjin had desperately been longing for his lifelong dream, and his parents were cautious of offending the company by hiring a lawyer.

B. Signing the Contract

There are two types of contracts in the K-pop industry: one for trainees and the other for idols. Trainee contracts usually have a term of one to two years, or it may be connected to the idol contract which lasts for seven years. In the latter case, the trainee cannot move to another company and must wait until the current company determines the date of their debut. The trainee contract includes an agreement that the company pays for all the lessons, meals, and lodgings, and usually has a clause that allows the company to expel the trainee if the trainee makes "trouble" (e.g., by having conflicts with other people in the company or becoming a juvenile delinquent) or not having improved singing and dancing skills and fails to pass the monthly exam. Once trainees have been chosen to debut as an idol group, they sign an idol contract that lasts about seven years (this excludes the two-year military enlistment period, so it is *de facto* nine years for Korean male idols). The company pays for any expenses during the promotion period, such as hairstyling, makeup, and skincare treatments.[111] Some companies provide monthly payments for idols for "appearance maintenance [*p'umwi yujibi*]" even when they do not appear in public.

[111] Jaeho Song, "*Aidorŭi keyakjokŏne daehae allyŏdŭrigetsumnida*" [I will tell you about the contract conditions for idols], YouTube, October 25, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOduguKcYBs.

However, the majority of small companies that have low budgets sign contracts that compel idols to pay back the expenses used for training, music production, and promotions once idols make profits. As a result, idols who debuted from these companies often earn nothing during the first three to four years of their careers, until they pay off the debt. Moonjin states that when idols finish paying off the debt for these expenses to the company, they would begin to receive 50-70% of the profits earned, based on the initial contract, although his company often "played a trick" with the accounting; Moonjin did not believe that his company had paid him correctly (Moonjin, personal interview, July 10, 2017). Sohyun explains that although it takes three to four years for idols pay off the debt on average, each contract differs from group to group based on the payment schedule. Some companies and idols sign a contract that provides payments before the idols have paid off the debt: "If the company treats its idols as consumables, they don't have to pay them before they pay off the debt; but if [the CEO] wishes to develop [the company] along with the idols, then [a CEO] might accept an offer [and pay the idols before they have paid off the debt]" (Sohyun, personal interview, September 28, 2016).

Signed trainees must also repay training expenses as penalty fees if they leave the company after "making trouble." Not all companies retrieve investment from their idols, although the majority of small companies with low budgets do include such a requirement. By 2015, the investment to debut an idol group—of five members who each underwent two years of traineeship—had reached 940 million Korean won. According to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the average period of traineeship was 25.6 months. The expenses to debuting an idol group are as follows (Table 3).[112]

[112] Chae-gŏl Sim, "*2 nyŏne 10 ŏk … 'Ŏk' sori nanŭn aidol yuksŏng piyong*" [1 billion won in 2 years … Idol training expenses that cost billions], *Hankook Ilbo*, June 2, 2015, http://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201506020930428711.

Table 3. Expenses for debuting.

Lessons	15,000,000/mo. * 24 months	360,000,000 won
Trainers from overseas	20,000,000 (2 times) * 2 years	40,000,000 won
Lodging	5,000,000/mo. * 24 months	120,000,000 won
Meals, etc.	5,000,000/mo. * 24 months	120,000,000 won
Album production		50,000,000 won
Music video production		50,000,000 won
Marketing and promotion		100,000,000 won
Costumes, hair styling, etc.		100,000,000 won
Total		940,000,000 won

The education curriculum typically includes singing (89.4%), dancing (89.4%), foreign languages (55.3%), courtesy and manners (44.7%), speech delivery (25.5%), and acting (17%). Some companies include expenses for composition and musical instrument lessons (8.5%), mental healthcare (6.4%), and lessons for schoolwork (2.1%) as well as the Korean language for foreign trainees (2.1%).

C. Government Intervention in the K-pop Business

From the early 2000s, the South Korean government and the entertainment industry have been discussing the so-called "slave contract" between entertainment companies and their entertainers.[113] Three months after actress Jang Ja-yeon [Chang Chayŏn] committed

[113] Hyŏk-ju Kwŏn, "*Yŏnyein hyŏndaep'an nobimunsŏ pulgongjŏng p'anjŏn*"*g* [Entertainer's modern version of slave contract is judged to be unfair], *Nocut News*, June 17, 2004, https://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=102&oid=079&aid=0000002673.

suicide after being forced by her company to perform sex labor, the Korea Fair Trade Commission finalized the Standard Form of the Exclusive Contract [P'yojunjŏnsoggyeyaksŏ] for entertainers, based on the guideline provided by the Korea Entertainment Producers' Association in June 2009. The contract period for singers was limited to seven years maximum, taking into consideration the long training period.[114] Most recently on March 7, 2017, the Korea Fair Trade Commission released the Improvement of Unfair Trading Convention between Entertainment Companies and Affiliated Trainees [Yŏnye kihoeksawa sosok yŏnsŭpsaeng kan pulgongjŏng kyeyak kwanhaeng kaesŏn] after evaluating the trainee contracts from eight entertainment companies: SM Entertainment, LOEN Entertainment, JYP Entertainment, FNC Entertainment, YG Entertainment, Cube Entertainment, Jellyfish Entertainment, and DSP Media. A few major changes to the contracts are outlined in the chart below (Table 4). The Commission rectified six articles from the previous contract, and all eight entertainment companies revised their trainee contracts to incorporate these changes.[115]

[114] Yu-yŏng Pak, "*Idal mal yŏnyein p'yojungyeyaksŏ naonda*" [The standard contract form for entertainers will be released by the end of this month], *Newsis*, June 22, 2009, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/06/22/2009062201427.html.

[115] The Korea Fair Trade Commission, "*Yŏnye kihweksawa sosok yŏnsŭpsaeng gan pulgongjŏng kyeyak kwanhaeng kaesŏn*" [Improvement of unfair trading convention between entertainment companies and affiliated trainees], March 8, 2017, http://www.korea.kr/common/download.do?fileId=184821188&tblKey=GMN.

Table 4. Changes in idol contracts after the publication of the Improvement of Unfair Trading Convention between Entertainment Companies and Affiliated Trainees

Before the Improvement	After the Improvement	Reasons (Selected)
When the trainee violates the contract, the trainee must pay a penalty fee equal to double or triple the amount invested by the company for training. (Valid at YG, JYP, FNC, Cube, Jellyfish, and DSP)	When the company cancels the contract, it may demand a penalty equal to the amount invested for training.	• It is unfair to force the trainees to bear such financial pressures • Considering the economic status of trainees, they are not capable of rejecting or negotiating such excessive penalties
After the trainee contract is terminated, the trainee is responsible for signing an exclusive contract with the company. However, even before the trainee contract ends, upon request, the trainee must sign an exclusive contract with the company. (Valid at JYP, Cube, and DSP)	After the trainee period designated in the trainee contract is terminated, the trainee will prioritize the company for contract renewal or an exclusive contract.	• This article forces the trainee to sign an exclusive contract and thus unfairly restricts the trainee from signing a contract with a third party and unreasonably restricts the trainee's legal rights. • Since the trainee contract is separate from the entertainer contract, under the principle of contract freedom, the trainee should be free to determine which entertainment company's contract they will sign after the termination of the trainee contract.
The company may cancel the contract via written notice anytime during the contract period. (Valid at LOEN, JYP, YG, Cube, and DSP)	When the company wishes to cancel the contract due to the fault of a trainee, the company must first inform the trainee and give a 30-day notice that the contract is being terminated.	• This article unreasonably deprives the trainee of the benefits during the cancellation period, and may be unfairly disadvantageous to the trainee by loosening the requirements for the company's contract cancellation rights.

Before the Improvement	After the Improvement	Reasons (Selected)
The trainee must not demonstrate behavior that demeans popular cultural artists and negatively impacts their entertainment activities. The trainee must not demonstrate behavior that harms the dignity or credibility of the company or the company's affiliated entertainers. (Valid at SM, FNC, and DSP; SM Entertainment followed the Standard Form of the Exclusive Contract, although since this article includes unfair clauses, the Commission plans to revise the article on the Standard Form.)	Removed.	• The article sets a duty that is too vague and allows the company to cancel the contract whenever the trainees are deemed to disobey [the company]. Thus, it is disadvantageous to the trainees. • Since contract cancellation is beneficial to the contracting party's interest, the reason must be valid and detailed. • It is difficult to verify the trainees' performance on abstract factors such as damage to the company's dignity or credibility, and thus, it disadvantages to the trainees and may create a legal dispute. • Contract cancellation due to the violation of an abstract and unclear duty makes up the largest portion (28.5%) of legal disputes over artists contracts.
The trainee must immediately pay any penalty to the company. (Valid at YG and LOEN)	Removed.	• This article unreasonably restricts the trainees' legal rights by forcing them to pay penalties without negotiation.
In case of a legal dispute over the current contract between the company and the trainee, the court having exclusive jurisdiction will be the Seoul Central District Court. (Valid at YG, FNC, LOEN, Cube, Jellyfish, and DSP)	In case of a legal dispute over the current contract between the company and the trainee, both parties will try to reach an amicable agreement with trust and sincerity; if they cannot, they will resolve the dispute based on the fundamental principles of the Civil Procedure Code.	• The article is unfair to the trainees in terms of the agreement over trial jurisdiction.

D. Demarcating Boundaries between the Private and the Public

The biggest difficulty in protecting basic human rights of the idols comes from K-pop's intimate labor system—the more the idols renounce their personal lives, the bigger commercial success they achieve in the industry. When I asked Moonsu's thoughts on fans complaining about the inhumanely hectic schedules managed by his company, he replied, "Some fans say the company is abusing us, but honestly, we're in the same boat, and the company is obviously trying to treat us well. After all, it's fans who will leave us if we don't show up often [on the media]" (Moonsu, personal interview, August 15, 2015). Instead of understanding the relationship between the company and idols merely as the power and the powerless, Moonsu points to the commercial nature of the K-pop industry, in which intimacy between the idols and fans is interrupted by the business partnership between the company and idols. As business partners, idols frequently tell their company executives about their current dating status, so that the company can have a countermeasure against the upcoming scandal that will impact its business conditions. Then the idols would censor their own verbal and physical behaviors, personal relationships, and online activities.

For ease of management and surveillance, the company provides a flat in which idols live together, especially early in their careers. In whole or in part, these flats, or "dorms" [*sukso*], then can become production sites for television shows or internet broadcasts. Consequently, the idols' dorm is decorated and organized with public exposure in mind. When a video of the idols' dorm is broadcast, fans become investigators of the private lives of the idols. Occasionally, when fans see products designed for sexual use in the idols' dorm, disputes may arise regarding whether the idols actually own or use them for sexual purposes since the majority of fans do not tolerate idols being in a sexual relationship.

While idols publicize their domestic spaces (seemingly) voluntarily via the new media, public spaces are not protected or controlled by the companies or the fans, and idols can find themselves in jeopardy in the public sphere. As Lisa Lewis argues about American boys, public streets have served as a "major site of sociability and escape, the formation of subcultures, rebellious play, male bonding, and female pursuit" (Lewis 1990:36). This applies to Korean boys as well. Since American females are "expected to use streets as the route between two interior spaces . . . Women's level of comfort on city streets is tenuous at best—rape and harassment are constant threats that structure their street behavior" (ibid.). In South Korea, "*molka*," or images of females recorded secretly by male strangers or by victims' sexual partners in non-domestic spaces such as subways, public toilets, and/or motel rooms, have become "a part of daily life," attesting to the atmosphere of constant fear for Korean females.[116] However, whether female or male, idols' access to outdoor spaces and activities is extremely restricted, as fans often fill the role previously held by paparazzi. In a metropolis with a dense population such as Seoul, it is not uncommon to encounter celebrities at cafes, restaurants, bars, and/or night clubs. When I met idols in public spaces for interviews, suspicious strangers often came near to us to take what appeared to be "selfies," though it was obvious that including the idol in their photo was part of their goal. To avoid such surreptitious photography or video, the interviewee and I often left the interview site early and kept a distance between us while walking down the street.

Three types of private behaviors and relationships must be self-managed by idols in public: (1) a demonstration of friendship with the other group members; (2) an excursion outside of the dorm; and (3) the absence of a romantic or sexual partner or any friend of the

[116] Justin McCurry, "'A part of daily life': South Korea confronts its voyeurism epidemic," *The Guardian*, July 3, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/03/a-part-of-daily-life-south-korea-confronts-its-voyeurism-epidemic-sexual-harassment.

opposite sex who is unknown to fans. The first is a prerequisite for all idol groups, as fans hope to see the idols developing friendships with their group members. Through analyses of idols' interactions with each other on television shows, social media platforms, real-time broadcasts, and fan-filmed videos, fans continue to evaluate friendships between idol members in the same group. Almost all of the fans I interviewed told me stories about how their idol has a good relationship with Idol A but not with Idol B. Some fans develop a preference for a specific idol, because the idol's interaction with other members reflected how "considerate" he was. Moonjung, however, explains that idols are instructed to exhibit signs of friendship at all times in public (Moonjung, personal interview, November 29, 2017). During my interview with Moonho, we watched his group's television interview. Moonho noted how the members of his group were purposely touching each other, giving an impression of a homoerotic/bromance connection, which indexes a popular topic in K-pop fan fiction (Moonho, personal interview, July 18, 2017).

The second behavior—an excursion outside of the dorm—is forbidden for idols, especially during their debut years when their fan base has not yet solidified. Maintaining a fan base becomes more difficult if the idol's behavior—even offstage or off-camera—is viewed by fans as a kind of mistake or wrongdoing. Fans are exceptionally strict with their idols when idols are thought to be dating, drinking alcohol, smoking, or in any other type of miscreant behavior outside of the dorm in the first three to four years following their debut, because idols are supposed to be "working hard" during this period to pay their debt. Because fans are the ones who are paying the debt—for instance, by buying concert tickets and all relevant merchandise—the idols, in return, must show gratitude to their fans and demonstrate their appreciation by "working hard," which excludes any type of private (i.e., fan-free) pleasures and entertainments, such as dating or hanging out at bars or night clubs. An idol

met me for an interview at 2 a.m. to avoid fans, but also to avoid "managers who wouldn't let [him] go out"; he was eventually summoned by the company around 4:30 a.m. To avoid any misunderstanding from his fans and not to get caught by paparazzi, we kept a distance of 10-20 feet between each other as we walked on the street. He further mentioned that all of his group members were forbidden from going to a bar for a drink because the youngest member was still a minor, so the entire group must wait for him to reach the legal age for drinking (Moonsung, personal interview, August 21, 2015).

Because a company cannot legally prevent its idols from dating, it will instead advise the idols to inform the company of their current dating status, just in case the company must cope with any possible scandal or rumors. Super Junior member Kim Heechul states that his company, SM Entertainment, encourages its idols to date other idols within the company because it is more convenient to handle potential scandals.[117] Meanwhile, small companies, such as that of Moonjung, restrict their idols' freedom by taking cellphones away or forbidding them even to look at other opposite-sex idols at the music chart shows (Moonjung, personal interview, November 29, 2017).

Management strategies for social media accounts also differ from company to company. Big companies with large followings do not restrict their idols from creating and using personal social media accounts. Some small companies, however, do not allow their idols to create personal accounts because doing so might cause a schism among fans who support different members, which could eventually harm the career of the group as a whole (Moonsu, personal interview, August 15, 2015).

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[117] Sŭng-mi Yi, "*T'aeyŏn-Paekhyun 'yŏraesŏl'… Kim Heechŏl 'Yi Suman, sanaeyŏnae kwŏnjang* [Taeyeon and Baekhyun's dating scandal… Kim Heechul says, 'Lee Soo-man encourages idols to date with another idol in our company]," *JTBC News*, June 19, 2014, http://news.jtbc.joins.com/article/ArticlePrint.aspx?news_id=NB10503063.

E. Idols' Musical Agency and Copyrights

A trainee's musical taste and preference are rarely taken into consideration by companies in the production process. The company will collect the broadest pool of idol materials (i.e., trainees), choose a concept for its new idol group, and then select trainees who best fit the concept chosen by the company. Those who fail to become a member of the new group may wait for another chance, or they must leave the company and seek another chance at joining a group with another company. Due to the lack of debut opportunities, trainees often make their debut with a concept or worldview that does not consider each and every member's musical taste and artistic preference. As they develop their careers, idols engage more in making music, selecting themes, and expressing their individuality in music production. SEVENTEEN Woozi states,

> During our debut years, I wasn't skilled at directing vocal recordings of the thirteen members. Back then, I tended to sing a guide track and adjust everything to the guide form. But as we produced more and more albums, I realized … that SEVENTEEN's most genuine way of singing was for each member to sing in their most comfortable ways. (Park 2018:27)

Very often, the CEO is the main in-house producer for a company. Because CEOs set up the entire process of idol production, they are deemed "fathers" of idol groups. Such a metaphorical father-son relationship conceals the dominant-subordinate, hierarchical relationship between the CEO and idols. Moonsu illustrates how his CEO's relationship with another company negates the possibility of collaboration:

> I really like Company F. But I can't do any collaboration with [Company F's musicians], forever. I once mentioned Company F and [the CEO] got enraged, because he hates [Company F's CEO]. Just because I belong to this company, I can't work with people in Company F. (Moonsu, personal interview, August 15, 2015)

When this dominant-subordinate relationship is at its most extreme, the CEO will consider his idols to be his products. Moonho claims that his relationship with his CEO soured when he requested copyright fees for the lyrics he wrote:

> Until we released the song "Desert," our CEO allowed me to register copyrights for more than thirty songs. Idol M and I wrote most of the rap lyrics, and he didn't give us the copyright fees at all. So we thought, "Since the song 'Stay with Me' [the single released right before 'Desert'] topped the chart, perhaps we could ask him by now," so we asked him politely about it. And he responded, "Oh, sorry, I didn't know about that, I'll treat you well." So, we thought, "This is great!" But the next day—and this was when we were practicing the choreography for "Desert" after "Stay with Me" had topped the chart—I had been slated to dance at the center, but with hesitation, the choreographer changed my position to the back row. Something was wrong, so I asked him what was going on. He reluctantly confessed that the CEO told him to take me out of the center because I complained about the copyrights: "I gave him the center [position] and he became arrogant." When we went to shoot the music video, I wasn't given a close-up shot. So I asked the director why I didn't get one, and she refused to answer. (Moonho, personal interview, July 18, 2017)[118]

Moonho expected that since his group had topped the charts and gained enormous popularity, his financial contribution to the company would provide him with opportunities to claim copyrights and make his voice heard in the decision-making process of music production. However, after his request, he not only failed to receive copyright fees but also lost his close-up shot in the upcoming music video trailer as a tacit punishment.

Once they establish a profitable fanbase, idols begin participating more actively in the production and other decision-making processes in the company. Then they get a chance to release solo albums, which is a great opportunity for idols to showcase their musical virtuosity, artistic sensibility, and personal thoughts. Moonsu explains,

> For a group album, I make music based on our concept and the stories that need to be added to the album. There's a certain theme set up [for the group], so sometimes we cover something trendy. When I make music alone, I don't think about my group. I just find a subject that pops up in my head . . . because that's most genuine as if your unconscious mind is reflected in your dream. I try to make my music only when I have such intuitive moments. (Moonsu, personal interview, August 25, 2015)

[118] I used fake song titles for this interview reference in order to maintain anonymity of the interviewee.

Although talent in music and dance is the least important factor in trainee recruitment, they provide a unique way of expressing oneself and eventually become the most powerful capital of the idols.

F. Assault and Abuse

Because of their young age and subordinate position in the industry, idols and idol trainees are often treated as "children" of the CEO. Idols also refer to their CEO as "father"—Victoria, Hyun Jinyoung, and Yunho referred to Lee Soo-man, the CEO of SM Entertainment, as their father figure, while DSP Media's CEO Kim Kwangsoo also referred to himself as the father of his girl group T-ara. Such nomenclature may be a simple reflection of emotional closeness, yet it also carries economic implications within the industry. John David Ebert, in his portrait of Michael Jackson, argues that Diana Ross and Berry Gordy functioned as "displaced parental figures of Michael, and thus played roles in the very ancient myth of the birth of the hero, in which the hero's original parents are swapped out for a new set who happened to stumble on the child in the wilderness, where he has been abandoned and then raised him" (2010:191). Such a myth of heroic birth is also valid in the K-pop narrative. The typical narrative of K-pop heroes, as can be seen in dozens of documentaries and interviews, proceeds as follows: idols are depicted as passionate youths who are so diligent and desperate to have a career that it would seem unfair if they were not to succeed. Yet they are considered to be naïve regarding financial issues, caring only about realizing their dream of becoming a singer. They find the "right" CEO, who can give them an opportunity to realize their dreams. The CEO is not merely a business partner of the idols but also a friendly father figure who "cares" about his idols' mental and physical health, provides

them with services via his company, and occasionally hangs out with them and buys them dinner.

At the same time, the father-child metaphor implies a hierarchical relationship between the CEO and his idols, and sometimes can mask an abusive relationship. Several idols have experienced abusive relationships with their company executives. Moonjin, for example, recalls that one of the executives at his company harassed him during his traineeship years by ordering him to smile with his full set of teeth every time he came across the executive in the company building (Moonjin, personal interview, July 10, 2017). Maydoni, a YouTuber and former idol trainee at JYP Entertainment and YG Entertainment, explains that an executive's abuse was a major impetus for her to leave the company:

> When I was young, the company compelled me not to talk about why I left JYP and why I left YG . . . They said, "You'll die if you talk about this," so I couldn't talk about this at all until now . . . The company started to acknowledge me as a vocalist [after four years of training], so I got into the A-level class with senior trainees. But one day a chief manager came from China . . . and suddenly changed all the rules. The manager brought a new vocal lesson teacher, but the teacher was for beginners, although I was learning from a teacher for advanced [trainees]. But the manager told me to learn from the new teacher . . . I was so stressed out, so I called the manager and asked, "Can I take vocal lessons from my former teacher?" but the manager suddenly said, "How dare you, rude little thing, ask so many things?"[119]

As Maydoni's and Moonjin's cases demonstrate, some idols and idol trainees suffer disadvantages under the guise of "training." In October 2018, eighteen-year-old Lee Seok Cheol and sixteen-year-old Lee Seung Hyun, two members of the group East Light, revealed that for four years they had been exposed to constant assault, verbal abuse, and death threats from Moon Young-il, the in-house producer of Media Line Entertainment. Lee and Lee's

[119] Maydoni, "*Wŏndŏ Kŏlŭs membŏ? Nanŭn Iraesŏ #JYP Rŭl Kwandwotta. 8 Nyŏn Yŏnsŭpsaeng Sijŏl Ponaen Ŏnniŭi JYP Silch'e / Silch'e Riŏllit'i Ssŏl #4* [*Kasuŭi kil (My Way)]*)_*Maydoni (MAYDONI)*" [Wonder Girls Member? This is the Reason Why I Quit #JYP. The Real JYP by a Lady who Had Spent 8 Years of Idol Traineeship / Stories of a Real Experience #4 [A Way to Become a Singer (My Way)]_Maydoni (MAYDONI)], YouTube, December 14, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guPivM_HSTk.

lawyer stated that "Until now, Media Line has controlled the members by making them surveil one another. Also, as all members were minors, they were worried that the executives of Media Line would find out if they discussed the abuse with their parents."[120] The members were assaulted with baseball bats and microphone stands, were forced to smoke cigarettes, and were choked with guitar strings. The producer assaulted the members for a variety of offences: (1) because the member tore the fabric of a massage chair; (2) because the member was late for practice; (3) because the members were performing badly; (4) because the members did not follow the producer's Instagram account; (5) because the members were rude; (6) because the members did not used their Facebook account as per the producer's instructions; (7) because a member played soccer; and (8) for no reason.[121] They further stated that the reason they endured the assault was because of their "dream and fear that [they] might not be able to continue performing music once [they] were kicked out."[122]

Article 18 of the Standard Form of the Exclusive Contract for Entertainers (Singers) in Popular Culture, entitled "Protection of Children and Teenagers," provided by the Korea Fair Trade Commission (last updated in 2014), states,

> 1) [The production company] guarantees the child/teenager entertainer's fundamental human rights such as physical/mental health, right to learn, right to personal freedom, right to sleep, right to rest, and freedom of choice.

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[120] Kyu-hwan Ch'oe, "*Tŏ Isŭt'ŭ lait'ŭ-ga palkin Midia Lain 4 nyŏn p'okhaeng jŏnmal… 'Chŏngsan, chugŏbi chiwondo mu*" [The East Light's full account on Media Line's 4-year assault… 'No payment or rent support provided], *Chosun Ilbo*, October 19, 2018, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/10/19/2018101901478.html.

[121] Min-ji Kim, "'*Jiokŭi 4 nyŏn' tŏ Isŭt'ŭ Lait'ŭ Yi Sŏkchŏl-i palkin #p'okhaeng #p'okŏn #kapjil*" ['4 years in hell' The East Light Lee Seok Chul reveals the #assault #verbalabuse and #powerabuse], *News1*, October 19, 2018, http://news1.kr/articles/?3454925.

[122] Kyu-hwan Ch'oe, "*Tŏ Isŭt'ŭ lait'ŭ-ga palkin Midia Lain 4 nyŏn p'okhaeng jŏnmal… 'Chŏngsan, chugŏbi chiwondo mu*" [The East Light's full account on Media Line's 4-year assault… 'No payment or rent support provided], *Chosun Ilbo*, October 19, 2018, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/10/19/2018101901478.html.

2) When [the production company] concludes a contract for entertainment management, it must check the age of the entertainer, and in case of a child/teenager, it cannot request indecent exposure of [the entertainer's] body or excessively suggestive performances for profit or popularity.
3) [The production company] cannot demand that the child/teenager entertainer must provide popular cultural art labor for an excessive amount of time.[123]

While some companies use the standard form for their contracts, a businessperson in the industry states, "Honestly, the standard form of the (exclusive) contract is disadvantageous for the companies, so which company would observe all [of the articles]? It doesn't matter if they don't observe it anyways."[124]

G. Fan Management

As much as idols are managed by entertainment companies, fans are also expected to follow the rules set up by entertainment companies for an easier and faster commercial success of the idols. During the era of first-generation idols (who debuted between 1996 and 2004), fan clubs had been run by fan club executives and supporters—these executives and supporters were also fans who volunteered to manage the fan club by handling transportation and food expenses and delivering gifts to idols via the company. In return, the fan club executives were allowed close contact with the idols' manager, could acquire the idols' schedule-related information in advance, and could meet the idols while delivering gifts, meals, and/or snacks. Only those who were well-known to the group's fandom through

[123] Korea Creative Content Agency, "*Kasu chungsim p'yojunjŏnsokkyeyaksŏ*" [Standard Form of the Exclusive Contract for Entertainers (Singers) in Popular Culture], https://ent.kocca.kr/UID/BBS/U007/contract.do.

[124] Yu-jin Yi, "*Anjik'yŏdo kŭman'…Hŏulppunin p'yojunkyeyaksŏe mŏngdŭnŭn 'Yŏnyein inkwŏn*'" ['Doesn't matter if we don't observe it'…'Entertainer's rights' are not protected under the gloss of the standard form of the exclusive contract'], *The Kyunghyang*, October 23, 2018, http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?art_id=201810232130005.

active, long-term participation in offline events were able to run in elections for fan club executive positions.[125] Fan club executives were accessible to their idols' upcoming schedule, because it was their job to announced it on the official fan club's voicemail for other fans, with an instruction to assemble at a specific place, thus establishing a hierarchy between them and other fans.

With the arrival of the second-generation idols (who debuted between 2005 and 2011), entertainment companies started to incorporate fan club management into their duties. Entertainment companies no longer relied on fan volunteers and their free labor for the fan club management. Instead, they officially launched fan clubs and hired "fan managers" [*p'aen manijŏ*] to organize and manage fan-related events. To become a fan club member, fans were required pay annual membership fees to receive membership benefits. When they had become fan club members, fans received a gift box that included a photo book with messages from the idols, were given access to the idols' online messages, exclusive photos, and videos, and had priority when purchasing concert tickets. The company directly announced the idols' schedules to all fans via the official website. From the third generation idols (who debuted between 2012 and 2019), all entertainment companies established a fan management division [*p'aen manijimŏnt'ŭ*] for more effective management of fan clubs.

The implementation of in-house fan management brought major changes to the idol-fan relationship. Today, fan club executives no longer exist, and fans can communicate with idols directly through social media. One's status as a fan club executive does not guarantee special access to the idols; instead, anyone who can invest money, time, and labor in the events and platforms set up by the company can gain physical and emotional proximity to the

[125] Chak-ga Kim, "*Igŏsi han-guk p'aenkŭllop saengt'aegye*" [This is the nature of Korean fan clubs], *Hankyore*, February 17, 2011, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/specialsection/esc_section/463863.html.

idols. Maintaining official, and thus fair, access to idols has become one of the most important fandom rules to observe. Both idols and fans no longer treat *sasaeng* (stalker fans who hacks idols' cellphones, follow their private schedules, or trespass on their private spaces) as "fans," because respecting idols' privacy—i.e., idols' offstage and offcamera lives—is one way of maintaining a wholesome idol-fan relationship.

H. Media Coverage Management

In addition to managing trainees, idols, and fans, entertainment companies must also maintain a good relationship with broadcasting networks and news media outlets. When an idol group releases a new album, their manager visits show producers and executives at television and radio stations to promote the new album and leave a "good impression" in hopes that the producers might give the album more airplay. This hierarchical relationship was cemented when music chart shows started adding "on-air points" to their ranking methods, so that a song must be aired on the broadcasting company's shows to chart. Entertainment company worker Sojung explains,

> Topping the chart is important. But you just don't get the first place by chance, it is *made* by the management and marketing divisions, with on-air points that can be earned through [the number of times] the song aired on variety shows as background music or in a music video format. Next, the marketing division sets up schedules for fansign events; the rest of the work is to be done by fans by increasing the view counts on YouTube and other social media. (Sojung, personal interview, September 15, 2016)

As a result, idol groups are often compelled to appear on variety shows as well. Workers at both entertainment companies and television stations mentioned biannual idol athletic championship shows as examples of a method through which the broadcasting company's entertainment production division confirms its authority, because "if you refuse to attend [the

show], you are defying the Entertainment Production Division" (Sojoon, personal interview, September 3, 2016). Sojung adds,

> [Idols are allowed to appear on music chart shows only after appearing on the athletic championship shows,] and our [company's] idol couldn't even promote his new single because he got injured while participating in the athletic championships. Network A, for example, banned Group E from appearing on its variety shows because Group E was produced by Network B [via Network B's audition show]. In other words, broadcasting companies are the superiors [of entertainment companies]. (Sojung, personal interview, September 15, 2016)

Music chart show producers, workers at entertainment companies, and fans whom I interviewed have all argued that music chart shows should be banned because of their inefficiency, because it takes enormous labor by the television network staff, entertainment company staff, idols, and fans to produce a single episode. Moonsu states,

> The music chart shows are the most important. Perhaps popular groups like EXO wouldn't have to appear on all music chart shows; perhaps they could select a few among them. But [less popular groups] like us shouldn't select the shows because of our relationship with the broadcasting companies. We can feel the pressure that we just have to attend all of the shows. What's wrong is that we have to be on standby all day long. On the broadcast day, we do our hair and makeup around 4 or 5 in the morning, and pre-record our performance. The show is a mix of pre-recorded performances and live performances [in order to make fast transitions]. Then those who pre-recorded their performance can go home, right? But you have to wait [until the end of the show in the afternoon] because you have to be on stage for the ending scene just to display the authority of the show. All of these are desperate attempts to become popular, since [the broadcasting companies] don't put pressure us once we get popular. Of course, they still have power, but we can gain much better conditions as soon as we become popular. (Moonsu, personal interview, August 15, 2015)

Despite their "absurdity," music chart shows serve as an important medium to bond idols and their fans through intense competition.

I. Leaving the Group

When a contract (generally seven years, based on the Standard Form of Exclusive Contract) terminates, idols can decide whether they will remain in the group and the

company. Although there is no legal obstacle, idols often find it difficult to leave the group in which the company, the fans, and the idols have been invested financially and emotionally for several years. This struggle can become more visible in cases where idols file a lawsuit against the company following the termination of their contract.

On July 31, 2009, three members of TVXQ—Kim Jaejoong, Kim Junsu, and Park Yoochun, who later formed a group called JYJ—applied for provisional disposition to terminate the validity of their thirteen-year contract with SM Entertainment. Without the two remaining members of their group, Jung Yoonho and Shim Changmin, the three members (hereafter JYJ) claimed that they had signed what they considered to be a "slave contract" [*noyegyeyaksŏ*] with SM Entertainment. JYJ's lawyer, Im Sang-hyŏk, explained that two elements must be established for a provisional disposition: (1) the case seeks the nullification of the contract; and (2) the issue is so urgent that it requires a provisional disposition before the formal trial. Im pointed out, "We claimed that this was urgent since the career span of idol stars like TVXQ was so short that their career as entertainers may end within the two to three years of the lawsuit, and the court accepted our claim."[126] He explained that such "unfair" contracts are prevalent, especially in the music industry, because the market is monopolized by the Top 3 major companies (SM, YG, and JYP), making it difficult for new entrepreneurs who want to enter the market. He continued, "Even [superstars like] TVXQ are 'forever subordinate'" in the music entertainment industry, because of the clause in TVXQ's contract, such as: "All rights for [TVXQ's] appearances on broadcasts and in entertainment activities in and outside of the country belong to SM [Entertainment]."[127] On August 28,

[126] Won-chŏl Kim, "*Aidolgŭrup 'Tongbangsinki' ch'ŏnsokgyeyak hyoryŏkjŏngji ch'ŏt kach'ŏbun sŭngso Im Sanghyuk p'ŏnhosa*" [Lawyer Im Sanghyuk, who won the suit of the first provisional disposition for idol group TVXQ's nullification of exclusive contract], *Kukmin Ilbo*, December 3, 2009, http://news.kmib.co.kr/article/view.asp?arcid=0002115777.

2009, 121,073 fans from TVXQ's fan club Dongnebangne presented a petition to the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, claiming, "Due to this exclusive contract being a legal action related to one's talent and labor, fundamental human rights should not be violated."[128] After JYJ left SM Entertainment, fans also raised questions about whether SM Entertainment was forcing broadcasting companies to exclude the members of JYJ from appearing on television shows. Subsequently, Congress passed a bill that is known as the "JYJ Bill," that banned broadcasting networks from refusing media appearances of particular entertainers at the request of a third party or for an irrelevant reason, if the entertainer's appearance is confirmed to be unproblematic through the court's decision of provisional disposition, adjustment, or arbitration.[129]

TVXQ's legal and emotional split created an intervention from fans who acted as mediators between SM Entertainment and JYJ. TVXQ's two other members, Jung Yoonho and Shim Changmin, argued that the conflict had started after the three members began their own cosmetic business and further claimed that they were "unable to join the business, assuming that a cosmetics company that approached the members individually without consulting with [SM Entertainment] would be problematic."[130] Before the three members'

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[127] Ibid.

[128] Chae-ho Ch'a, "*Tongbangsinki p'aendŭl 'SM pulgongjŏng kyeyak pandae*" [TVXQ fans say, 'We are against SM's unfair contract'], *Simin Ilbo*, August 30, 2009, http://www.siminilbo.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=170629.

[129] *The Asia Business Daily*, "*JYJ Pangsong Ch'uryŏn Kil Yŏllina…'JYJ Pŏp' Kukhoe T'onggwa*" [Will JYJ Be Able to Appear on Broadcasts Again…'JYJ Bill' Has Passed], December 1, 2015, http://www.asiae.co.kr/news/view.htm?idxno=2015113021392121421.

[130] *Chosun Media*, "*Yoonho, Changmin, 'Hwajangp'um saŏp ihu modŭn-ge pyŏnhae*" [Yoonho and Changmin Say, 'Everything has changed after the cosmetics business'], November 2, 2009, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/11/02/2009110201244.html.

lawsuit was made public, JYJ's family members—Kim Junsu's father, Park Yoochun's mother, and Kim Jaejoong's older sister—contacted their fans, primarily the owners of fan community websites, to address several issues including SM's exclusive, thirteen-year contract, a second "unfair" contract with the company handling the promotion in Japan, the cosmetics business, the upcoming schedules, and their decision as to whether to remain with or leave SM Entertainment.[131] The TVXQ fan club Dongnebangne's executives held several meetings with the relatives of the three members and executives from SM Entertainment, although all fan club executives subsequently resigned because "back then, we couldn't readily tell [other fans] that the three members gave up on [maintaining] the five-member group."[132] TVXQ eventually split into TVXQ (with Jung Yoonho and Shim Changmin, the two members who remained with SM Entertainment) and JYJ (Jaejoong, Yoochun, and Junsu), which resulted in the split of their fandom as well. The respective fans of TVXQ and JYJ continued to dispute among one another over who had caused the conflict and split.[133]

J. Media Manipulation by Entertainment Companies and Idols

Moonho, who left his idol group, asserts that fans already knew that he would be leaving the group before the official announcement. Originally, all members of his group had decided to leave their company after the seven-year contract expired. However, according to Moonho, "It's a huge change, you know, the previous company would interrupt our

[131] Pyŏl, "*3. Chaninan 6 wol*" [3. Brutal June], Dongnebangne, January 16, 2010, http://dnbn.org/003.htm.

[132] Pyŏl, "*1. to. Kasiop'eia yŏrŏbun*" [1. Dear Cassiopeia], Dongnebangne, January 16, 2010, http://dnbn.org/?ckattempt=1.

[133] See the website of TVXQ Time (http://tvxqtime.com/hoisting) and 00's blog (http://blog.naver.com/stickam/220442384712).

television appearance, we might not be able to use our group name [because the company owns the trademark of the group], and we might not be able to perform anymore. So [other members] hesitated" (Moonho, personal interview, July 9, 2016). One of the most important reasons behind the members' hesitation was the relationship between fan expectation and profit. Moonho continues,

> Of course, fans love the dancing and the songs, but in fact, what they love more is the relationship among the members, that is, the process of boys sharing friendship and pursuing their dreams . . . I still believed that song and dance would be important to them, but by the time of the contract renewal, I realized that the relationship [among the members] was more important [to fans]. I was not going to re-sign with this company no matter what, because I didn't want to break up the team. But later I found out that each of them had met with the CEO individually without telling each other. When I suggested three months ago that we all leave the company together, they were like, "Let's just make money with our current fans, let's [perform at] more festivals and concerts, we can't become more popular than this, we're at our peak now, so let's just make money" . . . I think that was the point at which we started to have fewer conversations . . . Now I am so skeptical about this thing called "idol." I could do it when I was young, but I felt like I had become fake as time went by. I truly want to do my music, but I really like my fans, too. I thought I should protect the group for my fans and for the friendship we had . . . But after they betrayed me, I had no reason to remain in this group or keep the friendship. (Moonho, personal interview, July 9, 2016)

Apart from his breakup with his group members, Moonho was unable to tell the "truth" to his fans, because whatever reason he gave, he would still be the one who left the group and would be considered a traitor. He decided to wait until his former company announced his leave, not to give a chance for his former company to distort his words. Instead, Moonho delivered his thoughts by uploading specific photos, song lyrics, and messages that would indirectly inform his situation on his social media account. Some fans readily caught his signals, while others blamed him for "media manipulation" [*ŏnp'ŭl*].

However, Moonho's actions were a defensive tactic, taken in response to his former company's media manipulation. Moonho had already informed the company that he would not renew the contract; however, the company postponed its announcement but instead kept

releasing news articles that it was waiting for Moonho's decision, implying that Moonho was at the center of the members' breakup. The company's postponement of the announcement not only prevented Moonho from openly seeking a new contract with other companies but also caused conflicts in the fandom. Some fans sent direct messages to Moonho, blaming him for "not thinking of his group and fans" and for being "too ambitious" (Moonho, personal interview, July 9, 2016). Pursuing his dream was deemed "selfish" to these fans, because by then, the group was not just a family of the members, but also belonged to fans who had built his group. Moonho also found out that the company released news articles which made his fans believe that he "appropriated his group as a platform for his acting career" (ibid.). As a response to this media manipulation, Moonho released a single right after he left the group, proving that he pursued his idol career simply because of his genuine love for music.

K. Conclusion

In an active participatory culture like K-pop fandom, celebrities assume various roles: their mediated images circulate as textual commodities; as intimate laborers, they please their fans through various "fan service" performances; though, at the same time, their publicity and music productions are transformed into cultural capital that allows them to accumulate more cultural/economic capital. While K-pop idols are charged with obligations and restrictions as intimate laborers, music can offer them an empowering space in which idols express their thoughts and gain cultural/economic capital.

The chronicle of an idol's journey from entering the business as a trainee to leaving his group with his fans demonstrates how idols begin their careers as commodities produced by entertainment companies and later become independent capitalists with their fandom capital. Not all idols accumulate fandom capital by the time they leave the idol industry;

those who succeed do so by acquiring visible fan power early in their career. This fan power is not created by the so-called "*anbangsuni*" (bedroom fans) who enjoy media productions at home, but by those who show their consumer power through purchasing albums and tie-in merchandise, protesting and making their voices heard in the media entertainment industry for the benefit of their idols, and/or physically participating in offline events. While idols play multiple roles as commodities, laborers, and capitalists in the K-pop industry, fans also become part of the training and management system. Their active interactions with idols further require them to observe an appropriate distance by understanding theatrical interconnectedness from their idols (see Chapter 2). Through entertainment companies' fan management and K-pop fandom's consensus, fans learn how to respect idols' privacy, maintain ideal idol-fan relationships, and thereby, sustaining the K-pop economy.

IV. "Feminism Brings Money": Claiming Hegemonic Femininity in the K-popsphere

The "fan" is inseparable from consumption. Fans are often deemed to be specialist consumers with their own ideological orientations and cultural activities (Cavicchi 1998; Hills 2002; Crawford 2004). However, as Mel Stanfill points out, consumption carries negative connotations, such as waste or destruction rather than creation, natural rather than civilized, personal, private, irrational, emotional, and thus "feminine" (Veblen [1899] 2000, Baudrillard 2000; Campbell 2000, Hebdige 2000, Arvidsson 2005, Sandvoss 2005, Rafferty 2011, Sandlin and Maudlin 2012, quoted in Stanfill 2019:77). In an effort to normalize our understanding of fans and their activities, Jenkins and Lancaster describe them as performative consumers who also "produce" and "create" (Jenkins 1992; Lancaster 2001), and reject the idea that fans are passive receivers of mass media production. In terms of the dichotomy of consumption and production of fan activities, Matt Hills raises a question about "decisionist narratives," which produce moral dualisms that "hinge on making political decisions as to the 'goodness' or 'badness' of fan cultures" (2002:vxi). He further asks, "should these fan attachments and interpretations be devalued as industrial complicity or valued as creative expressions of audience agency?" (ibid.).

What is at stake in academia's dichotomy between production versus consumption, and the "goodness" and "badness" of fan cultures, is the industry's control over fans as consumers. Western academia has discovered several case studies in which fan activism negotiates with or resists a media company and changes some portions of media production, for instance, by changing characters or narratives through resistance. However, K-pop is a unique case of fans as shareholders, controlling music production and the aesthetic styles of their idols, and making decisions about the idols' contracts and company policies, often in coercive and oppressive ways.

In Chapter 2, I discussed how K-pop fans understand the mechanism of parasocial relationships and utilize the illusion of intimacy that was originally fabricated by the mass media. This chapter explores Korean female fans' use of their parasocial relations with their male idols through the lens of gender and sexuality. More specifically, I demonstrate how these fans perform a hegemonic femininity by reversing patriarchal norms and removing hegemonic masculinity from the arena of K-pop. Although hegemonic femininity sounds like an impossible identity performance in South Korea's patriarchal society, I find it a useful apparatus when explaining the power dynamics of the K-pop scene in which actors consistently attempt to construct an alternative universe with newly arranged social relations.

This chapter is divided into three parts. First, it begins with my theoretical analysis of hegemonic femininity. The second part discusses how male idols embody and materialize an emphasized masculinity as a reflection of hegemonic female fans. In this section, I explore how the K-pop industry implicitly endorses fans' participatory culture of fan fiction. How do heterosexual female fans fantasize about the male idol body by reading and writing same-sex fanfic texts, and how do male idols readily respond to their female fans' fan fiction fantasy through "business gay performance"? The industry's active adoption of same-sex romance from fans' fanfic narratives demonstrates how fans provide a secondary gender role as a business model and how the industry readily accepts it. I will also explain how male idols display submissive masculinity to female fans through their looks and behaviors. The last part of the chapter delves into hegemonic femininity as a social structure. In this section, I will turn to fans' interactions with the K-pop industry and hip hop musicians and explore how these fans claim their hegemonic femininity by de-masculinizing the industry and normalizing hegemonic femininity in the K-pop world.

A. Theorizing Hegemonic Femininity

The concept of hegemonic femininity originates from the idea of "hegemonic masculinity," which first appeared in R.W. Connell's critique of sex role theory. Connell made an attempt to reject role theory in the article "The Concept of Role and What to Do With It" (1979), claiming that role theory rose to prominence along with the ideological foundation of functionalism, but that the actor's power and agency are missing from this account. Likewise, Connell argued that "[w]ith 'sex roles,' the underlying biological dichotomy seems to have persuaded many theorists that there is no power relationship here at all. The 'female role' and the 'male role' are tacitly treated as equal" (1987:50). Adopting Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Connell defines hegemony as:

> A social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes . . . Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth, is [hegemony] . . . 'hegemony' does not mean total cultural dominance . . . It means ascendancy achieved within a balance of forces, that is, a state of play. Other patterns and groups are subordinated rather than eliminated. (1987:184)

Instead of role theory, which prescribes and sanctions one's expected role through outside forces, Connell suggests hegemonic masculinity is "not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships" ([1995] 2005:81). In delineating the patterns of masculinity within the Western gender order, Connell suggests that certain types of masculinities—i.e., subordinate masculinity, complicit masculinity, and marginalized masculinities—are "constituted in relation to other masculinities and to the structure of gender relations as a whole" (ibid. 154). Connell argues that there is no dominant form of femininity equivalent to hegemonic masculinity (1987:183). Instead of hegemonic femininity, Connell suggests the term "emphasized femininity," which is "linked with the private realm of the home and the

bedroom" (ibid., 187). While emphasized femininity is privileged by its subordination to hegemonic masculinity, it has no social power or agency for change.

Connell implies that there are multiple femininities, although she does not elaborate her ideas on this assertion. A few scholars have attempted to define hegemonic femininity by applying Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity (Pyke and Johnson 2003; Shippers 2007). Karen D. Pyke and Denise L. Johnson apply hegemonic femininity to white American women in relation to Asian American women who are endowed with subordinated femininity, claiming that "the supremacy of white femininity over Asian femininity mimics hegemonic masculinity" (Pyke and Johnson 2003). However, as Pyke and Johnson acknowledge, their version of hegemonic femininity is "confined to power relations among women" (2003:51). Mimi Schippers notes that identifying white femininity as hegemonic femininity and non-white femininity as subordinate offers "little conceptual room to identify multiple femininities with race and class groups, and more importantly which raced and classed femininities serve the interests of male dominance and which do not" and fails to "identify how *men* benefit from the relationship between white femininity and Asian-American femininity" (Schippers 2007:88-89; emphasis in original). Unlike Connell, who described hegemonic masculinity through its hierarchal dominance over femininities and other masculinities, Pyke and Johnson fail to explain the gender hierarchy of domination and subordination between hegemonic femininity and masculinities, and how the concept can be applied to women in relation to men. For a better theorization of hegemonic femininity, Carrie Paechter suggests conceptualizing it with "a clear relationship to hegemonic masculinity which would not simply leave [hegemonic femininity] as Other" and "the ways in which hegemonic gender forms are supportive of the status quo, that they perpetuate an unequal gender regime" (2018:122).

Because gender is not a fixed entity but a performative and relational identification, I give an example of hegemonic femininity in the relationship between hegemonic female fans and subordinated male idols. In the business world of K-pop, male idols often earn their debut opportunities via audition programs in which the audience, or potential fans, vote for the idol trainees they like (e.g., Hot Blood, WIN: Who Is Next, Mix & Match, Mix Nine, YG Treasure Box, Stray Kids, Produce 101, and Boy 24), At the same time, they can also lose their status as an idol if their fans boycott them (e.g., 2PM's Jaebum, Super Junior's Kang In and Sungmin, Sechs Kies's Kang Sunghoon, and AB6IX's Lim Youngmin). In contrast, their fans freely join and leave fandom or become fans of different groups at the same time. This implies that the gendered labor system of the K-pop industry works in a way that is opposite to the patriarchal labor system (Hartmann 1976). In other words, women maintain their control over men's labor power, and such control has formed an indirect, impersonal system of control of the K-pop industry. Male idols' living and labor conditions, behavior, appearance, and personal relationships are all subordinated to the censorship of their female fans. It is female fans who define the sexuality and gender of male idols, not the other way around. The gender relations between female fans and male idols demonstrate how female fans define male idols' identity and practice and how male idols are subordinated to the gendered roles and norms defined by hegemonic femininity in K-pop.

B. Alp'esŭ, the Underground Desire

Through fan labor and the accumulation of fandom capital, Korean female fans claim their rights as producers of the industry and even claim ownership of their idols' bodies. As much as fan-idol interactions on social media form the "*yangji munhwa*" (overground culture), fans have also developed the "*ŭmji munhwa*" (underground culture), a behind-the-

curtain scene of their own. Along with other fan activities, fan fiction or "fanfic" [*p'aenp'ik*] has been a significant part of the K-pop fan activities that have been developed in a milieu in which fans cultivate more imaginative forms of connection with their idols. The most popular fanfic genre in K-pop is called "*alp'esŭ*" (RPS or real person slash), an alternative universe in which fans support same-sex shipping (pairing) of their favorite idols. It resembles other global fiction genres, including American slash fiction and the Japanese comic book genre, Boys' Love (BL). *Alp'esŭ* not only refers to the same-sex fanfic genre but also indicates same-sex romantic/erotic relationships. In South Korea, *alp'esŭ* is consumed in fanfic form on blog sites and amateur writers' platforms but is also consumed instantly through memes or posts on social media.

In the alternative universe of *alp'esŭ* (RPS) and *tongsŏng p'aen'pic* ("homosexual fanfic"), a male idol is always in a romantic/erotic relationship with another male in his group. In her work on Korean women's fandom for male-male romance, Jungmin Kwon argues, "The gay body is romanticized by Korean FANtasy [Korean women's fantasy for male-male romance] fans (and by extension, by Korean women) because gay men are believed to have features that straight men do not" (Kwon 2019:10). However, Sunmin, an NCT fan who identifies herself as a *sisŭjendŏ het'ero yŏsŏng* (cisgender heterosexual woman), argues, "Fanfic is not a gay fantasy but a tool through which heterosexual women project their [heterosexual] desire" (Sunmin, personal interview, August 13, 2020). A *paisekshuŏl* (bisexual) BTS fan also explains that heterosexual fans consume *alp'esŭ* not because of their fantasy toward gay men:

> I think it is dangerous to categorize BL and homosexual fanfic/RPS [*tongsŏngp'aen'pic/alp'esŭ*] into a single group. Korean BL was greatly influenced by Japanese BL, so it reflects a lot of Japanese stereotypes, full of misogynistic heteronormativity. But *alp'esŭ* fanfic is a creation that borrows characters from real people [K-pop idols], so the writer doesn't create the characters. The writer can only come up with how to interpret the existing people. So what is important in the fanfic

> is not the gay sexuality but the realization of a love relationship between members of the same group. (Sunhee, personal interview, August 13, 2020)

Although K-pop *alp'esŭ* seems to focus on gay masculinity, Sunhee and other fanfic readers I have interviewed argued that it *happens to be* a same-sex romance simply because of their desire to see romance between their favorite idols.

Even though these fans' main purpose of *alp'esŭ* do not originate from their desire for gay fantasy, *alp'esŭ* fanfic provides a safe fictional universe specifically for female readers, not because the protagonists are gay men but because there are no female characters. Sunhee states, "It would be so painful if you depict the world that women live in through women characters. Life is so dangerous and painful, so it might be difficult to consume if the fiction is too close to reality. But by removing femininity, you can keep a safe distance" (ibid.). Feminist scholar Ryu Jinhee also argues that the removal of female characters allows female writers and readers to assume the position of omnipotent actors (Ryu 2008). The male idols' sexuality is objectified and transformed into a commodity in which fans—both authors and readers—can claim ownership within the imaginative world of fanfic. As readers prefer gay male characters to heterosexual ones, the conventional hierarchy of masculinity seems to be disrupted in the female-dominant world of K-pop fanfic. The hegemonic masculinity of Korean patriarchy does not exist in the K-pop fanfic, as idols turn into gay male characters.

Gay men, positioned as representatives of subordinated masculinity in real life, are celebrated and desired in fanfic narratives. The celebration, however, is ironically appropriative—the male idols' sexuality is deployed by female fans at their convenience in the course of removing female characters from their fanfic narratives. The Korean LGBT+ community has rendered individually and structurally invisible, and scholars often attribute the invisibility to two strands of social power: Korean Confucianist heteronormativity and evangelical Christian homophobia (Yeu 2004; Im 2016; Cho 2019). Korean Confucian

scholar Lee Donghee argues that a same-sex family is "not an ideal family form" and "cannot be recommended as a normal family" (2009:160, 162). The Korean Confucian ideology has forced gay and lesbian youth into marriage against their will. These young people carry on the family lineage while secretly maintaining same-sex relationships, because becoming model citizens by getting married, having kids, and getting a respected job is deemed to fulfill the filial duty expected by their parents (Yeu 2004:2-3). Fundamentalist Christians have also treated gay and lesbian citizens as mentally ill and actively promoted homophobia and discrimination against them.

The gay male fans whom I interviewed expressed ambivalence about fanfic, because although it objectifies gay men, it offers a stage on which they can gain visibility as main characters and entertain gay readers. Some lesbian fans explained that they read male idol fanfics by projecting a *puch'i* (butch) role onto the male idol body. Gay and lesbian fans also correct fanfic writers by complaining about the heteronormative setting of K-pop fanfic. Sunhee once castigated the author of a fanfic that described "homosexuality as abnormal as adultery" (Sunhee, personal interview, August 13, 2020). The writer revised her fanfic; however, Sunhee expresses frustration over the prevalent heteronormative gaze in the K-pop world, including the fanfic universe:

> After all, even in the Western fanfic world, the most popular ones reflect sex roles based on traditional heterosexuality . . . An Indian Canadian transgender writer I know also experiences cyberbullying very often. Queer fans remain safe when they quietly play on their own at the margin. But once their fanfics become popular or their social media accounts become famous and visible, they are attacked right away. Queer fans are welcome only when they're beneficial to the idols' reputation. (Sunhee, personal interview, August 13, 2020)

As Sunhee argues, even in the "underground culture" [*ŭmji munhwa*] of fan fiction writing, a heteronormative universe dominates commercial popularity and visibility. Then fanfic does not reflect an emasculation of heterosexuality, but simply a removal of the female body. As a

heterosexual female fan recalls her first experience of reading an *alp'esŭ* fanfic, "I thought, 'It might be better if my men date with each other instead of dating another girl!' It was something like, 'I'd rather want you to be a gay if I can't have you!'" (Sunjin, personal interview, December 12, 2014). Instead of endowing their idol with heterosexual masculinity, heterosexual female fan writers transform him into a gay male who cannot maintain any sexual relationship with women or the "potential competitors." Then the writers designate another idol as a counterpart of this relationship to claim full ownership over both idols' sexuality.

While both protagonists are designated as gay men, "*oen*" (abbreviation of *oenjjok* or "left") and "*rŭn*" (abbreviation of *orŭnjjok* or "right") roles are assigned respectively to the couple.[134] Although the *oen-rŭn* relationship is similar to the top-bottom roles of gay male couples, the terminology is only used in fanfic to differentiate the fictional roles of "*oen*" and "*rŭn*" from actual gay men's sexual practices. In the English-speaking fandom, for instance, "vmin" refers to the shipping of the idols V and Jimin, regardless of their roles; the couple would not be called "minv." However, in the Korean *alp'esŭ* practice, the *oen* role indicates the penetrator while the *o* role always refers to the penetrated, so the order has significant importance to the fans who consume the alternative universe.

Although it is changing, fans explain that the "*oen*" character often showcases a tough personality, leads the relationship, and actively courts his lover. In contrast, the "*rŭn*" character often maintains a submissive personality, following *oen*'s lead. The *oen-rŭn* relationship is an effective apparatus for heterosexual female fans to project their desires onto by identifying with the *rŭn* character. The conventional depiction of "masculine" and "feminine" roles in the *oen-rŭn* relationship is grounded in the heteronormative imagination

[134] Fans also use the term "*oen-o*" to refer to "*oen-rŭn*."

of female fans who consume the dominance of femininity through non-threatening male bodies. While fans develop the notions of masculinity and femininity through their own creative activities, the portrayal of gender norms in the fanfics often reaffirm heteronormativity by "maintaining the gender hierarchy that subordinates women to men" (Schilt and Westbrook 2009:441).

Because these fan novels are narrativized based on real people, and because the site of circulation has moved to the internet to which the idols also have access, Korean fans have collectively created and observed norms that would generate a virtual space of what fans call "underground" [*ŭmji*]. Fans are less concerned about copyrights or publicity rights, convinced that entertainment companies will not take legal actions against them. However, some of them have stated that they do not wish their idols to see them writing and reading fanfics because it would be rude to sexualize a person in public. Sunyoung, a fan of EXO, states,

> Imagine your fan depicting you as a gay man who has sex with your friend [group member]. How would you feel? You don't have to be rude, so just enjoy it behind his back if you want to. (Sunyoung, personal interview, July 10, 2016)

The internet provides a space for social interactions between idols and fans but is also an underground scene for fans' sexual exploration. Korean fans strategically demarcate the boundaries of "*yangji*" (overground) and "*ŭmji*" (underground) by uploading their writing to fanwork and fiction writing community websites such as POSTYPE and Joara, limiting visibility and "spreadability" to the text they produce (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). When they post fanfics or consume the *alp'esŭ* shipping outside of fanwork communities—such as their personal blogs, which idols can also search—fans post them in a .txt file format or deliberately misspell idols' names, so the content does not automatically appear on search

engines. It therefore requires more time and effort to search for, download, and/or open the file to consume the same-sex romance fantasy.

C. Underground Desire Becomes a Business Model

Female fans' fantasy about their male idols' same-sex romance and male idols' responses are never discussed in public, although reciprocity is actively at work. Legally, K-pop fanfic, as a real-person fiction genre, violates K-pop idols' publicity rights. Instead of taking legal action, K-pop idols and their companies have readily adopted fanfic's idea of heteronormative femininity. Male idols' materialization of hegemonic femininity through the display of gay masculinity is called "*pijŭnisŭ gei p'ŏp'omŏnsŭ*" (abbreviated as *pigep'ŏ*) or "business gay performance."

An example of business gay performance would be Eric's roleplaying of "Ricsyung" (Eric and Hyesung), a popular *oen-rŭn* couple in Shinhwa fanfic during Shinhwa's 2012 Seoul concert. In the video, Eric holds Hyesung's arm, pushes other members away as if he is jealous, and passionately hugs Hyesung.[135] In the middle of a talk, Eric suddenly shouts to his fans: "Everyone, Ricsyung is the best!" As fans scream in unison for Eric and Hyesung kiss, Eric bashfully hugs Hyesung. While the two men reluctantly stand next to each other, fans demand that they kiss until Eric awkwardly kisses Hyesung's cheek. Shinhwa fan Sunyoon explains,

> [Same-sex romance is most popular in fanfics] because it's a total fantasy. So in some sense it looks more ideal . . . because it is a relationship that cannot be realized in Korea . . . So I think it is used as an escape from reality for students when they watch Shinhwa members kiss and hug each other. (Sunyoon, personal interview, December 13, 2014)

[135] FLASHBACK4shs, "*RicSyung_Rikshŏng-i tchang-iranŭn Edaep'yo-ŭi soyuyok*" [RicSyung_Eric says RicSyung is the best], YouTube, April 9, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htQiJcZUOx0.

It has become a convention for K-pop idols to play sensual games and touch each other on variety shows or during press interviews, catering to female fans' fanfic desires. When Group B's Moonho and I were watching Group B's television interview, Moonho suddenly pointed at his group members Idol X and Idol Y, who were sitting behind him. While Moonho was talking to the interviewer, Idol X kept touching Idol Y's leg. To me, it seemed unconscious, although Moonho said, "They don't even talk to each other when the camera is off. They obviously know fans are watching them" (Moonho, personal conversation, August 2, 2017).

As the term implies, "business gay performance" has to be fulfilled through a deliberate, staged, public performance by idols who are publicly known as heterosexual males. Through paparazzi photos and rumors that Eric and Hysung dated women, fans firmly believe Eric and Hyesung are straight males. Sunyoon states, "I don't think their relationship is real. Both of them had girlfriends before, and I think I only want to enjoy this as a fiction." (Sunyoon, personal interview, December 13, 2014). Sunkyung, another Shinhwa fan, also insists that idols cannot really be gay men:

> Of course people will have different marriage plans, but the idols are already thirty-six years old. So I think they should get married [to a woman]. And it's so obvious they like women when you see them on talk shows. I think it's natural for them to kiss each other's cheeks since they've been friends for sixteen years. [If it's true that they're gay men,] I'd be okay, but I don't think I can say, "I'm so happy for you! Hope you have a lovely relationship!" I think they should rather get married [to a woman]. Considering that I enjoy reading same-sex romance stories, I know it is ironic, but I'm a Christian and I think homosexuality is wrong. (Sunkyung, phone interview, December 14, 2014)

To some fans, gay men exist only in the realm of fantasy, and it is unthinkable to accept them as members of society. Ryu Jinhee argues that fanfic activities have enabled women to "accept homosexuality as a more acceptable reality" (2008:178). However, this has not brought a visibly positive light to the LGBT+ community. The first and only

K-pop idol who came out as gay was Holland, who made his debut in 2018. He failed to sign a contract with a number of entertainment companies when he insisted on singing about sexual minorities. Holland eventually made his debut without corporate support.[136] Regarding the fanfic culture and business gay performance, Holland explains the restrictions on his behaviors:

> I knew about the [fanfic] culture because I used to like various celebrities when I was younger. I don't really know why they [write and read same-sex romance fanfic], but I can only guess fans probably wouldn't want to see their favorite idols going out with anyone else. Instead, they want to see them going out with another idol they like. I think that's how the culture started. I'm particularly cautious about this, because many people can misjudge my intentions. Even if I simply say hi or make some gestures to other idols without any intentions, people can misinterpret my behavior [because of my sexuality], so I'm cautious about it. I'd like to ask all the fans to take it easy in this regard.[137]

Holland's remark attests to the artificial setting of business gay performance, which can be realized only under the assumption that the idols are heterosexual males.

Idols also assert their heterosexual masculinity immediately after they perform a business gay performance, by making a wry face, screaming with anger, continuing the business gay performance with exaggeration, and/or denying rumors about them. After his kiss with other male idols on a 2009 concert tour, Super Junior member Heechul wrote on his blog that the kiss had been staged:

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[136] In-ha Ryu, "*Int'ŏbyu: 'Sŏngsosuja sinin-gasu Hollaendŭimnida*" [Interview: I am the sexual minority rookie singer, Holland]. *The Kyunghyang Shinmun*, February 4, 2018, http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?art_id=201802040927001.

[137] sbspopasia, "EXCLUSIVE: Sam Hammington talks to the first openly gay K-pop Idol Holland," YouTube, April 10, 2018, https://youtu.be/xZhT5Q29aTQ. I have used the interview translation on the video subtitled by sbspopasia, with a little revision for the accuracy.

> Really, what is this fuss all about? Everyone is trying so hard to turn me into a homosexual kiss maniac. Well, I knew there would be a controversy over this before I did it. If you guys at the concert enjoyed it, then everything's fine and I don't care about the controversy.[138]

Later in a press interview, Heechul reaffirmed, "I am not gay at all. I only attempted it as a new type of performance."[139] After all, business gay performance can be presented only under the assumption that the idols maintain a heterosexual identity. The more the idols perform business gay performance on stage, the more they can affirm their heterosexuality.

RPS fanfics reorders the conventional power structure (Xu and Yang 2013). At the cost of fantasization and commodification of gay masculinity, female fans entertain themselves by subverting the conventional gender hierarchy between heterosexual femininity and heterosexual masculinity, and male idols readily appropriate this power structure for their fan service. The subversion of gender hierarchy is still pertinent to the presentation of heterosexual masculinity outside of the fanfic fantasy, as I will describe in the case of the "flower boy."

D. Construction of "Flower Boy" Ideals

The industry's materialization of fanfic sexuality into business gay performance demonstrates how male idols' sexuality and gender are crafted for female fans' sexual desires. Male idols' sexuality is publicly fixed as heterosexual; however, their heterosexual

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[138] Hŏl, "*Tongsŏng k'isŭro kei nollane Kim Hichŏl ppullatta!*" [Kim Heechul is upset by the gay controversy after his same-sex kiss], Nate Pann, January 22, 2009, https://pann.nate.com/talk/3732151.

[139] In-kyŏng Yi, "*Int'ŏbyu 2: Shup'ŏjuniŏ Hichŏl, tongsŏng k'isŭ haep'ŭning 'T'wiŏboryŏnŭn p'ŏp'omŏnsŭ*" [Interview 2: Super Junior Heechul, same-sex kiss event was "an eye-catching performance], *Chung Ang Sunday*, March 11, 2009, http://article.joins.com/news/article/article.asp?ctg=&Total_ID=3525642.

masculinity does not equate with the hegemonic masculinity of South Korea's patriarchy. After all, the male idols must display and maintain their subordination to their female fans. For this reason, a married heterosexual male idol—who has gained hegemonic masculinity—becomes an unwanted commodity, because he is no longer qualified for deep acting of pseudo-romance with his female fans as a professional idol. In the K-pop world, male idols must always be subordinated to and legitimized by female fans; however, there is extremely little space for female fans to acquire dominance in their relationship with a married male idol. As one of my interviewees says, fans "don't want to play with a pseudo-affair relationship" (Sunyoo, personal conversation, June 9, 2020). As far as male idols maintain their careers through their subordination to female fans, they have no social power to change this systematized gender hierarchy. Once they refuse, they are relegated to the status of an ordinary "singer" [*kasu*] who is no longer obliged to perform theatrical interconnectedness but also with no massive financial and emotional support from K-pop fans (see Chapter 2).

Male idols' subordination to female fans is not always demonstrated through the materialization of same-sex fantasy but is also realized through their display of heterosexual masculinity. When the idols interact with their fans at concerts, video chats, or in their "*p'aensong*" ("fan song" or a song written for fans), male idol group's fandom is always personified as a female partner:

> This song is dedicated to the world's biggest fan club
> The "ELF," my girls, my angels
> We met several years ago for the first time
> And we fell in love at first sight
> —"From U" by Super Junior (2006)

> I think I'm a lucky guy
> It's so good like we're in a fairy tale of our dreams
> Oh my god! It's the best thing to hear
> Her voice melts me like ice cream
> —"Lucky" by EXO (2013)

Although male idols postulate their relationship with female fans as heterosexual lovers, this heterosexual masculinity is not equivalent to that of the Korean patriarchy. Instead, they perform "emphasized masculinity"— a male version of emphasized femininity theorized by R.W. Connell (1987). Just as emphasized femininity features compliance, nurturance, and empathy, the ideal male idol will also care about and listen to his fans, will be regularly in touch with them, and will not disappoint them with self-defeating behaviors. Male idols are caregivers but are also vulnerable and not strong enough to lead the relationship:

> Maybe she is burdened by my young age
> And I think I'm gonna hate it girl,
> It's coming to the end
> But no matter what, my heart tells,
> Nuna is so pretty
> —"Nuna, You're So Pretty" by SHINee (2008)[140]

> When you called me, I became your flower
> As if we were waiting, we bloom until we ache . . .
> As much as my heart flutters, I am worried
> Destiny is jealous of us
> I am scared a lot, as much as you are
> —"Serendipity" by BTS's Jimin (2017)

> I'm going nineteen to twenty,
> I have things to show you plenty
> Rose, scent, and kiss, that's all I need from you
> My twenty is all for you
> —"Rose, Scent, Kiss" by AB6IX's Lee Dae Hwi (2020)

As the lyrics exemplify, male idols' subordination and compliance to hegemonic female fans are often materialized into their youthful appearance. When idols make their debut as teenagers, the companies prevent them from becoming muscular, forcing them to remain boyishly slender. Male idols also remain clean shaven, to maintain a young, fresh image of a pretty boy who has not fully grown.

[140] "*Nuna*" is an appellation used by a male to refer to either his older sister or an older woman in his peer group. In this song, *nuna* refers to the latter.

K-pop male idols in fact exemplify the pan-Asian "*kkonminam*" (flower boy or pretty boy) craze. Many scholars have interpreted Asian males' grooming practices as a feminization of masculinity (Ilda 2005), describing *kkonminam* as "men who are pretty looking and who have smooth fair skin, silky hair, and a feminine manner" (Jung 2011:58). Some have also described the *kkonminam* syndrome as androgynous; Kim Yong-Hui explains it as "a consequence of the deconstruction and the hybridization of female/male sexual identities rather than males merely becoming feminized" (2003:104, quoted in Jung 2011). Although these scholars often deem Asian males' grooming practices as feminine or androgynous, I argue that male idols' pretty boy image is not merely feminine or androgynous but reflects another type of heterosexual masculinity—i.e., emphasized masculinity—from which hegemonic masculinity has been removed. Female fans prefer pretty boys, not because they are feminine or androgynous, but because their looks reflect the removal of a patriarchal gaze. It is the male body that is policed by female fans' panoptic gaze; he will internalize and self-discipline his body to reflect his fans' socioeconomic power in the K-pop business by maintaining the pretty boy image.

E. Deinstitutionalizing the Masculine Industry

Although K-pop provides a space in which patriarchy is surveilled and regulated by capitalist needs, it is not entirely discrete from Korean patriarchy, because the majority of actors in the industry—especially company heads and the most popular idol members—are Korean men. When fans feel the need to lodge a complaint against a company for unsatisfactory content, they attempt to deinstitutionalize the company. After all, the industry is not an impersonal entity, but consists of numerous actors in the scene. Instead of calling out the company, fans identify the workers in each department by name and address their

requests to these individuals. In order to do so, fans share the company worker's phone/fax number or email address and send requests by making a polite phone call or by sending massive amounts of emails and fax files to the worker. In this way, fans disempower the industry and gain a dominant position by calling out individual workers.

Idols eventually learn how to develop their relationships with fans over the course of their careers. Occasionally, they take advantage of their intimate relationship with fans to gain autonomy and freedom in the industry. Matt Stahl, in his study of the commercial music industry and recording artists in the U.S., explains, "[W]hile a recording artist's balance of autonomy and alienation is variable in its historical particulars, the core themes and problems of autonomy and alienation are quite persistent . . . In other words, recording artists must obey their company's executives and turn over their recordings to the company" (2013:9). Although the Korean popular musicians are under similar conditions, K-pop idols often come to a compromise with their companies by asking fans for assistance. Super Junior-M's Henry once posted on his Instagram account:

> This is hard. I'm exhausted . . . Now [the company] has become too big that it [doesn't have time to] support [me] . . . I think I only have my fans now. If you read this, please tell [the company] instead of me. My company doesn't listen to me.[141]

Other idols, including Eric Nam and Amber, have also expressed their discontent with their company, asking fans for assistance. Moonho states, "When I complained to my company, one of my idol friends suggested I tell my fans about it. He said it was very effective" (Moonho, personal interview, September 4, 2017).

[141] Chŏl-o Kim, "*SM-e pulman t'ŏjin Henri? Hanpamchung SNS-e ŭimisimjang-han sajin*" [Henry has complaints to SM? He uploads suspicious photos on his social media account at midnight], *Kookmin Ilbo,* December 31, 2016, http://news.kmib.co.kr/article/view.asp?arcid=0011169272&code=61181111&sid1=ent.

F. Systematizing Hegemonic Femininity Against Hip Hop Misogyny

As I have described in Chapter 1, Korean hip hop developed its authenticity by comparing itself with "inauthentic, artificial, and agency-lacking" K-pop. One of the ways hip hop artists claimed superiority was to suggest K-pop was "girly and/or gay" unlike Korean hip hop, which was "masculine." The second half of this chapter will explore how idol rappers first take hip hop rappers as a model of hegemonic masculinity and how female fans correct them and expel hegemonic masculinity from the K-pop scene through consumer power. This process will show how female fans claim hegemonic femininity on personal and interactional levels through their relationships with male idols while systematizing hegemonic femininity as a gender structure of the overall K-pop scene.

In November 2013, hip hop critic Kim Bonghyun celebrated the first anniversary of the podcast interview series, *Hiphap Ch'odaesŏk* (Invitation to Hip Hop), by inviting BTS's RM (the then Rap Monster) and Suga—whom their company promoted as "hip hop idols"—and underground rappers Okasion, P-Type, Don Mills, and B-Free. B-Free, one of the "underground rappers" panel, ridiculed BTS members in misogynist terms for conforming to mainstream popularity:

> B-Free: You call [your music] hip hop? You call that hip hop? What does an "idol" mean?
> Rap Monster [hereafter RM]: It means "*usang*" ["idol" in Korean].
> B-Free: Whose idol? Oh, girls' idol?
> Kim Bonghyun [hereafter Kim]: By definition, "*usang*" means "idol," but in this country, it has become a concept that is extremely complicated in a musical and industrial sense. Some ask an ontological question about the compatibility of "idol" and "hip hop." What do you think about such criticism?
> RM: Many people talk a lot about idols' makeup and clothing but if you listen to our album, it is in itself very hip hop.
> Okasion: But actually hip hop is not just a music genre. It's bigger than that. I think that's just a rap album, rather than a hip hop album.[142]

[142] bwiyomi, "(ENG) B-Free Disses BTS Pangt'ansonyŏndan disŭhanŭn Pipŭri [(ENG) B-Free Disses BTS B-Free Disses BTS], YouTube, November 23, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evfNBEeChek.

The host Kim Bonghyun asks if the popularity-seeking idol music with dance elements could be compatible with hip hop, of which authenticity is defined by the absence of dance and nonconformity to capitalist power. When RM claims their album to be "hip hop," Okasion points out that hip hop is not a mere music genre but a culture that encompasses both musical and non-musical aspects. Their conversation discusses the cultural aspects that exclude BTS from the Korean hip hop circle:

> Kim: The most important thing in rap is a sincere self-narration, so people assume it is fake if you don't write your own lyrics. What do you think about that?
> RM: I agree as well. And we write about our own stories.
> Kim: This may be a somewhat sensitive question, but since you are here—in some sense, hip hop is a masculine, macho culture, and as you see Deep Flow here, he has a masculine appearance. To give you an example from the lyrics, a verse in the Cohort [Okasion's hip hop crew]'s album says, "a gay-looking appearance, bring back the manly look." But things like this in hip hop seem to contradict BTS wearing makeup on stage.
> B-Free: No, no, not "*punjang*" [makeup] but "*yŏjang*" [men's crossdressing]. Don't you call it *yŏjang* when you dress like girls?
> RM: In terms of smoky eye makeup, I am still intrinsically resisting it and do not want to do it. I also understand what it means to be "gay-looking" in the hip hop culture, but I understand both sides.
> B-Free: If you understand both sides, want to do both [idol music and hip hop], and understand the hip hop culture that much, what is it you want to do? If you really feel that awkward and do not want to do smoky eye makeup, then why are you doing it?

The conversation invokes hip hop's artistic superiority by positioning rappers as true musicians who write their own lyrics, secure musical autonomy through rejection of capitalist control, and demonstrate hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is at the core of hip hop authenticity as it is linked back to rejection of capitalist control and commercial popularity. Donning smoky eye makeup, performing dance moves, and receiving consumer support from "girls" are not acceptable ways of exhibiting "ideal" (or hegemonic) masculinity, and the rappers arbitrarily use terms such as "girls," "gay-looking," and "crossdressing" to prove their superiority by stressing the patriarchal order. Their assertion of musical authenticity continues to intersect with that of hegemonic masculinity:

> Suga: In my case, I wanted to make my voice and music heard by many people. That was one of the reasons [I became an idol rapper] and it is the same with [RM].[143]
> B-Free: Same here.
> Suga: So, actually, you might be upset if I say this, but last time I mentioned that I wish to become a bridge [that connects] the underground and the mainstream. The reason is I also had such a hard time when I performed in Daegu. I skipped every dinner and walked two hours just to buy musical equipment. It was very hard. When I sold my music and failed to receive even 10 won, I was extremely mad at the reality. Until I came to [Seoul], I obviously hated smoky eye makeup as well, but it was so hard to make music in Daegu, so…
> B-Free: So, because you didn't like the struggle…
> Suga: No, I've wanted to do music with my musician friends . . . Eventually my dream is to gain recognition first by doing [idol music] and then bring my friends [to Seoul] and make music together.
> B-Free: Which means, right now, you are making money temporarily [as an idol]?
> Suga: No, that's not what I meant.

B-Free's response "Same here" implies that while he also pursues commercial success and popularity, he does so in the "legitimate" way. This idea is similar to what Lisa Lewis describes as the "romantic scenario of the struggling artists" in rock discourse, which claims that "[t]rue rock musicians are thought to have worked harder, experienced the pain of little recognition, and honed their craft by logging time in small music venues" (Lewis 1990:30). Dave Laing also states that the model of self-improvement was "pitted against the 'instant' nature of many teenybop artists, apparently with little performing experience and apparently manipulated by a producer or a manager" (2015:77). Similarly, B-Free rejects Suga's way of achieving commercial success by avoiding struggles and the limits that he would have faced in the underground scene. To B-Free, Suga conforms to the control of the "manipulative" K-pop industry, in which Suga and other idols are forced to surrender their hegemonic masculinity by assuming a "gay look" with "smoky eye makeup" to become the "idols of girls."

[143] Ibid.

In the latter part of the discussion, B-Free reprovingly asks questions about how BTS members met with each other and formed the group, pointing out the manipulative nature of the K-pop industry, in which group members do not meet through peer connections but through company recruitment. RM, however, gives an unexpected answer: he first auditioned for Big Deal Records, Deep Flow's hip hop label. The hip hop duo Untouchable then introduced him to Bang Sihyuk, the producer who is now CEO of BTS's company, Big Hit Entertainment. RM continues, "In the beginning we were not a [dance] performance group but consisted of four rappers who didn't dance. We were planning to show a lot of hip hop music with rap but no dance, but the original members of my group didn't join. And due to various factors, [our group] eventually danced. I also wanted to quit and wasn't sure if this was right."[144] After talking about his suffering from poverty and "paying his dues" as a musician, B-Free argues,

> Everyone [here] is in the same situation, but eventually [it is a matter of] whether you put up with [the struggle] till the end . . . You wanted to change that? With what? With Bang Sihyuk? Did you think you could change [the environment] by becoming an idol? . . . You could have come with us but failed to resist the temptation.[145]

Kim Bonghyun's questions, B-Free's ridicule, and RM and Suga's responses altogether imply a number of elements that construct a hierarchy between Korean hip hop as a sincere, authentic culture, and K-pop as a factory-made, falsely written, and thus inauthentic sound. In the discourse of hip hop authenticity, the idol rapper position is an alternative to hip hop musicians. Idol rappers, according to hip hop authenticity encapsulated in B-Free's reproach, succumb to the capitalist temptation of commercial popularity and waive their autonomy in their musical activities. The purview of the restraints on one's

[144] Ibid.

[145] Ibid.

autonomy includes the lack of agency over their own bodies and music and the "surrender" of hegemonic masculinity. After the talk, B-Free uploaded a photo of female audience members who came to the talk with a comment, "Calm down," sarcastically degrading BTS fans as irrational and hysterical.[146]

Discourse on Korean hip hop authenticity appropriated the American hip hop discourse (e.g., "Keeping It Real" and writing one's own lyrics) and the American rock discourse (e.g., focusing on individuality rather than community and "paying one's dues" as musicians), hinting at issues present during the localization of rap in South Korea (e.g., detaching dance elements from rap dance). Yet the conversation above ironically informs similarities, rather than differences, between K-pop and Korean hip hop as commercial categories. Both BTS and B-Free write their own music; in fact, a majority of idols write their own music. RM's scouting experience also attests to the overlapping scenes between the K-pop and K-hip hop industries.

G. Feminist Capitalism: Claiming Feminism via Consumer Rights

The year 2015 marked the beginning of a feminist movement called the "Feminism Reboot" [*p'eminijŭm ribut'ŭ*], which was triggered by the Gangnam Station femicide. The Gangnam Station femicide was the murder of a 23-year-old woman, who was stabbed to death in a unisex public restroom of a building near Gangnam Station on May 17, 2016. The perpetrator was a 34-year-old male, who stated he killed the victim, who was unknown to him, "because women have always ignored me."[1] Two days after the murder, citizens in

[146] Songvely, "*Myŏt siganjŏn issŏtdŏn hiphapch'odaesŏk sanghwang (feat.Pangt'ansonyŏndan)*" [The situation of Hip Hop Invitation Talk a few hours ago with BTS], New Bbang, November 21, 2013, http://cafe.daum.net/_c21_/bbs_search_read?grpid=1CxsU&fldid=680V&datanum=810284.

Seoul held a memorial service and left notes and flowers at exit 10 of Gangnam Station. Similar memorials appeared in other regions, including Busan, Daegu, and Daejeon. Hundreds of people, mostly women in their twenties and thirties, visited Gangnam Station to leave tributes to the victim. The station's exit was covered with flowers and sticky notes with handwritten messages left by visitors, although there were some clashes with members of the misogynist group, ILBE.[1] At the "Urgent Conference Regarding the Gangnam Femicide: The Current Situation of South Korea's Gender Violence [Kangnam Yŏsŏng Salhae Sagŏn Koallyŏn Kingŭp Chipdamhoe: Taehanminguk Chendŏp'ongnyŏgŭi Hyŏnjuso]," hosted by Korean Women's Association United, Seoul National University Professor Kim Sua claimed that one of the current problems with misogyny in South Korea is the denial of Korean women's citizenship, under the assumption that women do not deserve equal rights to men because they are not allowed to perform compulsory military service.

Angered by the Gangnam Station femicide, two female fans of BTS, Sunhye and Sunhyo, made a Twitter account called "Pangt'an Sonyŏndan Yŏsŏnghyŏmo Kongnonhwa" (Publicizing BTS's Misogyny) and requested an explanation of the BTS members' misogynist remarks and lyrics from the members and their company, Big Hit Entertainment (Sunhye and Sunhyo, personal interview, July 3, 2016). Some of the lyrics in question were from Rap Monster's mixtape, *RM*. Sunhye and Sunhyo cited the verse "Yeah, you're the best woman, bossy [*gapjil*] / That's why you're so f*cking bossy / Ah, but actually you've never been a boss / so I'll take out 'gap' and call you '*im*,' '*imjil*' [gonorrhea]," stating that the lines connote the traditionally misogynist rhetoric that women are either whores or virgins.[147]

[147] @bts_female_fan1, "(2)," Twitter, May 22, 2016, 12:31 a.m., https://twitter.com/bts_female_fan1/status/734285571653144576/.

Rap Monster, who debuted as a "hip hop idol" rapper, had constantly been attacked by underground hip hop rappers and their fans for "surrendering" to mainstream popularity and commercial success. Releasing songs in a mixtape form was an opportunity for him to show more of his genuine self: "Because I am on the mainstream scene, I thought I could express more raw things with less censorship or restraints when I release the mixtape."[148] In *RM*, Rap Monster followed hip hop convention by sampling other artists' beats and distributing his mixtape tracks for free. What Sunhye and Sunhyo could not accept, however, was Rap Monster's use of misogyny in the name of artistic freedom and aesthetics of hip hop.

> . . . On May 17, 2013, Suga, a member of BTS, posted a picture of himself holding a camera with the caption, "My dear, I have got my eyes on you. So if you look at [other idols], I will smash the back of your head with this camera." . . . "Converse High" and "Hormone War" include misogynistic lyrics as well . . . The majority of BTS' fans are females in their teens and twenties who are in the midst of learning gender roles determined by society . . . Most of the people who are asking for their feedback about their misogynistic behavior are also A.R.M.Y.s [fan club members] who have been supporting BTS for a long time . . . We would like to receive a response from the BTS members and their company, BigHit Entertainment, about the misogynistic tweets and songs they made in the past.[149]

In demanding an apology, Sunhye and Sunhyo identified themselves not merely as feminists but also as fans of BTS; they explained that this was a way of claiming their consumer rights. In this way, they appealed to the idols and the company by speaking for hegemonic female fans. When Sunhye and Sunhyo were threatened by RM and Suga's performance of hegemonic masculinity, they infantilized the male idols and reminded them

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[148] Pak Chu-nu, "*Raepmonsŭtŏ: 'Aidori miksŭt'aeibŭl palp'yohandanŭn gŏt* [Rap Monster: 'The fact that an idol releases a mixtape]," *Weiv*, March 23, 2015. http://www.weiv.co.kr/archives/20480.

[149] @bts_female_fan1, "[*Chŏnmun*] Pangt'ansony*ŏndan membŏdŭlgwa Pikit'ŭ Ent'ŏt'einmŏnt'ŭ-ŭi p'idŭbaek-ŭl* wonamnida (1)" [[Full text] We want feedback from BTS members and Big Hit Entertainment (1)], Twitter, May 22, 2016, 4:01 p.m., https://twitter.com/bts_female_fan1/status/734285464945856515.

that they were "idols" who were not only young but also subordinated to their consumers ("Based on how one reacts to his mistake, he can either grow up or face limitations").[150] They also stressed that this problem could be solved before it became more serious ("This is a matter of what kind of stance BTS will take before they become a rival-free global celebrity in the future").[151] In July 2016, when a major newspaper published an article about the protest, Big Hit Entertainment released its official apology, stating that

> . . . We have learned that musical activities cannot be free from any social prejudice or error, because the [musician's] growth process and experience, as well as things that he has learned from the society, may influence his [musical] activities. We have also learned that it is not desirable to define women's role or value in the society from a male perspective.[152]

This was the first official apology by an idol group and its company for their misogynistic production.

BTS fandom was not the only one that was influenced by the murder in Gangnam Station. JYJ's fan club withdrew its support of Park Yoochun for soliciting prostitution in June 2016. Fans of male idol groups, such as EXO (@exo_feedback), SEVENTEEN (@seventeen_femi), and VIXX (@stars2equality), opened Twitter accounts in November 2016 to point out their idols' misogyny, racism/colorism, and other types of discrimination. The account owners of @stars2equality stated that their main goal was not to blame VIXX but to educate the idols and themselves: "One might say that this is simply an account that publicizes [the idols'] hate speech, but we have made [this account] in the hope that [fans] can accept criticism and have self-critical voices within the fandom. Our final goal is to

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[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid.

[152] Yuna Yi, "*Pangt'ansonyŏndan 'Yŏhyŏmkasa, simnyŏkichŏ choesong' kongsiksakwa*" [BTS officially apologizes for the misogynistic controversies over the lyrics], *Sports Chosun*, July 6, 2016, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2016/07/06/2016070602522.html.

breakdown discrimination that is prevalent in society and to move altogether toward equality."[153]

The loss of fan support occurs when an male idol breaks the tacit promise with female fans that he will remain as a docile, and subservient boy—and threatens their dominant position. When the idol refuses to perform emphasized masculinity, female fans have no choice but to end their support for the idol (and the company) so that they can maintain their dominant position in the realm of K-pop. After all, a male idol's demonstration of hegemonic masculinity in the K-popsphere does not lead to dominance and social ascendancy, but a loss of popularity and publicity, and eventually, the end of his career as an idol.

H. Expulsion of Hip Hop Masculinity in the K-popsphere

From 2016, the so-called "radical feminist" websites—i.e., Megalia (2015-2017) and Womad—have demonstrated "mirroring" [*mirŏring*] strategies by counter-discriminating, mocking, and physically assaulting men. The public evaluation of Megalia was extreme, as feminists praised its contribution to Korean women's status while the self-proclaimed "equalists" [*ikwŏlisŭtŭ*] blamed the mirroring strategies as misandrist.

In November 2018, a fight between two women and three men in a pub near Seoul's Isu Subway Station started a gender-charged online debate when one of the women accused that she and her sister had been attacked by the three men for their "feminist choices" of "not

[153] MilkyWay to equality, "*Tansuni hyŏmobarŏn kongronwa kyejŏng-irago ch'inghal sudo iggejjiman, p'aendŏmnaebuesŏ pip'anjŏgin t'aedorŭl suyong-hago chajŏng-ŭi moksoriga naolsu itgil paramyŏ mandŭrŏjŏssŭmnida. Sahoe-e manyŏnan ch'abyŏlgwa hyŏmorŭl t'ap'ahago p'yŏngdŭng-ŭl hyang-hae hamkke na-aganŭn gŏsi ch'oejongjŏgin mokp'yoimnida*," Twitter, February 27, 2018, 7:09 p.m., https://twitter.com/stars2equality/status/836163761035603968.

wearing makeup" and "having short hair."[154] Within a day, more than two hundred thousand people signed a Blue House petition asking for the Presidential Office to punish the three men.[155] After the release of a short YouTube video clip of the two women—presumably the ones involved in the fight—making fun of the men's genitals, more than fifty thousand people signed another Blue House petition the next day, asking for the women to be punished for sexually harassing the men.[156] One of the women claimed she was severely wounded after one of the men kicked her down the stairs. However, the National Forensic Service announced that there was no evidence found on her clothes that supported her claim. The police also announced that the conflict was initiated when one of the women hit the hand of one of the men, describing the fight as "a mutual assault."[157] Meanwhile, rapper San E posted the YouTube video of the two women ridiculing the men on his Facebook page and released his new single, "FEMINIST":

> [Verse 1] I am feminist */ I believe women and men are equal / See, I mentioned "women" first / Like how "mom" comes first in "mom and dad"/ I also read a book / "The personal is the political" / Those were nice words / Women have always been oppressed / We, men, have always oppressed, historically /* But, *I don't understand*

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[154] Claire Lee, "'Isu Station' Assault Case Triggers Online Gender War in South Korea," *The Korea Herald*, November 18, 2018, http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181118000177.

[155] Kwang-su Pak, "*'Isu yŏk p'okhaengsagŏn' ch'ŏng kukminch'ŏngwon, Harumane 20 manmyŏng* ['Isu Station Assault' Blue House citizen petition reaches 200,000 people within a day]," *JoongAng Ilbo*, November 15, 2018, https://news.joins.com/article/23126063.

[156] Sŏn-myŏng Yi, "*Ch'ŏngwadae kukminch'ŏngwon taekyŏllo pŏnjin 'Isu yŏk p'okhaengsagŏn'…'Kahaeyŏsŏng ch'ŏpŏlhara' ch'ŏngwonin 5 manmyŏng tolp'a* [The Isu Station Assault becomes a Blue House petition competition…The number of petitioners who requested the punishment of female attacker exceeds 500,000]," *Kyunghyang*, November 16, 2018, http://sports.khan.co.kr/bizlife/sk_index.html?art_id=201811161101003&sec_id=560101.

[157] Claire Lee, "'Isu station' assault case triggers online gender war in South Korea," *The Korea Herald*, November 18, 2018, http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181118000177.

> [*those who say*] *that women and men are not equal today / I would if my grandma says that / But how much inequality have you faced today?/ Again you'll say among OECD countries, South Korea's gender pay gap is blah blah /* Fucking fake fact */ Hey, if you want rights that much, why aren't you going to the military?/ Why do I pay while we are on a date?/ What do you want more? / We gave you your own space in the subway, bus, and parking lots, why on earth? /* Oh, girls don't need a prince / *Then pay 50/50 for our house when we marry /* I'm no fucking prince */ I also have lots to say / Men are also victims of Confucian patriarchy / But why? Did I make this? Did I do this? /* Sister, why mad? Blame system, not men */* I am feminist[158]

In the first verse, San E rejects the idea that gender inequality exists in today's world and argues that Korean women selectively choose their rights and obligations, avoiding military service that is mandatory for Korean men and refuse to pay dating/housing expenses. In the second verse, he criticizes the "side effects" of the #MeToo and Corset-Free movements as well as South Korea's legal system that "counter-discriminates" against men:

> *I support the #MeToo movement, you know that, right? . . .* But *honestly, except those extreme cases / Why do you join #MeToo after having sex under agreement, after doing everything you want? / Are you a gold digger? . . . They sell their bodies and earn money while men become criminals under the fucked up laws . . . Also for the sane feminists, we should first get rid of misandry, WOMAD* [Korean "raedp'aem" (radical feminist) online community] / *Also the Corset-Free movement these days,* huh*? / I won't stop you /* But *you say that they all came from the male* [dominant] frame, what? */ When did we ever say that you should be pretty? / You did all the plastic surgeries for your own satisfaction / And now you're acting like a child / Not wearing bras, not shaving your armpits, cutting your hair short . . . Do you think that makes you an enlightened, progressive woman now? /* Equality sex? / Nah, that's *inferiority complex,* man */ I like your long hair,* don't change */ And I am feminist*[159]

The next day, San E clarified that it was not a misogynist song, because the speaker in the song is not himself. He concludes, "Since I am not a woman, I cannot understand and empathize with everything unless I am reborn as a woman. But men also do not want to live in a world in which we are afraid of any possible crimes. [Misogyny] can never be a good

[158] San E, "FEMINIST," YouTube, November 16, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QInRQ8zEGyM. Unitalicized lyrics are originally in English.

[159] Ibid.

reason to attack all men."[160] From the next day, female netizens criticized San E for ignoring the gender hierarchy between men and women, putting misogyny and misandry under the same hegemonic structure.

On December 2, San E's company Brand New Music held a concert with all its artists, including San E, despite the online protests against his appearance. The result was disastrous—some feminist listeners brought banners meant to sexually humiliate San E, and San E replied on stage, "I want to tell something to WOMADs and Megalians who came here. Feminist? No. You're just mental patients . . . I support normal women. WOMAD and Megalian are social evils."[161] After San E left the stage, Rhymer, the CEO of Brand New Music, abruptly ended the concert in defense of San E: "Each artist in Brand New Music has different thoughts, and their thoughts should be respected."[162]

The next day, fans of Lee Daehwi and Park Woojin, two idols at Brand New Music, started media protests against Brand New Music. On Twitter, fans used hashtags "*#SanE_bŭraennyuk'on_sagwahae*" (SanE, apologize for the Brand New Concert) and "*#Rhymer_bŭraennyuk'on_sagwahae*" (Rhymer, apologize for the Brand New Concert) for

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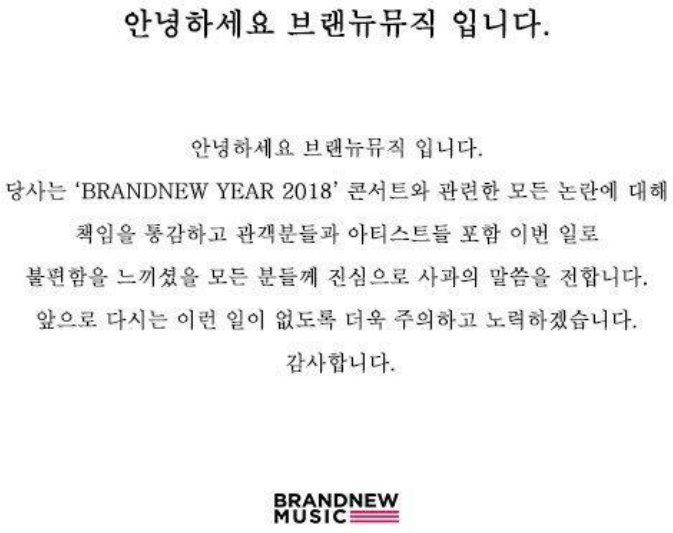
[160] To-hyŏng Kim, "*San E p'eminisŭt'u isshu haemyŏng, 'Mujogŏnjŏk hyŏmo t'adanghaji anta*" [San E explains the feminist controversy, "Unreasonable hate is not reasonable"], *MBC Sports Plus*, November 19, 2018, http://www.mbcsportsplus.com/news/?mode=view&cate=&b_idx=99872680.000.

[161] Chŏng-a Ch'oe, "*San E 'Ung-aeng-ung' sŏ 'Megarŭn chŏngsinbyŏng, sahoeak' … 'hyŏmo chojang' vs 'ppyŏ ttaerinŭn kasa'*" [San E states "Megal is mentally ill, social evils" in his song "Ung-aeng-ung" … "He is promoting hate" vs. "His lyrics are penetrating"], *DongA*, December 4, 2018, https://www.donga.com/news/Entertainment/article/all/20181204/93141557/2.

[162] Min-jŏng Shin, "*Raep'ŏ San E, ibŏnenŭn k'onsŏt'ŭesŏ 'P'eminisŭt'ŭnŭn no, nŏne chŏngsinbyŏng*" [Rapper San E says "Feminist? No, you are mentally ill" at a concert], *Hankyoreh*, December 3, 2018, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/872754.html.

San E's and Rhymer's remarks during the Brand New Concert. Two days later, Brand New Music released its apology:

Figure 4. Brand New Music's apology on its official Twitter.

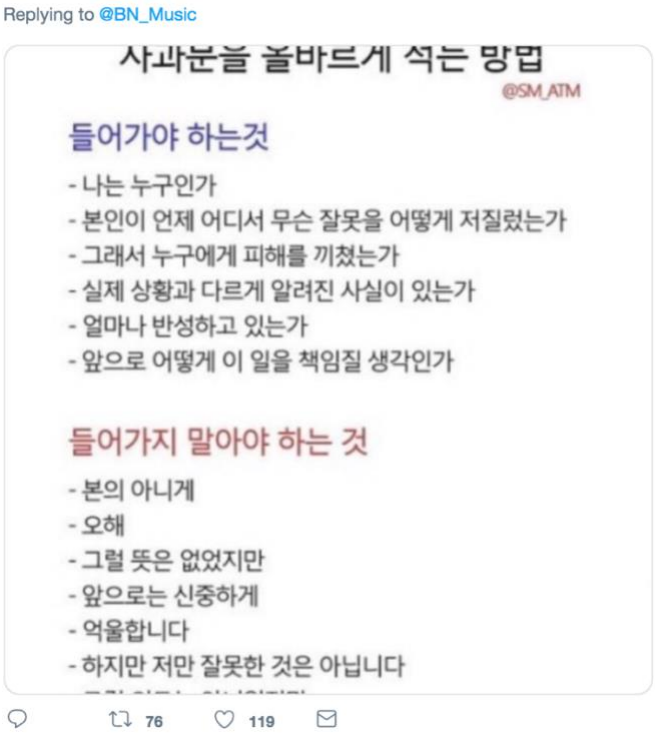


> Hello, this is Brand New Music. The company fully understands the responsibility regarding all the controversies over the "BRANDNEW YEAR 2018" concert and send a sincere apology to everyone, including the audience and artists, who felt uncomfortable by the incident. From now on, we will be more careful and try to avoid such incidents. Thank you.[163]

However, the vague statement drew bigger criticism from the fans for being "insincere." Many fans added an image of "How to write a proper apology," a popular image used by K-pop fans for a situation similar to this one:

[163] Brand New Music (@BN_Music), "*Annyŏnghaseyo Bŭraenyumugik imnida*" [Hello, this is Brand New Music], Twitter, December 4, 2018, 12:01 p.m., https://twitter.com/BN_Music/status/1069788643680649217.

Figure 5. Fans teach Brand New Music how to apologize properly.



> How to write a proper apology by @SM_ATM.
> What to add: Who am I? What kind of misbehavior did I conduct, and when and where did I conduct it? So who became the victim of my behavior? Is there any wrong information known to the public that must be fixed? How much do I regret? How will I be responsible for this issue in the future?
> What to remove: "Unintentionally," "misunderstanding," "I didn't mean it, but," "From now on, attentively," "I am innocent," "But I'm not the only one who did the wrong thing," "I didn't intend to do so, but."[164]

One of the fans who attached this image also added,

> Is [this apology] a preview [of a longer version]? All the company staff must apologize to everyone who were uncomfortable with your deceptive behaviors at the concert, and please, if you're going to develop the four members of BRANDNEWBOYS's career as idols, do not make them get in touch with those who do hip hop. It is hopeless to leave the four members with the company if the company's going to act like this.[165]

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[164] Although the original tweet has been removed, a number of fans uploaded the same tweet under Brand New Music's tweet. For instance, see @dh012486, Twitter, December 4, 2018, 12:05 p.m., https://twitter.com/dh012486/status/1069789831608205312.

[165] @_010129_hwi, Twitter, December 4, 2018, 12:27 p.m., https://twitter.com/_010129_hwi/status/1069795346618830848.

After unrelenting media protests, Brand New Music uploaded a longer version of its apology and cancelled its contract with San E. The incident shows how idol fans taught a company that had been a hip hop label and became an entertainment company for idol artists—to learn idol fandom culture and manners that the companies must internalize to communicate with K-pop fans.

I. Conclusion

When I asked EXO fan Sunyoung why she doesn't date a "real" guy, she replied, "A real relationship is too complicated. It gives me a headache. But idols? You just turn on your cellphone and click the V LIVE application icon. Then a handsome boy tells you he loves you. You can enjoy that moment with no responsibility. So why would I seek a real relationship with *hannam* [a disparaging nickname for patriarchal Korean men]?" (Sunyoung, personal conversation, July 28, 2016). In 2019, the average age of one's first marriage was 30.6 for women and 33.4 for men.[166] The most influential factor for the marriage of men in their thirties was their income; for women, however, their limited social mobility and economic status after marriage mattered the most, because "women quit their job several years after their marriage or experience career breaks until their re-employment."[167] By 2020, South Korea's fertility rate ranked 198 among 198 countries in the

[166] *Maeil Business Newspaper*, "*2019 Honinihon: 'Anaeyŏnsang' chohonbubu chŭnggase… Chŏnch'eŭi 17.5%*" [2019 Marriage and divorce: Increase in the first marriage of older wives… taking up 17.5% of the whole], March 19, 2020, https://www.mk.co.kr/news/economy/view/2020/03/285525/.

[167] Kwi-dong Cho, "*Kyŏlhondo iche t'ŭkkwŏn: 30 tae namsŏng, wŏlsotŭk 100 manwon tang kyŏron hwaknyul 12.4%P ssik olaganda* [Now marriage is a privilege: Possibilities of marriage for men in their thirties rises 12.4% if they earn 1 more million won]," *Chosun Biz*, November 21, 2017, http://biz.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2017/11/21/2017112101915.html.

world, according to the United Nations Population Fund.[168] More young women than ever call themselves "*pihon*," a single person who *refuses* to get married, instead of "*mihon*," a single person who has *not yet* married.[169] Many of my interviewees complained that "It is hard not to become a feminist once you become an idol fan" due to the constant threat of hegemonic masculinity, although shaping and perpetuating a docile masculinity subordinated to femininity through the fans' collective voice, is more feasible in the K-pop world than in the "real" world.

Despite the small number of scholars' works on girls' subculture focusing on the empowerment of girls, academia maintains its convention of pathologizing fangirls by stereotyping them as feminine, infantile, and irrational. However, female fans' assertion of hegemonic femininity in their interactions with male idols and as a social structure of the K-pop industry demonstrates new meanings and practices of femininity and leadership in the K-pop business world. Drawing from my case study, I argue that the academic tradition of pathologizing female fans is itself partly a legacy of heteronormativity and sexism in its premise that presents fans as having to give up such a "childish" activity, marry a "real" man, and have "real" children. As I have demonstrated in the case of K-pop female fans in their twenties and thirties, their fan activities did not occur at a sudden point in their adulthood as an escape from heteronormative rituals. Rather, being a K-pop fan has been a "normal" part of their regular lives since adolescence, back when H.O.T became popular nationwide. The

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[168] Kyŏng-dam Pak, "*Han-guk ch'ulsanyul 1.1 myŏng… 198 kaeguk chung '198 wi'*" [South Korea's fertility rate is 1.1… ranked 198 among 198 nations], *Money Today,* June 30, 2020, https://news.mt.co.kr/mtview.php?no=2020063015572976672.

[169] Ŭ-jin Kim, Chin-ye Yu, Mun-gun Ho and Sŭng-a Hong, "*Kyŏlhon kŏbuhanŭn pihonchŭijadŭl: Honja sanŭn nae insaeng-ŭn oeroun nakwŏn* [*Pihon* ideologists who refuse to get married: My life without marriage is a lone paradise]," *Shin DongA,* January 2018, http://shindonga.donga.com/3/all/13/1179827/1.

intersection of female dominance and Korean hegemonic femininity reflects ways of performing citizen-subjectivity as Korean women within the realm of K-pop.

V. Media Labors and Fandom Capital in the Online Moral Economy

K-pop fans claim to be producers and marketers of K-pop productions. They establish a set of putatively moral practices in the milieu of information technology and digital media in order to maintain their entitlement as "fans." These criteria of moral behavior also serve as a way for fans to accumulate and maintain their fandom capital, so that they can aptly exert control and power over the idols and entertainment companies. I use the term "fandom capital" to refer to a type of cultural capital that serves as a form of property and marker of class in the fandom and K-pop market. Fandom capital includes: the number of followers on social media accounts, visibility and publicity in online fan communities, recognition from the idols, and so on. While performing their media-based labor, such as music chart manipulation, hashtag movements, online protests, mail attacks against company decisions, and "underground" media productions, fans also police other fans to maintain the balance of the online fandom ecology.

Mass media objects have become diverse, including texts, images, sounds, characters, and many other audiovisual representations of lifestyles during the process in which fans constructed their vast scale of networks on the internet, the. As a non-Western music industry that has heavily relied on fans' reuse, remix, and redistribution of the original content on the internet for its broader global audience, the K-pop industry has shown an extremely generous and negotiable attitude toward those who claim to be "fans" and sell illegal idol-related merchandise with no legal business licenses. I find that maintaining entitlement as a "fan" is a significant criterion for being involved in the moral economy of K-pop. What kind of relationship between the companies and fans has developed today's K-pop moral economy? What are the kinds of economic and/or social values that entertainment companies hold behind this seemingly altruistic attitude? Lastly, what does it mean to be a "fan"? How is it

defined, and what kinds of qualifications and investments are needed to publicly violate copyrights and publicity rights as a fan?

This chapter explores new forms of social relations, capital assets, and networks in the K-pop industry and in forms of fandom in which individual and corporate actors create and impose newly-created social norms and ethics on digital media networks. How are ethics defined in the context of keeping the balance of K-pop ecology, by whom and through which process? Who do millions of fans collect everyone's voice and deliver their opinions to the companies? In return, how do companies respond to the fans' requests? In the process of articulating ethical standards, what kinds of social hierarchies are created, and how are existing identity categories of gender and sexuality, class, and nationality contested and reestablished? In order to investigate informal conflicts and negotiations between entertainment companies and fans and between different groups of fans, I have conducted several years of ethnography on social media platforms, including Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Daum Café, V LIVE, Lysn, and Weverse. Just as in other chapters, this chapter is an outcome of my field research involving participant observation and interviews that are conducted on online media platforms. For this reason, I begin with explaining my fieldwork and methodology on digital media.

A. Entering the Digital Enclave of K-pop

Fieldwork on the internet and digitized spaces has become more common in today's ethnographic research. With different emphases on technological, epistemological, ontological, and spatial properties of the internet and digital media, scholars have called it different names such as: cyberethnography (Robinson and Schulz 2009); digital ethnography (Murthy 2008; Pink et al., 2016; Hjorth et al., 2017); discourse-centred online ethnography

(Androutsopoulos 2008); ethnography of/on the internet (Beaulieu 2004); ethnography of virtual worlds (Boellstorff et al., 2012); internet ethnography (Sade-Beck 2004); netnography (Kozinets 2010); network ethnography (Howard 2002); virtual ethnography (Hine 2000; Constable 2003; Robinson and Schulz 2009); and webnography/web ethnography (Puri 2007).

I find "transmedia ethnography" appropriate to describe my research. Terms such as "digital ethnography," "internet ethnography," "web ethnography" and "online ethnography" focus on the technological aspect of the field site, excluding performativity of the researcher and her interactions with participants in the culture. "Virtual ethnography" proffers more emphasis on the researcher's epistemological and phenomenological presence, although it raises an ontological question of what it means to be "virtual" and "actual/real." Early scholars of online ethnography had tackled whether a cyberspace can be deemed a field site in which field researchers conduct participant-observation of an online community (Escobar 1994; Jones 1999; Beaulieu 2004). Researchers of cybercommunities argue that a community is not always physically perceived but can be socially constructed in a symbolic form (Fernback 1999; Burrell 2017) because, after all, a community is imagined and parasocial rather than "real" (Anderson [1983] 2006; Calhoun 1991). As ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice puts it, "there is no field there; the field is the metaphorical creation" of the ethnographer (Rice 2008:48). As I have discussed transmedia fan activities in Chapter 2, my participant-observation as a K-pop aca-fan was conducted in a transmedia environment. I have developed an intimate image of my favorite idol by watching television shows and YouTube clips, collecting videos and photos, sharing memes, and chatting about these activities with other fans via social media. In this sense, "transmedia ethnography" aptly

describes my performativity as an ethnographer but also explains my field sites and technologies relevant to my research.

As a transmedia ethnographer, I conducted participant-observation by developing a microcelebrity fan account on social media. Sociologist Christine Hine stresses that ethnographic engagement involves active participation in the field—in this case, the researcher's online activities—rather than simply lurking and downloading archives on the internet (Hine 2000:23). Indeed, such active participation have enabled me to gain abilities of "thick description" of the online K-pop fandom (Geertz 1973). In the beginning of my fieldwork, it was not difficult to find famous *homma* fan accounts, although they rarely responded back to me when I revealed myself as an ethnographer and asked for an interview for my work. After realizing that famous fan accounts form a network on their own, I decided to become one of these microcelebrity fan accounts. As a bilingual fan, I made a translator fan account, which eventually gathered more than 190,000 subscribers on YouTube and 50,000 followers on Twitter.

In order to gain more followers, I had to differentiate myself from other translating fan accounts. One strategy was to upload more quickly than others—I had usually uploaded my translated version of television shows or YouTube clips of the idol group within 30 minutes to 8 hours, depending on the length of the show clip. Participant-observation in the K-pop fandom meant active fan labor and accumulation of fandom capital by gaining fame, reputation, and visibility in the fandom—in my case, my fan labor was to translate what the idols said and convey their words to non-Korean fans as fast as possible. I had to be agile enough to know the idols' upcoming schedules, record the television show, download the raw file, add subtitles on it by using a video editing program, convert the subbed video, upload it on YouTube, and notify the followers about the new subbed video on Twitter.

Although I gained hundreds of thousands of followers on social media, I had never told my followers—except a handful of them who later became "friends" through regular online chat and in-person meetings—that I was an ethnographic researcher. There are ethical concerns regarding the omnipresence of the ethnographer and the tilted relationship between the ethnographer as a lurker and the participants in the culture as her research subjects. And I also faced challenges in revealing myself as an ethnographer. Market research ethnographer Anjali Puri considers researcher invisibility a positive factor that facilitates speed and efficiency of data collection and analysis (2007). Others, however, consider ethnographic lurking and avoiding online interactions to be problematic and unethical for the participants in the online culture (Beaulieu 2004). Christine Hine points out that participating in a private group without revealing one's role as a researcher poses a "considerable ethical problem," because online interactions are "sufficiently real for participants to feel they have been harmed or their privacy infringed by researchers" (2000:23).

My challenge was to determine what is deemed private on the internet. Sometimes it was clearly manifested, as some fan accounts were private and some were not. Direct messages were also deemed private. As I learned more about K-pop fanhood, however, it became more difficult to determine what fans preferred for documentation, because, even if something was entirely public, fans utilized the nature of the internet spaces and manipulated what could be provided to general audiences. Fans were very aware of the fact that things are never removed on the internet; instead, they cover up things with other texts. For instance, if an idol's scandal is trending on Twitter, the idol's fans would intentionally make other keywords go trending along with the idol's name, so that the scandal-related keywords would not gain visibility to non-fan audiences.

I have realized, when it comes to my choice of using online data, it is a matter of how I respect the idols and fans who are currently active in the field. I have used case studies and data that were acquired: (1) from fans as an ethnographer; and (2) as a fan, through my own fan labor. I did not reveal myself as an ethnographer to the hundreds of thousands of followers of my account. But as an ethnographer, I made my status and current research clear when I conducted one-on-one interviews with the participants and asked them to choose whether they wished to remain anonymous—in this case, remaining anonymous means not to reveal their real names as well as their usernames on the internet. Even after I established friendships with my previous interviewees and created private chatrooms, I always asked them if I could quote their conversation. I also encountered with a good amount of useful resources while I was on social media as a fan, but I have quoted individual fan accounts, only when their posts were open to public. I have used screenshot images of fan club websites; however, I did not use entertainment companies' paid content that should remain exclusive to paid members.

My experience as a fandom ethnographer—including fan labor, transmedia fan activities, and cyberbullying—made me realize that there is a unique online moral economy at work between the K-pop industry and fandom. By exploring the history of music chart manipulation and related legislation, I will explain the background context of how fans have gained their status not merely as eager promoters of their favorite singers but also as investigators who monitor suspicious media manipulations conducted by rival companies. K-pop fans investigate and report suspicious media manipulation acts to their idols' companies, thereby securing their fandom capital and maintaining alliance with their idols and companies. Fans make their financial support indispensable to an idol's career and maintain their dominant position by policing and legally reporting rival companies' chart

manipulation. In the second half of the chapter, I will demonstrate the ways in which fans claim their entitlement as members of the industry and intervene in the corporate policy making process as decision makers in the company. Fans' inspection and reports on rival companies are voluntary, but not cost-free. Their entitlement as fans eventually leads to the legal use of trademarks, publicity rights, and copyrights of idols and media productions. Exploring the social relations between the K-pop industry and fans will also allow us to understand how the industry and fans utilize media technologies to achieve equilibrium in the K-pop moral economy.

B. Music Charts and Fandom Wars

Moonjoon seemed upset and anxious. He smoked a cigarette for a moment and said, "Okay, I forgive my company." "What happened?" I asked. There was a negotiation between him and Group D—another idol group in his company—over their album release:

> I was supposed to release my single on Monday, but then Group D [in Moonjoon's company] also wanted to release their album on the same day. So I changed my release date for them. But then something happened to them and they had to change it again to Wednesday. The outcomes of the accumulated streaming chart and album sales are drastically different based on whether [you release an album] on Monday or Wednesday. It greatly affects the chart on the following week. But now Group D wants to release their album on Wednesday, so they want me to postpone mine to Thursday. Then I'll be wasting four days of that week. Also, there are rapid changes on the charts from Thursday once music chart programs start broadcasting their shows. So, Thursday is somewhat dangerous [to release an album]. (Moonjoon, personal conversation, October 1, 2015)

As Moonjoon explains, a company with multiple artists must consider the schedules of all of its artists because it has to effectively distribute the workload for each artist, but also to maximize its profits by ensuring that all artists will rank at the top of the music charts. Rankings are important, especially for idols who wish to secure opportunities for the next solo album release, because companies do not support solo albums as much as those of

groups due to their low album sales. In Moonjoon's case, Group D was planning to release their group album on the same day Moonjoon was going to release his single, and the company decided to concentrate on Group D's promotion, expecting to gain more profit from it. As a result, Moonjoon had to change his single release dates based on Group D's promotion dates, and he eventually grew frustrated when he was assigned to a potentially less profitable day. Popular artists with similar genres or concepts also avoid similar album promotion dates to secure the largest audience share and broadcast appearance.

Because album sales from the first week of release reflect the popularity of the artist, both Moonjoon's company and his fans will promote his album in various ways. Moonjoon will promote his album by performing at music chart shows from Thursday to Sunday for one to two weeks. Meanwhile, his fans will visit the music chart shows as audience members to emotionally support Moonjoon, stream the song online, watch the music video multiple times on his official YouTube channel and buy physical album copies, because the first week's album sales will reflect the size of the fandom and will lead to greater promotion, popularity, and media exposure of the artist.

The Gaon Chart and the Hanteo Chart are two major sales tracking systems that track sales of music and music video products in South Korea.[170] Both charts provide sales information for the television music chart shows such as Inkigayo, Music Bank, and M Countdown, and fans will make a group order from particular stores that are affiliated with either the Hanteo or Gaon Chart so that their purchase will not be omitted from the album sales count. As the following diagram demonstrates, rankings on the music chart shows are

[170] Due to the constant problems with music chart manipulation, the Korea Music Content Association established the Gaon Chart sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2010. The Chart was made to provide information on record sales with "accuracy and credibility," although it has never opened its tracking method to avoid fans appropriating the method for chart manipulation.

determined by online streaming, traditional (physical) album sales, view counts of the official YouTube music video, fan votes via cellphone apps, and more:

Table 5. Evaluation methods of television music programs' music charts.[171]

Music Chart Ranking Shows / Methods	SBS's Inkigayo	KBS's Music Bank	Mnet's M Countdown	MBC's Show! Champion
Online Streaming	55% (based on Melon, Genie Music, Bugs, and the Gaon Chart)	65%	45% (based on Melon, Genie Music, Bugs, and Mnet)	30% (based on Melon, Genie Music, Bugs, and Soribada)
Album Sales	5% (based on the Gaon Chart)	5%	15% (based on the Hanteo Chart)	10% (based on the Hanteo Chart)
Social Media (view counts of the official music video on YouTube)	35%	n/a	20%	n/a
Fan Votes	5% (via Melon's cellphone app)	10% (via a survey on the website)	10% (via M Countdown homepage, Mnet Japan's online votes)	50% (via Genie Music 20%; Idol Champ and Genie Music apps, 20%, and music critics' choice 10%)
On-Air Points	10%	20%	10%	10%
Real-Time Voting During the Show Time	n/a	n/a	+10% (only for the winner candidates)	n/a

Music charts in South Korea are not a mere barometer of public taste on popular music or the general popularity of an artist. They are the outcome of harsh competition between idol fan clubs. A higher rank on the music charts leads idols to get more media

[171] The "On-air points" category refers to the number of the song being aired on the television/radio shows of the relevant broadcasting companies.

exposure, publicity, and profits. This will lead the company to invest more in the idol's next album, and thus fans will be able to continue enjoying high-quality tracks and music videos. Idol groups from small companies may disband within a year if they fail to draw sufficient financial support from their fans. In other words, fans must invest in their favorite idols to expect quality tracks and music videos in the future, while leveling the playing field by surveilling rival companies' "unusual" album sales. Meanwhile, idols' dependency on their fans results in a hierarchical relationship in which fans claim ownership and exert control over their idols.

C. Music Chart Manipulation by the Industry

The history of music charts in South Korea goes back to the 1960s. The first radio DJ, Ch'oe Tong-ŭk from the broadcast company DBS, hosted the first music chart radio programs, Tong-a Pesŭtŭ 10 (Donga Best 10) and Kayo Angk'orŭ (Korean Pop Encore), for Western pop and Korean pop from 1963 until the 1970s. Since the 1980s, public television networks have aired music chart shows, which had served as one of the most important indicators of the popularity of pop songs and artists. KBS aired Gayo Top10 from February 1981 until it discontinued the show in February 1998 for "inappropriately encouraging entertainment" during the IMF Crisis, but it launched the new music chart program Music Bank soon in June after pushback from viewers.[172] MBC—i.e., Show Network, 1989-1990; Yŏrŏpunŭi Inkigayo (Your Pop Songs), 1990-1993; Kyŏlchŏng Ch'oego Inkigayo (Decide

[172] Sang-hwa Kim, "IMF *oehwanwigi sat'ae 20 nyŏn…Kŭttae kayogye to pyŏrang kkŭt wikiyŏtta*" [20 years since the IMF Crisis…The then popular music scene was in crisis as well], *OhMyNews*, November 22, 2017, http://star.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/OhmyStar/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002378935&CMPT_CD=P0010&utm_source=naver&utm_medium=newsearch&utm_campaign=naver_news.

the Best Pop Songs), 1993; Inkigayo BEST 50 (Pop Songs BEST 50), 1995-1998; Ŭmak Kaempŭ (Music Camp), 1998-1999; Saengbangsong Ŭmak Kaempŭ (Live Music Camp), 1998-2005; Show! Ŭmak Chungsim (Show! Music Core or Music Core, 2005-present in 2020—and SBS—i.e., Inkigayo (Popular Song), 1991-1993; Sŭt'a Seoul Sŭt'a (Star Seoul Star), 1993-1994; Saengbangsong TV Kayo 20 (Live TV Pop Songs 20), 1994-1998; Inkigayo, 1998-present in 2020—have also maintained their own music chart television shows since the late 1980s and early 1990s respectively. Later, cable television networks also launched music shows such as Show! Champion, The Show, and Simply K-Pop. While introducing the weekly chart of pop songs, the programs air pop musicians' live or pre-recorded performances for 1-2 hours.

Controversies over fairness of data calculation for a music chart have continued since its first broadcast on radio shows in the 1960s. One of the major newspapers, *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, released a 1965 column entitled "Pop Songs and Broadcast Networks: The Right and Wrong of Popularity Votes [*Taejunggayowa Pangsonggukkwa… Inkit'upyoŭi Sibi*]," concerning radio stations receiving popularity votes for pop songs from listeners via postcards and playing Korean songs that were "lowbrow" for copying Japanese pop: "Because the songs are selected by the listeners . . . [the radio stations] are flooded with lowbrow songs."[173] The discourses on the popularity vote in the 1960s and 70s centered on whether radio stations broadcast "instructive and wholesome" properties of pop songs, although by the 1980s and 90s, the concerns shifted to whether the entertainment media industry was manipulating the music charts for artists' publicity. In 1987, the two major

[173] *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, "*Taejunggayowa pangsonggukkwa…Inkit'upyoŭi sibi*" [Pop songs and broadcast networks…The right and wrong of popularity vote], August 4, 1965, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1965080400329205003&editNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1965-08-04&officeId=00032&pageNo=5&printNo=6091&publishType=00020.

national broadcasting networks KBS and MBC changed their methods for calculating the popularity of music for their popular music awards after they found some singers sending in a massive number of votes for themselves and gaming the numbers by asking for votes from their fan club members.[174] Journalist Pak Ch'an-su exposed the corruption within the entertainment industry in 1995, reporting that some managers paid about 2-3 million Korean won to have their singers appear on a television show and hundreds of thousands of Korean won to play their singers' songs on a radio program. A singer's manager who was under police investigation allegedly paid twenty million won to a [music show] producer and spent four hundred million won in total, because managers and singers would earn more profits from album sales, nightclub performance fees, and commercial model fees once they earned more opportunities for media appearances through bribery.[175]

Entertainment companies have continued to manipulate music charts after the voting platform moved to the internet. In July 2012, an entertainment news program reported an interview with a broker from a Chinese company that manipulated the South Korean music charts by mass-downloading and mass-streaming a particular song upon the order of their customer company. The broker explained, "[The manipulation] shouldn't be noticeable;

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[174] *Donga Ilbo*, "*Kayodaesang—Kasuwang sŏnjungpangsik pakugiro 'Yŏnmal mudŏgiyŏpsŏ mana kongjŏngsŏng-e munje*'" [Korean pop music awards—changes its selection method of the best artist, 'problems with fairness due to the massive postcards at the end of the year], October 16, 1987, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1987101600209212010&editNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1987-10-16&officeId=00020&pageNo=12&printNo=20319&publishType=00020.

[175] Chan-su Pak, "*Pangsong yŏnyegye piri silt'ae 'Inki=Ton' Suŏkdae twitkŏrae yesa*" [The corrupted reality of the entertainment media industry 'Popularity=Money' Secret deals of hundreds of millions of won is commonplace], *Hankyore*, January 15, 1995, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1995011500289116001&editNo=5&printCount=1&publishDate=1995-01-15&officeId=00028&pageNo=16&printNo=2123&publishType=00010.

otherwise you'll get caught. Rookies should be exposed within the TOP 50 for a while, then go up to TOP 30 on their next album, and then to TOP 20. We coordinate those steps together [with our customers]."[176] According to the Korea Creative Content Agency's 2017 Music Industry White Paper, the size of the South Korean music market was 858 million US dollars in 2016, whereas those of Japan and the United States were seven times (5.996 billion dollars) and twenty times (17.219 billion dollars) bigger, respectively, than that of South Korea.[177] Because of the small size of the Korean popular music market, it has not been difficult to top the charts by purchasing a few thousand albums. From the mid-2010s, fans began to surveil the "abnormal" changes of album sales of their idols' rivals.

D. Fans' Surveillance of the Industry's Music Chart Manipulation

"*Sajaegi*" originally refers to a bulk-buying practice, although in the K-pop scene, it only refers to bulk-buying that is conducted by a company to gain a sudden increase in album sales during a promotional period. It is considered fair game if the bulk buying is conducted by fans; however, it is illegal when a company buys its own album, expecting a higher rank on music charts and subsequent media exposure and popularity of the idol group.

Fans question a company's *sajaegi* practice when they find the album sales: (1) exceed the average of previous album sales; (2) drastically increase outside the aggressive marketing period, i.e., the fansign event weeks; and/or (3) surpass the album sales of rival

[176] Min-ji Yi, "'*Ŏk' Sori nanŭn tonimyŏn ŭmwŏnch'atŭ 1 wi pyŏlkŏanya, chat'ŭjojak kyŏng-ak*" [one can top the music chart anytime with hundreds of millions of won, the manipulation of music chart is shocking], *Newsen*, July 25, 2012, http://www.newsen.com/news_view.php?uid=201207252121402410.

[177] Korea Creative Content Agency, *2017 Music Industry White Paper*, http://www.kocca.kr/cop/bbs/view/B0000146/1835647.do?menuNo=201826&categorys=0&subcate=0&instNo=0&pageIndex=1#.

artists who have been more popular in the past. Once a fandom finds their rival's album sales anomalous enough to threaten their idol's ranking, fans become suspicious that the rival company has manipulated album sales and request feedback from the rival company. When Momoland's album *Great!* sold eight thousand copies within a day on February 12, 2018, fans of SEVENTEEN, iKON, Red Velvet, and other idols who were promoting albums during the same period, requested feedback from Momoland's company, Duble Kick Entertainment, by tweeting the hashtag, *#Momoland_sajaegi_p'idŭbaek_yoguhamnida* (Momoland, respond to the hoarding rumor).[178] To avoid blaming the group but targeting the company as a courtesy to the rival fandom, some used an alternative hashtag, *#Dublekick_sajaegi_p'idŭbaek_yoguhamnida* (Dublekick, respond to the hoarding rumor), so that the company could be blamed instead of Momoland. According to the Hanteo Chart, Momoland's albums had sold twelve copies a day during the past six weeks, but eight thousand copies of Momoland's album were sold in a day—more specifically, one thousand copies per hour. Fans from the rival groups claimed that this total was anomalous, as it occurred not during the fansign event period or the first week of the album release but right after SEVENTEEN's first-week sales ended. Based on the anomalous volume of Momoland's album sales, they claimed that Duble Kick hoarded albums to win the No.1 spot on music chart shows the following week when SEVENTEEN, one of the strongest candidates for No.1 on the chart, finished their promotion.[179] Duble Kick denied having

[178] Duble Kick later changed its name to MLD Entertainment.

[179] Loving the star (@Lovingthestar_), Twitter, February 13, 2018, 12:53 p.m., https://twitter.com/Lovingthestar_/status/963086146929438720.

engaged in *sajaegi*, stating, "We are also surprised by the surprising amount of sales in a day. There is no reason to do *sajaegi* and we are not in a [financial] situation to do so."[180]

As 885 copies were sold in addition on February 13, however, reporters also raised questions. The record store Hot Tracks, which owned twenty-three branches in Seoul, revealed that it only stocked a few copies of Momoland's albums. Reporter Hwang Chi-yŏng stated that it would be impossible to sell nine thousand copies within a day, because the Jamsil branch, which had stocked the greatest number among Hot Tracks branches in Seoul, kept six copies, while other branches kept two to three copies at most.[181] Fans continued to request "evidence"—in principle, the company's innocence can be demonstrated only when Momoland's fans provide their group order receipts; however, none of the fans provided any. In the afternoon, Duble Kick stated that the result was an accumulation of their February order: "In fact, the initial stock for Momoland's album was very little, about one thousand copies. Then the preorder increased, and including the order from Japan, the total accumulation [of album sales] in February resulted in 8,200 copies . . . [8,200 copies] were not sold in a day."[182] This meant that the Hanteo Chart's album sales record was incorrect.

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[180] Mi-hyŏn Hwang, "*Kongsikipjang: Momoland ch'ŭk 'Sajaegi? Kŭrŏl iyu ŏpta… Sunsu p'anmaeryang*" [Official statement: Momoland, 'Hoarding? There is no reason to do so…This is the real sales amount], *News1*, February 13, 2018, http://news1.kr/articles/?3235564.

[181] Chi-yŏng Hwang, "'*Haru 8200 chang' Momoland 'Sajaegi anya' vs maejang 'Soryangipgo*'" ['8200 Copies in a Day' Momoland say 'It's not hoarding' vs. stores say 'We stocked only a few'], *IS Plus*, February 13, 2018, https://news.jtbc.joins.com/article/ArticlePrint.aspx?news_id=NB11589376.

[182] *Herald Pop*, "*Momoland ch'ŭk 'Ŭmban Sajaegi? 2 wol yeyakbun modu hapsandwen such'i*" [Momoland says, 'Hoarding? It is a total amount that includes pre-orders in February], February 13, 2018, http://pop.heraldcorp.com/view.php?ud=20180213174014784088 4_1.

After midnight, the Hanteo Chart's CEO Kwak Youngho directly responded that the Hanteo Chart's record of Momoland selling over eight thousand copies in a day on February 12 is not an error. He stated,

> If the controversial sales of Momoland's album turns out to reflect bulk buying from an involved party, not actual sales, we will take aggressive legal action . . . According to Article 3, Clause 2 of the Hanteo Chart's contract with affiliated retailers, the retailers must send us data that satisfy our requirements regarding sales condition. Furthermore, under Article 4, Clause 2, regarding good faith, confidentiality, and copyrights, the retailers must not provide fraudulent data to the Hanteo Chart through artificial manipulation . . . Because providing false data to the Hanteo Chart is considered serious obstruction of business, we have agreed to terminate the store's affiliation with us and are demanding compensation for damages incurred.[183]

On the next morning on February 14, Duble Kick released an official statement:

> Hello, this is Momoland's agency Duble Kick Company. First of all, we would like to clearly announce that the controversial hoarding rumors regarding Momoland's album sale is not true. We would like to inform you that based on the company's investigation, we found that the current album sales were made through group orders by domestic and international fans via a few retailers. Momoland is planning its Japanese promotion starting on February 28 with the release of *Momoland KOREAN Ver. Best Album*. However, because the new single "Bbum Bbum" that is on the major Japanese charts is not included in the Japanese album, there were many requests from Japanese and international fans regarding the album that included "Bbum Bbum," so the company has instructed them how to purchase the album. We consider the upsurge in album sales on the 12th to be the result of Japanese and international fans' album purchases after the announcement of official Japan promotion . . .[184]

However, fans from the rival groups pointed out that: (1) there were no retailers that would stock such a large number of album copies; (2) international fans usually make group orders via the internet, not by visiting South Korea and purchasing albums in person; (3) they

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[183] Hyŏn-sik Kim, "*Hanteo Chart taep'yo 'Momoland aelbŏmp'anmaeryang chipgye, chŏnsanoryu anya*" [The Hanteo Chart CEO says, 'Momoland's album sales record is not an electronic error'], *Nocut News*, February 14, 2018, http://www.nocutnews.co.kr/news/4924640.

[184] Sŭng-rok Yi, "*Kongsikipjang: Momolaendŭ 'Sajaegi anya…Kuknae mit haewe p'aen kongdonggumae' kongsik palp'y*"*o* [Official statement by Momoland, 'It's not hoarding…It's a group order from domestic and international fans'], *MyDaily*, February 14, 2018, http://www.mydaily.co.kr/new_yk/html/read.php?newsid=201802141132687288&ext=na.

may have been bought by Korean fans, although the statistics for Momoland's fan club members on the official fan club website show that there was no drastic increase between February 1 to 12;[185] (4) occasionally, when the inventory is not available, fans may make a preorder and have the album delivered later, but this was not the case for Momoland, and the Hanteo Chart does not include preorders in the album sales record, either;[186] and (5) an individual retailer might have purchased the albums, although considering the constant increase in sales hour by hour, it doesn't seem like an individual bought all eight thousand copies.[187] A week later, the Hanteo Chart announced that it would file a petition to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to launch an investigation and claimed that "[Duble Kick] is manipulating the media too much."[188] Duble Kick once again asserted its innocence and provided pdf images of the confirmation of album purchase by a retailer, the invoice that a Korean retailer sent to the Japanese buyer, and the payment confirmation from the Japanese buyer. It further revealed that Momoland's promotion agency in Japan apparently purchased the albums for its promotion purposes and that it was the Japanese agency's own decision.[189]

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[185] Mumyŏng-ŭi tŏku, "*Hant'ŏ ch'atŭ Gaon ch'atŭ Momolaendŭ sajaegi tongsi chŏkyŏk*" [The Hanteo Chart and Gaon Chart attack Momoland at the same time regarding the hoarding], *The Qoo*, February 27, 2018, https://theqoo.net/square/681712888.

[186] Pyŏng-gŭn Chŏng, "*Momolaendŭ, 8200 misŭtŏri…Haemyŏng-edo ŭihokyŏjŏn*" [Momoland, the mystery of 8,200 copies …The suspicion doesn't go away despite the explanation], *JoyNews 24*, February 14, 2018, http://www.joynews24.com/view/1077707.

[187] Anonymous, "*Mari kyesok pakkwinŭn Momolaendŭ sajaegi nollan*" [Momoland keep changing their statement over the hoarding controversy], *Dmitory*, February 13, 2018, https://www.dmitory.com/garden/10376389.

[188] Ye-na Kim, "*T'ŏbŭl K'ik 'Sajaegi nollan hwangdang' vs Hant'ŏ Chatŭ 'Sosoksa ŏnp'ŭl' chinsil kongbang*" [Duble Kick says, 'Hoarding controversy is ridiculous' vs. the Hanteo Chart says, 'Duble Kick is manipulating the media,' a battle over truth], *TV Daily*, February 27, 2018, http://mtvdaily.asiae.co.kr/article.php?aid=15196915821328275010.

[189] Chŏng-a Yi, "*Momolaendŭ chŭk 'Sajaegi anya… Munch'ebu chosa put'ak' yŏngsujŭngkkaji konggae*" [Momoland says, 'It's not hoarding…We'll provided the receipt

Fans from the rival groups continued to claim that: (1) Mihwadang Records, the retailer that sold eight thousand copies to the Japanese agency, was run by Munhwain, the indie label of Loen Entertainment—and Loen Entertainment was the co-publisher of Momoland's album; (2) Duble Kick forged the invoice, because the bank swift code written on the invoice was changed in January and was unavailable by then; (3) the company also forged the payment confirmation from the Japanese buyer, as the payee's phone number was apparently the phone number of another entertainment company that was unconnected to Mihwadang.[190] Mihwadang apologized and clarified that it was a "mistake," and the Ministry concluded that Duble Kick did not violate the Music Industry Law Article 26, i.e., "hoarding or bulk buying by an interested party."[191] Momoland won No.1 at Music Bank a week after the controversy, although some fans from other groups called the group a disparaging nickname, "*Sajaegiland* [Hoarding Land]." In August 2018, the Hanteo Chart also announced its new policy of endowing a framed "Certificate of Physical Album Sales" to those who purchased more than one thousand physical album copies. Moreover, as international fans participate in the South Korean music chart competition, the Hanteo Chart announced its plan to add a hologram coupon in the CD that allows overseas buyers to certify

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to the Ministry's investigators], *SBS News*, February 23, 2018, https://news.sbs.co.kr/news/endPage.do?news_id=N1004637194.

[190] Anonymous, "*Momolaendŭ Mihwadang-ŭi songgŭm ŭirwesŏ such'iin chŏnhwabŏnhoe Plan A (Aeipink'ŭ, Pikt'on sosoksa) chŏkhyŏissŭm*" [Plan A (Apink and Victon's company)'s phone number is written on the payee box on Momoland Mihwadang's payment receipt], *Instiz*, February 23, 2018, https://www.instiz.net/name_enter/52204617.

[191] Sŏn-myŏng Yi, "*Momolaendŭ sajaegi ŭihok pŏsŏtta…'Tamtangja silsuro kyŏllon'*" [Momoland proves their innocence…'Concluded as a worker's mistake], *Sports Kyunghyang*, June 25, 2018, http://sports.khan.co.kr/sports/sk_index.html?art_id=201806251637003&sec_id=54010.

the purchase via a QR code.[192] In July 2018, the Gaon Chart's policy board that consisted of six major music streaming and downloading services (i.e., Naver Music, Bugs, Melon, Soribada, Mnet.com, and Genie) also decided to suspend real-time charts from 1 a.m. to 7 a.m. to prevent chart manipulation.[193]

The long, exhausting public dispute among multiple fan clubs, Duble Kick Entertainment, and the Hanteo Chart with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism's intervention is one of countless *sajaegi* controversies in the K-pop scene. While the controversies are not new, fans' thorough investigations and the industry's immediate responses imply the importance of the issue. While it impacts the reputation and credibility of the companies and institutions, it also influences fans' fandom capital assets and reputation in the K-pop fandom.

E. Music Chart Manipulation by Fans

From the early 2000s, the global music industry shifted from physical album sales to digital music sales including mp3 downloading, file sharing, and subsequently, online streaming. It has also had a gradual decrease in physical album sales in the 2010s—Drake's new album *Scorpion*, for example, earned No. 1 on the Billboard 200 Chart, although it was the lowest-selling album that topped the chart in the twenty-seven-year history of Nielson

[192] Hyŏn-sik Kim, "*Chikkyŏk intŏbyu Hant'ŏ Chatŭ taep'yo 'Such'ul injŭngjedo toiphe K'eip'ap kŭllobŏllaengk'ing sinsŏl*" [Interview with the CEO of the Hanteo Chart, 'We will establish 'K-pop Global Ranking' by institutionalizing the export certificate policy], *Nocut News*, August 16, 2018, http://www.nocutnews.co.kr/news/5016260.

[193] Sŭng-hun Chi, "*Ŭmwonsaitŭ, 11 ilbutŏ silsigan ch'atŭ simyasigandae unyŏng chungji kyŏljung*" [Music streaming websites determines to suspend operating the real-time charts at nighttime from July 11], *YTN*, July 9, 2018, https://www.ytn.co.kr/_ln/0117_201807090947221387.

Music, selling twenty-nine thousand copies in the U.S. for two weeks.[194] The only album that sold two million copies in the U.S. in the last two years was Taylor Swift's 2017 album *Reputation* that was released in November 2017; 1.216 million copies were sold in its first week.[195] It was one of the only two albums that sold more than a million copies in 2017. According to the Billboard Chart's senior director Keith Caulfield, it shows "a stark contrast to ten years earlier, when twenty-nine albums sold at least one million, with eight of those surpassing two million."[196]

The South Korean music market was one of the early frontrunners in this shift. Its digital music revenue has surpassed that of physical albums since 2004. In 2011, South Korea was the only country in which digital track sales surpassed those of physical albums.[197] Its fast adaptation to digital media technologies and services, however, did not necessarily indicate a complete shift from the physical to the digital. Physical album sales in South Korea dropped in the early 2000s but then increased in the 2010s. Most recently, K-pop group BTS released their new album *LOVE YOURSELF 結 'Answer'* in 2018 and sold 1.93 million physical album copies in the first eight days, thanks to the industry's diverse marketing strategies. Entertainment companies produce diverse versions of albums that

[194] Keith Caulfield, "A New Sales Low for the Week's Top Selling-Album in the U.S.," *Billboard*, July 20, 2018, https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/8466413/a-new-sales-low-for-the-weeks-top-selling-album-in-the-us-billboard-charts.

[195] Keith Caulfield, "Taylor Swift's 'Reputation' Becomes Only Album Released in Last Two Years to Sell 2 Million Copies in U.S.," *Billboard*, March 21, 2018, https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/8257460/taylor-swift-reputation-sells-two-million.

[196] Ibid.

[197] Korea Creative Content Agency, "2017 Music Industry White Paper," http://www.kocca.kr/cop/bbs/view/B0000146/1835647.do?menuNo=201826&categorys=0&subcate=0&instNo=0&pageIndex=1.

include different album booklets, photos, and other tie-in products with the same music tracks. They also hold fansign events for those who purchase the album at a designated store during the first one or two weeks. Because only one to two hundred fans are invited to each fansign event, entertainment companies select fans either based on the number of albums purchased or at random from the pool of album buyers. As a result, passionate fans who wish to meet their idols in person and *homma* fans who have tens of thousands of online followers waiting for newly-updated on-site photos of the idols often buy more than one hundred physical copies, aiming at a higher chance of getting the tickets for fansign events. Bulk buying is illegal when it is practiced by a company or "audio/visual production-associated dealers for the purpose of increasing album sales."[198] Bulk buying by fans, however, is deemed legitimate by both the K-pop industry and fandom, as it requires collective, voluntary labor that entails time, money, and effort by thousands of individuals. The organized and systematized fan labor not only demonstrates the fandom's overall power and capacity but has become indispensable for an idol's musical career. An idol once complained during her Instagram Live broadcast that she cannot release her album anymore because of the lack of fan support, stating, "If you guys [fans] worked hard and put my song at the top of the chart I could have released my single again."[199] Later, she deactivated her account and apologized to her fans after it drew criticism. Her remark shows the significance of fan support in idols' album sales and their future careers in the recording industry.

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[198] The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, "*Ŭmak chinhŭng-e kwanhan pŏpnyul: che 26 jo, ŭmbandŭng-ŭi yut'ongjilsŏ hwaknip mit chiwon*" [Industry Promotion Act: Article 26, the establishment of order and support on the distribution of music albums and more], http://www.law.go.kr/법령/음악산업진흥에%20관한%20법률.

[199] Sŭl-bi Yi, "*Tana 'Myŏnmok ŏpda'… Insŭt'agŭraem laibŭbangsong nollan sagwa*" [Dana Says 'I Have No Words to Say'… Apologizes for Her Controversial Instagram Live Broadcast], *Kukmin Ilbo*, November 28, 2018, http://news.kmib.co.kr/article/view.asp?arcid=0012877376.

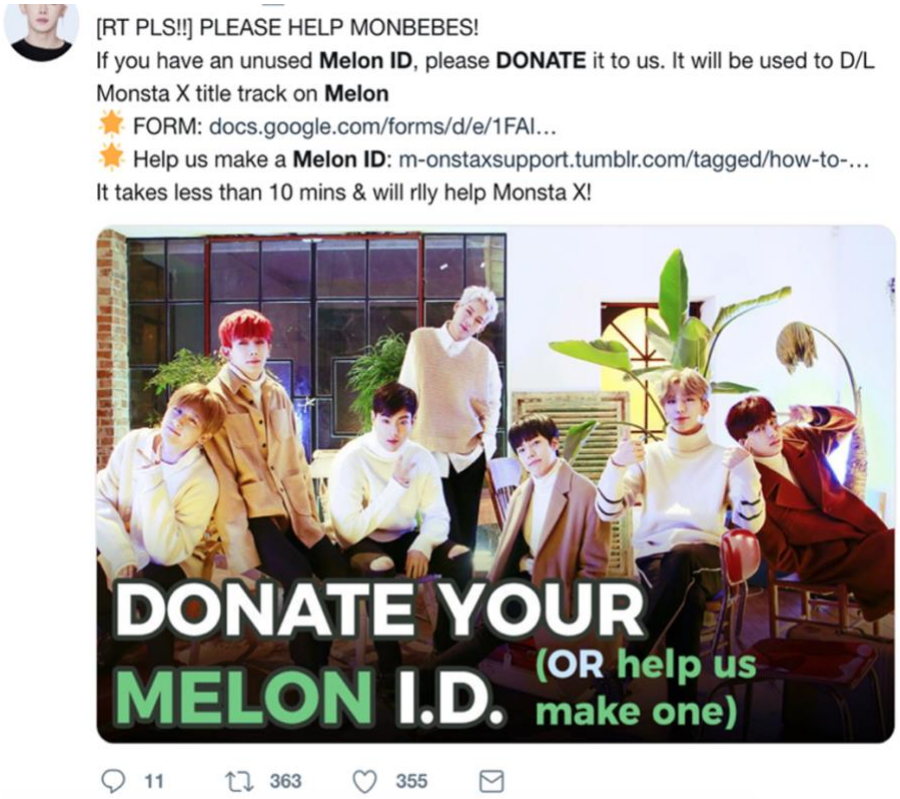
There are multiple ways for fans to manipulate the charts, from bulk-buying physical albums to promoting an album via hashtags on social media, streaming the album 24/7 with multiple IDs, putting the album title on the "most searched word" list on Korean search engines, playing the music video multiple times on YouTube so that the video will gain more visibility from the public as a "trending" video. When streaming songs online, fans strictly observe the "rules" to be counted on the music charts: (1) make sure to "stream" the song on the app instead of downloading the mp3 file; (2) never stop in the middle or replay a certain part of the song, because it won't be counted as one stream; (3) using multiple devices will not count if you use the same ID, so make sure to stream with multiple IDs; (4) mute and play the song while you sleep; (5) the streaming service may stop when you stream for a long time, so check occasionally; (6) more scores will be added to the music chart if you download each song respectively, instead of downloading the entire album; (7) start downloading the songs thirty minutes after the album is released; and (8) follow the recommended playlist distributed by the fan club, because only one stream per song will count within an hour—the fan club's playlist is the most effective way to put multiple tracks on the chart.[200]

Fans who voluntarily engage in streaming labor ask other fans to lend or "donate" the streaming website IDs so that they can collect these and maximize the streaming numbers that will be counted for rankings in the music show charts. Once these volunteers receive the donated IDs, they log in and download the song tens of thousands of times and put the song at the top of the chart. Occupying No. 1 on the chart is also important for drawing public

[200] Mumyŏng-ŭi tŏku, "*Ŭmwon sŭt'ŭriming/sŭming kwallyŏn kaidŭ p'ŏmjŏngrigŭl*" [Music streaming guide summary], The Qoo, July 30, 2017, https://theqoo.net/wannaone/528521777.

attention, since the general public does not search for new singles from each artist but often listens to pop songs based on the music chart, starting from the No. 1 song.

Figure 6. An "ID donation" request for online streaming.



F. Fandom Capital Assets as Shares in the Company

In mid-December 2018, the hashtag "*#Pledis_kyejŏngt'onghap_chŭkgakch'ŏlhoe*" (Pledis, cancel the plan of merging accounts right now) was trending on Twitter in Seoul. It was CARATs, SEVENTEEN's fan club, who were trending the hashtag as a way of protesting against Pledis Entertainment, the entertainment company of SEVENTEEN, who decided to merge SEVENTEEN's YouTube channel with that of Pledis. As a declaration of their objection, numerous CARATs posted their boycott announcement on their Twitter accounts. Some of the major fan accounts circulated a guide for the boycott.

According to CARATs, the controversy started when Pledis uploaded its artists' support messages for students who were taking the *sunŭng* exam, South Korea's college entrance exam that is held annually in November. Pledis had uploaded each artist's support message every year on the *sunŭng* day, and a number of fans started to raise questions when the video message was not posted on each group's YouTube account but that of Pledis. Sunha, who is a CARAT, recalls,

> After fans started asking questions, the company removed only SEVENTEEN's video clip from its channel. At that time, it wasn't an issue, but the fandom [CARATs] found out in late November that all of the new teasers and music videos of NU'EST, a group in Pledis, were uploaded on Pledis's channel. So there was a rumor that Pledis was merging [its artists'] YouTube channels, and fans started to trend hashtags while asking the company about the issue via the fan [club] website from early December. But it was not confirmed back then and there was no official announcement either, so we didn't proceed a full-scale attack until then. (Sunha, personal interview, December 20, 2018)

The "full-scale attack," or "*ch'onggong*," is a term that refers to fans' collective action of acquiring visibility through various types of media. For instance, "*sŭming ch'onggong*" (streaming attack) or "*t'up'yo ch'onggong*" (voting attack) refers to fans' collective action of manipulating the online streaming chart or voting on year-end music awards. Fans also conduct "*tŭnggi ch'onggong*" (mail attacks) by sending a massive number of letters stating their position, demand, and/or intention of boycotting. "*Haesit'aegŭ ch'onggong*" (hashtag attacks) is one of the most common attacks that aim at publicizing a certain issue by trending certain Twitter hashtags, which provide information about current trending issues, such as a boycott of a company or an idol's birthday.

When Pledis uploaded the new music video teaser on December 14, 2018, fans were convinced that the merger rumor was true. Sunha claims that major reasons for the boycott were: (1) the discrepancy in terms of the numbers of subscribers between SEVENTEEN's channel (approx. 3,250,000) and that of Pledis (approx. 610,000); (2) the nullification of

SEVENTEEN's channel that SEVENTEEN and CARATs have used for a long time since the group's pre-debut years; and (3) CARATs' unwanted subscription to other Pledis artists' content (Sunha, personal interview, December 20, 2018). Sunha further argues that "At this moment of Pledis preparing for its new idol group, we can only assume that Pledis is expecting an influx of fans to the newly-debuting group" by merging its artists' channel with that of Pledis (ibid.).

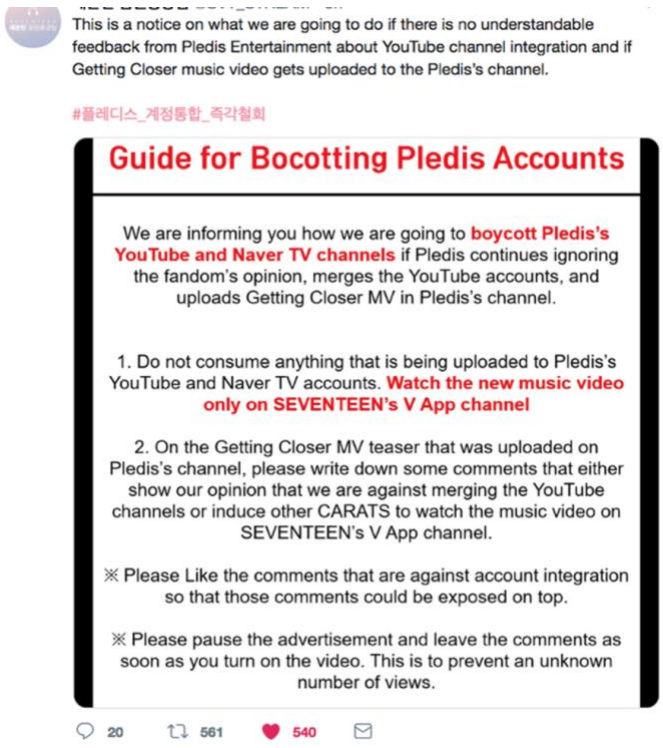
Figure 7. SEVENTEEN fans boycott Pledis on SEVENTEEN fan club's official website. Screenshot by Sunha.[201]

In the K-pop market where view counts and numbers represent fandom power and determine the longevity of a group, the company's decision to discard the record of music

[201] The boycott is usually held in a fan community board in the fan club's official website and is inaccessible to non-members.

video view counts that fans accomplished would be a unidirectional decision taking fandom capital assets away from both SEVENTEEN and CARATs. One of the SEVENTEEN fan accounts tweeted Korean and English hashtags, "*#Pledis_YouTubet'nghap_kyŏlsabandae*" and "#PLEDIS_YOUTUBE_BOYCOTT," claiming that "SEVENTEEN is already being disadvantaged due to Pledis YouTube integration. Saying that boycotting Pledis has a direct impact on SEVENTEEN and being unable to join the boycott will only cause greater damage to SEVENTEEN's upcoming comeback and future activities . . ."[202] Another fan account posted the "Guide for Bo[y]cotting Pledis Accounts" and encouraged other CARATs to join the boycott:

Figure 8. A fan account circulates instruction how to boycott the company.



[202] SVT_INTL (@SVT_INTL), Twitter, December 18, 2018, 7:50 p.m., https://twitter.com/SVT_INTL/status/1074980334771437568.

After a few days, Pledis's CEO tried to have a conversation with CARATs on the fan club website, imploring CARATs to support his decision on Pledis's YouTube policy:

> Hello, this is Han Seongsu, the CEO of Pledis Entertainment. First of all, I appreciate SEVENTEEN fans' love and affection as a representative of the Pledis Entertainment staff. Also I would like to begin by apologizing to you. I always try to listen to you, but I am still not good at understanding each and every one of you . . . I have been contemplating [the policy regarding SEVENTEEN's YouTube channel] for a long time. I also fully understand your worries . . . An entertainment company that produces K-pop must not only manage its artists and produce content but also must become a platform itself. Only after the company becomes a large platform and develops its capacity can its artists demonstrate their abilities on a larger scale . . . The YouTube policy is the beginning of a change in order to develop the company's capacity and to keep up with current trend . . . I once again apologize for not considering a way of making you fully understand. Still, I hope you [trust] my decision.[203]

The boycott continued until the next year, however. Eventually, on January 8, 2019, Pledis announced its cancellation of the integration of its YouTube channels, stating that "It should be the company that makes decisions for its management policies, including those regarding its YouTube [channels]. However, we believe the policies and principles are also a process of SEVENTEEN producing fruitful results and fans becoming happier. We will make our best effort to understand you and artists and achieve better outcomes in the future."[204] Pledis's reluctant decision to maintain SEVENTEEN's YouTube channel demonstrates how entertainment companies are occasionally forced to consider fans to be decision makers regarding company policies, especially when they are related to the idols' and fans' fandom capital assets.

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[203] Pledis, "*Annyŏng-haseyo. Pledis Entertainment Daep'yo Han Seongsuimnida*" [Hello. This is Han Seongsu, the CEO of Pledis Entertainment.], Daum Café, December 19, 2018, http://cafe.daum.net/pledis-17/fBt2/262.

[204] Ibid.

G. Fans' Censorship of Other Fans

One of the common understandings of fans' roles is that fans serve as promoters and patrons of their idols. The majority of Korean fans concur with the idea of "fans as producers" who consider themselves to be decision makers in production processes and able to launch protests against the companies to convey their opinions, whereas some international fans claim that Korean fans often "cross the line." When Korean fans of BTS, or "K-Armys," were protesting against BTS's collaboration with a Japanese producer who was known as a misogynist and pro-imperialist in the eyes of Korean fans, non-Korean fans of BTS, or "I-Armys," discussed whether K-Armys were entitled to force the company to retreat from its decision on BTS's collaboration project. When K-Armys suggested I-Armys join the protest, some of the I-Armys chose either to remain neutral or to criticize K-Armys for being "possessive" with the idols:

> This really is a K-Army issue. In my opinion, I-Army have no say in it. We just need to be here to support our boys no matter what the outcome is.[205]

> . . . are we less of a Fan just because we don't speak Korean or do we love BTS any less that K-ARMY? Didn't they said themselves that language barrier is non existent between us ?[206]

> it can be seen as k-armys controlling bts and bighit, but that means we can do that too as i-armys, we just gotta work altogether and create a big force if we found something that might harm /BTS/ and their reputation[207]

[205] Lora (@GummyYoongiiiii), Twitter, September 16, 2018, 12:15 a.m., https://twitter.com/GummyYoongiiiii/status/1040982454436278274.

[206] Myriam (@Myriam905), Twitter, September 17, 2018, 4:03 a.m., https://twitter.com/Myriam905/status/1041402156304265222.

[207] I:NM (@Eosowa), Twitter, September 16, 2018, 8:37 p.m., https://twitter.com/Eosowa/status/1041290025680330752.

While K-Armys gathered on a fan club website—where they could have closed and direct communication with the company—and uploaded more than fourteen thousand posts to urge the company to cancel the collaboration, I-Armys continued to discuss whether K-Armys' protest would affect BTS's reputation negatively and would eventually damage the overall image of the group. One of the most popular videos, which was retweeted by 5.6K accounts and liked by 9.7K accounts, asked for a peaceful reconciliation:

> Some think K-ARMY r the wrong part…others think that I-ARMY r the wrong ones…when in fact BOTH parts r wrong becuz they r not seeing the GOAL #1…they are forgetting about this… [In the video] I-Lovelives, K-Diamonds…I-Lovelies are afraid that BTS would feel controlled by their fans. And K-Diamonds are afraid that BTS would get hatred from their own country. Isn't it the same thing here?! Loving BTS and being afraid of hurting them? Arguing and fighting each other, [dividing] ourselves. How is that gonna protect BTS?![208]

Whether I-Armys supported K-Armys' protest or not, their debates demonstrate how much fans feel entitled to make their voices heard in the industry, and how their entitlement is determined by their cultural proximity and contribution to the idols' current popularity and commercial success. During K-CARATs' protest against Pledis over the YouTube policy change, I-CARATs were worried that the Korean fans' protest would harm the idols' reputation and careers. In regards to their worries, Korean fans explained their position in English:

> At this point, we have no intention of withdrawing the boycott. Rather, we think it is the best and most proper time to boycott. SEVENTEEN is already being disadvantaged due to Pledis YouTube integration. Saying that boycotting Pledis has a direct impact on SEVENTEEN and being unable to join the boycott will only cause greater damage to SEVENTEEN's upcoming comeback [new album release] and future activities. We are not interested in forcibly convincing CARATS who do not wish to join us in boycotting, so please reduce the conflicts within the fandom and support SEVENTEEN in whatever ways you wish to … We believe it is a process for SEVENTEEN's and CARAT's better future, and we thank those CARATS who are joining us. We ask you to say with us until the end.[209]

[208] Typical BTS ARMY (@Typical_BTSArmy), Twitter, September 17, 2018, 2:27 a.m., https://twitter.com/Typical_BTSArmy/status/1041378054315155456.

Protests are conducted in sophisticated and organized ways supported by the consensus of the fan community. The consensus is reached arbitrarily—fans do not ask for a general opinion through surveys, but figure it out by whether other fans oppose the protest or not. In other words, if there is no objection, they will continue the protest. In many cases, such attacks are conducted by "*ch'onggonggye*" (attack account), an account that is run by multiple fans to conduct various types of attacks. The account is, for example, used to promote music chart voting during the album promotion period; but it will also be used to encourage other fans to participate in the boycotting or mail attacks in special occasions when fans oppose certain decisions made by the company. These account owners, however, do not hold a special position in the fandom; the account is run anonymously and other fans do not know who the account owners are.

Based on the type of issue, the protest may proceed *publicly* or *internally* on the internet. When fans assume that publicizing the issue will not affect the idol's reputation (e.g., Pledis's YouTube policy case), they proceed with the online protest on both Twitter and the official fan club website called "fan café" [*p'aen k'ap'e*] so that the company can readily respond to it before the issue is known to news reporters and the general public and eventually harm the credibility of the company. However, when a problem occurs as a result of the idol's wrongdoing (e.g., the idol's embezzlement of fan club funding), fans attempt to fix the problem internally by protesting only within the closed fan club website, so that news reporters and the general public will not be informed about the issue until it is solved. In many cases, these fan cafés do not accept new members during this period. Occasionally, idols ask fans not to publicize their posts outside the fan cafés, although they can sometimes

[209] SVT INTL (@SVT_INTL), Twitter, December 18, 2018, 7:50 p.m., https://www.twitter.com/SVT_INTL/status/1074980334771437568.

be publicized by news reporters who already have access to the website. When fans are disappointed with the idol to the point that they no longer find it meaningful to protect the idol's reputation, fans become determined to expose the idol's misbehavior to the public. This happens mostly when fans feel exploited by the idol and decide not to sustain their fan activities anymore.

Fans also surveil behavior or remarks of other fans, attempting to censor them if they think they will harm the idol's public image. Sunbin, who has been a fan of Group E as a translator fan, complains,

> I was once blamed by another [fan of Group E] for literally translating [the idol's] remark in a video clip where [the idol] complimented [his member's] dreadlocks. He literally said "*dǔredǔ*" [dreads] in Korean, so I translated his words [in English] to "dreads," but a black girl was mad at me for accurately translating his words and giving him a bad name. It was ridiculous. She didn't blame him but me. (Sunbin, personal interview, July 5, 2018)

The fan, who was offended by Sunbin's direct translation of the idol's remark, was aware of the controversial issue of Korean idols culturally appropriating dreadlocks. Although she was aware of the fact that the idol stated "dread" in Korean, she blamed Sunbin, not the idol.

On many occasions, such "problems" are accumulated yet tolerated by fans up to the point where fans are disappointed at and/or feel betrayed by the idol and decide to publicize everything they have tolerated so far. Very often, these "accumulated problems" are exposed when fans are disappointed by their idol's dating scandal. When EXO's Baekhyun admitted to dating Girls Generation's Taeyeon, Baekhyun's fans, who by then turned into anti-fans, exposed his past misdeeds; when H.O.T's Moon Heejun announced his marriage, his fans announced their withdrawal of support and exposed his illegal business activities; and when Shinhwa's Eric announced his marriage, fans complained about Shinhwa's recent low-quality concerts and Eric's lack of leadership in the group. To fans, exposing their idol's drawbacks is a final resolution, a way of renouncing their fandom capital assets that they

have accumulated so far in a particular fandom. Once Sunbin, for example, leaves Group G's fandom, she is not only renouncing her entertainment channel and community but is also renouncing her tens of thousands of followers and leverage in the fandom. Accordingly, idols and their companies take it seriously when fans become anti-fans, because their loss of fans results in their loss of fandom capital.

H. The "Underground" Scene on the Internet

I stated in Chapter 4 that there are "*yangji munhwa*" (overground culture)— public online spaces in which fan-idol interactions occur—and "*ŭmji munhwa*" (underground culture), hidden spaces in which only fans reside and express explicit sexual desires in regards to idols, primarily through fanfic narratives of same-sex romance. Although fanfic is a "peripheral" genre that is even deemed illegal, fans secure their fanfic practices by observing norms and remaining in the online underground spaces. I will focus on how individual fans utilize multiple media platforms and manage texts for different purposes. I argue that there is no single, linear hierarchy or a core community of digital media, but instead a web of networks among numerous individuals who interact with idols in multiple ways with multiple attitudes—for instance, by kindly responding to idols' real-time chats on the one hand and writing extremely sexual fanfic content on the other.

Along with other fan activities, fanfics have been a significant part of K-pop fan activities. Fans share their fanfics on fanfic platforms such as the Archive of Our Own (AO3), one of the largest non-profit fan production websites in the world. Among 195,500 K-pop fanfics, 186,720 fanfics are written in English, 2,311 in Chinese, 1,607 in Russian, 1,550 in Spanish, 1,293 in Indonesian, 348 in French, 343 in Brazilian Portuguese, 177 in Turkish, 115 in Korean, 92 in Polish, 86 in Dutch, and 82 in Italian. The largest numbers of

fanworks at AO3 are: 193,000 fanfics about Harry Potter; 136,800 about The Avengers; and 84,600 about Star Wars. Although AO3 cannot represent the entire K-pop fanfic world, since there are other local-, nation-, and language-bounded fanfic websites that are more popular than AO3 in some regions, K-pop fanfic is undoubtedly one of the most popular activities in international fandom. Unlike the low participation rate in AO3, Korean fanfic writers and readers often use the Korean writing community POSTYPE, which provides a section for "*p'aench'angjak*" (fan creation), including K-pop fanfics. Famous writers earn hundreds of thousands of views.

Fans are exceptionally cautious about expressing sexual desires on Twitter since idols occasionally search their own names on social media. 2PM member Ok Taecyeon once stated publicly that he will sue two Twitter users who were making sexual jokes about him in their tweets. The users did not tag him or mention his name in their conversation, although Ok Taecyeon accidentally found them sexually harassing him on a thread of tweets.[210] It is important to note that the fans were talking about Ok Taecyeon not as an imaginary RPS character but as a real person. However, even if it is written in an RPS form, most of the fans do not wish their idol to read their posts and purposely distort their idols' names so that the names cannot be searched but can only be read by their account followers. BTS member J-Hope once teased his fans by listing all the distorted names, or the so-called "*ssŏbang tanŏ*" (search protection words) that fans used to refer to the BTS members—for instance, Namjoon as "Naemjyoon," Seokjin as "Swuokjin," and Yoongi as "Yoomgi"—on a newly-released CD booklet. After fans realized that J-Hope was aware of the search protection

[210] Chin-sŏk Kim, "*Ok T'aekyŏn, sŏngherong net'ijŭnege 'Sŏnch'ŏttawin parajima' koso sisa*" [Ok Taecyeon Implies Suing Netizens Who Sexually Harassed Him, 'Do Not Ask For Favorable Arrangements], *JoongAng Ilbo*, February 9, 2014, https://news.joins.com/article/13845789.

words, they dropped those names from the search protection word list and started using new distorted names to refer to BTS members on social media platforms.

A major sentiment in K-pop fandom regarding homoerotic fanfics is that "underground should remain underground." At the 2015 LA KCON, one of the largest K-pop conventions overseas, organizers hosted the "Live Erotic / Sexual K-pop Fanfiction Reading" event—it was an open mic session in which fanfic writers brought their own stories and read them to the audience. One of the BL transcripts narrated a homoerotic pairing of two EXO members, Baekhyun and Chen. The session received great attention, although soon thereafter it faced severe criticism for allowing fans to sexualize and objectify the idols in public while the idols were present at the convention.

Paul Booth explains that fan fictions are "subversive acts that are, or can be, supported by the same culture that is being subverted" (Booth 2010:72). Fan fictions subvert the "political power of the established media oligarchy" by rewriting and rereading copyrighted materials. Media producers also unofficially and passively support this particular act of copyright infringement, as it serves as a way of advertising the product (ibid., 73). KCON's sexual fanfic reading session was sanctioning the act of publicity right and copyright infringement but also provided a marketing model of business gay performance for idols (see Chapter 4).

I. Homma Fans and Publicity Right Infringement

There are no existing regulations on publicity rights in the current Korean law, but there is a precedent that acknowledges the right of publicity as "an exclusive right of an individual to use and control a commercial use of one's name, image/likeness, and/or other aspects of one's identity" and a commercial use of a celebrity's image as an infringement of

publicity right.[211] According to the Civil Code Section 750, celebrities may claim damages when a third party commercially uses their name, publicity, or related character.[212] But so far, none of the companies and idols have sued fans for making unofficial merchandise and violating publicity rights.

Homepage masters [*hommasŭtŏ*], who are also called "masters" in English or "*homma*" in Korean, are fans who take high-quality photos at airports, concerts, fan sign events, and fanmeets and upload the photos on their homepage. Sunjae recalls her experience of becoming f(x) Sulli's *homma* fan:

> After I graduated high school, I went to see Sulli for the first time and became friends with a *homma* fan there. She hid behind me and took photos of Sully, and that's how we became friends. And then I eventually became friends with her other *homma* friends and learned all the photography skills from them. Then [as a *homma* fan] you can either open a homepage or a blog. But when you just open a homepage, people wouldn't come, so you should upload preview photos on your Twitter account and tell them to come to the homepage. (Sunjae, personal interview, April 15, 2016)

There are no clear official criteria on whether *homma* fans are violating idols' privacy. Moonho states that he used to refuse to say hello or smile to *homma* fans on the airport, but as it became mor popular, he began to accept the culture (Moonho, personal conversation, August 18, 2016). Super Junior Heechul talks about his standard of violation of privacy:

> Heechul: I'm okay with fans coming to my workplace. Because it's a workplace and I exist because they exist. They can come where I put makeup on, but if they come to a place where I don't put makeup . . . Especially coming to my house is…
> Host: I heard that [*homma* fans with] expensive cameras followed you when you came here.
> Heechul: Yes, but I don't treat them as *sasaeng* [stalkers]. When I hear them taking photos of me, I also walk in a stylish way. Because when these fans take my photo and upload it on the internet and post it as "Heechul *oppa* on his way to [the show],"

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[211] Korean Ministry of Government Legislation, "*Sonhaebaesang(ki)dŭng*" [Compensation for Damages], http://www.law.go.kr/판례/(2006다 25745).

[212] Korean Ministry of Government Legislation, "*P'ŏbŭllisit'ikwon*" [Right of Publicity], http://easylaw.go.kr/CSP/CnpClsMain.laf?popMenu=ov&csmSeq=530&ccfNo=4&cciNo=4&cnpClsNo=2.

> then the show will be mentioned again among fans as well. So I'm totally fine with [fans coming to] my workplace.[213]

By commenting on fans' behavior through various channels, idols inform fans what is permissible and what is not, and fans learn the officially illegal but internally permissible practices. By the late 2010s, *homma* fans taking photos of their idols during the commute to work became an entirely normalized as part of the fan culture.

Figure 9. *Homma f*ans are taking photos of SHINee Jonghyun while he performs at Myungdong. Photo by Stephanie Choi.

A majority of *homma* fans also sell idol-related merchandise such as calendars, slogan banners, photo cards, water bottles, and stationery to other fans and use the profit for "*sŏpot'ŭ*" (support) or for their future *homma* activities. *Sŏpot'ŭ* refers to a direct supply of goods to the idols via the entertainment company—*sŏpot'ŭ* includes birthday gifts for the idol or lunchboxes and food/coffee trucks for the entire staff when the idol films a drama or movie. *Sŏpot'ŭ* also includes donations in the name of the idol. *Homma* fan Sunjae explains

[213] JTBC Entertainment, "Super junior member, Kim Hee-chul's distressed with 'Saseng fan(crazy fans)'? – Ssuljeon Ep.42," YouTube, December 12, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2KBLR2YZyk&vl=ko.

that *homma* fans' merchandise sales are allowed because the companies and other fans trust that the profit will be used for promoting the idols:

> Sunjae: Our main goal of selling merchandise is to provide *sŏpot'ŭ* to our kid [idol]. But because we use our own money and because we're not rich enough, we need to sell things like slogans to make up the loss . . . Company A knows that we sell merchandise. It's like an unofficial permission.
> Me: How do you know that?
> Sunjae: We have to contact the company in advance if we want to send *sŏpot'ŭ* to the idols. And if the company's not fond of our [*homma*] activities, they tell us to stop. From this year, no one [from the company] stopped us. But if the quality of our *sŏpot'ŭ* is not good enough, fans will blame us so much. (Sunjae, personal interview, April 15, 2016)

In order to show their sincerity to other fans and prove they are not appropriating their idols' fame for their business, *homma* fans send expensive birthday presents such as clothes from high fashion brands to the idols. Idols, in return, express their gratitude by wearing the clothes on their way to the airport, and *homma* fans take photos of their idols and upload the photos on their websites to verify the fact that they did send their gifts to the idol. Because airports have become an important site for the idols and *homma* fans to create another narrative that intensifies their intimate relationship—not only between idols and *homma* fans but also between idols and fans in general—the company provides a temporary photo zone near the crosswalk at the airport so that *homma* fans can wait for their idols at the designated area in good order. Such moments are called "*konghang rŏnwei*" (airport runway), because idols are aware of the photoshoot by *homma* fans and thus dress up nicely before they arrive at the airport. *Homma* fan Sunja states that "I heard from another *homma* fan that Idol L always checks on his *homma* fan's Twitter accounts and tells her to remove some of the airport photos that he doesn't like" (Sunja, personal interview, June 21, 2016).

J. Online Moral Violators and Third-Party Intervention

Setting the criteria for a "normal" relationship between idols and fans is a learned process in which idols and fans share ideas, sometimes coerce one another, and eventually set up a consensus on their behavioral rules. Through these processes, idols and fans standardize how intimacy should be transacted between them. Proximity to the idol gained through "proper" ways of sharing intimacy reflects fan's accumulation of fandom capital and reputation in the fandom. If the proximity is not acquired through official processes, the fan loses her entitlement as a fan.

Sasaeng is a notorious example of this moral violation. Abbreviated from the term "*sasaenghwal*" which means "privacy" or "private life," *sasaeng* refers to a fan who invades an idol's privacy through violation of physical space such as stalking and/or trespassing on the idol's house, or through violation of media space such as online hacking the idol's social media accounts and/or personally calling the idol. There are two types of *sasaeng*, *sasaeng p'aen* (*sasaeng* fans) and *sasaeng ant'i* (*sasaeng* anti-fans); *sasaeng* fans invade their idol's privacy due to their fanatic interest in the idol, whereas *sasaeng* anti-fans invade the privacy of their idol's rival idol so that they could find misdeeds by him and expose them publicly. Either way, both idols and fans do not treat *sasaeng* as "true fans." Super Junior Kim Heechul recalls that a *sasaeng* came into Super Junior's dorm and put her underwear among the members' underwear. Then she texted Kim: "*Oppa*, your teddy bear boxers are so cute."[214] Kim also states that he received a text from her saying "*Oppa*, we all know even when you change our number," as soon as he changed his phone number.[215]

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[214] *Chosun Media*, "*Kim Hi-ch'ŏl sasaengp'aen-ŭi 'sogott'erŏ' ch'ŏnt'aemansang*" [Various behaviors of Kim Heechul's sasaeng fan including the 'underwear terror'], July 10, 2017, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2017/07/10/2017071001990.html.

[215] Ibid.

Meanwhile, other parties also interrupt the moral economy between entertainment companies and fans. For instance, in July 2000, the Ministry of Information and Communication (what is now the Ministry of Science and Technology) proposed a bill called the Establishment of Public Order in Communication [T'ongsinjilsŏhwagripbŏp], which included the Internet Content Rating System [Int'ŏnetnaeyongdŭnggŭpje], a service that allowed information users or guardians of minors to filter or block certain online content based on the suitability of the content (Song, Min, and Ch'oe 2013:35). Within a month, various communities and groups, from the Democratic Labor Party to the Korean Progressive Network Center and YMCA, protested online as well as offline against the state-led media censorship. About two hundred fifty civil society organizations opened a temporary website (www.freeonline.or.kr) and led the protest by uploading hundreds of posts on the websites of the Information Communication Ethics Committee and the Ministry of Information and Communication.[216] Passionate leaders of this protest included teenage girls from fanfic websites such as Sŏngmo Ch'ŏnsa (Angel Sungmo), Ch'ot'iyŏnghon (H.O.T. Spirit), Shinhwa Changjo (The Birth of Shinhwa), and Nŏhiga Chek'irŭl Anŭnya (Do You Know Sechs Kies), and from *yaoi* websites such as Yaoi Sarangbang (Yaoi Salon), Ryano-ŭi Yaoi Sosŏlbang (Ryano's Yaoi Novel Room), and Yaoi Milgyo (Yaoi Mystic Scripture). It was reported that fanfic and *yaoi* websites that joined the protest accounted for approximately 30% of the protesters.[217] A number of fanfic and *yaoi* websites closed after the bill was passed; a 16-year-old Jo Sungmo fan stated, "All of my friends actively upload posts that

[216] *The Korea Economic Daily*, "*Int'ŏnet naeyongdŭnggŭp pandae 'ollain siwijung*'" [Opposition against the internet content rating 'online protest is underway'], July 4, 2001, http://news.hankyung.com/article/2001070444361.

[217] Sinyŭn Tong-ŭk, "*Ŭrin Mausŭro Chŏhang-handa*" [We Protest with the Computer Mouse], *The Hankyore*, September 6, 2000, http://h21.hani.co.kr/arti/special/special_general/447.html.

oppose the censorship and also participated in online protests."[218] In 2004, "*tongsŏngae*" [homosexuality] was eventually removed from Ch'ŏngsonyŏnyuhaemaech'emul Simŭigijun (the Rating Standards for Media Content Harmful to Minors) after the National Human Rights Commission of Korea advised its removal for the human rights of the LGBT+ community in South Korea.[219]

K. Conclusion

The discussion of moral economy brings us back to the issues of agency, dominance, and governmentality of fans, idols, and the industry reflected in their interactions via theatrical interconnectedness and hegemonic femininity. Although music is K-pop's major product, the interactions between idols and fans inform us that music is only one of the products that enable the transaction of intimacy. For this "unofficial" product of intimacy, fans have established, and continue to create, new norms for better trading conditions in the moral economy of K-pop. Previous fandom studies of moral economy have failed to incorporate the media industry in the loop of moral economy. However K-pop, as a service work industry that requires affective labor from both idols and fans, demonstrates a case study in which fans and the industry constantly respond to each other, establishing and revising social and economic norms that are only valid between them for the sustainability of the K-pop economy. The mechanism of K-pop's moral economy informs how the seemingly cultish behaviors and outrageous protests are, in fact, governed by their own rules that are

[218] Ibid.

[219] Korea Ministry of Government Legislation, "*Ch'ŏngsonyŏn pohobŏp sihaengryŏng*" [The Enforcement Ordinance for the Juvenile Protection Act], http://www.law.go.kr/LSW/lsRvsRsnListP.do;jsessionid=TU5Zbo9EBMBPjArdIFwGU-0-.LSW2?lsId=005209&chrClsCd=010102&lsRvsGubun=all.

negotiated with the industry, as a way of sustaining the unique milieu and social structure of K-pop.

Conclusion

Moonho and I met four days a week for English lessons at his house, but Moonho cancelled the lesson one day to sign the artist contract with his new entertainment company. When we met the next day, he exclaimed with fear, "You know what happened last night? As I left my apartment, I saw a girl with a cellphone sitting on a bench. I turned on my camera with selfie mode to see if she was following me. She soon stopped me, but when I turned my back, she was like, 'Oh fuck, beard?' She calmed herself and gave me a letter, but I told her not to come to my house again." It made me laugh to hear that the fan unintentionally cursed at him for growing a beard—he was on hiatus and didn't shave for a while. Being bearded obviously didn't fit into the ideal mold of a K-pop male idol who should display an emphasized masculinity with infantilized physical features. At the same time, I was so relieved that we cancelled our meeting on that day, because sometimes we ate out and left the house together; it would have been a disaster for a male idol to get caught by a female fan while leaving his house with a young woman. Imagine if the fan took photos of us and uploaded them online—the truth will no longer be important and it would be impossible to fully recover his untainted image as an innocent idol. I could imagine how the fandom would start a fight over whether he lacks self-management skills or fans should respect his privacy.

This dissertation is about how intimacy becomes a primary commodity of the K-pop industry and how both idols and fans work as producers of intimacy. As a way of setting the price of intimacy, entertainment companies, idols, and fans continue to reach informal agreements about which part of an idol's life can be either commodified as a product or regarded as a private matter. On that night he encountered his fan in front of his house, Moonho had the right to tell her not to come to his house. At the same time, the fan's surprise over his beard implied the general expectation of a groomed bodily presentation of an idol,

and her presence in front of his house once again reminded Moonho of fan surveillance that is directly linked to the media circulation of his bodily presence. After all, Moonho's media persona is not crafted solely by himself and his company; a large portion of it is also shaped by millions of fans on social media.

I am writing this conclusion in the summer of 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic broke out in South Korea in early February, and from March and April, news media simultaneously reported how the K-pop industry was deteriorating as numerous festivals and concerts were either postponed or cancelled.[220] However, entertainment companies quickly adjusted themselves to the new normal environment of "ontact"—a new Korean slang term for "contactless" in the COVID-19 pandemic era. In-person fansign events have been transformed into one-on-one video calls; indoor concerts have been replaced with drive-in concerts; and virtual concerts have become the new normal of the K-pop industry. BTS's "Bang Bang Con: The Live" has drawn the biggest audience for a virtual paid concert, selling 756,600 tickets with an estimated profit of $20 million.[221] Except for a few hundreds of *homma* fans in South Korea who used to physically follow idols' official events, most of the fandom and their fan activities are rarely influenced by the pandemic. Everyone in the K-pop world continues to live in digital media.

So far Korean fans' labor and cultural practices have been at the center of the idol-fan relationship in global K-pop. Korean fans had exerted great power over entertainment companies, and their fan practices were deemed standard by the rest of global fandom.

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[220] Sŏ, Ch'ŏng-sŏk. 2020. "*Hwich'ŏng-inŭn K-POP sanŏp…Onlain p'ŭlaetp'om p'iryosŏng ↑*" [K-pop Industry is Staggering…and Is in Need of More Online Platforms]. *Seoul Economic Network*, March 31. https://www.sentv.co.kr/news/view/570803

[221] Vandenberg, Layne. 2020. "K-pop Leads With 'Contactless' Concerts." *The Diplomat*, July 16. https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/k-pop-leads-with-contactless-concerts/

However, as BTS and other K-pop groups target the American mainstream market, and as the pandemic crisis necessitates more performances of theatrical interconnectedness on the internet, I expect my dissertation research to be challenged by the fast-changing relations between the K-pop industry, Korean fans, and global fans outside of South Korea. BTS's phenomenal popularity in the U.S. from 2017 onwards has already started to threaten the conventional hierarchy between Korean and non-Korean fans, and such change has further engendered numerous (mis)translations, cultural (mis)understandings, conflicts, cases of cooperations, and negotiations.

While the power dynamics and social relations revolving around the consumption practice of intimacy will change in the global K-popsphere, I wish to go back to the notion of mediated intimacy and intimate labor that comprise today's global celebrity culture. Popular music studies have conceived of the music industry as a production system maintained through material labor and commodities (i.e., music); however I have argued that immaterial labor and commodities (e.g., intimacy) are at the core of today's popular music business. Although my case study was restricted to K-pop, it is not difficult to find other examples of affective relationships between musicians and fans resulting in one's economic (dis)engagement in the market. My friend in Minnesota said she no longer listens to John Mayer's music, problematizing his complicated love relationship; a video of Justin Bieber with his fans shows how he allows a dozen fans to kiss him on his cheek while they take selfies; Taylor Swift's personal interactions with her fans—such as visiting her young fans at children's hospitals—are well-known to the public, because the footage is recorded and circulated on social media by her fans, who re-craft her persona through their media labor.

Anthropology, cultural studies, and communication studies have mystified fans' love toward celebrities as "one-sided," "illusory," "parasocial," or "magical" at best. It is also

gendered in the sense that it is almost always female fans whose consumption activities are considered unproductive rather than being understood as wholesome, creative, and/or empowering leisure activities. As my work demonstrates, however, the global music industry cannot be detached from celebrity culture and is heading toward a more systematized service work facilitated through digital media technologies. Today, more and more pop music fans understand intimacy as a commercial outcome, identifying themselves as legitimate producers and laborers of commercialized intimacy, and even urge the musicians to fully engage in the service work system as co-workers.

Studying the commodification process of intimacy in K-pop allowed me to witness millions of people striving to maintain a balance between neoliberal capitalism and humanity. Sometimes I was devastated by the actors in the K-pop industry and fandom dehumanizing and attacking each other. But more often my heart was filled with joy, caring, and excitement that idols and fellow fans shared with each other. We know that we'll go through endless conflicts and negotiation. But we also know that they are always followed by communal resilience and solidarity. And that's the power of K-pop.

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