July
2026

“We Call Them Idol: Globalization, Transculturality, and Appropriation in Global K-Pop Fan Performance”

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN MEDIA AND CULTURE STUDIES

BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY,

ARTS, DESIGN AND MEDIA

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Acknowledgements

It would hardly capture the depth of my experience to simply state that my community has been by my side throughout the past five and a half years. Their support has far exceeded anything words can express. Through severe bouts of imposter syndrome, late nights, and stress-ridden attempts at taking a break or resting, the people around me have guided me over the finish line in the ways that they do best.

To my supervisory team, Dr. Charlotte Stevens, Dr. Hazel Collie, and Dr. Asya Dragonova, I am forever grateful for your constructive guidance. You've made me a better writer and a much more confident researcher, and I am so incredibly lucky to have such a supportive team working with me, boosting me up whenever I needed. I especially want to thank this team for their support during the Los Angeles Fires of 2025; I didn't know I needed help until they gave it to me. Thank you for identifying when I needed the helping hand, even if I didn't know how to ask for it.

Thank you to my family, particularly my sister, Tricia, and my inherited family of in-laws that constantly checked in on my work and reminded me how far I've come. While it always seems like I'm working, you never made me feel lesser for it, instead reminding me that the finish line is always nearer every day.

To my community of friends, colleagues, and the large village that cheered me on, I want to express my gratitude. To Dr. Sarah Raine, thank you for being another mentor that helped me learn more about academia. To Sarah Turner, thank you for being the best partner-in-writing on projects big and small. To (future Dr.) Margaret-Ann Simonetta, thank you for enthusiastically sending me those voice memos I needed so much.

Starting a PhD in Fall of 2020 during the height of the pandemic was a very strange time, but to those internet friends that became friends in real life, I am so grateful to you for being my chosen cohort. To Masha in Seoul and Juliana in Brazil, I'm sending you a big virtual hug.

An endless thank you to my husband and partner in life, Mark, for supporting me through late nights, early mornings, and endless coffee to fulfil this ambition. Thank you for believing I could be a scholar and a doctor long before I defended this work. You made sure to pick up the pieces when I couldn't be bothered, and I couldn't have survived this process without all of your love and patience

Abstract

In the decades since its inception, South Korean Popular Music (K-Pop) has experienced a meteoric rise in international fandom and media attention. Fans in Anglophone and Anglophone-proximate/able markets quickly adapted K-Pop's distinct fan subculture and rituals, both on and off-line. These practices and markers of subculture are perceived as authentic Korean domestic customs and a signal of authentic "Koreanness" to these global fandoms; however, these adaptations are often infused with Global North fandom practices and cultural superstructures that result in significant departures from actual Korean domestic fandom traditions.

This research, therefore, examines how Anglophone fans reperform Korean domestic fandom culture, analyzing whether these performances constitute as cultural appropriation, or alternatively, if these behaviors reflect a broader phenomenon of cultural globalization. Contributing to growing literature on K-Pop fandom studies, this work utilizes interviews, participant observation, virtual ethnography, and autoethnographic insights to negotiate fandom behavior and performance within a global/glocal context, offering new frameworks for future dialogue on cultural appropriation and transcultural translations.

"INTRO: PERSONA" – Loving Something You Don't Even Understand

Demystifying the Origin of K-Pop's Popularity in the Global North

In 2016, YouTuber Ryan Higa captured a now-familiar scene in a comedy sketch video entitled, "Dong Saya Dae," in which he and four of his Asian American, male friends gather together at a party, noticeably without the attentions of the women attendees there. Instead, the women, none of whom are Korean, crowd around a laptop, entranced by the K-Pop idols singing and dancing on the screen. Visibly exasperated, Higa asks: "they're still watching K-Pop?" To which friend Phil Wang replies, "this whole time." The men are visibly irritated, Red Solo cups clutched in their hands, trying to puzzle out what about these Korean Popular Music ("K-Pop") idols on the computer could monopolize these female partygoers' attention. "They don't even speak Korean…how can you love something so much that you can't even understand?" It was a joke about a niche obsession then, but his punchline has evolved – nearly a decade and 19 million views later – into a legitimate cultural question about K-Pop's persistent popularity and global reach.

That one scripted line in his sketch video would be a question that in a few years' time would be echoed by Global North media outlets. By 2020, the name BTS was as synonymous with mega-fandoms as predecessor male music acts like One Direction, *NSYNC, or the Backstreet Boys. Yet, unlike these Global North archetypical groups, BTS's trajectory followed a Cinderella-like story arc, originating from a small South Korean (herein referred to as "Korea" or "Korean") agency, rather than a major American label. Debuting in 2013, the seven-member

boy band Bangtan Sonyeondan[1]("BTS"), was a quintessentially Korean popular music act at the time, composed of singers, dancers, and rappers performing synchronized choreography to dance music, hip-hop, and pop-adjacent compositions. Though the group was active in Korea for several years already, by 2018, BTS had experienced a meteoric rise in Global North markets, including North America and the United Kingdom (herein referred to as "the UK."). Achieving accolades that positioned them as trailblazers for non-Global North artists reaching mainstream success, BTS broke several Billboard chart records, outsold various American and British contemporaries in album sales, dwarfed streaming numbers, and executed numerous lucrative and profitable tours (IFPI, 2022; Ahn, et al., 2024a; Ahn, et al., 2024b). In their transition into North American and British markets, fans and audiences from those geographic locales appeared to engage in distinctively Korean fandom practice with an enthusiasm, zeal, and organization that had not quite been observed in Global North media before. Despite the majority of BTS's music being in Korean and only one band member of the seven able to speak English, something resonated with fans; they loved BTS despite literally not understanding the songs. It was a phenomenon foreshadowed by Higa two years prior.

To casual observers encountering K-Pop via BTS's 2018 global boom, its popularity may have seemed to come out of nowhere – a random wave of international popular culture products anchored in images of all-too-perfectly groomed idols, sharp choreography, and English catchphrases wrapped in Korean lyrics. And even before BTS's rise to stardom, K-Pop's growing visibility in Global North markets was consistently framed as an abrupt phenomenon by media outlets, despite being built on a longer transnational trajectory of international influence (S. Kim,

[1] Romanized version of 방탄소년단, translating to "Bullet Proof Boy Scouts." Translations and romanizations are authors' own.

2017). And yes, while K-Pop began as a domestic, albeit hybrid, blemish in Korea's music scene in the early 1990s, it grew from domestic product to niche East Asian music genre in global markets. The "K-Pop" designation nudged past national boundaries continuously to neighboring countries, most notably Japan and China. As south and southeast Asia saw K-Pop players enter their charts, K-Pop was no longer the national embarrassment it once was at its inception but rather had evolved at that point into a marketable tool of nation branding leveraged by the Korean federal government (Choi and Kim, 2014; Koo and Koo, 2022). K-Pop's popularity was so impactful in these intra-Asian markets, that scholarship matched suit, researching and analyzing transnational audiences in other East Asian countries (Jeon and Yoon, 2005; Shim, 2008), southeast Asia (Shim, 2011), and west Asia (Otmazgin and Lyan, 2013). Though K-Pop's globalization throughout Asia and eventually westward was the result of decades of exportation as a cultural product, and though it was strategically supported by politics and government, Global North media remained flabbergasted and fascinated that a foreign invention could translate to dominant media markets as K-Pop did.

Beyond media's positioning of this explosion, K-Pop's steady international footprint was indeed already expanding before BTS arrived in Global North markets. Long before the group's entry into the larger zeitgeist, fandoms were already engaging with K-Pop artists, providing a necessary foundation that would later catapult BTS into the global stratosphere (Kang, 2015; Lie, 2015; Jin, 2016). Korean studies researcher John Lie (2015) recounts attending a massive K-Pop music event that featured some of the country's biggest musical acts in Paris; Lie, a diasporic Korean scholar traveling Europe, was shocked at the popularity of the festival in France. In an earlier interview with *The Korea Herald,* Lie explains that he had every expectation that diasporic Koreans would make up the entirety of the audience at the festival, however, he

observed very few ethnically Asian peoples, and instead the concert goers were almost entirely European (Oh, 2011). Almost a decade before BTS would receive their first Billboard #1 Single,[2] Lie observed large contingents of K-Pop fans in a media market far geographically removed from Korea.

Since Lie's research, K-Pop has expanded further and with more visibility, becoming far more accessible outside of its geographic epicenter. Whereas in 2011 potential audiences outside of Korea may have had to laboriously seek out pirated copies of compact discs or peruse tiny shops in ghettoized ethnic neighborhoods in order to consume K-Pop, as was the case for many, niche international products in a hegemonically "western" information society (Mattelart, 2012), in 2016, when Higa and his friends lament that their lady friends are entranced by K-Pop idols, hundreds of thousands of hours of material was ready to consume in the digital form. While YouTube's accessibility was not always as prolific as it is now, with early usage of YouTube equating to similar labor to locate niche content (Jung, 2011), this new digital form now allows for material associated with K-Pop to spread at an unprecedented, rapid rate (Jin, 2016; Lee and Nornes 2015). Social media platforms allowed not just the circulation of materials but also provided a digital space for fans to interact with one another across national boundaries; the digital world made access and engagement incredibly easy for a burgeoning K-Pop fan. Previously, the nature of dissemination outside of Korea leaned into niche, subcultural fan practices of back-alley engagement that felt more insular and isolating than communicative. BTS also pioneered a branding model leveraging social media, providing a blueprint of engagement that directly accessed fans worldwide, without having to dive into hard-to-find shops. Their use

[2] In 2020, BTS achieved their first Billboard #1 Single for "Dynamite," an English-language song. It was the first song by a K-Pop act from South Korea to debut at number one on the Billboard Hot 100 (Billboard Staff, 2020).

of social media also comfortably aligned with Korea's national strategies of branding and opened up K-Pop as a fan community that could be understood as more mainstream (Jin, 2016). As fans from the Global North interact with a Global South product, however, it proves a cultural remixing riddled with nuance, inquiry, and hybridizations, which provides the basis for this research. Media object aside, this work focuses on the fandoms of which interact and engage with this "newly" mainstream-ed product. Beginning with this context building introduction, I outline the foundations of Korean domestic K-Pop fandoms and how the subculture associated with the community is one of particular cultural practice. In establishing this baseline, I introduce my lines of inquiry and research, questioning and interrogating the meanings of translation, adaption, globalization, and appropriation.

The Transcultural Conundrum of Global Fandom

The distinctive nature of K-Pop fandoms stems from a complex mix of Korean traditional cultural values and broader cultural superstructures. K-Pop music scenes – networks of fans, producers, and practices built around a surrounding genre (Bennett and Peterson, 2004) – hinge on various traditional pillars of culture, including quantitative success, collective relationship building, and high value placed on investment of capital and labor. One such example is that K-Pop fandoms characteristically participatory nature, built on the fostering of highly affective relationships between fan and idol that is rooted in specific Korean practices of bonding and production, born from an amalgam of postcolonial trauma and Confucian hierarchy (Elfving-Hwang, 2018). Consequently, the global expansion of K-Pop fandom represents more than a mere demographic surge; it signifies an increasing number of international participants

interfacing with fannish behaviors that are, at their core, subtly exported Korean cultural practices. Yet, as the globalization of these communities scale-up in participants, there is a noticeable and seemingly fundamental dynamic shift in the fandom as well, reflective of an expansion of cultures present within fandom spaces and spheres of existence. A change that is both quantitative and qualitative, the growth of K-Pop fandom communities transcends participation, and creates a new transcultural, transnational space, of which I center in this work. This thesis explores the idea of transcultural spread from a domestic, Global South origin to an international, Global North audience in how fandoms operate and interact with one another, borrow practice from one another, and reinterpret ritual and material culture.

I contend that much like other music genres in the US and UK. which began with notably cultural roots in their composition and origin, K-Pop fandoms were formed, built, and sustained on the cultural frameworks of Korean society as a foundation. Jazz and Rock ‘n Roll, for example, were founded on the sights and sounds of African American histories and culture, and these music genres are framed and discussed within the context of cultural and racial imagination and translation (Hamilton, 2016). Explored as genres that diffused outwards across racial communities, researchers of these cultural forms dissect how Jazz and Rock ‘n Roll were recreated, appropriated, and remixed so that the sounds and aesthetics of the reconstituted product were similar to the original genre, and yet distinctively altered. Here, these genres serve as an analogy for the transformation of K-Pop fandoms’ behaviors, rituals, and objects as they flow from Korea to Global North and Anglophone audiences. Not unlike how K-Pop itself was influenced by music genres from America, like Motown during US military intervention (Kim, 2021), Anglophone fandoms’ culture, behavior, and rituals, are shaped by Korean domestic precedents.

For decades, Hallyu Studies researchers[3] have grappled with the question of what defines the "K" in K-Pop, and thus far, many scholars have focused on the musicology and composition of the songs and groups themselves to find the answer (Yoon, 2017; Lee, 2023; Miroudot 2024). However, the cultural roots of which Hallyu researchers have so animatedly debated for years, I argue, are not within the notes of anyone's discography, but rather lies in K-Pop fandom and its practices. As I briefly introduced, I argue that fandom practice in K-Pop is borne and crafted out of a specifically Korean traditional and societal context, and the transcultural translation of Hallyu is crashing on North American and British shores not just in media object, but in fandom participation. According to Ganghariya and Kanozia (2020) in their systematic review of Hallyu literature from 2000 to 2019, a large concentration of Hallyu literature derives from exploration of East Asian and Pacific regions. There are also large gaps in literature when discussing North American fandoms and audiences, with no mention of the United Kingdom in Ganghariya and Kanozia's study. Anglophone fandoms, however, are increasingly more present in K-Pop spaces, expressing thoughts and community in online spaces in the English language and now making up a large commercial market as evidenced by BTS's reception on music charts. In this disconnect in literature and the reality of the fan, I believe the definition of "K" exists.

Recognizing a cultural shift in how they engage with media, Anglophone fans learn a new grammar of engagement, mimicking domestic Korean fan subcultural components, to fit into the genre's more specific expectations of audience. However, I argue that as Global North fans adopt these practices, they simultaneously adapt them, weaving their own cultural

[3] Hallyu Studies refers to the academic study of Korean cultural exports, such as K-Pop, K-Dramas (South Korean television shows), K-Beauty (cosmetic products), and K-Food. The name is a Sinophone variant of a phrase that translates to "the Korean Wave," thus researchers and media have routinely referred to the popularity and soft power of Korean products as "the Hallyu Wave" (Jin, 2018).

superstructures into the original Korean fabric. This creatives a feedback loop, where the fandom's perception of "Koreanness" and "Korean" ways of doing things reshapes the fandom's output continuously. Ultimately, as was the case with the genres themselves of Jazz and Rock 'n Roll, the resulting reshaping constitutes novel cultural products that are both like the original but infused with different sights, aesthetics, and behaviors.

Research Questions, Chapter Previews, and Aims of Research

In these adaptations and translations, I confront questions of cultural transformation, particularly as these objects move from Global South to Global North positioning. To fully articulate my findings of globalization, adaptations, and appropriations within Anglophone K-Pop fan performance, I pose the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Anglophone fans perform the role of K-Pop fan, and do these performances change or permutate from Korean domestic performances and practice?

RQ2: Can these Anglophone fan "reperformances" be considered appropriative?

In answering RQ1, I explore in what specific instances Anglophone fans have altered how Korean domestic fans approached, interacted with, and executed fannish behavior across K-Pop fandom spaces both on and off-line. Discussions of this question situate how these permutations fit into a vernacular or habitus of Anglophone cultural frameworks as well as establish a new baseline of fannish behavior and ritual in global fandoms. In answering RQ2, I argue that K-Pop

fan practice stems from Korean society and culture itself, a larger discussion of which I will explore further, and I dive deeper into analysis of cultural appropriation and Korean domestic response to Anglophone actors and acting in K-Pop fan spaces. With this discussion I explore whether these re-performances and translations are offensive to Korean domestic and diasporic fans that engage in K-Pop fan communities to the point of appropriation. Conversely, I introduce the idea that Anglophone fandoms are more of a case study of transcultural flows of objects more akin to globalization and glocalization, referring to cultural economic theory that describes a relocalization of global products in domestic spaces. As observed in other examples, like Rock 'n Roll and Elvis Presley's adaption of sound and aesthetics to become known as "the King of Rock" – and thus the analysis for erasure and appropriation observed in scholarship (Lott, 1993 and Ward, 2002), I explore the "similar, but not the same" paradigm of product. In this case, Anglophone fandom practice is the adaptive object that is increasingly becoming the most familiar and dominant mode of being, living in similar story arc as Presley and Rock 'n Roll regarding racial and cultural erasure and appropriation.

The above research questions are explored with support from data and textual analysis, presented in six chapters – a literature review chapter, a methodology chapter, and four findings' chapters, starting with a short introductory context that chronicles a brief history of Korea, Korean cultural exports, and society. Chapter One (literature review) outlines previous Hallyu, fandom, and popular music scholarships' understanding of K-Pop and fandom, as well as introduces anthropological and cultural studies frameworks of comprehending and defining culture. I introduce these theories to articulate the trajectory of the eventual glocalization of a transcultural product, in this case, K-Pop fandom. Starting with the invention of culture, moving into discussions of propriospect (Goodenough, 1971) in culture, I explore new cultural habitus

formed around glocalizations. First, a fan is introduced to something, understanding it as "other" (invention of culture), then a fan forms an understanding and fluency of said space while simultaneously injecting their own cultural influences – propriospect and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1979 [1984]). Finally, this newly reperformed understanding of culture becomes a whole new Anglophone K-Pop fan subculture that speaks to the local with influences from the parent culture, but quite unlike it: glocalization. These theoretical frameworks as discussed in the literature review provide insight into the complex, yet nuanced ways in which cultural practices and products are transformed as they move across boundaries.

Chapter Two (methodology) explains my research project and chosen methods utilized to craft an understanding of domestic K-Pop fandom spaces and culture, and Anglophone reperformance and adaptation of such. While I initially believed this research to be a heavily autoethnographic piece with infusions of other methods commonly found in ethnography, this research actually became quite qualitatively heavy, relying on observations of other fans operating in online and offline spaces, survey data amassed from anonymous questionnaires, and interview content of fans. While I still identify this work as ethnographic in nature, I acknowledge in my methodology that it is, in fact, an ethnography with autoethnographic interludes, wherein my identity and own experiences as a fan inform my analysis, grant me access to fan spaces, and situate me in the community; however it is not the sole manner in which I gather data. My analysis indeed filters through the lens of researcher positionality and my own propriospect, but I am not at the center of the research, save for particular chapters as specified below. I understand that the subject matter is closely related to my own identity in many ways, therefore my methodology reflects such analysis.

Chapter Three ("Crazy Form") explores Anglophone interpretations of the body in K-Pop fandom and how that illustrates non-Korean understanding of Koreanness. Interrogating Koreanness and the perceived absolutism of K-Pop from the start of this research, I begin my findings by destabilizing identity. It also introduces the idea of the absence of bodies in fan spaces where bodies are pivotal in consumption and understanding. This chapter introduces one of the first glocalizations of fandom and Anglophone habitus that I observed throughout my research, that is a newly formed and performed fannish practice of gatekeeping and policing of idol bodies in the K-Pop genre, exhibiting an Anglophone perception of expertise into the understanding of Koreanness. While not in conversation with appropriation in the ways of "borrowing" or "stealing" from Korean cultural practices, this subsection of research explores a more paternalistic method of approaching Korean "as Other" – that is, a Korean practice of parasociality feeding into an Anglophone understanding of expertise, and perhaps even an Anglophone entitlement to act as keepers of K-Pop. Despite members of the parent culture not voicing concern that would align with the markers of cultural appropriation, Anglophone gatekeepers are stalwart stewards of bodies in this genre, making themselves the arbiters of appropriation. Within this same conversation on bodies, however, this chapter also explores when fandom expertise falters, particularly from the absence of bodies from the parent culture establishing a baseline habitus. As the Covid-19 pandemic stopped the gathering of bodies, the chapter dives into how the absence of bodies in K-Pop spaces altered how Anglophone habitus was formed for fans who entered into the fandom during this era of time.

Chapter Four ("New Jeans") moves on to discuss bodies and dress in more detail, chronicling Anglophone fandom practices of fashion and materiality that deviates from Korean domestic practice, dissecting how Anglophone hegemony crafts a perception that such practice

was and has always been a part of K-Pop fandom. Once again, these fannish permutations of behavior point to a glocal understanding of fandom. Here, I delve deeper into the questions of appropriation and return to the policing of bodies in K-Pop genres, comparing how fans themselves perform Koreanness on their own bodies funneled through the lens of understanding Koreanness as synonymous with K-Pop-ness, through dress and bodily adornment. And while my own propriospect intervened in my own experience encountering these adorned fans, we will discuss appropriation in terms of Korean domestic fan response.

Chapter Five ("Piri, Play the Pipe") surveys behavior and ritual in K-Pop fandom subculture and habitus, interrogating Anglophone adaptation of domestic K-Pop fandom ritual in ways that speak to and are understood within Anglophone cultural superstructural values. First, recounting field work in Seoul, Korea when I observed fan habitus clashing and meshing in rituals of materiality and material culture, I then turn to case study work of fandom rituals being appropriated and reperformed outside of fan spaces, including politics, in the American context. These practices gave rise to many, glocalized fan practices that did not carry much resonance outside of the Global North context, but have, in recent years, become a hallmark of international fandom outside of Korea. Throughout all of the chapters, I include Korean domestic fan responses to Anglophone reperformance, touching on how, if any, responses introduce ideas of cultural appropriation; or rather if any, or all of these things, are a reflection of globalizing and glocalizing fandoms in an age of interconnectedness.

Chapter Six ("Sharon's Interlude"), my last findings chapter, is like the rest of my research in that I explore the effects of fans in K-Pop spaces, but here I take on a more pointed autoethnographic turn, reflecting on the effects of K-Pop fandom and K-Pop as genre on a particular subset of Anglophone fans: diasporic East Asians. In this interlude, I discuss the

erasure and marginalization of diasporic East Asian fans in K-Pop scholarship, and broadly Hallyu research and Asian Studies. This chapter explores the stories of those who do not easily fall into the binary of domestic versus global fans. Utilizing the psychological frameworks of racial melancholia, racial dissociation, and racial objects, in this chapter I discuss how members of the global/glocal Anglophone fandom may experience racial melancholia borne out of their participation in the fandom.

To begin each section, I use a K-Pop song title with lyrics that reflect the chapter's main theme, grounding the academic discussion in the prevalence of that particular aspect of fannish behaviour or fan subculture within the genre itself. This provides a playful expression of discussions on fandom at hand, and perhaps you will feel compelled to more deeply explore how these networks of text and fan interact with one another.

In terms of contribution to knowledge, this thesis has five aims: first, to provide an alternative explanation to the “K” in K-Pop, contributing to a larger conversation of culture and nation branding that already exists in Hallyu research. Second, as I will discuss in the literature review, work on Anglophone fandoms and Korean domestic fandoms wherein they are treated as two distinct cultural contexts is minimal in Hallyu research; this research works to break down a monolith of fandom, identifying that fandoms that move transculturally also bring with them, their own cultural superstructural values, practices, and habitus. Third, this research seeks to expand the conversation of fandom and fandom behavior outside of a Global North context, introducing Global South fandoms and conversations into literature as the center or originators of the discussion. Fourth, this work deals with portions of K-Pop fandoms that are largely underexplored in Hallyu Studies, namely Korean domestic fans and diasporic fans, who are often relegated to footnotes in favor of those global (North) fandoms. Fifth, and most significantly, this

work interrogates how cultural appropriation is approached and treated differently by fandoms around the world, opening up space for discussions on the nuances of colonialism, power, and gatekeeping. It seeks to contextualize the transmission and translation of cultures across national boundaries in a multi-faceted way, interrogating how these models of cultures interfacing and interacting with each other can be articulated without the intervention of hegemonic, narrowed viewpoints.

PRELUDE: Map of the (K) Soul - Contextualizing K-Pop and South Korea

Korean History and Culture, Abridged

To provide a baseline understanding for the history and trajectory of K-Pop in Korea and to provide the supercultural framework on which K-Pop fandom is built, in this prelude, I provide historiography and context to the rise of South Korean creative industries, discussing how traditional Korean history and culture largely impact the framing and globalization of cultural exports like K-Pop. The broader question of what K-Pop as genre, particularly compositionally or in musicology, lies outside the scope of this thesis (for that work, see: Yoo, et. al 2017; Lee, 2023; and Miroudot, 2024). Instead, my work focuses rather on the idea of the "K" of K-Pop in cultural and national terms rather than as a musical genre based on sound. That said, on K-Pop album track lists, it is not uncommon to see shorter preludes, interludes, or outros,[4] and in that genre tradition, this prelude is a short history that informs the rest of the thesis moving forward.

The Korean peninsula, once divided among three kingdoms, was unified under Silla in the 7th century and later ruled by the Joseon Dynasty from the 14th to the late 19th century. The dynasty ended in 1897 with the short-lived Korean Empire. Japan annexed Korea in 1910 (five years after Japanese protectorate status of Korea), after gaining international support during the Russo-Japanese War, leading to decades of Japanese colonial rule that strongly influenced Korea's music and art in the 20th century.

[4] For examples, please refer to "Prelude" (NCT 127, 2016); "Interlude" (BTS 2016); and "Outro: Long Journey" (ATEEZ, 2020).

After World War II ended in 1945, Japan's colonial rule of Korea came to a formal close, with Soviet forces occupying land north of the 38th parallel and American troops taking control of the south. In 1948, two separate states were established: the U.S.- backed Republic of Korea in the south and the Soviet-backed Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north. By 1950, tensions escalated into open conflict when North Korean forces invaded the southern state, sparking the Korean War. Following the conflict, the North withdrew into political isolation (Clayton, 2020).

Immediately following liberation from Japanese imperial rule, South Korea's new government understood the influence that art could have in sharing history, culture, and news, especially among the illiterate population (Kim, 2017). From 1945 through the early 21st century, Korea viewed Japan both as an economic example to follow and as a rival to surpass (De Mente, 2012:346; Park, 2010:74), adopting Japanese models of industry and cultural reform to remove traces of foreign influence. Numerous early laws targeted remnants of Japanese culture in Korea, and later regimes—including military dictatorships—deepened government involvement in popular culture production (Kim, 2017). Alongside rapid industrialization and exports, the creation of popular culture became what President Park Chung-hee (1961–1979) called a "second economy." Later presidents continued this centralized approach to music and art, enforcing strict censorship until as recently as 1996. Anything considered too somber, overly negative, or especially too foreign was subject to scrutiny and elimination, although American cultural imports were met with both acceptance and aversion at the same time (Kim, 2004; Hong, 2014).

Although centralization aimed to restore and preserve Koreanness on the peninsula following decades of cultural suppression, it often constrained the daily lives of Korean citizens.

As collective memories of Japanese occupation faded and domestically born leadership became increasingly authoritarian, university-based youth movements began to re-engage with traditional Korean culture, incorporating its elements into theatrical and musical protests against consecutive autocratic presidents (Kwon, 2017). The emergence of kugak kayo, also romanized as gayo—a genre combining traditional Korean music and instruments with modern pop—represented some of the earliest counter-authoritarian musical expressions in the 1970s, with notable groups recording and performing publicly by the next decade (ibid.). Paradoxically, both the centralized government and opposing populist groups regarded themselves as agents of cultural restoration, and this divergence was further amplified following the assassination of Park Chung-hee in 1979. The way each successive presidency chose to rebuild Korea largely influenced how the "youth" of that decade reacted. In particular, the shinsedae (also romanized as sinsedae) teenagers and young adults in the 1990s, was coming of age as Korea peeked open its doors to the world stage. They, therefore, welcomed "western"-style products and western-style consumerism (2013:53). It was at this point of a relaxing policy, socially global curiosity, and economic freedom that Seo Taiji all but burst onto the scene.

The Birth of K-Pop

In 1992, the established structure of Korean music changed dramatically. Seo Taiji, a rapper, along with two backup dancers and vocalists, Yang Hyun-sik and Lee Juno, made their debut on a reality TV talent show with an American-style rap performance featuring synchronized dancing, much to the horror and disappointment of the judges. Despite the audience's fascination, "Seo Taiji and the Boys" were unanimously rejected on the show (Jung, 2017). They also faced

regular censorship and bans from television, as authorities wanted to preserve traditional genres like Ballad and Trot, a uniquely Korean mix of big band sounds and vibrato vocals. Nevertheless, Seo Taiji and the Boys dominated the Korean music charts for seventeen weeks with their track Nan Arrayo ("I Know") (Chang, 2017). The shinsedae had found what they were looking for: a “western” product repackaged into a distinctly Korean group of young, attractive men. Although Seo Taiji and the Boys disbanded just four years later after enduring government censorship, their experiment inspired companies to develop and refine the "K-Pop Idol Factory" system, which is now renowned for its intensive training of adolescent artists.

Korean-born, American-educated Lee Soo-Man founded SM Entertainment in 1995 (Chandler, 2011), the agency that spearheaded the formulaic trainee system; trainees spend years, sometimes as long a decade, training in singing, dancing, and languages before being curated into a group to formally debut to the market (Finan, 2020; Fuhr, 2015). Shortly after SM Entertainment’s establishment, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis propelled Korea’s exploration and investment into soft power industries that made the country a desirable destination for travel and an icon of popular culture (Ganghariya and Kanozia, 2020). The private sector of entertainment agencies, having witnessed the immediate success of SM Entertainment’s earliest idols groups like H.O.T, grew expeditiously. Government and industry cooperatively joined together in ventures like the Korea Record Center in 1998, where private and public funds and efforts collaboratively created a distribution center and scheme that promoted Korean music abroad (Finan, 2020).

Today, the national government of Korea directly supports, in both funds and policy, the entertainment sector focusing on the “3Cs” – creativity, culture, and content (Fuhr, 2015). Within the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism as it has been referred to since the mid-

2000s, subsidiary offices have been charged with specific organizing, funding, and researching of cultural content agencies. For instance, the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange (KOFICE) is tasked with working with K-Pop makers to "nation brand" the country as economically and culturally desirable. The KOFICE partners regularly with sister agency, the Korea National Tourism Organization which works toward the dissemination of cultural products abroad in the form of concert festivals and cultural industry seminars (Oh, 2018). In the 2013 fiscal year, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism ("MCST") allocated the equivalent of $280 million USD for "Hallyu assistance and grants-in aid" (Oh and Lee, 2013). In more recent years, the MCST has continuously built record-high budgets to support "K-Content" endeavors. In 2023, more than $620 million USD was specifically set aside for the creation of K-Content (Yonhap, 2023), while for the 2025 fiscal year, MCST's content and culture budget equated to a staggering $4.9 billion USD (Korea JoongAng Daily, 2024). Government intervention is high in East Asian countries, not just Korea (Otmazgin, 2011 and 2016); idols are often contracted to participate in these state-sponsored campaigns, directly and indirectly, and thus their visages become the faces of Korean culture and desirability (Oh, 2018). And as monies are dedicated to the production and creation of Hallyu content, some agencies and idols are reliant on this government support to survive in these K-Pop ecosystems.

The Trainee System and Fandom

Idols are critical to the nation branding scheme as their success (and falls from grace) serve as both representative of Korea but also Koreanness. Thus, as graduates of a rigorous training system that often sees young people participating for the better part of a decade to

become stars in singing, dancing, rapping, and language skills, idols are taught to remain morally superior to their youthful counterparts, or at least, keep up appearance of such moral high ground. The name itself derives from the idea that idols are superior to "regular" humans, far more polished in both skill and lifestyle. Though originally born from the Japanese entertainment industry, idols in Korea have taken on a whole new transcultural meaning, inclusive of the lifestyle of an entertainer not just their products (S.Y. Kim, 2023). While in Japan the idol is considered more of the "girl/boy next door" and is meant to be approachable – therefore, human – Korean idols are much more a product of a stricter, historically Confucian society where competition and morality coincide to create the archetype of a successful, good person (Hong, 2014; Finan 2020).

The idol as a product of Korean culture and meaning is important here for two main reasons. Firstly, to successfully be considered a "face of Korea," idols must maintain a level of being that's artificially God-like in many cases, as the reputation and soft power of the "brand" of Korea depends on ambassadors that are beyond reproach, and yet desirable. Second, and most relevant to this work, is that fandom in Korea comes to expect this level of behavior from idols as well. While there is room for some parasocial-derived authenticity on the part of the idol, of which we will dive deeper into in the findings chapters of this thesis, idols are meant to embody an emulative or aspirational standard that is policed by both the agency, as well as fandom (Elfving-Hwang, 2019). Therefore, at this intersection of cultural expectation and fandom reception emerges a distinctive participatory fandom culture that is deeply rooted in the cultural superstructures of traditional Korean society and life. As idols are expected to behave and participate in certain ways in the K-Pop genre, fans in Korea hold similar standards to one another in how they participate in fandom rituals and spaces. Though it is not unlike behavior

within the prescribed rules and protocols of any other environment that requires such adherence, the way in which Korean domestic fandoms operate is different from many fandom community behaviors observed in Global North popular music fandoms as well. In my contention, that is largely due to Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework of habitus, a concept that describes how a person moves through and behaves in society based on lived experiences, social environment, and the overall "everydayness" of life (1977).

The Korean domestic fandom habitus is built and perpetuated by the Korean cultural values and markers of meaning and informs how they interact with idols, other fans, and materials present in the K-Pop music scene. I establish this concept for several reasons. First, to introduce a framework that will carry on as the soul of my thesis particularly to describe deviations and reperformances of Korean domestic fan practice. Second, to emphasize that Korean domestic fan practice, and subsequently Anglophone fan performances, are not crafted, created, or changed within a vacuum or for no reason, fandom practice from either community of fandom is built from systems of meaning that already exist in other forms in the lives of these fans. As this thesis dives deeper into the concept of habitus, the meaning of culture and community, and transcultural flows of information and appropriations, the intercultural exchanges that take place within fandom serve as a metaphor for larger arenas of informational and cultural flow, providing even more context on a broader subject of the reception of global products.

CHAPTER ONE – "There and Back Again": A Literature Review

"But I think I need ya...more than I'd like to admit." -- Eric Nam, 2022

In an exploration of everything that has transpired in his love life up until the moment of the release of his sophomore English extended play album, "There and Back Again," Eric Nam reflects on how relationships past were vital to shaping his understanding of love. And while I can't necessarily say that this literature review is an homage of love per se, it is an exploration of the foundational texts and arguments laid out by researchers past on how anthropology, fandom studies, media studies, and cultural studies have shaped the observation and analysis of fan spaces and behavior, and vice versa. This literature review serves as a retrospection on theories past of the transcultural and global in both an economic and cultural sense, while fitting K-Pop into the landscape that is fandom, media, and culture. Leveraging foundation anthropological frameworks as they pertain to the discussion of cultural theory, this review articulates how and why conversations of culture used in this context contribute to larger understandings of the fields at hand. Furthermore, this review identifies gaps in Hallyu Studies wherein this research works to bridge conversations in the field that have not been connected before.

As a historian-turned-contemporary media researcher, I draw upon multiple frameworks in an interdisciplinary approach to articulate how Korean domestic fandom practices form, are diffused into Global North and Anglophone markets, and then are re-interpreted and re-performed based on the environments and culture of that Global North fandom. In this review, I first draw upon anthropological and sociological frameworks to lay a foundation to cultural theory. Researchers such as Ward Goodenough (1971) and Roy Wagner (1975, 2016) address the definitions and understanding of culture through articulations of a "lens" built and crafted by

individuals in a particular society. Understanding this base framework, I then discuss how this lens concept, coined as propriospect (Goodenough 1971) and inventions of culture (Ward, 2016), can be utilized in popular music and fandom studies to understand transcultural flows of information and behavior. In these conversations of foundation theories, I will explore the ways in which Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1977, 1979 [1984]) have been deployed in cultural studies and more specifically in research studies dealing with fannish behaviors and communities. In addition to providing an overview of the treatment of fandoms of color and non-Global North media objects in literature (Jenkins, 2014; Pande, 2020a; Pande, 2020b), I discuss the relatively siloed nature of Hallyu Studies, during which I explain how very little convergence there is between media and fandom studies concepts and Hallyu Studies objects, despite a similar parallel track of evolution.

Furthermore, there are three core Korean domestic fandom concepts built out of Korean cultural superstructures that I introduce to preface the findings of the following chapters, and as such, each concept warrants an exploration of literature as to how I frame and articulate its movement from one culture to another as well. The concepts – parasociality (Liebers, N. & Schramm, 2019), materiality (Hills, 2014), and Confucian competition (Elfving-Hwang, 2019) – are re-occurring themes within domestic K-Pop fandom spaces, and as such, I argue that these concepts continue to intersect and are read anew in Anglophone fandoms as glocal reimaginations of K-Pop fan behavior. Superstructure, as deployed within this thesis, refers to Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944, 2002) culture industry, wherein culture is industrialized and mechanized as a part of everydayness and economy in a Marxist sense. I do, however, reject the paradigm of passive consumers in this context and instead embrace fandom productivity models. Therefore, within this review of literature, I include moments of cultural context for these three

prevailing concepts, supplementing my discussions with frameworks specific to parasocialism and materiality.

Here, I must define fan and fan culture as communities organized around shared affinities for media objects both offline (Jenkins, 1992; Hills, 2002) and online (Baym, 2007). Such affinities are mediated through media texts including celebrity and creator interviews, discographies, performances, and increasingly social media (Booth, 2010; Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2017). Fans not only cultivate affective relationships with the object of their fandom but also with one another, forming dynamic social networks and participatory practices that extend into rituals, events, and everyday behaviors (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Duffett, 2013). Such discussed everydayness is how Bourdieu's habitus paradigms (1979 [1984]) are re-imagined in fandom studies. These practices and habitus constitute what can be conceptualized as "fan culture," (Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, 2006), collectively formed by both media producer and fan. Within this research, I argue that fan subculture is a projection of broader cultural and economic superstructures (Gramsci, 1971; Storey, 2021) and that transcultural fandom practice is an exercise of glocalizing transcultural products that helps reconcile them in said in larger, familiar, cultural structures.

The Invention of Culture, Propriospect, and Habitus as Frameworks for Intercultural Reperformance and the Creation of Subculture

Cultural anthropologist Roy Wagner (1975, 2016) contends culture may be defined within the dichotomy of "opera-house culture" which alludes to a high brow, refined culture that is "manifested, extended, and explained all within institution" (2016: 26) and anthropological

culture, a democratized study of abstract, everyday culture—the "how" and "why" things are done or the "sum of our ways" of life (2016: 28). Wagner concedes that culture as an objective, static object cannot be strictly defined. Even in his attempt to parse out "high culture" and "anthropological culture," Wagner highlights that culture's definition can be understood in the betweenness of the two as well. However, in one's imagination, a person's "home" culture from all these webbed spaces is not realized as a culture entity unto itself until a person encounters "another culture."

British Cultural Studies has long provided a critical framework for understanding culture as a site of negotiation and struggle over power and meaning as well. Emerging out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), the idea of culture as everyday practices and media as texts warranting of critical analysis produced work which foregrounded how social groups reflect and produce wider social structures and hierarchies (Williams, 1958; Hoggart, 1957; Hall, 1980). Central to this legacy was the formulation of youth subcultures that positioned youth-driven communities as agents of ritual and meaning, rather than as deviant outliers. The CCCS argued that culture did not have to necessarily be dictated as high versus low, either, rather ordinary practices and popularly consumed media forms are just as much a part of culture as elite forms and thus is ever evolving and never fixed (Hall, 1980). By framing subcultural participation as a meaningful response to social conditions and everydayness, the CCCS provided the groundwork for analyzing complex, values-driven, and societal reflective communities rather than just consumers. Therefore, marrying both Wagner's invention of culture and CCCS scholars' position on culture, it is the everyday practices, peoples, and things that are invented as a separate culture when contextualized against a different set of practices, peoples, and things. Wagner's framework of propriospect is the metaphorical object that visualizes and

conceptualizes how Bourdieu's habitus and CCCS's idea of ordinary culture and the formation of youth subculture is ever present in how we move through the world, lest of all how K-Pop fandoms in Korea and Anglophone markets impose different meanings on the same rituals or enact different behaviors within the same spaces. Their culture as manifested through habitus dictates how each respective fandom body reacts to the goings on of that fandom community.

When encountering the "other," a person realizes their understanding of life is shaped by their own culture, which differs from others. Wagner (2016) calls this realization "the invention of culture," noting it requires recognizing one's own cultural position and learned habits. This leads to the challenge that "no one really knows what the term culture means" (2016: 9). Though often focused on symbols, Wagner acknowledges that such meaning depends on contrasting with other cultures, highlighting his radical approach in earlier research. In Wagner's earliest incarnations of his work, he cheekily subverts the foundational nature of anthropology, emphasizing and chiding the field's obsessions with "inventing others" and then "selling" these others and tales of them, in "professional marketplaces" (Wagner, 1975; Handler 2002). Wagner's 1975 work was a departure from traditional anthropology – such as the likes of Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) whose works are criticized for over-exoticizing the Other and Franz Boas (1911), the father of American anthropology infamous for reductive "selling" of culture. Wagner failed to gain much traction against contemporary anthropologists (Handler, 2002; Dulley, 2019) as he unconventionally referred to anthropologists as creatives, individuals who had to invent cultures in order to navigate through and understand them through the veneer of objectivity. However, that perception of the objective is what traps anthropologists into prototypical structures of the field (Wagner 1975).

This early challenge to the discipline was one of the first attempts to de-center the "west" as the developed, more advanced culture to foil against another "foreign" culture; this work is foundational to postcolonial approaches to culture and since Wagner, anthropologists like Richard Handler (2002) have analyzed the evolving reflexive nature of the field, further developing that culture is dynamic and continuously inventive. These evolving theories that would not have been possible had not been for Wagner's first musings on inventing culture, rather than assuming culture as fact. In these frameworks, power assignations are also less unilaterally flowing and more continuous between two poles. Wagner's later, updated work on inventing culture continues to operate within this more "level playing field" of culture orienting western and non-western objects, languages, and symbols in the postcolonial (2016; 2019). This is also evidenced in the continued reflexivity of the field, where Wagner's paradigms provided foundations to multi-directional flows of culture inventing and crafting, such in Pedro Pitarch and José Antonio Kelly's (2019) work on indigenous groups understanding culture as foiled as hegemonic, Global North cultures.

Wagner (2016) further posits that encountering "another culture" at the point of adulthood, rather than adolescence, builds on firm and established foundations of how the world is constructed. Whatever is "learned" from the other culture is an extension of knowledge built on a superstructure of meanings and systems that already exist in the individual's mind. It does not supplant pre-existing norms in their cognition but feeds into a multi-focal lens of understanding (2016: 20). Wagner's contemporary, Ward Goodenough's framework of propriospect describes this specifically tailored amalgam of cultures within an individual. Goodenough coined the term propriospect to describe the distinctive compendium of culture that each individual compiles and crafts by virtue of their personal experiences (1971: 36; Wolcott,

1991). Within Wagner's theorizations of culture, a secondary culture must exist for one to recognize their own as being a culture in and of itself, while in Goodenough's framing, a multiplicity of cultures speaks to one another to create an aggregated package of the world. While Wagner's work presents cultural interactions more like buildings with a ground floor of superstructural understanding from the "home" culture, Goodenough's work (1971) describes it more as a tributary that flows away from the central body but still carries comingled matter.

Within these two frameworks individuals encountering a new culture build on pre-existing frameworks and understandings of culture and society, as it carries with and away pieces of culture when entering into another space. This is where a deeper exploration of Bourdieu's habitus (1977) provides an understanding of K-Pop fandom cultures as a framework that helps marry the invention of culture and propriospect into a way that fandom studies has interacted with in previous literature. Habitus refers not just to the cultural superstructures that dictate behavior nor the lens through which said behavior is viewed but also the accepted habits, the acquired skill, and dispositions of participants within the culture as they act and move through the community (ibid). In a fandom's case, the structured routine of fan subculture legitimizes fannish behavior, coding them into practice as accepted, fannish everydayness. Bourdieu's concept of habitus focuses on how power, social interactions, and societal structures shape cultural meaning, emphasizing predetermined frameworks within societies. In contrast, Wagner (1975) views culture as reflective and reflexive, functioning as sites for interpretation. However, I argue that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Instead, cultural interpretations develop reactively, especially when encountering "the other." Habitus and related cultural structures can be newly shaped and understood, allowing for continual transformation.

Grappling With Subculture

As early fandom studies researcher John Fiske asserts (1992) habitus informs structure, hierarchy, and behavioral standards within a fandom community, and it is within these structures of fannish behaviours that Sarah Thornton's (1995) "subcultural capital" communicates a fan's legitimized understanding of the fandom (i.e. "hipness") as well. As Matt Hills (2002: 57) continues, "fan social capital" also communicates a fan's fluency in the fandom spaces, particularly that of parasocial networks and relationships that help fans navigate through fan cultures. Thus a paradox of culture and the transmission of culture exists, as explained by culture theorists Laila Abu-Er-Rub, Christiane Brosius, Sebastian Meurer, Diamantis Panagiotopoulos, and Susan Rhichter (2019), in that, "separate" cultures are unremittingly translating and re-shaping themselves in response and disruption to each other; therefore, cultures cannot actually exist without one another, but the separateness of each culture helps to inform the similarities and differences between the two. Understanding that culture as a siloed construct cannot exist, I contend that transcultural transmission of information, customs, rituals, languages, symbols, and performances is an inextricably inherent part of culture in and of itself. As I argue in Chapters Three and Four, the creation of an Anglophone K-Pop fandom habitus simply could not exist without products from Korean culture or Korean domestic fandom culture. Here cultural studies and anthropology align in understanding the paradox of "culture cannot be defined" and that any sort of discerning attempt at extrapolating an answer of what culture is leads to the dependence on transculturality, a cyclical conundrum.

Anglophone fandom and Korean domestic fandom are hardly representative of the entirety of their supercultural forebears, however, and I must recognize that they are but microcosm communities that reflect the larger society around them but are not the entirety of it. Much like a multiplicity of cultures is necessary for the invention of cultures, as well as the

compiled lens of propriospect, we once again confront the necessity to define culture in terms of its plurality. Goodenough (1971) further delves into the making of culture, discerning the macro-culture, or the society's predominant culture, and different micro-cultures that simultaneously exist within the macro-culture. These micro-cultures include "sub-cultural" variants, that newcomers must learn to navigate these variants and understand when they should be performed within the macro-cultures. Just like facing the conundrum of defining culture, the meaning of subculture, Dick Hebdige (1979) asserts, is always in contention and dispute. Hebdige chooses to frame subculture within the context of power placements, speaking in terms of the dominant versus the subordinate or groups and communities that willingly choose to subvert against the normalized and the mainstream (ibid). In his analysis, Hebdige also decidedly focuses on British, working-class, youth cultures which are overwhelmingly white and male in nature. For these reasons, scholars like Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris argue that the term "subculture" is all-too restrictive, lacking a nuance that captures the diversity and fluidity of modern youth movements (2004). This is a sentiment shared by Angela McRobbie (2024) who argues that the term "subculture" can and should be placed in a dialogue with intersectionality, providing a much-needed update to the CCCS's earlier interpretations of subculture that resonated with a small, yet hegemonic, subset of society.

While K-Pop fandoms might not intentionally subvert the mainstream or the larger societies at hand there have been many arguments made and analyzed that discuss K-Pop fandom as fulfilling of Hebdige's definition of subculture, while also focusing on the intersectionality of identity which McRobbie discusses. For example, popular music researchers Sarah Hare and Andrea Baker (2017) outline this expansion of subculture as larger transcultural conversation utilizing the work of Sarah Thornton (1995) and Rupa Huq (2006). Thornton (1995) is a key

figure in the deployment of the term subculture to refer to groups outside of class-based resistance paradigms, instead identifying subculture and subcultural capital as a form of being in the transcultural "know." Huq (2006), meanwhile, researches on the subcultural in a postcolonial world, where/when diasporic and diverse populations are at the center of the narrative. In this widening of subculture's definition and contextualization, subculture comes to rely less on a preoccupation of youth cultural subversion of authority and power, and places more significance on shared interest, community, ritual, and collective identity (Hare and Baker, 2017) akin to Andy Bennett and Richard Peterson's (2004) characterization of a music scene. Bennett and Peterson's music scene is characterized as a fluid framework of identity and belonging, where music and engagement in music is an interpretive mechanism of community building. Scenes have also been used as an alternative framework to subculture, particularly when the definition of subculture felt too narrow and without room for interpretation, but I see the aforementioned scholars' expansion on subculture as a complement to the music scene paradigm. Huq (2006) in particular argues that youth culture and communities where youth audiences are the predominant participants are not fixed, in general terms, nor are they fixed as oppositional or subversion as a general rule. Rather, subcultures describe a much more fluid and globalized space wherein various participants negotiate identity stemming from histories and cultural memory around a central set of understandings and meanings built in that subculture (ibid). Hare and Baker (2017) further leverage Huq's work to highlight issues of underrepresentation of ethnic/minority groups and women and contends that this expansion of subculture leaves more room for conversation of global music subcultures that may not be ruled by the same concepts of power and popular culture as it is in studies that focus wholly on Global North subcultures. Thus, K-Pop fandoms can be considered a subcultural space, one informed by such media flows and cultural

understandings as Huq argues but is not necessarily in contention with nor subversive of the societies and mainstream beliefs and behaviors of the superculture; rather subcultures in my contention are very much informed by it.

As discussed above, while there is some relevant research on K-Pop fandoms as subcultures, these research projects are still very few in number and remain specific to certain communities, and/or play with the idea of subculture in a different paradigmatic sense (Sim, 2019; Fedorenko, 2021; Yena. 2023; Nandakumar, 2023; Saeji, 2024). K-Pop, as musical genre and the fandoms associated with the musical form, are rarely treated as communities, subcultures, or music scenes, with only a few exceptions (Sim, 2019). Even then, research on K-Pop fandoms often is not treated, explicitly, as a subculture or music scene specifically, but rather the community is recharacterized into different frameworks dealing with audience and reception. Some of the most notable literature includes Yena Lee's research into subcultures within subcultures—specifically, subsets of K-Pop fans who create counterpublic spaces on X (formerly Twitter) to challenge dominant fan practices and foster critical discourse (2023). Lee's study examines these subcommunities as a form of subculture closely aligned with Huq (2006), characterizing K-Pop fandom as both transcultural and subcultural. These groups sometimes act subversively in relation to mainstream culture due to the centrality of hegemonic media systems, while maintaining distinct identities. In her 2021 study of K-Pop fans in Seoul, Olga Fedorenko explores how K-Pop functions as a subculture within the broader society. She describes fans "taking over" the city's metro by placing billboard-style advertisements that celebrate their favorite idols' achievements. In Fedorenko's work, this practice is a reclamation of an urban space transformed into a fan space, thus subverting the capital interest of traditional advertisers within K-Pop fan practice. This work frames K-Pop fandom as more subcultural in Hebdige's

sense rather than Lee's (2023). Meanwhile, Aparna Nandakumar creates a complimentary paradigm to Lee, describing K-Pop fandom as the sub-visible culture, communities that sit between the global hypervisibility, just skirting the mainstream, while still maintaining the invisibility of operating in everyday life in seemingly significant ways. CedarBough Saeji (2024) refers to K-Pop fandom as a part of a system of adjacent industries, where this community's intense ownership and bonding with the idols crafts meaning (and questions) of authenticity in ways that subcultures or music scenes interpret the text or source object. Thus, while there are elements of a counterculture present within fandom, it is more appropriate to work with Huq and Hare and Baker's treatment of music subculture as a complement to music scene.

To review the evolving theoretical understandings of culture and subculture, I began with Roy Wanger's (1975, 2016) foundational anthropological work on the invention of culture, aligning with Ward Goodenough's (1971) concept of propriospect that highlights the multiplicity of cultural experience within an individual. Both of these anthropological frameworks, while the drivers of my analysis in my findings chapters below, align with elements of British Cultural Studies which foregrounds the everyday practices and media of ordinary social groups (Williams, 1958; Hoggart, 1957; Hall, 1980), stressing that culture is interpretive, every day, and not bound by class distinctions. By linking Wagner's reflexive invention of culture to Bourdieu's habitus, I show how K-Pop fandoms construct distinct subcultural practices, where fan rituals, behaviors, and interpretive frameworks are encoded, enacted, and transformed within different cultural contexts. As culture is a question of interpretation and meaning, so is subculture; how subcultural has been deployed in various literature, including in Hallyu-based research, is varied, and yet the common denominator is also that of interpretation and fluidity (Hebdige, 1979; Thornton 1995; Huq, 2006; Bennett and Peterson 2004), while a common critique of earlier

treatments of subculture lie in its whiteness and maleness (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2024). Subculture is even more of a fluid, interpretive framework in the K-Pop context. Some studies frame them as counterpublics engaging critically with hegemonic fan norms (Lee, 2023), others as spatially subversive communities enacting subcultural practices in urban environments (Fedorenko, 2021), while still others highlight their liminal visibility within global media networks (Nandakumar, 2023) or their entanglement within K-Pop's adjacent industries and icon-making structures (Saeji, 2024). Collectively, the established literature on culture and subculture indicate that the study of interpretive communities is still in flux, and various fields, such as Hallyu Studies, Fandom Studies, and Popular Music Studies, are actively engaging in what this says about our world.

The Parallel Trajectories of Hallyu Studies, Fandom Studies, and Popular Music Studies: Questions and Challenges in Interdisciplinary Literature

Research topics rooted in popular culture have easily been dismissed by previous generations of scholars as something that merely exists but does not inform or craft anything of consequence, nor reflects the shaping of the past. Pre-Wagner era anthropologists, for example, like Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) and Franz Boas (1911) treated everyday culture in the "western" world as mundane, characterizing the known Global North world as 'the boring,' while characterizing the exoticized Global South as 'the authentic.' Cultural studies researchers prior to Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies shared similar sentiments, with scholars like Theodor Adorno, likening popular culture to the decimation of authentic taste, seeing the popular as mass-produced, formulaic, and a form of hegemonic control over everyday people (Adorno and

Horkheimer, 1944, 2002). However, the CCCS, along with the aforementioned dialogue in the anthropological field of study that valued everyday interpretation of culture, helped dismantle a high-low binary, arguing that the everyday is a microcosm of much larger understandings of resistance, identity, community-making, ideology, and meaning (Hebdige, 1979; Hall, 1980; McRobbie, 2004).

Since the eventual unpicking of popular culture as a lesser subject matter, postcolonial studies contend that popular culture objects and texts represent a consistent gap in contemporary media studies, also failing to account for the deep-seated colonial structures that remain unaddressed within contemporary media (Atia and Holden, 2019). Korean popular culture proves no exception as previous research and writing on matters of Korean popular culture artifacts are often discussed in limited vacuums of economics, consumption, industry, and marketplaces (Lie, 2015, Choi and Maliangkay, 2015; Kim and Kang, 2023) where portions of colonial legacies, power structures, globalizations, fandoms, and their implications are rarely explored in nuanced ways. However, those who intersect with Hallyu Studies are increasingly engaging with other frameworks outside of economics and markets to explain and reconcile globalization, power, and postcolonialism in ways that are not necessarily reliant on but still relate to economy, including work on fan productivity and grassroots translation (Cruz, et al. 2019), cultural hybridity intersecting with Global North hegemony (S. Kim, 2017; K.H. Kim, 2021), and international fandom (Jin and Yoon, 2016). Cultural exports from this small East Asian country have disrupted a world media order wherein the Global North had historically laid claim to the top tastemaker title and as such, the majority of literature on K-Pop still concentrates on the idea of export, soft power, industry, and production.

When discussing the treatment of popular culture texts and artifacts within Hallyu Studies, there have been very distinctive trends within the field that, though increasingly discuss globalization, neglect to dive deeper into fandom studies and particularly overlook domestic fandoms and their interactions with global fandoms. Rather, fans are limitedly discussed as receptive, rather benign audiences and market variables within discussions of soft power, cultural exports, and cultural campaigns, like in the research of Dal Young Jin and Kyong Yoon (2016) and Kyng Yee Park and Yoon Young Yee (2017). Within such framings, the study of K-Pop and Korean culture's international popularity has traditionally been categorized in 'waves'; "Hallyu 1.0" (Jin, et al., 2021) was employed to describe the beginning stages of Korean popular culture as the newest export of South Korea in the 1990s. While referred to simply as the Hallyu Wave, a name that originated by China media to describe the importation of Korean popular culture to other Asian countries, the moniker was quickly adapted by scholars, and in subsequent eras of research, further "waves" are characterized by similarly framed academic trends (ibid.). During that first era, Jin and Yoon (2016) argue, researchers explored the manufacturing of Korean popular music but predominantly focused on the depiction of Korean society in television and cinema and its dissemination to surrounding East Asian and Southeast Asian countries as propelled by *Winter Sonata*. Scholars like Beng Huat Chua (2004) and Jinhee Jung (2005) were key researchers, chronicling the first wave through the lens of cinema and television. The latter half of Hallyu 1.0 largely focused on the onset of, not just idols, but also carefully selected solo artists as viable cultural export (Choi and Maliangkay, 2015). Throughout the early to mid-2000s, scholarship supplemented the "what," referring to content and the object of affinity, with the "why" and "how," attempting to understand the reach that K-Pop and K-Dramas had throughout the Asian continent (Marinescu, 2014). As social media radically changed the

landscape of K-Pop, it altered who had access to the materials generated by the industry and when. Hallyu 2.0 as coined by Dal Young Jin and Kyong Yoon (2016), encompasses the 2010s and beyond and is largely characterized by rapidly transnational and intercontinental interactions where social media was the dominant form of media flow, and where global audiences, namely North American audiences, have joined the fandom communities. Now, scholarship has abandoned its homogeneous fascination with television and cinema and have begun exploring grassroots disseminators of information across social media platforms (Jin, 2018), transnational audiences outside of Asia (Fuhr, 2015; Koo and Sung, 2017; Oh, 2018; Cicchelli and Octobre 2021) and implications of K-Pop behemoth boy band BTS on global markets (Cho, 2022; Larsen 2020; Cho, 2024; Ahn, et al. 2024a,b). Traditional boundaries are blurred because of transnationalism, and researchers have responded with questions of K-Pop's appropriation of other cultures (Hare and Baker, 2017; Anderson, 2020), discussions on Korean soft power (Ju, 2010a; Ju,2010b; Yoon; 2023) and a near obsession with Psy's brief fame in the west (Hu, 2015).

While Hallyu 3.0 as an emerging wave has yet to be scholastically categorized by any major researchers in the Hallyu Studies field, the current literature appears to be leaning heavily toward the exploration of transnational fandom and fandom practices as largely circulated by BTS's increasingly global brand as well as global audiences crafted from the steady cultural content machine of K-Dramas and Korean cinema (Cho, 2015; Yoon, 2023). A subfield of BTS Studies has emerged and diverged from Hallyu Studies fields as well with authors like Miranda Larsen (2020a, 2020b) discussing "BTS Exceptionalism" where BTS is deputized to represent all of K-Pop in academia, while researchers like Joowon Suh and Eun Sung Park (2025) lean into such frameworks, analyzing BTS's impact on Korean economics and the K-Pop industry. On the

whole, these popular culture products and global domination elicit conservations of Korea and its soft power as leading players in the cultural export economy rather than an underdog in a losing bracket. Rather than framing Korean products as niche objects of affinity making their way onto the global stage, scholarship is grappling with Korean products being at the center of it. The aforementioned Dal Young Jin is one of the more prominent names of the Hallyu field, and Jin's work traditionally deals most significantly in K-Pop as a genre object, wherein he explores how it diffused into transnational markets in a more capital sense. Positing social media and the digital age as primary agents for the rapid dissemination of K-Pop and other Hallyu artifacts, Jin's work (2018) understands audience as passive receptors and consumers of Korean pop cultural items, rather than understanding or utilizing any fandom studies or broader audience study frameworks to articulate the phenomenon of the spread of the object of affinity. Jin's framing of a relationship between the object and the audience/fandom is tenuous at best; indeed, Hallyu studies is just in the elementary stages of engaging with the idea of a "post-object" fandom (Williams, 2015) in its everyday form. Researchers like Paula Guerra and Sofia Sosa (2021), for example, research and discuss the ways in which K-Pop fans engage with memorabilia and memory making when their favorite idol groups are not actively performing or have disbanded. Many of the aforementioned fandom and audience frameworks present in Hallyu Studies are also now largely driven by diasporic or international academics (Berbiguier and Cho, 2017; Wilson, 2024) and deal with both fandom and genre in terms of authenticity of production, productiveness of fans toward metrics, and inter-appropriations of cultures adapting and borrowing from Global South cultures.

The primary work that deployed transculturality prior to many of these authors is Kyong Yoon's (2017) research of Canadian fans' "lived experiences" engaging with K-Pop texts. Yoon

makes the same observations on the state of K-Pop scholarship contending that his predecessors like Jin and Lie have failed to define the “K” of K-Pop because of its preoccupation with the “traditional” text of K-Pop, like musical production. Yoon argues that the Koreanness of K-Pop is located within fan lived experiences and fan-created meaning; it is a premise that aligns with my own theoretical analysis and directly guides this research. Yoon's analysis, however, overlooks uniquely Canadian fan interactions and experiences, focusing only on majority Asian-immigrant participants and traditional texts. While fan engagement with K-Pop texts is important and will be part of my study, my research goes beyond just fan-to-text interactions and expands the idea of fandom more globally. It explores fan participation with texts, paratexts, retextualization, and interactions within the fandom itself. Yoon also neglects fan performance, a key aspect of "lived experience," and treats traditional texts as the primary focus instead of the fandom as a transcultural object. While Yoon's framework suggests the potential for Hallyu 4.0, I argue that each wave of Hallyu scholarship builds on the previous rather than becoming redundant once a wave "ends."

As mentioned, another preoccupation of Hallyu scholarship has largely questioned the idea of the “K” in K-Pop, particularly in the “wave” of rapid globalization. Jin (2018) and John Lie (2015) have argued that the “K” in K-Pop really has nothing to do with Korea culturally or historically; the lettered prefix merely indicates country of origin, and if one were to strip the language from the music, there would be nothing uniquely Korean about its production. Ethnomusicologists like Sébastien Miroudot (2024), however, do contend that K-Pop is characterized as a hybrid genre of dance-heavy and Anglo-Pop music with significant influences from Swedish House music, a blend that appears wholly specific to K-Pop. K-Pop’s signature remixing of international music traditions is prevalent when compared to other similar East

Asian music products that relay on seemingly international models but still do not result in the same musical renderings as K-Pop (Fuhr, 2015; Anderson, 2020; Finan, 2020). The closest geographic cousins to K-Pop would be from neighbors China or Japan. While the "boy band" or "girl band" model is emulated and represented in all these nations, the insular market for J-Pop in particular results in a Japanese focused products that sounds musically very different from K-Pop (Hong, 2014; Jin and Yoon, 2016; Finan, 2020). Pop music from China, in its current form, now is glocalizing the sounds, and even production models of K-Pop, but of course they do not sing in the Korean language. No matter how simplistic, however, Korean language offers a dimension of Koreanness to K-Pop that is unique to the genre. The use of the label "K-Pop," argues Crystal Anderson in talking about genre, describes cultural fluidity, idols, idol fan subculture, and of course the Korean language (2020). K-Pop, is also interestingly, a moniker that is reserved for the global markets; in Korea domestically, the term "idol music" is used to describe K-Pop. It is within these discussions of what the "K" in K-Pop is, or perceived to be on a global fandom stage, that my work currently sits, incorporating data of and by the fans in ways that have not yet been previously executed in Hallyu studies, particularly when examining the "K."

Fandom Studies

The study of fandom in Hallyu is still developing and in its infancy compared to other disciplines. Similarly, fandom studies is scratching the surface as it pertains to fandoms of color or fandoms that derive from non-Global North media objects. This section of the literature review outlines the parallel trajectory of fandom studies to that of Hallyu. Firstly, in fandom studies, Henry Jenkins' (1992) de-pathologization of fans from the fanatic to the empowered, beautiful producer is largely considered a seminal shifting point in this area of study; his framework focuses on the fan as empowered producers, rather than audience as receivers (Gray,

et al., 2017; Grant and Love, 2019). Jenkins' work in this era dismantled a monolithic casting of fans and fandom as an obsessive mass hysteria that has existed since the onset of media depictions of fandoms in 19th century Europe and America (Cavicchi, 2017) and re-cast fandoms as complex communities and subcultures that reperform commercial or mass culture in fandom spaces to produce texts unique to that fandom. Borrowing from John Fiske's (1992) media work on taste-making and fandom identities, fans in this paradigm were interpretive communities, who were bonded through and in a subversive relationship to a media and cultural "power bloc" (Gray, et al. 2017). This paradigm of fans as meaning-producing, movers and shakers able to turn the tide for both traditional media texts – that is television shows, music, choreography, and other agency produced materials – as well as fan discourse to create something anew, serves as the basis for my questions on Anglophone fan reperformance, but my work is not overly reliant on it. As I will discuss, these first wave paradigms had plenty of analytic holes to fill as Jenkins and Fiske's understandings of fandom were all born out of media objects derived from the Global North, and their assessments read as an absolute truth for fandom without interventions or implications from Global South objects and audiences. This theoretical gap in literature has undergone considerable scrutiny in the 2020s. As with any industry, discipline, or research, there are certain approaches that tend to be more *en vogue* than others at certain periods of time. In fandom studies, Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (2017) analogize these trends of fandom studies research into (yet another) series of waves that crest in the academic community; each wave represents the academic treatment of fan materials and fans in a certain period of time, spearheaded by certain academics in the field.

The first "wave," that of Jenkins and Fiske's 20th century work, is dubbed "Fandom is Beautiful," and describes Fiske and Jenkins defense of fannish behavior and subculture. It is

critical of reductive academic and popular media representations of fans as both outliers whose behavior sits outside of prescribed societal norms and as passive receivers of media production (2017: 3). At the same time, while establishing the beautiful fandom, scholars of the era accidentally entrenched a dichotomy between productive fan and passive/receptive audiences which in a way further served to pathologize fandoms no matter the initial intent (2017: 9). While scholarship has since in recent decades worked with other dimensions of fan behaviors, empowered or not, seen within cultures and communities to further discuss the fan in a modern world encompassing the digital (Hines, 2000; Jenkins, 2006; Duffett, 2013; Bennett, 2014; Williams, 2015; Chin and Morimoto, 2017) groups of fandom studies scholars still contend that fans can be beautiful, arguing that this foundational framework of empowerment and fan relationship with textual producers is a powerful paradigm, particularly in a time when fan pathologization may again be on the rise (Coppa, 2014). Although fans continue to encounter "antagonisms" from traditional creators who reinforce negative stereotypes about fandom (Geraghty, 2014; Williams and Bennett, 2021)—and sometimes even within Fiske and Jenkins' frameworks—there is also an intentional pushback against the overly optimistic portrayal of fandom as always empowered. Recent scholarship points out that some fan communities struggle to include groups previously marginalized, such as fans of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and women (Scott 2019, Pande 2020), which challenges early perspectives and informs later analyses.

The second wave of fandom studies, as framed by Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, questioned the autonomized nature of fans and focused on Pierre Bourdieu's (1979 [1984]) conceptual framework of the habitus to explain fandom behavior toward their fan objects and each other. Poking and filling holes in the idea of fans as thoroughly beautiful and empowered

resistance movers and shakers, the progressive waves of fandom question the utopian ideal of fans (Click and Scott, 2017) as antithetical power producers and turned more to the motivations, behaviors, and hierarchy systems crafted in fandom communities as a reflection of the society in which those fans lived (Hills 2002, Crawford 2004, Duffett 2013). In Melissa Scott's introduction to *Fake Geek Girls* (2019), she introduces the slogan "Make fandom great again," (17), mirroring the slogan of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign slogan. In a parallel assertion to that of the Trump campaign, Scott explored comic fandom's attempt to restore the centrality of white, cis-hetero, male voices and to "cancel" the PC (politically correct) culture of diversifying their texts. In this exploratory introduction, Scott reminds readers that fans cannot always be lauded for their productivity as doing so often devalues women and people of color (2019: 22). In this reflection and refraction of the troubles and ideologies of the "real world" onto fandom subcultures in the second wave, researchers revisited the pathologization of fans in terms of community identities, including how race, gender, class, or age (Gray, et. al 2017:4) played a more significant part in their out casting and subsequently in the fandom community itself. And though it may seem that this wave focused largely on the identity of the fan, in reality, it emphasized fandom as collectives, representative of habitus, and dealt with that collective's relationship with the object of affection (Crawford, 2004).

From here, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington characterize a third wave of fandom scholarship, wherein fandom communities were broken down from being treated as monolithic blocks of people but analyzed as individuals who engage in inter/intra-personal communication and behavior (2017: 7; Jenkins, 2014). For instance, as Scott further explores in her monograph, not all comic fans sought the restoration of the fan-boy as ultimate arbiter of fandom, but rather there was plenty of resistance from groups within groups (2019: 25). This could also describe

Yena Lee's (2023) work on counter publics on Twitter within K-Pop fandoms as discussed earlier in this review; Lee recognizes the culture within the culture, identifying that fandoms cannot be treated as true, absolute wholes, since individuals form communities within K-Pop fan practice that is divergent from other individuals within the subculture. Here, identity is foregrounded, as it was in the second wave, but in ways that speak to the intersection of fandom identity, experience, and fandom space. In the third wave of fandom studies, scholarship turned to psychological frameworks to articulate fannish behavior. However, Jenkins, ever-present in the updated frameworks of what rules fan studies at any moment, discusses the possible pitfalls of taking psychological or psychoanalytic approaches in studying fandom motivations as deployed in the third wave (2007, 2014). Criticizing psychology interventions, in particular, Jenkins calls to reassess how fans as individuals are treated in relation to the networks in which the individuals operate; he feared in this third wave of psycho-analysis, that fans as individuals are re-pathologized and reduced to manic individuals rather than parts of a machine of fannish networks, community, and meaning making (2014: 255).

However, in what I see emerging as relative fourth wave, Julia Trzcińska (2018), a fandom scholar who studies K-Pop's transculturality in Poland, notes that in recent years, scholarship has become more critical of fandom actions, treating fan behaviors less like practices studied in a vacuum and more like movements with observable consequences, accounting for both the individual's identity, motivations, and behaviors and how it affects, not just the fannish the networks Jenkins prioritizes, but also resonates with society outside of the music scene or subculture. Individuals and their motivations and interpretations are as much a part of the conversation as the networks of which they belong, both in and outside of fandom. And fans, as both individuals and as a part of a community, are expert users, producers, and community

members affecting the outcome of extratextual and extra-spatial areas (Xiao et al., 2024), should be treated as a part to a whole in this ecosystem of fannish identity and societal happenings. There also is a large concentration of literature focusing on how fandoms operate in digital spaces, building an intensified digital participatory culture that is not just limited to interactions on social media, but expounds on fan practice of working with and relying on one another to increase fluency and affect outcomes of digital spaces (such as Cheng and Frens, 2022; Piva, 2022). In terms of K-Pop fandom and discussing how digital practice and expertise build on and affect change in culture outside of subculture, this is observed in recent literature surrounding K-Pop fandom's role in the 'Black Lives Matter' protests across the globe during the summer of 2020. Fans, as expert users and players in K-Pop subcultural fandom practice, deployed their knowledge to affect change in digital spaces, namely by crashing tip hotline video applications and websites by uploading "fan cams" of their favorite idols to the portals rather than legitimate video tips of protesters (Lee and Kao, 2021; Cho, 2022; Epps-Robertson, 2023).

Falling in line with recent waves' critiques and self-reflection on the state of the field and looking to expand how they interpret fandom, I point out one flaw of the ever-so-popular waves metaphor. What this chronicling of fandom studies throughout the last few decades as "waves" suggests is that each wave is a progression on the other, supplanting the previous era of scholarship until that too recedes back into the water. Elements of the old wave recede and wash away and this new wave is then what we ride to feel relevant in literature. Each subsequent wave develops beyond the wave of the past and somehow is seen as a linear progression in the same mis-conceptualized way history is characterized as progressively evolving. Instead, I contend that they are valuable elements from many different fandom waves that can co-exist, even if at a particular moment in time, such analysis doesn't fit into the era's more popular thematic stylings

of the moment. Hence, I'd like to offer a different thematic analogy to the characterization of my fandom studies frameworks as an alternative to Gray et al.'s waves. Fandom studies is like the Korean street food of kimbap. Kimbap is a rice roll with nori (seaweed) serving as the outer perimeter shell with a layer of rice laid in between the nori and whatever fillings you'd like inside. The fillings can vary depending on the type of kimbap it is -- some are vegetarian, some are fish-cake based, others have beef centers with smatterings of veggies. And like the different varieties of kimbap that can be swapped out to suit the diner's wants and needs, the fillings of my K-Pop fandom kimbap here are bits and pieces of past fandom studies rhetoric that can still exist with one another to explain how K-Pop fandoms operate and help digest Anglophone performances of K-Pop fan communities. Therefore, my K-Pop fandom studies kimbap is composed as thus: the rice is indeed Jenkins' arguments of empowered, productive fandoms reproducing texts or producing new texts, which in this case would be Anglophone fans crafting reperformances of fandom that speak to their cultural superstructures. The fillings then are that of fans as expert producers as individuals and networks and communities, crafting such performances, with a focus of fandoms derived from non-Global north markets. The final filling is an attempt to discuss individual and network motivations through various interdisciplinary frameworks on which I will provide further discussion about in this literature review. The nori, the thing that wraps it all together, are discussions of culture, propriospect, and habitus. And from my K-Pop kimbap, we can then add other topical ingredients from popular music and K-Pop literature. However, noticeably absent in the kimbap of fandom studies in its current state are fandoms of color and non-Global North media objects, an observation that the second and third waves of fandom has condemned in many cases.

Whiteness in fandom scholarship has been treated, not just skin deep, but also as a cultural framework to describe the situating of fans in "western" (i.e. American, British, and Australian) markets as desirably and dominantly white (Dyer, 1997). In covering various fandoms in the discipline, researchers have historically neglected fans of color, homogenizing and privileging white fandoms as the most exemplary of fandoms in those aforenoted locales and erasing fandoms of color that are cast as oppositional or in conflict with white fandoms (Stanfill, 2018). There is a persistent critique of fandom studies, namely the field's tendency to ignore fandom's outside of the "west" or the Global North, continuing to paint a white utopia of fan composition or neglecting to understand that whiteness is itself a racial identity (Wanzo, 2015). Henry Jenkins issues an avenger-like call to action (2014), wherein he urges the field to welcome studies on fandoms of color, a grossly underrepresented object of study in fandom and media. And in the decade since that call, fandoms of color – though often still subjected to audience, fandom, and media theories that derive from the Global North, as this research admittedly does as well – are carving out spaces within the discipline as important research objects. While scholars of color that reside in Global South geographies have always existed and persisted in discussing their respective national and cultural media objects and their associated audiences, their work operates very much in the silo of their area studies and effectively is ignored due to language barriers or other transnational boundaries like networking or cost of inclusion in Global North conferences. Known in the hard sciences as academic imperialism (Raju, 2011) which assigns higher intrinsic value to "western endorsement" (5), it is not dissimilar to the marginalization of media scholarship that originates out of Global South/non-Western European or American geographic origins and discusses fandoms of color. For Hallyu Studies in particular, research on K-Pop fandom in eastern Europe (Trzcińska, 2018), Southeast Asia (Sutton, 2018;

Siriyuvasak and Shin, 2007; Capistrano, 2019), the Middle East (Otmazgin and Lyan, 2013), and Latin America (Choi et. al, 2014; Madrid-Morales and Lovric, 2015; Yoon and Larbarta Garcia, 2024) illustrate a rich publishing history about periphery audiences in non-European or American localities. Without digital intervention, however, these pieces could not be disseminated and stamped with western endorsement, and the onus is on the scholar locating these articles to locate, obtain, and translate non-Global North scholarship, adding yet another level of exclusion when it comes to discussing diverse fandoms. However, fandoms of color, in conversation with fandoms that derive from or have a prominent presence in the Global North are increasingly becoming a part of the narrative of Global North fandom studies.

Rukmini Pande, one of the most vocal advocates for fandoms of color to be represented in academia, critically dismantles whiteness as a default of fan study and depiction. In *Fandom, Now in Color* (2020b), Pande posits that "different modes and categories of fans and fandom" can co-exist in a network of meaning in which one subsection of fandom does not necessitate a privileged position nor does any one particular demographic need to become the default consideration (3). In this vein, researchers are increasingly fore fronting fandoms of color at the center of research, including Aisha Powell and Sarah Breyfogle's (2024) study on the formation of Black fandoms and Troy Zhen Chen, Jackie Cameron, and Nancy Xuizhi Lui's research on Chinese fandom as method (2024). The thread that connects the aforementioned works is the framework of intersectionality and decolonization, understanding that more than one race – and in fact more than race itself – produces meaning. Pande's arguments for diversity and Jenkins call for diversification in fandom studies, as a field, is relevant to my work, two-fold. As a scholar of color, dealing with an object of affinity of color, situating my research as a legacy of non-white, non-Global North contexts is paramount. A lack of understanding of K-Pop's pre-

global roots would essentialize discussions of its globalization, treating it as a foreign interloper rather than a text that Anglophone fans approach transculturally. Second, while my work may not focus on fandoms of color in Anglophone spaces specifically, where the individuals identify as people of color explicitly or parts of my data and subsequent reflection on the identity of those in my data pool, intersect with my arguments of appropriation and globalization, I contend that highlighting their voices as non-White provides crucial contributions and context to fandom studies. How each fan views the world, as I will discuss in my conversation on cultural propriospect, changes or slightly alters how the fan interacts with the object and fellow fans, and while not a focal point of my study, its presence is felt in the data collection and analysis in this research.

Furthermore, K-Pop is a transcultural object, with fandoms of color and not, as well as an undertreated diasporic variable. Inherently, K-Pop's domestic audience is, unsurprisingly, an audience of color so homogenizing that and resorting to a default of whiteness of Anglophone fans ignores the history of the objects and the fandom's reality. Exploring transnational objects of affinity in fandom studies has also largely been lacking, with transnational and transcultural objects in fandom often treated in a siloed, one-to-one exchange, such as conversations of K-Pop's diffusion into country-specific markets like Eun-yung Jung's analysis of K-Pop's boom in Japan (2015), Suray Agung Nugroho's exploration K-culture exports in Indonesia (2014), or the reception of K-Pop in former Soviet satellite states (Trzcińksa, 2018; Gajzágó and Shim 2023). These previous explorations of K-pop as a "global" phenomenon draw dichotomized observations of two nationally intwined identities, limiting analysis to the framework of these two countries, rather than understanding transnational subcultures. In recent years, however, these transnational and transcultural objects and fandoms have experienced some intersection

with a more global approach, like in Crystal Anderson's *Soul in Seoul* (2020) which discusses K-Pop in a global, hybridized manner with intercultural and transcultural meanings. But still, there is trepidation about the reception of transnational objects by international fandoms, with researchers pointing out a persistent paternalism that is underexplored in K-Pop and other K-Culture exports, like reality television shows (Istad et al., 2024). For example, in Bora Kim's K-Pop studies works, she experimented with the production of a non-Korean K-Pop group, called EXP Edition, in which she challenged the nationalistic-based construction of K-Pop as genre (2018). The group was met with absolute backlash, with international fans in particular expressing discontent on social media accusing the group of cultural appropriation and "cheapening" K-Pop (Vice 2018). Even though Korean domestic consumers of K-Pop found Kim's experimental group a rather delightful show of Korean culture on a global stage, the disapproval and rejection of EXP Edition on the part of global fans proved an orientalist consumption of K-Pop as text (Kim, et. al, 2018: 964-965). In Kim's analysis, fans prefer to objectify and consume K-Pop as Other in a show of paternalism and potentially in a display of neocolonialism pushing narratives of appropriation as a way of justifying continued orientalism and exoticism in the genre (Kim, et al. 2018: 985-966). In a bit of a rushed-logic conclusion, Kim treats her experiment as a one-to-one country exchange, ignoring the cultural nuance of international fandom identity, interpretation of identity, and domestic fandoms/media object's identity. In my research, however, I discuss fandoms and transnational objects of color in less direct diffusion flow, but rather as a part of a network of meaning where racial identity informs motivations drawn from cultural habitus and individual propriospect. Fandom is not a flattened utopia of sameness, nor is it a direct exchange, and should not be treated as such by the field. My

work, thus, helps expand the conversation of fandoms of all shapes and sizes, understanding how identities and non-Global North cultures are inherently present within my work if not its focus.

Popular Music Studies

Fandom studies engages with a broad spectrum of media texts, including film, music, and television. Given that K-Pop is primarily a musical genre, my focus turns to popular music studies and the position of my research within scholarly discussions on fan engagement in this field. Notably, some of the most prominent and extensively examined fandoms pertain to popular music, such as analysis of the Beatles' fan community (Lebovic, 2016; Frontani, 2021) and boy band fandoms (Proctor, 2016; Gregory, 2019), and the historical development of popular music fandoms (Cavicchi, 2017). In these cases, scholarship has often approached such fandoms with a degree of pathologization (Shuker, 2022), reflecting broader tendencies within the media and academia prior to discourse introduced by Jenkins and Fiske (1992). This pathologization persists in current literature particularly in relation to the idea of media stereotypes in popular music studies (Coleman and Lyons, 2023) though popular music researchers in the recent decade have attempted to situate popular music and the fandom associated with it, as an area that warrants study and of which displays a formation of rich social identities (Shuker, 2022: 129, Gregory, 2019: 101). Mark Duffett (2013) notes that researchers studying media fandom have typically focused on areas outside of popular music, often lacking either the expertise or interest to examine how the production and distribution of popular music impacts fans and audiences. Meanwhile, scholars in popular music tend to be more engaged with topics like composition, musicology, and the mechanics of producing and distributing music, rather than exploring how audiences receive and interact with the music itself. As a result, the study of fan practices,

culture, and behaviors has been largely overlooked (Duffett, 2013: 6-7). Even though the activities around genres and artists are essential to defining the identity of music scenes and subcultures, research has rarely centered on fans as communities, as opposed to simply treating them as an audience. Some researchers have even contended that fandoms and audiences do not successfully participate in transnational media flows in general since audience music tastes often stay within the same locality, culture, and language as it is created (Lee and Cunningham, 2012), a discourse that I wholly reject.

Following Duffett, researchers have since taken up the mantle on proving why – and how – popular music fans and fandoms are of value. Particularly at the intersection between gender/sexuality, and audience demographics, popular music studies is now diving deeper into what fandom behaviors and practices means for the construction and production of music as a text and form, marrying what popular music studies have traditionally focused on with an infusion of why it matters in an everyday context (Hesmondhalgh, et al., 2002; Deflem, 2016; Tsioulakis and Ng, 2016; Ewens, 2020). These scholars focus predominantly on audiences and fandoms that are largely female and discuss to some extent the characterization of feminine behavior towards a male or male-presenting object of study or affinity (Lacasa et. al, 2016). This bears the question of whether popular music studies treatment of fandom still exhibits vestiges of pathologization and thus, is perhaps still engaging in arguments of fan productivity and empowerment, as seen in the first wave of fandom studies, and is working its way through the idea of fandom as an empowered or productive part of the music scene. Others cast popular music fandoms and audiences as inherently problematic, pathologizing them as almost inhibiting factors in the creation and dissemination of artful and tasteful music forms or getting in the way of or bastardizing formerly considered forms as well (Williams, 2013; Tsioulakis and Ng, 2016).

Fandom is typically not regarded as an integral aspect of the community scene, nor is it commonly addressed in popular music studies as such. Instead, the term "audiences" is generally deployed by scholars who engage with musical texts and forms; it serves as a synonym for "fan" but does not negotiate frameworks of pathologization (Lull, 1987; Porcaro et al., 2022) and does not engage with the nuanced theoretical treatment that fandom studies affords fans. Consequently, fandoms are often treated as a tertiary component of the scene, folded into conversations of audience.

A notable area where fandom studies intersects with popular music research involves examining musicking across varied identities, specifically without pathologizing fan behavior. This includes analysis of the platformisation of music and the evolving ways in which audiences and fans engage with digital platforms. Such studies utilize data from widely used social media networks like TikTok to assess how listeners and fans interpret and create musical experiences on a transnational and transcultural scale (Zaborowski and Bennett, 2025). Furthermore, these works highlight the mobilization of music-based communities and identities in influential activism campaigns, as seen in K-Pop fandom's involvement with 'Black Lives Matter' and the use of fandom practices during the December 2024 protests in Seoul following President Yoon Suk Yeol’s enactment of martial law (Engel, 2024; Rashid, 2024; Yoon and Ables, 2024). Within these works, popular music frames fandoms and audiences alike as productive, possibly even subversive, actors in a music scene; the focus is also on the productivity of the fans themselves, rather than on industry and agencies’ production and distribution of music texts for audience consumption. Here audience is not a superior framework to that of the fan, and using the designation of fan demonstrates a readiness to engage with the idea of fandom, even if comes

with the definitional and cultural baggage of pathologization, messy evolution, and loaded history.

Given this incongruous discourse as it misaligns with the current state of fandom studies and Hallyu, the aforementioned literature demonstrates how research that intersects all three fields is lacking, despite their similarities and the nature of the media object. I find my work situated intersectionally and thus, I seek to bring the parallels between the disciplines to a point of focused collaboration. As a popular music object of study that focuses on fan and audience reception and behavior in response to and around said object, which is Korean in nature and a part of the Hallyu wave, it is impossible to ignore this intersection. Working through previous fandom literature in relation to habitus, as well as how popular music studies treat fans and audience, all with an overlay of Hallyu's scholarship (or lack thereof) in mind, this research puts these disciplines in communication with one another to articulate how international fandoms might treat a global media object.

Globalization and Appropriation Theories to Communicate Intercultural Media Flow and Subculture Crafting

Korean media products, like K-Pop, arguably were crafted and exported with the idea that Korean culture would also be exported, and in a sense, was "asking for" a level of appropriation or reinterpretation of the exported object. As something is disseminated and meant for globalization in the form of soft power– a term used here to refer to the positive reception from international audiences that helps the country of production coalesce popularity and translate it into international power (Nye, 2002, 2004; Gallarotti, 2011)– one cannot ignore the capital gain

that the origin culture or country benefits from such. However, as my thesis deals with K-Pop fandoms at its core and not strictly the marketing, distribution, and selling of the media object itself, I do not entirely engage with the idea that K-Pop fan practice is meant or destined for appropriation or adaptation, rather I focus on how it occurs. However, I understand how important it is to contextualize K-Pop fandom within the power and production networks of economy and soft power, thus in this section, I address the historiography of Korea as a soft power player and then introduce an interdisciplinary framework on globalization and appropriation that describes the terminus of the cultural and media theories I have already discussed in this review.

South Korea and Soft Power

Soft power, as coined and defined by political scientist Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (2002; 2004), is the power by which a country may exercise control and establish hegemony via a positive endearment to other nations in the world. While hard power relies on tangible, possibly even coercive modes of compliance—military being a prime example of such—soft power utilizes indirect, intangible methods that creates a meta-power dynamic involving attraction and persuasion through affinity, rather than rely on the coercive nature of hard power (Nye, 2004; Gallarotti, 2011). Theoretical discussions of soft power have evolved since Nye's initial analysis, opening up arguments on the hybridity of soft and hard power (Gray, 2011), with key figures like Suzanne Nossel (2004) exploring the concept more in depth in terms of "smart power," a combination of culture and military. In the case of Korea, the national export of popular culture—K-Beauty, K-Drama, or K-Pop—and its deep popularity and resonance with the Anglophone market makes Korea a major cultural player in international economics and

contributes to the country's voice in global policy and relations (Prasirtsuk, 2020). While Korea's strategic importance has less to do with their literal hard power – something Nossel would argue is antithetical to real power – and more to do with their associations with and proximity to countries that exhibit hard power, Korea as a country has excelled in exported products that are viewed as distinctly Korean.

Scholarly discourse on soft power in economics and international relations often situates its analysis within contemporary nation-state paradigms. As a result, research on the globalization of K-Pop and related soft power cultural products has traditionally framed these phenomena as transnational. Transnationality encompasses the movement of goods, people, and ideas across nation-states and shifting borders (Stolte et al., 2021). While territorial units undoubtedly influence local, regional, and global dynamics (ibid.), such a perspective is limited in describing the multifaceted diffusion of K-Pop—often compared to a sequential chain reaction. Nationality should not be regarded as the sole determinant of globalization; adopting a transcultural approach offers broader analytical scope by facilitating exploration of both bordered and borderless communities and simultaneous cultural interactions rather than restricting understanding to linear exchanges. The propagation of Korean soft power may be more accurately likened to reflections in a funhouse, where a single object assumes diverse forms according to the structure of each mirror, instead of uniform dominoes falling successively. Employing transculturality enables the inclusion of various cultural groups connected by overarching cultural frameworks yet untethered from national boundaries or citizenship. Within K-Pop fandoms, issues related to race, gender, and sexual orientation frequently transcend country of citizenship, emerging in contexts where national identifiers are minimized or absent (McClaren and Jin, 2020).

Within the context of K-Pop's diffusion, globalization can be discussed in terms of both cross-border and cross-cultural movement of capital and commodities; Korea's soft power, its reach, and the immediacy of its reach via the internet and social media all create the sense that the world is smaller, and Korea is much closer to consumers than it was decades ago (Lie 2015). Globalization and "the global," however, does not erase the local, a concept that is intrinsic to the evolution, adaptation, and reperformance of Korean cultural ideas in K-Pop fandom. The world is made even smaller by the glocalization phenomenon, a concept that explains the insertion and adaptation of locality into growing global and intercontinental trends (Roudometof, 2016), which will be explored at length in the next section of this review. The glocalization of K-Pop in other markets such as China and Japan is an underrepresented area of study in Hallyu Studies literature, and the concept will serve as a foundational element of Anglophone and international fan behaviors in the analysis of my research as glocal products are increasingly formed in the K-Pop space. To an extent, transcultural fandom re-performances should be considered a glocal phenomenon, an avenue of research that will be explored in the findings of this work. But given the cultural and commercial glocalization of a product that has roots in Korean societal superstructures and traditional cultures, how does one reconcile conversations of appropriation and exportation?

Economic Globalization Theories as it Aligns with Culture

Marrying transculturality and globalization, these diffusion theories widen what the idea of community can be, shifting from ethnic, national, or local belonging to include people from different locations that are exposed to the same cultural commodities; popular culture consumption is creating a sense of 'we-ness' that transcends transnational communication and

constitutes identity in a mediated global imagination (Otmazgin 2016). This imagined community, built from participatory fan practices in online spaces (Morimoto and Chin 2017), highlights the importance of framing this research within the context of transculturality, as members of the community can move in and out of fandom spaces without ever crossing borders or disclosing the borders in which they are physically situated. Indeed, Rukmini Pande (2025) argues that the concept of transculturality in fandoms simply does not truly exist, as increased globalization of such products inherently means that fandoms are all transcultural in a sense. While I still deploy the term through this thesis, I understand and agree with Pande's provocation that the inter-connectedness of fandoms from around the world will be a dominant thread in fandoms studies moving forward. I deploy the term "glocalization" (Roudometof, 2016) to articulate how commercial media objects function across cultures. Rather than a singular globalization, I posit that K-Pop fandom involves a series of repeated glocalizations working in tandem with fandom habitus. This process—moving from the invention of culture to propriospect, habitus, and subculture—is effectively a glocalizing act.

Understandably that statement may concern those who see resemblances on the surface to globalization theories that argue, somewhat patronizingly, that the "playing field" is completely leveled with no obstacles for anyone in the world to participate the same as any other would, in global endeavors. The most controversial and infamous of such is economist, Thomas Friedman (2006) who notoriously argued in his "the world is flat" theory that the digital and information technology age, as ushered in by Globalization 3.0, has shrunken and flattened the earth, allowing any entity to compete with traditionally regarded global superpowers, while prior to the information age, the world was peaked at centers of commerce. However, his work is deeply problematic, utilizing colonial metaphors that measure economic superiority through

"Americanness" such as accent-free English and the adoption of Western names. Economists and business researchers repeatedly take issue with Friedman's paradigms, criticizing that a) his metaphors are altogether too vague to be useful b) his belief that the world is flat is unevidenced and rather interconnectivity actually creates more spiked centers of activity and c) he ignores fundamental power dynamics that disadvantage individuals not from traditional centers of economy from even reaching the level of a leveled playing field in the first place (Leamer 2007, Ritzer 2007, Christopherson et. al 2008, Roudometof 2016a). While I acknowledge Friedman's "flattening" as a decentering of the Global North, his neoliberal definition overlooks transculturality beyond economic interaction. I argue that cultural diffusion is not strictly capital-driven (Cazdyn and Szeman, 2011). Following Michael Mann (1986) and David Hesmondhalgh (2019), I frame globalization through aspects of cultural superstructures like politics and social measures, and transcultural flow, rather than purely capital paradigms.

The world, however, is still not entirely flat, but these progressive models of globalization show that the world is much less dramatically mountainous throughout history than we may have believed. Instead, the world has always been rather hilly, as transcultural power and taste making were set within communities of power, but the disparity in elevation is not as dramatic as some researchers and writers like Richard Florida (2005) and Vandana Shiva (2005) would believe. The peaks could get higher and lower depending on the colonial or imperial relationships of the time, but there were still fascinations for the materials derived from the Global South during these periods. While cast as oriental in nature and deeply problematic in its adaption, appropriation, and eventual erasure of origin, this example still represented a kind of cultural consumption that pointed to more of a hilly landscape than a peaked one on which ultimate cultural power was in the hands of the colonizers; in essence, cultural flows were much

more multi-directional, even during colonial times than hegemonic narratives outline (Banerjee, 2001). As the world globalized and became more connected after the fall of the Berlin Wall, for example, is a time when the peaks became more dramatic. Here the cultural arbiters, particularly that of popular culture and media, formed Himalayan peaks in the United States and United Kingdom, a legacy of postcolonial/colonial cultural dominancy and hegemony where Anglophone worlds ruled (Lull 2000; Coban, 2020). But with the digital age, the peaks are once again leveling out (Jin, 2016; Chin and Morimoto, 2017) but are still not entirely flat. Such is the critique of a perceived homogenizing effect of internet fandom and imagined communities by media and fandom studies scholars Bertha Chin and Lori Morimoto (2017). Chin and Morimoto highlight that the internet is generally, albeit erroneously, perceived as a space and place of cultural and global diffusion where traditional makers of identity (phenotype, given cultural names, etc.) are stripped away from the forums in which fans interact, and therefore crafts an idealized, unproblematic, or flattened – if you will – place where fans can engage with one another without the obstacle of formal borders in the way. However, these online spaces are not flattened, but in reality, the same, speedy diffusion of culture that the internet is credited to permit to take place may also exponentially increase intercultural, transcultural conflict from a fan that, in the offline world, operates in a culture that is separate and different from that of which they are engaging online. Our differences make for hilly online spaces, despite breaking down traditional boundaries of identity and geography (2017: 176-179). The flat earth and the perception of internet imagined communities neatly and overly optimistically describe a world in which we can all be global friends but sadly is not the reality of globalization.

So then, if the world is not flat, how do we reconcile globalization and appropriation in terms of K-Pop, a cultural product that is so distinctly Korean and yet a globally consumed text?

Here, I integrate the definitions of globalization in the economic sense into the anthropological and cultural fields framework already presented in this literature review. It is in this context, I want to introduce a decades-old framework of the glocal. First theorized by Roland Robertson (1992), the glocal was crafted to describe the absence of the local as formed in a vacuum, but rather the local is always constructed through and in which what is popular or important at the global level. As a fan of metaphors and analogies much like Friedman and I undoubtedly are, Robertson also analogizes the glocal as a Hindu deity, one that is a single entity and yet manifests among different people in different ways in so that the deity is recognizable globally. In Robertson's definition of the glocal, practices or products that are crafted globally (i.e. not locally by that or for that particular community initially) are re-translated, or re-performed, while encoded with a familiarity that resonates with a local community (Holton 2005, 2009); it is an imported product and yet a bit more familiar than a strict "foreign" import. Later researchers have styled this phenomenon as glocalization, naming a vernacularizing of globalness (Axford, 2018). Classifying international K-Pop fandoms as a series of glocalizations is a framework that pays attention to market re-adaption and performance, capturing the nuance necessary to interrogate the binaries of cultural appropriation, though not without its own logical faults.

I craft this intercultural perspective of globalization and glocalization because South Korea, and the Korean peninsula as a whole, does not fit neatly into the typical paradigms of economy, power, and media centers that other postcolonial regions do and rather proves as a curious case of a Global South country that punches above its weight class on the global stage as carried by government subsidy and a value placed on soft power (Yoon, 2023). Traditional postcolonial theories, such as Homi Bhabha's (1994) Third Space of hybridity and mimicry, fall

short here. Bhabha, a leading thinker on hybridization, postcolonialism, and cultural appropriation, developed the concept of the Third Space to describe a form of cultural mimicry wherein the space resembles a colonizing culture of origin but is never identical, instead reflecting fragments of a secondary culture layered over the remnants of colonial influence. It is like the craquelure in an old colonial paintwork revealing proceeding layers of covered up work. Bhabha assumes a direct colonial link between a Western "superior" and a subjugated "inferior." Korea, however, was never colonized by the Anglophone world; its colonial legacy is rooted in its relationship with Japan. Furthermore, Bhabha's model of power flow is inverted with Korea and the flow of K-Pop; Korea is tastemaker despite being a Global South entity and a formerly characterized "Third World" country (Tomlinson, 2003). Where Bhabha's conversations on the flow of power between the colonizer and the colonized may be relevant in the K-Pop context is in the exportation of a colonized local product into the global, then reimagined into the glocal in the colonizer's culture. This dances in the same space as conversations on what cultural appropriation is but still does not quite capture the colonial flow of information and power present in Korea's situational case. Ultimately though, power, economy, culture, and globalization all work in the same eco-system, it is just a matter of understanding how all this works together to place the particular object at hand in said eco-system. As Bhabha's postcolonial is a bit of square peg in the round hole of Korean culture and economy, his theorizations fall short. While previous literature has leveraged Bhabha's work in cultural mimicry to describe Korea's adaptations and reperformances of global popular culture, thus crafting a hegemonic state in terms of soft power (Kim, 2021), these frameworks do not account for the addition flows of culture that move and forth between the markets. Kung Hyun Kim (2021) treats Korean cultural products as a final product exported and received by international

audiences, however, in my theorizations, there is no “end.” Rather it’s a cycle of exchange that reflects constant and consistent reinterpretation and adaptations of subcultural tenets that are constantly flowing and flexing. Rather than cultural exchange being treated as an exchange between two poles it is more of a network of understanding that creates a web of power and meaning. Globalization theory, including glocalization, explains how new Anglophone fandom subcultures continually form and evolve in response to economic and power dynamics.

Glocalization and Appropriation

While glocalization in Hallyu Studies typically focuses on K-Pop music products rather than fandom or subculture (Kim, 2017; Oh and Jang, 2020), I argue that the truth of the "K" in K-Pop is more present in fan subcultures. Therefore, my use of glocalization emphasizes how Korean pop culture is disseminated, consumed, and reinterpreted within these communities. In this reinterpretation, we must discuss then the parameters of cultural appropriation, a concept that has a rich history of argument and discussion. James Young’s early work (2005, 2008) on the subject explores the dichotomy between respectful borrowing and exploitative appropriation, emphasizing the ethics of taking from another culture. He dives into the understanding of intent and context, as well as introduces the idea of power dynamics between the borrower and borrowee. In his research, Young coined the term profound offense, a paradigm that describes how members of the appropriated culture react to other cultures taking or borrowing from them. Young argues that a measure of cultural appropriation should lie in consultation and reaction from the taken-from community, also clarifying that the “profound offense” felt in the community should indicate that the borrowing is morally wrong, not just mildly offensive. It must “strike at the core values and identity of a culture” (2005: 145), but the intention of the

borrowing, the power dynamics between the cultures, and context of the borrowing should be accounted for to determine whether we can consider this cultural exchange to be considered culturally appropriative. Conversely, Susan Scafidi (2005) analyzes legal and social aspects of cultural ownership, arguing that appropriation occurs when a marginalized community's culture is used without permission, with focus on the appropriator's intent. Meanwhile, Young evaluates appropriation based on the reactions of marginalized groups. However both Cruz and Lee distinguish appropriation from appreciation by emphasizing the importance of reflexivity, highlighting that mutual understanding and at least tacit approval from the originating community is essential (Cruz et al., 2024).

Cultural appropriation is a topic of relevance within Hallyu Studies in certain capacities, however, the majority of literature discussing such framework operates mostly in how K-Pop as a music genre takes and borrows from other cultures to produce their songs, choreography, and aesthetic styling (Hare and Baker, 2017; Anderson, 2020; Wilson, 2024). Rarely have researchers approached K-Pop as something that is borrowed *from*, with few exceptions of which I count myself among (Kong, 2026a). This examination of cultural appropriation offers a different and distinct analytical framework within Hallyu Studies, broadening the field’s current concepts.

Reoccurring Fandom Practices and How to Locate Its Meaning

This part of the literature review highlights three major themes that consistently appeared in my research: parasociality, materiality, and Confucian competition. Parasociality describes the unique, emotionally charged relationships fans develop with K-Pop idols or among themselves

within fandom communities as part of their social practices. Materiality focuses on the significance of objects and physical items in fandom studies and Korean supercultures. The discussion on Confucian competition delves further into Korea's cultural framework, examining the origins and impact of these competitive markers within domestic fandoms. These three concepts form the cultural foundation of Korean domestic fandoms and often intersect in complex ways. Anglophone reinterpretations of these themes consistently served as the basis by which I observed fandom glocalizations

Parasociality

Traditional media frequently depict fan communities—such as those for the Beatles, Elvis Presley, Justin Bieber, One Direction, and BTS—as irrational or outside societal norms, especially when fans form strong connections with media objects (Jensen, 1992; Jenkins, 1992, 2014; Duffet, 2017; Sandvoss, 2017; Click and Scott, 2018; Grant and Love, 2019). In this sense, fans are illustrated as helpless, delusional, and often female participants, powerless to stop themselves from engaging in fantasies of celebrity worship. Celebrity studies researcher William Brown writes that fans *do* actively participate in the ritual of parasocial interaction when consuming media and are not just passively receiving coded cues to engage in bonding behavior, but as far as Brown can trace, the encouragement of parasocial relationship building between fan and media object on the part of the celebrity—or their agency—has been normalized as long ago as Kate Smith's World War II-era stardom when the singer sold war bonds for the American government (2018: 256). Psychologists Robert King Merton, Alberta Curtis, and Majorie Fiske (1946) coined Smith's success in selling bonds as "mass persuasion"—over $31 million was pledged by radio audiences for the purchase of war bonds; Brown postulates that it was Smith's

deployment of affectual bonding during a media package that was the root of the audience motivation to purchase the bonds (2018: 257).

Parasocial bonding, or relationships or interactions that promote kin-making, is not uniquely an Anglophone fandom phenomenon nor is it uniquely a marker of Korean domestic K-Pop fandom. Rather, parasociality is long studied in the "western" psychological context as well as in Korean society and cultural contexts. An anthro-sociological term coined by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl (1956) to describe the "conditions of response" from consumer to performer in a period of changing media, a parasocial relationship, traditionally, describes the perceived intimate bond between media audience to media object; the object, even if fictional, appears to authentically engage in real, peer-to-peer relationships with the media audience (1956: 215). Horton and Wohl also outline parasocial interaction as another degree in which a parasocial relationship may take place, framing it as a performative imitation of dialogue that occurs when media objects respond to audiences by acquiescing to certain tropes and performing certain behaviors that the audience seems to desire (1956: 215-216). Rubin, Perse, and Powell's 1985 Parasocial Interaction Scale, however, characterizes "PSI" as more of a single directional flow of affection from audience to object while the "parasocial relationship" denotes a bi- or multi-directional flow of interaction and communication (Liebers and Schramm 2019), representing a more equal investment from both audience and object.

Within both domestic and international K-Pop communities, distinct forms of parasocial behavior are observed, influenced by foundational relationship norms rooted in Korean traditional culture—norms that may not be adequately reflected in Anglophone contexts or media originating from the Global North. The effectiveness of parasocial marketing strategies in K-Pop is closely linked to overarching Korean cultural frameworks that equip fans with an

understanding of parasocial kinship, particularly through two principal traditional values. The first is Jeong, a cultural concept emphasizing togetherness, which facilitates relationship-building among individuals who are not directly acquainted or related (Elving-Hwang 2017; L.H. Lee, 2022). As Jeong underscores the significance of interconnectedness, it normalizes the presence of parasocial relationships within Korean fan culture, stemming from established societal practices of forming social bonds (Elving-Hwang 2018). For example, male idols frequently encourage younger female fans to address them as "Oppa," a term denoting older brother and also used for romantic partners, thereby reinforcing these social dynamics. Fan activities imbued with elements of parasociality and Jeong often reflect profound admiration and reverence, such as organizing subway advertisements to commemorate an idol's birthday or a group's debut anniversary (Cho 2020). The second major influence is rooted in traditional Korean kinship models, which operate synergistically with parasocial frameworks, further validating such relationships for Korean K-Pop fans. In this domestic context, parakin-relationship formation involves assigning familial linguistic markers to close friends and confidantes in a more systematic and less emotionally driven manner compared to practices in the Global North; this use of familial language is integral to the cultural environment shaping fandom behaviors. This accepted cultural standard enables both agencies and artists to foster perceptions of the artist as both an object of affection and a significant other, while simultaneously encouraging fans to view their peers as members of a community unified by collective admiration (Yan and Yang, 2020).

Understanding these two cultural frameworks, the root of parasociality in K-Pop fandom is within the larger society of Korea. Contrary to contemporary practice in K-Pop production and current industry practice, in the 1990s the "first generation" of K-Pop idols leveraged mystery as

a marketing tool. Private lives and any aspect of the celebrity's personality and personal details were kept very much a secret (Herbrink, 2020). While idols' families and friends are still often kept out of the spotlight to the point their images are blurred in photographs and their names are not shared, the second-generation of idols began utilizing fan desire to "get to know" their celebrity. This phenomenon closely parallels the rise of celebrity within post-1920s cinema, in which the standard practice of naming and promoting actors only developed several years after the inception of the film industry. Over time, the industry shifted away from anonymity toward adopting a theatre-inspired tradition, where actors' names and reputations became integral to promotional efforts (Shail, 2019). In such a move toward accessibility to the idol, the K-Pop industry leaned into the power of parasociality. And in a society already equipped with the language and customs to negotiate closeness and relationship building with strangers, idealizing idols to fit a role in a fan's life become more routine than a pathological anomaly. Strengthened by direct digital access that fans may have to their object of affinity through social media and other online forms of intimacy (Bennett, 2014a), fandom is interconnected with the information age and cultural influence. Understanding this cultural context when coupled with fandom expertise in the object of affinity, my research discusses the relevance and presence of parasociality in crafting fandom performance as it moves from a superculture and habitus with acceptance of such parasocial and parakin making to a superculture where that practice is much more pathologized or misunderstood. Discussions of parasociality are present in Chapter Three's discussion of expertise of the body in fandom, as well as Chapter Four, in the formation of inter-fandom relationships. Parasociality is also discussed within the context of methodology, as my own researcher positionality engaged with reflexive understanding of parasocial relationships among fans.

Materiality

Another consistent emergent theme throughout my research findings is materiality, and its presence within the subculture of K-Pop fandoms, both domestic and Anglophone. To understand these approaches to materiality later in this thesis, I must include literature on the treatment of materiality in fandom spaces, particularly on how it is a part of fandom practice. While most literature I interacted with discusses how materiality operates in Global North fandoms, my findings chapters will discuss how these paradigms of materiality are at odds with domestic K-Pop fandoms, at times, and how Global North fandom habitus with materiality informs emergent, glocal Anglophone K-Pop fandom subcultural practice.

Within Global North fandom discourse, material objects from costumes to memorabilia to merchandise play a significant role in the creation of community and identity in fandoms (Hills, 2014; Sandvoss, 2015; Booth, 2018; Bennett, 2022). Materials serve as both outward semiotic signals that indicate membership into a fandom community but also build a fandom archive where personal and community memories and objects are stored (Scott, 2017). Fans ascribe special meaning to objects, whether purchased as a part of agency or industry dissemination of the media object or DIYed to level the fan playing field or exhibit affect (Lamerichs, 2018). Here, fans as consumers live in a contradiction – while fan participation as reinterpretation and reproduction of the object of affinity is considered extra-textual and operate outside the norms of western capitalist ideals, fans consistently buy into the capitalist model of consumerism when "keeping up" with the object of affinity's latest text (Hills, 2002). Both collecting and crafting, therefore, are ideals found within Global North fan habitus, an aspect of fan materiality that will be important in my findings chapters on Anglophone reperformance of K-Pop fan practice.

It is essential to emphasize a significant aspect of fandom materiality literature relevant to my research: the concept of DIY. The term "do-it-yourself" (DIY) refers to the practice whereby individuals create their own memorabilia and materials using personal resources. While DIY objects appear both within fandoms and related subcultures as well as outside them, in the context of fandom, DIY functions as a ritual of production. This process demonstrates how fans actively assume ownership of media properties they admire by engaging with these objects through a material perspective (Wirman, 2009). Fan productivity in material DIY has been described as a subcultural ritual (Booth, 2010) and a means of gaining fan capital (Lamerichs, 2018), as well as an act of subverting power structures and capitalism (Hills, 2002; Carter, 2018). While much research focuses on immaterial or digital texts and paratexts (Jenkins, 1992; Sauro, 2017), this aspect is less relevant to my findings. However, emergent paratexts remain compelling and present valuable opportunities for future research on K-Pop fandom.

Confucianism

Confucianism is a central aspect of Korean traditional culture, and I believe it has greatly influenced certain behaviors and rituals found in fandom activities. Despite a deeply historic context, Confucian ideals in Korean society have not fallen to the modern wayside, rather they are still very much present in contemporary discourse, co-mingling with democracy, identity, and modern belief systems (Gao, et al., 2023). Some scholars like Seok-Choon Lew, Woo-Young Choi, and Hye Suk Wang (2016) argue that Confucian values craft a positive, ethical framework by which modern Koreans can thrive, while others like Joanna Górska–Szymczak and Adam Machowski (2022) illustrate Confucianism in constant tension with modernity, constantly being reformed anew. At the heart of much of modern Confucian scholarship as it

pertains to Korean society is the principle of filial piety, a framework that consistently appears in this thesis on both the part of the idol and the Korean domestic fan. Filial piety refers to the respect one has for elders and those persons of authority; it is a cultural fixture that plays hand-in-hand with other Confucian values of discipline and collectivism (Śleziak, 2013). Traditionally framed as respect and obedience toward immediate family, namely parents and ancestors, filial piety extends beyond family and structures relationships in schools, workplaces, and other aspects of daily everyday life (Lew, et al. 2016). Scholars argue that this enduring moral framework helps sustain Korea's highly organized, group-oriented social systems while simultaneously shaping notions of civic responsibility and trust (Lew, Choi and Wang, 2016; Kim, 2013).

In the domestic K-Pop subculture, Confucianism and collectivism as learned through cultural structures like filial piety, manifest in fandom behaviors and rituals. And much like how globalization has not removed Confucianism from everyday Korean life (Kim, 2013), Confucianism has not been erased from Anglophone reinterpretations of K-Pop subcultural norms. Rather, fans do not realize that they may be glocalizing a practice so ingrained in traditional Korean cultural ideals. As discussed in Chapter Three in regards to Jeong and interconnectivity building a normalized parasociality, these practices of Confucianism are simply taken as fact in the K-Pop subculture and relocalized and understood in an international context, though without the same language of culture. In Chapter Five, as well, Confucianism and filial piety help shape Korean domestic fandom rituals, while Anglophone fans' lack of understanding inadvertently subverts it.

A Conclusion on Literature

While the fields of cultural studies, fandom studies, popular music studies, Hallyu studies, and economics discuss similar topics dealing with globalization, cultural transmission, and transnational media objects, they are not typically unified in a single approach. However, given the complexity of this transcultural media object, I found that drawing from these different fields crafted a new fluency in the analysis of the object. Articulating each theory helps me analyze my research in terms of stages of transcultural movement. One invents culture, then crafts a lens by which to view and interpret that culture, then infuses their own fandom and cultural habitus into that lens. The resulting lens – which includes codes of behavior, symbols of meaning, and rituals – is a glocalized economic and cultural product understood and performed by the fandom community that crafted it.

To summarize, I first explored fandom studies development on the treatment of the fan, acknowledging that frameworks deployed in past "waves" of popular scholarship can persist and are relevant in conversations of K-Pop. Whereas popular music scholarship has largely steered clear from discussing fandoms, save for explorations of fandoms that are still relatively pathologized by researchers and media, it is evident that there is space within the discipline to understand fandoms, in a more nuanced way, as a reflection of subculture and a larger culture. In terms of Hallyu studies, my work is operating within a move in the field to engage with K-Pop, in all of its distinctive ritual and behavior, as a marker by which to define the "K" in K-Pop and to illustrate how Koreanness (and an expertise in such) deviates, in a fan's mind, from previous conversations on identity and globalization. And lastly, in introducing globalization theory to this work, I demonstrated the trajectory of cultural glocalization and foreshadowed K-Pop fandom as a case study of 21st century glocalization.

CHAPTER TWO – "Zimzalabim": Methodology and the Ethnographic Self

***"After chasing anything…don't get burnt out. If you only just sit and wish…it won't come true."* –Red Velvet, 2019**

Red Velvet's hit from 2019, "Zimzalabim," is a catchy tune with a lively jazzercise-inspired beat that often makes its lyrics seem less important than the music. Still, if you listen closely to what the group is expressing, the song's lyrics tell a story about letting go of worries to pursue whatever brings fulfillment—whether that's love, happiness, or simply enjoying yourself. For me, this song became an unexpected methodological metaphor. As a researcher navigating the complex intersections of fandom, identity, and cultural production in the Hallyu phenomenon, I too found myself needing to shed apprehension about what constitutes "traditional" or "proper" research. To pursue this study authentically, I had to trust my own interpretive instincts and positionality, embracing a methodological approach shaped by reflexivity and hybridity. This chapter outlines that approach and situates my chosen methods within broader methodological conversations in cultural and fandom studies.

My methodology draws from established qualitative traditions, that of participant observation, online survey, semi-structured interviews, and virtual ethnography, but discusses them through a distinctly reflexive, and sometimes embodied lens. While my approach shares conceptual ground with other acafans' (Hills, 2002; Evans and Stasi, 2014) methodologies in leveraging familiar methods to gather data (Barron, 2013; Largent, et al., 2020), it carves out a reflective and reflexive ethnographic niche through my very conscious embrace of personal

subjectivity and parasocial entanglement as valid sites of data generation and interpretation. This study uses participant observation across four countries and three continents, semi-structured interviews with Anglophone fans in two national contexts, virtual ethnography across digital fan spaces, online surveys, and autoethnographic reflection to answer questions regarding Anglophone fandom reperformance of Korean fandom practice and whether those reperformances constitute appropriations or glocalized propriospect. The combined result is what Kühn (2013) terms a "focused ethnography," an intensive and adaptive form of fieldwork that accommodates the pace and temporality of popular music fandom. This approach privileges the everyday, the ritualistic, and the affective, in other words those fleeting yet deeply meaningful acts that define fan communities. In conceptualizing my methodology, I align with recent discussions within fandom studies that emphasize transparency, interdisciplinarity, and researcher reflexivity (Largent, Popova and Vist, 2020).

These scholars highlight the productive "messiness" that emerges when fan-scholars examine their own participatory positions, arguing that such reflexivity makes ethnography multi-faceted, diverse, and rich rather than diminishes its value. My methodology therefore situates researcher identity not as interference but as context—as part of the ethnographic field itself. My Korean identity and phenotype, for instance, at times afforded me privileged access and at others complicated my participation, shaping both the texture of the data and my interpretive lens. Throughout this chapter, I critically reflect on how my identity as a Korean researcher and fan influenced both data collection and analysis. Instances of parasocial bonding, moments of cultural privilege, and tensions in self-presentation became integral to the research process itself, rather than considered biases to be neutralized; these experiences instead became data to be analyzed. In this way, my methodological stance resonates with theorizations of hybrid

researcher identities and the dismantling of hierarchical scholar–subject relations (Pink, 2009; Jenkins, 2012).

The chosen methods of this thesis also embrace interfacing with Anglophone K-Pop fans in more direct ways, something of which Hallyu literature tends to be scarce in. Previous research on K-Pop has critiqued the field's strange aversion to speaking to actual K-Pop fans when it comes to research projects oriented towards fan/audience studies (Lynch 2022), and while the field shows drastic signs of improvement and has begun incorporating fan-based observations and data in the research (Yoon 2017 and Berbiguer 2023), Lynch remains largely correct in her assessment of K-Pop fandom literature. To actually consult fans is a novel methodological advancement, and, to an extent, rocks the foundation of Hallyu scholarship where fans and audiences remain regarded as passive consumers rather than treated with the same frameworks of power subversion, productivity, and autonomy that fandoms of other objects of affinity, particularly situated in the Global North, have been analyzed within. Perhaps an overreliance on internet ethnographies and participant observation has led to this paucity of actual fan input, therefore, I seek to bolster pre-established practices of the field with additional ethnographic methods to craft a most complete picture of my conclusions. By positioning my methods within these overlapping frameworks, I outline an adaptive methodological model, one that recognizes the affective, participatory, and relational dynamics of fandom research. This approach is not a rejection of traditional ethnographic trajectories, of which I readily contribute to, but rather an expansion of it, incorporating affective labor and identity navigation as legitimate components of knowledge production. As "Zimzalabim" suggests, embracing creative uncertainty can itself be a rigorous scholarly act.

Ultimately, this study adapts a multi-method ethnographic design that is qualitative in nature to capture the complex, transcultural dynamics of a complex, transcultural product. Given that global fan communities operate within, effectively, borderless dynamics, these qualitative tools articulate both the transmission and adaption of practice, as well as its effects. They are key to this overall approach. This diverse data collection and associated matrices move past the monolithic nature of previous K-Pop literature framed in policies or textual readings and instead utilizes more diverse data to analyze fan culture, their autonomies, productivity, and understandings of agency and power. Furthermore, this network of methodologies is a strategy of triangulation, embracing Kuhn's (2013) focused ethnography rather than just a collection of random methods. Each method spoke to a gap in a previous execution of study, attempting to provide the connective tissue between the data points, but also build on a paucity of this data present in the field to begin with. Each data method feeds into and out of its counterparts, as much as my autoethnographic analysis contributed to data sets to contextualize cultural interrogations, as seen in Colin Weber's (2009) discussion on autoethnographic material in reflexive analysis on creative research in music.

The analysis of my data can largely be considered within the framework of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clark, 2019) wherein the researcher (myself) plays an active role in the production of knowledge. As largely an acafan-led qualitative inquiry, data was analyzed through iterative phases of data set creation, preliminary reading, creating patterns of understanding and meaning, and reviewing data against other forms of data. This is not mechanical task (Braun and Clark, 2021) but rather approached as interpretive strategies that help devise empirical chapters focused on specific themes that relate to body, dress, and ritual. It

is messy, as Largent et al. (2020) laments, but purposeful in its deployment in providing a most-whole picture of Anglophone fandoms as reflective of Korean domestic foundations.

An Ethical Review of My Work with Fandom Data

A tension exists between the perceived temporary and ephemeral nature of online content creation – whether it be a reactionary Tweet or complaining Instagram story – and the online archive of data in which researchers can pull from to serve as research texts (Dym and Fiesler 2020). In their qualitative and quantitative work on this debate on the ethics of public fandom material that exists online, Brianna Dym and Casey Fiesler (2020) concluded that privacy concerns among fandom participants is quite high, though in reality, very few fans had experienced any substantive violation of privacy or felt threatened by the use of their words in research or journalism. However, Dym and Fiesler cautioned that in the use of such data, context is paramount. While the ramifications of "lurking" in online fandom spaces will be discussed further in this methodology, I seek to mindfully deploy the data gathered from my chosen methods, of which virtual data is included. With this ethical, yet strategic deployment and its context as a key, I fully valued transparency with my interview participants, particularly. Pursuant to Birmingham City University, Faculty of Arts, Design and Media (2016) Ethical Principles and Practice Policy Statement ("BCU Policy"), I acknowledged the ethical necessity to safeguard participants and myself. First, interview participants were directed to read and sign a consent form (Appendix A), outlining how the research was intended for use, as well as informing participants of the method their information will be stored and used. Interviewees

were given the ability to recall or redact any sensitive information that they did not want shared in my research analysis as well, but none of the participants elected to have anything removed from the transcripts. As such, in using online fandom production as data as well, I was careful to only utilize online material that did not reveal any sort of identity marker on the part of the creator. If any screenshots are used as figures in this work, the profile picture does not feature the real visages of users. In following Milena Popova's (2020) call to acknowledge fannish production as citable data, I also cite any comments and/or screenshots taken from online spaces as authors in my works cited or figures cited.

Further, as a researcher whose identity is inextricably linked with the research subject and community, I understood the necessities to protect myself from the same risks associated with participants. Since the outset of my doctoral journey, I created and maintained research based social media accounts that detailed my university and professional life and privatized personal accounts to a) establish ethos in the community as both fan and academic authority and b) create an outlet separate from everyday life to engage the community that I could leave open for people to engage with me in, but reserve the space to remove myself from the space without my personal information being linked to online profile. To date, I have not been on the receiving end of harassment or doxxing, however, drawing from anecdotal experience from fellow Hallyu researchers of whom I will anonymize, protecting personal boundaries is of paramount mental health importance for both researcher and participant who may be at odds with general fandom opinions or views.

Participant Observation

Participant field work data took place in the United States, the United Kingdom, South Korea, and Canada from 2021-2023; a complete table of participant observation field work sites can be found in Figure 1 below. These sites included a variety of events and venues, including concerts, museum exhibitions, busking venues, and Korean entertainment agencies. Notes on participant behavior, dress, and language were noted via iPhone Notes app (excerpts in Figure 2.) as well as documented in photographs and videos captured by iPhone. My practice of keeping a physical field work diary ceased in late 2021 upon several inquiries from fellow fans as to whether or not I worked for the entertainment companies that were conducting the event. Therefore, in order to discourage suspicion and to promote my "true" membership into the community, I utilized inconspicuous methods of note taking and memorialization that would look, at first glance, like just another fan, fan-girling to her heart's content. Thus, in order to maintain the environment without inducing unwanted participant reactivity or disrupting the organic actions of fans, field notes were inconspicuously recorded. This approach aligns with previous ethnographic methods (Bernard, 2018; Emerson, et al. 2011) in which real time and oftentimes covert fieldnotes are systematically expanded into more detailed ethnographic analysis and narratives post-observation. This is best done within an immediate period of time after the event, in order to preserve immediacy and data validity, something I strove to do when analyzing data. Furthermore, most field work sites, particularly concerts, were ones I purchased admission for, while one site (as indicated in the figure) I volunteered as a member of staff. I also attended admission-free busking gigs as part of my data gathering.

The gigs I chose to attend were done through the lens of an acafan; as a member of both the BTS and ATEEZ fandom communities, I had lived experiences interacting with the fandoms of both groups, and it was a natural entry point for me to begin engaging in research. Other sites, particularly multi-group festivals, were chosen for the range of fans I anticipated to encounter that may be different than what I experienced in either the BTS or ATEEZ community. I believed that with a multiplicity of artists would come a multiplicity of Anglophone audience members that ranged gender expressions, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and nationality. Other groups like, WEi and DKB, were selected due to small fandom size and potential access I had to direct idol-to-fan interactions, while Stray Kids was based on concert availability in my geographic area at a certain period.

Figure 1. Participant observation field work sites

Group	Date	Location
ATEEZ	17 September 2021	Virtual Concert, Home Streaming
BTS	2 December 2021	Concert, SoFi Stadium, Los Angeles, CA, USA
ATEEZ	24 January 2022	Concert, Prudential Center, Newark, NJ, USA
ATEEZ	31 January 2022	Concert , The Forum, Los Angeles, CA, USA
BTS	12 March 2022	Virtual Concert, Cinema Streaming
DKB	10 June 2022	Concert, The Monarch, New York, NY, USA
Stray Kids	28 June 2022	Concert, Prudential Center, Newark, NJ, USA
Golden Child*	11 July 2022	Concert, Keswick Theatre, Glenside, PA, USA
Liz Entertainment	31 July 2022	Trainee Busking, Hongdae, Seoul, South Korea
ATEEZ	1 August 2022	Comeback Pop-Up Shop, Young Plaza, Seoul, South Korea
BTS/HYBE Entertainment	6 August 2022	HYBE Insight (Museum), Youngsan, Seoul, South Korea
WEi	2 October 2022	Concert, The Monarch, New York, NY, USA
ATEEZ	10 November 2022	Hallyu! Exhibition, London, UK
ATEEZ	1 December 2022	Hello82 ATEEZ Pop-Up Shop & Exhibition, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
ATEEZ	2 December 2022	Concert, FirstOntario Centre, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
Multiple Artists	21-22 April 2023	Concert, WeBridge Music Festival, Las Vegas, NV, USA
Multiple Artists	16 June 2023	Concert, Lotte Duty Free Family Concert, Seoul, South Korea
ATEEZ	20 June 2023	Comeback Pop-Up Shop, Hongdae, Seoul, South Korea

**Participated as a member of staff (unpaid) wherein I executed logistics, security, and translation duties. Studio PAV, the organizing American agency, was notified of my doctoral research prior to recruitment, and permitted me to execute work for them.*

Figure 2. Excerpts from my field work diary hosted on iPhone Notes Application

Excerpt from field work observation notes, specifically before and during Field Work Site #2, BTS Permission to Dance Concert, Los Angeles, California, USA.

As is discussed in the literature review, K-Pop fan cultures, both global and domestic, rely heavily on a recognizably entrenched ideal of fan participation and productivity (Elfving-Hwang 2018:193). Even so, the observation of participants in fan spaces, especially those that are considered particularly important in K-Pop such as Fan Signs, concerts, and festivals/conventions, is absent from large concentrations of Hallyu work. Rather, these studies

tend to explore less people or place/space-focused interpretations of the subject in favor of more impact-focused, sometimes monolithically framed interpretations of fandom (Koo and Koo, 2022). This research measures nation building, branding, and dissemination on policy or procedural levels or the research simply spotlights various transnational presences of K-Pop in countries that are not Korea (Choi & Kim, 2014). Previous research is less of a discussion on fandom practice and its impact and more of an explanation of fandom object. This is not unique to K-Pop, however, as evidenced by Grime researcher, Lee Barron (2013) who contends that Grime, as a genre of music, has a distinctive ethnographic form rooted in urban locations and spatially linked to creative space and place. I argue that K-Pop is not dissimilar in that K-Pop as genre and with fandom practice is rooted in space and place—or at least perceived space and place. I argue that these physical fan behaviors, rituals, interactions, and embodiments are essential when establishing oneself as a true community member within K-Pop. The measured behaviors of such are inextricably linked to questions of transcultural translation in global, namely Anglophone, fan performance. Participant observation, therefore, provides the optimal space and place to establish several baselines – a baseline for Korean domestic fan practice, a baseline from which Anglophone fans interact with Koreanness, and a baseline from which Anglophone fans define Koreanness. The collision of Anglophone location and Korean celebration rituals provide insight into the potential hybridity and/or Anglophone adaptations of K-Pop fandom culture.

Therefore, I undertook 18 in-person and virtual observations of participants at K-Pop and Hallyu related events in the United States, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Canada, and online. I must note, however, that while the primary purpose of these events was to observe other fan participants around me, I utilized my engagement during these events to also observe the

research/media objects (the idols), to recruit potential interviewees, and to engage in reflexive embodiment of fan practices and rituals (i.e. I came, I saw, I fangirled). The data collected from these observations inform analysis in Chapter Three on the reception and interpretation of bodies in fandom spaces and places, in Chapter Four on how fans adorn themselves in reflection of Anglophone reperformances of K-Pop fandom and the idea of Koreanness, and in Chapter 5 in reperformances of ritual and behavioral glocalizations.

Online Survey

Online survey facilitated on the Microsoft Forms platform was available for open participation from April 2022-April 2024; participant geographic locations were not specified, instead relying on the participant ability to read and communicate in English to fulfil their "Anglophone" characterization. Participants were prompted to my professional webpage wherein they could read more in-depth on the study, including research questions and ethical review forms which were deployed for interview participants as discussed further below. Participants were recruited from a variety of avenues, with "parasocial authority" (Trzcińksa 2018, Liebers 2019) acting as a potential motivator for those who chose to participate—I will explore this term and what it could potentially mean for fandom studies in "A Note on Recruitment" below. Recruitment methods included: disseminating a portion of my research as a guest speaker on a Korean culture podcast whose target demographic included non-Korean expats living in Korea and Korea culture enthusiasts abroad, guest lecturing to graduate students at local universities, passing out physical cards with survey links at K-Pop events both in the United States and South Korea, and

presenting my research study to the Birmingham City University K-Pop Dance society. I received a total of 27 responses (for a full analysis of results, see Appendix B).

Questions asked on the surveys are as follows:

1) Where do you consume your K-Pop information?
2) Which groups do you follow the most?
3) What makes K-Pop, K-Pop to you?
4) Are you familiar with fan chants? Then how did you learn about it?
5) Are you familiar with light sticks?
6) If you are familiar with light sticks then how did you learn about them?
7) In your opinion, what are the most important parts of being a K-Pop fan?
8) Does K-Pop motivate you to learn more about Korea?
9) Have you learned or plan on learning Korean?
10) Are there any "rules" or "etiquette" to being a K-Pop fan?

The first two questions were selected to discern where the fan gathered their information on K-Pop and with which media object this information is rooted. The third, seventh, and tenth questions were asked to provide insight into fandom perceptions of Koreanness and fan performance in Anglophone communities. Questions four to six were asked to establish to what level Anglophone K-Pop fans were aware of Korean domestic fandom rituals and to what extent they have engaged with such material. Questions eight and nine provided data points as to how deeply fans were engaging with Korean culture, beyond using K-Pop as a substitute for Koreanness. In considering the above questions, survey respondents indicated what online platforms they engage with, how they perceive Korean identity as located within the genre, and exhibited their knowledge of fandom.

Online survey as method is an important potential repository of information as it offers the ability to have a direct line of communication with fans in a quantitative manner, sometimes an obstacle of other methods like interview of which requires time, labor, and geographic closeness. Fan communities are now often dispersed and sometimes niche, and scholars like Lucy Bennett (2014b) argue that the internet is a natural gathering space for fans, thus online surveys can cast the data net wide. At the same time, for fans that enjoy living in anonymity, online surveys can still encourage targeted participation without fear of pathologization in ways showing up for an interview or logging on to a video streaming platform might. It allows for the invisible fan (ibid.) to be captured in the dataset. Surveys can also contribute to a plurality of data, preventing research from compulsive jumps in logic when overly reliant on one method. As a note, while quantitative methods prioritize larger sample sizes, these quantitative online surveys were utilized for open-ended textual data not necessarily designed for statistical sampling (Braun et al, 2019; Salmons, 2022) but for a qualitative data-mapping tool that elicited rich reflections, rather than bulk numbers. For the above reasons, I believe online survey was an important addition to my methodology, and the data captured from this method is analyzed in Chapters Three to Five in detail.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with seven participants from the United States and the United Kingdom took place from June 2023-April 2024 and were conducted on the platform Microsoft Teams. While I had drafted a handful of anchor questions, including questions on how the interviewee was introduced to K-Pop, who the subject's favorite groups were, and how they felt

the fans were different from other fandoms of which they were a part, the interviews were largely conversational during which participants relayed to me and confided in me stories and experiences, as well as confided judgements of fans, fannish behaviors, and their own engagement. While promised anonymity in the research, the interviews were recorded and transcribed and securely stored on Microsoft OneDrive as per Birmingham University ethical protocols. Participants were either assigned or requested pseudonyms for clarity in analyzing data. A full list of participants is chronicled in Figure 3., as well as captured in the appendices of this thesis (Appendix C).

Figure 3. Table of Interview Participants, June 2023 to April 2024

Pseudonym	Location	Racial Identity	Age Group	Fandom	Interview Date	Appendix
Evangaline	Boston, Massachusetts, USA	Chinese American Transnational Adoptee	Late 20s	GOT 7; Jackson Wang	June 2023	C
Lee	Los Angeles, California, USA	White American	Mid 20s	TWICE	July 2023	D
Stephanie	Los Angeles, California, USA	Latinx American (Puerto Rico)	Early 30s	Multi-fan	July 2023	E
Annie	Southeastern USA	Black American	Early 20s	BTS	July 2023	F
Victoria	Birmingham, UK	Japanese, Latinx British	Early 20s	Multi-fan	April 2024	G
Trinity	Birmingham, UK	White British	Early 20s	ATEEZ, Multi-fan	April 2024	H
Betty	Birmingham, UK	White British	Early 20s	BTS, ATEEZ	April 2024	I

Before inclusion in this work, participants were also given the opportunity to omit anything from the transcript they wished to strike, if necessary, for up to four weeks after the interview took place. No participants elected to revise the transcript and/or strike anything from the record. Much like my recruitment process for online surveys unfolded as noted in the section above, I utilized platforms and methods where I served as a spokesperson for my own research. I found that methods wherein potential participants could "bond" with me and were able to hear my voice, see my face, or directly read anecdotal experiences prompted the most enthusiastic responses. Every participant who agreed to be interviewed and recorded was recruited from instances where they had seen me online or met me directly, building on a semblance of rapport that already existed. Three other participants, who could not be interviewed due to logistical difficulties and scheduling issues, were either also directly recruited from more "intimate" situations or were snowball referrals. Complete transcripts of the seven participants can be found in the appendices at the conclusion of this work (Appendices D through J).

However, it is worth noting that everyone who did commit to participate were primarily recruited after some sort of interface with me, whether it be mediated or not; more discussions on this particular parasocial methodological thread are explored further in this methodology chapter. My position and persona as both authority and parasocial friend – akin to an "acafan," a researcher than also identifies as a member of the fandom community (Hills, 2002; Raw, 2020; Lee, 2021) – provided a level of trust in which interviewees felt safe, and even excited, to share their experiences (Bernard 2018, Collins 2018, Moore 2020). This consideration of my positionality and the semi-structured nature of my methods closely align with fan studies researcher Benjamin Woo's (2021) "ethnographic interview" method, in which real-time reflexivity and interviewer/interviewee trust is at the core of any interview conducted. While

certain questions remained the same, as seen fully in the transcripts in appendices, others were adapted or omitted based on the trajectory of the conversation, and largely dependent on how the interviewees spoke on identity and perceptions of Koreanness. In alignment with previous work featuring semi-structured interviews with qualitative output in mind (Seidman, 2019) anchor questions were balanced with conversational flexibility. Standard questions consistent with each interview included:

1. What group are you a fan of?
2. How are K-Pop fandoms different from other fandoms you've been a part of?
3. Who is your bias?
4. Have you ever been to a K-Pop concert or event?

These baseline questions established community credibility, exhibiting my fluency in the fandom subculture and habitus. Questions two and four, in particular, also began conversations central to my thesis, prompting interviewees to discuss their practice and perceptions of K-Pop fandom from an Anglophone fan perspective. In speaking to these fans and directly observing them/encouraging them to partake in my survey, I also valued complete transparency, and I gave as much information about my research as I could to those who wanted to participate in it, as academia has come to expect. Discussing participation in K-Pop fandoms is not as straightforward as one may think, and discussing publicly with potential critical observations may catch the eye of otherwise "enthusiastic" fandoms. Scholars such as Joanna Elving-Hwang (2019) and Miranda Larsen (2020a,b) have noted the highly participatory culture of K-Pop fandoms. Those who take part in discussions or research that challenge the idealized "fandom is beautiful" narrative, or who refuse to label fans as simply passive or neutral consumers, may face repercussions from the fandom community. At the 2020 Fan Studies Network North America

Conference, for instance, which took place virtually in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, a group of Hallyu scholars, spoke on the veracity of K-Pop fandoms. For the safety of these scholars, they wished to keep the streaming of this particular session confidential to conference-goers, asking participants not to put mention of its content, particularly live-Tweeters, since speaking about K-Pop fandoms critically did lead to online harassment in their experiences. As these warnings were issued early into my career as a researcher, they always rung very loudly in my mind as I pursued this work. I wanted to give my potential participants the opportunity to learn how my research was going to be used, how I too was a fan, and offered protections that would, hopefully, remove any issues about security. There were certain safeguards that I personally had to place to afford myself the same protection, but as I will discuss in my researcher positionality portion below, components of my researcher identity tended to provide inherent privilege and protection during my data gathering.

Virtual Ethnography

From June 2020 to June 2023, during times of significant online activity for various K-Pop fandoms such as the Black Lives Matter protests, debuts of unconventional groups, and anniversaries and comebacks I engaged in data mining surveys across digital platforms in order to explore my research questions with my quantifiable and qualitative data. To capture the breadth of fan engagement and discourse that was not fully captured in interviews or online surveys, I engaged in social media sampling collected within a sampling strategy. Platforms were monitored during specific event windows and high-profile times of public and media commentary (i.e. comebacks, award show season, political engagements) in a “sampling

strategy" (Highfield and Leaver, 2016) within thematic groupings aligned with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Data was captured via screenshots from YouTube comments, Instagram posts and engagement, X (formerly known as Twitter) conversations, application store reviews, TikTok short form content, and briefly, Discord, to address questions and support findings where the breadth of analysis that I executed could not be fully articulated with direct participant interaction like on-site observations, interview, or survey. These images were stored on Microsoft OneDrive, catalogued in chronological and thematic order, then grouped roughly by platform. Some comments extracted from YouTube and X were directly transcribed and linked if included in the write up of the body of research. These "origin posts" were a combination of fan produced paratexts—more of which will be discussed further in this section—as well as texts produced by the Korean entertainment agencies of which these idols are a part, including interviews, concert clips, vlogs, and gameshows that particular idols engaged with. This dual focus of evaluating agency-produced artifacts alongside fan-produced material ensured that digital content was evaluated not as isolated texts but as active sites of negotiation (Hills, 2017).

During my online data gathering, I further deployed an autoethnographic method of embodiment (Csordas, 1990; Bessel and Riddell, 2016) wherein, I directly engaged in and performed fan practices myself, particularly when it came to parasocial building/bonding virtual platforms like Korean streaming platform V-Live and Korean agency proprietary platforms like Universe, an interactive application. As discussed by Dal Young Jin (2018), today's chosen methods of engagement by K-Pop fans is via social media platforms; young audiences depend on social media to receive and consume "popular culture" and, in turn, social media quickens "cultural diffusion of media products" via interpersonal and transcultural sharing without the

need of traditional media intervention or mediation (2018: 408), thus I turned to the online spaces as the spread of K-Pop is largely associated with online texts. As ingrained as social media platforms are to the landscape of K-Pop production and fan participation, it is impossible to ignore virtual ethnography and the aforementioned social networking platforms in data collection about fans. Therefore, I utilized this online data to answer questions of Anglophone fan reperformance as measured against or with Korean domestic performance and reactions from one group to another. Data collected from online spaces and texts that featured Korean domestic fans was crucial in establishing and measuring feelings of profound offense or cultural appropriation, contributing to conversations of the appreciation versus appreciation or globalization.

Largely, when I consulted virtual data in the capacity of participant observer and not as a part of autoethnographic study, I did not engage directly with any of the users, but rather "lurked" as an anonymous and quiet bystander. This bifurcated my virtual ethnographic data collection into two "buckets" with the first being participant observation data without researcher invention and relying on data collection and capture, while the second bucket was autoethnographic survey of these applications. Broadly constituted by marketing researchers as "passive forms of engagement" on virtual social media platforms (Fernandes and Castro, 2020), media scholars posit that consumers "lurk" as an actual ends to a means rather than just non-intervention consumption like their marketing counterparts. "Lurking" pointedly is a strategy deployed to capture unprompted, organic fan interaction and discourse that maintains textul integrity (Bury, 2005; Hine, 2015). This approach resembles Bill Gillham's (2000) "Detached Observation" method, of which there is an emphasis on structured collection while observing, albeit my methods were not as quantitative as Gillham asserts this detached method should be.

However, lurking in this sense seemed to fulfil a quasi-quantitative element in terms of the quantity of data available online to gather for purposes of the study. In an autoethnographic interlude though, lurking in online spaces made me feel as if I was, in a way, exoticizing fans who were actively engaged in these online arenas. As this is a practice that I would not normally do as a fan, nor did I attempt to autoethnographically embody in this research, lurking did make me feel uncomfortable in the work, like I was illicitly pulling from private interactions though it was posted in a public online space. I will further discuss this discomfort in my ethical review found later in this methodology chapter, since the topic of online data collection as ethical practice in fandom studies has gained visibility in the last few years (Dym and Fiesler 2020 and Jansen 2020).

Sipley (2022) contends that users will lurk on platforms in order to "gratify desires" for one of six reasons: (1) to research contradictory viewpoints to the users' own opinions, (2) confirm or verify information, (3) stop the spread of information the user encounters online, (4) move to "offline social action", (5) use the platform for professional advancement, or (6) maintain communities' happiness, homeostasis, and "quality of life." In pursuit of one of these gratifications, users are exercising participatory restraint and "protective curation" (ibid). Sipley's contention about lurking as mechanism and intentional passivity largely describes my virtual ethnographic strategy. While Sipley's framework emerges from the context of neighborhood Facebook groups—spaces that typically utilize users' real-world identities, relationships, and geographically specific communities—it nonetheless provides useful parallels to fandom contexts. Within fandom studies, Rhianon Bury (2005) conceptualizes participation as existing along a continuum of engagement, where lurking represents one among many legitimate modes of participation, rather than an apathy. Despite anonymity in online forums associated in

this methodology, I still identify with Sibley's frameworks of protective curation as my embodiment of fandom participation whilst lurking was still affective. In my own research, I lurked to achieve the second and sixth "desire gratification" measures—confirming and verifying information and maintaining an "untouched" virtual landscape by which I could observe and extract data. Since I did not intervene, I believe the data I gathered here did in fact confirm the observations I gathered from interview analysis specifically. As I, as mediator of sorts, am still involved in the progression of data presented in interviews, there is always a small pitfall that my presence and conversation is leading in some ways. However, drawing from an "untouched" space, I could safely bolster my conclusions drawn from interviews with, essentially, "clean" data in a quasi-quantitative way through this lurking practice.

Virtual ethnography, with the term "ethnography" inherent to this research method, is a method characterized by its diversity as reflective of the nature of the internet itself, and within it, several subsidiary methods work together to produce data sets (Hine, 2015). In my research, virtual ethnography is composed of participant observation—albeit online/virtual—and, to an extent, extracting data from video comments and threads reads very much like a confessional account of fans in the fandom that one may gather from online surveys, but in a more free text format. The fan is making commentary and/or participating in rituals; it is data that I hoped to achieve when actually speaking to fans, however my lurking in these spaces produced those data sets without direct interview intervention. My lack of intervention perhaps dismantled any semblance of power structure between subject and researcher (Bernard 2018), or rather there was a vacuum of power. These interactions (or lack thereof) do not disturb fans' feeling open, honest, and willing to share *everything* and *anything* on their minds without need from myself to prompt them to speak. This is how I leveraged this data, and the lens by which I viewed these comments.

Furthermore, participatory fans, do in fact *produce*, and these paratexts—and subsequent textual analysis—provide insights into the fan psyche, as understood in Fiske's semiotic productivity paradigm (1987) in which fans struggle over and create meaning from media objects, not just simply receive them. In digital spaces, semiotic productivity in fandoms is characterized by networking, collaboration, and mediation – collective semiotics, or collaborative meaning-making at high rates of diffusion (Hills. 2002, 2017). However, there are also contentious methodological debates in fandom studies surrounding the deployment of fannish material as "data." Milena Popova (2020) cautions the erasure of the fan voice, culture, and identity when approaching fan texts from an academic perspective. "Fan knowledge production…is produced by fans for fans," and should be respected. Fan texts provide a means by which to de-power and de-privilege the academic voice as arbiter of right or wrong. Popova's analysis and arguments very much align with my own values of transparency to fans about my role as a researcher and my own experiences and place within the fandom community. It also reinforces my choice to remain "lurking" in many of these virtual fandom spaces; I did not want to engage when my identity as acafan could potentially disrupt an organic space and dialogue among other fans.

Much like internet fannish behaviors do not necessarily abide by bounds or borders, the internet is also borderless. Virtual ethnography creates an even larger geographic data set from which I can draw. Since internet communities do not have to overcome the burden of travel and borders, I accessed larger communities of both Anglophone and Korean fans. These borderless internet communities, as characterized in the likeness of Benedict Anderson's imagined communities and discussion on print capitalism (1983), are used in fandom media studies to detail online fandom groups and communities composed of people from diverse geographic locations and cultures in a virtual space (Morimoto and Chin, 2017). Lori Morimoto and Bertha

Chin, in acknowledging the un-bordered vastness of fandom communities on the internet, also theorize that media studies, particularly fandom studies, has "depoliticized" imagined communities, often focusing on the union of groups or "flattening" of the world, rather than working through conundrums of marginalization, power dynamics, and the periphery (2017). We, as media scholars in our excitement to make the world smaller and more accessible, can often overlook the critical for the normative, and in that we lose nuances of transculturality. Just because the world is ever-more connected than it has been, does not mean behaviors, cultural meanings, rituals, etc. live in absolute harmony with one another; in other words, the internet world is not flat either.

Internet researcher, Christine Hine (2000, 2015) asserts that internet spaces create different meanings for different people and the convergence of these differences on the same outlets can create online behaviors across platforms that lead to cultural clash, especially as traditional markers of national, racial, or any otherwise classification, is erased in favor of—in K-Pop's case—profile photos and avatars of famous K-Pop idols and usernames claiming themselves as extensions of the idols. I believe these online interactions of potential cultural provide rich data sets for deciphering what Anglophone fans value and how they interpret, interrupt, and seemingly "own" or police Koreanness. At the same time, it provides unfiltered and raw insight as to how Korean domestic fans may be in conflict with Anglophone ones.

Note on Covid-19 on fieldwork and the importance of virtual ethnography

When I first received institutional clearance to commence my fieldwork—namely observation and interviews of fans—it was in the second half of 2021 when the Omicron variant of Covid-19 caused renewed pandemic dread and accompanying governmental regulations on travel, numbers

of people gathering in indoor spaces, and lock downs. While I am based in the United States where strict lockdowns and restrictions on domestic travel ended in the summer of 2020, I continued to operate under a degree of stress and anxiety that in-person events would no longer be viable data gathering sites. Furthermore, as recently as August 2022, the impact of Covid-19 on anticipated opportunities for participant observation has become evident, particularly within the context of South Korea.

However, in 2023 field work sites and research opportunities are more regularly maintained despite Covid-19 variants, affecting my sites of research less than at the inception of this project in 2020 into its coordination in 2021. Now, working around the Covid-19 pandemic has become the norm for many industries, but of course any industry that revolves around the mass gathering of people continues to be impacted, and the reliance on virtual experiences as a backup or supplantation of traditional methods of media has profoundly impacted the ways in which Anglophone fans interact with K-Pop fannish behaviors. Though virtual experiences, online platforms, and streaming had already been developing as major avenues through which fans engaged with one another and with the fan object pre-pandemic (Booth 2016), I believe new forms of fan ritual and practice have emerged out of these 2020-2021 Covid-19 regulations that will be incorporated as part of K-Pop fan practice and memory moving forward.

A Note on Field Work Gaps- Girl Groups

Despite my extensive participant observation field work, there are some gaps in my data collection. More geographic diversity in North America, for example became a concern, however, as I thought through what adding another physical geographic location could mean in the data, I was resolved that it would not significantly alter potential findings other than

providing additional threads of analysis that may prove to be outside the eventual scope of this research project, such as a more engaged analysis of diasporic fans or a more nuanced exploration into fandoms of particular demographics like age and race. Similarly, my lack of a concert venue in the United Kingdom also was a concern, however, I supplemented my predictions of performance and behavior with later participant interviews. However, one gap stood out to me as I gathered my data, and as I attempted to fill that gap, I confronted an issue of researcher health and safety.

To any keen K-Popper's eye, they will notice that the vast majority of my participant observation field work sites feature "boy groups" or groups comprised of solely male performers. With the exception of multi-artist music festivals or the occasional busking field site, "girl groups" or groups with only female artists are missing in my research. As fandom researcher Sam Pack describes: "media does not affect all equally" as audiences and fans are not a homogenous, monolithic body of people (2020:29); one woman's love of girl groups may present power, desire, or respect, while another woman's trepidation represents aversion to commercial femineity or sexualization of the female body. For me, it was neither as so much it was the fandom, or namely male participants in the fandom, that distanced me from including many of those fandom groups in my study. At a 2019, pre-doctoral research engagement at the Korean Convention ("KCON") in New York City, New York, I recall extreme bartering from male fans, asking other fans to trade them their randomly assigned meet and greet from one of the male groups to the extremely popular, hyper-feminine and largely juvenile female group at the convention. Later, at the multi-artist concert, male participants continuously filmed this female group without a break. While this behavior was not only exhibited by male fans-to-

female-groups, and many female fans were equally as enthusiastic about male performers, I noted, perhaps, my discomfort stemmed from a degree of self-reflective positioning.

Helen Davies (2023) notes that the music industry as a whole is still widely dominated by male players, and when female players do interact, they are subjected to a balancing act of performing femininity, sexuality, and gender in ways that simultaneously exhibits artistry and potential marketable qualities; Davies' subjects in this study express concerns of over-sexualizing or over-revealing their bodies illustrating that women on stage in music are either constantly hyper-aware of their identity and bodies in spaces and a industry that continue to be male-dominated *or* women attempt to make themselves smaller or less noticeable in the case of those lone female participants at the start of Davies' study. Hallyu researchers who study female bodies and performance in K-Pop and K-Beauty provide detailed insight into the commercial endeavors of "selling" girl groups and discuss the commodification of K-Pop and the woman's body (Jung 2011, Oh 2015, Kwon 2019). Hye Kyong Kwon (2019: 6-8) writes that K-Beauty, K-Pop, and K-Drama, in cooperation with government entities, have meticulously crafted a national brand that highlights culturally specific content for a globalized audience that transcends borders and temporal boundaries and is exported out to the world. In the Korean context, the woman's body has historically (and currently) served as a form of a cultural currency whether explicitly sexual or more subtly commercial (Yuh, 2002; Soh, 2008; Elving-Hwang, 2018), and understanding the cultural implications that observing a female body had for myself and identity trauma I could not engage in these theoretical works in the context of my own data collection. However, in order to address my lack of outright fieldwork as it pertained to girl groups, I did engage with such in other ways outside of the participant observation method, namely through discussions during interviews and virtual ethnography. Understanding both the male intervention

in the creation of these bodies and the male gaze in the reception of these bodies I contend that I *may not* be the researcher to further scholarship explaining the data gap here; however, I will now position why I *am* the researcher for other parts of this object of study, detailing my positionality and autoethnographic role in the work.

A Parasocial Practice of Fandom Bonding and Musings on Researcher Positionality

Social media studies researcher Christopher Moore, in his work on fan creator personas and creator industries, deploys concepts of persona studies that detail the performance of identity and negotiation between individuals, namely fans and fan creators/celebrities (2022). Fan creators leverage "real-time community-based interaction and collaboration" (ibid.) to simultaneously speak as authority and act as peer or friend around a fandom object. This "befriending" phenomenon, I contend, occurs for several key reasons: (1) Fan creators are often anchored in more "niche" creative industries, or as Moore designates "NCIs" so fandoms exploring social media channels and virtual spaces seeking a fellow fan or friend who understands their interests, find community with the creator and (2) the parasocial phenomenon of "getting to know" an internet celebrity through these fan creator's content forges an intimate, albeit one-way stream of affection, pseudo-relationship (Lin 2022) between creator and fan that builds trust on the part of the fan for the creator.

Now, I do not consider myself a proper "creator" by any means – I do not make money from my social media posts, nor did I produce content regularly. However, leveraging my own social media and persona in the dissemination of my research proved a powerful recruitment tool

for my survey and interview methods within this methodology. As I noted in the cautions of interview and virtual ethnography, researchers have been doxed and harassed in the past for affiliating with critical fandom studies. I too have spoken openly about this constant threat, namely during lectures and recorded interviews, and I thought this could also make me a target. During the taping of the podcast, *The Dark Side of Seoul* in 2022[5], I detailed my own strategies for protecting myself from potential dangers and the strategies I deploy to signal membership in the community—language, participatory fandom experiences, etc. This was the most "public" platform on which I espoused some of the dangers of K-Pop fandom study. When invited onto the podcast to discuss my research and the potential "dark sides" of K-Pop and K-Pop fandom, I was hesitant at first, but for the sake of participant recruitment and research, I agreed to participate in the show. The response was overwhelming, and while I was only able to capture a singular participant interview from this experience for my research, I received messages, social media follows, and emails from listeners of the show who continued to interact with my social media beyond the life of the podcast episode. My social media profiles, which I had set up at the start of my doctoral research to separate from my personal accounts, increased in following and interaction, especially when I spoke about my fandom participation. From the outset upon the creation of these profiles, I was quick to declare my affinity for particular groups, so my social media history proved affection and engagement with fandom practices and potentially entrenched and encouraged a level of parasocial approachability. I found this to be true of non-social media presentations of my work as well. During an April 2022 lecture that took place

[5] *The Dark Side of Seoul* podcast is popular with Korean culture enthusiasts, and the subject of the show is to detail some of the less-than-rosy aspects of Korean history, culture, and life, often geared toward themes of the supernatural, true crime, or folklore. However, hosts Shawn Morrisey and Joe McPherson, also craft episodes about contemporary Korean society, observing as two ex-patriot (from North America) residents of South Korea who have lived in the country for over two decades.

online for the University of Southern California, delivered to graduate students in the sciences faculty, K-Pop fans, with no academic pursuit of media studies or anything of the like, approached me either in the virtual chatroom, during the question and answer portion of the lecture, or on social media afterwards to express some sort of enthusiasm or excitement about K-Pop. From this, I also recruited a key participant interview, and the interviewee was quick to inform me that he wanted to engage because he was elated that I seemed to "get it."

This appeared to be in glaring contrast to the scholar experiences as told on that Fan Studies North America Conference panel I explored in my virtual ethnography discussion of this methodology. Half of the panel, composed of non-East Asian scholars, lamented at the harassment one faced as a person of color doing work in this space wherein fans leveraged the scholars' identities as a way to mitigate the scholars' knowledge and findings. *Because* of their ethnic heritage, they could not possibly speak as an authority on K-Pop in these harassing fans' minds, despite the presence of Caucasian scholars and East Asian scholars making similar remarks but with no such fall out as the panelists of color. It was in listening to these researcher experiences and confronting my own "ease of access" to Anglophone field work sites that I understood my researcher positionality afforded me a great privilege much of the time that I physically spent in K-Pop spaces as well as when I spoke about K-Pop. These scholars, despite being as open and public as I was in sharing my interest in K-Pop, would not have the same reception with K-Pop fandom by virtue of my positionality and the accidental fan persona I had crafted for this work.

Membership in the communities of which academics study is a topic explored across disciplines. In dissecting the place of the researcher within research, sociologist Alford Young Jr. (2016) discusses his field work related to young Black-American men and their perception of the

job market in New York City. Young notes that researchers who hold membership in the groups that they are studying can focus their positionality as a data point by which they can draw conclusions or judgements; the researcher is the conduit by which some of these actions and thoughts from the research participants can be negotiated, explained, and triangulated (2016: 56). My Korean identity, and also perhaps my non-threatening cis-female gender identity, as well as my overt membership in the fandom community and willingness to "openly fangirl" online, were all leveraged in this study in an accidental presence that resembles the fan creator persona, and of which potential participants "bonded" with online, infusing a trust in me that unpicked and challenged traditional interview power dynamics. Much like Young's research on African-American men, a general demographic of which he is a part, my formal data gathering interactions were conducted with a level of familiarity for one another. Young writes that his research interviews read very much like a more formal version of various encounters he had "in the wild" out in the community like on street corners or in shops. His identity allowed him a unique level of access to the observations and thoughts of his interviewees as a person who seemingly shared some sort of identifier with his subjects.

At the same time, I *did* experience an inability to access field work sites and to speak with participants directly in spaces where my ethnic heritage, nor my genuine fangirling was not enough to build trust. During my initial non-Anglophone, international field work in June 2022 in Seoul, South Korea, as I casually approached fans at busking events, at K-Pop museum exhibitions, and at fan gatherings, I realized the same kind of parasocial bonding that immediately occurred in the same sort of events in the United States was not a given at the sites in Seoul. Rather, there was a general sense of distrust of a stranger in the fold; there I was not a part of the community, but an interloper with a heavily-accented and elementary language ability

that did not fit the aesthetic of a typical “fan girl” in the Korean context nor had an idea of how fandom in Korea worked in said wild. I quickly understood that I would not be able to gather data in the same ways in Seoul as I had been in North America or the UK. so instead, I had to reflexively pivot to gather data in ways that did not rely on such access, namely participant observation in a more sanitary sense. To Korean fans, I was not a pseudo-fan creator, nor could I speak with authority. To them I was the stranger. The intruder.

But Is It Autoethnography?

Given how much I saw myself in my own research and given how much I used my identity as a negotiation and data point in pursuit of the research, I was utterly convinced that I was an autoethnographer. But then, my supervisory team posed a provocative question to me: is this really autoethnography? Or is it an autoethnographic analysis? I was dumbfounded. Of *course* it was autoethnography…right? I thought about it some more. While yes, I was placed in my own research, was I really researching myself? I unravel this question and discuss the idea of “my self” or the “I” in my research in terms of positionality versus autoethnography below.

In contrast to mid-century anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski (1945), who conducted research as "scientists," this approach extends beyond mere physical immersion characteristic of traditional schools of thought. Instead, it acknowledges that complete detachment from one's identity is neither feasible nor desirable in scholarly analysis, and that maintaining a wholly "dispassionate" perspective may not fully capture the complexities of the subject matter. While Malinowski emphasized the need to operate in a detached vacuum from the culture of which he was analyzing, my analysis cannot be done without healthy injections of

own self. Again, this may not seem novel, especially in an age of "acafans" claiming membership in a community (Gray et al., 2017), the difference here is that fan community members can choose to leave that community. That part of their identity can be erased and fall away from their propriospect if need be. There are no phenotypical markers of identity to which they are bound (except for the occasional tattoo); my cultural identity and those phenotypical markers position me in particular ways that are read by others in K-Pop fandoms. However, this does not necessarily mean I can never fully provide critical, objective analysis, rather this inherent positionality has provided me insider status in many different pockets of fandom communities where I can move through, without much issue, and gather data. Further, as an insider (or at least a perceived insider) from these different groups, I can negotiate between them and extract characteristic interactions, relationships, and practices that explain how these fandom groups, the Anglophone transcultural, and the Korean domestic, work around one another. The concentration of data which I can reflect on is profound because of this.

As a researcher that relies heavily on the existence of a propriospect, that "mixed lens" that individuals acquire and form through personal experiences and interactions within cultures, to measure deviations, reperformances, and translations of ritual, language, culture, and practice between Anglophone fandoms and Korean domestic fandoms, I would be entirely remiss if I neglected to speak on the presence of my own propriospect, my own experiences, identity, and positionality within this research. Simply, this research and these questions would not exist had it not been for my enquiry into how my propriospect formed around K-Pop fandoms. I am K-Pop fan, a member of the Korean American diaspora, a woman in a fandom largely pathologized. And yet I am also an academic researcher, former anthropologist, and trained historian. Somehow, and all too often, the qualities of the latter are valued more as analytic tools that bring

objective research to life than the former, regarded as anecdotal at best, and biased at worst. However, without the qualities of the aforementioned Korean American fangirl, I would not have the same levels of data or research I would have as strictly a scholar, albeit an interdisciplinary one. It was my identity and propriospect that allowed this work to exist and be created; much of my work is articulated in and through the identity by which I was able to successfully navigate these fandom spaces.

As Elizabeth R. Hornsby contends about fandom identity, particularly when it comes to race and ethnicity, "fandom is not devoid of the personal or the politics of identity," (2020: 18), and research should not be as well. How one is treated in the field, the data one is privy to, and even the data that one cannot obtain is all dictated in one shape or the other by the researcher's presence (Hornsby, 2020; Young 2016). It is the foreignness of the body that (dis)allows access or is given alternative data, and conversely it could be the familiarity of identity that makes things that otherwise would be too sensitive to share, a shareable data point; in these contradictions, one thing is the same—who you are is crucial to the output of your research in an ethnographic sense. While Goodenough likely never intended to insert his own propriospect in the analysis of culture in anthropology, I very deliberately place my own in the analysis of K-Pop fandom culture, in a bid to both legitimize autoethnography as a key element in ethnographic research while also acknowledging the precarious and delicate presence the method has in being the proverbial glue that connects the observed and seen to the theoretical articulations of literature and academia.

Although I was applying my own personal interventions, were those interventions themselves generating data points, or was it the way I applied them that resulted in data points coming from other sources? In a critique of what has been considered ethnography in fan studies

and audience studies, Sam Pack (2020) argues that "traditional methods" like surveys/questionnaires, or even participant observation in a "controlled environment" can only offer a small sliver of the "shifting constellation of audiences" (29-30). Music researcher and practitioner, Colin Weber also asserts that the entire "point" of autoethnography is to observe the self, while simultaneously observing others, and using both data points to "feed off each other"; researchers should foil these experiences as a way to inform and tease out how you and others compile different or similar data points (2009: 268). Judith Halberstam (2003) articulates that autoethnography gives space to the learning process, as rigid frameworks of quantity can often limit its production and value. These similarities and differences tell a rich story that speaks to research enquiries. And while yes, my own experiences were data points that fed into and off of those I encountered while interfacing with participants, it was not a pervasive method that I deployed in the totality of my research project. Instead, I found that I deployed mini-autoethnographies during particular instances of my work, namely while using fandom platforms that focused on embodied parasociality and during in-person fan meet and greets, both of which I will discuss more in depth in the findings chapter three, four, and six. I used autoethnography in very specific ways to achieve very specific data points, but for the majority of my research, I used autoethnographic reflections to pursue data from participants on and offline. Not identifying as a fan would have othered me to such fans, thus not achieving the same qualitative interview, survey, and participant observation data I would have hoped to gain, though I understand that to some scholars, highlighting my fannish engagement tends to underscore the value of my data (Larsen, 2021). However, my identity as a fan also informs ethnography as a scholarly concept, as has been discussed by prior researchers in the field. So, is it autoethnography? Not completely. Is it autoethnographic? Yes.

Methodological Conclusions

This study employs ethnography as its principal methodological approach, incorporating participant observation, online surveys, interviews, and virtual data collection to establish a comprehensive data set. The process of data collection is influenced by my acafan and cultural identity and perspective, leading to conclusions informed by autoethnographic methods; however, the work does not constitute pure autoethnography. Closely connected to parasocial practices, this innovative application of ethnography offers valuable insight into the significance of ethnographic research within fandom studies, especially concerning K-Pop. Through reflexive analysis, this methodological synthesis facilitates an exploration of identity and transculturality that is pertinent to contemporary global contexts, while maintaining foundations in established literature and traditional research techniques.

CHAPTER THREE – "Crazy Form": Anglophone Fan Performances, Interpretations, and Appropriation of the Body of Koreanness

"My ego's in this show, to the moon we go…

Oh, have you been to all continents?...

Hey this is some crazy form.

***Just close your eyes if you think it's unsightly"* – ATEEZ, 2023**

"Crazy Form" (미친 폼), ATEEZ's comeback song[6] in December 2023, challenges fans and listeners to ignore negativity and succeed in their own way, all the while reminding fans that the group's dance moves are exceptionally killer – a "crazy form" of sorts that surpasses their fellow groups and is above anti-fandom reproach. With particular attention paid to the importance of the body, how it moves, and what it represents to others, ATEEZ's lyrics here serve as a metaphor for a number of bodily observations when it comes to domestic and Anglophone K-Pop fandoms. Namely for this chapter, I will discuss findings on the interpretation of the role of the body by Anglophone fans. Their understandings and adaptations of said bodies – whether it be the body of the idol or a body that represents "Koreanness" and acceptable fandom behavior – informs how Anglophone fans read the fandom subculture anew. It is within these interpretations of the body of Koreanness where one can directly observe the glocal fandom product in which international fandom propriospect alters the fandom subculture from its domestic parent.

[6] A "comeback" refers to a K-Pop idol or group's newest released single and subsequent media tour all revolving around the central aesthetic and music theme of the song itself.

First, this chapter will use the concept of fandom parasociality in K-Pop, emphasizing how this brand of bonding marries perceived fandom expertise on the object of affinity to craft, again what is perceived to be, an incredibly elite authority on the body of Koreanness. Second, I will discuss a particular case study involving two groups – KAACHI and Katseye – in which that perception of authority adapts into a policing ritual of Korean body and how it affects genre. While a level of policing and inter/intra-fandom tension are apparent in various fandoms around the world as well as in Korean domestic fandoms – a "fantagonism" as it were (Johnson, 2017) – I explore in this discussion how this brand of policing is in fact an inherently glocalized Anglophone, borne out of an Anglophone superstructural and cultural understanding of race relations, blended with fandom expertise. Lastly, this chapter will discuss how the absence of bodies within the fandom altered the fan habitus in Anglophone markets, addressing how Covid-19 contributed to the reperformances of fandom I observed in both field work and in virtual ethnography that is decidedly different than how the absence of bodies affected Korean domestic fandom practice and behavior.

Fandom Parasocialism, Expertise, and Authority on the Body of Koreanness: KAACHI and Katseye as Case Study

In the height of summer in 2022 I traveled to Brooklyn, New York to attend the concert of all-male K-Pop group, DKB; they have a relatively small but quite fierce and loyal fanbase, and though I had purchased a VIP ticket for a photo and a fan sign, I did not consider myself an expert fan in this group in any sense. However, with a VIP ticket, I was constantly queued together with groups of these loyal fans for hours at a time, moving from our fan sign

(autograph) time slot to our photos together, to the concert together. I had the same core dozen people around me. None of these fans appeared Korean, so I had assumed I was the only person of Korean descent there. During this encounter, my fellow line mates were fascinated and elated to know I was Korean. They squealed with glee, joyfully exclaiming about which Korean foods they loved, how they could write the Korean alphabet, and asked if I had a Korean name. Never had my Koreanness been so overtly treated as a thing of privilege or envy. Even though I was not a super fan of this group, my Koreanness afforded me access in an intimate and welcoming way. I came to find throughout my work with K-Pop fandom that my identity was a shielding asset that allowed me entry into privileged spaces and allowed me to have open interactions with Anglophone fandoms.

In conversation about my Korean identity, a fan who self-identified as being a super fan of this group, and therefore an expert and sort of leader of this fandom community approached our little gaggle. “OMG, are you Korean?!” she exclaimed excitedly. I expected this to be much like the other fans around who seemingly had never seen a Korean person “in the wild” before, but instead, this fan declared she was in fact Korean. Based off appearance, I would have never assumed this person identified as Korean, but she proudly boasted to us that one of her ancestors, I believe it was a great-grandmother, was Korean, making her $1/8^{th}$. She wholly identified as Korean, no matter how small that piece of her genetic makeup was. Sharing her Korean name with us, one she had assigned to herself as none of her other ancestors were Korean, she perceived her Koreanness as something that served as a reason why she most definitely belonged there and was entitled to this space. This fan’s proud declaration of her Koreanness, paired with the other fans’ fascination of my Koreanness demonstrates the value Anglophone fans assign to the presence of Korean bodies in K-Pop spaces. While fan subcultural capital (Hills, 2002), as

derived from Bourdieu's concept of subcultural capital (1979 [1984]), describes the "prosumer" fan as one that simultaneously has knowledge of the media object as well as invested emotional affect in the subject, my Koreanness somehow seemed to bypass any measure to prove my subcultural capital and situated me within a higher part of the fan hierarchy. Similarly, the other fan who claimed Korean heritage legitimized her fan presence by virtue of her family history, perhaps in a show of belonging, or even more, her placement as an executive or superfan fan (Edlom and Karlsson, 2021) with taste-making prowess and knowledge in the fandom.

While there is glee to include a Korean body in Anglophone K-Pop spaces, and an acceptance of non-Korean bodies in those spaces, even those non-Korean bodies adorning themselves in Koreanness and claiming Koreanness (more on that later), the same cannot be said about non-Korean bodies as *idols* in these spaces. Occupying space as an idol body mandates a certain level of Koreanness on certain occasions – a distinction I will discuss later in this chapter – which only can be overlooked in certain instances that the non-Korean idol body fulfils the same mandates as a Korean body, according to Anglophone fans. This condemnation or tolerance of a non-Korean body as an idol, a ritual of policing, is, I argue and will evidence in this chapter, a distinctively Anglophone practice that has become a well-documented and even expected part of the glocalized fandom. I contend that this interpretation and ownership of authority on the Korean body is an exhibition of glocal understanding; it is where this specific brand of K-Pop parasociality and fandom expertise collide.

Anglophone fans place a particular importance on the body of the idol, projecting and/or policing identity. Considering themselves experts in the text of K-Pop, which I argue often also serves as a substitute for a definition of Koreanness, Anglophone fans craft a propriospect of idol identity that they see as permissible to occupy the idol role. And while participating in the

"policing" and sometimes considered "protecting" of idol bodies, Anglophone fans participate in the appropriative identity acts of which they often protest when executed on idol bodies but permit themselves to do in their own bodies. I contend that both practices regarding the body, are glocalized, non-Korean components of Anglophone K-Pop fandom, particular insofar as my data exhibits, to Anglophone communities. Though these practices may deviate from Korean domestic fandom practices as I will discuss further in this chapter, Anglophone fans reperform what they believe to be their role through expressions of their body and perceptions of the idol body. In this chapter I address how the body is interpreted and performed in Anglophone K-Pop spaces, both as an expression and policing of Koreanness as well as a glocal form unlike Korean domestic fan subculture.

As discussed in the literature review and methods of this research, fandom expertise and fan habitus as supported by Korean cultural frameworks of parasocial bonding create the perfect storm by which Anglophone fandoms feel empowered to engage in activities and behaviors that maintain the sanctity of the K-Pop genre. The "sanctity" to which I refer to in this instance is the representation of the genre as "Korean" through the body of participants – only when said bodies receive the buy-in of expertise and elite fans, I argue through case studies chosen for this chapter, can they be considered both commercially and culturally viable to belong in the space. Even if accepted to a certain extent by a small number of fans in the Anglophone fandom, a non-Korean body's legitimization as an agent of the genre (i.e. the idol) is contingent on the universal acceptance of their non-Korean presence, of which is achieved when fulfilling specific expectations of idol participation. And of course, those expectations are largely fan driven, rather than industry or agency defined. This is best articulated through the British K-Pop group, KAACHI and fan reaction to their debut, as contrasted through the relative success and

celebration of K-Pop groups in Korea that include non-Korean members in their lineup, or those groups that do not claim certain aspects of genre, and yet operate in the same ecosystem.

In April 2020, a new K-Pop girl group debuted among a maelstrom of social media frenzy, but unlike previous media darling groups like BlackPink, Itzy, or aespa, this new group faced more media fire than showers of love. KAACHI, a London-based group originally composed of four members and represented by FrontRow Records, sought to challenge the norm of K-Pop with its majority, non-Asian composition. The group sang in Korean and danced in the style of other female K-Pop groups but only had one ethnic Korean member while the remaining three members were Irish, Spanish, and Spanish English. Anglophone K-Pop fans turned to social media and live-streaming platforms to express discontent. From white and diasporic Asian British reactors on YouTube to anonymous X (at the time "Twitter") savants to commenters during streamed performances, fans condemned the non-East Asian idols for adapting K-Pop aesthetics—the same K-Beauty and K-Fashion derived aesthetics that many fans themselves were trying to emulate—while also criticizing the members' Korean language ability. In doing so, these fans negated the presence of the Korean member, deeming her an accessory to the appropriation. As exhibited in Figures 4 to 6, screenshots of fandom exchanges on X and TikTok located via searches of the hashtags #KAACHI and #KAACHI_DISBAND, Anglophone users deployed the term "Koreaboo," a derogatory slang term that refers to someone who fetishizes Korean culture and people, to describe the three non-East Asian members, effectively accusing them of cultural appropriation. The sole Korean member, who was born and raised in Korea, is a Korean citizen, and speaks Korean fluently was singled out as "useless" or accused of not knowing "what she's doing" as if her Korean identity hinged upon the fact that she was familiar with how to be an idol. Do Yeonsoo, stage name Coco, was clearly not a "good Korean" (i.e. her

language ability was questioned because she was often quiet in interviews, and her place of birth was questioned because it was not addressed during promotions) in the eyes of Anglophone fans in these online interactions since she had agreed to go along with this "farce of K-Pop." Do was often relegated to the background in earlier promotions and music videos, likely because she had joined the group right before debut (Kaachi, n.d.), and while this logistical note explains her minimal exposure at the group's debut, fan expertise in Anglophone fandoms equated this to an erasure of her Koreanness, thus stripping what little cultural legitimacy the group had. Notably, these individual exchanges gained very little engagement indicating perhaps it was a small group of gatekeepers targeting KAACHI.

Figure 4. Screenshot from X user Rim, expressing discontent with Kaachi (2020).

Figure 5. Screengrab of a TikTok video in which user txt_crown__ identifies KAACHI's behavior in promotional videos as "kboo"(short for Koreaboo) (2020).

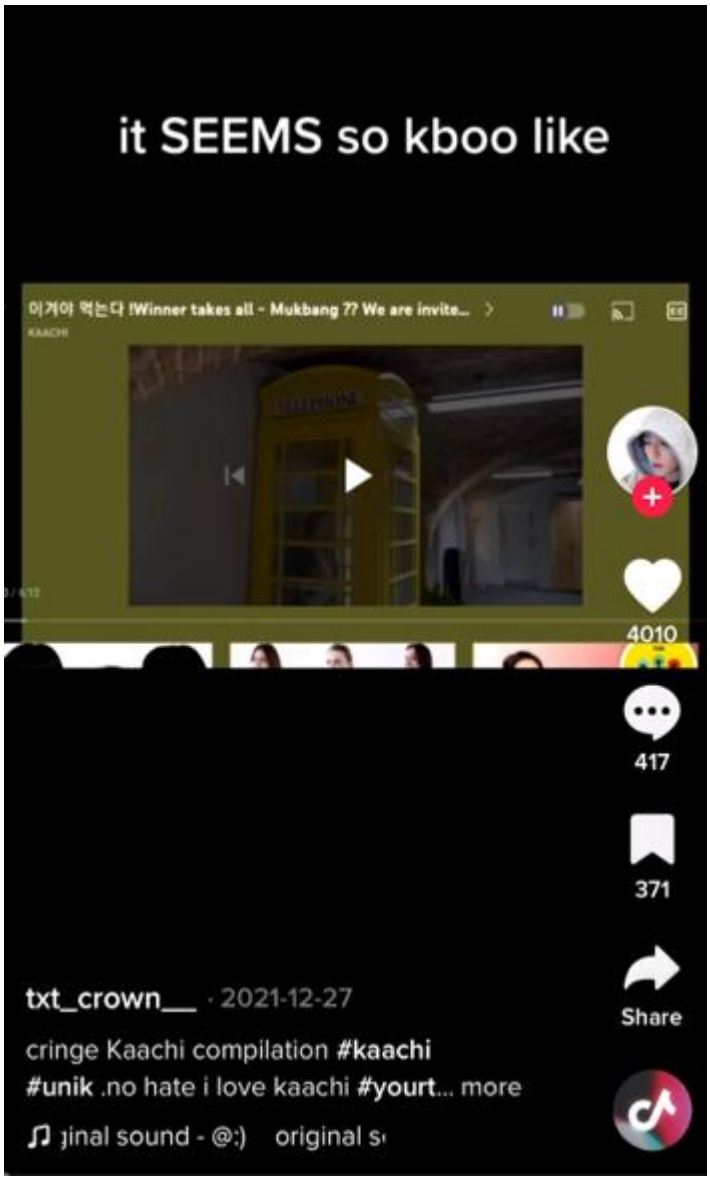


Figure 6. Screengrab of a TikTok video in which user kpop_hyuna_bts_kdaniel mitigates KAACHI's Coco's Koreanness in KAACHI's debut music video (2020).

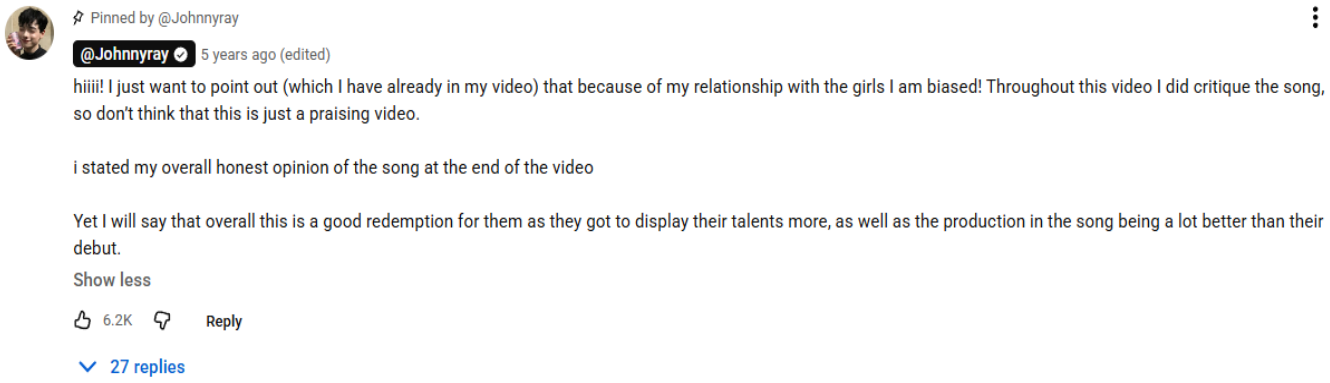
Facing backlash and online harassment about their K-Pop "interpretation," KAACHI agreed to an interview with famous gyopo (a Korean term to refer to someone of ethnic Korean heritage but not living in Korea) YouTubers DKDKTV to discusses their motives for joining the K-Pop industry and their appreciation for Korean culture (DKDKTV, 2020). In the interview, Irish member, Dani describes that their desire is not to "be Korean," and that they do not plan on donning hanbok[7] and parading around London, but rather that they deeply appreciate K-Pop as a genre form and have since their cover dance team days. Dani, and the other two non-Korean

[7] Korean traditional dress or garments.

members, address accusations of being Koreaboos, defending themselves against claims that their deployment of Korean language and aeygo*,* a term used to refer to a particular brand of Korean "cuteness" in behavior, was in an attempt to pretend to be Korean. Coco further dispels any rumors of her Koreanness in this interview as well, speaking in Korean and explaining her diaspora story. Notably, DKDKTV is notorious for creating content that is quite critical of Korean culture, government, and people, though they are ethnically Korean. Also notable is DKDKTV co-host, Danny's response to KAACHI as a concept; in a nonchalant manner Danny asks why anyone would ever think this should not be considered K-Pop, suggesting that KAACHI is so obviously part of the genre that those who accused them of appropriation were just plain silly.

This did not stop other YouTubers, primary among them British vloggers who go by mononyms Johnny and Ploppy, from criticizing KAACHI. Johnny (2020a) particularly, picked apart the group's production value, song composition, and choreography—all elements which are synonymous with K-Pop as genre—and referred to the group's "Korean behaviors" as cringey *until* he was invited to join KAACHI's production team in later 2020. Figure 7, a screenshot taken of Johnny's (2020b) comment under his November 6, 2020 video in response to KAACHI's comeback, illustrates his transition from critic of KAACHI to friend.

Figure 7. Pinned comment under a video entitled "Is KAACHI's new song actually better?" (2020) from YouTube creator Johnny.



YouTuber Ploppy dedicated an entire video to discussing KAACHI, revealing that she had been asked to be the fourth member before Korean Coco was asked to join the team (Ploppy678, 2020). Incidentally Ploppy is British-East Asian and built her audience from K-Pop dance covers, not unlike the other members of KAACHI, but Ploppy quickly identified what she believed to be troubling Koreaboo behaviors from the members as well, including their language inability. However, Korean domestic audiences showed less negative response to KAACHI than English-speaking fans did. As will be discussed in depth further in this chapter, Korean domestic responses to KAACHI showed similar sentiments to Danny of DKDKTV, in essence asking the question: "why shouldn't this be considered K-Pop?" In almost an ironic situational context next to the Anglophone fan practices of adapting physical Koreanness, or perceived physical Koreanness, into their own practice of fannish behavior, Anglophone fans simultaneously exhibited a brand of policing and gatekeeping of K-Pop against the introduction of non-Korean or non-Asian bodies while adapting behaviors not unlike what they were accusing members of KAACHI of doing.

In similar cases of other non-Korean and more specifically, non-Asian as idols in the K-Pop space, Anglophone fans exhibited behaviors of either condemnation or explanation as to why that particular body belonged there. In the case of experimental project group, UHSN, it was the latter. As user OnlyMusic16 (2021) adamantly asserts in her comment below UHSN's debut song (2019), "These girls are members of a Korean reality show about teaching foreigners about Korean culture…Yes I get that it can feel cringey to watch foreigners mimic a culture that isn't there's, but this group… took excruciating time and efforts TO LEARN. Let them live, jesus, they aren't here to steal K-Pop from Koreans." This comment received 8,000 likes at the time of this writing. Incidentally, KAACHI continuously popped up in the comments as well, with users (Figures 8 and 9) urging fans not to compare these women to KAACHI; while KAACHI was the clear example of a bad group, UHSN was a good version.

Figure 8. Screengrabs of YouTube users (2019) referring to KAACHI by a derogatory nickname and asking fellow fans not to compare UHSN to them.

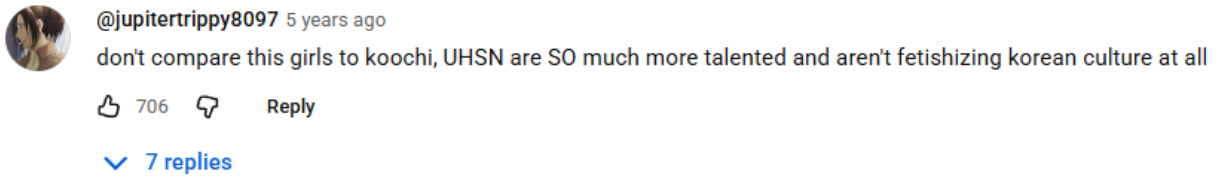


Figure 9.

Idol groups like Black Swan, a girl group composed of entirely non-Korean members not unlike KAACHI, and Lana, a Russian idol who began in the K-Pop space and has since transitioned to the C-Pop space, were similarly defended as "good" interlopers in K-Pop for participating in the idol "manufacturing" system of training and total cultural immersion, while non-Korean group EXP Edition, one of the earliest non-Korean entrants into the K-Pop genre, were also ill-received by Anglophone fans, accused of mocking and fetishizing Koreans, culturally appropriating the craft, and not being technically trained enough to be in the space (Vice 2017).

In the context of KAACHI, fans policing non-Korean idol bodies can be explained through the lens of a borrowed concept from critical race theory: white guilt. A term coined by theorist Shelby Steele, white guilt refers to the uneasy and uncomfortable knowledge that White-American populations in America have gained an "ill-gotten" advantage over Black-Americans. Though uneasy about said advantage, White-Americans are secretly grateful; therefore these populations of White-Americans feel it is a kind of "White Man's Burden" to uplift and "help" Black populations, sometimes even unsolicited (1990). Anglophone fans in a way are exhibiting a similar sort of self- righteous guilt, of which I am calling Global North, postcolonial guilt in their policing behaviors when accusing non-Asian bodies of attempting to appropriate, co-opt, and in a sense colonize K-Pop spaces with the intrusion and invasion of their Global North presence. As evidenced by data gathered during this virtual ethnography and from survey respondents, I discern that British and American fans feel a need to police and gatekeep K-Pop on behalf of Koreans because they see the entry of non-Korean as modern imperialism trying to exploit and capitalize something that should rightfully be Korea's or for Koreans. If, and only if, the groups exhibit a decent enough supplication and respect toward the industry, are they seen as peaceful co-habitators rather than parasitic invaders. This sentiment of postcolonial guilt is

something that fans bring with them from their foundation cultural beliefs, their everyday habitus, to K-Pop fandom spaces, both physical and meta-physical.

Survey respondents reaffirmed this perspective when questioned about the significance of the "K" in K-Pop. According to participants, K-Pop is distinguished not only by its Korean lyrics, predominantly Korean performers on stage, and production within Korea, but also by the rigorous idol training conducted through a specialized system that enhances the overall quality of production. If a non-Korean body trains in this system and respectfully participates in the formalized rituals and systems of idol production, then Anglophone fans designate it to be permissible in K-Pop. Idol trainees spend years, if not over a decade, of their life dedicated to producing the most commercially viable versions of themselves, training in singing, dancing, speaking, and even international languages, and the romanticism that fans craft of this Korean-specific training system acts as the first gate a prospective non-Korean idol must clear to appear authentic. Trainee spaces have been analyzed as spaces of aesthetic labor, where bodily evolution and affective display are closely and continuously monitored, corrected, and perfected (Lie, 2015). At the same time, K-Pop's globalization translates these distinctively Korean processes into valorized paradigms of K-Pop's technical precision, which in turn translates to authenticity. Anglophone fans policing training and technicality is – in a way – a means by which they police authenticity.

Interview respondents aligned with survey responses in their perceptions of idolness equating to Koreanness. Interviewee Stephanie, a female fan in her 30s based in southern California, USA, also commented on the difference between KAACHI and other "global" K-Pop groups that feature non-Korean idols. Though she was initially unaware of KAACHI when we

began chatting about the subject, she formulated an opinion based on my, albeit colored, description of the group. This conservation is excerpted below:

> **Sharon:** "KAACHI was a British K-Pop group that had three white members…[they] sang in Korean. Their dancing ability was a little, you know. The production value was not as you would hope for in K-Pop, but something they ran into a lot was fans gatekeeping and accusing them of…cultural appropriation."
>
> **Stephanie:** "It might not have been the intention, but it gives the vibe of appropriating-ish. While if it had been solidified in Korea, it might have made a big difference. Also, if the production value is not up to par of what we see in K-POP, it might also be seen as a joke of like, oh, they're just trying to…They're trying, but they're just appropriating the stuff and they just wanna play around because they just like K-Pop. They're just fangirls, so I can see how all of those things can come up…"

In contrast, this same standard is not held by Korean domestic fans or Koreans when asked whether KAACHI or EXP Edition is considered K-Pop, (Vice 2017), pointing to a specifically Anglophone policing of the space in this regard. Korean and Korean American content creators lent their voice in counter argument to KAACHI critics, specifically. Jessica Lee, former member of idol Group Highteen and current content creator commented in a 2020 vlog, "I appreciate that they tried to sing in Korean…K-Pop is a genre, so I do think there's no problem calling themselves a K-Pop group." For Lee, K-Pop encompasses what Hallyu and musicologists might frame K-Pop to be, that is, following certain composition styles, singing in

the Korean language, and dancing to characteristic choreography. Former Trainee for Global H Media and Korean American YouTuber, Grazy Grace (2020), criticized fans for their policing, "I'm more disappointed on the comments…look at all these hate comments!"

In stark contrast to the condemnation of Anglophone fans during KAACHI's debut across social media channels, the immediate response from Korean domestic fans, casual observers, and even influencers were not to be quick to anger but rather suggested an openness that Anglophone fans did not offer. The above reactions from Korean and Korean diasporic vloggers in content videos and interview comments all expounded on an expansion occurring in the K-Pop genre, one that included the presence of different ethnic idols but still emphasized the training and production value that is so closely intertwined with the genre's definition. DKDKTV also provided additional commentary outside of the KAACHI interview on the presence of non-Asian idols in K-Pop in a series of street interviews compiled under the title, "Is KAACHI K-Pop?" (DKDKTV 2020b). In these interviews, domestic Koreans reacted to KAACHI, again not critical of their non-Korean bodies, but more critical of production value and language ability. However, their language ability, or more accurately, inability, was not considered a contentious piece of proof that they were appropriators or worse colonizers in the K-Pop space, but rather to domestic Koreans it showed that the Korean language and therefore Korean culture was spreading abroad. If their little country could influence and command audiences overseas to the point where British participants were wanting to engage with Korean culture, was that after all, not a great thing?

Figure 10. Screengrab of the thumbnail for DKDKTV's 2020 video interviewing members of KAACHI.

Figure 11. Screengrab of the thumbnail for DKDKTV's 2020 video interviewing members of the Korean public on the street on whether KAACHI could be considered K-Pop.

EXP Edition experienced a similar response from Korean domestic fans and participants that KAACHI had, having also received similar condemnation from Anglophone fans. In a mini-documentary entitled, “The Most Hated Group in K-Pop,” (Vice, 2020), the group discusses how warmly they have been greeted during their time in Korea where they were able to perform among other K-Pop artists in music shows and perform in concerts for fans. These introspections are coupled with film footage of the group members interacting with fans, all of whom are excited to see EXP Edition and make comments about how both fascinating and exciting it is that the genre is expanding. None of the domestic Korean fans interviewed during the documentary

express any sort of concerns on cultural appropriation, something that group members are quick to point out. All the "hate" they received upon their debut all came from English-speakers, an indication that English-speaking fans felt they were the arbiters and gatekeepers of what made K-Pop, K-Pop. Bandmembers address accusations of cultural appropriation head on in the documentary, with one member pointing out that: "interestingly enough, that type of criticism comes from non-Korean K-Pop fandom, mostly English speaking actually."

Figure 12. Korean fans during an EXP Edition Meet and Greet, as captured by the VICE documentary (2020). The English translation captions a fan's enjoyment of this new "global" K-Pop.

Ironically, interviewee Stephanie pointed out that she believed that fan reception in Korea determines a group's overall success. Given a group like EXP Edition's pseudo-success in Korea, there appears to be a profound absence of Young's profound offense paradigm (2005, 2008) to point to solidly objective cultural appropriation. At the same time these global groups'

ability to break into Korean markets and find a level of acceptance with Korean fans would not amount to international success. In Stephanie's words, "Their reception…in Korea will be the thing that kind of…makes or breaks them as a group." Stephanie's comments point to a divergence of expectation and treatment of these global groups, reallocating the gatekeeping role from Anglophone fandoms to Korean domestic ones, reinscribing a hierarchy. While Stephanie believes that Korean fans dictate Koreanness and permissions of non-Korean bodies into the industry, the irony in her systems of understanding is that Korean domestic fans often find no issue with global idols who attempt to sing in Korean, dance in the style of K-Pop choreography, and position themselves aesthetically and sonically as participants in the genre. Rather, Anglophone fans rooted in a cultural superstructure of post-colonial guilt, ascribe their own performances and expertise of understanding fandom subculture and habitus.

Crafting an ownership of expertise on what the "K" in K-Pop is, Anglophone fandoms simultaneously monitor and pass judgement on the appropriateness of appropriation on the part of non-Korean K-Pop idols while adapting and performing Koreanness themselves often expressed in dress and bodily adornment. The presence of the idols themselves, craft Anglophone's fans understandings and perceptions of the Korean identity (not just in a K-Pop context), which are interpreted and performed – but also policed and gatekept. From body-related readings of the idol as their "text," Anglophone fans draw upon their "expert" knowledge and engagement to simultaneously "protect" the space from interlopers but in doing so, also ignore Korean traditional and cultural contexts of Korean identity. However, with Anglophone fandoms there is a fracture between what that "expert" knowledge is perceived to be and what *is*. In this fissure, postcolonial guilt explains the disagreements between fans on who, or what, is permitted to be an idol body.

This is effectively a study on the modes of "doing" in Anglophone fandoms, crafting a throughline between the Anglophone superstructural, fannish behavior of gatekeeping and how it transculturally translates to K-Pop fandoms of which they are a part. "Doing fandom," as understood in Hills (2002) analysis, discusses the modes of engagement observed in participatory fandoms – such as collecting, ranking, and making performance expertise known. Gatekeeping within Anglophone fandoms can be understood as part of a broader, culturally specific mode of "doing" that extends beyond the Korean context, illustrating the glocalization of fandom behaviors towards the body. For example, Anglophone fandoms of Global North media texts, like *Star Wars* and *Doctor Who* have long exhibited the practice of gatekeeping and policing, with challenges towards newcomer fans (and a general disdain of such newcomers as well) on their legitimacy; if fans are unable to prove their place in the fandom hierarchy and prove their subcultural capital through encyclopedic knowledges of the text's canon, it is deemed by executive fans that said person is inauthentically taking up space (Jenkins, 1992; Scott, 2019).

Reciprocally, when Korean fans engage with Anglophone-based media objects, their mode of doing fandoms exists to fit the vernacular of Korean fandom communities. Elements like gift culture, collective organization, and advertisement campaigns are practiced when celebrating media objects like *Harry Potter* or *Marvel* (Cho, 2020). Though contextualized as normalized behaviors in Korean fandoms, to global fans reading the practices anew, this sort of fan collectivism – this particular mode of doing – is read with global superstructures and seen as inauthentic and perhaps overly commercial (Lee, 2019). This reading highlights that fandom is not culturally neutral, but culturally contingent on locality. Such readings also further entrench the point of argument when it comes to Anglophone fandom gatekeeping as a part of doing, as

often Korean or Asian fandoms of Anglophone subjects are accused by Anglophone fandoms as "doing fandom wrong"

In K-Pop's context illustrating this Anglophone mode of doing, KAACHI and EXP Edition did receive support from a subsection of international fans, illustrating some type of fissure within Anglophone fandom expertise reading. In fact, even aforementioned idols like Lana, were subject to either defamation or defense of their presence in the genre, leveraging how her participation in traditional idol-making either confirmed or mitigated how legitimate she was as an idol. However, a new emergent group type in the K-Pop ecosystem is experiencing an entirely different reaction to that of KAACHI or EXP Edition. I caution to refer to these groups as being a part of the K-Pop genre, however. Though these groups train in Korea as trainees would have done pre- and post-debut, and very much present in the same stylized manner on and off-stage as idols do, they do not sing or rap in Korean. While some have Korean language ability, they do not present this as a hallmark of their group identity. Rather, these new groups that operate within the mold of K-Pop-making consider themselves a new, global form of where K-Pop can go. This, I argue, is a glocalization in itself, however, as this research focuses on the K-Pop fandom glocalization of subculture, and not on the glocalization of the product itself necessarily, I will be brief in my discussions on these groups and will focus my attention on fandom and audience response after providing context.

It is within this distinction of fan-driven parameters of genre where the K-Pop, glocal groups of XG and Katseye find their commercial success. Both were chosen for this analysis for their non-Korean membership, their production by Korean agencies, and their visibility in the K-Pop music scene. The first group, XG is an all-female band with members who are ethnically Japanese. Their Spotify profile reads that "XG is a seven-member Hiphop/R&B-inspired girl

group...” with a “mission to empower people from all walks of life through boundary-breaking music and performances” (XG, Spotify: 2025). They debuted in 2022 and since their first single’s release, XG has gone on to achieve a number of Global North media accolades, including a cover on *Billboard* magazine (the first Japanese girl group ever to do so) and performing at Coachella Music Festival in 2025 (ibid). Interestingly, their profile gives no mention of K-Pop as an associative genre. However, fans include them as part of the K-Pop ecosystem, as evidenced by their inclusion in the K-Pop fandom Wiki (XG, n.d.), a grassroots page dedicated to chronicling all things K-Pop. On that page, XG’s “pre-debut” years of training with agency XGALX (a Korean company) is discussed, highlighting that the group’s “place of origin” is in Seoul, South Korea. The group name and fandom name are translated into Hangul, the Korean alphabet, on the profile as well. XG also bears many other hallmarks of K-Pop including a fandom name, a formal “reveal” and debut of members, and the members of the group appear to be fluent in Korean as well (ibid.).

While there’s ongoing debate regarding XG’s inclusion as either J-Pop or K-Pop, or neither, or both (again discussions of which are outside of this research, strictly), the main argument here is that to an extent, the fandom was generally accepting of the group’s presence in the K-Pop ecosystem. Interviewee Stephanie acknowledges this tension when asked about XG, commenting:

> “I’ve heard it’s been controversial because they’re all Japanese members, but they sing in English, but they’re considered K-Pop… So it just it feels like there was a lot of drama there. Like I remember hearing a lot about it and it's like I love their songs… I love them. I think they're so great and I'm just like, yeah, they're…they're doing, they’re-

> - ohh not advertising--but they're debuting in Korea like….there. I don't know. It's, I guess as someone who likes to diversify things and not make things as just as a bubble of, like, these are the only ways. It's not just a script. I kinda like it, like the idea of XG… I really like the idea, like the girls sing amazing. They can rap. They are just fantastic. They can dance... They're just, they're just an amazing group. Their latest single, it was like this is what other groups wish they had because it's true and I'm like, I love so many groups and I respect all groups because it's the talent it takes to get into a group. The training period is a lot, like I know it takes styling to debut, but this song, this song is it y'all. So that's a whole conversation I had with a friend because we were like, wow, some groups, wish this was their debut song or some groups, wish this was their comeback song right now. So it's one of those things that I feel just like with Black Swan, XG. I love them. ”

This interesting amalgam of genre and influence can also be evidenced by exhibiting the group’s commercial success in both Global North arenas as well as their inclusion and positive reception in the Korean music industry. Their discussed accolades, including charting Billboard 200 records, point to a relative success (or at least non-condemnation) in Anglophone markets, while their appearance on Korean television programs and shows like KBS World’s Music Bank (KBS WORLD TV, 2023) exhibit an acceptance of their place in the industry. In fact, fans attempted to get XG nominated for the largest annual awards show in K-Pop by engaging in a voting campaign for XG for their inclusion in the Global Artist awards genre. Despite coming out on top for this fan vote, XG was not nominated for any other categories outlined by the program, displaying an interesting divergence of fandom perception of these non-Korean bodies

in the genre and an industry-held standard of what K-Pop is (XG Official, 2024). This was in direct contrast to EXP Edition and KAACHI, both of whom were shunned and policed by fans by virtue of their non-Korean bodies. XG as a product itself marks an interesting reversal of the historical Hallyu trajectory wherein Japan was a primary export for K-Pop, instead utilizing a K-Pop infrastructure to localize Japanese identity (Finan, 2020). Thus, XG is able to navigate a middle ground that satisfies fan expectation and policing of "Asian-enough" in ways that EXP Edition or KAACHI could never achieve. Another glocal group reaching an impressive level of success in both Global North markets and Korean domestic industry is Katseye, an all-female group assembled and trained under Geffen Records and K-Pop agency, HYBE. HYBE is best known as the force behind behemoth group BTS, and while Katseye has both non-Korean and non-Asian members and sings in English, the group's engagement in fan-prescribed expectations of what K-Pop as genre is still places them firmly within K-Pop's ecosystem. Because the group followed the training, aesthetics, and sounds of the genre as dictated by expert fans, their bodies are not policed when they lay claim to genre via their inclusion in "traditionally" K-Pop spaces like the MAMA Music Awards (KBS World, 2023).

Although the glocal products created by these groups offer compelling examples of transcultural genre translation, this research focuses on KAACHI, EXP Edition, XG, and Katseye primarily to highlight how glocal fandom norms emerge through the policing of idols and their bodies, as well as through the development of expert opinions about what constitutes Koreanness. More specifically, it examines perceptions of acceptable mimicry that are absolved from accusations of cultural appropriation. While the first two groups I introduced, KAACHI and EXP Edition were caught in a maelstrom of cultural appropriation accusations and ultimately were not commercially viable, XG and Katseye are acceptable "deviations" of genre as dictated

by industry and/or fans. Despite the fact that Korean domestic audiences and fans did not exhibit profound offense (Young, 2005, 2008), both of these groups were considered neo-colonizing interlopers, mis-performing idolness and therefore Koreanness. This bears the question: did KAACHI and EXP Edition merely violate what Anglophone fans *perceived* to be appropriately Korean? KAACHI and EXP Edition both attempted to brand themselves as global K-Pop groups, speaking, singing, and rapping in Korean, without fulfilling fandom expectation or policed standards of inclusion in the K-Pop world. XG and Katseye, rather, positioned themselves as K-Pop's cousin while simultaneously ticking the boxes of fan expectation of what Koreanness, or at least Korean idolness, was perceived to be. And interestingly, all four groups were also born out of Korean agencies or Korean directors.

While postcolonial guilt helps articulate the reception of KAACHI and EXP Edition, the why can't the theory apply as neatly with Anglophone fandom reception and inclusion of XG and Katseye into K-Pop spaces? First, I argue that both groups' concerted effort to follow the K-Pop formula was an appeasement factor to fans who feel they have a stake in keeping K-Pop "pure" and free from intercultural interventions that read colonial in any way. Returning back to survey data, respondents expressed that the high production value of idols is a hallmark of the K-Pop genre, and an absence of such fails to meet the threshold of authenticity. The country of origin—Korea—and elements indicative of Koreanness, such as the idol production system, were emphasized as markers of authenticity, effectively defining the "K" in K-Pop. The emergence of these definitional boundaries as genre criteria suggests the presence of transcultural gatekeeping practices, which Anglophone fans have introduced into the fandom context.

In the case of this gatekeeping of Koreanness and bodies in the genre as glocal practice, XG and Katseye fulfilled the markers highlighted in survey data. Rather than coming in and declaring oneself a member of the K-Pop genre, industry, and community, XG and Katseye were both crafted as respectful of the due process of becoming an idol, engaging in the very Korean archetypes of idol creation. Interviewee Stephanie points out that these groups successfully used a "formula/formula" in her comments that XG and Black Swan in particular "give a little bit of formula vibes" but they "strayed" just the right amount away, "diversifying looking into seeing what, who fans want." The fans here refer to a global fan community, "a diverse group of fans" that aren't "just Asian fans and a few here or there." For Stephanie the "diversification of K-Pop" is permissible and accepted by these international fans if groups keep the main elements of K-Pop authentically intact – "keep them as they are because they work" – but develop. "Why not add one member and see how it works. Add another one." XG, and by extension Katseye are seen as said positive interlopers that understood fandom and market wants without compromising on respect for the process. This fandom phenomenon fits into a paradigm of fan productivity (Fiske, 1992) wherein official agents of production were powerless to make groups like EXP Edition and KAACHI commercially viable. Despite Korean producers at the helm of both projects, XG and Katseye's success points to both a subversion of agency and a mitigation of Korean meaning, suggesting that it was never truly a question of Korean authenticity being violated, but rather an expectation of Anglophone-derived Koreanness being met.

In contrast, during KAACHI and EXP Edition's active years, these groups were treated as musicians that cut the queue, as it were, and despite being appreciators to a degree, failed to follow the formula that earned them the right to be included in the genre. As the formula itself as identified as the "Korean" of K-Pop by survey respondents, not participating in the formula is, in

essence, not presenting the fan-expected level of fluency in Koreanness necessary to properly be considered a part of K-Pop. This inauthentic participation, and gatekeeping as such, can be interpreted as a glocal practice and expression of postcolonial guilt, keeping the genre safe from neo-colonizing efforts and instead allowing good interlopers – i.e. foreigners with good intentions – into the fold to do good works as so long as it aligns with their glocal, Anglophone ideal of Koreanness. Scholarship on colonial and neocolonial discourse in media has long observed how representations often hinge on binaries of the "good" versus "bad colonizer, reproducing moral hierarchies that legitimize hegemonic powers – and perhaps in this case Anglophone fandoms interventions, humanizing some while vilifying others (Hall, 1997). This juxtaposition of good non-Korean body and bad non-Korean body seemingly mimics the gatekeeping that occurs within fandoms as well with good fans "doing fandom right" and those doing it wrong.

In furthering the "good" non-Korean body theory, both XG and Katseye do not sing or rap in Korean, another element that may absolve them from accusations of cultural appropriation, as both KAACHI and EXP Edition did perform songs in Korean, without fluency in speaking it. Furthermore, the response of Anglophone fandoms may have been stronger with KAACHI and EXP Edition perhaps due to the racial make-up of its members, entrenching this "protection from interlopers" narratives that my postcolonial guilt theory seeks to explain. Notably, the members of these two groups are ethnically Caucasian for the most part (with one member having some Asian heritage in either group), and as discussed, their overwhelming whiteness both negated their Asian members' heritages and played into the perception of inauthentic players in a game of Koreanness. In contrast, both XG and Katseye are predominantly composed of non-white members, with the majority of performers between two

groups having ethnically Asian heritage, including south and southeast Asian roots. Seeing non-Korean idols in the K-Pop genre is not uncommon and has been a practice in place for decades now with Chinese, Japanese, Thai, and now Indian, South American, and (non-white) European idols a more regular sighting in K-Pop. This desensitization towards non-Korean idols, and their decades-long acceptance in K-Pop spaces (Siriyuvasak and Shin, 2007) may lend itself even more to fan expertise. Since non-Korean idols were a fixture prior to Anglophone fandoms, then to Anglophone fans who quickly learned fluency of the genre from archival idol texts, these bodies do not have to be policed to the same level as explicitly as non-Korean, non-Asian bodies. Caucasian bodies, to an expert fan reading, can be seen as merely "jumping on the bandwagon" while racially diverse bodies, ones who have gone through all the hallmarks of K-Pop industry training and styling, are deemed "Korean enough" fit into K-Pop spaces from fans. In this context, idolness is associated with an accepted form of Koreanness within Anglophone, glocalized fan communities. This perspective draws on Goodenough's (1971) theory of understanding and propriospects, combining Anglophone colonial interpretations with established genre conventions to produce a whole new glocalized (Robertson, 1992), habitus (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984) that is a regular practice of Anglophone fandom.

These group's "non-whiteness" can also factor into why they are considered good colonizers or interlopers. Global South-on-Global South imperialism tends to fall outside the dominant Global North psyche because imperialism is often framed in Global North societies through Eurocentric narratives that cast whiteness as the agent of conquest and non-whiteness as its subject (Chow, 1998; Shih, 2011). This way of thinking buys into the postcolonial guilt paradigm, as Global North fans may see idols of color as being colonized themselves, or understanding them as victims in some way. Thus, there are permissible to share in a non-White,

Global South space without fear of being considered appropriative. However, this paradigm is proving a gatekeeping superiority in of itself, as colonial power relations between non-"Western" nations, such as Japan's occupation of Korea, are marginalized, discounted, or misrecognized in Anglophone discourse; it effectively continues a global hierarchy that places the Global North at the center, despite fandom claims to decenter whiteness and keep colonizers out of K-Pop. Thus, XG and Katseye's lower quantity of white members allows the group to claim authenticity by the following the formula of idolness and Koreanness with the understanding that these idols could never be white colonizers. It is the permissible threshold by which groups are judged as either: appropriate players in the game, rather than appropriative cheaters looking to get famous quickly and take advantage of Korea. Again, I want to emphasize that none of these groups are considered appropriative from the online ethnographic data I gathered, as discussed earlier in this chapter, from Korean domestic audiences; none of these groups meet the threshold of profound offense when consulting the "parent" culture (Scafidi, 2005; Arya, 2021), emphasizing an Anglophone cultural tendency to play savior rather than listen to the community from which elements are being "appropriated" from.

Anglophone fans tend to police and gatekeep the boundaries of K-Pop fandom more vigorously than Korean domestic fans, prompting consideration of whether cultural appropriation concerns are adequately addressed when engaging with the parent culture. The ensuing glocalization within these fan communities encompasses both Anglophone practices of gatekeeping and the dynamics of including or excluding non-Korean participants. This phenomenon exemplifies "doing fandom" according to broader cultural superstructures (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002) that characterize subcultures within K-Pop fandom and highlight distinctive glocal practices absent from domestic Korean contexts. Additionally, this form of

gatekeeping reflects post-colonial guilt and perpetuates Global North narratives of power and colonial structures, suggesting the persistence of such rituals concerning genre and membership criteria in the community. While policing idol bodies relies strictly on the presence of the body to draw conclusions from, however, it was an absence of bodies during the Covid-19 pandemic that also drastically glocalized Anglophone fandom to fit into Anglophone cultural superstructures.

Feral Fandoms: Anglophone Fan Reperformance and Altered Habitus in the Absence of Bodies During the Covid-19 Pandemic

We were maskless, and the screams proved it. Though in-person concerts regained traction at the end of 2020 with BTS's "Permission to Dance" tour kick-off in Los Angeles, in-person gatherings were still subject to various Covid-19 safety protocols, including attendees masking while indoors. While masking was put in place to inhibit the spread of Covid-19, it also added a layer of calm; while yes screaming, shouting, and excited jumping up and down were still very much in practice during the time of masks, there was almost a muted blanket in how fans behaved at concerts. Or perhaps fans were much more versed in how their counterparts in Asia attended events. In April 2023, at the WeBridge Music Festival held in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, masking protocols were no longer a requirement for concert-going, and it felt like something was unleashed. This permutation proved to be an exaggerated example of how Anglophone fans perform the role of the fan, and to what degree bodily performance developed outside of the Korean cultural context to form a new glocal product when expert bodies from Korean fandoms could no longer be relied upon to set the subcultural expectation. This section of

the chapter moves on from racialized idol bodies to consider the movement and behavior of fans' bodies at live concerts, pointing to new glocal, propriospects that form without understanding Korean domestic practice, nor the culture of which it derives.

As any researcher diving into the depths of internet archives, I had casually seen murmurings of certain fandoms being condemned as “scary” or “crazy,” a categorization that I never wanted to believe since, in my opinion, it entrenched a long-held pathologization of fans as psychologically abnormal from the rest of society. This casting of the emotional-filled and tasteless fan disproportionately describes fandoms wherein the majority demographic are adolescent women, like boy band fandoms (Coleman and Lyons, 2023); in this framing, the “fangirl” is stereotyped as having generic taste, stuck in a paradigm of youth (Bucy, 2025) that monolithically mitigates any other component of the fandom that could challenge the stereotype of naivety like fanboys who add a perceived gendered power to the fandom (Scott, 2019)—or “grown ups,” adults who have disposable income and participate in fandoms to build community, perhaps out of nostalgia or as a continuation of fan practice into adulthood (Driessen, 2019). As an acafan and a woman, I refused to buy into this pathologization and gendered framing of the naïve and tasteless during my research…

That was, until a large plastic handheld globe smacked the back of my head, not once, not twice, but thrice while at the WeBridge Music Festival. Fans hooted and cheered around me for the rotating schedule of K-Pop idols that took turns performing, obviously excited and unbridled by the sheer numbers of people that were permitted to congregate in one place, without the imposition of other Covid-19 protocols. Light sticks from various groups lit up the audience, several bouts of confetti fell from the sky, and beams of stage lights crisscrossed the stadium. But the energy ramped up, ten-fold, when a particular boy group took to the stage. ENHYPEN, a

7-member group assembled from the competition show *I-Land*[8], debuted on 30 November 2020; audience participants from around the world were invited to vote on members they wished to see in the final line up of the band (BeLift Lab, 2026)—fans already felt a sense of ownership of this group, given their productive participation in dictating how the member line up was formed. Each week, fans or experts (or a combination thereof) voted trainees off, until a final number of trainees were left to form the group, ENHYPEN. Given the show's airing during 2020, when various parts of the world were still going in and out of pandemic lockdowns, where leaving the home was not possible, the show and ENHYPEN captured the attention of a captive audience. Streaming on several online platforms with replays available via over-the-top streaming services Rakuten Viki, the television source material was readily available to a beholden audience. The final line-up of members represented a diverse-for-K-Pop group with members of Korean diasporic origin from the United States and Australia making the final cut as well as an international member from Japan. Other international contestants that did not make the final line up included trainees from Vietnam and Taiwan, and other diasporic trainees from the US and Australia as well.

Considered a junior group to superstars BTS, the group is managed by subsidiary label Belift Labs under HYBE Entertainment. ENHYPEN quickly gained attention after the show's release, amassing a large, dedicated fandom with the agency appointed fandom name of ENGENE. That fandom, with all of its enthusiasm and number, showed up to WeBridge Music Festival in droves. As the group moved through their set, all sinuous dance moves, lip licking, and winking, the audience's screams hit a decibel that I had never experienced before at a K-Pop

[8] *I-Land* was a collaborative television program produced by HYBE, CJ ENM, and Belift Labs that aired on Korean television network MNET. It was broadcasted every Friday from 26 June 2020 for twelve episodes. 23 contestants began on the show, and fans could vote from anywhere in the world ((ENHYPEN Wiki, no date).

concert… and by that point, I had been to dozens upon dozens of gigs for both field work and as a fan myself. The fans around me appeared to lose any sort of functional agency of their bodies, reminiscent to stories told of the Beatles and Elvis Presley fandoms, which is analyzed in great detail by Mark Duffett as an affective show of participation in fandoms that have often been monolithically mis-categorized and pathologized as lower brow forms of entertainment (2020). Before Duffett, researchers Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs (1992) set the stage for such analysis, contending that the supposed mass hysteria of Beatlemania is not evidence of female irrationality but rather an expression of collective feminine energy and display of resistance against societal expectations of a chaste young woman. Rather the screaming enthusiasm of Beatles fans was a paradigm shifting moment wherein young women could publicly express wants and desires, thus laying a sense of autonomy to their own beings and bodies. Even though I appreciated and understood Duffett's work to re-characterize and reclaim screaming and squeeing, including de-gendering and de-aging the act, and Ehrenreich, et al.'s argument that these acts can be interpreted as those of reclamation and resistance, the swells of noise I observed during ENHYPEN's performance erased any scholarly intervention in my mind. It eventually culminated in torrents of happy tears from the fans, and torrents of injured tears from me…I had, after all survived assaults to my head several times. In my quite literally bruised state, I lamented that perhaps, for all the good Duffett and predecessor academia was trying to do in dispelling the myth and pathology of the fan girl to the world, perhaps we were all wrong. Perhaps there was truth in the pathologization, and I was part of a fool's circus trying to disprove that in some way. This largely female audience seemed to lose all ability to function when ENHYPEN was performing, and while most of the audience was juvenile and thus could fall into the parameter of Ehrenreich et al.'s analysis, the unfettered expression of desire and

sexuality from older women yearning for members of the group who had not yet come of age felt all too feral. Thus, I could not help but wonder whether international K-Pop fans were grossly playing into the stereotype that such pathologization paints.

However, lessons on reflection and reflexion slowly re-entered my brain after the stars had cleared post-concert. Perhaps this was not just a matter of fans behaving badly, but another illustration of a fan permutation from domestic fan behaviors to ones that fit within the vernacular of glocalized, Anglophone fannish practice. Duffett's analysis of the screaming fan, thus, was not an inaccurate assessment of my experience at the ENHYPEN performance, but rather is the baseline for Anglophone fan behavior and participation at concerts such as WeBridge. The Anglophone habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) of the screaming fan at concerts overtook that of the established practice of concert-going as cemented by domestic Korean groups, largely in part, I argue to the absence of Korean bodies to observe during government public safety mandates during the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022. Without Korean fans in international and/or Anglophone spaces to "teach" international fans of proper fan-going rituals and protocols, the predominant reperformance of fandom was and is executed within the paradigms of Anglophone fan participation and cultural superstructures from Anglophone lived, everdayness in doing fandom – screaming of which is a hallmark. Previous to the pandemic, when K-Pop artists could readily tour internationally or perform with large audiences in domestic markets of which were filmed and reproduced online, these spaces – both physical and virtual – served as a version of a bazaar of sorts, where transcultural encounters could take place, and where and practices could be mimicked, reproduced, and then reperformed in other subcultural fan spaces.

Martin Beattie (2008) describes the bazaar as a historic example of a transcultural space that facilitated exchange; a place of cultural sentience, growing propriospects, and globalizations. Discussing the hybridity of colonial and post-colonial marketplaces, Beattie suggests that both the local and the transnational are entangled together to reproduce new forms of cultural ideas. This builds on anthropologist Clifford Geertz's (1963) ideas of the bazaar as a symbolic space of social nexus where rituals rule cross-cultural encounters. Concerts, fan engagements, pop-up shops, and even archival footage of groups all were the bazaars of which cultural exchange could occur, but with newer groups debuting before these ritualized encounters of fandom bodies assembling (and being memorialized on camera for the archive) could occur, a vacuum of understanding arose. Covid-19 effectively halted this process of exchange and stopped concerts, festivals, and other fan-attended events from serving as that urban microcosm. In such a vacuum of information and subcultural expectations, *I-Land* and ENHYPEN became a viral sensation, giving rise to a feral fandom within the Anglophone K-Pop community. Laila Abu-Er Rub (2019) describes the bazaar as a historic example of a transcultural space that facilitated exchange; a place of cultural sentience, growing propriospects, and globalizations. His concept of urban microcosms articulates the process of cultural exchange as facilitated through these meeting points, of which then was carried and disseminated further afield.

Scholars have employed the concept of "feral fandom" and its corresponding frameworks in multiple contexts, with Matt Hills' (2016) analysis serving as one of the most prominent and widely recognized characterizations in the literature. Hills defines the term, as derived from internet jargon, to refer to young media fandoms, like that of *Twilight*, as fans who bypass the normal fan community gatekeeping parameters as set by expert fans. Thus, feral fandoms do not know how to act or understand the "rules or boundaries of behavior and taste" (2016: 123) in a

given fandom space or community. Hills understands this characterization as problematically named, and yet it encompasses groups of people who enters fandoms in more egalitarian ways – something that is becoming increasingly common given the accessibility of the internet (Jin, 2016; Jin and Kwak, 2018). While Hills explains that feral fandom is a derogatory term within the jargon of the internet to pathologize new fandoms with largely juvenile audiences, at its core, without the veil of pathologization, feral fandom simply defines a fan who finds their way into the subcultural community without a formal introduction of a gatekeeper or without an "education" into the insights of the community. For my purposes, I refer to feral fans in this stripped down way, referring to Anglophone fans that found themselves deep within the community of K-Pop fandom, but without engaging in the same sort of mimicry or education that other fans may have received via in-person concert going or, at the very least, watching archival imagery and footage of fan behavior in prescribed spaces. While there is evidence that feral fans did perform outside the parameters of Korean domestic "appropriateness" and did not adhere to fandom hierarchies of understanding (Stewart, 2023), feral fans, in the absence of bodies during the Covid-19 pandemic either in person or filmed for dissemination or consumption, affected how Anglophone participants were introduced into fan spaces when they eventually did open up for corporeal attendance. In essence, there was no bazaar for them to take any sort of transcultural lesson away. And rather than cast the feral fandom as something altogether incorrect in the act of doing fandom, this translation of fan behavior and misunderstanding of ritual, dictated new glocal ways in which Anglophone fans performed the role of the fan. How bodies – or the paucity of such – affect fan subcultural habitus and Anglophone reperformance is prevalent in how fans utilize their own bodies, translated from on screen interactions to off screen manifestations.

During a pre-show engagement at the WeBridge Music Festival, I had the chance to interact with ENGENES during a meet and greet with the group wherein fans gathered in a more informal space to listen to a hosted question-and-answer forum with the group. Several fans I causally spoke to mentioned that ENHYPEN and *I-Land* were their first forays into K-Pop as a dedicated fan – only having heard BTS and BLACKPINK on television or radio in passing – illustrating that their engagement in fan practice as outlined by the parent culture of Korean domestic fandoms was quite low. Unfortunately, none of these encounters translated to one-on-one interviews no matter my efforts at recruitment for a deeper discussion, however, in our brief interactions, it was evident that ENHYPEN was either their one and only group of affinity or these fans were just beginning to understand the larger music scene that is K-Pop. Their introduction to *I-Land* appeared to be kismet: a random video popping up on their social media algorithm or a friend of a friend who may have an interest in K-Pop. They dove in headfirst, in said vacuum, without other fandoms or without previous knowledge into the habitus of K-Pop fans. These ENGENES did, however, bring their Anglophone propriospects and habitus with them to the K-Pop space resulting in a feralness that is quite outside the previously established habitus of K-Pop fandom.

This is not to say that earlier fandoms were totally fluent in Korean domestic fandom habitus when entering into the world of K-Pop either. For example, while early Anglophone fandoms of BTS did not quite know how to incorporate the light stick in their physical expressions of fandom from 2017 to 2018 (of which I observed during predoctoral concerts I attended as a fan), with more opportunities for in-person fan gatherings, the Anglophone fandom slowly transformed the glocal fandom practice to better match the physical expression of Korean fandoms as the years went on. By December 2020, at the Permission to Dance Tour concerts –

one of which I attended in Los Angeles as a field work site – light sticks were uniformly waved in a more choregraphed dance. This was more like what I had observed at concerts in Seoul, South Korea and in video clips in other parts of Asia. Fan chants were also deployed during this concert, a practice I have observed slowly becoming obsolete in Anglophone spaces, particularly with groups that debuted during or after the pandemic, like ENHYPEN. [9]

Hallyu researcher Courtney McClaren (2020) writing with Dal Young Jin, describes how participants in her study first entered into the K-Pop fandom community and subculture prior to the pandemic; they described it as a guided experience facilitated and fostered by those who had more fluency than them in fandom spaces and behaviors. Predominantly, these exchanges were facilitated online, via social media, which served as a bazaar for information. For this, her subjects expressed gratitude to their fannish mentors, believing that had been "raised right" in the fandoms, understanding how to behave, express happiness, and discontent all within the subcultural parameters of domestic Korean fandoms, or at the very least, close mimicries of what those domestic fandoms were doing. Many of these practices are borne out of Korean cultural traditions rooted in Confucian collectivism and Buddhist ideals of community, translatable practices that resonate within the societal habitus of other East Asian audiences as well. In my own research, interviewee Victoria, herself a half-Japanese fan who lived for a period of time in Japan, commented that there is a stark difference between Japanese fans – whom she referred to as very similar to Koreans in behavior and culture – and "western" fans she has engaged with in the UK. Victoria noted a respect for other fans and idols is paramount with fans in East Asia,

[9] Fan chants (ttechang in Korean) describes the practice of chanting during sanctioned moments of a song during a performance in order to display support for a certain K-Pop group performing (Kim, 2017; Takayanagi, 2021). These chants are crafted and disseminated by agencies to the fandoms, and the fandoms then learn and teach them to other fans. This practice is common at concerts and performances in East Asia but is dwindling in practice in concerts in North America (as observed during participant observation and noted in survey data) and Europe/the United Kingdom (as outlined by interviewees).

while in western fandoms fetishization of their idolness as well as general Koreaboo behaviors, were hallmarks. Victoria explains:

> "What I see in Japanese fans is that… there's really respectful fans that…I feel like a lot of idols have, like, expressed how they're so shocked about how respect[ful] their fans are, like they follow the rules... Japanese fans are more of… how do you say like… calm in the sense of like that Japan and Korea are not that [different]. Like, Japan and Korea… it's not like Japanese people can be too much of, what you say Koreaboo. So I don't know if that's too much, but I just noticing a lot of like Western fans. I don't know British specifically, we're just Western, that Koreaboo kind of thing happens…like 'I only want Asian guys or those kind of things.'"

While concerts-as-a-bazaar do not mitigate the fetishization that Victoria highlighted, these viable venues of cultural exchange did facilitate the "respect" protocols and behaviors that are an early part of an Anglophone fan's education into the subculture. But as more fans joined these online spaces without the facilitation of domestic fans or transcultural fans that were indeed "raised right," nor could these new fans observe at concerts how Korean bodies operated in the fandom, their feralness became a glocal reperformance of fandom behavior. As transfused into the fandom practice from Anglophone understandings of accepted fannish behavior, it has steadily become the habitus where rituals born from Korean tradition, as were previously mimicked by observing Korean fan bodies, disappeared. As I observed during my participant observation, concert-goers will rarely hear fan chants at concerts for groups that debuted post

Covid-19, nor is there a real understanding of light stick choreography (the material implications of which will be discussed in the next chapter). Thus, this feralness is now a glocal habitus of many Anglophone fandom realities.

Fans who have ostensibly been "raised right" in McClaren and Jin's (2020) sense, with embodied practices in fan spaces or exposed to the latest footage that illustrated fan's bodily behavior, can often be at odds with these "newbie" fans, who without any sort of coaching, participate in ways that would be frowned upon in the Korean domestic context. Newbie fans, joined during Covid-19 did not have the privilege of observing and mimicking idol bodies as their introduction to K-Pop fandom, behavior, and practice; they likely learned through the streaming of concerts with no bodies present to learn from, or from watching performances where audiences were either incredibly small or non-existent. Once again, the absence of bodies on which to emulate behavior on, mixed with this intense perception of expert authority upon entering the K-Pop fan subculture, led newbie fans to create a whole new concept of acceptable fandom behavior that is particular to international, non-Korean domestic fandoms who have been "raised" within the norms of Anglophone fannish behaviors. The fandom arguably is more feral than it once was, comparatively to Korean domestic fandoms, and ultimately exhibits a major, glocalized permutation. The lack of bodies and the lack of a bazaar space where transculturation exchange could occur and be shared effectively disrupted translation and forced K-Pop fandom subculture to glocalize without the context that would help fans understand how such engagements previously worked. If bodies and bazaars were a present factor then perhaps these propriospects would not clash, as so much as slow or stop glocalizations. The nature of fandom has altogether observed shifts, both in and out of K-Pop spaces. Renee Raymond (2024) writes in their doctoral research that prior to Covid-19, face-to-face interactions created a community of

social inclusion where fans could craft identity with positive sense of self, whereas, post pandemic, fans had to become increasingly more comfortable with crafting community, meaning, and identity in virtual spaces. And while virtual spaces in lieu of physical ones — and that is the key here, in lieu of, not in addition to — did have a measure of success to keep the machine that is fandom going, in Raymond's work, fans still exhibited an affinity for face-to-face interactions in the anime fandom of which they studied. In in-person spaces, anime fans could learn from one another, particularly reading body cues in this formulation of community and identity.

The reflexive analysis of my time in the heart of a feral fandom illustrated to me that ENGENES were not necessarily the proof in the proverbial fandom pudding that fandoms composed of teenage women are particularly more childish or childishly obsessive than fandoms in rock or rap. Rather, it was evidence to how the Covid-19 pandemic, and its inability to allow for bazaar-like spaces of cultural exchange and replication of Korean bodily behavior, altered how fans learn the culture of the K-Pop fandom… or do not learn it altogether. Thus, this is not a cautionary tale of pathologization nor did it really serve to launch me into an existential crisis of study (too much); it illustrates a break in the transcultural translation between fandom to fandom that made an ENHYPEN fan's propriospect very different to that of an ARMY – BTS's fandom, as a reminder – and served to fuel a rapid glocalization of Anglophone fan performance that may not have occurred had it not been for a public health intervention that stripped the space of bodies.

Conclusion

Bodies in both idols and fans in K-Pop fandoms, domestic and international/Anglophone, provide much qualitative data to analyze how Anglophone K-Pop fans perform the role of the fan in ways that are significantly different from Korean fandoms. While one may expect that domestic fans would take issue with the introduction of non-Korean bodies in an industry largely represented by Korean ethnic players, reactions of domestic fans and ethnically Korean citizens as reflected from data I gathered via virtual ethnography and archival prospecting, did not fulfil the burden of profound offense as Young (2005, 2008) outlines in his measures of appropriation. Instead, Anglophone fans, rather, take up the mantle of protector, maintaining a racial space based on their definitions of Koreanness, and who is permitted to be an exception to that role. This policing and gatekeeping of the body is specifically an Anglophone fandom practice. I theorize that such behaviors arise out of a common, supercultural phenomenon which I have called "postcolonial guilt" to describe the shared legacy that many Anglophone cultures feel in a certain shame towards in their history of colonization; though the execution can be just as paternal and rooted in perceptions of power dynamics which in of itself buys into colonial paradigms. That is, colonizers interloping in a space, eradicating the local culture, and subjugating a power structure that made Whiteness, or Global North-ness in this case, the default superior in everything from language to practice. Therefore, in order to disallow such neocolonial practice from taking root, Anglophone fans take exception to the introduction of non-Asian and or non-Korean bodies as idols in the genre. The case studies I presented, KAACHI and EXP Edition, specifically outlined the Anglophone-fan perceived issues with white bodies, in particular, taking up space in K-Pop.

However, in their safeguarding of the genre, Anglophones have crafted a viable pathway by which, according to their expertise, allowed certain non-Asian idol bodies to exist in the

space. This includes my case studies of XG and Katseye, two groups formed within the ecosystem of K-Pop, abiding by parameters defined by fans. Whether these agencies knowingly engaged in this fan-set rubric is beside the point of this argument; rather fans identified these groups as "good" updates to the genre, thus permitting them to exist. XG and Katseye trained as Koreans do, participated in the same produced texts as idols, and crafted a sense of parasociality that fans could actively engage with. Their purposeful omission of the Korean language also distances them from the strict definitions of K-Pop that also may allow fans to accept them as a glocal product of the genre. For fans, idolness also approximate an accepted level of Koreanness that white idols in groups like KAACHI could never achieve. Whether Anglophone fans express their discontent on social media or in their non-support of the group in commercial endeavors – thus leading to a group's dissolution – Anglophone definitions of Koreanness creates a new set of fannish behavior and performance that did not exist in domestic Korean fandoms prior to K-Pop going global, first through intra-Asian brand building (S. Kim, 2017; Choi and Kim, 2014) and eventually to Anglophone fan communities.

Furthermore, bodies in K-Pop fandom play a pivotal role in the learning, or lack thereof, of the behaviors found within fandom habitus. When such learning cannot occur given the absence of bodies, new habitual forms of behavior arise, transforming the subculture into a localized form that new Anglophones understand as informed from supercultural aspects of fannish behavior. Thus, new, glocalized reperformances of fandom in Global North markets rely less on what domestic Korean fandoms have pre-established as the norm of their subculture and more adapt from Global North fannish behaviors, such as screaming out of enthusiasm and community. Despite the object of affinity or affection/media text deriving from Korea, with its own meanings for fans of that country, without observable bodies to provide a platform for

mimicry and learning, Anglophone fans produced and performed a feral response that is now more familiar in the vernacular of K-Pop fandom habitus. These glocalized hallmarks of Anglophone fandom performance of policing, while simultaneously creating a lawlessness to fandom practice that Korean domestic fans and even fans fluent from prior to the pandemic either do not recognize and even condemn, illustrate just how bodies in spaces give way for discussions on appropriation, adaptation, and globalization. And as will be addressed in the following chapter, their own performances of Koreanness through dress and bodily adornment skirt a line of appropriation and globalization.

CHAPTER FOUR – New Jeans: Membership Signals and Reperformance of the Korean Body Through Dress and Bodily Adornment

"Look, it's a new me

Switched it up, who's this?...

New hair, new tee

***NewJeans, do you see?"* – NewJeans, 2023**

When girl group NewJeans debuted in 2022 under the agency ADOR (a sub-label of HYBE),[10] they took the K-Pop world by storm with their ever-so-popular, girl-next-door concept, yet characteristically cutesy musical sounds. In their eponymous song "NewJeans," released in 2023, the group highlights their versatile concept shifts, moving towards the hip, feminine, yet more adult concepts of their later music, while also speaking to a larger re-launch of how women are treated in K-Pop. In fact, the group would be mired in industry drama and controversy not too long after "NewJeans" (the song) released, related to the mistreatment of their female producer and director at the hands of parent label HYBE. In the song, the group calls attention to their newness, to their re-imagined aesthetic, placing an importance on how their clothing and styling signaled a certain shift in their own rhetoric as a group. This is not unlike K-Pop fans adorning themselves to perform the role of the fan; how one dresses their bodies signals a larger

[10] HYBE is the rebranded conglomerate agency founded by Big Hit (agency to BTS). Several subsidiary labels exist under the HYBE Brand, including New Jeans' Adore and ENHYPEN's BeLift Labs.

messaging of who they are as a fan and imbues a sense of meaning into their performance of the role.

Much like how ATEEZ's song "Crazy Form", mentioned in the previous chapter, discusses the body and what it signals to their competitors, fans, and haters in the group's discography, NewJeans frames their clothing and bodily adornment as a messenger, signaling a new era; it is an analogy that is none too far from the practice of dress and bodily adornment in K-Pop fandoms. In returning to Bourdieu's frameworks of society crafting, Bourdieu's theory of distinction (1977) expounds on dress as a mechanism by which social classes and hierarchy are communicated throughout a culture. Aesthetic choices, like clothing, communicate a level of both cultural capital and traditional capital-capital and the possession (or lack of) builds parameters of what a social class is and who belongs in what class. Through clothing and bodily adornment, among other markers like taste, a contrasting distinction between who is "in" and who is "out" is formed within communities. Sarah Thornton's (1995) theory of subcultural capital and Matt Hills's (2005) fan capital build on Bourdieu's foundational framework, discussing how fans communicate with one another to position their knowledge, belonging, and identity within a fandom culture. These distinctions are built not just into habitus as Bourdieu conceptualizes, but also into a fan habitus that crafts hierarchy, shapes relationships, and establishes a perception of expertise and power that legitimizes certain behaviors. At the same time, certain behaviors and expectations of the-body-to-signal-expertise are monitored and gatekept, at times, by fellow fans in the space, as if bodily adornment is the physical manifestation of belonging. As Michel Foucault (1977) argues, surveilling and disciplining bodies are a means by which to internalize control and regulation, even amongst themselves. In

K-Pop fan communities, norms and expectations around dress acts as a form of gatekeeping that polices bodies and appearance to the point of determining who belongs and who does not.

Bourdieu (1977, 1984) further discusses fashion and clothing's role in crafting distinction, referring to dress as a field of struggle that serves to maintain or enhance status. In my positioning of dress and bodily adornment as a communication method of identity and inclusion in a community, I refer to status here in two ways. First, status indicates a level of fluency in how K-Pop fandoms operate in fandom spaces, and second, I refer to status as a marker of understanding and a perceived expertise of Koreanness. Both legitimizes said status holder to gatekeep and surveil bodies akin to Foucault's concept of surveillance and discipline. As will be discussed further in this chapter, however, the two can also be conflated by Anglophone fans who believe that their fluency in K-Pop fandom spaces is a pipeline for their expertise in Korean culture. In other words, if you're a K-Pop super fan, you are an expert on Korea, as exhibited and communicated through how you dress. In summary, the use of dress or expressing distinction through dress is not common in domestic Korean fandoms. Instead, this practice seems to be a distinct aspect of Anglophone K-Pop fandoms, reflecting how global and local influences combine. This suggests that Anglophone fans have developed their own subculture, demonstrating different ways of embodying the role of a K-Pop fan.

In discussions about what makes K-Pop fandom recognizably different among other fandoms in the Anglophone context that engage with a shared object or text of affection, interview respondents expressed quite similar views to one another on "dressing" as a K-Pop fan. At concerts and music festivals, in particular, fans gather and signal through dress and material culture particular fandoms within the K-Pop genre. Whether fans choose to mimic certain music video costumes or try to embody an aesthetic associated with a series of idol comebacks, there is

a certain expectation that attending a K-Pop event is more than, what my interviewee Trinity calls, “a T-shirt and trouser” event. Though Anglophone fans have assigned a particular value and importance to bodily adornment in K-Pop spaces, and it is perceived as a regular practice in K-Pop fandom culture as much as assigning oneself a bias or purchasing a totemistic light stick, my research illustrates a departure from this Anglophone-fan created assumption in the “parent” culture, or the Korean domestic fandom. The practice of bodily adornment—referring to the ritual of clothing and decoration as communicative symbols that structure identity (Victor, 1967 and 1969; Eicher, 2010)—within K-Pop fan behavior, as observed during fieldwork and interviews with Anglophone fans, represents a glocalized phenomenon within Anglophone contexts. This tendency appears not to originate directly from Korean domestic fan culture, but rather may be influenced by subcultural identity practices found in other Anglophone and non-Korean environments, such as the foundations of costume play (Rahman, et al, 2012), counter culture music movements (Hebdige, 1979; Bennett, 2005), and Disney fandoms (Williams, 2017; Brock, 2017). This chapter will argue that dress in Anglophone fandoms is a performance tool more specific to non-Korean audiences and yet plays a significant role in crafting fandom identity and community as both a marker of simply identifying as a fan as well as communicating facets of a fan’s particular fandom identity.

In order to place these arguments within the wider K-Pop scene in this chapter, first I will discuss the Anglophone fan’s relationship with dress and bodily adornment as seen as a ritualized form of community crafting and identity building, then I will explore Koreanness in multiple contexts – Anglophone perception of Koreanness, exported ideas of Koreannes, and traditional cultural components of Koreanness. In discussing the remixing and glocalization of the idea of Koreanness as well as bodily reperformance of K-Pop fan behavior, this chapter

engages with transmission and cultural flow theories, interrogating the question of cultural appropriation on the part of the Anglophone fan as juxtaposed to Korean domestic reaction, as well as my own engagement as a Korean-American K-Pop fan. Utilizing data collected from virtual ethnography, interview, survey, and participant observation, I ultimately contend in this chapter that this particular attention to body presentation is less a hallmark of K-Pop fandom, but in fact a glocalized practice built on an assumption of Korean behavior and interpretation of Koreanness and identity as reperformed through the lens of a history of costume play, dress, and bodily adornment. A clash – or remixing—of propriospects create a glocalized ritual.

Fans (Ad)Dressing : Visual Markers of Community Through Dress and the Anglophone Fandom Practice Of "K-Pop Bounding"

Dress and bodily adornment is a major factor in how/who/where Anglophone fans place the "K" in K-Pop; however, the importance placed on dress appears to be a permutation away from the parent, Korean domestic fandom culture, though assumed as a part of it. Further, how Anglophone fans, then, utilize dress as both a communicative tool to signal membership in community, as well as signal a fluency in the definition of Koreanness or Korean culture, vastly contrasts with Korean domestic fans. Dress as a semiotic cue of representation and inclusion in community is a phenomenon that is not unique to any geographic region, religion, ethnicity, or nationality. However, in this particular research, dress has the potential to provide incredible context for a particular moment in time, in a particular culture that helps "decode" the habitus of a society and relay information on the perceptions and intentions of the players in it (Affuso & Scott 2023). Habitus, here, once again refers to Pierre Bourdieu's (1979 [1984]) seminal

sociologic paradigm, interpreted through the lens of community wherein the observed, ritualized cultural practice of a group of peoples – the "everyday-ness" of Anglophone K-Pop fandom specifically in this context – are unpicked to decode community hierarchy, power, and relationships. Dress and bodily adornment is a regular, accepted, and normalized ritual of K-Pop fandom's "everyday-ness," and when confronting those practices, it reveals a bevy of insight into how Anglophone fans treat others/finding community with one another, where they believe power and expertise lie, and what they believe their prescribed "role" is in the community. And while, yes, dress is not a unique cultural superstructure to Anglophone societies, I argue that a history of costumed play as an expression of fandom and fandom community contributes to this particular practice of Anglophone K-Pop fan reperformance.

When asked to define said "K" in the genre, a particularly similar answer among survey respondents detailed the "fan culture" and "fan community" as something unusually, yet delightfully, specific to the K-Pop genre. As one fan shared in the survey's free-writing space:

"The fan culture is something completely different to any other type of music I've listened to and [definitely] differentiates kpop [sic] from other forms of music."

A quarter of survey respondents named "fan culture" and "fan community" specifically as something that defines K-Pop and differentiates it from other fandoms of which they are a part, and as I will explore further in this chapter, dress and bodily adornment is a major benchmark by which Anglophone fans negotiate that culture and community. The fan culture of ritual and behavior, as is discussed in the previous chapter entitled engages with readapted

fannish behaviors in Anglophone fan spaces, but in so much as it pertains to the body and to community, Anglophone K-Pop fans identify dress as a major component of navigating community and specify it as a practice apart from other music genre fandoms. Interviewee Trinity, observes that at varying artist gigs/concerts, fans in the British context dress to match, in Trinity's words, "the music aesthetic:" Fans of girl group TWICE, for instance, who are known for their normally girl-pop, bright and bubbly anthems, dressed "in more pink and light colors" than fans of the boy group ATEEZ at whose concerts Trinity says "everyone's dressed like vampires." Trinity further explains that at the outset, and even sometimes today while at concerts, she often feels out of place,

"because I'm like t-shirt, trousers, and everyone else is like I'm gonna wear a corset and massive skirt… it's like, 'oh, I should maybe dress nicer for these.'"

Interviewee Betty confirms Trinity's observations, further detailing dress practices in the ATEEZ fandom in the UK. She describes how it was incredibly obvious on the day of an ATEEZ concert at the O2 arena in London who was "real" Atiny and who was, perhaps more casually invested. Fans replicated outfits from music videos – Betty herself dressed like group leader Hongjoong in the "Déjà Vu" (2021) music video – and deployed certain visual elements that were characteristic of the group: "Even if they're not…in an outfit from the music video or something, you can like tell…you can tell when someone is [Atiny]." Dressing in the vague goth-angled, carnivalesque clothing characteristic of ATEEZ points to a subcultural understanding and hierarchy of placement in this fandom, just as dressing in overtly feminine, frothy costuming would signal a fluency in the TWICE fandom. Fans recognize ATEEZ's

styling as goth-coded, drawing from existing visual language of goth subcultural practice; though to be more precise, the distinction between carnivalesque goth performance and goth as lived subculture helps explain how ATEEZ's visual aesthetics operate not as authentic participation in goth culture but as theatricalized citation of its visual codes (Spracklen, 2015, 2017). But in this exaggeration lies a perceived authenticity.

Trinity and Betty's descriptions of Anglophone K-Pop fans' dress and bodily adornment aligned with my own observations at K-Pop concerts and festivals throughout the United States. While these two interviewees are based in Birmingham, UK. and travel to London for concerts, I encountered similar dress and bodily adornment practice in Los Angeles, New York City, Las Vegas (Nevada, U.S), Toronto (Ontario, Canada), and Newark (New Jersey, US). Throughout 2020-2023, during observations that took place at concerts throughout North America, I noted that fans often dressed in particular ways to signal they understood and identified with a particular idol group as well as to prove that they understood the identify of said group. For example, at BTS's "Permission to Dance" concert in Los Angeles in December 2020, ARMY wore varying shades of purple (often associated with member V's favorite color and famous catchphrase, "Borahae*,"* which is a portmanteau of saranghae or "I love you" in Korean and borasaek meaning "purple"). Other fans were adorned in varying pastel and retro outfits that reflected the current theme and aesthetic of BTS's "Permission to Dance" comeback which leaned heavily into disco-inspired iconography and costuming. Similarly, at ATEEZ concerts throughout 2021-2022 in the United States and Canada, I observed that fans dressed in dark colors with gothic themes and BDSM-adjacent adornments like collars, harnesses, and fishnets, mimicking the group's overarching "dark" concepts that incorporate goth visual cues with other pieces of "signature" clothing that are synonymous with ATEEZ's symbology such as black

fedoras, black blazers, and copious amounts of leather – again, all visual codes that align with a performed understanding of goth visual subculture as it aligns with ATEEZ's fan vernacular (see Figures 13 and 14). As observed by Betty, the ATEEZ Hongjoong cosplayer, and me, it was fairly obvious to see where fans of those respective groups drew their inspiration—the costumes and themes of the idols' performances—when executing concert-going outfits and accessories. Notably, this was regardless of gender or age, factors which I had expected to play a larger role in whether a fan dressed up. Those who did not costume themselves in either the vintage outfits of BTS's fandom or the black gothic fedoras of the ATEEZ fandom, did wear explicit fandom merchandise whether it be official "merch" released by the studio or concert production company or unofficial products that were DIY or purchased from fan-producers on Etsy and Amazon. It was not uncommon to see group member names emblazoned on a sweatshirt or screen-printed portraits of members on a t-shirt.

Figure 13. Screengrab of user Crystal Rivera's Pinterest post for ATEEZ concert outfit inspiration. This aesthetic is from the group's "Deja Vu" comeback in 2021 (July, 2025).

Figure 14. Screengrab of user Jeslyn Asante13's Pinterest post for ATEEZ concert outfit inspiration, following the group's "goth pirate" concept (July, 2025)

In writing on material culture in cultural studies, John Storey (2021) asserts that the "stuff" of culture helps place people *within* culture and community in a network of meaning; materials give meaning and significance about how one, or it, may perform in the network (234). Material objects can give meaning either as a mediator or intermediary, as originally coined by Bruno Latour (2005)—the former conveys meaning without change from network to network while mediators "transform, translate, distort, or modify meaning" from network to network (Storey, 2021: 235). Storey further leverages Latour's work and explains that while material objects may

hold a significance or particular meaning in the network of one culture or community, it likely is "inconceivable" to someone or something outside of that network; ignoring materiality both prohibits a way in which to study these networks but also ignores how one can articulate those *outside* of the network as well (242). In these discussions, Storey also specifies that dress in particular, is rife with meaning, but when its materiality is relegated to the mere act of adornment and not what that adornment signals to certain networks—"locating materiality in a particular realized regime of significance" as Storey describes—it ignores another important articulation of analysis to explain why things are the way they are, or to explain how people, products, and bodies are perceived in the way that it is. In the broadest sense, dress and bodily adornment, as an element of materiality, is a pathway by which one can navigate networks of meaning and social practice, and most significantly, signify inclusion in that network of meaning. Dress, in this context, is a habitus decoder, and most profoundly provides insight into community.

As Damian Chaney and Christina Goulding (2015) describe in their exploration of consumer behavior as it relates to heavy rock subculture and the role of "dress," I refer to the term "dress" to mean the entire assemblage of a community members/fan's clothing, accessories, styling, bodily ornamentation, costuming, and merchandise worn in and out of fan spaces. I also want to further specify that other bodily adornment, such as makeup, hair style (including color), tattoos, and piercings can be classified as body modification is therefore an extension of dress as outlined by Reddy-Best (2020). As Elizabeth Affuso and Suzanne Scott (2023) write on fandom and fashion, beauty products and styling of the body are ways in which a person can mold one's personal identity, particularly in fandoms, and the identity in question here is that of the Anglophone K-Pop fan's community level of expertness and "role" to be played. When

particular attention needs to be drawn to specific characteristics of dress or body modifications, I will specify in my language to which particular practice I am referring.

While dress is identified by Anglophone K-Pop fans as both a routine ritual of concert-going or occupying fan spaces, how one executes said ritual of bodily adornment provides key interpretations of who the Anglophone identifies themselves as. Are you a true stan? Then of course you will wear the fedora for ATEEZ. Just a casual fan? Then perhaps dressing in dark colors is more appropriate to signify your level of involvement and investment in the fandom. Understanding how to place other fans in the K-Pop world around them is a major function of dress as a communicative mode of community membership; existing in the same breath of Storey's analysis of materiality and dress in negotiation of network, community, and identity, Anglophone fans can discern the meaning and membership of other fans which serves as a pathway by which other fans can cross the threshold from a community bound by visual cues to forge a community based on relationship and interaction. Interviewee Victoria explains that once she understands who another fan's favorite group or bias is, then she knows how she can and should interact with them; if they are similar to her own fandom communities, she feels much more comfortable to act accordingly. Dress is an accepted ritual and tool of communication that signals membership in K-Pop fandom in Anglophone fan spaces. Anglophone fans understand these body-related rituals as normalized behavior in K-Pop fandom, citing it as what sets it apart from other "western" fandoms of which they are a part. However, as I will further explore in this chapter, though this ritual is, to an Anglophone fan authentically and specifically K-Pop, it is not so in reality. What is distinctively K-Pop and what is authentically and dinstictively Korean, however, are conflated together in dress and bodily adornment, and this none more obvious than

as exhibited by another dressing practice common in Anglophone K-Pop fan cultures – one I am dubbing: "K-Pop Bounding," recalling previous work on Disney Bounding (Williams, 2017).

I observed that, in absence of clear costuming or messaging from idol group comebacks, or at music conventions or festivals where multiple groups were performing – such as KCON 2019 in New York or the WeBridge Music Festival in Las Vegas, Nevada in 2023 – a concentration of Anglophone fan fashion fell into a second group of dress and bodily adornment outside of straight replication of a particular group's thematic aesthetic. This category emulated a sort of generalized K-Pop fan outfitting that did not seem to explicitly match any one given group, but instead exaggeratedly mimicked fashions that idols wore during appearances and interviews, in music videos, and on stage. This genre of dress was not necessarily reflective of the fashion I had seen on the streets of everyday Seoul or Daegu but instead was an amplified hyper-fashion style that incorporated elements very similar to ATEEZ fandoms—BDSM accessories and vaguely goth themes—but without the particular hallmarks named above that made it specifically ATEEZ. There were exaggerated, aggrandized interpretations of streetwear that I had only observed in dance rehearsal videos of idols and choreographers or seen in "idol-off-duty" videos/vlogs.

Fashion and clothing were not the only means by which Anglophone and international fans adapted idol fashion either. Visual styling elements—the "bodily adornment," of which I have identified as a subset of dress—like brightly dyed, unusually colored hair synonymous with idol styling, was also a common component of this second group of fandom dress. Particularly female or female-presenting fans adorned their faces with K-Beauty-inspired looks, emulating the same sorts of visages famous on TikTok or Instagram that could be categorized as Korean

adjacent Douyin, Ulzzang, and Lolita[11]-inspired make up. Male-presenting fans in this second group of dress donned asymmetrical earrings and the skinniest of black jeans. It was not uncommon to see a bright shock of unnaturally colored dyed hair paired with a single spiked earring to float and bob among the crowd. This was all done in the style of extra-ordinary Korean fashion, or idol fashion. In my observation, idol fashion is not necessarily representative of Seoul street fashion as seen "in real life" and instead fulfills a performance of mediatized curation of Korean fashion or a mediated performance of a perceived persona (Sihombing, 2025). It was unclear if they realized it was, indeed, mediated and mediatized costumes they were mimicking and not necessarily K-Fashion as it would be regularly adorned on Korean bodies in Korea.

While this second group of dressed fans I observed did not explicitly tie to a particular band or appear to be inspired by any particular idol group, there was still a purpose to their dress. In most observations, this group emerged during multi-artist festivals or Korean cultural conventions, and these Anglophone fans appeared to represent a larger swath of idol groups. This is different than the aforementioned "T-shirt and trousers" observation from Trinity, where a more "casual fan" would dress in accordance with the fandom and group's aesthetics but did not necessarily declare membership in fandom; rather this version of fan dressing is the opposite. It is a communicative reading that perhaps signals a "multi-fan," a sort of super fan of the genre that is inspired by many or all idols. It may also signal a fan who is associated with a group that has a less distinctive aesthetic, but who still wants to identify as K-Pop literate. As such, this particular second group practice points to the significance of dress as a marker of community,

[11] Douyin refers to makeup stylings made famous on the Chinese Douyin social media platform, characterized by dramatic, doll-like appearance with clear contours. Ulzzang is a Korean makeup term that emphasizes a soft, feminine beauty (Jenson, n.d.). Lolita makeup is a Japanese style that also places importance on doll-like imagery, emphasizing large, sparkling eyes and overexaggerated lashes (Wong, 2014).

even if a particular community-within-the-community is not specified. Rather than being mistaken as a newbie in the space, Anglophone fans feel compelled to engage in dress and bodily adornment as K-Pop fan practice to communicate fluency in community and culture. This is how idols dress, therefore, I am understood as being a fan of idols. It is in this group of fan dress and bodily adornment that is distinct from the original text (or tome, if you will). It is a compelling transcultural reperformance of K-Pop fandom behavior that aligns with other well-discussed and researched Anglophone fandom practices: K-Pop Bounding.

K-Pop Bounding is a term I have crafted to describe the certain ways in which fans dress for and adorn/modify their bodies and faces to represent a generalized, yet still expert fan in spaces to address the two situations as noted above (multi-artist events and to identify with groups with more generalized aesthetics). But I also further deploy K-Pop Bounding to describe the Anglophone fan's perceived expert knowledge of bodily Koreanness itself as expressed in a replication of idol aesthetics. It is simultaneously a glocal product of Anglophone reperformance of K-Pop fan behavior (as is the mimicry of specific group aesthetics and themes as described by my interview respondents), *and* a contribution to the propriospects of Anglophone fans in determining what is "Korean." Similar to Gertrude Lehnert's (2013: 66) discussion of "oriental" fashion materiality in 18th-19th French and German fashion magazines, in which "the Other" is a repository of "visual forms" with "vague connotations and fantasies of sensuous appeals," K-Pop Bounding is engaged in an Occidental reflection of Korean bodies, beauty, and dress. Dress, here, is both signifier of community to each other for Anglophone K-Pop fans as well as international and fan intervention in the definition of what Korean beauty and body is.

The term is inspired by the concept of "Disneybounding," (Brock, 2017; Williams, 2023) a term deployed by "Disney Adults" and Disney researchers to describe the practice of dressing

like, but not explicitly as, characters in Disney movies, television, and shorts using everyday clothing rather than a traditional costume used in conventional forms of costume play ("cosplay"). This practice originated as a way to work around the Walt Disney Company's all-out ban of adults (over the age of 14 years of age) dressing in costume at any of the Disney theme parks (Williams 2023). Originally, committed fans started this as a form of resistance by deliberately breaking Disney's protocols to show their dedication. Now, it has become a routine among adult Disney fans, reflecting their community's connection to power, their ways of subverting authority, and their shared rituals. Both Disneybounding, and Anglophone fandom K-Pop Bounding, I argue, finds heritage in the history of cosplay, a fandom practice which bears striking transcultural resemblance to the remixing and performance of K-Pop fan practice.

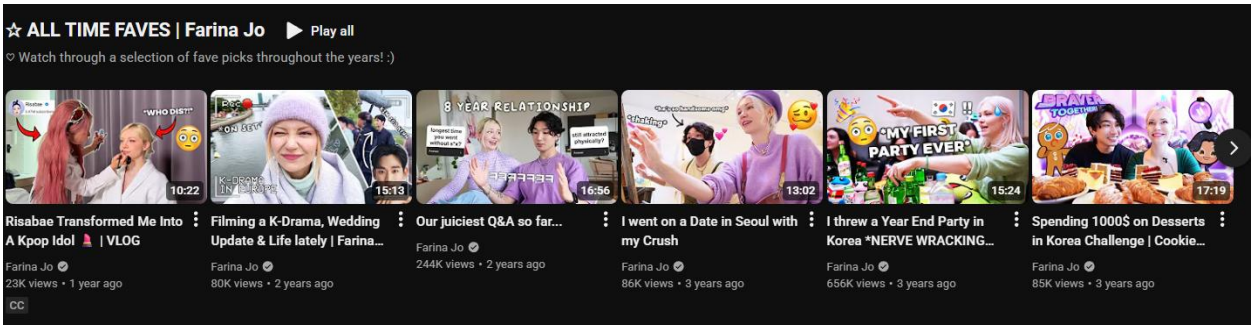
Cosplay is, ultimately, the Anglophone superstructure I argue is remixed and reperformed in K-Pop Bounding and in Anglophone K-Pop fan dress and bodily adornment but incorrectly understood as something that came out of the parent culture of Korean domestic fandoms. Incidentally, the origins of cosplay and its current affiliation with the anime and manga worlds are not unlike how dress, bodily adornment, and K-Pop Bounding is perceived as a Korean import, even though the practice was derived from Anglophone audiences. The origins of the practice cosplay itself is debated among researchers, with conflicting theories as to whether cosplay was a North American invention or a Japanese one (Winge 2006 and Kellem 2022); however, Manga researcher Theresa Winge details the likely "hybrid" theory that cosplay, as a term and as *globalized* practice, was the brainchild of Takahashi Nobuyaki who, in 1984, encountered costumed science fiction and fantasy fans at World-Con in Los Angeles (2006). With more specific origins in the Star Trek fandom (Kellem 2022), cosplay was incorporated into Japanese anime and manga fandoms in Japan at Nobuyaki's introduction, and a new glocal

brand of cosplay emerged. In the decades thereafter, as anime and manga were integrated into science fiction and fantasy conventions in North America, the prevalence of Japanese-glocalized cosplay (a manga-reperformance of sci-fi/fantasy practice) became more and more synonymous with Japanese bodies then with North American sci-fi and fantasy cosplayers. With its importation into Japan via these sci-fi and fantasy fandoms and its re-exportation in and out of Japan as a ritual of manga fandom, the idea of who "owned" cosplay became mirky. Glocal Japanese manga/anime cosplay lost the said glocal prefix when introduced as a Japanese product to North America. While teasing out more specific and nuanced arguments of where/why cosplay originated is outside the scope of this research, the fact that this debate even exists within conversations of fannish practice and behavior transmitting transculturally illustrates how Anglophone K-Pop fandom could realistically assume that K-Pop Bounding were rituals were practiced by all K-Pop fandoms globally and believe that these styles represent Korea and Koreanness authentically. While, potentially, influenced by cosplay as a norm of fannish behavior, Anglophone fans took from idol fashion aesthetics, plugged and played dress as bodily ritual, and now use that glocal perspective to claim expertise in Koreanness.

This exaggerated, almost hyperbolic rendition of Korean fashion and make up styles, as done on idol bodies, is not understood in Anglophone fan spaces in North America as anything akin to cosplay or performance but rather assumed and understood as a fluency of K-Pop fan cultures and Korean culture in general. However, beyond leveraging dress and bodily adornment as a signal of community membership, this practice is equated to the understanding of Koreanness, itself. K-Pop Bounding, particularly, transcends the lines of K-Pop fandom community and contributes to an Anglophone fan's propriospect of what being Korean may mean, something then which is reperformed in fan spaces and "Korean spaces." Dressing like an

idol and styling oneself like an idol is to dress to the standards of Korean fashion and beauty, though these persona performances greatly exaggerate said standards. This also is in part fueled by Anglophone and international K-Pop influencers, content creators, and creator-fan celebrities like German YouTuber Farina Behm or Asian-American YouTuber Fei Yang, who emulate the content that idols make as well mimic the performance of idol persona via dress and beauty, and post content about how, you too, can dress the idol part. Here, "idolness" is actually equated to crafting an identity around "Koreanness," and serves as both substitute and source material for bodily adornment. These niche industry creators (Moore, 2022) are not subjected to the same policing scrutiny as discussed in the previous chapter from fans as they are not idols themselves. There is no expectation, therefore, of their participation in training, living in Seoul, or language ability, rather they are seen as expert fans (not unlike how fans perceive themselves) that are permitted to engage in this exaggerated display of Korean hyper fashion and culture as their fandom expertise translates, in their perceptions, into Korean expertise too. Content creators like the German Farina Behm on YouTube and Instagram display such exaggerations, laying claim to authentic representation of Koreanness through bodily dress as legitimized through a Korean-German ex-partner (see Figure 15.)

Figure 15. A screen grab from Farina Jo's YouTube page showing videos that help construct her fan expert identity in the Hallyu space (February, 2026).



This proved in stark contrast to fan engagements I observed in Seoul, South Korea in June 2023. At the Lotte Duty Free Family Concert, a multi-artist festival held at Jamsil Olympic Stadium, there was a very clear disparity between Korean domestic fans' dress and that of the international (or visibly obvious non-Korean-ethnic) and Anglophone fans. While international fans dressed as I had seen them throughout the United States and Canada, and how my interviewees described dress practices in the United Kingdom in the ways noted above as either replicated homage or exaggerated Korean-idol style, Korean domestic fans (or those that read Korean domestic) dressed as if they would in everyday life. These were the same "pedestrian" or "civilian" innocuous outfits that the fans would have worn on the streets, in the subway, at the mall. Some younger fans were even wearing their school uniforms and did not appear bothered that they were not in any sort of K-Pop uniform instead. There was nothing that overtly signaled fandom on the Korean domestic fan's body, not even "merch" of any kind. Domestic fans did have other material markers of fandom, but not dress and bodily adornment. Material culture like light sticks, stickers, photocards, banners, and keychains replaced clothing merchandise among Korean fans. Unlike Anglophone K-Pop fan spaces, dress did not carry the same significance or ritual value for domestic fans. In a perhaps obvious inference, Korean domestic fans also did not

engage in K-Pop Bounding; dressing in the hyperbole of Korean style to express their Koreanness was not necessary, as they are already Korean. The need to "prove" Koreanness is not something that would be on the top of a Korean fan's mind when attending idol events as it is a part of their everyday reality.

K-Pop Bounding is an accepted and perceived norm of K-Pop fan culture, one which fan discussants in this study readily identified as something that is distinct about K-Pop fandom over others, but what is not entirely understood by Anglophone fans is the importance of dress and bodily adornment in their fandom is actually the product of glocal understanding and a "mis"-translation of what is a "normal" K-Pop practice from the parent culture. A history of Anglophone superstructure and history into cosplay, and subculture as community crafts a foundational understanding of fandom dress that is built on with K-Pop aesthetics. Much like cosplay's exportation to Japan, and re-importation into the US, there appears to be another dress-as-ritual component to popular music cultures on the horizon. Since the kickoff of American pop musician Taylor Swift's, "Eras" tour in 2022, Swifties—fans of the singer and songwriter—from around the world co-conspired to dress in different "eras" that matched Swift's albums as homage to the title of the tour (Frankenberg and Brooks 2023). Concurrently, Beyoncé fans, known collectively as the Beyhive, also organized to dress monochromatically in silver in the case of Beyoncé's "Virgo season" shows in late August to September 2023 (Maruf 2023). For Harry Styles fans, the fan-crafted "dress code" for his concerts in 2023 called for "all out glam," embracing rhinestones and feather boas as hallmarks of fandom community (Newman 2023). Now, even in pop music scenes, it no longer suffices to dress nicely to attend concerts and fan spaces, but instead this ritualized form of exaggerated, costumed dress, as inspired by the pop stars' own exaggerated aesthetics and bodies displays fan understanding and fluency of the pop

stars' artistry. The difference here is while this style is understood to a degree to be the performance costumes of these pop stars and not necessarily how they would dress day-to-day, K-Pop fans infer a sense of cultural competency in Korea. Ironically, what began as a perceived practice born out of Korea in K-Pop but actually an Anglophone crafted idea, ritualized dress in this sort of "Pop Bounding" is now re-exporting to transcultural fandoms of Taylor Swift in Asia as exhibited in Swift's 2024 concerts on that continent.

Dress in the form of both K-Pop Bounding and other more obvious idol group replication practices of dress and bodily adornment ultimately is hallmark of K-Pop fandom, though regularly earmarked as a key component to Anglophone K-Pop habitus. Perceived to be a fully integrated ritual and practice in the entirety of K-Pop fandom, dress, bodily adornment, K-Pop Bounding serves as a framework to articulate a glocalized understandings of: 1) domestic K-Pop fan practice and 2) what Korean aesthetics are, and what Koreanness looks like. K-Pop Bounding in particular, as an interpretation of how idols adorn themselves, is a stand-in for how Anglophone K-Pop fandoms understand and interpret Koreanness and Koreans. In doing so, Anglophone fans engage in the practice of expressing Koreanness through their own dress and the body in a form of Korean mimicry. And while, to an extent, this crafting of hyper-Koreanness through K-Pop Bounding is present, and even accepted in K-Pop fan spaces, this perceived expertise of Koreanness in body and dress is now executed on Anglophone bodies *outside* of explicit fan spaces. As I will explore in the following sections of this chapter, K-Pop Bounding that leaves the prescribed K-Pop space is where the line between appropriation and glocalized reperformance is toed.

It is a music fan, cosplaying Koreanness, while not entirely fulfilling an understanding of what true cosplay is, since it is not necessarily anchored in a character's likeness. Rather it is an

amalgamation of idolness as understood as Koreanness. Thus, as an inauthentic understanding of Koreanness, can this practice be interpreted as appropriation? Or because it is perceived to be authentic, can it be truly understood as appropriation?

Fans Performing and Appropriating Korean Bodies: A Glocal Remix of Koreanness and K-Pop Fan Culture Through Anglophone Fan Understanding of Idol And Fan Bodies

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Anglophone fan understanding of Koreanness as exemplified through the body and dress is very much an exaggerated, hyper-aesthetic that is not necessarily representative of Korean bodies in reality. Idol style and a fluency in the idol themselves serves as inspiration and legitimization for fandom perception of Koreanness. Thus far, I have alluded to fandom participation in the crafting of Koreanness on their own bodies, and while these practices involving the body are heavily policed when displayed and enacted by idols, it is not readily done when adapted by a fan body in idol spaces. K-Pop Bounding as taken outside of explicitly fan spaces and removed from the context of fandom is something I most observed in Seoul, South Korea and Daegu, South Korea. International fan willingness to declare their "expert" identity as built and validated by Anglophone K-Pop fandom and dress and then take it to the streets of Korea – in restaurants, at shopping malls, and at historic sites – illustrates that the Anglophone interpretation of Koreanness on bodies through idol aesthetics is what they believe to be a reading in the culture itself. Otherwise, if there was an understanding that this manner of dress and bodily adornment was "just a K-Pop thing" or an "idol thing," the practice would not be witnessed removed from fandom spaces and translated to spaces that represent the

everyday-ness or habitus of Korean society, writ large. Unlike punk subcultural/countercultural values of obvious visual disruption and subversion of the status quo (Hebdige 1979, Moore 2004), Anglophone fans in non-fan Korean spaces dress in such a way to suggest they are replicating and participating in the Korean status quo. However, such perceived replication is crafted out of the exportation of Korean beauty, products, and fashion and a positive or neutral Korean domestic response, which nuances this discussion from simple cut-and-paste cultural appropriation to one of idealized, yet exoticized consumption and glocal adoption and adaption. In this intersection of exoticized consumption of Korean aesthetics and perceived expertness in Koreanness, an additional layer of orientalism and exoticism arises: the privileging of Korean or Korean-appearing bodies in K-Pop spaces. Here, I analyze the Anglophone fans' adaption, understanding, and treatment of Koreanness on their own bodies as a non-Korean participant, as exemplified through observations in South Korea and North America, as well as discuss the privileging of Korean bodies in fan spaces in an autoethnographic turn in my fieldwork.

In June 2023, in the highly trafficked neighborhoods of Myeongdong and Hongdae in Seoul, it was common to see international tourists dressed as they would at a K-Pop concert back home, including with variations that incorporated more obviously BDSM pieces like leather corsets, grommeted belts and neck collars with loops for a lead as well as the brightly colored, fan-merch incorporated among BTS Army. It was as if they expected K-Pop Bounding would be the norm or status quo of Koreanness here, as if streets of Seoul would be filled with those looked like and dressed like idols would when they were meant to embody their idol personas. Perhaps the expectation was that idol fashion was to Seoul what Harajuku fashion was to the streetwear of Japan: an authentic replication of Japanese aesthetics (Wang, 2024) This particular concentration of international fans was likely due in part to BTS's 10th anniversary celebrations

that took place in Seoul in June 2023. "BTS 10th Anniversary Festa," as the activations – i.e. "pop-branded entertainment exercises" (Kohnen, 2020) – were formally titled by HYBE Entertainment, were collaborative installations with the municipal government of Seoul and the national South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Activations included: a fireworks show on the Han River, a ceremonial lighting up of heritage buildings and iconic landmarks throughout the Seoul metropolitan area in BTS's signature purple, and "history of BTS" exhibitions (Reuters, 2023; Enos, 2023). Tens of thousands of fans had chosen to visit Seoul during that time period in order to be a part of the festivities and as that was a primary reason for visitation, I do need to acknowledge that that may have skewed a) the sheer numbers of international K-Pop fans represented during my observations and b) that dressing "as fans" even when not in spaces designated for K-Pop fans perhaps was why Seoul felt like one large fan space itself. In fact, throughout Seoul during the BTS Festa period, I observed fans identifying one another from dress or other forms of materiality exclusive to K-Pop fandoms—photocards, keychains of cartoon characters associated with group members, plushies, etc.—and then would engage in fan rituals such as swapping photocards—in places where K-Pop meanings were not necessarily or exclusively, inscribed. This meant that photocard swapping bled into the streets of Seoul in ways I had not seen in my previous field work trip the year prior; such practices could take place in front of a random rice porridge restaurant in Myeongdong or at the gates of Gyungbukgung Palace rather than outside of a concert stadium or in front of a K-Pop merchandise pop-up shop or other traditional "fan spaces". Since the fan understanding appeared to be that Seoul was transformed into a land of BTS, fans K-Pop Bounding outside of explicit fan spaces may have been partially motivated by this idea that Seoul was one big, K-Pop fan city. On the other hand, I contend that viewing Seoul as a fan space parallels how Anglophone K-Pop

fans perceive K-Pop Bounding as an expert form of Koreanness. Once again, K-Pop rituals and spaces serve as a representation of and substitute for Korea, so said fan practices and exhibiting fandom is synonymous to (in the Anglophone context) exhibiting a fluency in Korea.

While I do concede acknowledgement of the potential skewing of my data from the BTS Festa taking place, the same understanding of Koreanness through bodies, dress, and bodily adornment would also regularly take place in Korean diasporic communities in Los Angeles and New York City while I was in those locations for concert or music festival field work. K-Pop Bounding here was apparent, though not as prevalent during BTS Festa in Seoul, but its presence does support my contention that Korean spaces are interpreted as K-Pop spaces and vice versa. In these spaces traditionally associated with Korea (meaning Korea itself or diasporic community spaces), Anglophone fans further adapted body-related practices to exemplify or even overstress their Koreanness or understanding of Koreanness. This was most obviously observed in spoken language and body language, as Anglophone fans, I observed, adapted and performed snippets of the Korean language and physical mannerism learned from idol behavior and bodies from mechanisms of parasocial engagement like YouTube vlogs, live streaming sessions, interviews, and game show participation. Snippets of the Korean language, such as “Oppa!,” (translation: affectionate term for older brother or significant other) “gee-ah-oh,” (translation: “cute”) and “saranghae,” (translation: “I love you”) are commonly learned and performed in Korean spaces in reference to idols or each other. Aegyo, a particular form of Korean body language which refers to a childlike cuteness, is also commonly adapted by Anglophone fans. I observed this mostly in spaces where fans took pictures of one another, whether it be a fan space or a Korean one.

Koreanness, as situated in a network of Korean products, is one of South Korea's most significant exports. Research into South Korea's soft power is profound (Prasirtsuk, 2018; Yoon, 2023) and though tangential to this research and discussed in earlier contexts, we cannot ignore South Korea's intention of cultural export in conversation of Anglophone fans' reception, re-adaption, reperformance, potential appropriation, and ultimately glocalization of the export. In terms of the body and bodily adornment, selling Korean beauty (and bodies) abroad has also been a practice that Korean industry and government have engaged in for significant periods of time and is a prominent economy in modern cross-cultural flows. Though a domestic market for centuries, in today's world, Korean beauty and the crafting of Korean beauty on both domestic and international bodies have grown tremendously. Hye Kyong Kwon (2019: 6-8) writes that K-Beauty, K-Pop, and K-Drama, in cooperation with government entities, have meticulously crafted a national brand that highlights "culturally specific content in the era of globalization" that transcends borders and temporal boundaries and is exported out to the world in a complex set of exchanges where "Western-driven homogenization" is not the arbiter of cross-cultural flows (ibid:167). The apex of beauty and style is not something that derives from the Global North but rather is dictated by K-Beauty and "K-Fashion." The objective of K-Beauty cosmetic products is to achieve a standardized ideal aesthetic beauty, and that definition of beauty is crafted by *Korean* standards of what it means to be beautiful. The poster children for this beauty, albeit dramatically overstated and oftentimes manufactured, are K-Pop idols (ibid: 151-152) who sell Korean beauty by virtue of their Koreanness, which in turn then is interpreted as *the* normalized standard of the Korean body by Anglophone fans whose only understanding of Koreanness derives from idols.

I believe the best way to articulate an Anglophone's reading of Koreanness and subsequent adaptation of it on their own bodies is in cultural theorist de Certeau's examination of the consumer and the poacher (1984). Consumption, de Certeau contends, should more accurately be described as a "secondary production" of texts and objects. As such the "consumer" is not passively nor complicitly imposed upon by the producers, but rather poach, reperform, and even craft unauthorized meaning in a reproduction of the text (1984: 174-176). De Certeau's work provides the basis by which many fandom studies frameworks, including Henry Jenkin's (1992) *Textual Poachers,* are built upon, wherein fans are active participants and producers who poach elements from media and construct it with their own subcultural meanings. In terms of secondary production, fandom researchers Matt Hills (2013b) and Suzanne Scott (2019; 2023) engage with enunciative and performative activity and productivity wherein the fan's body and presence become a tool of productive expression. Scott and Elizabeth Affuso's (2023) work on sartorial fandoms, in particular, suggests that dress and bodily adornment are not just external, aesthetic choices that are surface-level expressions of engagement, but rather they are forms of enunciative performativity that signal belonging, inclusion, and identity. Anglophone fans' reception of Koreanness in body, dress, and bodily adornment (inclusive of beauty) is not only an act of transactional consumerism, but rather an act of reproduction of acting, being, and feeling Korean. However, Anglophone fans K-Pop Bounding, adapting small samples of Korean language and body language, and secondarily producing Korean cultural exports pertaining to the body, do not identify as appropriators, rather ambassadors, and to an extent gatekeepers.

A line *can* be crossed however, though that line does appear to be a moving target depending on the fan. In forms of K-Pop Bounding by Anglophone fans, I return to interviewee

Victoria who describes that fandoms in the UK more often exemplify traits of the "Koreaboo" than fandoms she encountered while living in Japan. Victoria, a half-Japanese, half-South American university student now living in Birmingham, UK., observed that the hyper-exaggerated replication of Koreanness through dress, make-up, language and mannerism uncomfortably situated some British fans as Koreaboos. As a brief reminder, Koreaboo is a slang term in Hallyu fandoms that refers to a non-Korean person performing Korean identity problematically and inauthentically (Oh 2024). In Japan, interviewee Victoria explained, she did not witness Koreaboos, in that Japanese fans more strictly followed how Korean fan culture operated and did not engage in dress and bodily adornment in the same way British fans did. She surmised out of cultural proximity; there were no overt attempts to present Korean or to display a fluency in Koreanness because that did not determine identity as a fan.

Annie, a Black-American university student from the Eastern United States, presented a distinctive perspective on the consumption of Korean products and the material aspects of K-Pop culture. She considered neither to be essential for identifying as a K-Pop fan. Nevertheless, Annie expressed an interest in Korean traditional attire and questioned whether it was appropriate for non-Koreans to wear it. In flipping the traditional interviewer-to-interviewee script, she began asking me questions about my perceptions of appropriation. Annie first questioned if I was ethnically Korean, to which I disclosed I was, and then she expressed an interest in visiting Korea and its cultural heritage sites, where westerners commonly rent hanbok, Korean traditional dress, to take photos. Annie and I engaged in an interesting conversation of appropriation and appreciation, both being people of color in predominantly White cultures. Annie's inquiries unfolded as such:

Annie: "So is it okay for people to wear the traditional hanboks outfits and stuff?"

Sharon: “That one for me personally, is... is hard to answer because I think there is a difference between like what diaspora Koreans think like... I'm Korean-American. I was born and raised in the US… I think there's very much a difference between like people who have felt like being the... like, kind of immigrant perceived ”other” in the US or in the West and how they feel about that practice versus people in Korea… there's some people in Korea that really enjoy it because they see it as spreading the culture, and then there's some people in Korea who say, well, if you're going to do this, you should actually teach people about the hanbok and not just like, have them wear it, which is what a lot of these shop owners do. They just, like, take your money and you put it on and walk around. They don't really teach you about the parts or the history of it, or yeah, how it...because there's very particular way of tying the bow, but they just kind of like do it...

Annie: “Yes, I know that! I know that, I know! It's like very specific, very specific. So that's why I'm like, I wouldn't necessarily wear the outfit as much as I possibly would want to, but no, not not worth it. Yeah.”

Later, Annie inquired if other interviewees expressed any interest in wearing hanbok to see what it feels like, and in an attempt to maintain other interviewees’ data privacy, I shared a personal anecdote about a fellow fan with whom I had a lively debate about non-Korean tourists wearing hanbok.

Annie: “So from these interviews, have you heard people say ohh like they would try the clothes and they would wear the outfits just cause?”

Sharon: “You know, no...

The one person I know of outside of interviewing, just as like another K-Pop fan,

she would... And she has... And we've had some interesting conversations about that, but she's non-Korean...she's white..."

Annie: "The non-Korean! Ugh, of course...It's like, I'm sorry, like tangent again, it is not your culture like you don't know if they agree with you doing this and you don't know how respectful you're supposed to be. And it's now... I don't do it. You have your own culture or whatever that is. Deal with that, you know."

Sharon: "It was a very interesting conversation…it's very interesting practice because they're exporting their culture at the moment, and that's what's making them popular and making them money."

Annie: "Yeah, I see it. I see it, but it's just on a personal level. No, not worth it."

Her questions and following discussion are in reference to a common Korean practice of Korean youth dressing in Korean traditional dress, hanbok, in order to gain complimentary admission to the five historic palaces of Seoul, which are museums today. Hanbok rental shops are a common fixture around historic palaces, and today many experience tours sell a hanbok rental and photo shoot combination package. No longer reserved for and only practiced by ethnically Korean bodies, donning the hanbok, booking a photoshoot, and of course, gaining free admission to the palaces is a popular experience for non-Korean visitors. In fact, this moment of aesthetic divergence is captured in the Korean drama television show *The Story of Park's Marriage Contract,* in which female protagonist, Park Yeon-woo, a time-traveling bride from 19th century Josen Korea, lands in modern Seoul. Seeing people dressed in hanbok, a more familiar manner of dressing than 21st century city folk to the Joseon woman, she flags them

down. Upon getting to the hanbok wearers, she discovers that they are neither Korean, nor can they speak Korean; international tourists playing dress up is now such a common practice in the streets of Seoul that it caused a familiar problem for a time-traveling protagonist.

After answering Annie with my own beliefs as a Korean-American growing up in a diaspora and confronted with experiences as the "perceived other," I did disclose my perception that this practice was appropriative, while also providing context that domestic Koreans did not think this was appropriative. It was just yet another element by which South Korean is "spreading," or exporting their culture. Annie mused on my answer, eventually confiding that she had a desire to wear a hanbok, but "I wouldn't necessarily wear the outfit as much as I possibly would want to, but no, not worth it." She took particular offense to my stories of witnessing and encountering non-Koreans in Seoul wearing hanbok as well. Annie's response and reaction to hanbok illustrated that while proving fluency in Koreanness through dress and bodily adornment is a regular practice of K-Pop, there is a measure of hesitancy to engage in Korean culture at the risk of this behaviour being perceived as acting like a Koreaboo or, worse, a cultural appropriator. And her visceral reaction to my description of non-Koreans wearing hanbok suggested that this was not her first confrontation with non-Korean fans perhaps over-stepping K-Pop Bounding and moving into a place of appropriation. This is an instance of that aforementioned discrepancy of what is thought to be expert knowledge between factions of fandom is readily apparent. Some Anglophone fans participation in the fandom is a justification and confirmation of their expertness in Korea and Koreannes, particularly through dress and bodily adornment. This permits them to express Koreanness onto their bodies. However, in the case of Victoria and Annie – both fans of color, notably – there is a clear hesitancy to claim an expertness of Korean bodies, and rather a derision to it. However, this is all to say that on the

part of Korean domestic fans, there still has yet to be an expression of Young's profound offense expressed in any of the online ethnographic data of which I consulted. Instead, as seen in *The Story of Park's Marriage Contract*, the practice of westerners donning hanbok is framed as a comedic anecdote of mistaken identity, rather than an offensive practice. Hanbok is, in this instance, an extension of K-Pop Bounding in many ways – an Anglophone K-Pop fan, who feels they have engaged an appropriate amount in Korean culture vis-à-vis an affinity for K-Pop, uses hanbok as another means of bodily adornment to make Seoul their effective Hallyu playground.

K-Pop Bounding is not where the adaption, projection, and re-performance of Koreanness on an Anglophone fan body stop, however. Only two months after my conversation with Annie, I returned to Seoul during that time of BTS Festa. As I described before, Seoul was teeming with K-Pop life in June 2023. While the BTS Festa attracted tens of thousands of fans, it wasn't the sole reason international visitors spent their summer—despite the intense heat, humidity, and monsoon season—exploring through Seoul's streets. ATEEZ also was celebrating a milestone: a long-awaited comeback. With their extended play and single "Bouncy" releasing simultaneously with Festa celebrations, international fans had yet another series of events to attend. Both international fans and domestic fans gathered at these events; K-Pop Bounding was everywhere and obviously set apart non-Asian, international fans. Said fans treated this style of dress as a sort of avatar of what Korean domestic fans, and broader, Koreans, looked like and dressed like. Korean domestic fans, meanwhile, did not dress to reflect any ATEEZ era or album, nor did they sport the fedoras (a hallmark of ATEEZ) of Anglophone fans. These events, like pop up shops and special busking celebrations, was the perfect bazaar to observe transcultural flows of fan practice and how glocalized habitus truly differed from one another.

Among all of the transcultural exchanges and vaguely goth dress in the heat of Seoul summer, one international fan, however, caught my attention. I observed a non-Korean, Caucasian fan –who I inferred was American by her ability to speak English with other international fans and accent—that stood out due to her dressing selection. I did not speak directly with her but merely observed from a distance. This was, in part due to my initial shock at seeing how she dressed; my own personal positionality as a Korean-American took offense to her dress, and I felt like I could not engage with her safely. The fan wore the top half of a woman's hanbok, called a jeoguri*,* which resembles a gauzier version of a wide-sleeved spencer jacket, open and untied over a cropped, midriff bearing top and denim shorts. She had tied a norigae*,* a traditional tassel-like ornament often worn at the front of the jeoguri, at her belt loop and had placed flowers in her hair. While the overall arrangement of the pieces of the hanbok was not necessarily shocking to me – this interpretation of *hanbok* resembled girl group BlackPink's now-viral modern hanbok costumes worn in recent years (notably during a performance on the *Tonight Show With Jimmy Fallon* in 2020, see Figure 16) – seeing it on a non-Asian body in that manner did shock me.

Figure 16. A promotion still of BlackPink wearing "modern" sport hanboks (YG Entertainment via The Korea Times, 2020)

Dubbed a “sport hanbok” perhaps in an attempt to separate it from the more “sacred” forms of traditional hanbok, the sport hanbok is understood as costume, and would not be worn as such in a traditional setting. While modern hanboks, usually featuring knee-length skirts and more practical jeoguri, are a new vernacular of hanbok, sport hanbok is not something observed outside of idol costuming (Lee, 2022). Hanbok in idol styling and in more modernized styles is also rife with meaning in Korean history. The acceptance of a modern interpretation of the hanbok like the sport hanbok was not a given during the first introductions of these alternatives to the traditional. Hanbok is steeped in deep national and ethnic tradition and for centuries it was the dress of everyday but tied distinctly with Korean class and culture structures. Certain colors and arrangements of ornaments were reserved for the yangban, or ruling classes, while certain

uniforms confirmed a person's place in court, or indeed outside of it (ibid). Korean traditional dress would even serve as a symbol of resistance and connectivity to other Koreans in society when worn during colonial occupation and or during government suppression as exhibited in the Gwangju Uprisings and the protests thereafter in May 1980 (Courtright, 2020). To have the hanbok transformed for the sake of fashion whilst decontextualizing traditional meaning was not readily accepted by Korean society. However, in the last two decades upon the mass exportations of K-Culture, K-Beauty, and K-Pop, opinions about hanbok's modernization has shifted to general acceptance that, as fashion, modern hanbok contributes to the promotion of traditional hanbok, and therefore, to Korean culture overall (Lin and Bahng, 2019; Choi and Lee, 2024). The third generation of idol production, idols who debuted in the mid-2000s, began incorporating elements of hanbok into their music video costuming, live-performance costuming, and red-carpet appearances, disseminating the image in a way it had not been before (Lee, 2022). Most famously, BlackPink's sport hanbok made a return to the stage at Coachella in 2023 and BTS's performance of "Idol," a song composed utilizing traditional Korean instrumentation, on *The Tonight Show With Jimmy Fallon* in 2020 spotlighted male hanbok on the members (see Figure 17). Selfishly, as an Atiny, I also will include ATEEZ's hanbok costuming in 2020 in a performance of "Inception" on Korean music program, "Music Bank" here as a key example of hanbok's presence in idol aesthetic (Figure 19). Notably, ATEEZ did wear hanbok during a performance that took place on South Korea's Liberation Day (August 15), a detail that was noticed by international fans (Kim, 2020, see Figure 18).

Figure 17. A screengrab of BTS performing on the *Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* (2020), wearing interpretations of the Korean hanbok.

Figure 18. An interpretation of Korean hanbok as worn by one of the members of ATEEZ on Korean Liberation Day (2020). Displayed at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London in 2022. Photo by Sharon Kong-Perring.

In the five minutes I observed this fan and her interactions with others in front of the ATEEZ pop-up, I waited for someone to say something to her. Maybe a Korean domestic fan would intervene, expressing dismay or at least offering a helpful correction in how she wore pieces of the hanbok. If not a domestic fan, where a language barrier might be an issue after all, perhaps a fellow Anglophone fan who was familiar with structures of appropriation and race – and had called out groups like KAACHI and EXP Edition – would offer a gentle reminder of such. However, no such interaction took place, and instead the fan engaged in all of the typical rituals of fan-to-fan bonding and behaviors without hesitation. From the prospective of a Korean American fan, and researcher, it was at this moment I understood K-Pop Bounding as it took place in the great K-Pop landscape that was Seoul, that some Anglophone fans did not equate dress as appropriation. It also confirmed the belief that, as I will further detail in later analysis, Korean domestic fans view Anglophone bodies projecting Koreanness on their bodies through dress as unproblematic and a sign of Korean culture's popularity abroad rather than something taken and butchered into oriental costume. Though I have detailed K-Pop and Hallyu's role in the decentering of Global North media flows at length in other chapters, I as an ethnically Korean body, existing in a hegemonically structured society based on the predominant crafting of white bodies as the ideal, had a very volitional reaction to confronting a white body in hanbok.

Up until this point in my observation, I had yet to see an overt example of an Anglophone fan engaging in something traditionally Korean, and treating the costumed version of such as an accepted form of adapted Koreanness only added an extra layer of uncertain, intangible aversion. Recalling this observation now, I wish I had spoken to this fan and asked to engage her in a formal interview; I wanted to know her motivations, her perceptions on Koreanness, and gauge where she believed herself to be in a fluency of Koreannes. However, as such that identity can

make community, it can also interfere with it, and I could not bring myself to approach her based on, what I perceived to be, gross cultural appropriation. In this intersection of identity and meaning making, my propriospect produced profound offense, and while I technically am a member of a culture of which items were being "borrowed" and remixed, my otherness as a diasporic Korean put me in a minority among Korean domestic fans encountering this same fan. My perception was drawn from my own researcher positionality, however, as a Korean American woman enmeshed in post-colonial understandings of aforementioned guilt and living as a minority in a white-hegemonic society.

As I explained to interviewee Annie, seeing the hanbok on tourists from many different ethnic origins is not uncommon in the streets of Seoul. The incentive programs from the Korean government that encourages hanbok wearing to Joseon-era sites inadvertently became an official channel by which tourists could engage with this part of Korean traditional culture. Tourists are notorious for not actually wearing the hanbok correctly as well, but Korean proprietors are known to rarely educate renters on the history, significance, or cultural meaning behind the pieces. CedarBough Saeji (2020) does argue that non-Korean fans wearing hanbok use it as a tool for "play" to strengthen their physically embodied connection to Korea; the hanbok therefore transforms from a historic garment to an accessory of playful identity performances informed from Hallyu media. While equating "play" with national costuming can be read as a problematic framing, Saeji's analysis strengthens and supports my research theories that K-Pop is indeed an avatar of Koreaness for Anglophone fans. The ambivalence of Korean shopkeepers in the cultural promotion of hanbok also serves as a larger metaphor for Korean responses to Anglophone fans incorporating traditional Koreanness into K-Pop Bounding, where K-Fashion and K-Beauty are purposefully exported. South Korea, as a nation, has a history of exporting and

commodifying Korean bodies, most significantly in the Korean Comfort Woman archetype during Japanese colonial occupation from 1910-1945, and then in the sex work industry in US military "camp towns" in 1945 through the mid-century (Soh 2004, Min 2003, Kim and Choi 1998). This Korean cultural superstructure creates an expectation of cultural exportation of bodies and dress and may explain the ambivalence or nonchalance I observed among Korean domestic fans. Among other Anglophone fans, however, I observed their tacit acceptance of hanbok as costume and as an element of K-Pop Bounding, to mean that they saw themselves as expert enough in Koreanness to warrant this adaptation. Though there are fans who see this behavior as problematic in the case of Victoria and Annie, while others see it was a ritual of accepted understanding.

Conclusion

Here, the importance of the body continues in a conversation about how Anglophone fans reperform the role of the K-Pop fan in a glocalized way. And once again, an exploration of appropriation as the paradigm in which to explain these reperformances falls short in some ways. Rather, how fans utilize bodily adornment and dress as a signal of membership into the K-Pop community and subculture, as argued by researchers Henry Jenkins (1992), Matt Hills (2013), Suzanne Scott (2019), and Elizabeth Affuso (with Scott, 2023), proves yet another glocalized practice in Anglophone fandoms. As discussed in the previous chapter on the role of the body in K-Pop fandoms, idolness is considered proximate to Koreanness, and in understanding and exercising expertise over the former, Anglophone fans access the latter. It has become an accepted and reproduced practice to dress in a manner of exaggerated "K-Style" as idols do on

stage and during appearance, without the general understanding that this fashion and styling is in fact, mediated, and are not necessarily expressive of either the everydayness of Koreanness nor Korean traditional culture as well. K-Pop Bounding, the term I have crafted to describe this emulation of idol style, is now a glocalized fixture in Anglophone fan subculture and habitus, performed in spaces like concerts, music festivals, and fan meets. However, it has spilled outside of fan spaces. In the way that idolness has become an extension of Koreanness in terms of Anglophone fandom understanding, cultural festivals, diasporic towns and settlements, and even Seoul itself have become extended venues of fannish behavior, as fans consider their K-Pop Bounding, in a way, an expression that they understand Korean culture. Thus, K-Pop Bounding belongs in, and is acceptable, in these cultural spaces, indicating that this is indeed a glocalized practice, not just one of strict appropriation.

There is a moment in which K-Pop Bounding may equate to a level of appropriation, however, as judged by some, including myself, a member of the diasporic community. As was the case with an Anglophone wearing elements of hanbok to a K-Pop event in Seoul, I believed that this adaptation of Korean traditional dress was both decontextualized and offensive. However, the Korean domestic community in the space I observed did not provide any indication that this was an appropriative practice. It is very much still a viable tourist experience to dress up in hanbok throughout the country's prominent historical sites, and perhaps this exaggerated level of K-Pop Bounding was no different than seeing a non-Korean tourist partaking in such a practice. Thus, while K-Pop Bounding, even to the extent of incorporating Korean traditional material into an outfit, cannot be considered appropriation in the ways in which Young (2005, 2008) outlines profound offense, it does prove to be a glocal, popular Anglophone practice as exhibited by the lack of K-Pop Bounding from domestic fans at concerts held in Korea.

In future, I would like to build upon this research, further exploring diasporic reactions to Korean traditional elements' incorporation in Anglophone fan performance of fannish behavior. My own reactions to witnessing K-Pop Bounding, and even more still observing hanbok being used in a K-Pop space on a non-Korean body, provides a stark contrast to the non-reactions of domestic Korean peoples. This shows that the definitions of cultural appropriation are multi-faceted and nuanced, and while in the scope of this current research, appropriation is measured within Young's paradigm of profound offense, there are much larger networks of power, identity, and cultural transmissions that take place when you factor in a variable of peoples who do not neatly fit into separate categories of identity. Understanding this to be a gap in this research project, I am compelled to view this as a potential for future scholarship that will provide the necessary space to fully articulate those complex facets of identity.

CHAPTER FIVE – "Piri, Play The Pipe": the Transcultural [Re]Performance of Fandom Behavior And Ritual

"I'm lost and wandering,

But if I can reach you

***Play the pipe"* – DREAMCATCHER, 2019**

In a nod to traditional Korean folklore, girl group Dreamcatcher implores in the song "Piri" for someone to "play the pipe" and free them from wandering for eternity. An allusion to the Korean traditional bamboo flute, piri, the song incorporates elements of the believed-to-be Goryeo period (918-1392) shaman ritual of Jindo ssitgimgut, a funeral rite in which descendants of the dead pray for the ascension of the deceased's soul into a peaceful afterlife. The piri, along with a handful other traditional instruments from the time period, is played as an essential part of the ritual, music being focal to this "exorcist" exercise (Park, 2010; Koudela and Koo, 2016). The metaphor I derive here, between "Piri", the song, piri, the instrument, and piri-as-ritual, with K-Pop fan behaviors, is twofold. First, drawing on the idea of ritual as performance ritual can be understood as something practiced not just solely for the dead (or in this case for idols), but also enacted as a part of a community of people who engage in and sustain belief systems through practice (Schechner, 2002); it translates belief into something of which is tangible and real, as well as crafts community and collective identity around it (Durkheim, 1912; Bell, 1997).

The second metaphor I pull here is the idea of the transformation of ritual, or elements of ritual, from one community to an entirely different community wherein ritual is decontextualized and then recontextualized to mean something entirely different in another community (Bell, 1997; Grimes, 2014). Such is the role of ritual moving from one body of participants to another, it can be reshaped and reformed, until the original ritual is a relic or even so far removed from

the parent that there is no understanding that the ritual may have begun somewhere else. For K-Pop fandoms, moving from Korean domestic fandoms to international Anglophone fandoms, such fannish behavior as exhibited through ritual is often retranslated and reperformed in a way that is heavily coded with Anglophone cultural superstructures and unfamiliar to the parent culture of Korean traditional fandoms. This chapter explores a few key, highlighted K-Pop fan rituals – including rituals involving material culture and metric culture, specifically – within the context of performance as observable, qualifiable data points to measure transcultural translations and glocalizations between Korean domestic fandoms and Anglophone ones. Here, I discuss the questions of Anglophone fan performance as authentic globalizations of the fandom community or as appropriative mistranslations of ritual,

While fannish behavior and outward performance have been regarded as two intersecting, yet separate entities in fandom studies (Booth and Bennett 2015), the act of "being" or behaving as a fan should be understood as a continual performance of fandom. Paul Booth and Lucy Bennett (2015) further posit that there is no real distinction between fannish performance and fannish behavior, and that both "enact" identity through rituals of "consumption, viewership, collecting, conspicuous consumption, or oven overt emotional display (squee!)" (1.2) Performance theory suggests that performance operates through different modes of life, as well, from the staged to the ritualized to the everyday (Schechner, 2002). In everyday life, performance does not necessarily imply artificiality; however, it describes repeated actions of which identity is enacted. In both frameworks, there is no stable boundary between "doing" or "being" or "performing" as all operate within an ecosystem of community membership. The perceived distinction between what is natural behavior and exaggerated performance is often grounded in judgement calls on authenticity, wherein some actions are designated as authentic

expressions of identity while others are perceived to be artificial or overly dramatized. Authenticity, however, can be argued as an arena of subjectivity, not something that is inherently true of certain behaviors. Different contexts produce varying forms of authenticity and presentation (Peterson, 2005) and thus in these framings, I argue that performance and behaviour cannot be extrapolated from the other in the context of fandoms; behavior can be observed and noted, however, how distinguishing behavior from the more artificial idea of performance is an interpretive judgement. Therefore, I treat fannish behavior and fannish performance not as separable categories but rather mutual practices through which fandom is made meaningful.

While in performance theory discourses, performance is thought to be illusionary, liminal, and even "duplicitous" or rehearsed (Schechner, 2003: xi), when discussed in the realm of K-Pop fandoms, I cannot draw assumptions on the distinction between what is "being" and what is performance. I cannot argue that fandom performance is *observably* distinct from behavior. While it can be said that fandom performance is a state of meaning-making, reserved for certain times, places, and pilgrimages (Couldry 2008), and is not necessarily practiced in the everydayness of life -- thus making it distinct from behavior – many fandom studies scholars would and could argue that fandom and fandom practice *is* an expression of everyday conditions. As it is exhibited to the world, performance and behavior are working in tandem, dismantling a binary between "media/fandom world" and "real world" (Jenkins 2007, Gray and Sandvoss 2017, Scott 2019). I cannot distinguish fandom performance as a separate entity from behavior in the everydayness of fandom. Fan performance is as "normal" of a behavior, and as central to the habitus of K-Pop as light sticks are, something I have repeatedly observed in my fieldwork. Of course, as an ethnographic researcher, I must ask myself how I can qualify the ideas of fandom "being," "identity," and "performance" into observable and explainable pieces of data. As Judith

Butler (1990) postulates in her theoretical frameworks of Butlerian Drag, gender is performed, whether intended to be performed or not. Drag, and gender itself is not reserved for exclusive expression on a stage, nor is it confined to such places, rather it is lived, every day. Here, Butler also clarifies that despite the idea of "performance" being central to this work, it is not artificial or inauthentic as it is reiterated, embodied, and normalized every day. There is no start or stop to the performance of gender, and in a similar parallel to other aspects of identity, even elective ones as a fan, there is no confined measure of space and place that constitutes when a fan is simply behaving or when a fan is exaggeratedly performing.

Detailing the select K-Pop rituals I have chosen to interrogate, I seek to position each ritualistic, intercultural translation as borne from an Anglophone re-encoding, and offer Korean domestic fandom reactions as a foil by which to measure the departure from the "parent" culture. While I identify, understand, and argue that these newly reperformed rituals are indeed specific to Anglophone fandoms, I contend that Anglophone fans craft an understanding that this ritualistic behavior is, in fact, a replication of domestic fandoms, not realizing that they have actually routinized ritual in a way that is, literally, foreign to domestic Korean fans. In this replication, Anglophone fandoms believe their rituals are an expression of Korean behavior, but in reality, Korean domestic fans find these rituals unfamiliar at best, as evidenced by data collected during my in-person observation pertaining to alternate fan economies, or a gross misuse of fan ritual, at worst, as displayed by data conducted during a virtual ethnography in relation to the "Black Lives Matter" movement during the Summer of 2020. In the latter's case, I discuss whether the adaptation of these rituals by Anglophone fans is considered appropriative (culturally, or not) by domestic fandoms, or rather just regarded as a way K-Pop and its fandom have been exported and glocalized to fit the vernacular of Anglophone fandom life. In this

analysis, I draw parallels with the concept of cultural translation; though formed out of the linguistics field, but widely negotiated in anthropology and postcolonial studies, the overarching discussions involving interpretation and negotiation of meaning as it moves through different cultures via language, craft similar contexts to the cultural translations of ritual, performance, and behavior as well. As anthropologist Talal Asad (1986) argues, translation – with all of its loaded meanings of transformation – is not just affected by the denotative meanings of words and language itself, but rather reflects larger societal, cultural, and historical forces that change and reframe as cultures interact with one another. In postcolonial studies, scholars such as Homi Bhabha (1994) and Gayatri Spivak (1993) critique cultural translations as being inherently uneven, with a disproportionate flow into Global North epistemologies, a facet of the argument I cannot ignore in my framing of this research data. As such, I employ cultural translation in a metaphorical sense to examine how ritual, performance, and behavior are all recontextualized across communities, while remaining attentive to the social and cultural forces that shape these translations. Beginning with theoretical analysis of ritual as behavior and performance, I then discuss adaptations of ritual within the context of fan economies and materiality. Ritual is not devoid of immaterial measurements, either, thus I close this chapter with an analysis of reperformance of virtual ritual through virtual ethnography.

Fandom as Performance, Performance as Ritual, Ritual as Belief and Behavior

Here then, we bring behavior and performance into the realm of ritual. As the essence of this research discusses Anglophone fandom reperformance of Korean domestic fandom culture and Koreanness, it is essential to be able to qualify and measure those reperformances; and thus, I

utilize ritual in K-Pop fandom for that measurement. While this chapter seeks to discuss how fandom behavior and performance is translated through different cultural superstructures, the vehicle by which to qualifiedly measure such behavioral change will be through the analysis of said behavior and performance in ritual. Ritual, as configured by ritual studies researcher Catherine Bell (1992, 1997) refers to the social activity between people that measures structural patterns and structural dichotomies in a culture (1992: 25). Émile Durkheim (1912), who foundationally posited the theory of performance in ritual and the performing of ritualistic rites as the way by which beliefs in a community are constructed and reinforced, explains that performance in rituals both codify and personify cultural structures, routinizing them in a way that reflects a *collective* consciousness of accepted behavior. While outside of this community said ritual and behavior may not be inscribed with the same meanings, similar to dress and bodily adornment decontextualized from community spaces, ritual is highly regarded within community spaces as an anchor to the belief itself. Ritual, in a synthesis of Bell and Durkheim's seminal works then, is a repeated performance of behavior, incorporating the intangibles of belief, that reflect the values, desires, and parameters of a social group. Cultural psychologist William Dressler's cultural consonance theory (1997, 2007) further articulates that knowledge of ritual is essential to the successful navigation of culture, and failure to behave within the cultural protocols of a group has consequences and lasting effects on either the cultural interloper or the community itself (Dressler 1997, 2007; Legare and Nielson, 2020). That "lasting effect," in the case of K-Pop fandoms is the transformative (mis)navigation of ritual, a willful, yet authentic, misinterpretation of Korean domestic ritual by Anglophone fans. Their reperformances, and in many cases entirely new performances are distinct to this transcultural fandom and separate from Korean domestic fandoms. Anglophone performance of fandom ritual crafts a whole new set of

inscribed beliefs and practices that derive from some aspects of Korean domestic fandoms but are considered foreign to the parent culture. Performed rituals, both on and offline, are observable and capturable – whether it be discussed among fans in fandoms during in-person exchanges or through discourse on social media, chronicled in archives of fandom videos on platforms like YouTube, or embodied in fandom spaces. Rituals tangibly present performance in the same way that ritual tangibly articulates belief in a community. Ritual is a product of synthesized worldviews, crafted and articulated through performance, thus giving action to thought and behavior (Bell, 1992: 27). New Anglophone rituals, thus, are the integration, synthesis, and translation of the propriospects of Anglophone fandoms with what they draw (i.e. translate from) Korean domestic practice.

Ritual as a paradigmic structure to observe and articulate fan behavior and performance is not new to fandom studies, nor unique, necessarily, to this research on K-Pop fandoms. Sports fandom researcher, Michael Serazio (2012) discusses fan collectivism and community crafting through ritual, particularly the "collective effervescence" imparted on a community when the object of affection is framed as a totem by which a "civic collective" is created. In Serazio's work, fans of the Philadelphia Phillies engage in ritualistic practices that contribute to "intense social unity," build group ideals, and index solidarity. This framework of ritual in fandom very much resonates with K-Pop fandom, as well. Rituals practiced in K-Pop fan spaces and online, are all enacted in celebration, protection, or worship of an object of affection – the idol – and the idols and the materiality around them do serve as a kind of totemic artifact in which group ideals and a civic collective is formed. In using Bell, Durkheim, and Serazio's work on ritual, the emerging parallel drawn here is no doubt a throughline to religion, a link fan studies scholar Matt Hills has explored in the context of cult discourses (2002 and 2013). While Hills argues that the

comparison of fandom to religion mostly fails in a three-point schema presented by Buffyverse fandom scholar, Anthony Mills, the only point on which this comparison succeeds is in the practice of routinized ritual in fandoms (2013: 11); Hills reminds readers that, ritual cannot be treated just in the confines and contexts of traditional religious ethnography, but rather must be found and observed in the everyday-to-us-world, like in fandoms. Narrowly believing that ritual only points to the worship and institutionalized collective unity around an object of affection is to define ritual in a way that Catherine Bell did not believe was a productive development of ritual, even in 1992. Rather than deploying the word as a narrow framework, Bell believed using ritual in more flexible ways would evolve the term to describe societal behavior, outside of exoticism. Thus, in this spirit of Bell, in the foundations of Durkheim, and in drawing parallels to the treatment of ritual in other fandom studies work, I focus on two of Booth and Bennett's (2015) identified tenets of fandom performance in ritual: consumption and viewership. In the following examples of Anglophone fan performance and ritual, and in dissecting its deviations from the domestic Korean fandom culture, I discuss consumption and material culture's role in the crafting and destabilizing of ritual, engage with fan viewership as the basis of reperformed ritual as practiced outside of fan spaces, and discuss the misinterpretation of both consumption and viewership in the dismantling of the collective understanding ritual.

"Wooyoung, Wooyoung, I Want Wooyoung: Material Culture as Ritual and the Creation of Alternate Fan Economies

Just as materiality in dress and bodily adornment codes certain identities to the person dressed and adorned (Storey, 2021), materiality in ritual is equally communicative in its repetition and

regular deployment in fan spaces. Materiality and social practice are inextricably linked in that materials can mean very little until human action, like its framing in language, its production and consumption, and in this case ritual, inscribes its meaning to groups of people (ibid). That meaning is specific to communities; it changes when moving in and out of communal view or when objects are detached from ritual altogether. Anthropologist Wednesday Martin (2015), for example, illustrates human-imposed meaning onto material culture and how it can be translated from culture to culture with the autoethnographic case study of a simple, albeit nicely constructed handbag. Its use, objectively, is simply to transport materials, however, in a culture like the Upper East Side in Manhattan, New York, the nicely constructed handbag, in all its rarity, desirability, and exclusivity, becomes a power totem. The community and the culture imbue it with meaning; it gives the wearer immediate power over those who cannot get one, and signals to the rest of society where this person sits in the hierarchy of the culture. It codes to the rest of the community that this person fulfilled the ritual of hunting for this bag, entrenching their place in the other, non-materially connected rituals of the Upper East Side—lunches, shopping trips, and playdates among their children. Place this same bag in the rural mid-west of the United States, outside of the ritualistic rite to obtain this bag and removing it from any other ritualistic power, it is decoded from a totem and recoded as a frivolously expensive, if not wasteful and pointless piece devoid of power. “People from different societies use many of the same material objects, but yet what they signify varies enormously.” (Storey, 2021: 243) And such is the case of the deployment of material culture in the crafting of ritual among Anglophone K-Pop fans.

Just as Martin’s handbag crafts ritual among the Upper East Side, materiality in K-Pop fandom holds a significance in ritual, particularly the new rituals that Anglophone fans have crafted in their own understandings and interpretations of fandom ritual performance. Working

in tandem with materiality in K-Pop fandom, is the notion of consumption, as well. According to Patricia McAnany and Tomás Gallareta Negrón (2008), within the context of economy and ritual, consumption plays a significant role in the cultural reproduction of social relations. The transfer and circulation of material objects among individuals and groups effectively delineate networks of relationships, interactions, and social practices (2008: 5). Storey (2021) identifies the consumption of objects as a method through which communities attribute meaning to those objects. In the K-Pop sense, fan consumerism is a ritual of materiality in and of itself. Therefore, in this discussion, I will position materiality and objects in terms of ritual deployment and ritual economy in the particular ways Anglophone fans communicate and reperform identity. To illustrate the extent of the power materiality and material culture holds in K-Pop fandom, both Anglophone and Korean domestic, I want to highlight two pieces of material culture utilized in both subsets of K-Pop fandom, but used in different ways, within translated and performed rituals: light sticks and photocards.

The light stick most profoundly exemplifies the totemistic aspect of material culture in K-Pop rituals and spaces, and later in this chapter when I interrogate the lack of ritual contextualization and its impact on communities, I will discuss the light stick's deconstruction and loss of meaning. In this context, addressing the presence of material culture in ritual, however, I draw your attention to the light stick's prominent role in the facilitation of identity and community making, and how its usage has been controlled, reconstructed, and reperformed transculturally. A light stick, often given a nickname from the entertainment agency which personifies the object, is a torch- sized and shaped object fashioned around the theme and official colors of the group it represents. It often features a lighted mechanism, a handle, and some sort of group branding. For example, a "Light-tiny," the light stick for ATEEZ, features a compass

and globe design in theme with the pirate-concept of their first album series. Its prevalence in K-Pop fandoms transculturally was highlighted in the Victoria & Albert Museum exhibition in London, entitled, “Hallyu!: The Korean Wave” in which an entire wall of the gallery was covered with the light sticks of various K-Pop groups (2022). Similarly, the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle, Washington, USA, has a permanent display of K-Pop fandom light sticks as a hallmark of K-Pop fan ritual and practice in their discussions on fandom community and power located within the exhibition: “MASSIVE! The Power of Pop Culture” (Figure 19).

Figure 19. A wall of K-Pop light sticks on view at the Museum of Pop Culture, in Seattle, Washington (2024). Photo courtesy of MOPOP.

The inclusion of that materiality entrenches how the light stick holds certain value to audiences transculturally, as the Victoria & Albert and the Museum of Pop Culture understood that their British and American audiences, respectively, would potentially understand and celebrate the collection of these totemistic objects on display. Simultaneously, if a new observer, without any knowledge of K-Pop approached the wall, the exhibition would inform and educate

that attendee as to the importance of the light stick for fans. The light stick, in a K-Pop fandom scene, is inherently understood as a declaration of identity – of who are you a fan of, and which group you support, or even on the basest of levels, the light stick signals membership to the K-Pop fan community, writ large. Interviewee, Betty, describes an experience during a multi-artist K-Pop festival which took place in Spain in 2023. While she explained that it was relatively obvious to discern who was a fan of which group during her time in Spain, she attributed the light stick as the main arbiter by which she could definitively identify fandoms. One super fan, even, wore a harness full of light sticks, representative of each K-Pop group that was participating in this festival. This overwhelming display of materiality signaled to the rest of the fandoms that they were the ultimate fan, a performance of fandom pride.

To provide another brief illustration of the value the light stick has to fandom ritual, I would like to pivot to K-Pop parody group, BgA. Formed in Ryan Higa's video "Dong Saya Dae" (the same one where a group of Asian men tried to puzzle out American women's love for K-Pop), BgA works with all the hallmarks of a real K-Pop group. In a follow-up video after their debut, BgA introduces their new song "Who's It Gonna Be" (2017), with a K-drama-esque sketch about what they still need to do to in order to fulfil the "proper" requirements to be a K-Pop group. "Alright…fandom name, group color, and new song…That's what we need in order to be a K-Pop band," BgA frontman and YouTuber, Ryan Higa, rattles off, writing a list of business items the group needs to get done. Member Philip Wang replies, "Says who?" questioning who this authority is that approves them as K-Pop. Without a beat, Higa responds, "Everyone! The comments, uh Google." In their conversations of fandom name and color, the group members bring up glowsticks (i.e. light sticks) with excitement, understanding how these pieces of plastic are essential ingredients to a K-Pop group and its fandom's identity. These

aspects of K-Pop culture are so obvious to those in the community that BgA could parody it, knowing full well how their audience of K-Pop lovers would understand what was being made fun of. User snappymango commented, “I’m still waiting for BgA glow sticks to be in stock,” a comment that garnered over 1,500 likes at the time of this research (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Screengrab from parody band, “Boys Generally Asian” music video Who’s It Gonna Be? In this image, member Justin Chon holds two light sticks in each hand as a nod to the materiality of K-Pop fandom.

In the Korean domestic fandom context, light sticks signal membership most effectively in fan spaces where multiple fandoms congregate. For example, at Korean music festivals, several groups perform in a large venue. To show support for the group on stage, that group's fans use their specific light sticks during their performance so the performers can recognize their supporters in the crowd. In a coded and performed ritualization of the light stick, fans outside of the fandom (i.e. holding a different group’s light stick) *may* participate using that other light

stick, as it is contributing to the overall visual "sea" of light sticks that the group can observe from the stage. In some instances where a fan group may be small, perhaps the group has recently debuted, K-Pop fans from other fandoms will support the group by deploying a light stick, regardless of the group affiliation. On the other hand, if the fandom is attempting to express some sort of dissatisfaction with the group, it will collectively engage in a ritual of omission, turning off light sticks and withholding its power of light, resulting in what is called a "black ocean" in K-Pop (Kang, 2016). Fanvids across YouTube chronicle some of the industry's "worst black oceans," calling the experience "traumatic" for idols who understand that fans are expressing disappointment and discontent (KPOP FTW 2021 and BeBoss TV 2021). Fans exercise black oceans in the event of idols misbehaving, poor career choices that the fans are not happy with, or discontent with the record label. While these videos do inform and educate Anglophone fans – as the videos are in English – about the ritual of the black ocean with light sticks, the largely Anglophone comments under both videos express that they hope fandoms do not engage in such practices.

Though I observed black ocean footage archived as a part of Korean fandoms on platforms and reports of black oceans in Korea are still a part of the domestic fandom vernacular, Anglophone fandoms relegate its importance in fandom communication, and I did not experience this ritual during any examples of my field work. Furthermore, 24 of my survey respondents indicated that they learned about light sticks, and how to use them, from visual social media forms, indicating that the ritualization of the light stick in the same way Korean domestic fandoms ritualized it, is not constructively taught in Anglophone fandoms. Rather, it is far more important to possess the light stick to be a part of the collective than it is to use the light stick in rituals of communication, a departure from Korean domestic fandoms. Interestingly, 22 survey

respondents noted that YouTube was one of the primary platforms by which they learned, consumed, and interpreted K-Pop information, however, despite providing the opportunity for one-to-one mimicry via these archival mechanisms, a cultural translation without imbuing a certain level of historical and cultural meaning, did not occur. Though I did not capture this in my survey questions, I theorize that this could be understood in terms of when these fans joined their respective fandoms – whether it was before or after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even more so than light sticks, the ritual of photo cards, both old (domestic Korean fans) and new (Anglophone fans) exemplify quite significant deviations between the two fandoms. Photo cards are officially licensed, wallet-sized photos featuring one member of a group in each photo card. They are distributed via albums, special edition collectable packs, at fan events, and with purchase of merchandise, therefore a fan must purchase albums in order to gather as many cards as they wish or in order to get the photocard of the member of which they are a fan. Obtaining photocards is extremely random, and there are no guarantees that you will find the specific photo card you want. In some instances, obtaining photo cards can even be more randomized than purchasing large quantities of albums, as was the case with a DREAMCATCHER pop up, I attended in Seoul. During the debut anniversary of the girl group, a café located in Young Plaza hosted a "cup sleeve" event – a day which a sanctioned café serves themed drinks and has cup sleeves that feature the group's photo on them—and fans could obtain a licensed photocard from a kiosk. The cards were randomized and often during these events there are mechanisms in place that either limit the number of photocards per fan or incentivize larger purchasing practices like correlating the number of cards one can receive with the number of drinks they buy or a certain amount of money translates to a certain number of cards. These mechanisms continually encourage fan consumption explicitly tying purchasing with fan rituals.

The ritual and materiality of trading cards is not entirely unique to K-Pop fandoms. However, its tied consumption practice to the media forms on which idol groups are metrically reliant is somewhat of a K-Pop hallmark. The psychological reasoning behind this fevered ritual may have crossover with other fandoms that do have a trading card element, like sports fandoms or anime fandoms. Scott Parrott (2025) argues, based on a virtual ethnography of sports fandoms on social media platform, Reddit, that fans collect cards due in part to a parasocial connection the fan has with a particular player, as well as the addicting act that is collecting. Sports trading cards also nurture social connections and parasocialism within fan communities, and fans share that these cards provide an escape from stressful, everyday life. In returning to the idea of materiality's intersection with consumerism, Linden and Linden (2016) outline that fan consumerism, as well as its subversion, is an expression of fan participation and performance. In the K-Pop context, profound fan consumerism in the purchase of products was identified by interviewees as an incredibly distinctive aspect of K-Pop fandom. When asked about the consumer culture aspect of being a K-Pop fan, interviewees Bryce and Stephanie both responded that they felt more compelled than ever before in any other "hobby" to spend large sums of money on "fan things" like physical copies of albums, photocards, posters, plushies, clothing, and so on. Bryce expressed that he never cared for physical fan materials before but was convinced by fellow fans that he knew from university as well as fans within his group fandom, that purchasing products was the best way to show he supported his favorite group, TWICE. Initially borne from guilt, Bryce did purchase albums, posters, and concert memorabilia, until it became an everyday practice of his K-Pop fannish behavior. Interviewee, Stephanie lamented that being a K-Pop fan made her "go broke" because of the constant and consistent output of her favorite idol groups; when one group is finishes promotions and, another group begins their

promotions and thus the cycle of purchasing albums and merchandise continues. Stephanie explains:

> "So I haven't bought a Western artist album since, baby, since I was 15… there's something special about K-Pop that makes you want to invest yourself not only emotionally, but physically into it. Also, like economically into it. It like, it feels like you're broke every time. So every time you're on TikTok, it's like ohh this and that: I am a broke ARMY. And I mean I am, but I still find a way to pay my boy's bills… They don't need me like as a single unit of a person. They don't need my money, but I still feel like that. Gotta gotta, gotta help my boys out, which is very strange… As a grown woman to have that feeling, and I'm like, OOF, I really need to go talk to my psychiatrist again."

Stephanie and Bryce both understood that participating in the fandom financially was the best way to "show their support" to the idol group, but they also recognized and identified that these purchasing patterns are unique to their participation in K-Pop fandom. While consuming products in other fandoms is common, both respondents indicated how heightened such commercial participation was when it came to K-Pop fandom. Their behaviors are much more emulative of Korean domestic fandom rituals of consumerism, I observed in Seoul in 2022 and 2023 during which extremely keen Korean fans eagerly attended exhibitions, celebratory café events, and pop-up events to secure the purchase of some rare artifact.

This enthusiastic ritual of consumption is very well fictionalized in tvN's *Her Private Life*, a Korean television that follows lead character, Sung Deok Mi, a gallery curator, in her passionate participation in K-Pop group, White Ocean's fan club (2019). Not only does she collect artifacts from concerts and other similar events (even cherishing a water bottle thrown

into the audience), but she also excitedly purchases merchandise and products, and displays these materials prominently in her apartment in her own sort of museum exhibition. Her consumption as a ritual goes beyond obtaining materials for herself as well, as Deok Mi seeks to purchase something amazing for her favorite member (her bias) in White Ocean for his birthday. This is true of real-life K-Pop fandom transculturally, in which fans often organize and raise funds to "gift" something to their idols. In some cases, like in London and Manchester since 2017, the gift is intangible, like an anniversary billboard for BTS (Williams 2021). Purchasing materials as part of ritualistic support of idols is so ingrained in K-Pop fandom that, for many Korean fans of groups, gifts were banned due to the excessive nature of purchases (Koreaboo, 2025).

And while Bryce and Stephanie literally buy into this consumption ritual, Annie provided an insight that may help articulate another Anglophone performance of consumption ritual, that is, the subversion of it. Annie divulged that, as a fan in her late teens, her financial situation disallows her from participating in the high consumption culture of K-Pop materiality, and though totems like light sticks and photo cards are important to identifying as a "good" K-Pop fan, she contributes her time in order to show her love and support of the idol group. She participates in "streaming parties," organized online events and periods of time where fans coordinate the watching and rewatching of music videos or the listening of albums and songs on streaming platforms. Annie views acts of service as an alternative action to the materiality of K-Pop, but in doing so, she acknowledges that, as a good fan, she needs to do something a little extra to almost "make up" for her inability (and distaste) for spending excessive funds while participating in the fandom. In this way, her fan capital is exhibited not through monetary commitment, but through time and effort invested – a form of DIY fandom that, while present in Korean domestic fandom practice in a way, is not regarded as a standalone way of gaining said

fandom capital. In domestic fandoms, subverting or refusing to participate in consumer practice is not a part of the fandom vernacular and would instead be regarded as a lower form of commitment, or even an incorrect form of practice. Korean fandoms are built on the idea of "authorized" consumption, wherein official goods carry not just economic legitimacy, but also a moral and affective one (Noppe, 2011; Zhang and Fung, 2017). Thus, it is in this understanding of capital consumption wherein certain fans cannot invest economically in materials like Stephanie or Bryce can (or are willing to), when the Anglophone cultural superstructures of alternative fan economies, DIY fandoms, and gift giving in fandoms dismantles and reinvents ritual in Anglophone K-Pop fandom, with photo cards providing a primary example of ritual reperformance through these material re-engagements.

A healthy, subversive alternate fan economy of card-trading exists in photo cards in K-Pop fandom, and fans will often negotiate with one another online or in-person to trade cards of different members with one another to complete the collections. One such Korean fan I observed at the ATEEZ pop-up store in June 2023 in the Hongdae neighborhood of Seoul made her desire very clear to her fellow fans around her when she chanted, "Wooyoung, Wooyoung, I want Wooyoung!" Her own albums turned up nil, but she turned her chant to the fans around her, hoping that Wooyoung was somewhere in the hands of a less enthusiastic fan who would be willing to trade.

In the fan's quest to locate a Wooyoung photo card, she was confronted by an American Atiny, with a stack of photo cards in her hand. None of these cards were of Wooyoung, however, and none of them were official photocards, either. June 2023 was an exciting time to be an Atiny; there was a new, *full* album out with a pirate-meets-cowboy concept that ruled ATEEZ's marketing content that year. The group had just competed in and performed well in the hotly

anticipated Korean performance competition show, “Kingdom”, and crossovers from BTS ARMY fandoms excitedly visited ATEEZ pop-ups around Seoul while in the city for BTS Festa. In all the excitement, Atiny gleefully celebrated member Yeosang’s birthday which coincided with the album release and pop-up shops. At the Hongdae pop-up, this middle-aged American Atiny passed out homemade, DIY photo cards featuring different “concepts” of Yeosang—the boyfriend concept with a photo of Yeosang looking like a wholesome man in his 20s was popular, while “sexy” Yeosang in black and leather elicited squeals of nervous giggles from recipients spanning all age groups from late teens to women in their 50s. The different kinds of DIY photo cards were not unlike the very notion of the official photocards—collect, trade, keep. But these photocards were a show of goodwill and love on the part of the fan that made them. This fan, among others, was giving these photocards away to other fans in a gesture of good-will and fan comradery. I had seen this same practice (not unlike friendship bracelets at Taylor Swift’s “Eras” tour) at K-Pop concerts and fan gatherings in North America, and while other international fans accepted the fan-made photocards with grateful understanding, Korean domestic fans were extremely uncomfortable at first. They believed this fan was selling either real photo cards or was selling counterfeits, both potentially illegal practices. But upon realizing that these were freebies with no strings attached, Korean domestic fans embraced the practice and accepted the photocard. Though the fan from earlier was still on her quest to find Wooyoung among the official cards, getting a free, homemade Yeosang was not a disappointment, though highly suspect at first.

While there is a profound cultural history of gift-giving in Korean traditional culture, the context of such gifts is rooted in the idea of respect and honor stemming from “jo-gong” (tribute) and “sushik” (support). For the former (and as it pertains to idol fandoms), tangible capital gifts

to idols reflect a vassal to lord-style relationship formed from histories of colonization while the latter implies a fandom obligation to quite literally nourish their idols and associated production staff (Jeong, 2026). Within these cultural and fan subcultural parameters, the idea of propriety and official legitimacy is still highly present. Gifts, particularly of the luxury variety, to the idol are subject to the approval of agencies, who serve as gatekeepers to ensure that subpar productions or even unpermitted "fakes" are not among the gifts. Gift-giving structures from fans to idol are hyper-regulated as these items are viewed by domestic fans as an ultimate sign of respect and even a level of pure, non-exploitive loyalty; agencies cannot risk their clients' reputations are jeopardized by a suggestion of illegitimacy while fans would not choose a gift that would suggest wrong-doing (ibid). These expectations and unspoken understandings of how gift-giving operate, not just within Korean history and culture, but also in K-Pop fandoms, is effectively lost in Anglophone fandom subcultures. DIYness of fandom practice from Anglophone fandoms is not thought to jeopardize idols and their brand but rather is seen as an expression of fandom community building, scaffolded through individual contribution of labor and production. Understandably, these two existing cultural structures may clash when first introduced to one another and can explain Korean domestic fandoms' not initially understanding and feeling suspicion of such Anglophone permutations of material culture rituals. Domestic Korean fans' initial skepticism at accepting the gift, therefore, demonstrated to me that this ritual of material culture exchange was indeed a hallmark of global K-Pop fandom that was reconstituted and reperformed by Anglophone fans with infusions of Anglophone superstructures unfamiliar to Korean domestic fans.

This approach to materiality in Anglophone fan subcultures and their habitus is similar to Lucy Bennett's (2012) research on European music festivals, where collections of materials and

memorabilia have intrinsic value rather than capital value. These practices are not just rooted in generosity between fans, either, but in fact a ritualized participation that produces and executes community and belonging; in this gift economy, value is affective, relational, and even reputational on the part of the DIYing fan, rather than strictly monetary (Hellekson, 2009). Such affective, often feminized, forms of fan production usually exist outside formal capitalist exchange, yet these practices remain central to the subculture and community of which it strengthens. The homemade Yeosang cards mirror the logic of official merchandise – collecting, trading, displaying – while also simultaneously rejecting the paradigm that one must have the monetary capital to engage in said rituals. Whereas in Korean domestic fandoms, while intrinsic value is not entirely absent, the legitimization of the material comes from its official status, buying into traditional capital structures of economy and value. As Noppe (2011) and Zhang and Fung (2017) note in their work on participatory consumerism and the Hallyu Wave, Korean fandoms are structured around authorized consumption, and a DIY, Anglophone fan producing outside of "legitimate" economies runs the risk of being read as illicit. The eventual acceptance of the DIY photocards thus marked a moment of cultural and ritual translation, in which Anglophone infusions of practice, grounded in intrinsic and relational value (Bennett, 2012) were reimagined and reenacted within the global fandom and practiced within a traditionally Korean domestic fandom space.

In Oliver Carter's (2018) re-interpretation of fans, fandoms, and alternative economies, he introduces three primary elements by which we can discern if an alternative economy exists. First, there must be a "blurring of boundaries between professional and amateur media production and distribution;" while second the produced texts in these networks are exchangeable materials ("artifacts"), and lastly producers must "transgress" rules/regulations in

such that they must navigate *around* (i.e. break) rules and to produce these fan materials (2018: 35). In exploring the first measure of alternative fan economies, the blurring of boundaries between professional and fan made production and distribution, I turn to the theories of DIY production in fandoms as evolved from John Fiske's (1992) foundational building blocks of fan cultural capital and textual productivity and Hills (2013b) provoking analysis of fandom skill and cost in the production of fandom artifacts. Given the era of fandom studies in which Fiske's work is situated (and very much a leader of), Fiske's fan productivity speaks of a "'shadow cultural economy' that lies outside that of the cultural industries yet shares features with them" (1992: 30). In his theorization, empowered fans craft and create texts that circulate through fandom, and bears resemblance to official texts, and yet is discernable from such because fans lack the professional tools to mimic official texts in any serious way (39). While the concept of textual productivity was posited by Fiske to frame fans as active participants in the crafting of the object of affection (speaking to the era in which his work is situated), his analysis of the text/artifacts itself diminishes fandom productivity. Fiske negates the commercial capital possible for fans and instead relegates their productivity to cultural capital only. Hills (2013b), however, updates Fiske's work into the Web 2.0 era, in which fans have cost-efficient access and ability to craft texts in an extremely skilled way. Hill further argues that Fiske's pre-internet theories do not allow room for the nuance of inter-connected fandom networks that encourage the "hierarchical evolution" of fandom text (2013b:139), like beta-readers in fanfiction or shop reviews on Etsy. And finally, Hills critiques Fiske's evaluation of fandom texts as being inherently inferior, highlighting the monolithic approach that Fiske takes in assuming the lack of "competence" that fan texts have (2013b:138-139). Leaning into Hills's analysis here, the quality of output and the necessary skill to produce K-Pop fan texts is quite profound, and both

professional and amateur DIY products exist with each other in the same universe of economy – both genres of texts are present and exchanged during in-person events in the United States, and there are healthy markets for both online on sales platforms like Amazon, Etsy, and Redbubble. There is little distinction or hierarchy between fans in K-Pop spaces of those who wear or use official merchandise or those who use DIY fan texts in the space. Here, therefore, we can observe that there is indeed a blurring of boundary between professional and amateur modes of production both in the productivity itself as well as in its reception. In returning to the Korean domestic K-Pop fans at the ATEEZ pop up, who were concerned and confused about why an Anglophone fan was giving away photocards without an expectation of return, the quality of this card was enough to create an expectation of monetary exchange. Was it a real card that they were trying to hawk for money? Was it a "knock off" that the fan was trying to pass off to dupe a fan? This fandom textual productivity blurred this line before the domestic fans understood the intent.

In exploring Carter's second measure of alternate fan economies, that of exchangeable artifacts, I would like to further discuss DIY culture as it intersects with the concept of fandom gift culture and how exchange can also transcend physical spaces, especially in the internet age and as it works with K-Pop fandoms. DIY practices in music scenes have been synonymously deployed in relation to rebellion or subversion of the producing power bloc, with foundational texts rooted in the counterculture punk subcultures that value "indie" practices as alternative to commercial or traditional capitalism in the Global North (Martin 2008, Martin-Iverson 2012, Hare and Baker 2017). Here, DIY is used to describe, not just the production of music as Brent Luvaas (2013) discusses in his work on DIY musicians in Indonesia, but other aspects of textual production that have commercial value as well, such as clothing, accessories, and even zines.

Like the musicians that Luvaas identifies as tiring of sitting at the periphery of cultural production, and at a disadvantage compared to the industrialized world or musicians that come from wealth (Sutopo et al., 2020), I believe K-Pop fans are situated in the same subversive tactics in their DIYs, but with an aim of celebration rather than entirely commercial gain. Luvaas's work also does argue that the alternativity of DIY against the traditional is very much rooted in the Global North and its deployment in the Indonesian music scene is a transcultural and global exchange of the ideal; he indicates that this is quite the hallmark of Global North media production and unveils a foundation structure of DIY that is explicit to Anglophone music scenes (2013; Sutopo et al., 2020). While these DIY products are meant to circulate as an economical endeavor, particularly in the Indonesia context, much of the time these DIY artifacts in K-Pop are exchanged in the spirit of good will and community building. As such, exchangeable DIY in the K-Pop sense strongly intersects with Rachel Sabotini's fandom gifting paradigm. First introduced by Sabotini (1999) and re-introduced by cinema scholar, Karen Hellekson (2009; 2015), their works explore gift culture in the creation of reciprocity and hierarchy in fan communities. Hellekson, however, further interrogates the gift as a trademark of fandom communities. Gifts, according to Hellekson, expand beyond physical artifacts and encompass digital ones, like fan fiction; in this service of creation, even if the object isn't tangible, fans are still gifting each other extensions of the universe, more intellectual engagement, and increased community (2009). Bearing this legacy of Global North fandoms in mind, there is both explicit exchange of physical DIY goods in this Anglophone-driven crafting of an alternative fan economy, as well as an implicit exchange of goods in online spaces.

Lastly, Carter outlines the transgression of rules and regulations in textual production as the last measurement by which we can declare an alternate fan economy exists. Circumvention

(read: rule-breaking) is an absolute key ingredient as to why alternate fan economies are an Anglophone convention being reperformed in this new ritual of alternate fan economies. Anglophone superstructures that work in values of "entrepreneurship" and "pioneering" wherein "rules are meant to broken" to succeed, does not seem like a provocative prompt to DIY fans producing texts for free exchange, or even to fans produce texts for commercial gain. However, in a collectivist society where Confucian hierarchy and society expect, some may say command, an adherence to society's unwritten and written rules, such an alternative economy from fans may not have the room or cultural freedom to foment on its own or survive without the intervention or injection of Anglophone, pioneering or DIY capitalism. The objects produced within the materiality of K-Pop fandom are either for free among fans gifting items to one another or are likely still priced at lower price points than official merchandise—on sales platforms. Hellekson (2009) contends that while yes, some fans may profit from the fandom community shifting gift to commercial gain, fandoms at a whole tend not to legitimize this practice as being a part of the fandom, rather, these particularly entrepreneurial fans are only "accepted" as fans doing business when the profiting is "initiated by and embedded within the fandom in question" (26). However, when the fan intention appears more commercial than authentic, then the shop (whether online or in person) is relegated to a business first, fan second. While this may not necessarily affect sales, a sense of community identity is at stake. In the realm of K-Pop, entrepreneurial fans may keep their fan mantle when their products particularly appear to show skill in craft, aligning with Hills (2013a) observations on fan-made quality and skill. Objects that would likely never be a part of the official merchandise line up – for instance turning fan art into stickers and pins – appear to have the blessing of fellow K-Pop fans. Fan art is likely never to be co-opted by "official" producers; therefore, it is fair – as the creator of that

piece of art who put skillful time to craft it – to transform it commercially in the ways the fan sees appropriate. Some commercial objects are also texts that perhaps are taboo in official channels such as candles meant to imagine the "scent" of the idol or jewelry adorned with idols' names, initials, or song titles.

All of these pieces readily create an economy that, Carter details, must be parallel to the "official" or traditional economies and yet exist in a sort of "grey market." (2018). In closing the "transgressive" nature of these DIY texts, fan producers working in this space must be cautious of various copyright or trademark laws, especially if profiting from their products monetarily. Platforms, such as Etsy, are notorious for monitoring and policing products that violates or infringes copyright in any way, often resulting in the pulling of the product from the platform (Etsy, 2023). Fan fiction writers or vidders also acknowledge the grey space their works may exist in in the circulation of their texts, often posting "disclaimers" regarding the ownership of the official text and not claiming ownership of the elements adapted from the official text (Hellekson 2009). Just by using the likeness, logos, or branding of a group in their "fan merch," fans may be explicitly violating such laws, so many producers often will use more implicit details on their products such as song quotes and allusion imagery rather than strict likenesses or logos. However, this does not necessarily stop users from appropriating official material or fans from purchasing these texts either. Nor does the murky grey-ness of using likenesses or adapting copyrighted photos stop fans from DIY-ing photo cards that are circulated as freebies at official events.

Fulfilling Carter's tripartite analysis of an alternate fan economy, this new Anglophone ritual of fan textual production in the form of DIY freebies, unofficial merchandise channels, and online textual creation reveals a true Anglophone reperformance of K-Pop fandom. Propagating

and existing outside of Korean domestic fandoms but seen very much as an essential element of their propriospect of what K-Pop fandom is, this alternate fan economy existing in the circles of Anglophone ritual point to a transcultural re-appropriation of idols. When fans themselves craft, produce, and disseminate DIY photocards or sell them at prices that are less than that of an album, it democratizes access to fans who cannot necessarily contribute capital nor consume in ways the culture mandates, like interviewee Annie, and also allows fans to commercially succeed on the basis of Anglophone capitalism while simultaneously claiming membership in the community. The Korean domestic fans' unfamiliarity with the practice, one so regularly executed at dozens of concerts, conventions, and concert movie screenings I had attended from 2019 to 2023 in the United States and Canada, suggests just how materiality in ritual is glocalized, particularly with those sexy Yeosang photocards.

"How Do I Summon the K-Pop Stans": K-Pop's Metric Culture and Ritual Translated to Anglophone Activism in the United States

K-Pop fandoms often engage in rituals beyond material aspects, with Anglophone fans adopting a key metric-based ritual common in Korean fandoms and society outside of traditional K-Pop spaces. On June 4th, 2020, the Trump Presidential Campaign's social media strategy seemed simple; post a call for birthday wishes for President Trump's 74th birthday and watch the messages come in en masse on social media. Activists, celebrities, and the average social media user alike answered that call online…with less than appreciative messages. Twitter user (the platform had yet to undergo its name change) DigiAtlas (2020) felt a more significant response was needed and quote retweeted, "How do I summon the K-Pop Stans?...#Jungkook…Did I do

it." The plea was heard. "we got your message," user @DIONYSAN (2020) replied solemnly. @DigiAtlas and @DIONYSAN's interchange was a small vignette of a much larger movement that began the week prior during nationwide Black Lives Matter protests in the United States.

When various police departments around the country solicited footage and images of supposed illegal activity – a veiled hunt for protestors engaging in antiracist activism – Anglophone K-Pop fans rapidly organized and mobilized to spam the police departments with thousands of "fan cams," performance videos/clips of K-Pop performers, until submission portals crashed. Fans continued their online campaign, similarly "hi-jacking" controversial, right-wing, conservative hashtags like #whitelivesmatter and #alllivesmatter. Later, K-Pop Stans inflated attendance at a Trump campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma to have only a handful of real Trump supporters attend while most seats booked were left empty. Media outlets first praised K-Pop fans for their activism, including BTS's fan-led "Match a Million" fundraising campaign.[2] Outlets *then* began exploring how this activism came to be, *then* engaged in conversations with fans of color about their experiences in a space typically volatile toward issues of race (Ohlheiser 2020a, Ohlheiser 2020b, Lofgren 2020, Elba 2020, Tiffany 2020). While the editorial narrative of K-Pop Stan activism diversified in the weeks after initial coverage, media failed to understand K-Pop fan *culture* as an entity itself and as an extension of Korean culture. The metrics-driven, mass organization of many of these protests were a direct product of a Korean domestic fandom culture that exists in a deeply competitive, metrics driven society. The ritual of metrics, therefore, was a product that Anglophone fandoms transformed and reperformed anew in the realm of politics and protest as exhibited in the Black Lives Matter movement.

In another ritualist form, fans display remarkable dedication by closely tracking, replaying, and increasing views on music videos. They often stream singles repeatedly on both international and Korean platforms and energetically vote and campaign for their favorite groups during weekly music programs and year-end award ceremonies. Competition among idols is fierce, perhaps not driven by the idols themselves, but perpetuated by fandoms to make their group "the best." Culture critic Lee Moon-won, as quoted by writer Euny Hong (2014), asserts that despite the fact Korea's 50-million-person population pales in comparison to the United States' 300 million, the number of pop music artists is roughly the same. In a highly saturated market, and in a culture of extreme competition, the resulting culture of idol promotion is as aggressive as the industry itself. In order to understand just how this particular ritual has been performed and reperformed in fandoms like it was during the BLM protests in the summer of 2020 by Anglophone fans, we must first understand the Korean traditional foundation for metric culture.

Confucianism & K-Pop, A Never-Ending Story: Weekly Music Shows, Streaming Charts, and Philanthropic Campaigns

Once again, Confucianism's deep cultural foothold in Korean history and society appears in K-Pop fandom. As discussed earlier in the Korean history and cultural introduction of this work, Confucianism, and more notably Confucian capitalism, places an extreme societal emphasis on high achieving performance, but when this cultural ideology mixes with other traditional elements of collectivism found in Korean history, it creates a perfect storm wherein "it takes a village" to reach success. A prominent Buddhist principle that persisted through Confucianism's cultural influence on the Korean peninsula was sangha. In Buddhist Korea, sangha represented a collective ethos of resilience and mutual assistance among agrarian peasant communities, where individuals frequently collaborated to fulfill landowner tax obligations and

address labor needs within their neighborhoods. In a Confucian Korea, sangha planted a collective mindset that proved foundational to a societal-wide mobilization to recover from Japanese occupation (Youna Kim 2020, Hwang 2017). Competition aside, the marriage of Buddhist sangha and Confucian morality culminate in the almost untranslatable Korean phenomenon of jeong.

Jeong describes the Korean philosophy of togetherness, relationships, loyalty, and collectivism, something I have personally seen manifested in diasporic communities in Los Angeles and in my own family home. While other East Asian languages may have terms that correspond denotatively, these cross-cultural words do not fully express the profound interconnectedness that lies at the heart of Korean society. Jeong appears in all aspects of modern Korean life; reflected in the language, possession is expressed in collective plurality. For example, one would refer to their father not as “my father” but as “our father,” not “my home” but “our home.” Koreans approximate closeness with familial titles, calling older friends, “brother” or “sister” or family friends “aunt” or “uncle”. As an elder, one automatically becomes “grandmother” or “grandfather” regardless of true familiarity.

Domestic K-Pop fandoms blend jeong, sangha, and Confucian meritocracy within metric-based rituals. One such campaign for commercial success occurs in the context of weekly music shows. Airing on Korea’s major TV networks, these weekly programs follow a format similar to MTV’s “Total Request Live!” Each week, groups appear to promote and perform their newest singles. Fans participate by voting, streaming songs, and watching performance videos, all of which are counted with different weightings to determine that week’s winner. With five or more of these shows on different television networks running concurrently, it would seem the odds of every group winning something were quite high. However, with the sheer numbers of idol

groups and soloists operating, many artists simultaneously release singles, and only a handful of exceptional groups observe multiple wins across shows or across weeks. Artists may go years after debut before winning just one of these shows; some never win at all. The expectation of quick output on the part of the idol is high as well, with new music dropping as frequently as every two to three months; so exceptional groups may monopolize these shows with consistent releases.

Guided by the principle of sangha, which emphasizes collaborative effort toward achieving shared goals—here, interpreted as market success—and incorporating elements of Confucian competition, fan communities organize extensive streaming, viewing, and purchasing initiatives to enhance the performance metrics of idol groups. Largely organized by "lead" or "head" fans called "webmas," a shorthand for webmasters (Kang, 2016), these campaigns dictate metric goals such as "x million views on YouTube in 24 hours" or "x million streams on Spotify in the first week." CampaignzXZ details are often packaged in visually appealing graphics and disseminated on these large fan sites and all throughout social media channels. A trickle-down communication method is quickly adopted, as the webmas begin the information exchange and fans dutifully share systematically. In yet another personification of Confucian ideologies, accepting and then enacting webmas' instruction perpetuates a mutual understanding of hierarchy, duty, and community.

The Americanization of Anti-Racism, Postcolonial Guilt, and Black Lives Matter

Fan activism as promulgated by a celebrity is neither new nor unique to K-Pop fandom. Henry Jenkins (2012) utilizes the term "cultural citizenship" to refer to fans using their knowledge of media to engage in political activities, effectively poaching texts and using those same skills to

organize for social justice. Melissa Brough and Sangita Shresthova (2012) further argue that activism is inherently a part of fandom, as an extension of performative productivity. Asian studies researcher Kimery Lynch (2021) recognizes that certain fandoms predate BTS ARMY's efforts in activism and that plenty of fans operates outside of K-Pop scenes in similarly justice-motivated ways. However, Lynch argues that domestic K-Pop fandom's distinctive tradition of continual fan organization to execute charity projects, particularly in the name of BTS in her study, was likely the reasoning factor by which particular fandoms became involved in the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 (2021:5). Perhaps, though, the specific political and activists' mobilization in Anglophone fandoms prior to BTS provided the pathway by which Anglophone K-Pop fans saw their metric efforts in music shows and comeback campaigns, philanthropic campaigns, and political activism converge together. What makes the deployment of metric ritual in the BLM protests a new ritual phenomenon on the part of Anglophone fans was not in the mobilization of the fandom or the organization to execute a particular goal for the idols but rather to engage the fandom in what was perceived as, a political cause. And not just any political cause, but one that dealt with issues of racism, vestiges of such colonial power structures being still-present in many Anglophone cultural superstructures and histories.

While a nuanced and detailed overview of systemic racism in multi-ethnic, and often Anglophone, countries and societies is outside the scope of this study, medievalist Jonathan Hsy (2021) introduces an interesting observation about the English language and "English history" (history of the medieval, European world) as it originates from a socio-historic prospective which may explain why these power/race relations is prevalent in Anglophone societies: Hsy contends that the "medieval-past," most often characterized as a European, Christian past, is inherently fraught with systems of colonialism, white supremacy, and racist violence that still

manifest to today (2021: 4). Hsy names the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virigina in 2017 as a primary example of how these foundational histories of colonialism and ethnic struggle manifest in modern race relations. In the case of Charlottesville, rallyers even directly deployed iconography associate to the Knights Templar in their "quest" for freedom, perpetuating a falsity that the medieval world was exclusively white, European, and Christian. To simplify Hsy's argument on medieval foundations of race relations in the modern era, in today's multi-ethnic societies composed of diasporas, there has always been and there will also continue to be an attempt at erasure of the ethnic voice, and societies that stem from European colonialism seem to have a particular monopoly on colonial race hierarchy (Hsy, 2021).

Alastair Bonnett (2006) offers additional applicable insights to how race, racism, transnationalism, and American cultural superstructures converge. The "Americanisation of anti-racism," as Bonnett titles his research and paradigmatic race structure, refers to the idea that anti-racism was built as an American call-to-arms to legitimize and give authority to American actions on a global stage or domestically at home (2006:1098). The American struggle to fight racism is cast as a "valiant" battle story, one of the powerful helping the weak or the weak working side by side to overcome. To apply this superstructural narrative to Anglophone K-Pop fandoms, I borrow from Shelby Steele's concept of White Guilt (1990) to reflect a new, updated form of "the white man's burden" paradigm: postcolonial guilt. As described in previous chapters in regards to Anglophone gatekeepers policing idol bodies, postcolonial guilt can also be used to describe the phenomenon that occurred during the BLM protests.

In the execution of the "snitch cam" spamming during the aforementioned protests, Anglophone fans reappropriated and reperformed the ritual of metric campaigning, a ritual with roots in Korean traditional society and culture. In this particular instance, Anglophone fans

appear to have mobilized and were motivated at least in part by postcolonial guilt, understanding that with their ritualistic mobilization tools at hand, they could make a difference. Continuously taught to dismantle racism and generally being taught that racism is a societal evil, Anglophone K-Pop fans in America took the police state as a formidable cause to fight and campaign against. Idols in Korea, with the exception of those who spoke out during the BLM protests online, are notoriously apolitical, seen as entities that should not engage in politics. Therefore, Korean domestic fans do not engage in political issues either in most instances (the notable exception being K-Pop fans adapting popular K-Pop songs in protests, as discussed below) the reperformance of metric culture rituals proved to open the door to Anglophone fans protesting different political issues that affected the country.

It can be argued that these moments of fan activism are not necessarily a translation of ritual, nor can they be measured by performance or behavior as it takes place in the privacy of one's computer space and can be executed anonymously. Some may argue that, in the case of the BLM protests, the usurpation of K-Pop metric's culture and the deployment of regular practice within the fandom was a call to action for a particular political scenario. Fan practice online can still be considered performed ritual as it still crafts community despite physically taking place in "private." Even if the action is anonymous, it takes place within the online spaces that constitute fandom spaces, spaces in which other routine rituals take place, such as the aforementioned streaming parties and visibility campaigns. Thus, they are measurable, qualifiable, and usable data points of when and how metric culture and ritual are translated into fan activism distinctive to the glocal and global context.

To what extent, then, can I argue that this case study of BLM-specific protests is a permanent translation of ritual and not a simple appropriation of the culture for a targeted,

political event? During the same time frame as the protests for BLM, and in the years since, the fandom's metric and protest culture has been translated and harnessed for more causes than that of these specific protests. In fact, the earlier reference to President Trump's birthday messages on social media as well as his political rally in 2020 were instances of collective action against a political figure utilizing the ritualized skills and organization found within K-Pop that was not directly related to the BLM protests. While there may be some cross over between political demographic between those who did engage in BLM protests and those who obstructed President Trump's rally, we must bear in mind that these are not conflated incidents, but rather distinct, multiple situations where fandom practice and behavior, as observable through translated ritual, manifested in political action.

However, this is distinct from using K-Pop, as musical text, in political arenas. This *is* a practice with roots in Korean history and society, wherein protesters would adapt song lyrics and perform them in support of or in protest against certain political figures and government legislators. Observed throughout Korean history in the form of arirang[12] and later minjung gayo.[13] during recent times of political upheaval, music and specifically K-Pop discographies, are adapted to highlight messages of justice, rights, and activism. This includes during the impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye for allegations of corruption (Kirk, 2017) and in protest against former President Yoon Suk Yeol (The Guardian, 2025) for constitutional violations. Protest in of itself is also not foreign in K-Pop fan spaces, where domestic fandoms are known to protest agencies to make their discontent heard. However, what is not a regular part

[12] Arirang describes popular songs of resistance as observed during Japanese Imperial Rules from 1910-1945. In recent years, the term has evolved to mean nationalistic, popular music (Howard, 2006).
[13] Minjung Gayo literally translates to "people's songs" and refers to protest songs written and performance by student protestors, activists, and grassroots organizers during the democratization movement era from 1960-1980s (Lee, 2023).

of protest habitus in Korea is the use of K-Pop ritual forms as a key tool in grassroots' arsenals as a means of protest. The digital mobilization of fans is reserved for online campaigns to boost streaming numbers and artist visibility or to celebrate an artist with philanthropic campaigns to raise money for altruistic endeavors such as planting trees for an idol's debut anniversary or birthday.

Conclusion

While performance can be characterized by the public nature of behavior, I argue that in the context of this chapter, they are one in the same. As online spaces blur the boundary of what actions take place in private or in public, performing the role of the fan is an expression of one's identity located in both fan subcultural community and habitus, but also can spill into parts of a fans' everydayness – fan habitus and everyday habitus can, arguably, be synonymous with one another, as I cannot discern where the line between a fan's reality and an individual's reality starts and stops. With that said, a measure of performance and behavior is how Anglophone fans interact with and execute certain fan rituals that historically took place in Korean domestic fandoms.

Rituals are regular, repeated performances of prescribed behavior that take place within a culture or a subculture. When these performances are altered and performed differently, it results in an observable, tangible permutation of ritual. Co-opting ritual for a purpose that is quite outside of its normal aim, as was true in the case of the BLM protests in North America, can also account as a performance of ritual that fits into the cultural habitus of where the ritual is being

relocated. It could be argued that the deployment of a ritual for a one-off call to action may not actually account to a true, glocalized permutation of the ritual itself into another culture. One of the key concepts here for ritual is the habitual and repeated nature of the performance or practices, thus this permutation would have to occur repeatedly for a ritual to truly be considered transformed. In the years since 2020, claiming K-Pop's metric culture into the discourses of American politics proved not an isolated event, as global audiences have observed the fandom's ability to mobilize on a grassroots level, deploying various aspects of fan practice being used in a number of political pursuits, including doxxing President Donald Trump's political rallies. In some instances, like in the current case of unrest in the Middle East, fan mobilization is not entirely successful in dictating the idol's response or contributing to the overall cause, however.

In circling back towards cultural appropriation and measuring if these adaptations of ritual constitute said appropriation, illustrates a glocalized reperformance, or both, I reenforce that the unfamiliarity of the glocalized product elicits more fear and hesitation on the part of the domestic fandom rather than offense. This is evidenced by the Anglophone fandoms' reperformance of materiality as I observed in Seoul. While collecting photocards and other parts of material culture is very much a practice derived from Korean domestic fandoms, the subversion of traditional capitalist means of celebration and fan engagement via DIY practices is an unfamiliar practice to many domestic Korean fans. Thus, when Anglophone fans either create DIY freebies or build alternate fan economies for material culture, domestic fans are unfamiliar or even suspicious of the newly formed, glocalized ritual. Alternate fan economies are very much part of the habits of many Anglophone cultures, with roots deep in the DIY landscapes of other music genres and subcultures, like Punk. This new ritual is emerging as very much a localized

understanding of how to interact with K-Pop materiality in Anglophone fandoms, illustrating another aspect of fandom reperformance, this time through ritual and ritualistic understanding.

“Sharon’s Interlude”: Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation, and K-Pop as Racial Transitional Object

“Sometimes I don't know if I'm really walking

If I ceaselessly run towards the end of the tunnel

***What else would there be?...”* SUGA in “Suga’s Interlude” (Halsey, 2020)**

It is not uncommon in K-Pop discographies for a song to break up the flow of the track list, offering a song that is either a bit more melodic or ballad-like. Adapting this characteristic in her 2020 album, “Manic,” American pop star, Halsey, invited BTS member, SUGA, to collaborate on such an interlude. Aptly titled “SUGA’s Interlude,” the song describes the exhausting pursuit of fame, fortune, and craft with SUGA lamenting, “But never forget the stars you hope for only appear in the dark.” Halsey replies, “I been trying all my life -- to separate the time -- in between the having it all, and giving it up.” (Halsey, 2020). Paralleling this song, my own interlude of racial reckoning and crisis of identity is captured in this scholastic interlude to expound on two significant gaps in literature as it pertains to Hallyu scholarship in particular: researcher positionality and the Korean diaspora. This autoethnographic piece describes how I, in the search for research as sparked by my positionality in life and identity even outside of academia, came to a jarring realization that the privilege my Koreanness afforded me in non-Korean spaces was easily mitigated in Korean domestic spaces. While unlike the discussions of Anglophone K-Pop fandom reperforming the role of the fan as adapted from domestic Korean audiences, this interlude discusses the in-betweeners whose propriospects do not fit neatly into either group. Our performances inherently incorporate one and the other, and much like our identities, cannot be extrapolated from one or the other. The diaspora has feet in both worlds, perhaps more sensitive

to questions of cultural appropriation as we live through the hegemonic systems that make such analysis so. This interlude discusses a very specific, understudied subsection of the Anglophone fandom, and how we interpret, shape, and globalize the roles and behaviors of the fandom, and how in turn, it shapes us.

As discussed in the methodology of this thesis, this interlude, serves as a small insight into my researcher identity, discussing how my positionality not only informed my work and gave me access in various ways to field work sites and participants, but also deeply affected me while conducting research. In one of the more autoethnographic turns in my research, the research topic of this chapter had me reflecting on the "how" and "why" of research where my identity intersected with it. Researcher positionality is seldom discussed among Hallyu researchers (see Kong-Perring, 2026; see Appendix K) and is not often used as a point of discussion when framing how and why a researcher came to these conclusions. Rarely is the work autoethnographic, and when researcher identity is included in the methodology or findings of many Hallyu scholars work, it is leveraged as a fan identity or possibly even gender, in some cases. Racial identity, least of all intersectional identities, are not transparently offered in Hallyu studies, rather authors rely on their Koreanness and their Korean names to afford a sense of legitimacy in their work, rather than explore how their Koreanness informs their work.

Second, this interlude also offers some research and work into an incredibly under-researched demographic in K-Pop fandoms, or even Hallyu fandoms: Korean diaspora. When discussing "Koreans" in Hallyu work, this often refers to consumers that reside in Korea, as well as are ethnically Korean, while "international" or "global" fans monolithically refer to fans not in Korea. However, there is little inclusion of Korean-Americans, British Koreans, or other members of the diaspora who have a hard time identifying as solely Korean, or solely

international. In fact, this seems to be a critique of larger Asian area studies as I personally witnessed. At the 2023 Association of Asian Studies in Asia conference in Daegu, South Korea, a discussion session on underrepresented aspects of Asian studies grew relatively heated. Members of different area studies, like South Asian studies and Oceanic studies, which often get treated "second-rate" from East Asian studies or Sino-studies, pointed out blatant hierarchies in academic privilege. One discussant quickly brought up members of the Asian diaspora as well, as a population that is often ignored or discarded in Asian studies. This was an observation that deeply resonated with me, as I never truly felt welcomed in Asian studies, but as quickly as it was offered in the discussion space, it was forgotten. Ironically, I originally presented this chapter on diasporic experience at that conference, and while met with relative positivity at my attempt to bring an autoethnographic voice to Asian diaspora as situated in K-Pop fandom, it was not the most popular of papers by any means. Therefore, while this chapter may feel largely out of place for the rest of my thesis discussing transcultural, glocalized K-Pop fandoms, product, and practice, the following work explores how said transcultural glocalization affects Asian diasporic populations through a combination of textual analysis of diasporic peoples, interview with a Chinese-American transnational adoptee fan of K-Pop, and autoethnographic reflection through the lens of the psychologic framework, racial melancholia and racial disassociation.

What Young Adult Literature Teaches Us About Racial Identity and Racial Melancholia in America

David Yoon's 2020 young adult novel *Frankly in Love* hits all the best young romance tropes a reader wants when reading a story of high school crushes and contract romances. The slightly dopey, yet equally charming male lead character, Frank Li, finally takes the plunge and asks the girl of his dreams, Brit Means, out. But he and Brit are from different worlds—he's the child of

Korean immigrants, she the daughter of a White-American family. So, to avoid hassle and detection, Frank contracts with family-friend and fellow Korean American, Joy Song, to engage in a fake romance to throw his family off the scent of his illicit relationship with Britt. As one may expect when three people of varying levels of attraction to one another end up in a plot of romance, a love triangle ensues and—spoiler alert—Frank and Joy emerge as the winning couple.

However, embedded throughout the story of this young adult novel, a narrative of the second-generation Korean American experience unfolds. Told in first person point of view, Frank's stream of consciousness is consistently punctuated with observations and negotiations of his Koreanness especially foiled against the well-meaning naiveté of Britt Means and her privileged belonging in America's white majority, as well as against other Korean Americans who are able to more seamlessly "electric-slide between cultures while being perfectly confident in identifying as Korean first, American second" (Yoon 2020: 238). Often, even more so than encountering White Americans who exoticize Frank, his deepest introspections on his "in-between" identity come when interacting with others of Korean descent. Notwithstanding, Frank also reflects on his feelings when Britt gushes about how fun it is to be the only white person in a Korean space like a Korean grocery store or restaurant. He observes that when people make comments like that it is often because they have not had to live their lives as a constant foreign other in perpetual conflict with themselves. Frank's sentiments of lack of belonging can be articulated as both existing in an "in-between" space of his two cultures as well as a "no space," a feeling of never having had a space in the first space and perhaps feeling like he never will find a space ever.

Via his teenage character of Frank Li, author David Yoon describes a socio-cultural phenomenon not dissimilar to that of racial melancholia, a theoretical framework rooted in the psychology and minority studies fields but with salient articulations applicable to the study of Asian diasporic populations across disciplines. First developed by psychologists David L. Eng and Shinhee Han (2019), racial melancholia describes a pathological, underlying and unconscious "mourning without an end" on the part of Asian diasporic populations rooted in identity. Unable to fully assimilate phenotypically into white America, Asian Americans unconsciously mourn the loss of both being part of a homogenous majority where their positionalities are part of much more nuanced negotiations of belonging in a familiar cultural superstructure as well as mourning the "loss of whiteness" itself or rather mourning the inability to fully achieve whiteness—that is societal acceptance and equality. Despite adapting the norms and ideals of the heteronormative, middle class, Judeo-Christian all-American, Asian Americans have been denied whiteness, both implicitly and explicitly (Eng and Han, 2019).

But an ocean away, a soft power force born from a hybridization of global sound and aesthetics with infusions of overt Koreanness was starting a youth culture phenomenon in Korea. This wave of Korean popular culture would crash onto the shores of intra-Asian neighbors before cresting profoundly on the shores of Europe and North America. In the United States particularly, its presence coupled with the rising stardom of various Asian American Pacific Islander ("AAPI") creatives in media and a more widely publicized call for allyship in the wake of violence against AAPI communities throughout the Covid-19 pandemic (S. Lee, 2022), made the diasporic Asian voice and Asian identity one that could be part of the media mainstream. Could this increase in Asian visibility in media, then, be a potential tool in the reconciliation of

diasporic Asian Americans fans in K-Pop spaces experiencing Eng and Han's racial melancholia?

It is not unusual to hear from fans of Asian media that they found a home in their engagement. Participating in fandom is synonymous with opting into a chosen community and despite the absence of cultural proximity or cultural discount (Ganghariya and Kanozia, 2020), global audiences are engaging with Asian faces, bodies, and cultures. K-Pop fandoms are characteristically highly participatory, parasocial, and oriented around visibility and presence in fandom communities (Elving-Hwang, 2018), and while a breadth of, particularly Hallyu-focused, scholarship fixates on K-Pop fandoms in silos of global geographies wherein interactions are likened as 1:1 national transactions or transmissions—think Southeast Asian fans of K-Pop in Southeast Asia (Nugroho, 2014), or Latin American fans of K-Pop in Latin America (Choi, 2015)—those who exist in the "in-between" or the "no-space" are either ignored or erased as their diasporic identity is folded into the physical boundaries of geography. This is particularly exemplified in Kyong Yoon's (2017) research of Canadian fans' "lived experiences" engaging with K-Pop. Though the focus was on how Canadians interacted with K-Pop texts, Yoon's data collection relies on recent Asian-immigrant participants who may not rely on western paradigms of fan behavior and are more familiar with K-Pop fan culture as a "norm" than a learned embodied experience. Because of their physical supplantation to Canada, Yoon assumes them to identify with their now-Canadian geography with no intersections with their Asianness. This slip in trajectory of identity reveals a clear gap in scholarship when exploring Hallyu's globalization, its fandoms, and its relevance outside of commercial export. Though global in nature, previous scholarship often still speaks to how K-Pop effects the Global North by painting a picture of these fans in a hegemonic white space engaging with Koreanness and Asianness, or in the very

least, doing very little to clarify who these fans are under the guise of a mutually agreed upon "colorblindness" (Jenkins, 2014).

Essentially, how has the Global South's massive influence via K-Pop spoken to those who exist in the between, particularly Asian Americans and does that affect how we translate fandom practices from one culture to the other as we exist in and through both groups? Introducing scholarship on how diasporic identities are affected by K-Pop and K-Pop fandom through a combination of textual analysis of memoir, podcast/vlogs of Asian American creators, case studies of Asian American informants, and autoethnographic reflections analyzed through Eng and Han's (2018) framework of racial melancholia and transitional object and space theory, I negotiate where people like me fit into my own research. First addressing racial theories of Asian diaspora and then exploring Eng and Han's development of racial melancholia, I interrogate the effectiveness of K-Pop as either transitional and reparative space/object or as a tool of melancholic entrenchment. Through this analysis, I postulate how scholarship can place diasporic Koreans/diasporic Asians as fans in the greater "fanscape" of Hallyu and in their fandom reperformances

Asian American Communities and Racial Melancholia

While the presence of Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants in the Americas dates as far back as the 16th, 17th , and 18th centuries, these narratives are often overshadowed by the massive waves of immigration and diasporic settlement of communities in the 20th century (i.e. "Chinatown," "Little Tokyo," "Koreatown"); and even then, memory of pre-1964 Civil Rights racial structures in America wherein Asian immigrants and Asian Americans were particularly derided are

forgotten in favor of a cultural amnesia that positions those of Asian descent as the model minority as juxtaposed against, primarily, Black Americans (Chan, 1991; Jo 2017; Kang, 2021; Lee, 2022). Societal and racial frameworks of the model minority created equally unactionable yet optimistic openings for Asian diaspora to believe in their superiority over other ethnic minorities. This in turn creates a perceived stratification of minorities where Asian immigrants feel justified in their entitlement to whiteness more than other ethnic groups; termed the "Marginal Man," this subsection of Asian immigrant psyche represents a "split subject" who simultaneously understands and subscribes to the ideals of assimilation, criticizing those who do not, but with the inherent understanding of his otherness (Eng and Han 2018)—though his otherness is of course not as problematic as others' otherness. In a May 2023 paper, the Pew Research Center quantified that 1 in 4 Korean American adults have, at some point in their lives, hidden their heritage from a non-Asian person, while 51% of the Asian diaspora in America identify themselves ethnically in conjunction of the moniker "American" (I.e. Korean American, Chinese American) rather than with the ethnicity alone (Ruiz et al., 2023). This indicates a level of subliminal shame in highlighting Koreanness to an extent, while also emphasizing a level of Americanness that indicates assimilative identity.

Here, cultural amnesia of racial memory and the Marginal Man articulate different sides of the same die. Asian Americans are perpetually foreign in ways other ethnic minority groups in America are not through proximity to native languages, physical characteristics, and assumed cultural differences, but even then, Asian Americans have also been perceived as "next in line" to be white; this oxymoronic conundrum feeds into an inexplicable feeling of loss that Asian Americans will never achieve full American acceptance (Kang, 2021). This is only entrenched further in the second generation of diasporic populations who are even more removed from their

ethnic “homeland” but are still equally removed from achieving assimilation and whiteness. Here, the second generation may be less tied to or familiar with their cultural origins like their parents, who grew up immersed in these societies, and may not have the same language ability either. Though they identify as American first, reminders from American society constantly re-enforce this particular second generational brand of the Marginal Man. And while this is not the case for every Asian American, an example that was beautifully written by David Yoon in his “Super-Korean” observations of those who are able to switch through cultures, or at least are comfortable in choosing either their Asianness or Americanness first in their hierarchy of identity, Cathy Park Hong (2020) writes, “in the popular imagination, Asian Americans inhabit a vague purgatorial status.” Eng and Han developed the psychological theory of racial melancholia through their work as therapists for diasporic Asian youths, and in so doing, understood the throughlines and commonalities that dominated Asian American stories though the particulars of each case study they presented varied. A common theme to emerge from Eng and Han’s case studies was hatred of identity. The transformation of Asianness, whether out of self-hatred or hatred toward family, from a familiar pole in one’s life to something that presented otherness created a “lost object” to Eng and Han’s patients (2018: 64).

Drawing from Melanie Klein’s work on object relations (1940), Eng and Han theorize the “good” and “bad” object in racial terms. The “bad” object fuels a racial self-hatred while the “good” racial object could aid in reconciliation. Racial self-hatred, Cathy Hong contends, stems from Asian Americans viewing themselves through the lens of “the whites” (2020: 9). Hong’s illustrations of self-hatred and her further musings on shame—shame, she contends, allows Asian Americans to split themselves into both first and third person to recognize how “the Other sees me” (77)—live in the same ecosystem of Eng and Han’s Marginal Man. Joining together

Eng and Han's racial bad object, the Marginal Man's split consciousness, and Hong's definition of racial self-hatred, I posit that the racial bad object could also be the self or parts of the self that exemplify the characteristics that "reads" Asian.

K-Pop (And Koreanness) As Racial "Bad" Object and Triangulating the Binary

In returning to my June 2022 experience in Brooklyn, New York, discussed in Chapter Three , where my Koreanness was seen as desirable privilege (and prompted another to proudly proclaim her Koreanness), I began wondering if my scholarly interest in K-Pop fandoms, and thus my attempt to re-connect with Korea, was spurred on by the fact that Korea was suddenly (it felt) cool. Was K-Pop a racial transitional object that was beginning to cure my racial melancholia and layers of racial self-hatred? As Euny Hong (2014) writes, before the popularity of K-Dramas, K-Pop, and e-sports, Korea was not an idealized paradise of good-looking men and street food like it is now. And in a broader conversation of Asian identity, "Asian Cool," and Asian representation in general, had yet to gain any traction as a trope in media. However, with novels-to-films like *Crazy, Rich Asians* (2018)*,* and *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* (2018) entering the Hollywood canon of relatable lead roles while showcasing Asian culture and people, it positioned Asianness as relevant, cool, and desirable, facilitating the expansion of Asian narratives and Asian visibility (Besana et al., 2019). Then entered BTS into the Asian chat. It was not the face of the first Korean Americans/Asian-Americans elected to office, nor the small bursts of representation from diasporic Asians on the big and little screens throughout the early 2010s that made diasporic Asians realize their communities were celebrated, but in fact the superstardom of various K-Pop groups that made diasporic East Asians feel *seen.* Suddenly,

spaces only seen by the likes of diasporic populations, like Los Angeles's Koreatown, went from a ghetto of Korean immigrants to a desirable destination to visit, live in, eat at, or drink in (Lee 2022).

Growing up, my family and I shielded our Koreanness. Whenever we traveled, especially abroad, when someone would ask us where we were from, my mother always emphasized we were American. She constantly answered these questions with a sense of definite finality, that both dissuaded most folks from asking any follow up questions and confused them. My parents also rarely spoke about Korea, both having experienced extreme loss during and after the Korean War. Korean holidays were only a whispered myth in our household, hanboks were always around the house but were rarely worn after adolescence, and Korean food was really only eaten at dinner, but if I had American friends over, Korean food was secreted away into the fridge in the garage. It was a racial shame and secrecy that I learned, and it became a part of my everyday habitus. I was also highly competitive throughout my childhood, so I treated the shunning of my Koreanness as an uncharted game. The rules were: the more I came off as very American and the more I distanced myself and looked down upon my peers who were "too Korean," the more I increased my chances of winning the assimilation game. I did everything to make myself appear more American—I joined the Girl Scouts of America in grammar school, I competed in the Miss America pageant system in high school, I joined a sorority at university...all the while I refused to re-learn the language, something that my mother did eventually realize was a great loss during my teenage years. I had concluded that my own Koreanness was the "bad object," exhibiting a racial self-hatred so profound that I wore my Marginal Man badge with pride.

My story, in its generality, is not a unique one. Though I had believed I was alone in my crusade against Koreanness, other members of Korean and Asian diasporas experienced very

similar trajectories of racial melancholia and racial dissociation. Podcaster, Vivian Yoon (2023) recounts on an episode of *California Love, K-Pop Dreaming* called "Secret Fan" that though she grew up in and around Los Angeles's Koreatown, she was "different from the other kids in K-Town." Her father worked as a Federal Officer for the American government, something Yoon regarded as all-American and awe-inspiring and most importantly, related her more to the white children in school rather than the Asian Americans. Yoon diligently sported American clothing brands at school and listened to music that she perceived set her apart from other Koreans. Her taste in music, which at the time included the likes of Jimmy Eat World and Green Day, made Yoon feel like she was superiorly removed from other Korean Americans. However, underneath the façade of an American teenager desperate to deny her Koreannes, was also a Korean American who was secretly purchasing K-Pop music and fervently looking up Korean lyrics online, even learning hangul, the Korean alphabet to do so. This was Yoon's best kept secret until she outed herself on the podcast.

Korean American, Christina, also experienced a hunger for assimilation similar to Yoon. In *Rootless, The Podcast* (2019), she recounts a cultural code-shifting that she constantly had to execute moving from school to home. She tried to be "less Asian" at school; "I was trying to be a white kid" (ibid). Christina wanted to break the Asian stereotype, a desire that also lives in the ecosystem of the Marginal Man wherein fulfilling the Asian stereotype meant compromising Americanness and signaled failure. Christina's resistance against the Asian stereotype signaled her superiority over her Asian diasporic counterparts—she understood how to "play the game" and felt it gave her some sort of advantage if she embraced whiteness. However, as she grew into adulthood, and perhaps with the nudge of the Hallyu Wave, Christina temporarily moved to South Korea to attend university in Seoul. Christina was looking to find something, but as I will

discuss further in this interlude, Christina's experience may have aligned more with the Hallyu Wave serving as a tool of melancholic entrenchment than serving as only a racial transitional object.

In returning to Yoon's experiences, she kept her affinity for Korean popular culture a secret of all secrets during her adolescence. Terrified that her crafted Americanness would be shattered if anyone found out about her love for something as obviously Korean as K-Pop, she now realizes that her shame was very much internalized. Yoon points to the "currency" K-Pop has today that inspired her to "come out" as a K-Pop fan but also to embrace her Koreanness as something that has given her opportunities both personally and professionally. Here, K-Pop has served as a transitional object for Yoon twice over, once when she was actually listening to K-Pop in secret, where she connected with her Korean roots and identity, even learning the language on a basic level, to be able to engage with this cultural product. The second instance is in present day, where Yoon has "leaned in" to her Korean identity and reframed her fan identity as one to be proud of and celebrated.

Furthermore, YouTubers Dr. John Yoo and Dr. Jason Ki, known collectively as J Bros., assess the impact the popularity K-Pop and the Hallyu Wave has had on Koreans in a 2020 vlog. They assert that generally and especially in recent years, all Asians seem to benefit from the "K-Wave," acknowledging that even their own YouTube Channel grew out of the popularity of Korean culture exports. The vlog entitled, "Did we benefit from BTS and K-Pop," actually only briefly engages in this conversation and predominantly serves as a vlog of Yoo and Ki's New York City trip. However, knowing the "currency," as Yoon termed it, of K-Pop at this moment, Yoo and Ki titled their video in this way to attract viewers. Yoon also does not shy away from the benefits she received as a diasporic Korean at a time when Hallyu is profoundly dominating

international media. She attributes her ability to host a podcast about her life as a Korean American to K-Pop, plainly linking her success to that of the K-Wave (2023). These influencer case studies sit at the intersection of Korean identity and media-produced norms, operating within a subculture of fandom in which diasporic identity is neither fully Korean nor entirely Anglophone. At the same time, the above instances reveal how diasporic identity is performed and read within Anglophone fan cultures both externally for audiences as well as negotiated internally by members of the media that engage with Korean media. They demonstrate that Koreanness itself can function as a performative credit that legitimizes fan authority and visibility and thus is a way that this subsection of Anglophone fandom, diasporic Koreans and Asians, reperform the role of the fan. Their Asianness allows them to perform with perceived authenticity, sitting them in an unspoken hierarchy. In this way, K-Pop operates as a good racial transitional object, however, not without the potential to turn to bad racial transitional object when confronted in different contexts.

Like Yoon, I felt like distancing myself from popular Korean artifacts like K-Pop, K-Dramas, and even the growing popularity of street foods like bulgogi tacos set me apart from other diasporic Koreans. I had deemed them “too Korean,” an error of identity that alienated them from true Americanness. During this time, K-Culture texts still very much existed in a niche space only occupied by diasporic Koreans with the occasional transcultural journeyman/woman. This was the era, as Yoon highlighted, when lyrics online were only in Korean, and much more difficult to even find, so it really took an effort to engage with the text. I did not understand why Korean Americans would negate their Americanness in this way, but what I could not understand at the time was that an engagement in one did not necessarily equate to forsaking the other.

K-Pop As Racial Transitional Object: The Case of Evangaline

K-Pop's (and notably BTS's) notoriety made the Asian body and face attractive to the western media it had come to dominate. This adoration and popularity slightly opened a window of exploration for me: I began re-learning the language, I learned the meaning of many significant Korean holidays, I threw myself into Korea's history, particularly trying to understand how and why my family treated Korea how they did in our family's psyche—I was in the process of triangulating my binary of love and hate. And I was not the only one, as evidenced by interview subject, Evangaline.

Evangaline, a Chinese American transnational adoptee who was raised by Caucasian American parents from California, experienced a similar trajectory of triangulation as me, and other online content creators surveyed in this interlude. She grew up attending a Chinese immersion school where she was surrounded by "traditional" Chinese culture in an academic setting with other Chinese and Chinese American students, and though she was physically immersed in the culture, she did not feel comfortable nor was accepted in that setting. A woman in her late 20s, Evangaline was surprised when she encountered Thai-Sino-Korean K-Pop group, GOT7. A group that debuted in 2014 under JYP Entertainment and is now managed and produced by other labels upon the group's contract with JYP expiring in 2021, GOT7 is comprised of seven male members who represent a diverse set of Asian ethnicities and global nationalities. To Evangaline, the member that she was particularly curious about was Hong Kongese rapper, Jackson Wang. Wang, a former internationally competitive athlete, is notorious for his nationalist pride in China; he introduces himself as "Jackson Wang from China" and leans into his Chinese identity as exhibited by a 2020 interview on *The Late Late Show With James Corden*. In the interview, Jackson gives no indication that he is from Hong Kong, but rather continuously discusses "how they do things in China." During a segment when Corden and

Wang do a football ("soccer") shootout and Wang scores on Corden, he shouts "China!" in victory, running across the makeshift pitch in celebration (2020, 6:27).

Jackson Wang, and his group GOT7, was the first time Evangaline—who grew up in Northern California and is now based in New England—had seen (and felt) Asianness illustrated as desirable. Wang's celebration of China and his nationalistic pride was also the first time Evangaline had encountered someone with Global North media attention who so blatantly declared himself Chinese. For Evangaline, she also attempted to distance herself from Asianness, but not necessarily to be "more white" but because she felt a sense of rejection from the Chinese community due to her identity as a transnational adoptee. Evangaline explains:

> "What I came to associate with my identity really centered around the traditional markers of like the model minority myth and being like very respectful and high achieving and good at academics. And I kind of felt like I didn't identify with that quite as much… And then what was interesting for me as well as going home and being an adoptee, going home to my parents who are white American and then also, you know that like how I felt about my Asian American identity and engage with it when I was with them.
>
> And then like, yeah, being surrounded by mostly Asian Americans and then mostly white Americans… So I feel like pre K-Pop it was a lot of observations.
>
> Noticing things in general, I felt mostly like I didn't belong. Like I didn't really fit in umm or like I could maybe pass for a little bit but like it would ultimately would reveal that I'm not like 'other' Chinese people or I'm not like Chinese Chinese.
>
> So that was definitely like pre-K-Pop…I was coming out of that phase, I think feeling very ashamed and like I wasn't worthy or like that I didn't fit in with the Asian American community… And I think the other piece I drew me to them [GOT 7]

> especially, specifically connected to my Asian American identity, was that they were not all Korean. And so there was, like Jackson… Jackson Wang is like Chinese from Hong Kong."

Her sentiment was if she was not Asian enough to be considered "real Chinese" then she would embrace her Americanness, not necessarily as a composite of whiteness and assimilation but rather Americanness as defined by the Black and Latinx communities. "What I associated as being cool was being Black or Latina, because those were the groups who, like I perceived as, like they were super confident." So, for Evangaline, Jackson Wang's confident love of China, and as a man who was multi-lingual and internationally cosmopolitan, had to mean that China and Chinese folks were not as unaccepting of Evangaline as she had presupposed? She had envisioned the rejection/denial of Chinese acceptance of her as her own brand of racial, bad object, equating its exclusivity as a deterrent to engage with Chinese communities. K-Pop become a significant fulcrum point following Evangaline's employment at a secondary school wherein there was a significant body of Chinese immigrant students. These students, Evangaline says, accepted her broken Chinese language ability because they were elated just to have someone to be able to converse with, and this turning point, quickly followed by her discovery of GOT7 catalyzed a deeper introspection into her Chinese identity. As we analogized together in the interview, the Chinese students were the seeds planted in the soil while GOT7, K-Pop, and Jackson Wang were the water by which the seeds were facilitated to grow and flourish.

At this point, Evangaline re-started language study and implemented regimented independent study while seeking Asian diasporic communities; she began a YouTube Channel where she discusses her transnational adoptee experience. And she even took a step further in as

a K-Pop fan and began learning Korean as well, anticipating spending significant time in the country. Jackson Wang, and GOT7, was the racial transitional object by which Evangaline sought to demystify China, learn more about South Korea, and engage with her Asianness. California was no longer the only known variable to Evangeline, and China the great rejector; GOT7 helped facilitate a journey of identity. Evangaline did disclaim, however, that she did not swing into total patriotism for China like Wang does, but it did provide an entry point for her to really accept herself as a Chinese woman. For Evangaline and myself, K-Pop served the same transitional purposes, though our diasporic stories are different from each other. Just as Eng and Han saw Asian Americans' experiences as separate from one another yet connected by racial melancholia and transitional objects, K-Pop helped us recognize and explore our Asianness. It parallels in many ways to Yoon's closeted K-Pop fan existence as described in her podcast, but now, with the visibility of K-Pop and Hallyu artifacts in Global North media, she could declare not only her participation in K-Pop fandom, but also her Koreanness and identity as it was tied to her love of K-Pop. Though still linked, it was no longer defined by the extreme polar binaries of hate, love, acceptance or shame like it had been before for many of us.

K-Pop and Melancholic Entrenchment

In the Summer of 2022, I traveled to South Korea, planning to spend several months living there, taking multiple language courses, and experiencing Korean culture firsthand. I had only been to Korea once before several years prior, on an organized tour that visited sites across the country from Jeju to Seoul. My entire immediate family went together during that trip, and by the end of our two week stay, my mother promptly remarked at how grateful she was to be an

American and to be back in a place that was familiar to her. That comment struck me as odd at the time but has become clearer to me now: once again, she was sliding into her role as an assimilated Korean, putting her Americanness first. Now I understand that her emigration trauma barred her from dismantling her own creation of a racial bad object; even visiting Korea, a place of her youth, did nothing but entrench these two polarities of love and hate. At the time, I still existed in my own racial bad object hate, and I too was happy to leave Korea. However, my return to Korea this time around was my attempt at finding a kind of belonging. I hoped to find people who looked like me, who could sympathize and empathize with my immigration story. In some way, I imagined receiving a gold star for rejoining Korean culture and society; here I could truly experience jeong, that indescribable sense of connection deeply rooted in Korean communities, that I always rejected being born and raised in the US.

Korean diasporic repatriation is as, Ji-Yeon Jo describes that of diasporic Koreans "rehoming" to South Korea, either as returnees to country of birth or as "later-generation migrants" (Jo, 2017). My field work in Seoul in 2022 and 2023 equated to my own personal form of rehoming, seeking to pursue my racial transitional object and become a "better Korean," the same kind that David Yoon wrote could "electric-slide" between Koreanness and Americanness. I ran into a major issue however: no Korean I encountered, even if they were English speaking, seemed interested in engaging with me, a strange foreigner, a tourist in her own homeland. Like other diasporic Koreans according to Jo's work, I believed living in South Korea, as opposed to other international places, would prove an easier transition given my "ethnic state" and "affective investments" in learning everything Korean (2017: 185). As Jo argues:

> "Like foreign migrants, legacy migrants must navigate almost every aspect of life: social integration, cultural understanding, citizenship, language, and so on. Later-generation diasporic Koreans grow up in their diasporic countries of birth as minorities, and despite the optimism that may be generated by a sense of coethnicity they are yet again marginalized as minorities when they migrate to their ethnic homeland. Similarities in phenotype do not override sociocultural differences...." (Jo 2017: 185-186).

In returning to Christina's story on the *Rootless* podcast (2019), she also felt othered when she moved to South Korea. As a gyopo[14], Christina was a perpetual outsider. In fact, Christina asserts that the term gyopo in of itself represents the othering of diasporic Koreans, as it means "outsider". In a study of gyopo English teachers in Korea, researchers Jung Won Lee and Myonghee Kim found that, despite a gyopo teacher's assertion of her American identity first, her Korean phenotype disadvantaged her to find placement as an English teacher since many schools perceive English speakers as White American and nothing else. In fact Lee and Kim found that some jobs advertised wanting "American, British, Australian" etc. but not "gyopo, Asian, or Black" (2021: 91-92). At the same time, the teacher's familiarity with Korean culture did nothing to buy her any cultural currency with domestic Koreans. This provides a very real world parallel to Jo's rehoming fallacies; despite diasporic Koreans believing their proximity to Korean culture and physical attributes would make for a more seamless transition into Korean society, they often find "confusion, conflict, and contradiction" (Jo 2017: 185-186).

While Eng and Han do not articulate a temporal space after reaching a point of racial transitional object negotiation in any significant way, I explore this next stage of triangulation in

[14] A term in Korean used to describe a Korean raised abroad; its usages varies, with some believing it to be someone born in Korea and raised elsewhere, while others believe it can be applied more generally to diasporic Koreans. Translation and context is researcher's own.

a term I propose as “melancholic entrenchment,” an affective theory to describe the mourning disappointment coming out of rehoming after reconciling that the racial bad object is not necessarily bad. It speaks to a very real and emotional back sliding where positive reconciliation pauses for a moment, and elements of the racial bad object framework take root once again in the diasporic person’s mind. The racial bad object may appear in many forms—for me it meant returning to the “no space” of David Yoon’s characters in *Frankly in Love,* feeling foreign everywhere and shunning Korean popular culture texts for months on end, despite it being the subject of my doctoral study. For interviewees featured on YouTuber KExplorer’s 2022 video titled “What’s It Like Being a Korean American in Korea,” their melancholic entrenchment came from their inability to speak the language as well as problematic fetishization on the part of their non-Korean classmates about their Koreanness. One interviewee, a Korean transnational adoptee, points out that there are “hella Koreaboos” in Korea, referring to the large number of non-Koreans with an extreme affinity for Korean culture often borne from K-Pop and K-Dramas. However, he points to the fetishization of his Koreanness as both a benefit and a problem, “You can tell she listens to K-Pop...it’s working in my favor but it’s also strange and kind of funky...Do you like me or do you like Jimin?” (K Explorer 2022) referring to a vocalist of K-Pop group, BTS. His Korean phenotype serves as a substitute for the idol, a real-world consolation to Jimin for the “Koreaboo” he encounters in Korea. The two male interviewees very much identify as American more than Korean, however, and contend that their being in Korea led to a strange identity crisis that made them realize that long-term residency was not possible here. Here, Anglophone fans negotiating Koreanness through the bodies of these two diasporic, Korean Americans magnified a sense of strange isolation, a melancholic entrenchment that, at least tangentially, was facilitated by K-Pop. Interestingly enough, the top-rated comment under this

YouTube video by user Montel Kim provides a harsh critique of domestic Koreans and exhibits melancholic entrenchment:

> "As a Korean American who couldn't speak Korean, I can state without hesitation that Korea is not the place for a Korean looking person that can't speak Korean. If you look foreign and can't speak Korean, Koreans will go out of their way to teach you their ways. If you are ethnically Korean and can't speak Korean, they treat you like garbage. They just don't seem to understand that language is not something you're born with. You don't pop out speaking the language of your ancestors." (Montel Kim, 2023).

I had come to Korea with the expectation of building a community, to seek out Koreans who were willing to teach me about being Korean in a way my parents did not and would not. However, like K Explorer's video explores and Jo's diasporic repatriation work explores, I was met with disillusionment. As I reflected on K-Pop as my racial transitional object, I realized that the diasporic Koreans and different ethnic Asians I saw as idols, many of whom also struggled with the Korean language, made me believe the Korean society would accept me as Koreans accepted them. Yes, these idols clearly had elements of foreignness, but overall fans found their flubs charming and rejoiced at being able to teach them Koreanness. However, if it were not painfully obvious, I am not an idol, and many diasporic Koreans encounter similar roadblocks of cultural othering. It is a painful ritual of identity and reperformance of a specific subset of Anglophone fans that is not wholly captured in previous study of K-Pop fandom.

Conclusion and Future Research on Korean Diaspora

While I do not have the answer as to what the next psychological step may be when facing melancholic entrenchment as a result of the racial transitional object and the racially bad other, what I do understand is that K-Pop can serve as both things—a tool by which diasporic Asian people can feel a sort of bond and representation from the culture from which their ancestors came, but can also hazard into the territory of feeling othered in said culture. K-Pop still represents something that many diasporic Asians, especially in the United States felt was impossible, that celebrities—with their full Asianness and culture on display—could be relevant as well as wanted in a global media space. It has permitted Asian creators to introduce their narrative of belonging, exclusion, and otherness, opening the door for conversations of ethnicity and Americanness. Future research could incorporate larger data pulls in a quantitative way of diasporic Asians of whether or not they feel like or have experienced K-Pop as a means by which they felt permitted to engage with Asian culture. Perhaps through more surveys, larger quantities of answers could be collected. Furthermore, I acknowledge that more in-person interviews with Korean diasporic fans of K-Pop rather than relying on content creators is a methodological area to improve upon, which I seek to do in the further development on this particular subset of my research.

Asian diaspora experiences K-Pop fandom in a way that is extremely specific to their experiences and cannot be replicated by non-Asian interaction in K-Pop. These experiences of racial melancholia and the racial transition object via K-Pop are some ways in which diasporic Asian fan narratives can be extracted from the monolith of Anglophone fans and articulated with their identity as a foundational element of negotiation. Diasporic Asian fan populations, and

Asian American fans in particular, are profoundly impacted by the rising visibility of Hallyu, and this piece serves to ensure that their identity is not erased in a colorblindness of fandom literature.

"OUTRO: Cross the Line" – K-Pop Fan Performance, Abridged

"With our last step,

We dance across this line

***Into a new world."* – ENHYPEN, 2020**

The impetus for this research began with questions on Anglophone fan engagement, understanding, and most importantly reperformance of the role of the fan. To what extent, I inquired, did this permutation of performance and behavior constitute cultural appropriation, and in what situations could these reperformances be considered Anglophone glocalizations of K-Pop fandom habitus as informed by Anglophone propriospects? Moving from one culture to another, or learning from another culture, does not strip away the ideations and habitual understandings of the world that you obtained from other communities and cultures from which you are a part, and in understanding that, I argued that Anglophone fandoms exhibit largescale glocalizations that become a part of Anglophone, K-Pop fan subculture. In returning to Friedman's analysis of a flattening world where close information sharing makes us all equal in sameness, the glocalizations within the reperformance of fandom subculture on the part of Anglophone fans indicates that new mountain ranges are always in formation. While similar in height, material, and geography from other mountains in the range, these new peaks are like, yet unlike the others. New ecosystems form, different sets of flora may take root, but there may be some cross-pollination in habitat.

A Review of Transcultural Discourse

This thesis engages with the sheer multiplicity of paradigms that discusses culture, showing that no one theory may be enough to articulate what culture is, and how its practices, form and reform under different circumstances. Each culture theory I deploy describes a step in the process of which a person in K-Pop fandom learns, unlearns, and performs fandom. First, I begin with the invention of culture, a classic anthropological paradigm in which Goodenough (1971) describes our own understanding of culture as culture when confronted with a culture that is different from the one you are positioned in. Once that sentience occurs, I contend you move into the crafting of a propriospect as informed by various interactions, influences, and cultural superstructures from cultural and subcultural habitus. This propriospect is a compendium of cultural lenses in which you view the world through, no matter which culture you are currently situated. These propriospects then interact with culture, potentially altering the habitus of the culture itself, forming something anew that is neither like nor unlike the culture of which it began.

When such alterations occur based on interactions with different propriospects from different cultures, localities, and nationalities, I argue a glocalized object, text, or subculture emerges anew as well. These glocalizations are a measure of transcultural movement and offer an insightful and also inciteful provocation that pure globalization does not exist; all transcultural movement may merely be glocalizations occurring over and over again. In the case of K-Pop and its fandom, it is an example of an export globalizing, then relocalizing in a way Anglophone fans understand and take ownership up. At the time of penning this thesis, I have yet to encounter research that utilizes a wide breath of cultural theory to articulate K-Pop fandoms in particular.

In this work, I have discussed a number of gaps in Hallyu Studies research as well as media research in which an interrogation of Anglophone fandom behaviours, interactions with K-Pop fan subculture, and more nuanced understanding of who is in the fandom, doing what are all notably missing.

Summary of Findings

In my introduction, I laid a scene from YouTuber Ryan Higa's satirical video in which a group of Asian men are frustrated that the woman partygoers "love something so much they can't understand." To address the issue, the men decide they will transform themselves into K-Pop idols so that the women would begin to pay attention to them. The group of men insist they have the leg up in forming this K-Pop group, since you can learn to sing and dance, but "you can't learn to be Asian." In answering Higa and friend's first question, how fans could love something such much that they do not understand, my answer would simply be that they make it so they *can* understand. Anglophone fans bring their own propriospects into new cultural spaces; that paired with either an introductory gatekeeper or guide teaches them to understand. In the absence of that guide, however, their propriospects help them understand a culture or create meaning around something that is new and different, altering the parts of the culture to feel familiar. Addressing Higa's so-called advantage of "being Asian," it appears that Anglophone fans have learned what it takes to be Asian. By learning from Korean cultural concepts of parasociality and integrating them into their own perspectives on identity and fan practices, Anglophone fans develop a sense of expertise regarding K-Pop, idols, other fans, and Korean culture overall. These are the common findings threaded throughout the chapters of my paper; glocal Anglophone performance

is rooted in cultural superstructures infused into the very foundational behaviors of transcultural fandom as is expertise of the subject.

Starting with the Literature Review chapter of this work, I first cover the transcultural theories of which I recounted earlier in this conclusion. These theories working in tandem together ultimately work to articulate a cultural outcome that has feet in globalization and economic theories. Apart from these theories, many of which have never been applied to a Hallyu object of study, I address several gaps in Hallyu scholarship, media studies, and fandom research of which this work is attempting to fill. For Hallyu studies in particular, this work aims to dispel the idea of a monolithic K-Pop fandom, and work towards understanding a multiplicity of fandoms from different cultures exist in a fandom subculture. Research on global K-Pop fandoms and domestic K-Pop fandoms are often held in mutual exclusion, but my research positions them in the same ecosystem, informing or breaking from one another. In media and fandom studies, crafting a work that focuses on both domestic Korean fans as well as diasporic fans works towards diversifying a field of study that largely deals with hegemonic and homogenous subjects. I also posit the argument that fandom studies' "waves" of understanding fandom are not temporally exclusive to another as well. These elements can be combined within one paradigm, allowing fan studies to benefit from multiple perspectives—much like assembling a theoretical kimbap that brings everything together. Fandoms can be beautiful, productive, represent the everydayness of cultures, and warrant critical analysis all at the same time – all of which is analyzed in some way in this thesis. Treating fandom research as such does not make it dated nor antiquated, but rather the theories are refreshed in the language of today's scholarship.

The Methodology chapter of my thesis details my multi-pronged approach to information and data gathering. A complex web of methods that rivals my analysis of cultures drawn from

different disciplines, my methodology relies predominantly on observation in both physical and virtual environments, survey responses, textual analysis, and interview data. All of these methods have a fair autoethnographic impression, with autoethnography the primary method in which I process my final findings chapter on the effect K-Pop can have on diasporic audience reception and reflection, a wholly underrepresented demographic in Hallyu studies. In my methodology, I also address my own precarious and yet incredibly informative researcher positionality, understanding my researcher privilege when engaging with Anglophone fans, but also realizing the challenges associated with being a diasporic stranger in Korea.

In Chapter Three, I argue that the body provides a rich corpus of data on how Anglophone fans reperform the role of the fan, measuring that against Young's profound offense, cultural appropriation framework. One such reperformance on the part of Anglophone fandoms was taking on the role of gatekeeper and protector of Koreaness in the genre, monitoring idol bodies as an accepted new addition to genre or a neocolonial force in need of eradication. Ironically, while serving as gatekeepers within their propriospects, executing a certain postcolonial guilt, Anglophone fans themselves may fail to gatekeep their own behaviors. When bodies went missing from the translation of practice from culture to culture, there was little way in which fans could be "raised right" via observation. As such, feral fandoms emerged, subject to a small minority of gatekeepers familiar and fluent with K-Pop fandom subculture rooted in Korean domestic culture. However, this level of gatekeeping could not keep feral fandoms at bay, and this permutation can now be observed in many Anglophone fan spaces.

Chapter Four explores the body in more depth, bringing clothing and bodily adornment as a focus of fan communication. In utilizing anthropological and cultural theories to describe the importance of semiotic message crafting within communities, I contend that a particular

reperformance of bodily adornment, glocalized to Anglophone cultures, has become a staple in Anglophone fandoms. K-Pop Bounding, a term to describe this performance, encompasses a glocal, now routine practice, of fans mimicking the exaggerated styles of idols. As idols serve as a stand-in for Koreanness, K-Pop Bounding is a practice that signals a certain fluency and expertise in Korean culture itself from Anglophone fan to Anglophone fan. As such, the practice is now executed outside of fandom spaces, blurring the line between fan performance, fan behavior, and habitus. I observed K-Pop Bounding that also incorporated explicit elements of Korean traditional costume, and while it shocked me, it did not faze Anglophone fans, nor domestic Koreans fans who also observed the same bodily adornment. This returns us to Young's profound offense (2008, 2008) – that is, there was an absence of offense from domestic Koreans. This reperformance then, could not necessarily be considered appropriation in this strict sense, but once again a distinctive "quirk" of Anglophone fandoms that is continuously reperformed.

Speaking of performance, Chapter Five largely dealt with the understanding of behavior, performance, and ritual. Here I asserted the performance was but the manifestation of behavior, as I as an observing researcher could not discern what was a routine part of fan habitus or cultural habitus (behavior) from what was a public enactment of fandom practice (performance). As such, I utilized ritual as the way in which I identified other glocalizations of performance outside of the body. The rituals I chose to scrutinize included Anglophone deployment of metric culture and rituals associated with quantitatively boosting artist visibility in a political context, as well as Anglophone adaptation and glocalization of rituals pertaining to the strong material culture of K-Pop fan subcultural habitus. In the latter, fans crafted an alternate economy of material exchange, borne out of a DIY tradition, while the former, fans used K-Pop fandom's

practices and rituals of mobilization in political campaigns that were both successful and unsuccessful.

Chapter Six was my space to craft an introspective, reflexive reflection into my identity as a member of the Korean diaspora and a part of the K-Pop fandom community. While this piece of the thesis may fall outside the parameters of measuring Anglophone performance of fan ritual, behavior, or practice, it was important to me to highlight that diaspora is a part of the Anglophone fandom culture, but we will have much different lived experiences interacting with the people, places, and objects of the genre than non-Korean fans will have. I wanted to articulate that there was, not just in an in-between space, but also in-between people – we carry an identity that simultaneously allows us entry into the communities of some, while facing rejection from the other, and vice versa.

Anglophone Glocalization Versus Cultural Appropriation

In returning to Young's measure of profound offense (2005, 2008) as the means by which to articulate whether Anglophone fan reperformances of fannish behavior, ritual, and practices can be considered culturally appropriative, it appears throughout this research that Korean domestic fans, and largely Korean people who reside in Korea, do not take offense. Rather components of Korean traditional culture that manifests in fan spaces, like the hanbok or speaking snippets of the language, is a sign of a success globalization of their country's "brand." Young's profound offense details that, regardless of the act unfolding in front of the parent culture's eyes, it must be intrinsically offensive to said community, however, this does not appear to be the case. Rather,

those of ethnic Korean heritage – like myself – are subjected to an additional, layered propriospect wherein I may find the act offensive, but other Koreans in Korea would not. This does not fulfil the burden of proof based on profound offense; the mere divergence of reception exhibited here is enough to say that the act itself is not profoundly offensive as it is not universally offensive no matter place or person. My offense is drawn from autoethnographic experiences and Anglophone cultural superstructures that inform how I react in the face of non-Korean fans mimicking my ethnic heritage, not necessarily drawn by virtue of my heritage itself. Domestic fandoms rarely appear to take issue or exhibit profound offense at the presence of or reperformances and behaviors of Anglophone fandoms. While uncomfortable with how unfamiliar some of these reperformances are when situated in a domestic Korean context, it is not a reaction of offensive, cultural, appropriation. Therefore, Anglophone reperformances of Korean fandom practice, despite some of these practices being borne from Korean traditional identity, history, and culture, may not be a case of appropriative transformation, but rather points to a cultural translation more akin to a globalizing world, where products and practices from another culture coming into an established culture can observe transfusions from the already existing super culture and its foundations.

If Anglophone fandom's performance cannot be entirely considered appropriation, we must then shift to view their practice through a different lens: globalization. And while economic studies researchers have posed many analogies of how our world passes information and capital from one to another, the ways in which Anglophone fans receive K-Pop fandom, and all of its associated practices, then re-imagine them within the interpretive vernacular of fandom most familiar to them in their cultural superstructures and propriospects, amounts to an example of glocalization. It is a cycle of cultural translation, which optimally takes place in a bazaar

environment where cultures can meet, mix, and remix. This meeting of cultures does not predicate translation though, and in an age of shared media in online spaces as well as offline, these translations and reperformances are sped up to fit within the translating culture.

Future Work

While this thesis spans a wide breadth of data and research theories, there are many more avenues in which this work can continue to take form. One possible thread of research is to dig more into Korean domestic fandoms and their responses to Anglophone reperformance. While my data was gathered from participant observation, virtual ethnography, and textual analysis of video, I had little opportunity during my field work to secure interviews with Korean domestic fans. This was due, in part, to the Covid-19 pandemic which curtailed the gathering of fans in K-Pop fans in Seoul in 2022, due to an emergent variant. I also encountered a particular cultural challenge as well, in that, socially Koreans may be suspicious of new people and largely build their social circles from places like the workplace or school. Speaking to strangers on the street is less of a cultural expectation or norm. Thus, in future, deeper dives into this work, I would like to endeavor to gather more direct data from Korean domestic fandoms.

Speaking more broadly for future research, my sixth chapter outlines a population of K-Pop and Hallyu fan that is still largely underrepresented in many different disciplines: the Asian diaspora. Diaspora is sadly ignored throughout various areas of work, either folded into a dominant, monolithic category associated with Global North markets or mistakenly lumped into the experiences and sentiments of the “home country.” However, as was illustrated in my divergent opinions on the hanbok as worn by White, Anglophone fans, there is clearly a

noticeable difference between a diasporic fan and a domestic one. Whether taken up by myself or other members of the diasporic community, I hope that my current work sheds light on the complicated nuisances present within the diasporic community that deal with issues of identity, race, cultural translation, and belonging all within the context of Hallyu studies or even media studies where fandoms of color, and the concept of variable identity, is still under explored,

I am particularly interested in continuing this work to expand on reperformed rituals and behaviors. This thesis represents a small sampling of my findings in that I had to curate which Anglophone reperformances to focus on. While there were rich data sets to discuss the body, bodily adornment, material culture, and metric culture, there were entirely new threads of research I also could have pursued in answering my questions. This included analysis of sexuality, gender, orientalism, and fetishization, any and all of which could justify another thesis of this same size to fully articulate and explore. This leads to an opportunity to more fully engage with glocalized K-Pop products, not just glocalizations in fandoms, as well. As idol groups continue to diversify and push the boundaries of who and what traditionally was considered K-Pop, there is a prime opportunity for future research to interrogate what that means as a globalization or glocalization of genre.

All of these future research possibilities focus on the object of study more than the paradigms, theoretical frameworks, or methodological possibilities associated with said objects. As my deployment of framework and my use of methodology was wide-ranging and far-encompassing, I do believe there is a number of ways in which future researchers can narrow my scope or even expand if it felt appropriate. Methodologically, my future research may even lean more heavily into autoethnography in the future, as I began this project with that intention in mind but slowly realized that the data I was gathering and the analysis of which I was using to

interpret the data was less autoethnographic that I imagined. Thus, for my own personal research into similar topics and areas of study, I concede an autoethnographic turn is another opportunity. Autoethnographies in Hallyu studies are somewhat limited, defaulting often to textual analysis or virtual ethnography – participant observation, as mentioned previously in the literature review was even lacking previously in the field – so an autoethnography would prove to be an methodological update in dealing with K-Pop as a subject as well.

Closing remarks

The conclusion here and in answering my initial research questions, is that Anglophone fans perform the role of the fan in ways that can be understood within the propriospects of their lived fandom lives and fan subculture. They adapt rituals, create new ones, and shed the behaviors that do not speak to their own fan habitus. Through interpretations of the body, fans draw from Korean domestic fannish behaviors associated with intense parasociality and place these behaviors within practices that are characteristic of Anglophone audiences – such as policing and gatekeeping Koreanness. From bodily adornment and dress, we can discern that this well-developed practice is a specifically Anglophone one, drawn from said understanding of Koreanness and reperformed on Anglophone fan bodies. Of course, in the absence of bodies, some rituals and understandings are shed, as behavior is decontextualized in the parent culture and must be re-interpreted to be understood in this glocalized one. This all amounts to ritual to an extent, but specifically rituals associated with material culture are also reperformed by Anglophone fans, in ways that are not understood by the parent, domestic Korean culture. Rituals that reflect deeply Korean metric cultures are also adapted and re-used in ways that are

understood by Anglophone fans, particularly in political arenas. These adaptations and reperformances, while unfamiliar to domestic fandoms, cannot necessarily be considered appropriation, rather they are indeed glocalizations that make sense to the local space and culture, with infusions and translations from the parent culture present.

Recalling my ENHYPEN trauma, this group may prove to be the epitome of glocalized product in both idolness and audience. As their fandom developed largely in a vacuum devoid of emulative bodies from which to build a habitus on, the feral fandom of ENGENE is a subcultural norm among Anglophone fans. As a diasporic group composed of several members not from Korea, they are a fixture in the K-Pop scene, though a wildly experimental one when they first were formed from their unusual reality show origins. Their formulation and the subsequent formation of their fan group, crossed a line of sorts, where characteristics unseen in K-Pop fandoms before, particularly in domestic fandoms, are now a part of the everydayness of Anglophone fans celebrating their favorite idol groups. It is a new world of K-Pop fandom indeed, one that is not entirely flat as Friedman would suggest in his globalization theories, but one in which the peaks are clustered closer together, continuously forming new peaks to accompany those that have existed for many decades. And though fans may not understand, like Higa suggest, initially, they make it so they *can* understand. They understand how things work in the fandom, because largely, they re-molded it for themselves.

Later in his YouTube sketch, Higa decides he and his fellow Asian friends should debut their own K-Pop boy band. Throwing together random Korean phrases as lyrics – including the name of the song and sketch video, which translates to “I need to poop” – laid over electronic dance music, paired with a stiff hip-hop inspired dance performance, Higa and his new “band,” Boys Generally Asian (bGA) parodies the hallmarks of a K-Pop group. bGa offers a parallel to

the transitional, translated fandoms of K-Pop fans around the globe. Though comedically driven and a parody, bGa resembles a K-Pop band but is obviously different, and though such translation and adaptation were purposeful in pointing out the exaggerated production of the genre and fandom reception of such, they epitomize some of my findings with their flash bang video and bowel declarations. They made themselves into something women could know and love, just as how Anglophone K-Pop fans turn the fandom into something they know, love, understand, and operate.

Appendices (A-K)

Appendix A. Project Consent Form

Interview Participation Consent Form

Created June 2022

Research Investigator: Sharon Kong-Perring

sharon.kong-perring@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Research Project Title: "We Call Them Idol: Appropriation and Transculturality in Global K-Pop Fan Performance" and "Racial Melancholia: K-Pop as a Transitional Racial Object for Diasporic Koreans"

Participant's Name:

Thank you for your interest in participating in the above-named project(s). As per Birmingham City University's Code of Ethics, interviewees must agree to being interviewed and must be aware of and consent to how the information from these interviews will be used. This consent form is therefore necessary to ensure that you understand the purpose of your participation and agree to the following conditions and employment of information. Project participation is not anticipated to be harmful or pose risks, however, the participant has the right to stop or withdraw from the interview and larger project at any time.

I, ..., voluntarily agree to participate in the named research project(s) and agree to and understand the following:

- ¨ I have had the purpose of this study explained to me prior to participation.
- ¨ The interview will be recorded with both video and original audio.

¨ Recordings will be retained on a secured, Birmingham City University monitored Microsoft One Drive until the confirmation of researcher's thesis; information I provide will be treated confidentially.

¨ I may withdraw from the project at any time during the interview or may refuse to answer any questions.

¨ A transcript of the audio will be produced and analysed by the researcher as an investigator for the above-named project(s).

¨ Access to the transcript will be limited to the principal researcher, researcher's supervision team, and collaboration scholars.

¨ I will receive a copy of the transcript and may correct any factual errors or indicate desired omissions.

¨ I may withdraw my data up to four (4) weeks after the transcript is received.

¨ Participation involves the interview and any subsequent interviews or surveys following.

¨ I will not directly benefit from this research as a participant.

¨ My name will not be included in this research; age, gender, nationality, fandom, and ethnicity may be identified to shape narrative.

¨ Extracts and quotations from my interview my be lifted and used in researcher's work.

¨ This work will be produced and disseminated via academic publications and academic outlets, such as academic journals and conferences. Content and quotations will be anonymized.

¨ I am free to contact the principal researcher to seek further clarification and information.

By signing this form, you agree to and understand the above.

……

Participant Signature & Date

Researcher statement: I believe this participant is giving informed consent to participate in the above-named research project(s).

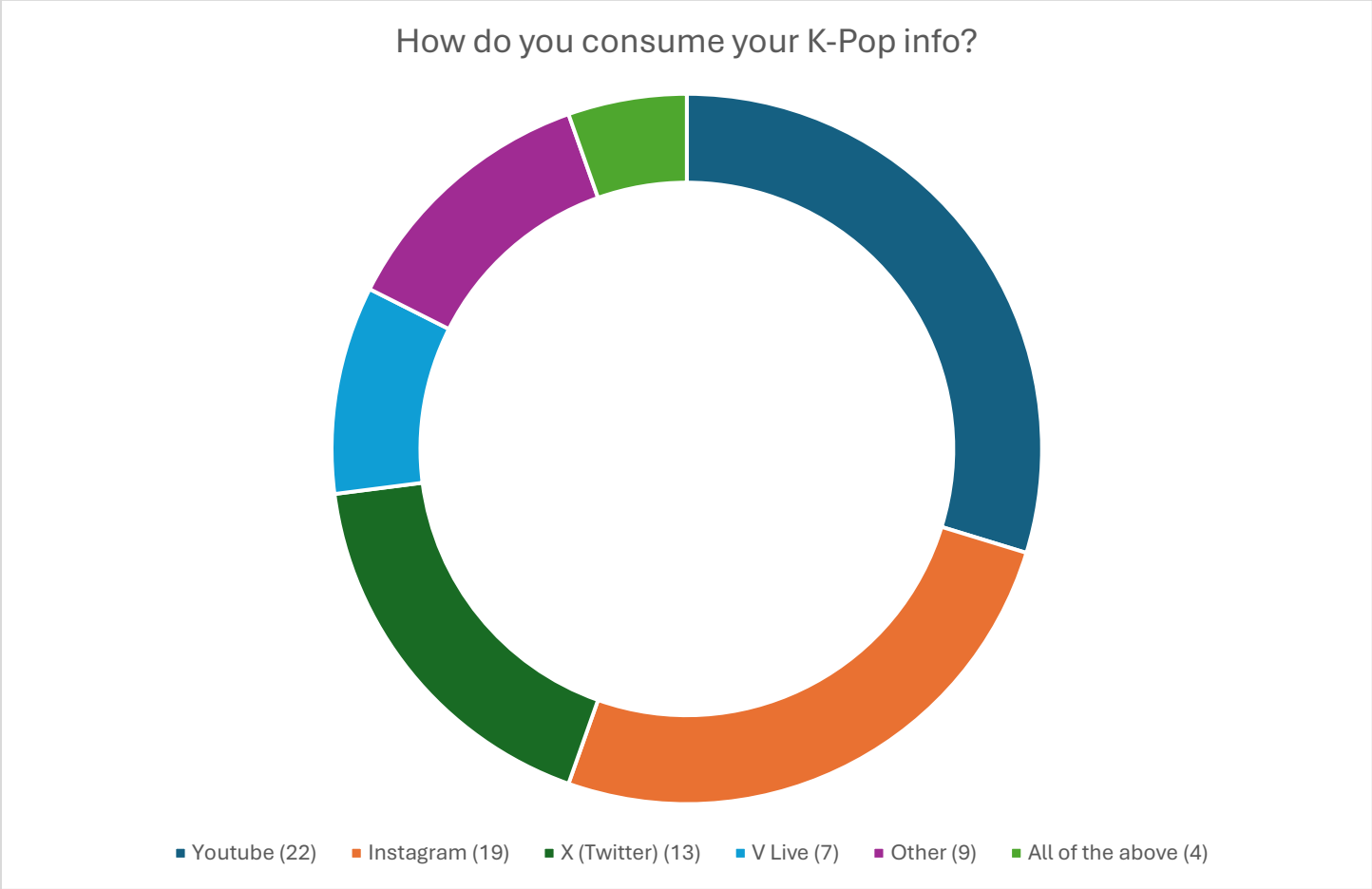
.....

Researcher Signature & Date

This research has been reviewed and approved for ethical clearance by Birmingham City University, Faculty of Arts, Design, and Media. If you have any concerns of how it is being conducted, you may contact the project's Director of Studies, Charlotte Stevens at charlotte.stevens@bcu.ac.uk.

Appendix B. Survey Data Analysis

i. Chart illustrating through which platforms Anglophone respondents consume K-Pop



ii. Word bubble visualizing the respondents' most-followed K-Pop groups

iii. Free text responses on the survey to the question "What makes K-Pop, K-Pop to you?"

To me, kpop should actually be pop. However, sometimes it seems like any music from Korea at all is lumped into kpop. Like, indie Korean music, to me, is not also kpop. I might even hesitate to call Epik High kpop, but they definitely call themselves kpop.

The flash-bang aspects, the unusual amount of access fans have to the groups. The culture surrounding it.

The mix of amazing vocals, dance, and cinematography

I think of it more as a culture of music production

, Idol culture, i think. For example, i listen to Epik High and 10cm but never consider them to be k-pop.

My inability to understand the lyrics and also escapism

Produced in Korea

Korean & Pop music

I like the diversity of the sounds. Every group has their own flare. Like u hear a TWICE song and you know it's TWICE.

Mostly Korean lyrics, high-budget music videos, and complex choreography.

Production value, video quality, promotion periods (music performances, entertainment show appearances, etc.)

Music originating in Korea; predominantly in Korean language; contain certain 'formulas' (choreographed dancing, visual 'concepts', different music genres within not just an album but even within songs)

Being music produced through the very specific SK Idol system, with an emphasis on spectacle, production, combining genres

The community

Korean Music

If it's Korean and it's Pop then it's K-Pop

The music videos, fan interactions, experimental sounds in the music

I guess that they are based in Korea, not really the members being Korean or there songs being Korea, just that's where the music comes from

Typically from Korea, or trained thru the kpop training system

The compact performance: singing, dancing, unique fashion, strong stage presence

The community that the fans create, as well as a love for the music

The creativity of the clothing and dancing

I was amazed how they could sing and dance at the dance time. Their stage presence and choreos really stood out to me.

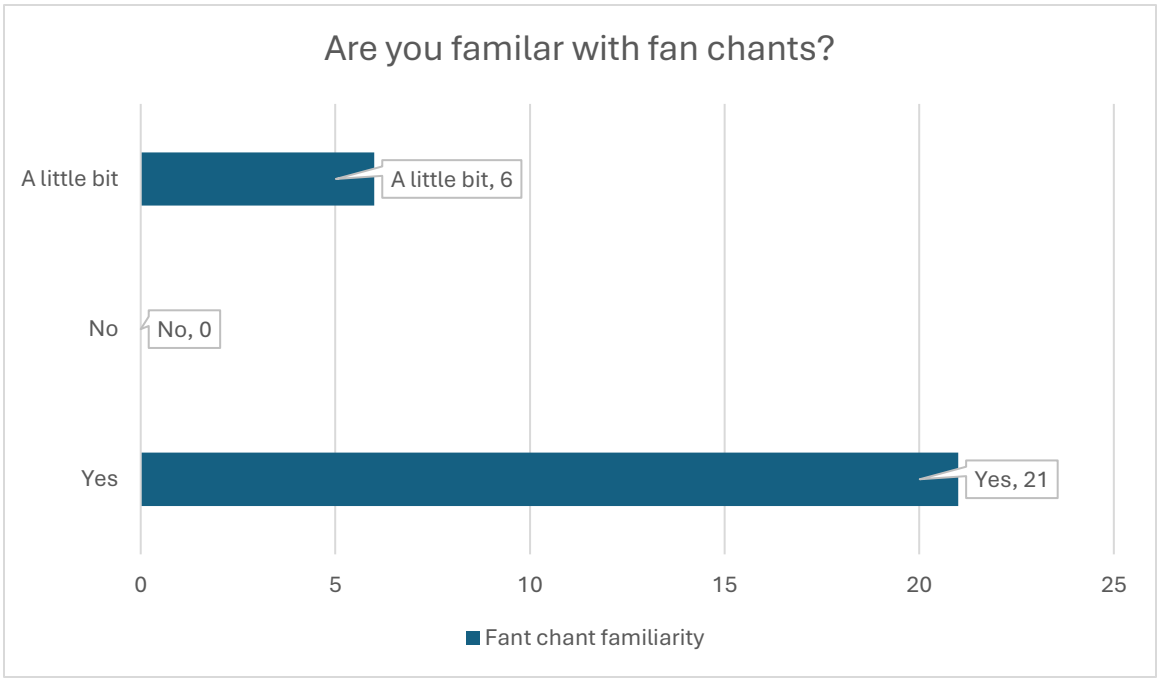
The fan culture is something completely different to any other type of music i've listened to and defininetely differentiates kpop from other forms of music. Also i feel like the type of music that comes out of kpop is completely different, and tends to have it's own trends.

On a musical level the only thing I could really say is that there is usually variation in the song to feature each member. But the more I learn about K-pop the more I think of it as the culture around idol groups as opposed to the actual music. It's hard to capture succinctly, but there's real formality of how comebacks happen and what those promotional cycles look like both for the idols and fans. But also thinking about what fan communities look like and what different people look for and find useful about idol groups because they are these blank canvases onto which you can project a lot and often times things that are totally not intended by them or their companies.

there different style ,of performance

Language (mix of Korean, Japanese and insane English), synchronised dancing, majority Korean performers and producers

iv. Bar chart indicating how many of respondents were familiar with fanchants as fan practice in K-Pop



v. *If respondents were familiar with fanchants, they were asked to indicate in free text how they became familiar with them*

I think I learned about fan chants from BTS, but I don't know exactly how.

In YouTube videos of concerts

Friends attending concerts in person or online were learning the chants to be prepared

Twitter discussions before going to a concert

Watching performances of music shows like Inkigayo and Music Bank

Going to/watching kpop concerts

Heard on YouTube during live performances

Other K-Pop fans from social media

Right when I got into BTS I learned about fanchants especially at music shows.

Fan chant tutorials on YouTube.

Watching performance videos

Observed them when watching performances. Then read about them. I don't really 'do' them myself.

Through reddit when I first got into BTS

Twitter and friends

YouTube

I learned about it from the official pages (YT/Twitter)

Youtube

I learned about it from the official pages (YT/Twitter)

Youtube

YouTube and Twitter

I think a fellow ARMY told me about it

I learn from video guidance made by the artist or learn through fanbase

Seeing and hearing others do it, as well as some of the artists creating videos about it

Through watching performances

Just by listening. Sometimes I do take out time to go through the fan chant guide provided by the artist and their company.

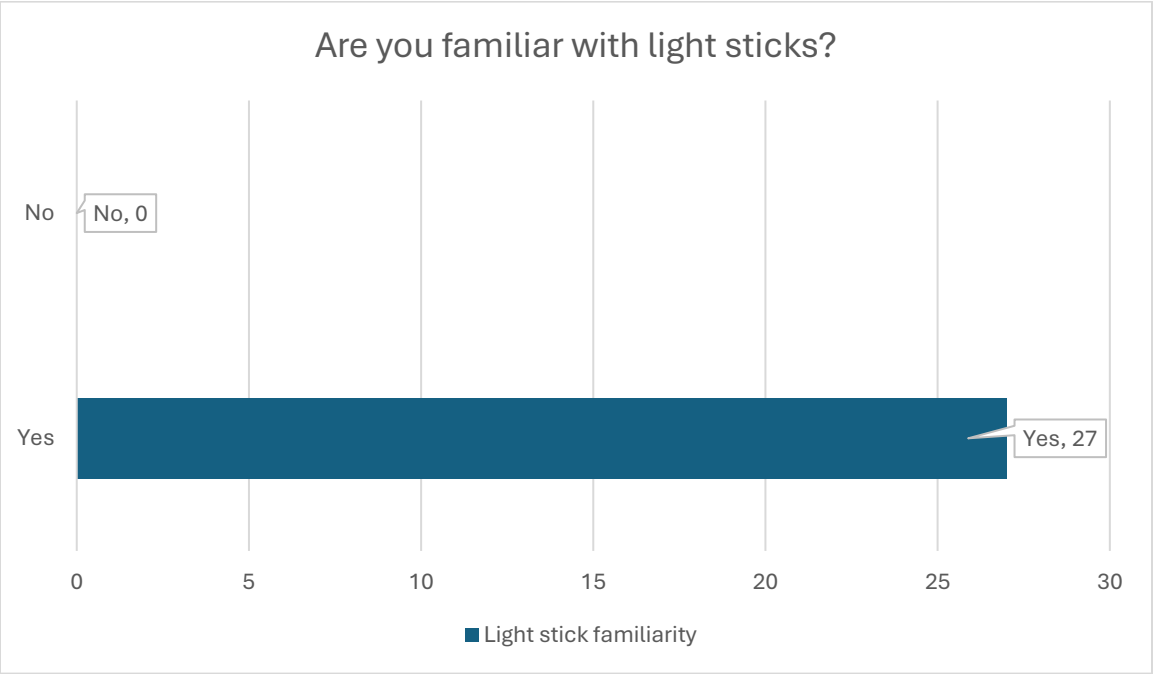
It was when i first started getting into kpop with BTS, I saw someone post a fanchant guide on twitter and i had no idea what that meant to I googled it and read some definitions and watched some videos.

Seeing concert videos on tiktok

Little bit ,not completely knowledgeable

Watching and attending performances

vi. Bar chart indicating how many of respondents were familiar with light sticks as fan practice in K-Pop



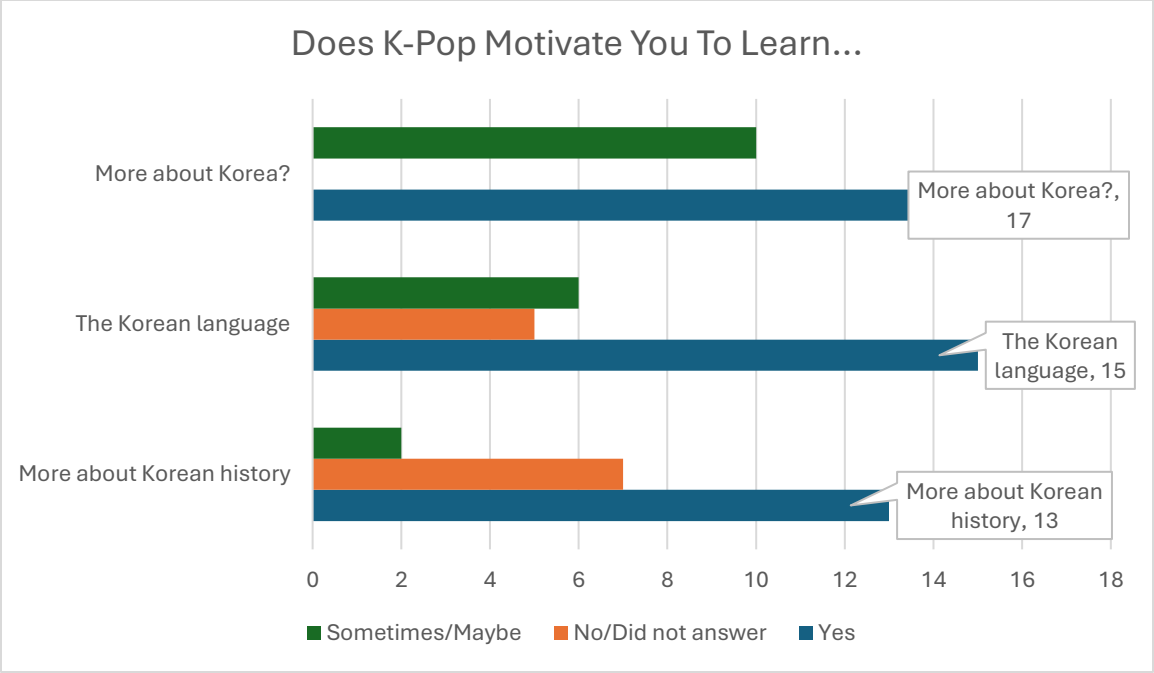
vii. If respondents were familiar with light sticks, they were asked to indicate in free text how they became familiar with them

	Social Media
I'm not sure... I guess I first learned about them in relation to Big Bang. I think I just have just seen them in concert footage and then learned what they were from context/inference.	I learned about them from social media when they first became a thing!
Same. YouTube fan cams where light sticks were involved	Instagram
Friends going to concerts and then seeing them in online concerts	Twitter, going to concerts
Twitter	I saw the ARMY bomb on videos
	from fanbase/fandom
	Same as fanchants
Watching performances online and seeing them	
Watching kpop performances and going to kpop concerts	Through my sister
Seen during live performances on YouTube	While watching their performances I saw the lightsticks in the audience. At first I though it was flashlights but then through twitter and youtube videos I learned that those are special cheering devices called lightsticks.
Social media, concert merch websites, other K-Pop fans	
I always see fans carrying them.	
	Again with BTS, watching their concert videos and seeing the lights in the audience and seeing people online reference them.
Through attending a K-Pop concert.	
Watching performance videos	
hard to miss them when watching any performance. We do not have one as of yet, mostly bc there has not been a live concert near us	
	Seeing concert videos on tiktok
Through seeing them on YouTube	
	From k pop Group, social midia study
Twitter and concerts	Watching and attending performances

viii. Free text responses to the question: "what are the most important parts of being a K-Pop fan?"

I think the only really important thing about being a kpop fan is enjoying kpop.	
For me it's the ambassadorship of liking something that the people around me don't participate in.	
Supporting your groups respectfully	
The built-in community with fairly regular content being pumped out by the groups	
Enjoying the music and connecting to it. Watching performances. Learning about the members of your favorite groups and watching content they put out	Just enjoying the music and dancing and supporting all the members of the groups
The community	understanding good music transcends language.
Enjoy the music	enjoy the music
Supporting your K-Pop Idols, listening and enjoying their music/their content, and respecting them/their personal life and understanding that they are people	Supporting the artists and the fans. Enjoying the music I think enjoying the art of the music, dances and clothing. Wether it is through making covers or sharing your opinions in social media
Enjoy the groups and their content. Having a wonderful time learning catchy songs and dances and having fun.	For me it's enjoying the music. Another aspect is the fashion. I love watching their stage performances and the way the style their outfits and hair and makeup. I didn't have many friends in school and uni but after joining the kpop community I made a lot of friends and we can share our love for the same idols. I love how we can dance to their songs together and talk about the inner jokes and memes which I cannot with non-
Just liking the music & being respectful of other fan groups.	
Sense of community	
Same as loving music from anywhere else I guess: just a genuine enjoyment of the music and the people performing it.	Consuming the content put out such as music and videos as well as interacting with the fan base.
Community! Working together to share translations and subs (back when we weren't getting subs), livestreams, information, freebies, local events, concerts	
Community and understanding	
Enjoying KPOP music	
Enjoying the music and connecting with others who have the same tastes!	been consistance with the fandom so that the group get motiveted
The dedication, being respectful, being a part of different fandoms	Liking the songs

ix. Illustration of fan interest in learning more about traditional Korean culture due to K-Pop



x. Free form responses to the question: "are there any 'rules' or etiquette to being a K-Pop fan?"

Be nice	You shouldn't bring other group's light stick to a different group's concerts!
Be kind to the members, but hate on the companies.	You should be able to respect others opinions and learn to not be toxic or rude towards others(especially online)
No stalking! Be respectful of the boundaries they and their company set	
Don't compare groups	For me it's just not to hate on other groups
I think fans really differ in what behavior they think is appropriate. I try to avoid anything that feels intrusive or harmful to the lives of idols. I also don't participate in fandom war type things.	just don't be an ahole
	Yes, I think every fandom/country have their own rules
Don't be a dick	Not to be a Koreaboo or saesang
None that I know of because some "fans" get so creepy and obsessive with their K-pop groups, and that seems acceptable to others.	I think being respectful toward idols should be one but is not
Yes. All the above from answer to question #8.	I absolutely hate solo stans. It baffles me how some people cannot love all the members equally. Having a bias is different than hating on a specific member. Same with other groups. I hate when people compare and engage in 'fanwars'
"rules" might include knowing the artists songs, member names and just the basics. But stuff like their height, their preferences, their birthdays is just really individual in my opinion.	I don't think their are any formal rules, everyone feels differently about how they express being a fan. However, I personally think that good ettiquette is being repectful to people no matter the grouos and music they listen to and your personal opinion on them.
I know that if you "Stan" a certain group, you're expected to know all the members and have at least one of their albums.	
Be respectful and accepting	
The same rules that apply to the rest of life: Be nice. Respect the privacy and space of the singers and other fans	
I think the only real rule we should be following is to be KIND. Don't antagonize other fandoms. Don't discriminate - fans come in all forms, ages, etc. Spread joy, not drama.	Absolutely. I think there are really complex rules/etiquette to any fandom. And in K-pop it gets formalized in a way that other fan communities don't always lay out.
Supporting the groups collectively and not just I individually	Not professionally ,but socially we have created some of them
Don't bring other groups merch/lightstick to another groups concert	Too many. IMO the fandoms are the worst part K-pop

Appendix C. Cast of Interviewees

"**Evangaline**"- Boston, Massachusetts. Late 20s, Chinese-American transnational adoptee with Caucasian American parents. Raised in Northern California, USA. A "fan" of GOT7 and Jackson Wang. A PhD student in English (she/her); Interviewed June 2023

"**Lee**"- Los Angeles, California. Mid 20s. Caucasian American. Fan of TWICE. A graduate student in STEM. (he/him); Interviewed July 2023

"**Stephanie**"- Los Angeles, California. Late 20s. Latin-x American. A Mutli-fan. PhD student in history. Originally from Puerto Rico and grew up in Georgia. (she/her); Interviewed July 2023

"**Annie**"- Southeastern USA. Late teens, early 20s. African American. BTS fan. Undergraduate student (she/her); Interviewed July 2023

"**Victoria**"- U.K, early 20s. Japanese-Latinx. Grew up in South America, moved to Japan in her teenage years and now lives in Birmingham, UK. Undergraduate student (she/her); Interviewed April 2024

"**Trinity**" - U.K, early 20s. Caucasian-British. Grew up in rural England and now lives in Birmingham, UK. Undergraduate student (she/her); Interviewed April 2024

"**Betty**"- U.K, early 20s. Caucasian-British. Grew up in the Midlands and lives in Birmingham, U.K. UK. Undergraduate student (she/her); Interviewed April 2024

Appendix D. Full transcription with interviewee, Evangaline (June 2023)

"Evangaline" + Sharon K-Pop Fan Interview-20230609_150309-Meeting Recording

June 9, 2023, 7:03PM

28m 24s

TE SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 2:11
Alright, so Evangeline. So first and foremost, could you tell me a little bit about how you engage with your like Asian identity prior to becoming a KPOP fan?

Evangaline 2:25
Hmm.
OK.
Umm, so I think that let's see, it would have been around 2020 when I feel like I started engaging with K-Pop more, like in like cause I've obviously heard of it.
But I think my associations honestly were just like, hey, K-Pop and C-Pop. Before that, the first time was like probably middle school and the associations at that point because of the way that I was feeling about my national community of Asian American identity at the time, were more like... I was like, oh, it's catchy.
But I was like, oh, that's so like lame because I was still very much in my, like, ohh.
I'm like embarrassed to be Asian American because it's like, not as cool.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:10
Like too Asian.

Evangaline 3:12
Right like it's weird.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:12
Like you're falling into that stereotype?

Evangaline 3:15
And if you, like for context I know you will appreciate this or like understand it, it was a Super Junior song.
Of course, groups have really evolved.

Evangaline 3:26
Yeah, I think they've evolved like a little bit in terms of like their marketing and like everything with the K-wave and stuff like that.
But anyway, so how I engaged with it before though was I feel like I was always engaging with it because it wasn't necessarily a choice when I went to my immersion school. Because I was around other Asian Americans more specifically like mostly Chinese Americans.
I was with like Chinese teachers, Taiwanese teachers...
And so my interactions with identity were very like school focused, honestly.
And so I think I learned a lot about it...
What I came to associate with my identity really centered around the traditional markers of like the model minority myth and being like very respectful and high achieving and good at academics.
And I kind of felt like I didn't identify with that quite as much.
So those are kind of the ways that I experienced it on like more of a day to day basis.
And then what was interesting for me as well as going home and being an adoptee, going home to my parents who are white American and then also, you know that like how I felt about my Asian American identity and engage with it when I was with them.
And then like, yeah, being surrounded by mostly Asian Americans and then mostly white Americans...
And then as a third piece, non white, non Asian Americans, those all I think like elicited kind of different thoughts and feelings and reactions which...Yeah
So I feel like pre K_Pop it was a lot of observations.
Noticing things in general, I felt mostly like I didn't belong.
Like I didn't really fit in umm or like I could maybe pass for a little bit but like it would ultimately would reveal that I'm not like quote unquote other Chinese people or I'm not like Chinese Chinese.
So that was definitely like pre K-Pop.
I was coming out of that phase, I think of feeling very ashamed and like I wasn't worthy or like that I didn't fit in with the Asian American community.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:44
Umm.

Evangaline 5:44
So I was like opening.
I had like started opening.
Sorry, just for thoroughness.
Like 2018, I started working at a high school and there were other Chinese and Asian students, but mostly Chinese students who had recently immigrated, and they kind of helped me a lot with wanting to return more to my Chinese identity because we would speak in Chinese and they didn't really care that my Chinese like wasn't perfect because they were more comfortable speaking in Chinese.
So that kind of initiated like an ohh maybe I do actually want to like... I like that I can talk to them and I you know I appreciate being able to engage in this and and so I think like coming up 2018 and then going to 2020 that was when I was like coming, coming out of that kind of ...I was more open to it already like at that point yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:32
OK.
Yeah, the the seed has been planted in 2018 by these Chinese immigrant students and like K-Pop kind of came in and like, sprinkled some water on it.

Evangaline 6:42
Yes.
Correct, yes.
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:47
OK. Yeah.

Evangaline 6:48
Yeah, that's a good way to describe it.
Sorry, that's a very long winded answer.
That's a good way to describe it, yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:51
No, no, it's great.
It's great.
UM, so you're kind of answer this question already, but 2018 with these Chinese students is really the impetus for some kind of return.
Not like…I don't want to say like rehoming, but like it's sparked the that kind of "OK" thought.

Evangaline 7:09
Mm-hmm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:12
So OK, I know you've told me off record, but on record, what group?

Evangaline 7:13
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:19
What group really kind of facilitated this for you in the in the K-POP sphere and and why?

Evangaline 7:25
Yeah.
So it was. Ohhh.
My goodness.

So it was Got 7 and I think, there wasn't necessarily in the beginning...
Like as I've told you, I heard like one of their songs randomly on an Instagram reel.
And it was just so catchy.
It was: “I won't let you go.”
And it was just so catchy.
So I did that thing where, like, listen to the song over and over and over again until I was sick of it.
And so then I started and was like, OK, I'm curious about the music video.
I wanna know what this looks like and that sent me down a whole rabbit hole of like performances and interviews.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:01
Umm.

Evangaline 8:02
And I think what stood out to me the most honestly was I saw this performance, a live performance of them doing this.
Umm.
And I remember thinking to myself for the like, I don't wanna say the first time, cause I've always thought that like Asian men were attractive.
But I do think there was some influence obviously of like White-Western ideas of what masculinity was.
But I think for the first time I had this realization that I was like, oh, well, like they don't necessarily need those traditional definitions of like, how I have been kind of socialized to understand masculinity.
But I still find them very, very attractive.
Not in like, and I go back and forth to myself on this, but not like fetishy versus quote unquote genuine appreciation, and the line is like blurry, right?

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:48
Umm.

Evangaline 8:52

But I remember having that thought.
I was like, wow, I like find them very attractive.
Umm.
And so then I like through the interviews, I kind of was like, oh, wow, I don't.
I don't know.
I'm very cognizant of, like not forming parasocial relationships that are like unhealthy, but I think that in learning more about the group, I started to be like,

OK, like I understand... I understand how these relationships, these parasocial relationships are kind of like built and like I get...I was kind of like, OK, I get it now.
Like I can see how this happens.
Umm.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:25
Umm.

Evangaline 9:26
And and so they.
Yeah, that was.
That was the group and that was kind of why, just like in an off chance. And I think the other piece I drew me to them especially, specifically connected to my Asian American identity was that they were not all Korean.
And so there was, like Jackson... Jackson Wang is like Chinese from Hong Kong, from Hong Kong.
Umm.
And I remember that being another motivator.
I was like, he speaks like a million languages.
Like I can try to speak too or something like that.
Obviously you can't do a direct comparison that way, but and then you have like other Members from like Thailand, I think BAM.
Comes from Thailand and Mark's also like Chinese as well.
Chinese and Korean, I forget.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:12
Think so?

I think he's Chinese.
Canadian...maybe I'm making that up.

Evangaline 10:16
Yeah anyways, Chinese Canadian.
OK, I know.
He's like, yeah... so I and I feel like, I feel like there's not many people that I remember distinctly as being like not Korean.
Umm, but that was.
Yeah, that was the group.
And that was kind of why it was a very off chance encounter.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:36
Umm, but the fact that there were Chinese members in it, it was that kind of like a jumping off point for you to get even deeper into like exploration of this group perhaps?

Evangaline 10:50
I think, yeah, I think so.
I think so and I think I also maybe had a little bit of... like I had heard of BTS obviously, but I think part of me was a little bit like ohh, but they're like the big group. Like I like the smaller group like there was a little bit of the kind of annoying like I don't like the mainstream K-Pop, but like, you know, you're like ohh like I like Got 7.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:12
I feel this so hard.

Evangaline 11:16
I don't like, but then I came around to BTS.
I don't identify as any sort of in this question.
I come up with like I don't really identify with any sort of kind of label or being like BTS ARMY or I think like Got 7's fandom... is named like Agassiz?

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:34
Yeah, I totally forgot about that. I was like what's their fandom?

Evangaline 11:34
Yeah so I don't identify being that.
Yeah, but yeah, I think that's it.
But so like I don't identify with like being that necessarily.
But I came around to BTS.
I was like, OK, I get it. I was like alright, alright, alright.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:48
Umm.
Yeah.

Evangaline 11:50
I get it like I get it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:52
Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.
I mean same.
I mean, I was started with BTS and like went away from BTS and then made my way back.
So like I get it, fine. Respect.

Evangaline 12:01
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:03
So would you say that like after, you know interacting with Got 7 content like listening to

some of their music, did that like galvanize you maybe to like more Asian things or like more Asian American things at all or like feel less shame at least?

Evangaline 12:21
Mm-hmm.
I feel like in some ways yes, because I got more interested in like Korean culture, so it was just like I had sort've been exposed to a little bit, but I honestly feel like most of my framing had been like Chinese American culture, like Chinese culture.
Not really so much Japanese, but I feel like beyond like Studio Ghibli and like, you know, certainly like Hello Kitty.
I love Hello Kitty, but like, I think just it, it was kind of an avenue for me to explore and become more interested in like Korean culture, Korean-American stories and experiences.
It also coincided with, like me, starting by PhD program.
So I was also doing a lot more work around like thinking about Asian American identity and thinking more inclusively and broadly about what that looks like for people who were not Chinese.
Not because I didn't consider people who were Chinese as Asian American, but just because obviously when I was thinking about it, I was mostly thinking about it with it from my own experiences.
So I think that also contributed as well, but I would say for sure... I didn't do like a 180 and like and like change because I don't have that type of personality where, like my entire identity shifts depending on like what I'm like into, but I definitely I think it did.
I was like ohh like, I would be curious to, you know, try more.
Try to learn more like Korean dishes or kind of the more things you might like.
The service surface level parts of like cultural representation like food, maybe like dress like style.
Umm, that kind of thing.
So I would say in that way, but maybe not in like the deeper sense of like what it means to be Korean, cause obviously, like, I'm not Korean, so yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:23
Yeah.
Yeah.
But like, how about even like your Chinese-ness? Did seeing like Asian men in that way or like Asians in mainstream media... but like did it feel like there was an opening to potentially like be OK exhibiting your Chinese-ness or engaging with it publicly?

Evangaline 14:34
Umm, that's a good question because on one hand I feel like I saw more representation of like, especially like K-Dramasand K-POP.
So like on one hand, I feel like I definitely saw more of that.
I feel hesitant to say yes though, because I feel like there is a very clear distinction between like, no, this is like the K-wave, like the things that are cool is like they're Korean, it's like not Chinese stuff.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:35
Umm.
Umm.
I see.
So even like Jackson way, you being in that space, it's still like kind of Korean.

Evangaline 15:42
But I'm also like, right, right.
Like I feel like, but I also feel like by that point I was less embarrassed.
Like uh, because I was, because I was already, like, starting to want to return to it.
And like K-Pop kind of was the the catalyst or the impetus that really liked was like, hey, like, go. I think I was already like, starting to, like, not be as embarrassed to do, like things that are, like, commonly associated as being like, quote unquote Chinese.

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:05
Yeah.

Evangaline 16:16
And I and then it's complicated because I'm like, I feel like people
who aren't Asian don't always, like, know the difference.
So I was kind of like, but I feel like on one hand, yes, I was like, oh, wow.
Like there's just there was more kind of in general, like Asian representation or specifically Korean representation.
But I do feel like it was a very distinct line of like.

You might be able to do things that are considered cool, but they're cool because they're Korean.
So like if people are to be like ohh, it's like you're Chinese.
Like when China is like, not really, it's not the same thing.
It's like, you know, K- beauty or like, you know, so I think like I did feel in some ways, yes, but not completely. Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:02
Yeah, yeah, I get that again.
It was, it was like it was already.
The seed was already planted, but the K-Pop was the sprinkle of water, so it seems like a very app analogy here.

Evangaline 17:13
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:14
So going back to kind of like your before times, right, and in school you had mentioned that you, you know identified with wanting to be American and and even despite the fact that you even were like in an immersion program, why was that?

Evangaline 17:18
Umm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:33
What drove you to want to be perceived as American over potentially, you know Chinese or Chinese American.

Evangaline 17:39
Umm.

Well, I feel like I don't know that I necessarily wanted to be because I I didn't have a good understanding necessarily of like... what do we mean when we say American.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:53
Umm.

Evangaline 17:53
I think commonly we would sit think like, OK, we mean like white American or whoever is like in power.
I never wanted to be white.
That's something that, as an adoptee, like the experience that I had at least and every adoptee, every person, is obviously different with this.
But I think what sticks out for me, was that when I went home I was like, OK, I'm very clearly like not white.
And I think, you know, my parents never, like, tried to act as if I was or anything like that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:21
Umm.

Evangaline 18:24
But so it was an interesting dynamic of like, I don't want to be white.
I don't feel accepted by Asians.
I would love to be, I think like if I could choose, I would have, I would loved to feel like accepted from Asians.
And I think now for sure, but I'm putting myself back in like younger Emily's shoes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:37
Umm.

Evangaline 18:42
Umm, but I think of anything I wanted to be like, cool.

And So what I associated with being cool was being black.
Or like Latina, because those were the groups who, like I perceived as, like they were super confident.
They were like very pretty and so a lot of these are based on like notions of, like, only like, media representation for the most part, because at that point in my life before high school, I didn't have as much exposure to, umm, like most of my classmates were like white or Asian.
So these were all like messages I was receiving.
I was like, oh, it's cool to, like, play sports and, like, listen to hip hop, R&B.
Like I wanna do those things I want to.
Yeah.
I just wanna be like cool, umm.
And so I think like for me at least.
That was I saw the kind of cultural capital that I felt that at the time those groups had.
And so that was what I yeah, that's what I think was what I wanted.
I think I just didn't want to feel... I wanted to feel accepted, but if I couldn't feel accepted then I was like, well, then I wanna be cool.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:01
Umm.

Evangaline 20:01
Ideally, you're accepted and cool, but I was like I can't be accepted by like people who are Chinese then I wanna be cool.
So I think there was a little bit of rejection of like you know... I was like OK, well, if you don't see me as like one of you then... which reflecting now I'm like maybe it's a little bit more nuanced than that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:10
Umm.

Evangaline 20:23
And I think that there's a tendency for me to focus on interactions or people that

felt too... very, like, ostracizing or, like, negative.
But then I also have to think about the people who... there were also a lot of like Chinese Americans in my life who did accept me and I have to like, I have to remind myself of that.
But it's just that those negative experiences stood out way more to me, yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:48
I mean what you said, I have two thoughts which are really interesting.
One is your kind of like affinity for media representations of black and Latinx cultures.
um, it almost kind of parallels like I don't like BTS necessarily, but I like the more underdog, like the other Americans are like Got 7. They're kind of like the other Americans that you thought... you think is cool.

Evangaline 21:09
Umm.
Umm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:16
Versus BTS is the mainstream and white.
That's like, uh, that's kinda interesting.

Evangaline 21:20
Hmm hmm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:21
And then the other observation that I think is kind of another parallel is that the way that you're describing your affinity for Black and Latinx culture is media cultures.
It's very much what like I see people thinking now of Korean cultures, right?
They see like these cool media representations and like K-Dramas and K-pop of Koreans.
And then they're like, oh, I wanna be cool.
So it's fascinating to me that like that there are those parallels that exist for people.

Evangaline 21:52
Umm.
Now, yeah, yeah. Same thing.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:57
There's.
Yeah, go ahead.

Evangaline 21:59
Sorry, continue.
No, this is good.
It's interesting for me to like see how, I mean I think to a certain extent same with me with Korean like before I had gone to Korea and even then like I think about who I was interacting with and like it's not necessarily like you know not it isn't necessarily an accurate representation of the entirety of like, the people of Korea.
Right.
But I do think it's interesting too, as I like think about myself and the media portrayals and like my thoughts and then like as I got older and like actually had friends and like was in community and in communities with like Black and Latin-a and Latin X groups, how it's just like it's not that I was like, oh wow, I had no idea about XYZ, but it was just actually experiencing and like being a part of those communities is very I think important because yeah, you just... the perspective you gain... a different type of perspective on it than if you had like it had only been in the media portrayal, right.
And same thing with K-Pop.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:12
Right.

Evangaline 23:13
I feel like even going to Korea allowed me to see like ohh.
This is like what an average Korean person looks like, and this is what Korean is like and what life is like.

And it's not.
It's obvious like I knew this in my head before I went.
I was like, it's not like the K- dramas, but going actually allows you to be like ohh like this is what this is like.
What Korea is like and and seeing people from different walks of life and not everyone looks like the K-drama actors and you know.
So I think like it's, it was nice to, it was still like... obviously like I loved going and it was still very cool.
Like I knew it wasn't gonna be like TV, but it was just... you know?
So so it was really awesome to be able to feel more immersed in, in Korea than being in the United States and like watching it on Netflix.

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:05
Yeah.
Yeah, for sure for sure.
Last question for you, if you can meet any K-Pop Idol, which idol or who would you meet?

Evangaline 24:17
OK.
I honestly wouldn't meet anybody.
I don't know if this is like... and I think it's because.....
This is where I'm like, so maybe I do have a pararsocila relationship, but I don't know.
I think it's just more so... I don't know....
I feel this way about all celebrities.
Honestly, I don't know what we would talk about.
Like I don't know... one, my philosophy is like, don't meet people, don't meet your, quote unquote heroes, even though I don't necessarily see like K-Pop members as like my heroes and...I try not to do that to people cause I'm like people are human and like it's important to remember that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:58
Mm-hmm.

Evangaline 25:00
But I just think like I don't know that I would meet anyone, even if they were like, literally, say, one person you can meet.
Anyway, I don't know that I would meet anybody, because yeah, I just, I don't.
I don't.
I'd like I'm like I have nothing.
I don't know what we talk about.
I really I really like.
I don't know we would talk about like and I also just would be hyper aware.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:20
Umm, no, I can actually understand.

Evangaline 25:23
Yeah, I'd be hyper aware of the dynamics of it too.
And like I'm like this is weird for you.
Probably like you might not admit it because like obviously you probably have like you know, but it's like I just think I mind.
I try to be mindful the fact that, like these people are people and they're who they are, and interviews and music videos and everything else like there might be elements of their actual self in there.
But it also might not be.
It might not be who they are, and so I think like I'd feel like I would be curious who they are outside of that.
I don't know that we would reach a level of that, you know, kind of like.
Truth.
You know, in one meeting.
So yeah, I wouldn't.
I wouldn't meet anybody.

Evangaline 26:11
It's a long winded way of saying it, yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 26:11
I mean, that's completely fair because parasocial disappointment is very much a thing like, you know, don't meet your heroes.

Evangaline 26:18
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 26:19
And so it's very much something that can happen to a fan and they tend to lose their shininess like seeing idols up close.
Sometimes I'm like, oh, you really are a person.

Evangaline 26:28
Yeah, I haven't met that many celebrities, but I we probably talked about this off interview record.
But like yeah, the few times that I have seen celebrities like Kevin Hart and Simone Biles, you really are like, yeah, you're like, ohh wow, you're just a regular person.
Like there is definitely.
I don't know.
Maybe you're kind of like I shouldn't see them
People like run into you on the street and like, why are you, Simon Biles, in like the street? Why are you at North station? Like I know she was looking for, you know, of gymnastics.

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:01
Mm-hmm.

Evangaline 27:05
Like there, there's a gymnastics competition.
She was just, like los...Your kind of like, wait, you're supposed to be, like, on television and, like, and these, you know, like, why are you....why are you where I am?

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:16
Mm-hmm.
She's decontextualized from her celebrity.

Evangaline 27:19
Yeah.
Yeah.
And also it just was like I don't know again. I go back to the like,
I'm like, what am I gonna say?
Like, I'm just like, Oh my gosh, I'm a big fan--
It's like what?
What?
What am I gonna say?
I don't know.

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:35
Yeah, yeah.

Evangaline 27:36
Like we, we don't have that much in common. Like I'm sure we can find
something, but like our lives are not that similar.
Like I don't know what, and especially with the added element of like I don't speak Korean, so I'm really like I don't know what I would say it would be like.

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:50
Fair.

Evangaline 27:51
So yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:51
That is very fair.
I like this answer though, because it does explore a lot about like mediation of personalities and about the creation of celebrity and all that great stuff.
Great stuff for me to use so thank you for bringing it up.

Evangaline 28:07
Hmm yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 28:09
OK, so I think that's the end of the formal interview, so I'm going to stop the recording

Sharon Kong-Perring stopped transcription

Appendix E. Full transcription with interviewee, Lee (July 2023)

Lee Interview-20230705_143813-Meeting Recording

July 5, 2023, 6:38PM

25m 36s

Sharon Kong-Perring started transcription

Sharon Kong-Perring 0:29
Is there a name that you would like to go by, or do you just want to make one up for you?

Lee 0:35
Uh, Lee.

Sharon Kong-Perring 0:36
Lee.
OK, awesome.
So we'll have you go by Lee in the actual writing.
OK.
So we're talking about K-Pop and we're talking about your experiences and K-pop.
So I guess first question out the door is are you a fan of K Pop?
If so, how did you get into it and what group are you into?

Lee 0:57
So the group I'm into is Twice.
I was introduced to them by one of my friends who was a lot more into K-Pop than I was.
He would send K-pop music videos on to our group chat and one particular music video that grabbed my attention was “The Feels” by Twice and when I watched it, I really liked the music and I also found the members like really attractive.
So I started to watch more of their music videos and get more into their music.
And that started me to become more of a fan with them and actually become more of a fan for them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:40
Awesome.
OK, so it's Twice, “The Feels” and so you would say probably that you like sound of the music and like the members kind of physical aesthetics drew you in.

Lee 1:54
Hmm yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:55
All right.
Very cool.
UM, have you gotten into any other groups since?

Lee 2:02
Umm, not exactly my friend that I mentioned, I will call him Bryce, Bryce.

Sharon Kong-Perring 2:08
OK.

Lee 2:09
Bryce is a very is mostly into BlackPink.
That's his favorite group, but he’s also into other K-Pop groups that he follows like Treasure and EXO.
But uh, I'm not.
I'm not so much into.
I'm only really into twice.
I'm don't really explore other K-Pop groups.

Sharon Kong-Perring 2:29

Got it, got it.
OK, cool.
He is into BlackPink, so that's old school now.
It's old school, I suppose.

Lee 2:37
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 2:38
OK, awesome.
And has kind of your enjoyment of Twice bled into other areas of like Korean pop culture, like film or dramas or food or anything like that?

Lee 2:51
Yeah, it has.
Like for example I tried, I went with my friends last week to a Korean fried chicken place that I actually had no idea existed up until recently in my hometown, and also my mom and I are currently watching a Korean drama by the name of “Crash Landing On You.”

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:13
OK, cool.

Lee 3:13
And yeah, I'm not sure if I would say that because I'm into Twice that I wouldn't have discovered, umm, more of Korean culture?
Or that I'm only getting into Korean culture because of Twice, but I would say that is a pattern where it's like, I notice I'm engaging more in that culture after I like started getting into them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:36

There's always like a reason, right?
That anyone gets into anything, so that makes total sense.

Lee 3:41
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:44
OK.
Have you engaged in like learning the language at all or like, are you curious about learning language?

Lee 3:51
I'm bilingual in Spanish because my mom is actually Spanish but and in terms of like learning Korean for example like, I don't.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:54
OK.

Lee 4:03
I know the basics like hello is annyong and other stuff like that but I don't really have like an interest in learning the language.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:12
OK.
And how about like I don't know, like the history or anything like that or like the traditional dress or anything, any interest in that?

Lee 4:28
Umm, sort of like my interest in like Korean uh, history and is sort of like kind of goes along with like, my general interest in history.

So like, there's not a like a fascination with like, Korean, the history of Korea that goes along with, like other types of histories, I learn. I find it all interesting.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:53
Ok, who's your bias in Twice?

Lee 5:02
Uh Dahyun.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:03
OK, cool. OK.

Lee 5:05
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:08
That's funny.
So you clearly know a bias means.

Lee 5:11
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:12
So like you know, there's, like, K-pop lingo, right?
Like bias or like Ult, or like cover dance. How did you learn that?

Lee 5:19
Umm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:22
Like what those mean?
Or how did you learn what those are?
Was it by other fans?
Was it by watching like variety shows?

Lee 5:31
Through my friend, of course, because he would of course ask me after I watched, like the first music video.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:33
Umm.

Lee 5:38
Like, who's your bias?
And I of course, have to ask him.
Like what the heck does that mean?

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:42
There. Mm-hmm.

Lee 5:42
And so he would actually teach to me the lingo as we kind of like talked more about K-Pop.
So like it would just like of course you would like kind of say these words out of nowhere because like you would expect everyone to know about them.
But of course he would have to teach me about them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:59

Umm, right, right.
And now you seem well versed in it.

Lee 6:04
Thank you.
I'm sure there are a few terms that I don't know about, like for example when you said ult like I don't know exactly what that means.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:12
Ohh ult... ultimate like so Twice since you only really listen to Twice, they're your ult group.

Lee 6:18
OK. Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:19
Yeah.
Yeah, or ult bias like your bias of all biases.
That's often how it's used.

Lee 6:24
Yeah, yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:28
OK, very cool.
Umm.
Let's see.

Lee 6:31
Thank you for expanding my vocabulary.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:34
No problem, of course, ha.
UM, would you say that you purchased like merch at all?
Like if you've gone to the concerts, have you purchased official merch?
Do you purchase unofficial merge on like Etsy let's say?

Lee 6:49
Ohh.
Like absolutely, there's a, there's a K-Pop store in my mall and like I bought this only a few days ago, this album by Twice.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:53
Uh-huh.
Yep.
Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Lee 6:58
And of course, like I buy posters from them, I bought a light stick.
I went to two of their concerts.
So umm, with me and my friend, we have like a joke that that basically
says that you're really into capitalism when you're K pop fan because you just keep buying stuff from your group.
So like you only really should become a K-Pop fan if you're secure with like your financials and all that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:33
Ha, that is very true.
Uh, do you think that you have spent the same kind of money, or you're willing to spend the same kind of money on like any other kind of like music groups you're into?
Or was is it really a K-pop thing for you?

Lee 7:48
Well, like for example I also have a Beatles poster.
Before I was into K Pop, I was very much into The Beatles, but definitely not as much as like K Pop.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:52
Umm.

Lee 7:57
Like for example I only have one Beatles album and only like one or two books about The Beatles because they're like, they're an old group.
So I like to read about their history, but I definitely have spent much more money on Twice that I have on The Beatles.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:07
Umm.
And why do you think that it's like that?
And I'm like this too, I buy so much K-pop stuff, but I'm like I never really did this with other groups.
Why?
Why do you think that is about K-Pop?

Lee 8:24
Like buying albums or their merch in general?

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:27
Both, I mean like even albums we can stream all of it, but for some reason I have to own every single album, right?

Lee 8:33
Yeah, exactly.
It comes from pressure, I would say, like my friend, like constantly has to ask me like if I bought their newest album like, “Ready To Be” and I still haven't yet because I I already have so much that I'm sort of like fatigued from it.
I'm, I'm course like very much into Twice, but like I don't feel the need to kind of like own everything from them.
I just like, I already know that I spent so much money.
I don't feel the need to like spend to get everything from them, which is like I know that like this pressure just doesn't come from my friend.
It comes from the K-Pop community in general.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:14
Umm.

Lee 9:14
Like I think he's told me before.
Like people say, you're not really a truly a fan if you don't buy their light stick or buy their newest album when it comes out and things like that.
So it's just like an expectation that comes from the community.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:30
Umm yeah, I definitely have all that too.
I completely understand that ohm.
Do you do like fan art or anything like that?
Or like fan fiction?

Lee 9:40
No, I don't.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:40
Nah, not your jam?

Lee 9:44
Not my jam, no.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:47
Fair enough.
Fair enough, uh, so well this may not apply to you as much because you really stan Twice and and no other group, but do you like when idols collaborate with each other, like different ideas from different groups?

Lee 10:03
I would say so.
Yeah, actually this is a rare occurrence from what I've seen.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:05
Yeah.
Umm yeah, I think it's becoming more and more of a thing, but definitely not as common as like in the West.
When people are, you know, collaborating with one another.

So we kind of touched about this about like kind of pressure to be like a true fan by buying things but, how do you think is the best way to like, support a K-Pop idol versus like any other kind of artist, global Western artist out there?
Like, what do you think?
Specifically, what fans do to support K pop idols in particular.

Lee 10:44
Umm.
Mostly just like unique to them other than like Western artists?

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:50
Yeah, yeah.

Lee 10:53
I'm not sure because like in the end, I think the answers are pretty much are the same, like listening to their music, attending their concerts, buying their merchandise.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:59
Umm.

Lee 11:03
So I can't really think of like things that you can like directly support a K-pop group that you can do with a western group.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:10
Umm do you watch like their interviews and like vlogs and variety shows and stuff like that at all?
Or is it mostly just like the music and dance for you?

Lee 11:20
Umm, when it comes up on their like YouTube channel, I would most likely watch it if it shows up on my recommended.
Sometimes I will watch it, other times not.
But I wouldn't like go out to actively seek like interviews from like other like third party channels for example.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:34
Umm.
Gotcha.

OK.
Umm have you ever like entered one of those like meet and greet things or bought like a VIP ticket to have like a high touch or a meeting greet with them ever?

Lee 11:50
No, I haven't.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:51
Do you want to ever?
Is that like something that you aspire to?
Or are you more like they can stay like behind the shiny glass?

Lee 12:00
Well, of course, like a big thing is money.
I don't know how much it would be, but I assume would be very expensive to meet them. And another big thing is that like, I know like for not just for K-Pop groups but for like idols in general like or like celebrities in general.
Like when they say to their fans like we love you so much.
Like we adore every single one of you.
I know they're saying that to like the group.
They're not saying that to like me as a person, so when I go to meet, if I go to meet, like Twice, if I go to like talk with, have a conversation with Dahyun, for example, even though I'd be very happy to meet her, I know that she knows nothing about me other than I'm a fan of her.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:41
Umm.

Lee 12:47
So that's sort of like changes the dynamic and I'm not really, I'm not, I'm not really as close to her as I know like other people might think because there are a fan of her...
So sort of keeping that dynamic with me like, even though, like, I love Dahyun, like I

know she's a performer and she doesn't...She knows nothing about me other than like I'm a Once.
So even though she I don't know... I'm not going to assume that like she hates me or that she doesn't wanna hear me, me or anything.
I just know that I'm just a regular person to her other than a fan, so it doesn't it...We don't really have any sort of like special connection with each other.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:29
Mm-hmm.
Cool.
Yeah.
And they're definitely fans out there that do feel like they have that special connection with their idols...

Lee 13:40
hmm.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:41
So that's really interesting to hear your perspective on that.

Lee 13:46
So I'm, I was just gonna say that was a very long winded answer, sorry.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:52
No, that's only fine.
No, that's great.
UM, it's really interesting to hear that perspective because you know, Twice does have some problems with, like sasaeng fans.
For example, if you're familiar with the term umm, which are like the problematic like Stalker fans is what it kind of translates to, and Twice has some of the more infamous cases of that right.

Lee 14:04
Yeah.
I have heard that from, like my friend.
Yeah, like a specifically that Nayeon has a stalker because they bring her gifts and say they're gonna visit her in Korea and all that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:19
Umm.
Yeah.
And I think Nayeon's stalking in particular really does believe they're in like a relationship with one another.
So, umm yeah, it's really interesting to hear.

Lee 14:30
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:32
Like the other perspective that you have on what that relationship, you know, fan relationship looks like with your bias and in Twice.
Yeah.
Thank you for sharing that with me.
Umm.
Again, may not apply to you too much because you're kind of a one group kind of stan, but have you come across or have you been exposed to at all to idol groups that don't have Asian members in them?
They do K-Pop, but they're not Korean and they're not East Asian.
And if so, what are your thoughts on that?

Lee 15:08
East Asian?
Well, for example, I know Lisa is from BlackPink is Thai, so she's kind of like, quote unquote minority in terms of like K-Pop.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:13
Umm.

Lee 15:20
But I don't know.
Well, I'm not going to have a bad opinion of anybody who performs in K-Pop because I think anybody should be allowed to like, sing and dance.
Whatever like song they want, and if K-pop, if Korean music and is something they're really passionate about, then go ahead and do and pursue whatever career you want.
But it's interesting because.
Uh, like I've never seen that person, that type of performer before.
And I actually wonder like what that situation would be like?
What type of music or what?
What, like the fan reaction would be and all that like, uh, with my friend like he was, he was kind of hesitant about, like Americans getting into K-Pop and, like, be going into groups because he felt like that's sort of appropriating Korea and Korean culture and Korean music and all that for their own because they can't really, I guess truly embody it. Truly appreciate like being a K-Pop idol, but um, like I said, like I don't.
I'm not.
I don't have any bad opinions.
I don't really wanna bar anyone from that career if they if that's something they really wanna do, I think that if anything is up to people, to kind of like actually like, give them a chance to see if they actually perform well, if they're actually a good singer and all of that, and then people can decide, OK, is this person, like, really worth paying attention to?
Like giving a career to or should we just like, listen to other performers?
Because they they're seeing better dance better and all that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:06
There are so a couple of groups that I've studied in the past that don't have or have non-Asian idols. They're really interesting, like Kaachi, which is... was they've disbanded, UM, a British K-Pop group.

Lee 17:27
Ah, could you type them to me?

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:28
And sure, I'll spell it out since I can't type on while it's transcription.
Transcribing.
It's KAA.

Lee 17:38
KA.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:38
C. HI.

Lee 17:40
KA.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:41
Yeah, KAACHI.

Lee 17:44
CHI.
Ohh OK.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:45
Yes.
So there are they've been in kind of hot water about the whole appropriation thing, but also the subpar performance part of what they're trying to do.

Lee 17:53
Umm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:55
And then the other one that is a little bit different because they have actually trained really intensely and Korean people are a bit more accepting of them is Black Swan, which is also predominantly non Koreans and non Asians, they're they're very interesting.

Lee 18:07
Hmm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:13
It's interesting to see to hear you know, that you really emphasize performance as being something that's a tenent of K-POP.
Whereas Bryce, Umm feels it might be a little bit appropriative and you can't truly embody the K-Pop, the K of the K-POP idol without being Asian, so that those are really interesting perspectives that that the two of you who like the same band have different opinions on.

Lee 18:33
Right.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:40
UM, yeah, this is really interesting.
UM, OK.
So my last question official question for you and then we can kind of talk about anything else in the K-POP life that you would like to fan about.
But last question is if you had to name 3 K-Pop songs that you wanted to like, recommend a newbie K-Pop fan.
Which songs would they be?

Lee 19:09
Hmm from any group.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:11
For any group, yeah.

Lee 19:14
UM.
OK.
Uh, hard choice.. I would say Fancy.
Fancy is like probably their most popular song, UM in general. Uh.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:25
Umm.

Lee 19:34
And in our uh, I would say like Du-du-du from BlackPink, because I would say that was the song that got Bryce into Blackpink.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:40
Umm.

Lee 19:45
So that was sort of their breakout role, at least for him and then?
Butter by BTS because if I understand, I actually found an article that said that.
But uh, Butter and other like fully English songs by hip hop groups aren't considered K-Pop because they don't have Korean lyrics in them.
I'm not sure if that's true, but I've been anyway...I would recommend Butter because like even though it doesn't have Korean lyrics, it has like the beat and tempo of K-Pop, and so if

people like it, if people for example like wanna get into the music without like getting confused by the lyrics for example, then that's a good starter song.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:28
Hmm, that's really interesting.
You say that cause, yeah, people definitely debate whether or not like the language makes the K-POP versus like the musicology, the composition.
Like you were saying, what makes the K-Pop? I feel like there's a happy like in between there that really what makes it K-Pop, a combination thereof of those things, not just one or the other.
But yeah, yeah, that's really interesting that you brought up that article.
Was that just like an editorial?
Like from like LA Times or Time magazine or something like that.

Lee 20:59
I'm sorry to say I'm I don't remember where the article comes from.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:02
That's OK, that's fine.
It is interesting though.
OK, cool.
So is there anything that you want to like?...Just bring up being a K pop fan?
Like any experiences you've had or like anything fun you wanna share or something you wanna get off your chest?

Lee 21:22
Well, one thing I constantly hear from Bryce is like for some reason there is a lot of competition and toxicity between K pop group fan groups like I know that between BTS and BLACKPINK, the fans absolutely hate each other and whenever something goes wrong for either of them, they make fun of each other or they try to, like, downplay their success and to be to be honest, like I don't know where that comes from.
And I actually wonder, like, why people?

Why?
Like there's such that toxicity between like K pop groups.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:01
Umm yeah, that that is really an interesting case.
It seems kind of unique to K-Pop, right?
Like unless there's like beef, like the Swifties and John Mayer's fandom or whatever, but.

Lee 22:15
Yeah, I'm, I'm not very much on social media, so like I only hear this like second hand from Bryce, but like he talks about it constantly so it makes it makes me think like ohh yeah it's this may be like a common thing you know and I just like I'm actually very curious as to why that is.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:31
Yeah.
Hmm, yeah, that is really interesting.
I have my theories, but I'll reserve that for the study, ha.

Lee 22:42
For this study, yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:43
Yeah.
Umm yeah this interesting that you bring that up and you say you're not on social media that much.

Lee 22:49
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:50
OK.
Is Bryce really into social media or is he on social media a lot?

Lee 22:54
Ohh absolutely.
He's probably on it every day.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:00
That helps, I guess, with his fluency and in K-Pop stuff.

Lee 23:04
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:06
UM have have either of you gone to like any like fan events other than concerts?
But like other K-POP events at all.

Lee 23:13
UM, I went to uh a Twice pop up experience earlier this year. Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:17
In LA? and how is that?

Lee 23:23
It was very fun.
I took a bunch of photos and all.
When I went there late so all the merch was already gone, which is like you know, there's

the silver lining is that like I didn't have to like, spend any more money but and, but yeah, there was also like, umm, like a chain link fence on top where you can like, leave notes to the members.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:33
Umm.
Umm.

Lee 23:48
I actually left one myself.
Umm I wrote a note to Dahyun asking her to Boba time and like putting my number down, which like I didn't do it seriously, I did it as like a complete joke, but like, I don't, I just wanted to like mess around like tell my friends that I did that and all and all that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:14
That's funny.
Did Bryce go with you to that too?

Lee 24:22
Ah no.
He umm he was busy that day so he couldn't come with me.

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:27
OK, so did you go solo?
Did you bring like other friends with you?

Lee 24:31
No, I went by myself.

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:33

OK.
Has any of this inspired you to like, visit Korea?
Would you ever want to go to Korea or Seoul?

Lee 24:43
Yeah, I mean, like I would have an interest in like visiting and taking vacations for example, but I'm not sure if like I'm going only because of like K pop or like that's my sole reason for visiting Korea.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:01
There are other things that you be interested in seeing, like the history and stuff like that.

Lee 25:06
Absolutely, yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:07
Got it.
Got it.
That makes total sense and makes for a really good vacation.
If it's not just based on one thing. Awesome.

Lee 25:15
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:17
Alright.
Well, is there anything else that you wanted to talk about or to throw in here for me?

Lee 25:24

I think no.
I think I got everything off my chest.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:27
OK, awesome.
Alright, so I will end the recording right now.

Sharon Kong-Perring stopped transcription

***Appendix F. Full transcription with interviewee, Stephanie* (July 2023)**

Stephanie Interview-20230716_150741-Meeting Recording

July 16, 2023, 7:07PM
1h 5m 47s

Sharon Kong-Perring started transcription

Sharon Kong-Perring 0:08
First and foremost, my first question for you is how did you get into K-POP?
What wasn't in life that led you there?

Stephanie 0:32
Well, about I wanna say a year and a half ago it was November 2021.
Uh, I actually, my friend got me into K dramas and she was like, you need to watch Crash landing.

Sharon Kong-Perring 0:46
OK.

Stephanie 0:52
And I was like, OK, I will watch it.
And from there I was like, OK, this sounds good.
There's some good stuff going on here.
So I started going online, checking Instagram.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:03
Yeah.

Stephanie 1:04
There were some people that were talking about K dramas and then while they were talking about k-dramas, they were also talking about K-pop.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:11
Umm.

Stephanie 1:11
And from there I was like, wait, I recognize this song.
I listened to this before and I think it was Blue Hour by TXT.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:16
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 1:20
Uh, that I remembered.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:20
Umm.

Stephanie 1:22
I was like, wait, I that sounds familiar.
And I went back to my Apple music and I saw in 2020 I had listened to Blue Hour, Dynamite, Lovesick Girls and Dinga, Baby, Mama.
So and I realized that I had like a lot of the music, but I hadn't gotten into it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:36
OK.

Stephanie 1:44
And I was like, let me check it out and went down the rabbit hole that is K-Pop.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:50
Then got sucked in.

Stephanie 1:52
Yeah, very much so.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:54
I love it.
What was it about K-Pop that you liked?

Was it like you said, the music initially, but was there something else that gave it like that, You know?
For you.

Stephanie 2:05
I think definitely the music. English is my second language, so I was used to just going with the flow with music and not knowing lyrics because I didn't know what the lyrics meant.

Sharon Kong-Perring 2:18
Hmm.
OK.

Stephanie 2:22
So I was like this is cool because it doesn't matter if I get it, I just get the vibe of the song and the general message of it.
And I just from there on I started like OK, let me actually see what this means.
And I like the messaging of a lot of the songs, and some others were just pop love songs and I was OK with that too, because I do love my pop music.
Just very generic messaging on pop music, so I was like this works and then from there it was just a very quick snowball effect into stanning groups and like getting really into it, going to concerts and just getting very involved in it.
And now I actually look up the meanings of songs and ohh there might there might be more, it might just be very plain and easy song, but sometimes it's deeper than what it shows you.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:05
Umm.

Stephanie 3:18
So I was like, let's do this.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:20
Umm.

Stephanie 3:20

It's kinda hard to like be like ohh no, this is it.
This is all I'm gonna look at.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:26
Umm.

Stephanie 3:27
Look at superficially, but in reality I was like, no, I need to deep dig deeper.
So that's how.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:34
Umm.
Got it.
OK, very cool.
Umm.
Which groups do you stan?
I know that we both like ATEEZ but which other groups are you like vibing with?

Stephanie 3:43
Yes.
So my ultimate group, my favorite of favorites, is BTS.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:52
OK.

Stephanie 3:52
That's my, that was my start into the into the world of K-Pop and then I got into Monster X.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:00
OK.

Stephanie 4:00
Got into ATEEZ and it was my first concert and I just...I knew I had only started hearing their music two weeks prior to the concert and I was like, OK, let me just let me just go join my friend who really wanted to go and I was like, I'll go.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:09
Ohh OK.
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 4:13
I haven't gone to a concert.
I wanna go so, but from there on it was full on ATEEZ.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:16
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 4:20
Also on top of BTS then I was like wait TXT, I remember them hold on.
I stan TXT, Mama Moo, Twice and then from there on it just became big.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:27
Umm.

Stephanie 4:34
Now I have I think I have over 12 groups that I stan uh.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:39
OK.

Stephanie 4:40
So what else do I stan... Lessarafim? Seventeen, Stray Kids, Astro, Got 7.
I just recently got into EXO.
And a whole bunch of other new ones that I could make a whole long list because it's it's a lot, a lot and I'm starting to get into soloists too.
So it's not just some so, uh, do you need it like a like a list?
Because I can give that to you too, because I am insane and I love to just write everything down.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:14

No, it's totally fine.
I get the gist and the transcript has caught a lot of the groups that you had mentioned.

Stephanie 5:27
OK, good.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:28
Uh, so OK, what is it about these groups then, is it?
Is it their music?
Is it the choreography?
Is it like their personalities?
Like what is it about these groups that draw you in?

Stephanie 5:38
So I guess it depends on the group.
So like some groups, it started with the music, and then I delved into: Ohh.
Let me look more into the variety shows and I fell for them some more.
I started with the variety shows and I was like let me look at the music and I fell for it and some were just just like, oh, they're in the same company.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:57
Umm.

A

Stephanie 5:57
Let me check because that company has some good groups.
Let me continue looking and I just started off like even from before debut, I was looking into these groups.
So, Lessarfaim was like that. XIKERs was like that.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:10
Umm.
God, I love that XIKERs.

Stephanie 6:14
I love XIKERs.
They're like my little just, they're so cute.
They're so fluffy.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:18
They're so cute.

Stephanie 6:18
There's they're...They're adorable.
I'm like, my sons!

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:21
Yeah.

Stephanie 6:23
And so like that, like I got into Fromis 9 when they were acquired, transferred over.
I don't know how they would consider that Pledis and over with HYBE.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:37
Umm.

Stephanie 6:39
So I was like, OK, let me look at them and I love all other songs.
I have them as my top girl group right now because of that, because they're just very, very pop and flowery and but still has an edge to it on in the B side.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:44
Umm.
Really. OK.
Umm.

Stephanie 6:55
So it was just that was one of the reasons, but mainly it's either one of those two ways, variety show.
So personality into music and choreography, of course.
Performance.
Everything performance I used to be a dancer back in my high school and college days, so that's like I'm like, wow, like synchronizations big for me.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:11
And umm.
Umm.

Stephanie 7:18
That's why 17 is being on my on my list, but then also some of them...

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:22
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 7:24
I started with the music was like, oh, I like this BTS song.
I love this and then I started watching Run BTS and I fell for them and I haven't looked up from them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:29
Yeah.
Umm.
Mm-hmm.
I mean, it's hard not to.

Stephanie 7:39
Right.
It's just like a heart thing.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:42
Yeah.
Now I'm going to ask you a little bit more of like a hard-hitting question, because you're a PhD and you kind of get the theory behind it.

Stephanie 7:52
Sounds good.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:53

Yeah, there's a lot of parasociality between fans and and the idols and a lot of like auto ethnographically analyzing my trajectory of parasociality with groups too.

Stephanie 7:55
Umm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:06
So when you watch like these variety shows or like Run BTS or any of these other like vlogs, umm, do you find yourself kind of like feeling like you're building a relationship you know, not as like you have a true relationship with them, but like you see their personalities and you see their kind of true selves?

Stephanie 8:25
I feel like I do.
It also depends on.
It depends on the group and their dynamics with.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:30
Yeah.

Stephanie 8:31
With the fandom in general, there's some groups that I feel closer to in the personality I guess you'd say, depending on how not only how much they share, but how they share it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:33
Umm.
No. OK.

Stephanie 8:45
Uh, like an example would be BTS.
That's my old group.
So like I look a lot of their content up a lot more and I'll randomly be like WeVerse live at 4:00 in the morning with JK falling asleep.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:54
Umm. Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 9:04
I'm like, OK, where that come from? Or washing dishes randomly?

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:06
While folding his laundry.
Yeah.

Stephanie 9:12
Bestie.
Coming over, having a drink like it, it feels like I am in a room with my friends, even though I'm not talking to them, which I mean, I've always liked groups like since I was little like Backstreet Boys and 98 degrees.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:13
Mm-hmm.
Yeah, yeah.

Stephanie 9:29
Ohh that stuff like that's been in my life since I was little.
But this it's like a completely different kind of.
Well, it is a kind of relationship, even though it's a mostly one sided, even though yes, they I feel like there is that back and forth between the parasocial like they, like they have a parasocial relationship with the fans and then we of course have a very deep one to the point that it can get out of hand at times.
But I'm like ohh I'd gotten some of their mannerisms when I'm like, talking to my mother and she has gotten some of their mannerisms by the amount of times I talked to them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:07
Umm.

Stephanie 10:13
So I feel like that parasocial relationship is definitely ther.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:14
Umm.

Stephanie 10:21
I feel like it's deep, but it's also understanding that you know it is parasocial it is not a tangible relationship.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:22
Umm.
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 10:31
It is not a relationship that, oh, we're gonna see each other, and we're gonna go get coffee, or we're just gonna go to the mall or to the movies.
Like it's not that kind of relationship, even though a lot of things of an everyday friendship or relationship might seem like it's part of that parasocial life.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:41
Umm.
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 10:52
You just have to... I guess for me as a very practical and rational person.
It's like I I know that Jin is not gonna come over and have a drink in my house, but he will have a drink in his house and turn on the Live.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:01
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 11:05
And I'm like, OK, we're chilling.

We're having a good time.
We're drinking.
I'm laughing at screaming over video games and when they show themselves as quote unquote normal people, which we know they're normal, but they they're celebrities at the end of the day, they have a very different lifestyle cause they get a little more money than we do.
So they have different opportunities that we might not have.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:31
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 11:32
I still it allows for like a deeper connection even though it's one sided.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:39
Yeah.
Yeah.
And so do you think then, this is something that I'm toying with, is that there seems to be kind of this like unique parasocial affinity or like an almost a different level of parasociality that K-POP gives us as fans? Like an opening to participate in versus like kind of like a Western or like a non K-Pop group.

Stephanie 11:58
Oh yes.
1000% because I was also a fan of One Direction back in the back.
In those days, you know, like…
Look, I was about to buy a flight to go to like, I was living in Orlando, was about to take a flight and go over to LA to see them because they were about to like,
Ohh, we're gonna go on a break break.

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:25
Umm.

Stephanie 12:26
Yes, which is also very different in the K-POP realm than it is in the Western self, but the parasocial relationship in the K-POP world is very different to the Western eyes because I never felt close to like Zayn.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:31
Yeah.
Mm-hmm.
Yeah.

Stephanie 12:50
I never felt close to JLo.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:50
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 12:53
I love JLo, and I still like.
I know that JLo's JLo and she has her life and but I never felt close enough to be like, Oh my God, my bestie JLo, and oh my God, we have the same taste in nail shape.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:58
Umm.
Mm-hmm.
Mm-hmm. Right.

Stephanie 13:10
I've never even looked at their nails, but if I get on a live and I catch Lessarafim and one of them is like, Oh my God, I got my nails done and I'm like, Oh my God, we have the same exact nail shape.
This is the best shape of my life.
Like I love how they look.
I'm like, wow, we have something in common.
Even though we're ten years apart almost, I still feel that degree of closeness with her, or even with any other fan at that point, like Jin, playing video games and screaming because the little thing died and kept falling into the bottom and had to start again.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:35
Yeah.

Yeah, yeah.
Right.

Stephanie 13:55
I know the struggle.
I don't like video games because of that, because I like to win, but I felt that I was like, see, that's why you're my bias, because you scream at the TV too.
So that's something that I couldn't at all say with Western artists, so.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:07
Umm.
This umm yeah there seems to be a different level of like where the line of pathologization of the fan is drawn, right?

Stephanie 14:22
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:22
It's like in in K-Pop there's a very fine line between like the Master fan and like the saesang versus in the West there's like a much bigger.

Stephanie 14:30
Umm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:34
Pool between whether you're like an obsessive fan or just like an OK rational fan, right?
So it seems like the line is blurred a little bit in in a good and bad way in K-Pop.

Stephanie 14:40
Exactly.
He he.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:45
So yeah, it's really, it's interesting to hear that.

Stephanie 14:47
Yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:48
Uh, you had said earlier and I I think this is a really interesting observation, is some groups you feel closer to because of how much they share and how they share it.

Stephanie 14:58
Mhm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:58
Are there groups that you stan that you feel like you may not know, like they're kind of true self or like you, you don't, you don't see the personalities as much?

Stephanie 15:08
Yeah, I think it also is maybe because I haven't ventured into checking out everything up theirs.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:16
Yeah.

Stephanie 15:19
But like idols that go online often or post like, Oh my gosh, I hope that this fan that we met at this thing is doing well.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:19
Umm.
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 15:32
Even that makes me feel like that's a compassionate person.
That's a person that cares, even if I don't know them in person.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:37
Umm.

Stephanie 15:39
I know that they are.
They care for their, for their fans and in a way that is more than just like, oh, they're my fans, that's it.
They pay my bills because that's what we do.
We pay their bills at the end of the day and I'm totally OK with that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:51
Umm.

Stephanie 15:54
I will pay Jennie's bills any day because that's just that is how it works.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:57
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 16:01
Capitalism works in very clear, mysterious ways, but when I feel closer to a group for like example like, I feel closer to BTS.

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:07
Umm.

Stephanie 16:15
I feel closer to, strangely enough, which because I haven't stanning for as long as I have stanned like, say, BTS, is Stray Kids.
Whenever Banchan comes in and starts talking and talking to staff
about ohh, let's watch this music video together and then turns the volume down whenever.

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:25

Umm.
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 16:36
A bad word comes up like taking care of the younger fans thinking of my fans are not all 18 plus or feel comfortable enough with cursing while others would be like, you know what?

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:47
Yeah.

Stephanie 16:50
I'm sorry.
Like most try to be very careful with that because they understand fandom ranges in ages, but those little things.

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:55
Sure.

Stephanie 16:59
The details I'm like, oh, you know, that's adorable.
They have a younger demographic, so it's understandable that they would lower the volume.
That means they care for it.
Well, there are other groups that I don't know much about them, whether it's because they are not as active now as they were before, for example with Got 7.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:13
Yeah.

Stephanie 17:21
I love Got 7.
I think they're hilarious, but I don't feel as close to them as I feel to
say TXT when Soobin brings Otis and shows it to me and it's like, oh, my baby's here and I'm like, ohhh, so, so cute.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:36
Umm.

Stephanie 17:36
So it's it's that difference and I don't.
It also has to do with.
When I came into the fandom and how K-Pop has progressed over the past 10 years too, because... and also technology has grown over the past 10 years, so it I think those are the things that kind of differentiate and help why I might be closer to some groups than others.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:43
Umm.
Yeah.
Umm.

Stephanie 18:04
I love Astro.
I'm not as close to Astro.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:08
Hmm yeah.

Stephanie 18:09
I am close to, let's say, fromis 9, and I might not feel extremely close to Mamamoo, even though I went to Mamamoo's concert and I love Mamamoo.
And I'm like, those are my girls.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:25
Umm.

Stephanie 18:27
I would see them any day that they come here.
I'm still not as close to them as I am to fromis 9 because I sit and I watch all the lives

that they go on.
So it's I think it's that difference, it's the availability and the rapidness that I can get into.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:37
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 18:43
Uh.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:43
Umm.

Stephanie 18:44
Or I can get a message on Instagram or I can do this or that.
I feel like that's also part of how that is shaped on how comfortable I feel with the group, or so.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:54
Yeah. Umm.

Stephanie 18:59
I'm not saying that I don't feel comfortable with any of them, because I actually really do, which is kinda...
That's a whole other thing...
Like how comfortable you feel with a group that sometimes people might message them stuff on, let's say, WeVerse or Universe or any of those apps.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:07
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 19:16
It can get a little out of hand.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:18
Umm.

Yeah.
Really interesting.
UM, switching gears a little bit, but you had mentioned willing to pay Jennie's bills any day. Same.

Stephanie 19:25
Yes.
Yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:32
Have you noticed or have you thought that K-Pop is particularly good at like fansumerism or like buying merch or buying the albums?
How has that experience either been different or the same or whatever with like a Western group like 1D for example?

Stephanie 19:51
Ohh, I yes, I bought all of 1D's albums but the amount of albums that I have for K-POP…I mean even just BTS.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:58
Umm.

Stephanie 19:59
I have the whole the full Korean discography less than two years like as a fan.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:05
Umm.

Stephanie 20:05
I still have all of their albums.
I have all of Jin's Korean discography photocards. It's something that I've realized is that the idols themselves, at least not ones that I've really follow**,**
OK like BTS, are not very into the capitalism line, but then you have the company, which is definitely into it because they are a company.
They are corporation, they need to make money.
That's the job of a company to make money.

So just today before logging in here, I saw that there's going to be a physical album of Jack in the Box, and I texted my friend, why does HYBE want my money so bad?

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:51
Umm.

Stephanie 20:58
And will I still give HYBE my money?
Of course I will because I want that album.
I want those photo cards.
It makes me feel this kind of like adrenaline high of ohh.
I'm getting something.
I don't know what I'm getting because if I knew what I was getting like I do with Western artist, I know all I'm getting in the album is the album.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:10
Umm.

Stephanie 21:18
It's a CD and that's it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:19
Umm.

Stephanie 21:21
So I haven't bought a Western artist album since, baby, since I was 15.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:28
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 21:30
And I don't think I would buy it.
I know, like other artists have had multi-verse versions of their own album, and that's kind of cool because you can get to collect and they like ohh version this and that.
Put four together, and it makes a pretty picture, you know, and I think that's great cause

it's more engagement with the fandom and stuff, but at the same time I'm like even if I was into those artists that are starting to do that, there's something special about K-Pop that makes you want to invest yourself not only emotionally, but physically into it. Also, like economically into it. It like, it feels like you're broke every time.
So every time you're on TikTok, it's like ohh this and that: I am a broke ARM.
And I mean I am, but I still find a way to pay my boy's bills.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:25
Umm.
Umm.
Umm.

Stephanie 22:33
Do they don't need me like as a single unit of a person.
They don't need my money, but I still feel like that.
Gotta gotta, gotta help my boys out, which is very strange.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:44
Umm.

Stephanie 22:48
As a grown woman to have that feeling, and I'm like, OOF, I I really need to go talk to my psychiatrist again.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:50
Umm hmm. Ha.

Stephanie 22:56
And then I go talk to them and I get all excited about how ohh I went to England. Just the other week and I bought an album because they had a UK exclusive of ATEEZ and I got excited and I bought myself two.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:05
Umm.

Stephanie 23:12

And I was like, you know what it is, what it is at this point.
Just live your life at the moment.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:16
Yeah.

Stephanie 23:17
Just enjoy it and have fun, and that's something that I feel K-Pop gives us that a lot of Western artists don't.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:22
Umm. Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 23:24
Is that, at least in my personal experience, it's kind of like a joy that you don't have to invest yourself too much in the drama if you don't want to, which a lot of people might do, and that's, you know, that's every person's business.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:29
Umm.
Umm.
Umm.

Stephanie 23:40
That's totally OK, if you want to invest yourself in that, but I like my fluffy stuff.
I like my joyous moments.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:46
Umm.
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 23:49
Do I still get sad when I here's some news I'm like, oh, give benefit of doubt?

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:55
OK.

Stephanie 23:57
Ohh no.
Not to get into any of that, but.
While I feel that Western artists and I...I'm fully separated from the drama,
but I'm like, yeah, let's, let's hear more about it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:12
Thank you and.

Stephanie 24:13
With K-Pop, I'm like, I don't want them to get in any drama because I feel personally invested in it and I think that also has to do a lot with the amount of albums I buy. For example, for the amount of times I stream the song, because I'm like, I want my boys to do well, so I'm gonna stream this.

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:18
Umm.

Stephanie 24:35
I'm gonna make a very specialized play list, just so that they can do good.
I'm gonna go and sign in at three in the morning to vote at this show because they are going.

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:47
Umm.

Stephanie 24:47
I want them to win for this week and then you get into the conundrum of,
like, there's several of your groups in the same moment and you're like, who do I vote for?

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:50
Umm.
Yeah. Umm.

Stephanie 24:57
So you just kind of have to start ranking your groups, which I don't like it, but I have to cause who do you vote for at the end of the day? But.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:02
Umm.

Stephanie 25:06
Going back to the capital and I guess thing of K-Pop, I feel the need to buy the albums.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:09
Umm.

Stephanie 25:17
My bookshelf is all albums right now.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:20
Yeah.

Stephanie 25:20
I have albums in a bin that I have to take to goodwill because I just want it for the photo cards, which is really sad.
At the same time, because I'm like, I wanna use the albums I want to be able to, like, cut them up and give them as trinkets.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:31
Yes.

Stephanie 25:33

If it's trade photo cards with someone or in next concert, I go for those for those groups, I can make little Baggies and be like, Oh my God, enjoy, love you.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:36
Umm.

Stephanie 25:45
And that's another thing.
Friendships you make with within K-POP so that but anyways, I probably already forgot the question you asked, so let me know again.

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:48
Umm.
No, this is great.
This is great.
That was another question I was gonna ask you is: at concerts, like, have you experienced fans making like fan made freebies or have you made fan made freebies? But it seems like you're familiar.

Stephanie 26:10
Yes.
So I haven't made freebies for concerts, but I do trade photocards a lot and through that I have made a lot of freebies.

Sharon Kong-Perring 26:16
Umm.

Stephanie 26:19
So, like, let's say I buy five of one specific album because I wanted to get the photo card I wanted for that.
Then I learned that there's other ways through trading to get the photo card you want, but besides the point that this moment, yes, I have experienced getting freebies at concerts, and they're adorable.

Sharon Kong-Perring 26:28

Umm.
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 26:39
They're some of the cutest stuff I've gotten, and I also have given freebies through the tradings and to win all that stuff, whether it's at a meet up and we start trading or someone gives me a little, here you go, and it has a fan made photocard some stickers, like I've gone back to my love for stickers once again because of K-Pop and there's a lot of things in my life that I've come back thanks to K-Pop, which I'm very grateful for cuz I was like, why did I stop doing this or why did I stop liking this as much as I used to.

Sharon Kong-Perring 26:48
Umm yeah.
Umm.
Umm.
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 27:18
But that, like friendship aspect of like, oh, here you go.
Like we stan the same group.
I hope you have a good day in the concert, whether it's because you are about to have a bad day because you have all the way in nosebleeds and can't hear anything.
And that's my make your day a little bit better or just because we have the same taste in groups and I want you to have a good day.

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:36
Umm.

Stephanie 27:45
And I here you go.
Have fun.

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:48
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 27:48

So I don't know.
It's just like the little details that I just really enjoy.
Uh, and that sense of, like, friendship, even though we don't know each other, that's another level of parasocial-ing.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:54
Umm.

Stephanie 27:59
I feel that's there because then you start getting into like, in the back, we'll say like getting into their Instagram or TikTok and oh my God, I love your stuff or your edits and just start liking them.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 28:11
Umm.

Stephanie 28:12
And then you start making a friendship completely online.
You don't even remember this person's face, but you start making a friendship online.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 28:18
Umm.

Stephanie 28:19
Online.
So like those kind of things, I just, I really love about the space that is the fan side of K-Pop because it allows for kind of like a bridging and making a friendships that usually are not there or people that you might be completely different to or people that you have complete things that are like completely equal, like how I found your Instagram and was like, it was very ...I don't know whether it was because of ATEEZ and that really allowed for me to be like ah, that's another PhD. That's really cool.
See, I'm not the only PhD here or getting into TikTok or Twitter and finding other people with like really big careers that are still in the space of K-Pop fandom.
So that's that's fun.

Sharon Kong-Perring 29:17
Umm, so it it seems like you've had really great experiences with other like K-Pop fans.

Stephanie 29:23
Yes, yes, I have.

Sharon Kong-Perring 29:25
Umm, have you mostly been in like the SoCal area doing fan stuff?
Or have you traveled at all over, like in in the US to do things.

Stephanie 29:35
So I went...Usually it's in here in the LA/SoCal/San Diego area, but I have gone up to Vegas before and that was great.

Sharon Kong-Perring 29:40
Umm.
Ah, OK.

Stephanie 29:48
I didn't go to any like fan meets cause it was like a day in day out because things cost. But I did have a great experience because we went to a K-Pop store after the, after the next day after the concert, and then I went to church with a friend and there were girls in there that had gone to the concert the night before.

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:05
Umm.

Stephanie 30:14
So all we did was just, like, get all excited and ohh my God, did you see how amazing it was?

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:20
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 30:20
So like that was our friendships were built through that, even though it didn't like we were in opposite sides of the stadium, yet we were there the same exact day and we saw each other the next day at my friend's church.

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:27
Umm.

Stephanie 30:38
So it was...It was kinda really nice to get that experience of like, Oh my God, other people that I know love, K-Pop too, and I will get all excited.

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:47
Umm.

Stephanie 30:49
And then of course, I might never speak to them again.
But I did get them on Instagram and stuff, so that's kind of like the... it's like parasocial within a parasocial relationship, which, hey, you, it's kind of something you have to like, unbox, 'cause there's a lot.

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:54
Mm-hmm.
Umm yeah.
Yeah.
I really get that.

Stephanie 31:10
There's a lot going on in there because then if you don't agree with something the other person might get upset.

Sharon Kong-Perring 31:12
Umm.

Stephanie 31:17
What do you mean?
I'm like, OK, chill, we're adults here.

Sharon Kong-Perring 31:19
Right.

Stephanie 31:21
Let's let's be reasonable about everything.

Sharon Kong-Perring 31:21
Right.

Stephanie 31:25
So it's one of those things that great friendships have been built, but also it could lead to other stuff.
I haven't had those experiences.

Sharon Kong-Perring 31:33
Fantasy.

Stephanie 31:35
Yeah, like ohh.

Sharon Kong-Perring 31:37
Yeah, yeah, I completely get that.
So when you're going to these concerts or these fan meets umm, how do you usually dress?
What do you wear?
Do you wear your fan merch?
Do you dress like the idols?
What's your MO?

Stephanie 31:56

So I try to find not themed clothing or like anything like that, though technically I guess it is themed clothing because like for let's say I went to Vegas to see BTS last year. I was like I am going to wear something that indicates J-Hope.
So I got a bright green crop top and then a yellow undershirt with bell bottom jeans and boots.
And I was just like, I'm gonna be...I'm gonna get, I'm gonna dress up as the aura of what I think of when I think of J-Hope, and I was like, after I was like umm, there are other options and I went in and I saw these people. Very cool.
Different outfits, and I was like Ohh mine is not as cool.
I just look like I'm going down to like the mall, but I always from then on I was like, I look forward to going to concerts just to see the outfits that everyone... and see what like trying to figure out what they're dressed up as.
So for another concert I went in, I went online, looked for a picture of Lee Know.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 33:03
Oh.

Stephanie 33:11
Back when he was a backup dancer before going to the Stray Kids concert and I found a way to kind of like cosplay as that specifically.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 33:19
Yeah.

Stephanie 33:21
Which again, gotta think of these things later
on for Twice. We're going "Alcohol Free" themed and we had floral and pink and green and colors.
So like I do, I guess I do try to go with a theme within the groups vibes.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 33:41
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 33:43
So, like Mamamoo, I wore black pants and a white blouse with a lot of....

Sharon Kong-Perring 33:46
Hmm.

Stephanie 33:49
So it felt very Mamamoo. Or ATEEZ.

Sharon Kong-Perring 33:51
Umm.

Stephanie 33:52
I wore leather and chains and then for BTS, very nice flower and poppy and very Permission To Dance.

Sharon Kong-Perring 33:54
Umm.

Stephanie 33:59
And so it I guess, yes, I do dress up every time I try to my best, but it does consume a lot of my mind that week.

Sharon Kong-Perring 34:10
Hmm.

Stephanie 34:10
It takes a lot of like I want to...I don't want to be a kitschy caricature of what they were like, whether it's music video, whether it's the personality of a person.
But I also don't want to just go and jeans and a T-Shirt, which is totally acceptable. Totally cool and chill, but I cannot help wanting a little bit more, even though I know they're never gonna look my way.
I just want to show off my best too.
Whatever artist I'm going to see. So.

Sharon Kong-Perring 34:43
Sure.

Yeah, that makes total sense.
And yeah, and I get, I get that very much.
So you're very well versed in the K-POP fandom space.
Obviously it's very apparent. When it comes to like Korea and Korean stuff other than K-POP, has being a K-POP fan and a K-drama fan like inspired you or like led you in any way to other cultural things about Korea, like the food or like film or clothing or any of that kind of stuff?

Stephanie 35:24
It has and it kind of like brought back a lot of things from when I was in high school that I didn't realize were Korean because I grew up in a heavily Korean area in Georgia, but I didn't realize about that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 35:32
Umm.
Umm.
Oh, OK.

Stephanie 35:40
I was just like ohh this just, there's just people here.
So like to me it was just like ohh, they just have really nice supermarkets and that's the one that my mom goes to.

Sharon Kong-Perring 35:44
Mm-hmm.
Umm.

Stephanie 35:51
So it brought back the: Ohh, we're going to H Mart and getting the very lean cuts of meats and very nice vegetables and great noodles and sauces and stuff like that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 35:56
Umm.

Stephanie 36:04
So kind of like brought all those memories from when I was in high school back.

But it led me to find so much more.
Something as basic as rice and my mom makes rice every single day.

Sharon Kong-Perring 36:17
Umm.

Stephanie 36:19
Yet it felt like I was appreciating more rice as part even of my culture as it is utilized in other cultures.
So it kind of like brought that and.
Korean fried chicken.
I'm in love now and it's.
I just.
I can't go back from Korean fried chicken anymore.

Sharon Kong-Perring 36:40
Ha ha. Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 36:41
It, like the other black bean noodles like I just I I just...

Sharon Kong-Perring 36:41
That's good.

Stephanie 36:49
I need them now in my life.
I before, I remember my brother eating a lot of like ramen, but now I am obsessed with ramen like I love ramen.

Sharon Kong-Perring 36:58
Umm.
Umm.

Stephanie 37:02
Umm, just because I love noodles.
But that's outside of the spectrum of the noodles that I was eating prior to that.

I'm eating a lot more spicy.
There's a lot of things that I've kind of like started to think ohh I'd really enjoy this.
It's opened my cultural horizons.
I don't know if that would be the right way to say it, but like I appreciate a lot more than I did before.

Sharon Kong-Perring 37:27
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 37:27
Uh.
And like I knew, I wanted to go to like, for example, I wanted to go to Singapore.
That's been my dream for a long time, but now I'm like, OK, I also when I go to Korea now and maybe I want to go to Japan, maybe I want to go to China, maybe I want to go to the Philippines.

Sharon Kong-Perring 37:40
Umm.

Stephanie 37:45
I'm like, I want to know more.
I want to.
Experience more than what I had already experience and it made me realize that we have a lot in common.
My culture with like for example Filipino culture and Puerto Rican culture are very similar in a lot of things.

Sharon Kong-Perring 38:03
Yeah.

Stephanie 38:05
And I'm just like, I've been not realizing that that specific food that you eat is the same one we just a different name.
And when I realized that I'm like ohh I feel so uncultured.
But then I'm like, no, you're just opening yourself to learn more, because at the moment you weren't able to.
So it's one of those things.

But yeah, there's so much that I'm like now.
Like I'm recognizing words when someone speaks them outside of just like a song or a BSide or a K drama.

Sharon Kong-Perring 38:36
Umm.

Stephanie 38:41
I'm like, ah, I know what that word means.
Ha ha, that's so cool.

Sharon Kong-Perring 38:44
Umm.

Stephanie 38:48
So those kind of things like culturally have learn to appreciate a lot more than what I knew.
And I knew that there were some awesome stuff outside of what I was accustomed to, but it kinda gave me an opportunity to be like, no, I want to like for sure, learn more so.

Sharon Kong-Perring 39:08
OK.
Are you thinking of like, you mentioned, You might wanna go to Korea now, but have you thought about, like learning the language, or do you want to learn the language? Or do you kind of just like like knowing some words here and there or?

Stephanie 39:22
It would be amazing to learn the language.
I don't know if I can handle learning the language right now because I know how hard it is to learn a different language.

Sharon Kong-Perring 39:28
True.

Stephanie 39:32
Having to learn English when I was in middle school...so it was like I'm like, yes I do.

And I downloaded dual lingo.
I learned a couple of words.
I can recognize some characters.
I'm like, OK, I know what that is.
I know that I know when someone says something.

Sharon Kong-Perring 39:51
Umm.

Stephanie 39:52
I'm like, oh, I know what that means, and I want.
I would love to just whether it's through a class and app, something to like be able to get into learning the language, but I also feel like for me personally, how I learn, immersive is the best way for me to learn a lot of the times.
So it's one of those things I'm like, how do I get that?
For me to be able to grasp a better concept because I can understanding the writing, but then I won't be able to speak it and it will be...it will take a good ten years for me to learn the just the spoken part, so trying to figure out a way to get into that and how to do it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 40:31
Umm.

Stephanie 40:37
So for now it is paying attention to subtitles and how they're saying even those subtitles are not the best option.

Sharon Kong-Perring 40:41
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 40:45
It does help in some ways.
Duolingo.
Sometimes does the trick.
Not a lot, but it helps a bit to say hello was like goodbye to say no so I get.

Sharon Kong-Perring 40:56
Umm.

Stephanie 41:03
I want to learn it.
It's just really hard at the moment to learn it.
I think that's, that would be the summation of everything.

Sharon Kong-Perring 41:06
Yeah, that's fair.
That's very fair.
Iin your experiences at like concerts and fan meets and things like that, would you say that the majority of like the North American fans you have encountered, are they, have you encountered any Korean fans of K-POP or like Korean American fans of K-POP or do you find that it's mostly like not Korean or like non Asian fans that congregate?

Stephanie 41:36
I have seen a good group of, I'm gonna say Asian cause I'm not sure if they are Korean or if they're from elsewhere, but I have seen like a good mix of a little bit of everything. So there's some concerts that I see more equally diverse groups, but then there are some that it's just like very heavily westernized. Like I see a lot of Latinos and I see a lot of just Americans raised born here.

Sharon Kong-Perring 42:09
Yeah.

Stephanie 42:15
I see, just like a mixture of everything.
And I'm like, ah, I like this.

Sharon Kong-Perring 42:18
And.

Stephanie 42:21
And through that, like you're in, you're in a queue, and then you're just like, ohh.

Hi just start talking to the person behind you and they're not what you would expect it to be a K-Pop fan?
And I'm like, OK, good, because I'm not what I would expect a K-Pop fan to be or my friend would also not seem like...
It's just, it's a moment where everyone can come in and we're all different, and some groups feels like the people that are coming in are a little bit more diverse than just, let's say, White fans or black fans or Latino fans or Asian fans, but there are some others that it's more women than men.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 43:14
Umm.

Stephanie 43:14
There's some, that is a very, you know, like a good gradient of people.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 43:19
Umm.

Stephanie 43:20
Some are older fans than younger fans, and I've noticed, like the diversity within gender, race and age in all these concerts, some I feel like I'm an old person there, I'm like, oh God, I'm so old here with two buns.
Like gosh, but then I just enjoy it because it's just a concert and we're just having fun.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 43:46
Umm.

Stephanie 43:48
And it's OK for a 15 year old and a 30 year old and a 60 year old to have fun at a concert, because that's what music is made up to.
Have fun with and enjoy and scream and have no voice the next day, even though you have a presentation like it's totally OK, But there's some that I feel the shock at first than I do with others. Some others I'm like Oh yeah, I expected the group to be this diverse.
I don't know where anyone is from.
I love it.
Let's go.
But some others II'm like, wow, there's a lot more Latinos here than I thought there

would be or.
Ohh, there's a lot more Asians here than I thought or I'm like, wait, but there's two days. What, like, how did the ticketing happen that it ended up being this way?
Who has days off?

Sharon Kong-Perring 44:37
OK.

Stephanie 44:38
Who is able to take, you know, who's the A student here that can't go on the Wednesday but was able to go this Saturday or those little... I put too much thought into it because I start thinking of like, OK, ratios.
OK, who's the who's, where?
When what?
Like the reasoning why the group is mainly female ages 15 to 30 instead of female and male equal proportion 25 to 50, why is it that at that at this particular concert?
So it makes me sometimes wanna go to all of the dates, but I'm like I don't have the financial capabilities to be able to go through every single one of the days and scream my life away.

Sharon Kong-Perring 45:16
Ha.

Stephanie 45:25
So, but it does make me think of those things so.

Sharon Kong-Perring 45:29
That's when your PhD brain shows that you even analyze or think about that kind of stuff.

Stephanie 45:34
Yeah.
Yeah, I'm like ohh, I wonder every time.

Sharon Kong-Perring 45:38
Yeah.

Stephanie 45:39
I'm just like I should start bringing a notebook.

Sharon Kong-Perring 45:43
Then people ask you where the bathroom is because they think you work there.
Or you're like, yeah.

Stephanie 45:46
Ohh no yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 45:49
So that's why I take all my notes on my phone now, because people then don't really think much of that.
Umm, but yeah, that's something I was like, I don't why so many people are asking you?
Ohh cause I'm like not wearing anything like fan merch-y and I'm like sitting in a corner with a notebook, that's why.
But anyways, yeah, I'm theoretically, one of you.

Stephanie 46:10
I promise I don't work here.

Sharon Kong-Perring 46:16
A couple of my last questions.
So we talked about the diversity of fans.
I'm really curious if you have ever interacted with or like gotten into groups that have non Asian idols in them because we know a lot of groups have non Korean idols in like Twice has a lot of non Korean idols and like Got 7.

Stephanie 46:34
Umm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 46:37
Umm but like, have you ever encountered non Asian idols ever?

Stephanie 46:43
OK, so I just recently because I saw this last year and I was like, oh, that's very

interesting.
Black Swan.
I believe it's the name of the group.
Their new single's amazing.
Ohh my God. Karma.

Sharon Kong-Perring 46:55
They're pretty good.

Stephanie 46:56
I'm here for it.
I love that song.
And the girls are so adorable.
I'm like I started...
I watched an interview that these two, I think they're from Senegal, just like two... they live in Korea and they bring in different idols into their show and they invited her and she came in and she didn't know that they were Senegalese.

Sharon Kong-Perring 47:13
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 47:26
So she got so excited you could see the joy in her face.

Sharon Kong-Perring 47:28
And.

Stephanie 47:29
I love that interview was one of my favorite interviews, and from there I was like OK, let me keep looking at these, like and I keep getting them recommended on YouTube.
On the shorts area and like I love their little the dance challenge.
And then Kard came in and they participated in the, what's the name... in the challenge?
And I was just like it.
It feels like they're having a great time.
They're doing, they they...
If I didn't see them, I wouldn't have known that they were a non Asian group.

Sharon Kong-Perring 48:04
Umm.

Stephanie 48:04
Ah, technically they have one Asian member from South Asia.

Sharon Kong-Perring 48:10
South Asia.
This is true.

Stephanie 48:12
They have a beautiful Indian girl who, because she was found on YouTube, I checked that out too out.
Like, I'm really excited.
I went in digging, but that's a group that's like starting to, like grow on me because their latest album's really good.
And I know that over the years they have changed members in their group and that this is the first time that there's not a known Korean member like, there's not Korean members in the group.

Sharon Kong-Perring 48:35
Yeah.

Stephanie 48:43
So I was very interested in that.
I was like, wow, that's that's pretty cool.
Like opening up to non Asian members in the group.
I mean it's working out for them.
It's.
Look, they're being very respectful of the culture.
They're doing, you know, great music.
They sound great.
Why not?

Sharon Kong-Perring 49:13
Hmm.

Stephanie 49:14
Question mark... it's one of those things that I'm like, I have to see how it's gonna go.
I guess next, I guess the next comeback will be the one to like solidify them, the next two comebacks I feel, but I found it great.

I was, I was really excited for the girls.
I got excited for them.
I was like, yay, you got this.

Sharon Kong-Perring 49:37
Umm.
So like their ability to speak and sing in Korean fluently and being in the culture and living there and them really having like a high production of music, like that all kind of makes it very K-Poppy, right?

Stephanie 49:39
Now.
Yeah.
Ohh yeah, for sure very K-Pop yet also very diverse and inclusive at the same time.

Sharon Kong-Perring 50:02
Umm.

Stephanie 50:05
So I felt it.
It felt fresh and at the same time very a part of the K-Pop culture.

Sharon Kong-Perring 50:19
Umm.

Stephanie 50:19
So it was giving a little bit of both and I felt comfortable with them.
I was like, oh, this is cool.
I think you know, are they going to be the Guinea pigs?
It feels like it feels like they're the Guinea pigs of this.
Let's see.
How does bringing in non Asian members into a K-Pop group work?
But I also know like I think a couple companies are doing global groups now.

Sharon Kong-Perring 50:46
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 50:46
I'm not sure what that's gonna entail, if that's gonna entail, let's say, if there's a global

group, they'll be like a a Dutch, Korean and and a Brazilian Korean and an American-Korean and or an Afro-Japanese or I don't know if that's what they're going for, or if they're just like this is a girl from Mexico and she will join this group.
So I don't know if that's the way they're going and I am open to anything when it comes to K-Pop at this point because I really enjoy it and I feel like at this moment, it's my safe space, uh, and as a Latina woman in the United States, it is so a little hard at times.

Sharon Kong-Perring 51:19
Mm-hmm. Yes.

Stephanie 51:34
So I I appreciate for another culture to try to like diversify, even if it's just their entertainment industry to start opening up to more than just Asians for the case of K-Pop, because there's so many fans from abroad like we love it, and there's so many great talents that could do such a great job in a group.
So it could be great.

Sharon Kong-Perring 52:02
Yeah.

Stephanie 52:04
It could also be a hot mess, so it's one of those things that I feel like at this moment we just have to wait and see.
Try it.
If it works, it works.
If it doesn't, we tried it.
I think it will work.
That's just personal opinion. I like it. It's fun as long as they keep singing in Korean, I don't see a problem.
There's K-Pop songs in English, so that's just pop.
But I mean K-Pop is just pop but still.

Sharon Kong-Perring 52:33
Have you ever listened to or interacted with like KAACHI or EXP Edition?
They may be more before your time as a K-Pop fan though. They are interesting.

Stephanie 52:42
No, I haven't.

Sharon Kong-Perring 52:47

They've both, I think, since disbanded, but KAACHI was a British K-Pop group that had three white members and one Korean member, EXP Edition had four white members

Stephanie 52:54
Cool.
OK.

Sharon Kong-Perring 53:06
One was half Japanese, half white and the other three were were white, umm.
And those groups sang in Korean. Their dancing ability was a little, you know, the production value was not as great as you would hope for in K-Pop, but something that they ran into a lot was fans like gatekeeping and accusing them of, like, cultural appropriation and, like, kind of stuff.

Stephanie 53:29
Hmm

Sharon Kong-Perring 53:33
So I think maybe the difference here with Black Swan, maybe is that they're physically in Korea and learning Korean and maybe in the culture?

Stephanie 53:41
And I think, I think so, because if it's a group built in, for the case of the first one in, the UK, it does it does give the vibe that... it might not have been the intention, but it givs the vibe of appropriatin- ish. While if it had been solidified in Korea, it might have made a big difference.
Also, if the production value is not up to par of what we see in K-POP, it might also be seen as a joke of like, oh, they're just trying to...They're trying, but they're just appropriating the stuff and they just wanna play around because they just like K-Pop. They're just fangirls, so I can see how all of those things can come up, but I feel like the difference between those groups like you just explained to Black Swan is that Black Swan...Not only because it didn't start now, it's just these members are in here now, and even the member that has been there the longest, Fatu has been there from when there were still Korean members in the group.
So I feel like that also makes a difference and how they're going to be.

Sharon Kong-Perring 54:58
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 55:02
They're reception now in Korea will be the thing that kind of like makes or break them as a group.
And if it's, the thing is going to be continued forward, cause I've heard a lot of just they're all Japanese members, like XG. I've heard it's been controversial because they're all Japanese members, but they sing in English, but they're considered K-Pop.

Sharon Kong-Perring 55:17
Yeah.
Controversial.

Stephanie 55:29
So it just it feels like there was a lot of drama there.
Like I remember hearing a lot about it and it's like I love their songs.

Sharon Kong-Perring 55:34
I love them. I think they're fantastic.

Stephanie 55:38
I love them.
I think they're so great and I'm just like, yeah, they'r...they're doing, they're-- ohh not advertising--but they're debuting in Korea like....there.

Sharon Kong-Perring 55:54
Yeah, yeah.

Stephanie 55:55
I don't know.
It's, I guess as someone who likes to diversify things and not make things as just as a bubble of, like, these are the only ways.
It's not just a script.
I kinda like it, like the idea of XG like.

Stephanie 56:13
I really like the idea, like the girls sing.
Amazing.

They can rap.
They are just fantastic. They can dance.

Sharon Kong-Perring 56:19
They can dance.

Stephanie 56:22
Ohh my God.
They can.
They're just, they're just an amazing group.
Their latest single, it was like this is what other groups wish they had because it's true and I'm like, I love so many groups and I respect all groups because it's the talent it takes to get into a group.

Sharon Kong-Perring 56:27
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 56:37
The training period is a lot, like I know it takes styling to debut, but this song, this song is it y'all.
So that's a whole conversation I had with a friend because we were like, wow, some groups, wish this was their debut song or some groups, wish this was their comeback song right now.
So it's one of those things that I feel just like with Black Swan, XG.
I love them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 57:05
Umm.

Stephanie 57:05
They're using the and I don't like to call it a formula or formulation, but it does kind of give a little bit of formula vibes, even though it's not a formula and I feel like a lot of the groups that are doing really well are some that have strayed away from the formula.
And that's something that Black Swan has done, they strayed and they said we are gonna bring up like I think it was like a Brazilian member 1st and then they brought in Fatu from Belgium.
I think it's Belgium or that they brought in like, they started diversifying looking into seeing like what, who fans want.

Sharon Kong-Perring 57:37
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 57:46
Let's try it.
So I think like that's important because you can't just pick what the fan wants.
You can't.
It might work for a bit, but it's not gonna work forever because as K-Pop continued to grow and it has grown exponentially in the past, just even the five last five years it has exploded around the world, they're gonna be that...
There's gonna be a diverse group of fans.
You're not gonna be just ohh, just Asian fans and a few here and there.
No, no.
You have a whole world that you need to like.
See that you have in here so I am OK with the diversification of K-POP.
As you know, there's some things that you know keep them as they are because they work.
Try to see if they can develop, but otherwise you know why not add 1 member and see how it works.
Add another one.
See how it works like Black Swan did it and they have.
I think they've done a great job so far, so it's one of those things just have to see in wait and see.

Sharon Kong-Perring 58:45
Mm-hmm.
I'd be curious to get your opinion just like as funsies, as a fan, about Z Boys and Z Girls because they were they were largely thought to be like the precursor to some of these international groups. They were a Pan Asian group and they sang English, but they were based in Korea and learning Korean and produced by Korean company.

Stephanie 59:02
Ohh.
Hmm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 59:13
But they had, it was mostly South and Southeast Asian members, and so people, fans of Black Swan, you know, really like this idea of, like the first Indian K-Pop star.
But fans of the Z girls were like, no, no, no, no.

There was an Indian K-Pop star there before, but they sang in English, so was it K-Pop? So there's this entire rhetoric out there, whether or not they were...whether Z Boy and Z Girls were considered K-Pop, and they also had interactions with ATEEZ which as an Atiny I was like, oh, so cute.
But yeah, so that that's really interesting to get your perspective on that because not many K-Pop fans, unless they're at least the ones that I have encountered, unless they're really deep into, like enjoying being in the space, they don't really venture into some of those new formulations of K-Pop.
So I haven't gotten much from folks and I am genuinely curious what people think about these groups, and I do look at them a little bit.
I'm trying to... trying to get in with XG. A friend of a friend of mine was their choreographer for Shooting Star.

Stephanie 1:00:21
Ohh, I love that one. Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:00:21
I'm trying to think trying to get that connection in a little bit more substantively.
Umm, but yeah, it's really interesting... and also has another fan side story, a few weeks ago I was coming back from Korea.
I posted on my story that there were 2 K-Pop groups in the lounge with me and that I like spilled water all over myself.
One of them was Kard, they were in the lounge and I just like I was sitting a few chairs away and I just like, dumped water all over myself.

Stephanie 1:00:42
Yes. Oh...

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:00:50
It was great.
It was fine.
That's the one memory, one visual they have of me and they're like.

Stephanie 1:00:52
Ohh.
Look at least you made it memorable.
Very memorable moment for them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:01:00
Yeah, maybe they kind of were like....

Stephanie 1:01:02
Look Big Matthew would be OK with it.
He's from down the road from me, so he'll be fine, no.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:01:08
He had like that bright yellow hair and was like, Oh..okay.

Stephanie 1:01:13
Hello so much.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:01:18
Keep enjoying your morning.
Fine.
Yeah.
The Rose wasn't sitting that further away from me. They were sitting behind me a little bit.

Stephanie 1:01:26
Ohh.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:01:29
But when I got up, they clearly saw that I was like running to the bathroom.

Stephanie 1:01:31
Ohh no, not the Rose in the same place!

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:01:38
Yeah, it was.
It was interesting because that's never happened where I've like, encountered them in the wild before. Only when like you know, every once in a while I moonlight as like a member of staff or like I do like PR things every once in a while with, with K-POP groups and that's the only time I've seen them like up close.

Stephanie 1:01:56
Up close.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:01:57
I'm always like you know, a fan doing the fan things, but that was the first time I'd seen any of them in the wild and was like, yeah, here we go.

Stephanie 1:01:59
Umm.
Uh, that's awesome.
My closest was XIKERs at the ATEEZ concert back in 2022.
Yeah, it was last year.
The one they had in January?
The boys were coming to the concert and they were like in hoodies, things and there was... you could see the managers running behind them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:02:16
Yeah.

Stephanie 1:02:24
And I was like, that has to be a group.
That's debuting soon, and then it turned out to be XIKERs, and I was like, Oh my God the boys, so.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:02:29
Yeah.
I was there at that concert, were there a couple of days...weren't they?
There were two days.

Stephanie 1:02:38
Yeah, they had two days.
Yeah, it was a Sunday and a Monday, I think.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:02:40
Yeah, yeah.

Stephanie 1:02:42
Or something like that, or Saturday, Sunday.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:02:43
I think I went on Monday.

Stephanie 1:02:45
I think I went on the 30th or 31st one of those two I don't remember, but I remember them.
Yeah, I went the second day also.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:02:53
So we were both there.
That's funny.

Stephanie 1:02:55
Woo great concert!

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:02:56
That's really funny.
Yeah. Great show.

Stephanie 1:02:58
Those were great concerts. Ah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:02:59
Yeah. Great.
Great show.
Uh, I'm waiting for the next tour because I'm pretty sure it's gonna happen soonish again.

Stephanie 1:03:08
Umm yeah.
Because it was November.
So it's around time.
It happens again.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:03:12
Yeah.

Stephanie 1:03:12
They've had a couple albums since then, so I'm like, come on, I want good stuff.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:03:15

Mm-hmm.
Yeah.

Stephanie 1:03:19
I'm ready.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:03:20
And they are going to be at KCON which I'm hoping to fight people for tickets tomorrow.

Stephanie 1:03:23
I know.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:03:26
When they release them for the day two concert.

Stephanie 1:03:26
Ohh ah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:03:30
We'll see if that happens.

Stephanie 1:03:31
I wanna go so bad because it's on my birthday and I'm just like, so I'm trying to figure out a way to to go 'cause...

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:03:34
Ohh that would be fun.

Stephanie 1:03:41
I'm like, I wanna go see them so bad.
I wanna go see G-IDLE, also Kard.
There's a lot of concerts happening in August, like, literally in a week and 1/2.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:03:50
I will say that day two, the same day the ATEEZ is performing, KCON announced that XG is doing a special stage, which is why I'm like OK, I'm actually going to try a little bit harder when I wasn't really going to.

Stephanie 1:04:0
So I'm I'm gonna have to like, look into it because I know that I have something one day it's either the 19th, the 18th or 19th.
I have something I have to figure out, so I want the tickets.
I want it so bad.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:04:17
Yeah.
It’s a great lineup, there's a fantastic lineup.

Stephanie 1:04:21
Yep.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:04:23
Uh, OK.
So I think that's it for my questions.
Was there anything that you wanted to add that you think is important for the world to know about K-Pop fandom?

Stephanie 1:04:26
OK.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:04:32
Or your experiences at all?

Stephanie 1:04:37
Get into K-Pop.
Don't spend all your money because it will take it.
Just have to be thoughtful on it, but as long as you are mindful of everything and don't get too deep into the parasocial… like you can parasocial, just don't parasocial so hard that you become a friend…like limits.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:04:47
Mhm.

Stephanie 1:04:57
There's boundaries and limits, and that's something that I feel as fandoms in general, we

need to work on cause I've seen like the whole airport stampedes.
I'm the way I am with the bodyguards on that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:05:10
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 1:05:13
I'm like, no, don't.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:05:15
Mm-hmm.

Stephanie 1:05:16
That's just safety risk for you, for the idols, for their staff, for other people at the airport.
It's just, it's just bad.
It's ohh.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:05:28
Umm Yep.

Stephanie 1:05:30
So.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:05:31
But agree again as someone who moonlights as staff, and we can get into that after I stop recording, yeah, it's crazy.
Alright, well this is the end of the formal interview, so I'm going to stop the recording.

Sharon Kong-Perring stopped transcription

Appendix G. Full transcription with interviewee, Annie (July 2023)

Annie K-Pop Interview-20230727_111019-Meeting Recording

July 27, 2023, 3:10PM

38m 13s

Sharon Kong-Perring started transcription

Sharon Kong-Perring 0:26
So first and foremost is how did you get interested in KPOP?

Annie 0:33
I want to say 2019, I wanna say early 2019.
So Boys With Love Era for BTS.
It came out maybe two weeks after three weeks after.
And umm, my friend, I was...I remember this so vividly because it it's like something that was so important to me.
I was in Algebra 2 in high school and my friend, she walked in with her headphones in, and she was just like smiling, having a great time.
And I'm like, I'm in this Algebra 2 class and there's so much that I don't understand... so much.
I'm like, I don't wanna be here and then she just walking and smiling and having a great time.
And I was like, what are you listening to?
And she's like BTS.
I was like, oh, you're one of those people.
Because, umm, we all had the this...How do you say this preconception that it's just, like, crazy and just rowdy?
But she was like she, she was the kind of fan that was like, I love this and it makes me happy.
And I truly do not care what the other person thinks.
So I was like, let me listen to something and then I think, the first song she was listening to was "Paradise".
So I listened to "Paradise" and I instantly loved it.

That was like, whoa.
But I was instantly bothered that I couldn't understand what they were saying also.
So that was annoying as well, but I was like, oh my gosh, this is really cool.
And she's like, yeah.
And she introduced me, so it was ”Paradise,” ”Save Me”, and then ”Boy, With Love,” these were the first three songs.
First three BTS songs and I went home.
I think I watched ”DNA” and by ”DNA,“ I was like they look so good.
It was so good and I was so excited.
So yeah, and then my my second group was Got 7 and then next thing I know, I'm like fully to K-Pop, yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 2:44
That is so funny.
So many other folks have said that Got 7 was their second group that they that really, like, funneled them into the fandom.

A

Annie 2:53
Yes, because you know...because you know the YouTube algorithm, it's like you start watching and then you get more of those videos.
And I think I watched ”Eclipse,” which was I think by June that year.
And I watched ”Just Right” and I was like, oh, my gosh, they're so... they look so fun and funny...Jackson....So I was into it, like right away.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:21
I love it.
OK.
I mean also I agree about Jackson.

A

Annie 3:25
Ohh yes.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:26
He's, but he's a little too charming for me sometimes, so I don't wanna like him because he's so charming. But...

A

Annie 3:32
That's me.
That's me.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:34
He gets it, he gets it.
Awesome.

A

Annie 3:37
Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:37
So it was really like the music that got you hooked 1st and then it was like the visuals and the dancing and the production of it seems.

A

Annie 3:45
Yes, yes, it it...
I, I think I was drawn into because again, like we're already starting with the comparison, Western artists, they don't go all out.
You know, they drop the music video, and they're gone and you'll hear maybe, like interviews here and there, gossips to, like, keep their names on the front page, but it's nothing about artistry.
Well, hi...
See, we're biased.
We're so biased.
It's... it's nothing about full on-- OK, that's the thing.

The agency, like the company thing like... they have a whole system around them in K-Pop, and Westerns are mostly like individual.
You know, I do this and it's my art and it's my stuff.
Yes, the companies there, the agents are there.
Whatever they're signed into, they're there, but it's not like: this is my life.
And I feel like I can K-Pop.
It is.
This is my life and that's why they give so much, and it shows in their art, in the videos and the music and the reality TV shows, all the stuff that they do is just so like them.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:02
Because of all that, because of like, the like vlogs and the reality shows and interviews and everything that they do, does it, it does it seem like you have a feel for like the true personalities of these artists.

A

Annie 5:09
OK.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:17
You feel like you kind of know them in a way.

A

Annie 5:21
Yes, yes it does.
But I think in the recent years, I wanna say 2021-2022, I don't know.
I'm sure you've heard about all these...
Umm bullying allegation and all that stuff?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:33
Mm-hmm.

A

Annie 5:35

I am now learning to be more cautious like ohh and so and so is this and so and so is that... I've understood that... this is a persona?
This is an image that, let's say the company has crafted for them or image that they feel like they're most comfortable showing the public.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:45
Umm.
Umm.

A

Annie 5:57
So I am fully aware I'm not like oh, I know Jay-hyun.
No, he's just the guy who makes music and is, like, really good looking.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:01
And.

A

Annie 6:06
But I don't know him.
Like he's funny and he has these silly jokes, but I don't know him, so I'm pretty self- aware of like ohh, I don't know these artists.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:09
Umm.

A

Annie 6:18
I know the persona.
I know, like they have these little stereotypes, like you have certain group members who are, like, super caring.
I know that if you're describing a super caring,...always cooking for the Members, I'm going to be like ohh that might be Seonghwa that you're referring to.

That might be Tae-yong that you're referring to, so I'll know these specific traits, but it's not like that's the person themselves as a person, yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:47
Umm yeah, I totally get that.
So you mentioned BTS, Got 7.
What other groups would you say that you're, like, really into at the moment?

A

Annie 6:58
Seventeen, NCT, Twice... New Jeans I don't stan, I like their music.
Umm.
Blackpink, I don't stand,
I listen to songs here and there. Did I say Twice?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:13
Yes.

A

Annie 7:13
Twice.
No, Stay-C.
Ohhh my gosh Lessarafim.
I'm listening to almost every popular group that you hear of and know of
because they're just.
Yeah.
I just get into songs.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:30
Yeah.
I think it's interesting that you made the distinction between groups that you stan and groups that you enjoy their music.

A

Annie 7:39
Umm.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:39
Can you tell me a little bit more about like how you perceive like being, being a fan or Stan of one of these groups?
Or just like kind of just enjoying their stuff.

A

Annie 7:48
OK, so I stan Seventeen.
I know members names, I don't know birthdays.
I'm not, not deep into umm... but I know some people signify stanning as birthday knowing and all that stuff.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:04
Umm.

A

Annie 8:06
I know who's a dancer and who sings and who raps.
I know the positions type thing.
I know their personas, their TV personas.
Uh, I can recognize voices if I'm listening to a song, I know who's singing.
So that's what's stanning is to me.
And like knowing each member, and also I like when they do comebacks.
If I like a picture, I'll like save them on my phone and stuff...New Jeans, I don't stan.
I can't recognize whichever member from the other member.
Uh, I don't watch their content.
I don't keep their pictures.
I keep up because during... K-Pop, like you see their names and you see their stuff.
Like I know if they're having a comeback, I know if somebody's doing a project, but I'm not, like seeking them out.
Like purposefully, yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:08
Got it.
That makes a ton of sense.
I'm also like that with New Jeans, but they're also just like everywhere.

A

Annie 9:16
Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:18
So I feel like everyone's kind of like that with New Jeans.

A

Annie 9:18
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
But I know some people who stan them and it's like... actually side note, most people who do stan them are around their age and most of us who are older don't stan them.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:31
I see.

A

Annie 9:33
We just say ohh, we like their music.
We like their sound and stuff, so I've noticed that.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:37
Hmm.
Yeah, the fandom skews younger for them.

A

Annie 9:42
Umm Yep.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:43
Hmm, that's really interesting.
I feel like that's a that makes logical sense, but isn't necessarily true of other groups too, so it, but it seems very true of New Jeans.

A

Annie 9:55
Yes, because it's the...
It's the age I think that's all it is.
There's so young and we're like, it's... and being truly honest over here, a part of us are like they should not be doing this, and they should not be in this in an insane industry.
I'll say it, I'll say insane, but their team has worked so hard to put them in front of our faces and they know what the people like sound wise.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:29
Mm-hmm.

A

Annie 10:29
I don't know if you've noticed, Lessarafim sound, New Jeans sound, Enhyphen sound... I don't know who their producers are.
They know exactly what goes up the charts.
They know exactly what takes off and they know exactly what to produce, and they do it. And it's like you cannot get away from these groups if you're a K-Pop music fan.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:41
OK.
Umm.

A

Annie 10:51
If you're like an upbeat Top 40 stan... because that's the sound they give you and that's the sound that you love.
So yeah, it's...
It's like that with them.
I can't think of any other group with like super young members, where like all of them are extremely young, and people are like they don't know what to do...
Like, we're conflicted.
Yeah, I think there were the only ones.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:17
Yeah.
Yeah, because it seems like other groups have, like, uh, a spectrum of ages.
And there's usually like the one that stands out as being really young.

A

Annie 11:22
Mm-hmm.
Hmm hmm.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:25
But you're right.
New Jeans is all around very young.
And yes, that's interesting.

A

Annie 11:30
Yes.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:32
I wonder if that has anything to do with how their fandom skews.
So we have a few groups that you stan, a few few groups that you listen to and enjoy their

music.
Have you gone to any of these groups like concerts or like fan events or like movies or anything like that?

A

Annie 11:55
No, I'm strictly like, uh, the BTS book.
I have them on my phone.
I didn't buy it.
I'm like down to Earth.
I'm not spending money.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:05
Ah, OK, OK.

A

Annie 12:06
(Money)...I don't have yet.
Yes.
So I'm that type of fan.
Let's see if I'm gifted something, like if I'm in gifted an album, I'll be thankful and I'll have the stickers.
I'll have the photo cards, but besides that it's nothing that I'm spending my own money on.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:21
Uh-huh.

A

Annie 12:27
When I go to Publix and I see those BTS magazines and they're like nearly $15, I'm like, do I do it or not?
Most often I don't.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:34
Umm.

A

Annie 12:35
So yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:35
Umm, OK, so do you feel like that not spending money on the fandoms that there are different ways to support the artist rather than just purchasing things?

A SK

Annie 12:52
Of course, of course.
Online, like social media, is a great thing, like those people who run fan accounts like they're making massive like publicity for those artists.
Because I don't know if everybody recognizes we are the people who make the artists, who they are.
Like, I'm so sorry to say it.
Like yes, they're talented and the company...but if we say we're not listening, if we say we're not talking about them, they're gone like it's, it's not happening.
So us just talking, this is publicity for K pop.
Umm me, just calling up my friend and being like ohh did you see the video and then she clicks on the video.
That's the view.
That's one view.
It counts every single thing counts.
The people who decide to spend money for them, I mean they have it.
They wanna do it right for them, but I am in real life, enough.
This is much as like... I don't like to be, but I know that I'm just...I'm not go into all that.
I don't stream and listen.
If I love this song and I want to put on repeat all day, I'll do just that.
But I'm not purposefully sitting there streaming.
I go to school.

I'm a college student.
I study so yeah.

I'm like, really down to Earth.
I wonder if there are any Stans like me because I'm like, am I even a Stan?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:29
Umm.

A

Annie 14:30
Like I am, I am so... here and there, you feel that you could do more if you spend money. If you do this and that, but then you go back to your life and you're like this: Is that what I can afford right now?
And I'm not gonna...

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:48
Umm, that is very fair.
That very interesting because many other fans that I've spoken to, they feel like almost...there's a pressure to have to spend money in an order, in order to support their idols.

A

Annie 15:01
Really.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:04
So this is a really interesting viewpoint of there's other ways and other things you can do to be considered a true fan or a stan, so very interesting.

A

Annie 15:13
Yeah, I really, truly hope that people don't like, go broke over K-Pop because that's so not fair like these.
I'm sorry, but like they're artists, they're going to get paid.

And if they don't get paid, they'll figure it out, but I'm not like... if I'm truly struggling, I'm not, I'm not doing that.
No, that's, that's absurd.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:30
Umm very fair.
So then being interested in K-Pop, has that translated over for you into interest in other popular Korean culture products like K-dramas or K- Beauty or food or anything like that?

A

Annie 15:52
Um, K-Dramas.
Yes, I love K-Dramas.
I started out "Almost" around the same time.
I think my first like... not Korean drama, but it was a C-Drama actually was like the year before.
And then I fell off.
But then I got back again when I got into K-Pop.
So yes, K-Dramas is yes, not K-Beauty because I'm not super into make-up and I feel like might not fit my skin tone.
So I stayed clear.
Uh food?
Umm.
Ramen.
I'll try here and there, but I haven't gone into like kimchi and samgyeopsal and um, all these other... kimbap or these other types of foods.
So I haven't on that, but reality TV shows.
Oh my gosh, I love their dating, their dating reality TV shows.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:50
Like Singles Inferno?

A

Annie 16:51
Oh yes, and Heart Signal, I think I started...

There's another one.
Ohh my gosh, Transit Love, the one about exes I think.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:02
I haven't seen that one.

A

Annie 17:02
Yeah. It's exes.
Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:04
Okay, I'll have to check that out.

A

Annie 17:04
So they have exes and they have exes in the house.
Yeah, it's called either Exchange or X-Change or EX-Change or it'll show up as Transit Love.
So they have people who broke up and then they either get back together or
make connection with somebody else.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:19
OK.

A

Annie 17:30
What else?
What else?
What else... Change Days?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:32
That.

Yeah, I was gonna say that sounds like Change Days too.
A little, a little bit.

A

Annie 17:35
Yes, yes, yes, yes.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:35
I guess they haven't broken up yet on Change Days.

A

Annie 17:38
But Change Days, they kinda like push towards the exes being together and then Exchange doesn't do that.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:46
Yeah.

A

Annie 17:47
They like let them in.
If you wanna be with somebody else, then you're free to do so.
So these two, they're so good.
I love when they get dramatic, or like when there's problems because I feel like when Korea and media they like shy away from showing their like, true angry, furious like bad traits.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:13
Umm.

A

Annie 18:13
The bad emotions.
So I love when I see like, toxic...
That's like my name.

And I'm like, Oh my gosh, this is so good cause it's not shown.
It's not showing unless it's like K-Dramas and the person is like a straight up villain.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:27
Right.

A

Annie 18:32
You don't see that in people.
So I'm like, Oh my gosh, it's so good.
Yeah.
So I love those.
I enjoy them.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:41
That's really funny that you say that...
I'm gonna have to look it up.
Exchange.
What service is that on?
The streaming service is that on.

A

Annie 18:52
Ohh I think.
I truly have no idea because I have this app called One Touch TV.
It's like really safe to use on a phone, so I just watch it there, but I don't know where it's like streamed, but I'm sure it's one of those.
Uh, like JTBC type stuff?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:20
Yeah, yeah.

A

Annie 19:21

I don't know.
I have no idea.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:25
I'll have to check it out because that one sounds very intriguing to me because I also like reality Korean TV.

A

Annie 19:26
Yeah.
Ohh yes ohh it's it's so good.
It's so good.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:35
Awesome.
OK.
So K-Dramas, you you at least know what the food is, but you haven't really like ventured into the food.
Umm have you?

A

Annie 19:44
No, no, not really.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:47
Have you felt like you've ever wanted to, like, learn the language or learn the history at all?

A

Annie 19:54
Ohh yes yes, the language yes, which is why I'm mostly a K-Drama... like I mostly use K- Dramas to learn words and phrases here and there.
So it's nothing like taking classes.
I have... let me see how many Korean learning apps I have on my phone.
It's because I know I have 36,912.

Look, look at this one.
That's my folder of Korean learning apps.
Do I touch them?
No, no, I do not.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:31
That's really funny.
And I didn’t even know that many existed.

A

Annie 20:32
So.
I am an absurd junkie.
This phone...
Ohh goodness, it's awful.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:40
That's the way.

A

Annie 20:40
So yeah, I downloaded them.
Try to run them.
Start give up, but K-Dramas have been like my most consistent way of learning phrases words here and there.
I love when I get the pronunciation right.
I'm like ohh, I'm getting there and it's just like one or two words.
So I think I think that was just so fun learning a new language and with the history.
Umm the the podcast....
I think what's it called?
Something Dark Side of Seoul?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:24
The Dark Side of Seoul... Sean and Joe's? OK. Mm-hmm.

A

Annie 21:25
Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.
So I listened to them here and there because they do give some folklore type stories or popular things.
I listen to Baking a Murder...Baking a Mystery with Stephanie Soo.
Yeah.
She gives some episodes where she talks about famous cases or whatever.
So here and there, I listen, but it's nothing that I dedicate, like extensive time to so it's it's a hobby.
It's definitely a hobby, Yep.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:02
Mm-hmm.
And has any of this made you want to visit Korea?

A

Annie 22:10
Oh, yes.
Oh yes, all the time.
All the time.
I'm like I have to go to the Han River at some point in my life I'll have to see you.
One of the palaces...
I'm reluctant about dressing in the traditional outfits.
I see many people doing it and I'm like, do they want us to do that?
Is that OK to do so?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:34
Umm.

A

Annie 22:34
I'm like, wait, I don't know if I'll do that, but I'll go and visit and like, see.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:41
Umm.

A

Annie 22:42
Do you happen to be Korean?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:45
I am.
Yeah I am Korean.

A

Annie 22:46
Yes, yes.
OK.
So is it OK for people to wear the traditional hanboks outfits and stuff?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:57
That one for me personally, is... is hard to answer because I think there is a difference between like what diaspora Koreans think like...
I'm Korean-American.
I was born and raised in the US.

A

Annie 23:09
OK. Umm.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:11
I think there's very much a difference between like people who have felt like being the... like, kind of immigrant perceived "other" in the US or in the West and how they feel about that practice versus people in Korea.

A

Annie 23:19
Umm.
OK.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:27
So I think there's the...
There are people in Korea that feel weird about it.

A

Annie 23:32
OK.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:32
OK, there's some people in Korea that really enjoy it because they see it as spreading the culture, and then there's some people in Korea who say, well, if you're going to do this, you should actually teach people about the hanbok and not just like, have them wear it, which is what a lot of these shop owners do.
They just, like, take your money and you put it on and walk around.
They don't really teach you about the parts or the history of it, or yeah, how it...because there's very particular way of tying the bow, but they just kind of like do it... yeah, yeah.

A

Annie 23:54
Yes, I know that!
I know that, I know!
It's like very specific, very specific.
So that's why I'm like, I wouldn't necessarily wear the outfit as much as I possibly would want to, but no, not not worth it. Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:12
And yeah, there's... there's definitely a difference between people who have, I think, grown up in a society that has seen like race and class stratifications like the US and the UK.

A

Annie 24:23
Yes, yes.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:24
Umm, but I've had colleagues who are not Korean but are from homogeneous cultures or like largely homogeneous cultures that don't deal with diasporas, like places in in Africa or Southeast Asia or other places in East Asia.

A

Annie 24:31
Mm-hmm.
Hmm hmm.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:41
And they don't quite understand why that's... that is like problematic to some people because they've grown up in a monolithic, homogeneous society where they haven't had to really learn about power dynamics and appropriation.

A

Annie 24:54
Umm.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 24:56
And it's not something that's in their regular life... and they're very educated and smart people, but they just have never been exposed to that.

A

Annie 24:59
No.
Ohh wow.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:03
So yeah, so it's interesting.

A

Annie 25:04
Oh wow.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:06
It's a really interesting practice and UM, Korea does it.
But you know, Thailand does it too.
Thailand has you rent the traditional clothing when you're walking around the old temples in the Ayutthaya as well.
So it's not just in Korea that it happens, but it's very much I think in the spotlight right now because of how popular Korea is at the moment.

A

Annie 25:19
Yes.
So from these interviews, have you heard people say ohh like they would try the clothes and they would wear the outfits just cause?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 25:36
You know, no...
The one person I know of outside of interviewing, just as like another K-Pop fan, she would...
And she has...
And we've had some interesting conversations about that, but she's non-Korean...she's white...

A **Annie** 25:54
The non-Korean!
Ugh, of course...It's like, I'm sorry, like tangent again, it is not your culture like

you don't know if they agree with you doing this and you don't know how respectful you're supposed to be.
And it's now...
I don't do it.
You have your own culture or whatever that is.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 26:18
Umm.
Mm-hmm.

A

Annie 26:20
Deal with that, you know.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 26:21
Yeah, yeah, it was...
It was a very interesting conversation.
Umm, but yeah, it's very interesting practice because they're exporting their culture at the moment, and that's what's making them popular and making them money.

A

Annie 26:33
Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 26:36
So yeah, yeah.

A

Annie 26:37
Yeah, I see it.
I see it, but it's just on a personal level.
No, not worth it.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 26:43
Yeah, yeah.
Yes, and I will have to be on the side that agrees with you more than the other side.
But again, everyone, lots of people think in different ways in Korea, and it's really interesting how one country has so many different opinions about something like that.

A

Annie 26:51
Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:01
You think that they all kind of have very similar sentiments, but it's very it's very varied.

A

Annie 27:11
That's interesting.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:12
Yeah.
All right, so you want to visit Korea eventually?
We talked about the music.
We talked about history.
I'm just looking at my notes to make sure I'm not missing any other questions that I wanted to ask you.
Ohh fun question.
I ask all of my interviewees this: who is your old bias?

A

Annie 27:34
Ohh my goodness, I knew this question was coming up.
I knew it.
I knew it.

Umm.
And I've been preparing for it and I will say...
I'm gonna cry.
Shownu from Monsta X.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 27:54
Oh, Shownu...alright!
All right.

A

Annie 27:56
Yeah.
And side note, umm DK from Seventeen because I can't not mention him.
I can't, but it has to be Shownu.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 28:10
That is fair.
I was lucky enough to meet Monsta X during one of my one
of my fieldwork trips and Shownu was still in the military, sadly, because it's it wasn't too long ago that this happened.

A

Annie 28:40
Oh my goodness, have you ever... have you ever met any other like artist like that exclusively?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 28:41
Kind of? Because it was a red carpet thing...
Yeah, I met Eric Nam in more of like a fan meet situation.

A

Annie 28:52

OK.
Mm-hmm.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 28:57
I worked for Golden Child for a concert, which was interesting.

A

Annie 29:01
Wow.
Umm.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 29:07
They don't know my name or who I am.
I was just like a nameless, faceless staff member that they contracted.

A

Annie 29:09
Ohh yeah yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 29:14
But yeah, I met them and.
I have done a high touch before with ATEEZ.

A

Annie 29:23
Ah, my loves.
Ohh, I'd love....
I was telling you....

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 29:28
I do too.
So I had a like a hat that had Aurora on it that I showed Hongjoong and he was very gracious and was nice about it.

A

Annie 29:38
Hello!

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 29:39
UM and he was very excited.
Who... who else have I...?

A

Annie 29:42
Oh my goodness.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 29:44
Ohh, I met Jesse.
I'm looking at pictures right now from that same event.

A

Annie 29:46
Ohh, nice, nice.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 29:48
Yeah, Jesse and Dreamcatcher.

A

Annie 29:52
You know!

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 29:53
And C-I-X? Cix?
I actually don't know how you say their name.

A

Annie 30:01
Yeah.
I say C-I-X too. Many groups I don't stan, I know the names of... I see like here and there.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:08
Yeah.

A

Annie 30:09
Yeah, like Dreamcatcher, I don't stan Fromis 9.
I don't stan.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:15
Oh here's my photo that I took.

A

Annie 30:18
Oh my goodness, they look so good.
Ohh I.M. and Joo-Honey is going to military.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:20
Yeah...

A

Annie 30:25
I think he... he's like he might be there already.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:26
Yeah, he is.
Yep, Yep. Mm-hmm.

A

Annie 30:29
I don't know.
I'm not sure.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:30
Yeah, yeah.
I.M. is my my bias in Monsta X.

A

Annie 30:34
Really!

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:36
Yeah, he's...
He's another one of those like Jackson guys where, like he's super charming and like super good looking.
But he knows it, and that's the problem for me.

A

Annie 30:46
Yeah.
Oh my goodness.
But yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:48
I can't help it.
Umm.
And they're very gracious.
Very nice.

A

Annie 30:57
Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 30:58
You know, Jesse was probably the nicest person I've met in this project in terms of people who are idols.

A

Annie 31:07
Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 31:08
So yeah.
UM, it's a really interesting and also potentially, you know, being on the staff side of things is very, very interesting.
The things that you have to do for them and the fans that you have to deal with, it's it is a lot.

A

Annie 31:25
Oh yeah.
Yeah, yeah, I can only imagine so.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 31:31
Umm, it is a lot, but I'm hoping that this year I have a couple of other opportunities to work as staff and get that insight too for a couple of bigger groups.
So we'll see how that works out...

A

Annie 31:46
I hope you meet Twice.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 31:49
You know Twice is one of those that is never on my radar unless...like the only one whose name I know is Naeyon because of the stalker situation.
And that's, eek.

A

Annie 32:00
Ohh wow.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 32:01
That's the only thing I really know about them other than their music, of course, but.

A

Annie 32:05
Ohh you don't like regularly listen to Twice?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 32:10
I think, ah, yeah, no, Twice has never really been on my radar as like a group that I listen to regularly.

A

Annie 32:19
Who usually, then?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 32:20
I tend to gravitate towards non big four groups.
Umm, I started...
Yeah, I started out with BTS or, you know, actually I'm old.
I'm old and I'm an old K-Pop Stan, so started out way back in the day with
like Se7en and SS501 and Rain and BoA and like those of that era, umm, so yeah, that generation. I fell off of it for a while and then came back to BTS around like 2017 or so, right when they're in there like wings era.

A

Annie 32:45
Ohh wow.
OK, that generation alright.
Yeah.
Yeah, that's so cool.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 33:00
And then yeah, obviously I love BTS, but since then I've gravitated a lot more towards non big four companies.
I mean as we talked about being a stan versus like listening and enjoying, like I enjoy all that music and I'm very familiar with you know like the I'm very familiar with NCT, Got 7 you know, Seventeen like all of them.

A

Annie 33:19
OK.
Umm.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 33:27
I'm very familiar with Twice as music, Blackpink's music, but I will tend to like if I'm going to fill that role as a fan, I tend to do it for smaller companies umm.
So like my ult group is ATEEZ and that's like the group that I really promote. Umm, not because of the small company, because I generally like them but it helps for me that they're in a in what was a smaller agency...now it's you know getting larger.

A

Annie 33:54
That's good.

Yeah.
Ohh yes, they're making bank for KQ.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 34:00
Yeah.

A

Annie 34:03
Good for them.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 34:04
Yeah.
Yeah, they are.
They're... they did the thing and like good for them.

A

Annie 34:08
Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 34:10
I always support the underdog, but yeah, I tend to...I don't know.
I really, really enjoy listening to super under the radar groups like DKB...

A

Annie 34:26
Yeah, I've heard
So I'm guessing you, you also like what's it called 1 + 1? Only... wait, I'm not messing up the name.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 34:36
Onlyoneof?

A

Annie 34:38
Yes.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 34:39
Yeah, I did.
I did enjoy them.
Yeah, they're in like a little bit of a weird space right now because they've... I've actually written an article about them because of the like the queerbaiting thing.

A

Annie 34:42
Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 34:51
And like the members leaving and... Yeah.

A

Annie 34:53
Yeah, I heard.
I heard about that.
OK.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 34:57
Yeah.

A

Annie 34:57
Ohh wow.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 34:58
So yeah, so I did listen to them for a while.
You know, I really like umm Xikers which is ATEEZ's hoobae group and they're really fun.

A

Annie 35:12

Yeah.
Did they debut?

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 35:14
Yeah, they debuted in like March or April, I think?
Umm. Yeah.

A

Annie 35:18
Ah, OK.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 35:20
And they're quite young, you know.
They're like in they're, you know, 16,17,18,19 like that age range.

A

Annie 35:27
OK. Uh-huh.
Uh huh.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 35:29
But their music is quite good, I think.
And now that they have the bigger KQ dollars, their production value is very high.

A

Annie 35:36
Yeah.
Good for them.
Good.
That's awesome.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 35:38
Yeah.

A

Annie 35:39
That's good.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 35:39
Yeah.
Mm-hmm.
And then I'm now getting more into girl groups as well.
I wasn't always into this much, yeah.

A

Annie 35:44
Ohh yeah, I love...
I love my girl groups.
Yeah.
I love them... Loona, I'm excited for.
I just cannot wait when we get news that all of them are out and truly doing what they love, whatever it is, if it is reality TV show, just whatever.
I just want them to be happy and get paid.
That's that's all I want.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 36:10
Mm-hmm.
Yeah, that is the the most important...
Oh, there are two other groups that I met, but I very much embarrassed myself in front of them because I happened to be in the airport with them at the same time.
But that was at The Rose and Kard.
We were all in the airport lounge.

A

Annie 36:25
Ohhhh

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 36:28
I spilled water on myself.
And that's like the only memory that they'll have of me, which is totally fine.

A

Annie 36:36
I feel like they they probably are like super nice, but I know especially Kard would be like super nice because BM.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 36:43
Yeah.

A

Annie 36:43
Oh my gosh, this man, he's always joking.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 36:45
Yes, yes, yeah, they they were.
I mean, it's not like they made a big deal about it because I almost took them out too, on accident. But...

A

Annie 36:51
Yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 36:55
Ohm.
Yeah, but it was.
It was interesting.
That was first time I've ever like experienced idols in the wild versus in like a curated setting.
So yeah, OK.

Anyways, is there anything else that you wanted me to know?
Any stories you wanted me to hear?
Anything you wanted to declare as a fan while I have you?

Annie 37:21
I declare as a fan that you decide what stanning in liking kpop means to you.
If anyone gets this, understand that this is your personal hobby and you do not have to do anything that is not on your terms.
It doesn't matter what anyone says.
The artists?
No, no, *you,* sorry.
They can't like force you to do anything and that's that.
And if they're not forcing you, the people getting paid, nobody can force you.
Make it your own.

Sharon Kong-Perring 37:57
Umm.
Love that.
Alright, OK.

Annie 38:00
Yeah, don't go broke.

Sharon Kong-Perring 38:02
Don‘t go broke.
I love that.
Alright, OK.
I'm gonna stop the recording now.

Sharon Kong-Perring stopped transcription

Appendix H. Full transcription with interviewee, Victoria (April 2024)

Victoria K-Pop Fan Interview Interview with Sharon-20240415_094146-Meeting Recording

April 15, 2024, 4:41PM

20m 43s

Sharon Kong-Perring 0:22
So first question I always ask is how did you get into KPOP and what is it about KPOP that really drew you in?

Victoria 0:34
So I first got into K pop because I used to live in Venezuela before, and then I moved to Japan when I was like 16 and because I moved to Japan, there was a year where I couldn't enter high school, even though I was a high school student because I had to wait until the next year to do a test to enter school for me to...because school, it's not, it's not...you don't need to enter your high school, so I had to take the exam in Japan. So that year, like I didn't have a lot of like, I didn't have any friends and I was hanging out a lot with my sister. The only person like I would hang out around was my sister and she started liking K-Pop because in Japan it's really like a common thing.
It's almost like it's not K-Pop as a whole.
Is more like what you listen to like normally, because there's a lot of like K-Pop groups have music in Japanese too.
So she used to be a K-Pop fan, but I was a bit like, like uh, no, I like, I'm not that kind of person that would listen to K-Pop.
But then, because I had a lot of time, like a free time, I just was like, you know what? I'm gonna try to listen to a song of BTS and I was like, oh, that song is good.
And then I was like, you know what, I'm just gonna try watching the video and then from there, it just... I think what I mean was I think the amount of, like, the amount of content that are for fans made from idols.
Like, it's not only their music that... like their music is good and their dances, but I think I enjoy the videos that they make about, like introducing members or like.

Sharon Kong-Perring 2:22

Like those ones that like, are both the entertainment companies videos where they like blog or like play games and stuff like that, but also like the fan vids that like kind of cut them all together.

Victoria 2:27
Yes.
Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.
I feel like it's just, it becomes almost like a new hobby to like... to some extent it's not like any other band.
It's not like just liking Taylor Swift, I feel like, or like any normal artist. I feel like you immerse yourself in so much content.
So I guess that's what drew me in, because I had so much free time just being able to get to know like a group, their songs, their, like as a whole that I think.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:03
Did it feel like when you were engaging in the content because it can be so personal? Did you feel like it was almost like having friends like the idols were kind of like that?

Victoria 3:09
Mm-hmm.
Yes, yes, yes, it's the same.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:15
Like you knew, the idols aren't like your friends, but like they were.

Victoria 3:16
Yes, yes.
Yeah, not like a person, really.
But like I, yeah, like umm, I was able to laugh at like videos of like I guess...it's just because they were friends.
It made me feel like I had friends because they were hanging out there and laughing, and

I used to also watch with my sister.

Victoria 3:35
So it's also something that bonding, so.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:38
Uh, OK.
Did you like bond with any other fans?
Like, did you meet up with any offline or like even online?

Victoria 3:48
No, because I never downloaded Twitter or anything like...
I never made fan accounts or anything, so because there was some like other ways of me like connecting with people through K-Pop. Until like my friends in my school told me that they like K-Pop and like we bonded through that, but never like people from other places or anything.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:10
Got it.
Umm, OK, so it's almost like, you know, you kind of felt like you had to have like a stan account or something like that in order to engage in the online spaces?

Victoria 4:22
Yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:24
Got it.
Got it.
Yeah, yeah.

That, I mean, that makes a lot of sense.
A lot of people do it so it makes total sense.

Victoria 4:29
Yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:32
So you mentioned, OK, so you moved from Venezuela to Japan.

Victoria 4:35
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:35
Are you Venezuelan?
Japanese?
Are you ethnically both?

Victoria 4:38
Yes.
Ah yes, my mom is Japanese and my dad is Venezuelan.
So, but I was mainly raised in Venezuela.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:42
OK.
You're mainly raised in Venezuela, but do you speak Japanese?

Victoria 4:47
Yes, because I was, I stayed there for four years, so.
Basic, like I'm not able to speak Japanese like a Japanese person.
But I am able to defend myself, yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:01
Yeah.
Yeah, got it.
And then, so when did you end up in the UK then?

Victoria 5:06
Uh, I when I graduated high school in Japan, I decided that I wanted to go to a like a, you know, a country where I could speak English because, like, it was kind of challenging living in Japan, having to understand and everything like that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:17
Umm.

Victoria 5:26
So I wanted to go to Europe and also wanted to speak English.
That was like England.
It's the perfect place and Birmingham was a cheaper city then London.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:33
Yeah.
That is very true and I totally get what you mean about being in Japan and speaking Japanese.
Cause I'm Korean American but when I go to Korea it's like having to think and communicate in Korean when it's not your first instinct is really hard.

Victoria 5:46
Ah yes.
It is it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:52
So I can't imagine doing that for four years, especially like while you're in high school, that must have been a lot.

Victoria 6:00
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:00
So yeah, so when you moved to Birmingham, clearly your like interest in K-Pop was still there because you're part of the dance society.
So, like how did you connect with the dance society?
Or like how did you connect with the other people that were part of this society?
Like to begin with.

Victoria 6:20
Umm so the question I always ask people that I meet them through society is like
I want groups do you like?
Who's your bias?
Because I feel like I can get to know them like if I can guess like who their bias is.
Like who they like?
Or their group, the group.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:37
Yeah.
Yeah, for sure.

Victoria 6:39
So I first always ask people like, through there, and it's so easy to like, connect because like there's so many... like if you like the same groups there's so many things to like talk about, you know talk about like the drama that's happening right now in K-Pop or like a lot

of things... and I feel like, uh, also when you like are in choreographies together...So like if you pick to be in the same dance, you somehow get to know each other because they're just like laughing or like getting to know the dance.
So you somehow just get really close together.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:13
Yeah.

Victoria 7:16
Naturally, like.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:18
Do you perform these pieces like in public, or do you do... like you know the KPOP dance in public where you like go and almost busk?
Or do you get like hired?

Victoria 7:29
I know what we've done so far is just film covers of like, dances and we normally do it in public.
But like, it's not like we're public dancing.
It's more like we just take the videos in public and the only, the other thing we've done is we've, we went to a competition like a K-Pop competition in England with a lot of other universities, societies...

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:43
Got it.
That sounds a lot like something I would love to see.

Victoria 7:59
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:02
That's so interesting.

Victoria 8:03
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:04
So who do you stan then?
Or who are you fan of?

Victoria 8:09
So I like BTS because the were the first ones I liked. I like ZEROBASEONE, a new group. I like 17 and like G-Idle.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:17
Ohh yeah OK, I know them.
Hmm.

Victoria 8:25
I like I don't have a list.
I always listen to the music, but I don't know their content that much, right,
like ATEEZ, I love too.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:33
Ah, those boys.
They're my ult. Love them.

Victoria 8:37
When they went to Coachella, like yesterday or the day before, I was so like...

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:42
Yeah, I almost went and I'm kind of regretting not.
But at the same time, I also know that being in that crowd, I would have like died a little bit.

Victoria 8:49
Yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:51
But yeah, everything coming out of Coachella right now, like I'm dying so good.

Victoria 8:55
So good.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:58
And have you been any to any concerts in the UK?

Victoria 9:01
No.
Ohh, I was gonna go to the one of BTS in Japan, but then COVID happened so I was not able to.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:12
Got it.
Got it.
So you haven't been to any concerts then? Not in Japan or in the U.K.?

Victoria 9:15
Nope I have never been.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:18
OK, one day it's gonna happen there.

Victoria 9:18
Yeah, I know.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:19
They're starting to schedule them a lot more so...
So I know this might be hard to answer because you haven't been to a concert in either country.
But like, do you see a difference between how like Japanese fans like interact with K-Pop versus like English or like British fans do?

Victoria 9:40
What I see in Japanese fans is that... a Japanese fan I feel like have two opposites.
Like, there's really respectful fans that, like, I feel like a lot of idols have, like, expressed how they're so shocked about how respect their fans are, like they follow the rules. And like for one of those the idols, I feel like there's a clip of Jimin in, like doing this thing and like all the fans are like, don't wanna touch him.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:00
Umm.

Victoria 10:08
But I feel like you get the other end of really stalker and crazy fans in Japan.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:16
Like the saesang fan in Korea?

Victoria 10:17
Yeah, yeah, I think there was a video for BTS. They were doing a live and you can see like fans behind, like in... if they were doing a live in their hotel room and you can see like through the door picture of, wait not picture of them, like some fans.
And so I think it just goes both ends of that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:37
Mm-hmm.

Victoria 10:38
And what I see, what I've seen through like British fans, is that they're more calm.
But I have to...I have noticed a lot of people are like...so Japanese fans are more of... how do you say like... calm in the sense of like that Japan and Korea are not that (different)...like Japan and Korea... it's not like Japanese people can be too much of, what you say Koreaboo.
So I don't know if that's too much, but I just noticing a lot of like Western fans.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:04
Mm-hmm.

Victoria 11:08
I don't know British specifically, we're just Western, that Koreaboo kind of thing happens, but the ones I have known personally are not. They are more normal, like normal, I guess like calm fans. They just wanna go to the concert and like have fun and they're not too weird.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:28
Yeah, like you have those fans that wanting to almost be Korean in that Koreaboo sort of way, is like their entire personality.

Victoria 11:31
Yeah.
Yes, yes, yes.
And like “I only want Asian guys or those kind of things that are... that I don't see in Japan obviously because it's not as....

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:38
Yeah.
They they're more like culturally linked.

Victoria 11:48
Yeah.
Yes, similar.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:49
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Victoria 11:49
Yeah. Yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:50
I totally agree with that.
I can see that too.
It's very similar with American fans, so it's not just British fans, but very much kind of like a Western, like ANGLOPHONE thing.

Victoria 11:59
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:00
That's really interesting to get your perspective on both sides because like, I don't think Western fans realize how different like Korea or Japan or like Chinese or Taiwanese fans can be from Western fans.

Victoria 12:10
Yeah.
Yes, yes, yes, it's interesting, yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:17
That's interesting.
Have you started or like, have you ever thought about learning Korean at all, or are you kind of like I don't need to do that?

Victoria 12:27
Ohm, I did because I really wanna go to Korea.
I did wanna learn a bit also because I think Korean is easy to learn through Japanese because it's very similar.
So I wanted to learn it, but I haven't.

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:39
Mm-hmm.

Victoria 12:41
Like I haven't started on or like I don't know anything so.

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:47
It's way easier than Japanese. If you are able to process Japanese in any way, you will have a much easier time learning Korean.

Victoria 12:52
That's good.
Then that motivates me to try to learn.

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:00
Yeah, I think you'll be just fine if you wanted to learn Korean.
And how about the food?
Are you into Korean food?

Victoria 13:09
I love their hot dishes like soup like kimchi jigae, kimchi.

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:17
Kimchi Jigae.

Victoria 13:19
And what else?

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:23
Like sundubu.

Victoria 13:26
What?

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:27
Sundubu.

Victoria 13:29
How does it look like?

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:31
It's like a tofu hot pot.
Kind of like kimchi jigae, but like softer tofu.

Victoria 13:34
Yes.
Yes, that one too.
I just like their soup base like just makes you feel, like when it's winter and you can like heat up. Like those kinds

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:44
Yeah.
And that's so true.
Especially in Birmingham, where it gets so cold and so dark, it's so true.

Victoria 13:51
Yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:55
OK.
You mentioned that you want to go to Korea.
Was that something you always wanted to do?
Like visit Korea?

Or has it like been more like because you have been effected by K-Pop? Like it's more of a thing that you wanna do because of that?

Victoria 14:09
Definitely is because I started liking K-Pop, but I wanted to like, was really interested, wanted to go to Korea because before I had no idea like what was in Korea but like because of K-Pop like I know more of like Busan, Jeju Island or things that I wanna visit, but definitely yeah.
It's because of I starting liking K-Pop that I grew interest.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:31
I was there last year for BTS Festa and it was wild.

Victoria 14:39
Oh my God.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:41
Like if you get a chance to go, it's a lot of fun, but also wild.

Victoria 14:46
Yeah, I can't even.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:48
I'll ask a two part question.

Victoria 14:54
Mm-hmm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:54

Who is your like ultimate bias of any group and who is your BTS bias?
And they can be the same person.

Victoria 15:01
Yeah, the same person.
My ultimate bias is Jin from BTS.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:06
Really!

Victoria 15:07
This is like, it's not too common, but yeah it is.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:11
I have. OK, I don't know where it is, but I have an RJ tote bag that, like I was just using yesterday.
I'm like... it's here somewhere.
So Jin is your ultimate bias. Ok.
And have you been counting down the days until he gets discharged?

Victoria 15:23
No, no.
But I am like ohh, I really hope he comes back and like, I want him to act in dramas.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:35
Yes.
Yeah, there was an April Fool's joke, I feel like a few years ago. Somebody was like ohh Jin has been cast in this drama like right before he enlisted and everyone freaked out, but it ended up being like an April Fool's joke.

Victoria 15:42
Umm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:47
So it was really disappointing, but like the poster, looked legit.

Victoria 15:49
Yes.
When God the effort.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:53
Yeah, the effort is.... seriously the effort that fans put in to do that.

Victoria 15:58
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:59
I mean the effort that fans put in for anything is kind of like a lot in KPOP.

Victoria 16:03
Yeah.
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:06
So.
Umm, I love that.
OK, Jin.
Uh, and OK, let's just, since it's the same person, let's do your second ultimate bias.

Victoria 16:12
Yeah.
It's a difficult choice.
That’s really hard because my second ultimate group is 17 and I cannot pick.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:28
There so many of them.

Victoria 16:29
I cannot pick a bias but...
If.
No, I cannot...
They have too many guys...
Just 17 as a whole, maybe my second.
Like ult, yeah.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:42
Yeah, that's fair.
That's fair.
Are you more of a boy group fan than a girl group fan?

Victoria 16:47
Yes, yes, definitely.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:48
Yeah.
What is it about like the boy groups?
Do you think that you're like, more drawn to?

Victoria 16:54
Umm, I just for some reason I I don't know.
I'm not trying to be mean, but like it's somehow, I find... I think you know those shows that the entertainment company makes of the groups.
I somehow always found the guy groups funnier than the girl groups.
For some reason, the only girl groups that I found funny to me was G-Idle.
That's why I do like them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:20
Umm.

Victoria 17:20
But I find like I only get into groups when I can like laugh watching their videos.
So yeah, that's it.
That's the main reason I like groups.
I think more because, like, they're funnier and like because they're more silly, I guess.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:38
It seems like they're more being, like they're real self, right?

Victoria 17:40
Yes, yes, yes.
And like, yeah, also I think their songs I like more too because most girls are like a little more cuter, which I do sometimes listen to.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:49
Ohh.

Victoria 17:52

But I don't usually do.
I listen to more like umm... that's why I like 17 or they do a lot of ballads as well.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:01
Mm-hmm.

Victoria 18:03
But I think girl groups do more like cute songs that sometimes I can listen to... That one just sometimes, yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:09
Yeah, yeah, I completely understand that.
I'm the exact same way about guy groups and girl groups too.

Victoria 18:18
Yes, yes, yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:19
And if I do listen to a girl group, it's usually more like the girl crush concept then like,
Like IZ*ONE
Like that's sort of concept.

Victoria 18:28
Yes, yes, yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:30
Yeah, I I totally get that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:32

My version, like you were talking about G-Idle, my version of that is Mamamoo.
Like they're the only like, girl group that I feel like is kind of like funny and like, unfiltered and sort of that vibe.

Victoria 18:37
Mamamoo.
Yes, yes.
For sure, for sure.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:44
Yeah, I completely get that.
OK, so be my last question because there were about to hit her half hour mark and I don't want to take up too much of your time, but if you could go to, let's see any concert...I think I know the answer to this, but if you can go to any concert, who would it be? And where? And what's the most exciting thing about Korea that you want to do?

Victoria 19:13
OK, so concert, it will basically be BTS.
But I would wanna go. The most.... and the most exciting thing I wanna do in Korea.
Yeah.
I think I really wanna go to like....
The thing I most wanna do in Korea....
Hmm...

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:35
I know there's a lot.
You can say a couple of things.

Victoria 19:38
I like the historical palaces a lot.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:42
OK.

Victoria 19:43
I think it's because when I went to Japan, I liked the castles a lot.
I'm also interested in like getting to know more of the Korean history and like seeing those sites in Korea.
And then I was gonna go to, like, near the beach, like Busan and places like that.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:05
Yeah, like the seaside.

Victoria 20:06
This.
Yeah, and eat food.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:08
I was going to say, do you like seafood?
Because they have some amazing seafood there.

Victoria 20:11
Yeah.
I don't eat it too much, but I do wanna try it. Like it seems really good.
When I see it, I'm like well....

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:18
It really good going to Busan and Jeju.
Jeju has really good seafood too.

Victoria 20:21
Yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:23
Highly recommend.
OK.
Well, that ends the formal interview.

Sharon Kong-Perring stopped transcription

Appendix I. Full transcription with interviewee, Trinity (April 2024)

Trinity and Sharon K-Pop Fan Interview-20240419_131039-Meeting Recording

April 19, 2024, 6:10PM

24m 30s

Sharon Kong-Perring started transcription

Sharon Kong-Perring 0:09
OK, let's start.
So my first question that I like to start out with is just how did you get into KPOP and what groups do you kind of really have a vibe with at the moment?

Trinity 0:49
Uh, so I got into K-Pop in 2017.
Sorry I hope my audio level is fine... 2017 with BTS, specifically Mic Drop and DNA.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:00
Oh ok!

Trinity 1:01
Yeah.
And the groups I'm currently vibing with, still BTS, you know, probably for life, to be honest, 17, Twice.
Sorry, I'm looking the posters on my wall... ATEEZ, and Billie.
They're the ones I've got posters out for, so they're like, top at the moment.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:20
OK, OK, we'll get to ATEEZ in a second because as I said with the K-Kop Dance Society, I am also very into ATEEZ.
But that's for fun later...

And what was it that kind of like captured you, about K-Pop?
Did you see BTS like performing somewhere online or just like hear about it from other fans?

Trinity 1:43
Umm to be honest, I was kind of annoyed at myself that was I getting into K-Pop because I was already into like some weird niche interests like anime and I'd given BTS a shot before that, and I was like, no, no, this isn't for me.
And then Mic Drop came out and I think, I think it popped up on my YouTube as recommended and I was like, ah whatever.
I'll give him a shot again.
So then I like, I watched it and it got stuck in my head for like a week.
Like I just walked around with it in my head for a week and I was so annoyed because I was like, this is another thing that I'm just gonna get made fun of for liking.
So I was like, I cannot.
I cannot get into this and then it just kept getting stuck in my head and I was like ohh fine.
OK.
I guess, I guess I'll listen to it again and I listen to DNA and I was like, oh, OK, this is actually really good.
And then the yeah, the American interviews that groups sometimes do where they go: Who's my favorite member? You know what skills do I have? Pick your favorite American breakfast.

Sharon Kong-Perring 2:48
Mm-hmm.

Trinity 2:48
Those started coming out, I think it was like maybe the VMAs, like some American award show.
And I started watching those and I was like, ah, they're really funny.
I like their music, so I was like, OK, I'm...
I'm OK with this.
I can get into this.
You know, it was sort of like, I guess this is happening to me now.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:03
Umm.

Trinity 3:07
You know, I guess I'm a fan.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:09
It's happening to you.
It's fun way of phrasing. So it really, it's like it was a combination of like the music being like particularly catchy as well as like kind of seeing the personalities of the boys a little bit.

Trinity 3:15
Mm-hmm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:20
Yeah, that makes total sense.
Umm, there is something that you mentioned that I was curious about.
You said that like you're into kind of like niche things and that you're worried that you were going to get made fun of.
Is that something that you kind of experienced with not just with KPOP, but like with East Asian like pop culture?

Trinity 3:38
Oh yeah, like quite heavily.
It's bit mainly been K-Pop, especially cause anime got a bit more mainstream when I was in secondary school, but initially I was.
I'm not so much into anime anymore, but back then like in 2017 I was and that was already a thing that I knew was like different to other people.
So I was like, this is not a thing I'm going to broadcast.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:57
Mhm.

Trinity 4:00
And widely, before that, K-Pop before 2017 wasn't well known.
And then when BTS started to hit it big, when I started getting into them, it started becoming a little bit more well known.
And I definitely knew people in my school, uh, not all of them, but quite a lot of them, I think... didn't really like it.
I really remember it was after the O2 concert I went to.
We had like a quiz in our forms at the start of school where would do like a quick little quiz and one of the questions was like, Ohh, who had a concert at The O2 this weekend?
It listed all these K-Pop boy groups and stuff...I genuinely remember like no one would take it seriously.
People were like taking the piss out of all of the names.
No one knew anyone other than BTS.
They were all like, oh, these can't be real groups.
These names. Wow.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:56
Umm.

Trinity 4:57
No, but they totally were all real groups and like people's being like.
Ohh, BTS.
Yeah, they're so shit.
Have you heard their music?
Ohh no they suck and I was like just out there like...
It was a very big thing of like, I definitely knew people would make fun of me if they knew I liked it, so it was a weird combination of me really liking it and trying to, like tell my friends about it, but also not trying to like broadcast it so much that other people knew that I was into it because this was like 2017.

Seven years ago.
Wow, I was like 13/14.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:41
OK. Mm-hmm.

Trinity 5:41
14 So it was very much like secondary, a combination of secondary school bullying and it also people were just not very accepting of it at all, especially not in my secondary school.

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:52
Umm do you think that that changed before you went to uni?
Like toward the end of secondary school?

Trinity 6:00
Hmm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:00
Did it change a little bit when like BTS, and like BlackPink got popular or did it not really change when you were there?

Trinity 6:08
It didn't change much in secondary school.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:11
OK.

Trinity 6:11
I think BlackPink did help quite a lot.

I do remember some of like the most stereotypically cool kids, some of them got quite into BlackPink**,** as it went on, but it was sort of like they were seen as the exception to the rule, not to the like the general K-pop stuff.
It was like, oh K-pop sucks, but BlackPink's quite good.
But you know all these other groups, you know...I was friends with a lot of the K pop fans in school and whenever like it would be mentioned or played, people were just not very nice about it at all.
And it'd be like, but then they would put on BlackPink and they'd be like, wow, this is so cool.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:50
Umm.

Trinity 6:54
But no Momoland totally weird, but Blackpink really cool, you know?

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:14
That's really interesting.
What you say kind of like fascinates me because, like, BlackPink is so like... they're able to speak English quite well and, you know, some of them are like Kiwi-Korean or like, you know, Aussie-Korean or Thai and speak English fluently.
Do you think that had anything to do with it or was it just maybe the sound is more familiar to them?

Trinity 8:11
I think it was the sound and a combination that they're not a boy group. Girl groups, I think generally...But I don't know about other countries, but U.K-wise, girl groups I think are always a little bit like ohh seen as more mainstream than boy groups.
You know One Direction it's always been like, Ohh niche audience.
But then girl groups like Fifth Harmony, Spice Girls, they've always been like more mainstream, and I think it was also the combination that it was like, oh, these groups

speak English.
They go on like award shows and they speak English well.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:44
Umm.

Trinity 8:46
So yeah, just the combination of that, I think we're probably the reason why people went wow, these guys are cool, but no one else, you know.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:51

Umm yeah, I can totally see, like why people would, especially in the UK, like compare BTS to someone like One Direction or like The Wanted or something like that where it's not like as, I don't know, like as cool.

Trinity 9:00
It's like uh boy groups are for like 12 year olds, you know.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:09
Yeah.
Yeah, that's so interesting, huh?
So then when you went to uni, when you came to BCU, did you like notice that there are more people in general liking it or did you end up finding like the K-pop Dance society and you're kind of like, there are other K pop fans on campus?

Trinity 9:27
Yet uh, in my first year because I'm in my second year now technically... did a foundation year...
Here's the whole thing.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:34
Umm.

Trinity 9:34
I didn't join the K-pop dance society because I was too nervous.
I was like, I was like, it's going to be just like secondary school.
I'm gonna get made fun of, but then first year it was really surprising because no one gave a shit.
No one cared.
Everyone was always like, yeah, we're all into different things.
I don't know if it was the arts course or if it was just a general uni thing, but like it was so open I made friends with people in my course.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:57
Yeah.

Trinity 10:01
We were like ohh yeah, I love K-Pop.
So I was like, wow, this is, this is fine.
People are... no one's gonna, like, make fun of me or anything.
This is great.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:11
Umm.

Trinity 10:11
So I just sort of like well maybe I'm gonna be a bit more open about this.
And then my second year, the one I'm in now, I was like, I think I want to make more friends because my course is quite small.
I was like, I need to meet new people.
So I was like, uh, join K-Pop dance society, see how it goes?
And then I joined that and to be honest, because I hadn't really interacted with the K-

Pop community much, I didn't realize like, sort of how big it was.
It's way bigger than I thought it was.
I was like, wow, you do like events at the HMV like sometimes you do like,
the dance outside.
It's like in public.
I was like, wow, this is crazy.
I didn't realize all this is going on because I hadn't really interacted with it much in my secondary school, especially because it's like a small town where I'm from.
So it's like, it's there's not much going on there, K-Pop related.
And then I came to Birmingham and there's just so much more to do here to do with K-Pop.
It's like actually crazy.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:10
And then I'm sure when you go down to London, you're like, Oh my gosh, there's even more things down here.

Trinity 11:15
Yeah.
I guess in London.
And I'm like, oh, my God, I can like, plan a whole day around just doing K-Pop related activities.
It's kind of crazy.

Sharon Kong-Perring 11:23
It is actually kind of crazy how much there is going on now.
So then like when you started, like interacting more with the K-Pop community, did you start like meeting more like K-Pop fans online or like or is it mostly like in person stuff that you doing?

Trinity 11:41
Umm yeah.
To be honest, I'm not super active in the K-Pop community online. Like I tweet about it.
I have like an ATEEZ account.
You know, like most K-Pop have, but I don't really have many followers on that.

I think it's like 5.
I'm not particularly very like...I'm like uh, alright, tweeted about it, but it's not like I don't get any traction ever.
It's just sort of me shouting into the void. I've made, like, a few online friends, but it's like a handful and mainly the people at concerts who have gone wow, hey, we've met, like, once. Here's my Twitter.
And then you sort of talk to them online.
It's, to be honest, it's mainly been in person through the K-Pop Dance Society, and to be honest, it's mainly just the K-Pop dance society.
I'm not super social, so when we go to the events I normally just stick with someone from society and just hang out with them for the entire thing. And there's, to be honest, there's quite a lot of intergroup dance drama that goes on.
So I've, I don't know all of the...I don't know all of the drama that goes on.
So it's like it's just a bit easier if I just stay with my friends.
Really, you know.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:48
Yeah.
Yeah, that's totally fair.
That's totally fair, but it does seem more like the in-person, like the concerts and like the like birthday cafes and stuff, that might be more of your thing.

Trinity 12:54
Umm.
Yeah, definitely.

SK

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:01
OK, very cool.
And you said you've been to a concert, right?

Trinity 13:04
I've yeah, I've been to a few, yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:07
OK, which groups have you seen?

Trinity 13:09
BTS. I've done Twice, ATEEZ, XIKERs.
I think that's all of them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:19
I'm very jealous at you saw XIKERs cause I really wanna see them.
Love them.
Have you noticed like a difference between, like the different fandoms at all?
Like when you've gone to the concert, it's like how they dress.
Or like who is a part of the fandom?

Trinity 13:36
Uh, definitely how people dress.
Uh, cause it's made me just like the music aesthetic...Like Twice people generally wear more like pink, and light colours and then ATEEZ you go and everyone's dressed like vampires and it's like, OK, so it's generally like, I think like a music aesthetic sort of dress.
Age wise, it's not really like a big mix.
I think the only time I've seen like a like elderly people has been at BTS.
There were a few at the O2 that I was like, wow, this is like crazy.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:10
Umm.

Trinity 14:14
You're like my grandparents, age, but you're here. And I was, I was 13 at the time, so this was like groundbreaking to me.
I was like, Oh my God.
But so yeah, I've generally not really noticed like an age difference.
Apart from BTS, they had like a really wide variety, but dress wise it's crazy.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:31
Mm-hmm.

Trinity 14:33
I always also under dress when I go to concerts because I'm like T shirt, trousers and everyone else is like I'm gonna wear a corset and massive skirt and it's like, oh, I should maybe dress nicer for these, you know.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:46
I understand and for me it's mostly comfort.
I wanna be comfortable while I'm watching the show.
Umm, that's really interesting.
What you say about ATEEZ...Everyone dressing like a vampire or like with like rivets and like spikes and stuff like that.

Trinity 15:01
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:03
And fedoras because that's like one of their things, right?

Trinity 15:05
Mm-hmm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:06
So yeah, you're spot on when you say that.
Umm is there like a big like gender difference?
Do you see like going to like a Twice concert or like a Momoland concert versus like going to ATEEZ?
Or do you not really see any difference?

Trinity 15:19
Uh.
To be honest, I think, I think K-Pop skews female mainly, so it's mainly women apart from when I saw Twice there were more men there than the other concert I've been to. A lot more men to be honest.

Sharon Kong-Perring 15:29
Hmm.
Umm.

Trinity 15:36
But it wasn't like a bad thing.
It was just like ohh this is, this is I guess more male than all the other ones.
Fun Facts I went to the BTS concert at Wembley with my mum and my dad at the time because my mum's a fan and my dad was there for emotional support and driving and stuff.
So when we were leaving, my dad was like, ohh.
Just gonna go to the toilet and he had to walk for like 10-15 minutes to find the male toilet because like all of them were women, because they're just turned so many toilets.
Yeah.
These are women's toilets.
These women's toilets... you have to walk like to the other side of the Wembley Arena to find a male toilet because they were just none in there for the BTS I was like, oh, it's just crazy.

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:20
That's so interesting.
Ohh wow.

Trinity 16:25
Yeah.
Bathroom queues at K-Pop concerts...Twice wasn't too bad, but any time I need the the bathroom at like the O2 or Wembley I have to queue up for ages and it's so

annoying.
At BTS I had to use the men's because the queue for the women's was like miles long and the men's was like 3 guys and I was like, I'm just gonna pee in the men's.
I'm can't wait this long.

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:48
Yeah, I completely understand.

Trinity 16:50
So it's like umm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:53
I get it.
So you said ATEEZ is also one of your tops and you had said BTS, XIKERS, Twice and Billie... OK Do you consider Billie 4th Gen or 5th Gen? Are we there yet?

Trinity 17:00
Umm.
Billie yeah.
So to be honest, I'm not convinced 5th Gen started.
I'm just convinced it's a big marketing strategy to be like, wow, we're the best in 5th Gen... 5th Gen started guys!
To be honest, I'm not convinced it actually should have started.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:20
Ah.

Trinity 17:23
I'm like, I'm sure we're in it now because so many people have, like, accepted it.
But when it, when it first people were like 5th Gen, and I was like it's been like 2 years since 4th Gen started, like really?
But I believe Billie is a 4th Gen, you know? Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:37
OK.
OK.
That's an interesting perspective and like something that's giving me thought, because I'm like, yeah, how's it actually started?

Trinity 17:45
No, because it first popped up when ZEROBASEONE first became big. When ZEROBASEONE debuted, and I generally think it's a marketing thing because they want ZEROBASEONE to be like a New Jeans.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:45
Umm.
Mm-hmm.

Trinity 18:00
Illiat, and like those big girl groups, they want them to be like, *the* group.
But you can't say the best in 4th Gen cause 4th Gen is still doing, you know, great stuff.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:09
Umm.

Trinity 18:09
So if you make a new generation, it's like, wow, this is the number one 5th Gen idols because it started when ZEROBASEONE debuts.
I'm not convinced to end the and going 5th Gen now and ZEROBASEONE is the best, you know?

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:18
Mm-hmm.
Umm, that's really interesting.

Trinity 18:21
Yeah, that's my perspective.
So so.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:23
Yeah, that's really interesting.
I kind of started getting lost toward the end of 4th Gen, so I'm like, oh, where's the line being drawn now?
And I was like, technically, I think New Jeans is 4th Gen, even though they're the same age as a lot of these supposed to 5th Gen people. But...
Who am I to say such things?
Was there any kind of like, wild story that you've ever like encountered with K-Pop or has it all kind of been like pretty like, you know, like normal fan stuff, enjoyable fan stuff?

Trinity 19:02
It been fairly normal...I mean some guy got stabbed at the O2 when ATEEZ were there.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:11
I remember that.

Trinity 19:11
But that, yeah, that was just sort of like a guy was there who just happened to get stabbed....
But that concert was quite fun.
I don't really have like super big story.
It's mainly been just like general fun stuff.
And you know, people get into like petty drama.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:27
Mm-hmm.

Trinity 19:29
You argue a bit, you know, I don't think there's been any, like, major stuff that's happened because of it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:30
Yeah.
Umm.

Trinity 19:36
I mean, BTS were on the Graham Norton Show.
That was quite interesting.
That was big news for me, you know, BTS on British television.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:42
Umm.

Trinity 19:43
I was like, wow, this is incredible.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:46
Umm.
In like a good way, right?

Trinity 19:48
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
I was like, wow, this is awesome.
Can we do this more?
And then they never did any like much else.
And I was like ohh, I'd like to see BTS and like British quiz shows.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:56
You're right.

Trinity 19:58
I love British quiz quiz shows, so I'd love to see like, a K-Pop idol on one of them, you know.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:03
Yeah, you're totally right.

Trinity 20:09
Umm.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:10
Like in America you know, they do these shows quite a bit, even if they're not BTS. Like 17, granted, 17 is also part of HYBE...Umm, so has your kind of interesting K-pop, has it inspired you to be like, interested in like Korean culture at all, like the food, the language, history?
Or is it mostly like the music for you, the fandom?

Trinity 20:37
I mean, definitely.
I've tried Korean food than I would have if I wasn't K-Pop fan.
I do really like it.
My only issue is that I generally I'm not very good with spicy food, so I generally... it's like I quite like it, but it has to be taken in small quantities and also trying to avoid the super spicy stuff.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:55
Yeah.

Trinity 20:59
And I have tried to learn Korean.
I tried for like 2 weeks from the alphabet and I could not get half the alphabet in two weeks and everyone always says it's really easy, but I'm really bad at languages.
I'm like, genuinely like, embarrassingly bad with languages, so it's like I couldn't learn like half the alphabet in two weeks.
I was like, hmm, maybe I'll come back to this at some other point when I have more free time.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:23
Umm.

Trinity 21:25
So maybe it's a summer project.
If I don't have life altering uni work to do, but my mom I think is definitely (learning) because she's a fan of BTS and she definitely like, took the route of like looking more into Korean culture where I generally just keep up with like the K-pop idol stuff.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:42
Umm.

Trinity 21:47
But I've definitely like tried more Korean food. Like I've tried to learn the language more, but it's just, it just sort of hasn't worked out for me to quite yet, you know.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:00
Yeah.
Yeah, but you have like hopes and aspirations and like an interest, it's more of like a time thing for you.

Trinity 22:03
Umm.
Yeah, a time thing.
It will take me ages to learn a new language just because I'm me and I'm not very good at remembering that sort of thing.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:09
Mm-hmm.
I understand. I get it.
So last question and this is, this is a fun question.
Who is like your ult?
Your ultimate bias and who is your bias in like, let's say BTS, cause you said that's who got you into it, and they could be the same person.

Trinity 22:34
Uh, my ultimate bias. It generally changes quite, like quite a lot depending on what group I'm in, but I only collect photocard-wise, Suki from Billie.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:44
Umm.

Trinity 22:50
I only collect her and my Twitter Stan account is Yeosang from ATEEZ, so those two are like sort of like quite up there for me.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:51
Ohh.

Trinity 23:02

I reckon in terms of idols I like and from BTS.
It's Tae...Taehyung.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:08
OK, V.

Trinity 23:08
Yeah, he's.
He's a yeah, the chef's kiss.
It's generally for the silly reason, but his photocards for DNA like changed my life.
I was like, Oh my God, this is absolutely insane.
It's one of the video game ones.
He's got silver hair.
It's a poster on my wall.
He's wearing a tie.
It's like that concept photo.
I was like, yeah, this one.
I like that one, you know?

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:35
Yep.

Trinity 23:37
And then I just sort of rolled with it for the rest of my life.
I was like, yeah, that one.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:41
I get that, I totally get that.
Uh, he was, he was one of my early biases, in BTS when I was getting into them as well.
And Suga.
I have this like, I don't know if you can see like this S tattoo on the side.

Trinity 23:57
That's so cool.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:59
It's for my name, but as well as for Seongwha and Suga from BTS.
So yeah, so I can very much bond with you about Seonghwa.
OK, well, I think I'm gonna stop the recording to stop the official interview.
Because that was really great.

Sharon Kong-Perring stopped transcription

Appendix J. Full transcription with interviewee, Betty (April 2024)

Interview with Betty-20240422_090737-Meeting Recording

April 22, 2024, 1:07PM

23m 49s

Sharon Kong-Perring started transcription

Sharon Kong-Perring 0:33
OK.
So we're here today with Betty, and we're just chatting a little bit about Kpop fan experiences.
So my first question out the door is always how did you get into KPOP?

Betty 0:51
I had a friend that really liked BTS in secondary school and he showed them to me and originally I was like, I don't know what is going on.
Cause it was the DNA music video which is quite high on like graphics and things so like that, that... that like at one point the members are just like floating in this big coloured background or something like that.
And I was like, what on Earth am I watching?
And then I kind of got into them from there because I was like I need to know what's going on..
I need to know if there's like a story behind this and then yeah, just kind of went like down a rabbit hole.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:19
OK.
Little did you know there was an entire universe that you're stepping into, literally.

Betty 1:30
Yeah.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:31
So it was BTS DNA.
So I was like 2017, 2018.

Betty 1:35
Yeah, 2017.

Sharon Kong-Perring 1:36
OK.
And you mentioned secondary school, was it like kind of mainstream already by that point or is it still pretty niche?

Betty 1:44
It was, yeah, we were still very much like...you see before I knew it when my friend showed me, I was...I was very much one of the people that was why did you show me this?
I don't like it, what's that?
And then yeah, there was a... there was a group of us that did like it in the end, but it was very much like it didn't really get spoken about. Like it was very, I wouldn't say taboo in a way, but also it was like, kind of like if you knew what it was you would be like a weirdo.

Sharon Kong-Perring 2:03
Yeah.
I see.
What was that like just with BTS or like when Black Pink came out?
Was BlackPink like less like taboo or like you know what I mean?

Betty 2:24
Yeah, I'm not entirely sure, to be honest.
I've never been a big girl group fan, so I don't really pay attention to how like the girl groups are like reacted to.
So I don't, I don't fully remember.
I think they were more accepted then BTS were at the time, but I think it was still very much like.
Yeah, like that's too different like cause... cause it's K pop.
It's still weird, like you know.

Sharon Kong-Perring 2:51
Umm, yeah yeah.
I'm also one of those people that is more boy group than girl groups.
So like I understand that bit as well.
I just don't know.
I find them more interesting... but OK, so did you feel like you had to kind of like, hide it at all when you were a fan in secondary school, or were you just, like, I don't care about people, I know what I like.

Betty 3:12
I'd say...
Yeah, definitely.
In secondary school, I felt like I couldn't.
Like I had to hide that I was a fan cause it was very much like...I know you get like a lot of American films where there's like the groups or the cliques or whatever.
But I think that definitely, at least in my school, it was like definitely a thing.
And obviously, like those that liked K pop or things that weren't like mainstream were very much like the weird group.
So you didn't wanna speak about it because you didn't wanna, like, solidify yourself as that of that group, if that makes sense.
So I think it was a very much like everyone was scared to talk about it, but I think I see now it's become more mainstream.
People are more happy to talk about the, like, love of it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 3:59
Umm, so do you feel like this shift when you went to university then?

Betty 4:05
Yeah, definitely.
I think as well like since I've joined the society as well and you see like, how many people on like a daily basis come into the society and obviously talk about KPOP and even those that don't come to the society like when we do stalls and stuff, they'll come up and they'll be like oh, I know this group, I love this group and you're like, whoa, I think when you see that many people in the university has setting, it's kind of like, ohh obviously because you're older, you're kind of like you don't really care as
much so, it's not... you don't...
I don't feel like it needs to be hidden, and I'm like, that's just music.
It's just what I enjoy.

Sharon Kong-Perring 4:37
Yeah.
Yeah, and it also like, I don't know if you agree about this, but also like K pop in general seems to be like bigger at the moment.

Betty 4:47
Yeah, it's definitely, yeah.
It's definitely become more mainstream and I feel like a lot of like people that I know if I say to them, I like K pop, I don't get the reaction anymore.
They kind of just go ohh OK.
Yeah....
“Like I've heard of that.”
It's just like a part of an everyday thing now, so it's not like (weird).

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:03
Yeah, that's interesting.

Betty 5:05
Like I have a lot of... where I work... I have in my phone...I have like a photo card a lot of the time or like my lock screen is members of ATEEZ and when obviously like I'm at work and they see my phone and they're like, oh, I've seen that poster in my friend's room, like or I've seen the like....
The other day I got someone asked me like ohh is that Jimin from BTS?
It wasn't, but I was like, it's crazy that they recognized that that is a member of a K Pop band, regardless of if it's the wrong man.
But I think people....

Sharon Kong-Perring 5:37
And they know his name, which is wild, even if it wasn't him.

Betty 5:43
Yeah.
So I think people... I think as well because like definitely BTS are like more into the mainstream.
And I think since they've done that, people recognize... obviously they've got quite a lot of English songs as a lot... actually have they a lot? Maybe like 3, but they've got English songs that have been on the radio.
So people like recognize that and I think a lot of the time now that groups are releasing English songs.
Sometimes people don't realize that they are (K-Pop).
I would like, I'll play a song and they're like, I've heard this song before.
And then I'm when I'm like, oh, it's a K pop band.
They're like, whoa.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:14
Umm yeah.
Yeah, that's very true.
I guess if you hadn't realized that, like dynamite was a not English speaker, you wouldn't realize that it was.

Betty 6:21
Yes.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:23
Yeah, that's true.
That's interesting.
Umm, so you mentioned BTS. ATEEZ, you have mentioned and we'll get to that later because like I told the society writ large, I am also an ATEEZ fan.
Umm, what other groups?

Betty 6:39
I'm a big fan of Monster X.
I've recently got into 17.
Umm.
And I listened to XIKERs and Enhyphen as well.
Quite a bit.

Sharon Kong-Perring 6:49
OK, OK, I need to show you.
I'm going to find it eventuall..., so I worked a thing last year with Enhyphen and Monsta X in particular, and I got this crazy photo of Monster X '...can you believe, like how close I was to them for this.

Betty 7:08
Wow.
Oh my gosh.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:16
You know, if you can see.
Ohh no, it's blurring it.

Betty 7:20
Oh my God.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:20
They're right there, except obviously Shownu is in the military still, because it was last year...

Betty 7:25
And that's insane.

Sharon Kong-Perring 7:28
Anyways, OK, so ARMY aside, would you like call yourself, you know, how they have fandom names?
So would you call yourself like a monbebe, or a carat, or an Atiny or...?

Betty 7:42
I would definitely say.
Yeah, I definitely say Atiny umm monbebe and maybe a stay.
I wouldn't yet call myself a carat because I can't name all of the Members and I feel like that is like... when you can do that, you've been like initiated as a fan of the group like, you know, like you've gotta, you feel like there's definitely like a certain level you have to get to or you can be classified as a.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:07
Yeah.

Betty 8:11
Like you can say, you're a fan of the group, but I think the names of fandoms are often used

when you are like in that fandom, if that makes sense.
Like there's like, definitely like a certain level.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:19
Yeah.

Betty 8:23
Or like a certain amount of rules that you've gotta, like fulfill to be classed as it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:28
Yeah, yeah, I get that.
Are you in Engene?
Then would you consider yourself Engene?

Betty 8:33
I yeah, I'd say so.
But they're like, they're not my ult.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:36
Yeah.

Betty 8:38
They're not like the ones that I listen to the most, so I wouldn't...
I don't like in my head, I don't immediately go on this group.
Like if you ask like the list of my top ones, I could probably go like ATEEZ.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:46
Sure.

Betty 8:49
Even more than that, like, OK down in an order.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:50
Sure, sure.
OK.
So would you say, would you say ATEEZ is your ult or BTS?

Betty 8:56
Ohh ATEEZ definitely.

Sharon Kong-Perring 8:58
ATEEZ, OK, alright.
I have not met many more.
Umm “Bangteez” or what's the other portmanteau that ATEEZ are given
if they’re a BTS fan... AtinyArmy, that like would say that like ATEEZ is like above BTS for them besides myself like cuz I'm that way too.

Betty 9:20
I think like BTS is definitely the first group that I discovered, so I'm like, definitely a fan of them, but I feel like.
I hyperfixate quite strongly on things.
So I feel like at the moment because it's ATEEZ, I rate them above BTS whereas BTS are like, I didn't know they feel... it's like an odd feeling.
Like I don't listen to BTS music quite a lot, but when I do I definitely get like a big sense of nostalgia.
Like, it's definitely like a.
It's like a little warm place.
Like I don't really go there.

Sharon Kong-Perring 9:50
Umm.

Betty 9:51
I don't really listen their music often, but like when you go back, you're like, yeah, this is like, I'd say, like home I when I listen to it, I'm like, yeah, this is like a childhood home and ATEEZ and Atiny are like my current home if that makes sense.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:07
It totally makes sense.
So then is it like the music that kind of like draws you into a group or is it like members or how do you kind of decide?

Betty 10:15
I think definitly the music and especially if the music like... if I enjoy the choreography as well because I'm a dancer and I like really enjoy doing the K-pop choreographies. If I like their choreographies as well that definitely draws me in and then from there I learn the members.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:34
Ah, yes, choreography for me is also really important, which I think like that's probably why both of us really like ATEEZ.

Betty 10:40
Yes, definitely.

Sharon Kong-Perring 10:42
And then and then you learn the members.
And does that like ever, is there ever a point where you like, like yes the music and then you watch interviews or like, you watch their vlogs and you're like, yeah...
Or does that ever happen to you?

Betty 10:57
Umm, it's not massively happened to me yet. I feel like I have to really get into the music

and by the time you're into the music you kind of everything else kind of just falls into place.
So I'm like, I don't go out of my way to... like right now, with 17, a lot of my friends like 17 and we're doing like, we're doing all these big, like, we have a collab with another unis as well to do a big cover of super and then we're doing a 17 event with our local HMV as well.
So it's like there's a lot of factors that are contributing into me getting to know 17 and obviously like if I'm teaching all the dances or I'm like doing positions for people and that was why a lot of the time I was like, OK, let me learn like at least some of their names.
So I can go, Ohh, this is Vernon.
He needs to be here.
So I feel like kind of like for...yeah, it falls into place.
Ohh, like with ATEEZ. The reason I got into ATEEZ was because my friends were covering Hala Hala and they were like ohh the person that's Jongho hasn't been in for quite a while and I was like, I don't know who Jongho is and also it's quite an awkward one to learn because obviously in a lot of the practices they're wearing, like the hats and they're in all black.
And I was like, I cannot do....I need to figure out who is who, so I had to, like, try and figure that out for myself.
And then by theircomeback, by that point, I was like, wow, I know every single one of these members.
By the time we'd like actually got around to performing Hala Hala.

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:19
That's really interesting way of lik,e or like pathway into learning members.
You weren't joking when you said you were a dancer.
And that's like how you got into it.
So OK, by the way, when you're doing whatever you're doing with the other university, even though I can't be there, can you let me know what it is?
So I can let people who I know might wanna go.

Betty 12:44
It's on the 18th of May.
We're not...We don't know where it is yet, but we've often filmed like in public, so it's gonna be obvious, there's thirteen of us.

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:48
OK.

Betty 12:51
So it's all all 13 members.
So it's gonna be quite a big thing and obviously like the recorde...we got someone recording.

Sharon Kong-Perring 12:55
Yeah.

Betty 12:59
So that makes it like 14 and then they'll be someone with the speaker and all the bags.
So there's probably gonna be like 20 of us by the end of it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:06
Wow I love this.
That's so awesome.
I wish I was there.
OK, I I'm going to have someone attend cause like I need to live vicariously through them.

Betty 13:12
Cool.

Sharon Kong-Perring 13:16
So that sounds like a lot of fun.

Umm, have you been to any of, it doesn't have to be those groups that you mentioned, but any concerts, K-POP, concerts?

Betty 13:27

I've been to ATEEZ in London this last year.
The one that they'd like just done.
And then we followed that with K-Pop Lux in Madrid, which was ATEEZ, Enhypen, and
Ohh my God. Shinee!.
How did I forget Shinee?
I'm a shawol but yeah, so Shinee like, Shinee kind of sits at the same as BTS.
Like I didn't...I didn't actually fully get into them until K-Pop Lux because I think, and like with the big groups that I now like 17, I looked at them and I was like 13 members, too many.
Like I don't need to get into that and have like 13 people... like 8 is enough for me and then now here we are and it's fine.
But Shinee was the same, but I think with Shinee I was like, really scared because I was like, I know I'm gonna get into them and I'm gonna, like, fall in love with them.
And obviously Jonghyun isn't like with us anymore, and I was like, I know I'm gonna be so sad about that and like I know... I was really scared to get into them and I'll say I saw them in Madrid, but that was only Taemin, Minho, and Key because Onew was like
on hiatus, yeah...
And then and I went down and I was now I'm like, ohh yeah...
I've seen like half of shiny live and then yeah, and Enhyphen ATEEZ, but I've not seen...
I know that Stray Kids are at Hyde Park, but I've not seen them.

Sharon Kong-Perring 14:51
Yeah.
Yeah, I'm super jealous you saw Shinee.
Because they are also on up there for me as well, but regardless of that, OK, so when you went to the concerts, did you notice like anything in particular about how fans dress or like when you went to K pop Lux and there were multiple fans there like, was it pretty obvious when people were fans of which people?

Betty 15:20
You can definitely, I think like outside of the O2, you could definitely find every single person that was in an Atiny attending the concert, like a lot, like there was one point like obviously people will replicate outfits from music videos.
So like for myself, I did Deja Vu, the Hongjoong's outfit from Deja Vu.
I did that one and I had a friend with me who did someone from Illusion.

So we were like complete opposite, the two of us walking around.
I'm in like black and white and she's in like every single colour you could find in someone's wardrobe.
So yeah, that like when ATEEZ comes, I think it's very clear, like in comparison to the rest of the people who are in the O2 at the time, you can definitely find those that are Atiny, even if they're not like in an outfit from a music video or something.
You can like tell, you can like tell when someone is.
Madrid was less so.
You still got... I think as well, because it was Midsummer.
It was really hot and so we were all like, you know, trying to keep cool.

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:20
Yeah.

Betty 16:24
We're all in like shorts and the shirt like, and I think you could still definitely tell.
Like, I wouldn't say you could tell by group, I think except Enhyphen maybe because I know that they have like they're representative Colour is orange, so you could find a lot of people that were in orange or had orange on them somehow, but I think because there was multiple groups there, the way that you could tell who was for which group was the light sticks that they had.

Sharon Kong-Perring 16:52
Mm-hmm.

Betty 16:52
So like I had my Lightiny with me.
I don't, I don't own an Engene-bong, an Enhypen light stick, but I had my Lightiny with me.
And then obviously you can see people with the Shinee lights stick, which has a ridiculous name on it, I won't say it.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:09
Mm-hmm.

Betty 17:09
But there was one person that had like a light stick for every single group.
That was like, they just had like... this like, like a harness on.
And there was, like every single light stick, like strapped onto this harness, it was crazy.
But yeah, I think through like light sticks, you can definitely tell who was what group, especially in Madrid.
And I think some of my friends have just been to, I think it was Music Bank in Antwerp recently.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:33
Mm-hmm.

Betty 17:36
Like the other day, and you can see in their videos as well, like all the different light sticks.
It's like how you can see who's in what group.

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:43
Umm.
Do you...and you don't have to speak for, you know, all British people, but do you find that there's, like, a lot of British fans that go to these concerts on the continent?

Betty 17:57
Like in Europe?

Sharon Kong-Perring 17:59
Yeah.
In Europe, yeah, like the concerts or the festivals.

Betty 18:04
Umm.
I'm not entirely sure.

I know that we found when we went to Madrid we had at least three other people going to K-Pop Lux on our flight and then obviously we met some of our friends there who had got like different flight times on different days and things.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:21
Mm-hmm.

Betty 18:21
So I think, I think it depends like what groups go like...
Obviously when I saw the lineup for Madrid especially, I saw ATEEZ as like the top one underneath, There was Enhyphen and at the time we hadn't got Shinee, but I was like ATEEZ and Enhyphen like... and Enhyphen don't normally come to Europe and I was like, this is the chance that I'm gonna get to see them.
So I obviously like I went to that and I think that's the same for a lot of people like obviously the one that's just been Music Bank, I think 17 were there and again 17 haven't been to Europe in like years.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:49
hmm.

Betty 18:53
So everyone that saw seventeen was like, oh, we gotta go.
So I think it definitely depends on who is playing.

Sharon Kong-Perring 18:56
Mm-hmm.

Betty 18:59
But I think a lot of people, especially if their group hasn't come to Europe in a long time, will go to other countries to watch, like, because they're like, this is the only opportunity that we get because they're not gonna tour for a while kind of thing.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:07

Yeah. Umm.
Umm Whereas ATEEZ is touring again.

Betty 19:17
Yeah

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:19
Love that.

Betty 19:20
Yeah

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:21
We'll see how much of a bloodbath it is to get tickets for that one.

Betty 19:25
No...

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:27
Yeah.
Yeah, it's gonna be wild.

Betty 19:31
Yeah no.

Sharon Kong-Perring 19:33
OK, so I think we're hitting the 25 minute mark.
So I only have a couple more questions left and then I'll let you go.
So you mentioned that you're more of a fan of the boy groups and the girl groups.
And you also talked about being a dancer.

Is it more because the choreography is not as maybe let's say...
Intensive or not intensive, because that's the wrong word, but...

Betty 20:00
I yeah, I get what you mean.

Sharon Kong-Perring 20:02
Yeah.

Betty 20:04
I think yeah, that definitely plays into it.
I think as well like when you look at the society, you're like, definitely like the cover groups, you can see that everyone has their own, like, dance style, and mine is definitely more towards boy groups.
Like I don't have a lot of the girl groups.
It's like very girly, if that makes sense like they...like, Kids of Life is a recent one.
Obviously there's a lot of, like, ass shaking in that basically.
So I'm not very good at that...
So I think I go more and more boy groups because I, yeah, I dance in more of a boy group style.
I think, I lean more towards, and I like more of their music because it's quite like...
Girl Group music I don't wanna sound mean, but it's like very much like the spring.
Like happy, not happy vibes.
And whereas Boy group music can be quite intense, like obviously in ATEEZ, like Gorilla is quite different to, I don't know, like Twice's "What is Love".

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:08
Yeah.

Betty 21:11
You know, it's quite, it's quite the jump.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:13
Yeah, yeah.

Betty 21:13
I do like some of the girl groups that are less like that.
Like G-Idle, I listened to a little bit of G-Idle.
Umm, because I know that they're like that.
Not massively like girly pop so to say.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:26
Umm have you have you checked out dream catcher at all?

Betty 21:27
I've heard a few of their songs and I've seen... we went to a competition recently with the society and someone did Boca Dreamcatcher.
That was that was pretty cool.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:44
Their producing team are members of the EDENry.
So they that's why the sounds very similar.

Betty 21:50
Ah, OK.

Sharon Kong-Perring 21:52
So I find I find if you're Atiny, than Dreamcatcher is a good entry into the girl group market, and their choreography is quite difficult as well.
Still kind of girly, but like...different.
Uh, OK, so last question, I always ask everyone who is your ultimate bias and who is your

bias in BTS?
Because that was your group that was kind of your like entree into K-pop,
and they're allowed to be the same person, but they don't have to be.

Betty 22:26
Uh, my ultimate bias is definitely Mingi from ATEEZ.

Sharon Kong-Perring 22:30
Ah, OK.
So were you freaking out with all the Coachella coverage because he was like, particularly like aces at Coachella?

Betty 22:32
Umm.
Yeah, I think I definitely... my timetable that day got delayed by about an hour or so because my TikTok was just flooded with my friends sending me all of these videos of him.
Yeah, it wasn't good...But yeah, so he's, yeah.
And then my BTS bias is J-Hope.
I have quite a tendency to lean towards the dancers and all the rappers, so they all fit into like a certain category.

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:10
I see that.
Wait, just out of curiosity, then, how about a monster X?

Betty 23:16
Uh, do you know Joohoney?

Sharon Kong-Perring 23:18
Ah, OK, OK.
I think that could have gone one of a couple of ways, so I see it though, OK.

Yeah, I this makes a lot of sense based on everything that you told me.
OK, alright.
Alright, so I think that's the end of our formal interview.
So I'm just gonna stop the recording and the transcription for now.

Sharon Kong-Perring stopped transcription

Appendix K. Draft of forthcoming chapter in the Bloomsbury Handbook of Gender and Sexuality in Popular Music Studies (2026)

Sharon Kong-Perring

Introducing: The Ick

During the summer of 2022, I spent eight weeks in Seoul, South Korea, committed to gathering in-person, participatory data for my doctoral thesis on domestic Korean Pop Music ("K-Pop") fandom behaviours. Unfortunately, my trip was ill-timed, coinciding with a resurgence of the BA.5 variant of the Covid-19 pandemic. It resulted in many of my potential field work sites cancelling events or minimising participants, and I was consistently one of the names removed from event lists. As South Korean public health measures were quite strict compared to their European, British, and American counterparts, I had failed to predict what a coronavirus resurgence could mean for fieldwork in Seoul. Nonetheless, as we are taught as doctoral researchers early on in our coursework, there are times where we must be reflective, reflexive, and pivot in the face of research challenges. And so, I did.

While I originally had intentions of attending concerts, festivals, and Korean music show tapings,[15] all of which were cancelled, I refused to allow this nearly two-month long research trip go to waste, and thus I turned my attention to other sites. I visited agency offices in a sort-of fan pilgrimage, attended K-Pop related museum exhibitions, engaged in popular music-related tourism activities, like tours, and – most notable here for this reflection on research – observed busking street performances of idol trainees. In the K-Pop idol music genre, trainees are just as

[15] In South Korean, weekly music shows across various national broadcasting channels air which feature various K-Pop idol groups performing new releases, and receiving awards for top streaming, voting, and charting accolades. These tapings are a site of gathering for fans to support their favorite groups and involved purchasing tickets.

they sound; adolescent youths train for years – sometimes for as long as a decade or more – under the direction of production and management agencies in vigorous exercises of rapping, singing, dancing, and international languages, to one day be selected by said label as a part of a new musical group to formally debut. Some talent agencies (which also serve as both the group's management team and creative production agency) utilise busking as a strategy, for both pre-debut marketing for the idol and practice to get the trainee comfortable performing in public. Effectively, these busking events act as mini-festivals held on the streets of Seoul – most prominently in the arts neighbourhood of Hongdae – and they are typically free, un-ticketed, and open to the public. Hence, I pivoted to include such a site in my data collection as these events were held outdoors, and I could easily access the site without intervention from a public health standpoint. My intention at these busking events was to observe how Korean K-Pop fans interacted with each other, the music, and the trainee/idol themselves in order to eventually juxtapose their behaviours with that of Global North fandoms in North America and the United Kingdom. In my other socially distanced fieldwork sites, there was little to no opportunity to observe fans interacting with or reacting to idols directly, so this busking opportunity afforded me a space to watch fans watching idols.

Though much of what I observed and paid attention to is outside the scope of this chapter, a common thread emerged: the male-presenting fan watching female idol trainees. When female trainees performed, I noted that a largely male crowd gathered around me. Immediately, mobile phones were raised into the air, continuously filming throughout the entire female trainee's performance and thereafter, if she made any remarks following her set. There was a noticeable concentration of older male watchers, who appeared to be aged fifty or older, and it was apparent that they did not have any pre-existing relationship with the trainee (i.e. the men

were not the trainees' family members). This lack of relationship was also assumed based on these men's consistent filming of every female trainee that performed, as well as any heckling that ensued after some performances that were done by trainees who were not as technically advanced as others. Some female trainees were even criticised openly by these older male audience members for not being traditionally beautiful, as defined by Korean beauty standards, as their fellow trainees. Although both male and female fans displayed passionate enthusiasm for their favourite performers, the kind of behaviour I witnessed—live commentary on attractiveness and heckling—appeared only among male audiences toward female groups. My discomfort, I realised, arose in part from a self-reflective awareness of these uneven gendered dynamics.

In the most scholarly way of saying it: watching older men, watching younger women, commenting on women, gave me, a woman researcher, the ick. And though the male gaze is not a new subject in any performance-related field (Mulvey, 1975; Derné, 2000), particularly in popular music studies (Ahvenniemi, 2021; Sergeant and Himonides, 2022) and I readily observed the male gaze in other music scenes of which I engage in, the role it plays in the K-Pop industry particularly, is profound. K-Culture researchers who study female bodies and performance in K-Pop and ideal femininity in K-Beauty, have previously provided detailed insight in literature into the commercial endeavours of "selling" girl groups and have provided discussions on the commodification of K-Pop and the woman's body (Jung, 2011; Choi, 2020). In the Korean context, the woman's body has empirically served as a form of a currency to be exchanged transnationally and transculturally, both explicitly sexual or more subtly commercial (Yuh, 2002; Soh, 2008; Elfving-Hwang, 2018). In reflecting on this crafting of female idols, and measuring how it affected me, the researcher, in pursuit of data gathering, I realised there is a

lack of dialogue, particularly from others that study Korean cultural exports, on how positionality may affect the outcome of research.

As a Korean American woman who phenotypically aligned with the trainees I observed at the busking event, I understood that I was re-experiencing my own past trauma of bodily policing and gendered beauty standards. Observing and analysing both the male intervention in the creation of these bodies and the male gaze in the reception of them, I found I had to extract myself from the site. Thereafter, I had a reticence to include female groups in my research corpus, not desiring to duplicate the visceral reaction I experienced on the streets in Seoul. Towards the end of my data gathering in 2023, I did attend various multi-artist festivals that did featured female groups, and yet I found I turned my research brain "off" when these idols performed. I could not bring myself to watch the male audience watch the female idol. And, as these later festivals I attended were in a setting with international audiences, the multiple meanings and multi-dimensional nature of the male gaze here prompted me to further disassociate when I was present (more on that later). I was ashamed of this clear variable gap in my doctoral data, believing my work to be incomplete and of lesser value. However, in further discussions with my supervisory team and colleagues, I realised this "lack of data" was actually an opportunity to reflect on researcher identity in a way that was missing from prior work in the K-Pop music and fandom space, and it also served as prompt for a much bigger question relating to gender.

Now, I am very much the furthest thing from an idol. A discussion on my unfortunate pitch and alarming dance moves aside, I am not suggesting here that by virtue of being a Korean-presenting woman, I automatically become desirable to male fans in K-Pop spaces. Rather, my shared gender with these trainees and idols prompted a reflection on my female Koreanness as an

autoethnographic revelation of researcher positionality; this in turn, spun into further ponderings on gender in the idol industry. It also spurred an internal monologue about the protection of oneself in the field. The objective of this chapter is thus two-fold. First, to discuss how my autoethnographic reflections prompted me to analyse the female body as treated by K-Pop fandoms domestically and abroad, including discussions on the history of "selling" female Korean bodies to various audiences. In this analysis, I observe how these two divergent sentiments of femininity, despite being local and global, are two sides of the same coin in face of transcultural translations of ideal Koreaness and femaleness. Second, I seek to introduce a conversation in the greater Hallyu studies field about emotional labour and intimacy, understanding the researcher to be simultaneously scientist, empath, and participant within the context of autoethnography or projects with autoethnographic elements inherent in the data. While autoethnography and self data has made great strides in anthropology, feminist studies, and gender studies throughout previous decades, there seems to be an absence of such in Hallyu studies. Here I will discuss potential harms of researching while female in K-Pop spaces, and how hearing and seeing gender in K-Pop fandoms affected, not just my research, but my psyche, as well.[16] In an effort to prompt further reflective and reflective moments in the study of Hallyu objects, I propose explanations on why the ick is not openly used as data in this cultural field.

The Development of Autoethnography, "Self-Data," Emotional Labor, and the Absence of Reflexive Methodology in Hallyu Field Work Research

[16] Portions of this chapter are excerpted from my larger doctoral thesis entitled "We Call Them Idol: Appropriation, Appreciation, and Transculturality in Global K-Pop Fandoms"

Much of my doctoral data was compiled from participant observation at sites across Seoul, South Korea from 2022 to 2023, as well as seven participant interviews (see Figure 1.) and two dozen anonymous online surveys. In that research, I focused on the transculturality of K-Pop fandoms, observing how Korean domestic practices were translated and re-imagined in Anglophone spaces and localities. Gender, while a thread that appeared in various forms throughout my research, was not a primary focus of the work. However, this particular thread on seeing gender – particularly how femininity was seen and received by myself, male fans, and other female-identifying fans – emerged as a consistent theme, and I soon understood that it could not be ignored. Simultaneously, I could not ignore how these gendered revelations affected my own body and its presence in the spaces that I was observing in and interacting with.

I recognise that reflexive autoethnography and the use of 'self-data' are long established in anthropology and have been widely taken up in feminist and gender studies. This chapter builds on that disciplinary lineage while arguing that Hallyu/K-Pop scholarship has, to date, a comparatively small number of published examples of autoethnographic methods in peer-reviewed Hallyu literature, with just a handful of exceptions. My goal is to show how these methods can productively illuminate gendered emotional labour in K-Pop fieldwork. While the notion of the impassive, objective, researcher is largely considered antiquated across disciplines (Harding, 1993; Megill, 1994) – particularly following anthropological paradigm shifts in the reflexive turn which foregrounded the understanding that researcher positionality could serve as a mechanism by which to provide interpretations and thusly can be an integral part of study (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Rabinow, 1977) -- there remains little reflection on the emotional labour, intimacy, and self-work involved in gathering data from a community where you

experienced past trauma and/or are a part in K-Pop music studies or Hallyu studies.[17] While wider methodological advancements in other humanities disciplines are diving deeper into ethnographers' roles in the communities of which they study and become a part, chronicling trauma, boundaries, and trust (Pilbeam et al., 2023, Khan, 2024, Backe and Fitzpatrick, 2024) rarely, are we, as academic researchers situated in the study of Hallyu, encouraged to reflect and analyse how *we* are affected by the work we engage in. Ethically, like in all research, we are bound to ensure the safety of our participants, but when engaging in data collection, especially observation and autoethnography, are we not a participant ourselves? While interdisciplinary research, namely in the humanities and social sciences, is increasingly acknowledging the body and intervention of the researcher (Pilbeam et al., 2023; Cîrstea and Pescinski, 2024), there is always room to include more context on researcher positionality in other fields as well.

Yet still, Hallyu's methodological engagement tends to stray behind other overlapping research fields that acknowledge researcher positionality. While there is some work on aspects of Hallyu, like the cuisine, that describe autoethnographic experiences (El Dakhakhny, 2017), most autoethnographic engagements are more commonly introduced in informal publications, like

[17] Hallyu Studies refers to the larger grouping of academic disciplines that deal with South Korean cultural export as objects of research including K-Pop, K-Drama, and K-Beauty. First coined by Dal Young Jin (Marinescu 2006), Hallyu literally translates to the "Korean Wave" and derives from Sino-language roots that articulate such.

blogs (Congdon, 2017; Villanueva, 2019). With the exception of a handful of studies that examines the researcher operating as a fan within fan spaces and discussing fan practices (James 2024) or contextualizing researcher positionality as peripheral to research (Kim, 2017), it is something most unsaid in Hallyu: how personal histories and broader histories can collide to create moments of conflict. The more we speak on this though, the more we can acknowledge the humanity and, indeed, innately social and personal contextof research.

While I have little room in this chapter to dissect the age-old question of "what is ethnography?" and even fewer words to dedicate to "is it an autoethnography?" I do want to discuss how emotional and intimate labour has been discussed within autoethnographies and research methods. Recent discourses on autoethnography, and the growing acknowledgement of its nuances and messiness, is no longer the taboo it once was. In returning to the reflexive turn in anthropology, Clifford Geertz's 1973 ethnographies of the Balinese people illustrated some of the first reflexive introspective on researcher emotion while in the field site. Geertz wrote on his reactions and emotions when participating and observing rituals of Balinese life, and said reactions provided rich material for his theories of cultural interpretation and symbolism. And in following in that expansion of reflection, John Van Maanen (1988) established three expressions on cultural writing: realist, confessional, and impressionist. The confessional accounts embraced "self-data" (73), establishing a methodological bucket of researcher reflection and positionality that have prevailed in further anthropological study. In fact, cultural researcher John Fiske (1990) refers to the "self" in research as a site rather than a fleeting observation; a researcher is "an agent of culture in process" (86), necessitating reflexive self-reflection in how an individual relates to the larger culture or society of which it is a part (Manning and Adams, 2015). Manning and Adams (ibid.) further articulate that a common measure of autoethnography is that "a-ha"

moment, when an epiphany strikes on how researcher experience is a microcosmic example of how larger communities interpret, react to, “make sense of and learn lessons from” (191) certain parts of the culture.

In popular music studies, this anthropological anchor of self-data – whether emotional labour, intimacy, or positionality – is only partially understood (Raine, 2020), and the paradigm that “emotional experiences can be considered data” not a lack of it (Pilbeam et al. 2023: 821) feels like a newer methodological advancement. And even though it is possible and probable that emotional engagement will crop up, not just in the fieldwork of a research project, but also in the analysis of the data -- thus giving rise to valuable epistemic discussions on researcher relationships and how knowledge is built – fields with association to music like Hallyu are still working through and trying to understand the the potential value in emotional engagement and data in autoethnographic research. There is very little productive work execute around “how emotional engagement may be safely and productively handled in practice” (ibid.) or analysed as a potentially rich data set.

So, while the “self” and self-data has a history of reflexive discussion and is becoming interdisciplinary in nature, the self as a woman adds another dimension of nuance – a nuance that adds yet another layer of missing methodological advancement in Hallyu and is still in its infancy in popular music studies. Arlie Hochschild’s seminal work on the presentation of emotion (1979; 1983) illuminated how feelings function as performances of self, shaped by social structures and expectations. When viewed through a gendered lens, these performances are often regulated to maintain the illusion of objective spaces—whether in labour, commerce, or scholarship. Feminist scholars have since reclaimed emotional labour as a critical analytic tool, challenging the masculinist ideal of objectivity and asserting that emotion and intimacy are

integral to knowledge production rather than evidence of its failure (Ahmed, 2004; Skeggs, 2004; Berlant, 2008). The supposed "ramifications" of emotional engagement in research, framed in the past as methodological weakness, reveal instead the false expectation of objectivity itself. Within academia, and particularly in feminist studies, emotional and embodied ways of knowing have gained legitimacy. Writing alongside this growing body of work, this chapter explores how emotional engagement, researcher positionality, and autoethnographic practice can enrich the study of Hallyu-based music and media. In doing so, it extends feminist discussions of emotion and intimacy into a new geo-cultural arena, demonstrating how emotional data can open space to interrogate larger questions of how the female body is produced, mediated, and consumed within K-Pop, while also pondering, why not yet in Hallyu?

A History of the Commodification of the Female Body in South Korea

In late 2020, Korean television network, tvN's series *True Beauty* went viral among global viewers. Boasting high ratings on film site imbd.com with an 8/10 rating and on OTT platform Viki Rakuten with a 9.6/10 rating, something about the show resonated deeply with an international fan base, despite lower than lower than average viewer stats domestically in Korea (Pereira, 2023). Based on a widely popular Korean webtoon of the same name by author/illustrator Yaongyi, the series follows 18-year-old Lim Joo-Kyung who leverages make up products to mask her outwards appearance in order to be accepted at her new school. Her "goddess" looks catapult her to the heights of popularity, and later in life, she eventually becomes a makeup artist to share how others can also achieve all they want in life through the manipulation of their face. The program proved to be a powerful force in the idealisation of and appreciation for Korean beauty from international viewers. To be pretty – or at least to be pretty

in Korea – will help one achieve great things: friends, a job that one loves, and most importantly, the admiration and love of a Korean man.

True Beauty is not the only, nor the first, media agent to sell a Korean beauty standard to either domestic or international markets; the commodification of bodily beauty and to an effect, an idealisation of Koreanness as beauty, has existed in and outside of Korea for millennia. Selling the idea of beauty, regardless of gender, has a cultural throughline from the ruling traditional tenets found in the ever omnipresent-Confucianism of post-Silla Kingdom Korea, wherein the outer appearance was thought to be a projection of inner beauty, faith, and fidelity. It dictated a particular cultural importance on how one attempted to meet the prevailing beauty standards of the day (Samzideh, 2022). Just as propriety, hierarchy, and meritocracy (Confucian *Li)* has created a strongly surviving obsession with competition and success while still emphasizing the importance of being a conformist member of society, Confucian attention to outwardly beauty and adornment birthed a modern notion where physical appearance is not *just* an advantage that helps one do better in life, but it is a necessity to do so. In modernity, Hye Kyong Kwon (2019: 6-8) writes that K-Beauty, K-Pop, and K-Drama, in cooperation with government entities, have meticulously crafted a national brand that highlights "culturally specific content in the era of globalization" that transcends borders and temporal boundaries and is exported out to the world in a complex set of exchanges where "Western-driven homogenization" is not the arbiter of cross-cultural flows (167). Rather, the apex of beauty and style is not something that derives from the Global North but rather is dictated by K-Beauty and "K-Fashion" in a curated and strategic way.

Female idols find themselves at the centre of this national brand-making as it pertains to beaty, wherein their visages, body, and highly gendered femininity are marketable domestically

and abroad as the ideal beauty, who exemplifies the successes in life one may obtain if they put their best face forward. Female idols are not the first instance of nation "brand" making using their beauty and bodies in Korean history, however. As early as the 13th century during the Koryo Dynasty (918-1392), Korean women and children were sent as Koryo "tribute women" to Yuan Dynasty (1271-1386) Mongolian "conquerors" during times of active war between the two countries as well as in the near-80 years of Yuan rule and influence on the Korean peninsula thereafter (Tudor 2018 and Soh 2004). In later centuries, Korean brides continued to be exported out to Ming Dynasty China (1368-1662), famed for their beauty and feminine subservience to their Chinese lords (Soh, 2004). But, perhaps the most infamous history of the exportation/exploitation of Korean bodies and beauty is found in the Korean Comfort Woman archetype during Japanese colonial occupation beginning in 1910 (Soh, 2004; Min, 2003).

Hundreds of thousands of women are estimated to have been "mobilised" to engage in sexual servitude for Japanese military officials and occupiers, often tricked into said servitude with the promise of a decent wage or the ability to escape some sort of misogynistically motivated domestic violence. Recruiters, more often kidnappers, took advantage of the Korean cultural norm of strictly enforced female virginity before marriage, leveraging sexual inexperience as another form of bodily currency that Korea could give to the Japanese military (Soh, 2004). Domestic Korean agents were not neutral bystanders in this exchange, however. Large numbers of Koreans, often former government officials who held places in Joseon Korea, knowingly aided the Japanese occupation as informants or became members of the Japanese-run police forces (Kim, 2012; Tudor, 2018). Upon the dismantling of the Japanese Empire at the end of World War II in 1945, American and Soviet occupation, a neo-colonial "facilitating" of new governments below and above the 38th parallel respectively, gave a new side to the same dice

that was Mongolian and Japanese rule, a "western" commodification of Korean beauty and body. The presence of U.S. military "camp towns" created a concurrent series of sex industry centers during which the bodies of these Korean women served as a national symbol of a helpless Korea (Kim, 2012). Here, once more, the Korean body, particularly that of a female Korean body, serves as a posterchild for the nation; the body is commodified and exported to mean and message certain things whether it be Korea's subservience to an invading force or a supplicant to a liberating one. In a striking parallel to the transition from Yuan-era tribute women to Joseon brides exported under Ming China, the American occupation marked the end of institutionalized sexual slavery of Korean "comfort women" for the Japanese but continued a less formalized version of the practice in U.S. military camp towns and the subsequent export of Korean military brides to the United States (Yuh, 2002).

While the above instances were all drawn from periods of Korean history that experienced war, invasion, and colonisation, the compelling throughline here is that of the continued commodification of the colonised body as a product consistently supported and perpetuated by government, and not just wayward "bad egg" individuals. The commodification of the Korean body was systemic and institutionalized, sanctioned by governing or organizing authorities, rather than merely the result of isolated or deviant individuals. Nation-crafting using labour of Korean beauty and body – whether as a means of survival throughout occupation or asserting a new-found soft power globally – is historically and currently very prominently represented in Korea.

I offer the above history to establish the recurrent theme of the male gaze on Korean female bodies. Here, said gaze is neither exclusively Korean nor foreign as nation branding through bodily commodification (and national survival) were perpetuated and perpetrated by

domestic Korean actors as well as recipients on a global stage. This is not unlike how female idol bodies are crafted and sold today. Though not as explicit as the times of Comfort Women or imperial brides, female idol bodies are a large component of South Korea's nation crafting by virtue of supplying a piece of the soft power branding schematic. Domestically, the image of a female idol is crafted in a hyperreality that expresses contradictory, yet normalised cultural aspirations of the perfect woman: simultaneously innocent (hence the attraction of viewing young female trainees in a busking setting) and overtly or explicitly sexual (Kim, 2019). This contradiction is neatly represented in idol group, NewJeans' 2023 song titled "Super Shy," in which the members sing that the mere thought of a romantic relationship with you (the listener) makes them super shy, despite wanting it so badly.

Globally, the consumption of the female body is not coded with as much loaded contradiction as the domestic ideal; however, transcultural audiences often align with a history of vague fetishism of Asian female bodies (Bow, 2022). Their display and depiction in media forms (Shimizu, 2007) are even more pointed sexual objectification of Asian femininity as either ultra subservient or the exotic, Othered temptress (Hwang and Parreñas, 2021). Either way, whether domestically consumed or globally understood, the female idol body as performed on stage and in mediated forms communicates a very specific message of Korean womanhood: the idealisation of a pseudo-reality is manifested, sold and consumed in idolisation.

The latter, international audience is not without nuance, however. In discussion regarding his engagement with girl group, TWICE, my interviewee "Lee" expressed a discomfort on the parasociality with and objectification of female idols. During our interview, he commented that he understood female idols as people, and he enjoyed listening to their music but did not identify as a leering male fan. Lee understood that he was not the female idol's boyfriend, protector, or

expert on them – characteristics that fans are encouraged to embody in the K-Pop fandom space – but rather, he understood himself as an observant fan that did not buy into the fantasy of a Korean female idol. However, when explaining a fan engagement Lee attended in the previous year, he described how he wrote his favourite female idol a note, casually slipping in his phone number "as a joke". While hesitant to claim himself a member of that male bloc that did consume the female idol body as desirable product, his actions inferred that he did feel an affinity for the female idol. Notably, Lee does not follow other K-Pop groups aside from girl groups, predominantly TWICE, and he did comment that his interest in TWICE did pique an interest into other aspects of Korean culture, namely the food and history. Here, we observe the success of Korean actors in crafting and selling Korea through the female body, and therefore fans may convert their interest in an idol body into the body of traditional culture of Korea.

In these observations and examples, the commodification of gender and sexuality falls in line with an a priori issue of purposing/the purpose of gender construction. Gender is a "routine accomplishment" that is performed and presented for other members of society that fall within the parameters of a practiced societal norm "embedded in everyday interaction" (West and Zimmerman, 1987:125). It is an assessment of gender theory that proves to be transcultural in this case. While the definition of ideal femininity is varied between Korean domestic audiences and international ones, gender normalisation is received and interpreted in ways that suit each definition. A female idol body, though dressed the same way in front of these two different audiences and practising the same behaviours transculturally, will be read anew in either culture to suit the narrative to make them desirable. Once again, I stress here that regardless of the audience, the female body in K-Pop is a keenly consumed product.

Understanding this legacy of Korean and global consumption of the female body, I located a level of self-reflective and reflexive vulnerability during my fieldwork and how I digested this emotional data thereafter. It did not matter that I was on the streets of Seoul, and it was older Korean men who engaged in the consumption of adolescent females, or if it was a multi-artist festival with an international audience of men. It did not matter whether it was a Korean domestic audience looking at their idealised young, innocent, yet sexually charged imaginary girlfriend or an international audience fetishising and exoticizing the body in on the stage. Regardless of the scenario or fieldwork site, the transcultural reception of female bodies in K-Pop spaces was the pathway by which I understood and analysed gender in Hallyu. In this way, my emotions really did provide that "aha" moment of reflection in my autoethnography – placing myself in the research provided the springboard to conduct an analysis on Korean femininity and transculturality, some of which I explored here (see also Kong-Perring 2026).

Vulnerable Analysis of Researcher Care

In this work, I inadvertently used emotions and intimacy (or an aversion to thus) as an interpretive method through which to explain how I viewed my body in these spaces. I found that my Koreanness was actually quite privileging in my fieldwork since my interviewees felt comfortable discussing difficult topics like appropriation, inquiring on my own positionality working within this field. My Koreanness also gave me access to certain fieldwork sites, like working as employee for a K-Pop group during a concert, as my phenotype was a legitimising factor as to why I was in such a position of authority. For many of my participants, my Korean identity also legitimised my engagement in the field, assuming me to be an expert – not by virtue of my research, but my virtue of my visage. Sometimes in these interviews, I was asked to

deputise on behalf of an entire national identity, serving as either the green light in which to condone their engagement or the sheriff to condemn behaviours.

And yet in the same breath that my Koreanness afforded me access, ethos, and privilege, it also situated me into a very vulnerable place. My research was inextricably linked to who I am, and who I am is forever tied to this research. It is simply impossible to remove myself from my data, try as I might by omitting female K-Pop groups in my data collection. Rather than a methodological failure, my omission of sustained girl-group observation yielded an analytic opening: an autoethnographic account of researcher care and the gendered emotional labour of fieldwork. If, then, I have concluded that this is all net positive, why is it that emotional labour and subsequently emotional data collecting, the platforming of researcher positionality, or even autoethnography are not methodological advancements we have been seeing or are to likely see in Hallyu studies? Perhaps gender and the purpose of gender rear its head once more in answering this question.

In the same way that hyper-femininity functions as the ideal prototype for the female idol in K-Pop, the expectation placed upon female researchers has long been to resist the so-called "failures and weaknesses" of our gender. Accusations of being "overly emotional," "too sensitive," or "insufficiently objective" have historically circulated across many professions, including academia, echoing the same gendered logic that once positioned emotion as antithetical to objective, scientific rigour and analysis. Yet, it needs to be acknowledged that such expectations are not universal. Feminist and queer scholars have long challenged the authority of detached objectivity, instead reclaiming emotion, embodiment, and reflexivity as critical epistemic tools (Harding, 1991; Probyn, 1993; Pillow, 2003). These traditions emphasise

that knowledge is always situated and that the affective self can be a generative site of inquiry rather than a liability.

Within Hallyu studies, however, the uptake of such approaches is slower, perhaps because the field still negotiates gendered expectations of behaviour in professional and academic spaces more akin to the traditional Korean cultural superstructures that commodify the Korean body then, and now. Emotional data and self-reflexive analysis are still not yet widely recognised as methodological tools in this area—whether out of disciplinary caution or inherited ideals of objectivity, particularly in the East Asian context. Historically, most Hallyu data has derived in the East Asia and Pacific (Ganghariya and Kanozia, 2020), and as such, methodologies may grapple with culturally specific expectations of the researcher. There also may be industry-specific reasons for distancing or ignoring self data on the part of the researcher as well. Research in Hallyu, particularly when directly interfacing wit idols, and the entertainment firms from which they are formed, operates in a tightly-lipped ecosystem of privacy and sensitive materials. Perhaps, this traditional of gatekeeping as to not damage or compromise access to sites, limits how candid researchers can get with their materials as so much as participants in the industry can be about their experiences (Jo and Kim, 2023). But as much as K-Pop has globalised, so has the scholarship surrounding it, and as such, the field needs to be prepared to discuss and analyse their research subjects, not in a cultural vacuum, but in contexts of other data formations, like autoethnography, reflexivity, and self-data.

Conclusion

While in June 2023, I fared better in my ability to secure tickets to concerts, festivals, and BTS-related anniversary celebrations, what I had learned about myself as a researcher impacted how I navigated the rest of my doctoral study. As mentioned, it took me time and many a teary PhD draft to reconcile with that fact that my inability to include girl groups in the bulk of my research was not a failure. However, the penning of this chapter proves that even such perceived failures could give rise to viable data and analysis. Leveraging emotional data in autoethnography can have its valuable moments, and for my work, this autoethnographic moment of reflection and reflexivity prompted an "a-ha" that not only help confront this gap in my doctoral research but also supply potential answers to fill that gap.

Though my first forays into field in Seoul began with a discomfort that prompted me to extract myself from similar situations, it sparked a years' long reflection on gender and the female body in K-Pop. At the time I was hyper-focused on transculturality, and in a way, this paper argues for transcultural flows of methodological advancement, acknowledging that there is a rich history of self-data in an autoethnographic context as well as an emotional labour context as seen in feminist studies that can have a place in the intercultural context of globalising Hallyu Studies . My researcher positionality and autoethnographic work cracked open a new line of inquiry in research, one in which I explored the commodification of female Korean bodies through history as well as the country's current campaigns of nation crafting, ideals of Korean femininity as formed by either or both domestic and international ones, and how emotional labour has a place in Hallyu studies (and popular music studies) in future research. I argue that because of Korea's history of dealing in matters of the female body, there is a space for

interpretations of and by the woman in Hallyu to discuss women in Hallyu, increasingly the interdisciplinary and geo-cultural inclusions of all the aforementioned discussed fields.

Figure 1.

Interviewee Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Nationality/Place of Residence	Age	Fandoms
"Evangaline"	F	Chinese-American; San Franciso, CA, USA/Boston, MA, USA	Late 20s	GOT7
"Lee"	M	Caucasian-American; Los Angeles, CA, USA	Mid 20s	TWICE
"Stephanie"	F	Latin-American; Puerto Rico, USA/ Los Angeles, CA, USA	Early 30s	Multi-fan
"Annie"	F	Southeastern USA	Early 20s	BTS
"Victoria"	F	South American & Japanese; Birmingham, UK	Early 20s	Multi
"Trinity"	F	Caucasian-British; Birmingham, UK	Early 20s	Multi
"Betty"	F	Caucasian-British; Birmingham, UK	Early 20s	Multi

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