

# Societal norms within K-POP

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# What is K-POP?

A sub-genre of pop in the Korean language. It has been increasingly popular worldwide, especially in the West with bands such as BTS and BLACKPINK. Through the rise of K-POP, they have challenged various stereotypes such as societal and gender stereotypes. Fans often times look up to them and see that them breaking stereotypes shows that it's okay to do the same without having to get judged. Although there are also flaws within the industry such as cultural appropriation and double standards with boy groups and girl groups, K-POP's heavy influence on society has a major impact on culture and how we perceive what is considered "masculine" and "feminine".



# It has challenged beauty standards.

In the K-POP industry, it's much more common to see men use beauty products. The article "How Male K-pop stars are challenging gender norms and looking great while doing it" talks about how "The Korean Pop industry can be unrelenting in their regards to beauty standards, but they are also free to express themselves without their sexuality being questioned." (McGory, 2019). They are not judged in South Korea for using these products as it's more normalized there. Although we are slowly seeing this become more common in the U.S., it is a long process due to the gender and societal stereotypes placed among men that they aren't supposed to wear beauty products. Western society views beauty products as a feminine thing as it is a female driven industry here. It isn't the case in South Korea and as K-POP is becoming popular, this can help beauty products become normal with men since international fans look up to them and see that it's okay. It's also more acceptable to see boy groups wear make up while performing. In the West, it's not as common until recently, but people such as David Bowie also did wear makeup in the past. Wearing makeup is also considered to be a feminine stereotype here as society associate makeup and other beauty products as something a woman would use.

However, there are flaws as often times, colorism plays a role as Korean culture views light skin/other Eurocentric features as the standard. They often look down upon darker skin tones as it is viewed as unattractive. Fans often times look up to these idols and want to look like them, which has a negative effect because this is extremely unrealistic as not everyone has a lighter skin tone. Plastic surgery also plays a major factor because it's common for bands to use it to be accepted by their peers. They also use apps that lighten their skin as well.

Pictured right is former boyband Wanna One promoting a beauty care brand.



# We can also see these gender norms in fashion.

In the K-POP industry, it is often times more common to see idols (K-POP stars) to dress that would otherwise be considered "breaking stereotypes" in Western culture.

Although it's becoming more common to see men such as Harry Styles breaking norms as he wore a dress for Vogue, it has been more normalized in South Korea. In the West, men are instantly viewed as "feminine" if we see them wear a dress, a crop top, makeup, etc. because we often associate those features with women as a feminine trait. Men are viewed as "unmanly" for doing so. There is still that stigma despite improvement. However, it is more fluid in South Korea as it's more acceptable for people to wear androgynous clothing. (Morin, 2020).

Pictured left is former F(X) member Amber, wearing a suit. She is breaking gender stereotypes as this type of clothing is considered masculine by societal standards.

She is also known for wearing these type of outfits. Furthermore, female K-POP idols are often wearing feminine clothing, so this is a major breakthrough.



Pictured above is G-Dragon, the leader of famous boy band BIGBANG. He is known for his music as well as his fashion. Often times, we don't see men wearing these types of clothing as wearing a skirt is considered feminine. Overtime, especially in Western societies, men wearing skirts, dresses, etc. are starting to become more accepted in our society, but it is a slow and long process as older generations aren't as accepting to these changes as the younger generations.

Pictured left is Kai member of groups EXO and SuperM, seen wearing a crop top. It is often viewed as feminine to wear a crop top so to see someone like him wear shows fans all over the world that it's acceptable for men to wear these types of clothes.



# Gender norms are seen in the choreography.

K-POP bands are well known for their eye catching choreography. Their choreography are often times the highlight of the performances when these bands perform. In addition, we can see gender norms in the dance moves. Often times, K-POP boy groups have a more masculine choreography and the girl groups have a more feminine choreography. Girl groups usually have a "cute concept" when they dance. Moreover, when K-POP boy groups perform, sometimes they will show off their abs when they dance. It's not often to see a male idol intricate a more feminine style and vice versa due to stereotypes that people have to dance a certain way as well as culture since South Korea is more conservative compared to Western countries.

Pictured left is Taemin, member of groups SHINee and SuperM.

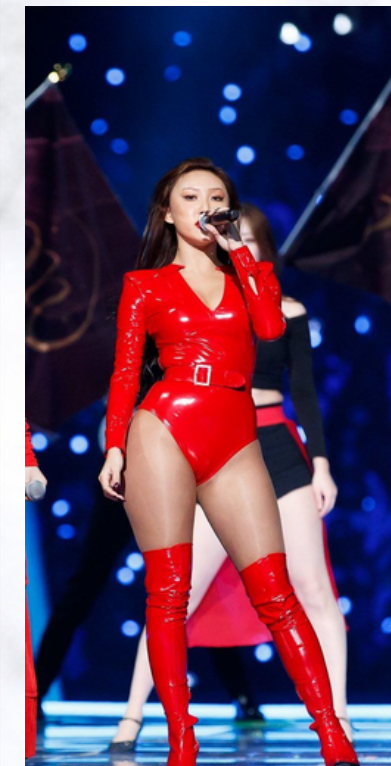
He is known for using both masculine and feminine styled choreography, seen in his song 'Move'. People praised him for doing so because it was rare to do so in the industry. Although it's still not common to see male idols doing the same, this was a turning point for younger idols and fans as they want to do the same. We don't often see this in Western artists as they usually use either masculine choreography or feminine choreography.



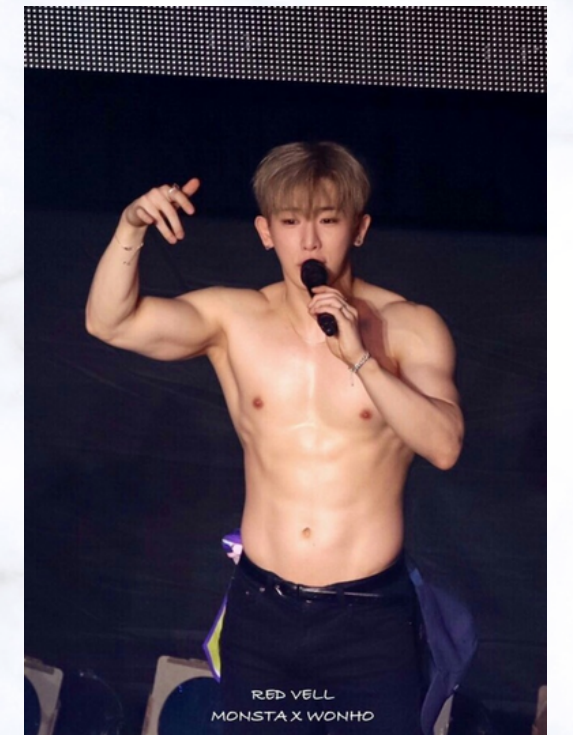
# There are double standards in the industry.

Despite K-POP challenging and shaping the gender and social norms, there are also double standards. The girl groups are often sexualized when they perform and wear more revealing clothes. Although boy groups are sexualized as well, the majority of them wear clothes that cover their bodies and has the option to strip and expose their abs when performing. For example, the article "How K-pop perpetuates Gender Inequality" mentions Hwasa from the girl group MAMAMOO wore a more revealing outfit when she performed at 2018 MAMA, an awards show. The media assumed she was a "slut" and didn't want her to become "westernized" as Korean/other Eastern cultures are more conservative than Western cultures. They also mention that former Monsta X member Wonho would expose his abs on stage and nobody criticized him for doing so (Lee, 2019). Male idols won't get criticized or suffer any consequences from exposing their bodies, while female idols do the same thing but will get harsh criticisms by the media as well as potentially facing consequences from doing so. Even though male idols do this as well, it's more expectant for women to appear "cute". They might face backlash if they appear differently.

Pictured left is Hwasa from MAMAMOO wearing a revealing outfit during her 2018 MAMA performance



Pictured right is former Monsta X member Wonho performing shirtless while performing.

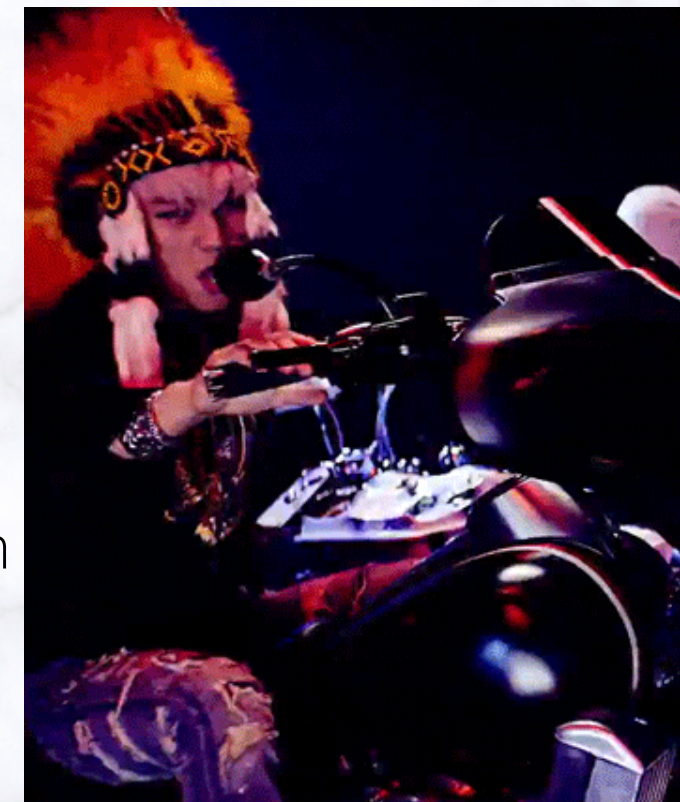


# Cultural appropriation is often seen in the industry.

In addition to double standards in the industry, cultural appropriation is also seen in K-POP. This is also a major issue as they are not aware of how sensitive the issue is. Especially when K-POP is becoming more popular on an international scale, more fans are becoming aware of the cultural appropriation that happens in the industry. There are some reasons for this, as the bands aren't often exposed to people of different ethnic groups/racial backgrounds. South Korea is also a homogenous country, as the majority of the population are Korean, with a small population of other ethnic groups. This can lead to cultural appropriation as they might assume it's appropriate to engage in the behavior when it isn't in Western culture. One example is that some idols have done blackface and have faced criticism by fans. Although there have been some improvements, such as the band ATEEZ after they received criticisms for a member having cornrows to promote a new song and their company instantly apologized for it within 24 hours (Dazed, 2020). Even though cultural appropriation is a bad thing, and must be avoided, some fans defend these actions (Tantra, 2020). Fans can support the bands as well as holding them accountable for when cultural appropriation is shown.



Pictured left is Taeyang, member of boy group BIGBANG having dreadlocks as this another example of cultural appropriation.



Former BIGBANG member Seungri (right) wearing a Indigenous headwear as an example of cultural appropriation.

# Annotated bibliography

Dazed Digital. (2020, August 12). How K-pop is responding to its longstanding appropriation problem. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from <https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/50045/1/how-k-pop-is-responding-to-cultural-appropriation>

Annotation: I used this source as an example of cultural appropriation in the K-POP industry.

Demegillo, M. A. (2020, October 4). K-Pop Idols Who Push Beyond Gender Norms. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from <https://sagisag.com/article/749/life-and-style/k-pop-idols-gender-norms-in-south-korea>

Annotation: I used this source to talk about gender norms in KPOP, particularly in fashion and dance styles.

# **Annotated bibliography(cont.)**

AGodbole, D. (2018, November 5). How K-Pop Perpetuates Double Standards For Men And Women. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/11/05/k-pop-double-standards/>

Annotation: I used this article to talk about the double standards in K-POP.

Hinsberg, M., & Valge, C. (2019, November 2). The Capitalist Control of K-pop: The Idol as a Product. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from <https://icds.ee/en/the-capitalist-control-of-k-pop-the-idol-as-a-product/>

Annotation: I used this to talk about gender norms in the industry and how they're portrayed.

Lee, J. H. (2019, December 24). How K-Pop Perpetuates Gender Inequality. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6eb327f58dd2412b8d8c6e85adb76613>

Annotation: I used this to talk about double standards in the industry.

# Annotated bibliography (cont.)

Lin, X. (2017). Does K-pop Reinforce Gender Inequalities? Empirical Evidence from a New Data Set. Retrieved from <http://www.e-asianwomen.org/xml/12430/12430.pdf>

Annotation: I also used to talk about the double standards in K-POP.

McGrory, K. (2019, June 11). How Male K-pop stars are challenging gender norms and looking great while doing it. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from

<https://medium.com/the-public-ear/how-male-k-pop-stars-are-challenging-gender-norms-and-looking-great-while-doing-it-136149db6854>

Annotation: For this, I used the article to talk about how male K-POP idols break stereotypes by beauty standards.

# Annotated bibliography (cont.)

Morin, N. (2020, May 12). What K-Pop's Beautiful Men Can Teach Us About Masculinity. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from

<https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2020/05/9674149/kpop-male-singers-masculinity>

Annotation: Furthermore, I quoted this article to talk about fashion in the K-POP industry..

Oh, C. (2015). Queering spectatorship in K-pop: The androgynous male dancing body and western female fandom. *The Journal of Fandom Studies*, 3(1), 59–78. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.3.1.59\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.3.1.59_1)

Annotation: I used this to talk about breaking gender norms through dance styles.

# Annotated bibliography (cont.)

Tantra, G. G. (2020, September). Defending K ending K-pop Idols Online: The F -pop Idols Online: The Fanbase's Underlying Issue of s Underlying Issue of Ignorance ("Thesis"). Retrieved from

[https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=engl\\_176](https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=engl_176)

Annotation: This article was used to talk about how fans defend their idols, even if they did something offensive such as cultural appropriation.

The Review. (2020, September 18). Chasing the aesthetic: the world of K-pop and cultural appropriation. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from <http://udreview.com/chasing-the-aesthetic-the-world-of-k-pop-and-cultural-appropriation/>

Annotation: Lastly, I used this article to talk about cultural appropriation in K-POP.