**Title**

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**Permalink**

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4c09h7w1

**Journal**

**Author**

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**Publication Date**

2019

**DOI**

10.5070/B3331044275

**Copyright Information**

Peer reviewed|Undergraduate

# FEMINIST FANS AND THEIR CONNECTIVE ACTION ON TWITTER K-POP FANDOM

By Yena Lee

## Introduction

The past three years have been a time of painful awakening for Korea as the country has witnessed an unprecedented polemical gender war in Korean society. Within the K-pop fandom, a series of fan-initiated hashtags such as #WeWantBTSFeedback have publicized the demand for feedback  for issues of misogyny in idol start texts[1] and the K-pop industry. The hashtag has since been personalized into different forms of action statements by various idol fandoms to bring into focus issues of misogyny, colorism, homophobia, and ableism into the public attention. Despite the attempts of cyberbullying that threatened to stop the movement, the voices of feminist fans have reached the ears of the public, leading to feedback from various idols and entertainment agencies.

Despite the fact that social media feminism has been the center of media attention for some time now, Twitter has yet to be studied as a site for online feminism in Korea. By means of virtual ethnography on Twitter, discourse analysis of conversation surrounding the movement, and in-depth interviews with feminist fans, I will attempt to answer the following questions: how has the hashtag movement influenced the ways fans interpret and relate to K-pop star text, fandom community, and its practices? What are the advantages and disadvantages of connective action in fostering organized collective action on Twitter?

In this research, I will trace the history of K-pop idols in the context of the socioeconomic changes that took place within K-pop music and entertainment industry. I will then discuss the recent feminist revival in Korea on the Twitter platform as an active site and tool for online feminism. I will also further explore how K-pop fans have formed a critical, feminist community  in their interpretation and understanding of K-pop lyrics, challenging the thought of an unconditional support and devotion to the  K-pop fandom.

By analyzing the rhetoric of various fan activist pages that have been established, I attempt to highlight the variety of ways that fans are reconciling and negotiating the two seemingly contradictory identities of being a feminist and a K-pop fan. I will then situate the hashtag movement in the broader discussion of networked counterpublic by exploring the organization of connective networks through activist accounts, interplay of action and awareness hashtags, diversification of issue networks, and the task of sustaining feminist mediality in the face of counterpublic antagonism.

## Theoretical Framing

### From Audience to Performers: Trajectory of Past Fandom Studies

In his book Fan Cultures, Matt Hills explains that the paradigm of fandom studies has shifted from interpreting fans as audiences to viewing them as performers[2]. I attempt to complicate the dichotomy of "producer versus audience, production versus consumption, and submission versus domination"[3] that characterizes first-wave fandom literature by showing how feminist fans went beyond the hashtag to turn activism into a form of play, feminism at play, turning some of the conventional fandom practices into activist repertoires. What differentiates the second group of fandom-studies scholars from the first group of scholars is their focus on internal fandom dynamics[4]. Fiske is an example of a scholar who shifts from an interpretive analysis of fans to a more performance-oriented observation of fandoms and fan behaviors. In 1987, Fiske adopts an interpretive analysis of text-reader interaction to study television fans, whereas in his 1992 article, "Cultural Economy of Fandom," he turns to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of distinction and discrimination to analyze structuration of hierarchy within and across

fandoms[5]. Mel Stanfill[6] questions the broad tendency in fandom studies to cast fans as rebels by showing how fans not only comply but also reinforce the stereotypes that mainstream culture projects against fans. In the same vein, Sophie Charlotte van de Goor[7] reveals the constructed nature of fan communities by studying how members of 4chan/co/ and Supernatural slash communities adhere to the internalized notions of "normal behavior" as defined by mainstream distinctions of good and bad fan practices. By analyzing the feminist counterpublic on Twitter K-pop fandom in relation to the fandom discourse surrounding the movement, this research expands upon the aforementioned studies on intra-fandom tension to explore how some K-pop fans protested against and even threatened to silence the feminist hashtag movement, adopting shared assumptions[8] of community practice on Twitter as a means of discrimination, othering, and surveillance.

### Participatory Culture in the Context of K-pop Fandom

20 years after he wrote Textual Poachers, Jenkins made a leap from describing fans as poachers to partners in his book Convergence Culture. Defining convergence as a circulation of distinct forms of media content across a complex system of networks, Jenkins[9] suggests that participatory culture and collective intelligence are both a product and a facilitator of convergence. By sharing information with others and forming a community around collective meaning-making, the process of collective intelligence invites fans' participatory engagement with media content, management, and even production. These forces complement one another to foster a cultural shift that enables and encourages audiences to transcend their position as spectators and foster partnership with media producers and industries[10].

Since the publication of Convergence Culture, several scholars have criticized Jenkin's rather utopian vision of partnership as technologically deterministic by pointing out the very premise that makes the convergence culture possible: fan labor[11]. Whereas Jenkins sees fannish productivity as a form of alternative media power, Tiziana Terranova questions whether fans' emotional, cultural, and knowledge labor can be  considered a true manifestation of power when they are offered for free to be commodified by the capitalist media industry as a crucial means of operating the digital fan economy. Min Woo Jung and Na Young Lee[12] complicate this notion of fan labor in the context of K-pop by studying the ways in which K-pop entertainment agencies attribute a role of both a manager and a mother to female fans as individuals who operate, manage, and market the K-pop idol fandom.

However, Terranova also warns against the danger of reducing fans' labor to nothing more than instances of corporate abuse and commodification devoid of any agency. In order to avoid such oversimplification, Jenkins and Mark Deuz[13] advise that understanding economic and technological contexts should precede attempts to make sense of fans and their operation. This statement is echoed in  Hoyoung Kim's and Taejin Yoon's "How the IDOL System in Korean Pop Culture Works,"[14]which demonstrates the complex ways in which technology functions as a double-edged sword that both burdens and empowers the population of fans as they use the internet to actively participate in the star-making process of K-pop idols. Compared to the number of studies that have looked into the micro consumption patterns and cultural practices of K-pop fans[15], little attention has been given to the evolving macro production structure of Korean popular culture. This research aims to contextualize K-pop fandom

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1  Star text is a sum of everything the audience associates with celebrities. Examples of a star text could include song lyrics, promotional and publicity material, and the celebrities' social media presence.

2  Hills, Fan Cultures; Kim and Kim, "From Interpretation Paradigm To Performance Paradigm."

3  Kim and Kim, "From Interpretation Paradigm To Performance Paradigm."

4  Fiske, "Cultural Economy of Fandom"; Hills, Fan Cultures; Johnson, Fan-Tagonism; Kwon and Kim, "Characteristics of power relations in Internet fan community - a case study of DCinside gallery 'Master's Sun'"; Stanfill, "'They're Losers, but I Know Better'"; van de Goor, "'You Must Be New Here': Reinforcing the Good Fan."

5  Kim and Kim, "From Interpretation Paradigm To Performance Paradigm."

6  Stanfill, "'They're Losers, but I Know Better.'"

7  van de Goor, "'You Must Be New Here': Reinforcing the Good Fan."

8  Hills, Fan Cultures.

9  Jenkins, Convergence Culture.

10  Jenkins, "Cultural Acupuncture."

11  Terranova, "Free Labor."

12  Jung and Lee, "Fandom managing stars, entertainment industry managing fandom."

13  Jenkins and Deuze, "Editorial"; van de Goor, "'You Must Be New Here': Reinforcing the Good Fan."

14  Kim and Yoon, "How the IDOL System in Korean Pop Culture Works."

15  Choi and Maliangkay, K-Pop – The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry; Kwon and Kim, "The Cultural Industry Policies of the Korean Government and the Korean Wave"; Oh and Lee, "K-Pop in Korea."

dynamics in the broader understanding of the Korean music and entertainment industry and its implications on the current state of fandom labor, practices, and norms.

Another underrepresented area in fandom studies is fans' relationship with celebrities. Numerous fandom scholars 16 have all pointed out the lack of research that deals with fans' relationships with non-textual fan-objects. Whereas a significant portion of fan studies literature looks at fans' negotiation with media texts 17, celebrity fans have been a neglected area of study. Although celebrities and their media texts are hard to separate, Giles 18 emphasizes that fan-object relationships between fans and celebrities need to be further theorized and distinguished from relations surrounding text-based objects. By analyzing the changing interpretations of fan-object relationships in K-pop fandom, I want to shed light on the reasons as to why many fans found their feminist identities in conflict with their fan identities and the ways in which fans have tried to balance these two seemingly contradictory identities.

*Theorizing Social Media Fan Activism*

Because fandom is considered an essentially affective community, the term fan activism can sound a bit puzzling. Melissa Brough and Sangita Shresthova 19 speak of the necessity to go beyond the cultural versus political binary commonly associated with fan activism. Jenkin's 20 research on the Harry Potter Alliance, an activist organization of Harry Potter fans, whose motto is to "change the world by making activism accessible through the power of story," 21 shows that fan activism does not have to be strictly resistant in nature to be considered as civic or political. Lori Kido Lopez's research 22 on Racebending.com deals with a more direct example of consumer citizenship, where fans chose to boycott the film version of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* for replacing the originally Asian character roles with Caucasian actors. While acknowledging fannish productivity as a potential means for civic skills, Bourgh and Shresthova explain that framing all types of fan culture as political acts can risk

oversimplifying the political and civic aspects that make fan engagements a form of activism. For example, there is a tendency amongst K-pop fan studies and the press23 to impose the mainstream notions of societal contribution to distinguish certain fan practices as "empowered" without considering the motives and purposes behind such practices. In her analysis of news coverage of K-pop fandom's chogong, or donation culture, Ju Oak Kim24 describes the patronizing ways in which the press has described such activities. Terms such as "smart fandom," "mature fans," "the improvement of fan culture," and "fan obligations," make explicit the deep-rooted stereotype against fans and the burden the society places on fans to make up for their image 25. Instead of simply phrasing these activities as "political practices," I want to point out the hierarchical relationships between celebrities and fans that force fans to both internalize such stereotypes and engage in image-making endeavors for the sake of their idols' reputation.

What differentiates the current feminist hashtag movement from past fan activisms is its explicitly political agenda around fans' identities and concerns. K-pop fans are well-known for their ability to organize and protest to protect and promote their idols. For example, "Cassiopeia," fan club of TVXQ, short for a K-pop idol group, Tong Vfang Xien Qi, led one of the biggest group-based participation in the 2008 beef protest in

16  Giles, "The Extended Self Strikes Back"; Kim, "Reshaped, Reconnected and Redefined"; Kim and Kim, "From Interpretation Paradigm To Performance Paradigm."

17  Baym, "Interpreting Soap Operas and Creating Community"; Bore and Hickman, "Continuing The West Wing in 140 Characters or Less"; Johnson, Fan-Tagonism; Wood and Baughman, "Glee Fandom and Twitter."

18  Giles, "The Extended Self Strikes Back."

19  Brough and Shresthova, "Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation." 20  Jenkins, "Cultural Acupuncture."

21  "The Harry Potter Alliance."

22  Lopez, "Fan Activists and the Politics of Race in The Last Airbender."

23  Chu et al., "The Evolutionary Processes of Fandom Culture: The Evolution toward Societal Fandom"; Kim and Park, "Ppa-sun-i, o-ppa-bu-dae, mun-hwa-un-dong-ga? - seo-tae-ji paen-deom i-ya-gi [Ppasuni, oppa Army, or cultural activist? Story of Seo Taeji fandom]."

24  Kim, "Reshaped, Reconnected and Redefined."

25  Kim.

South Korea 26. Unlike the majority of past K-pop fan activisms that were closer to promotional events than activisms, the feminist hashtag movement centers on not the idols', but the fans' agency and their agenda of advancing politically correct production and consumption of K-pop star texts.

*Situating Fan Activism in the Wave of Media Activism Literature*

W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg 27 remark that in the current society of spreadable and scalable media, networks no longer function as mere conduits for information but become "flexible organizations in themselves"28 that can cross temporal and physical boundaries in the process of connective action. I suggest that Bennett and Segerberg's concept of connective action can serve as a bridge between networked individualism and collectivism to explain how different kinds of coordinated political actions are possible on Twitter without a top-down resource mobilization. Bennett and Segerberg define connective action as the "self-motivated (though not necessarily self-centered) sharing of already internalized or personalized ideas, plans, images, and resources with networks of others" 29 . Hashtag networking, archiving, fundraising, holding offline events and writing fan-fictions are just a few examples of familiar K-pop fandom practices that activist fans have turned into a means for connective action and a set of political repertoires for personal expression, self-validation, and community-building.

Several works on online mobilization 30 have adopted the framework of connective action to explain instrumental communication amongst different social media agents. As Paolo

Gerbaudo and Emiliano Treré 31 note, there is a tendency in social media research to emphasize issues of "network and community"32 over formation of collective identity, experience, and practices. Even though my research adopts the concept of connective action to analyze organization of activist network and repertories, I want to pay attention to how K-pop fans negotiate, express, and shape their feminist identities through the process. By contextualizing the protest in the particular political opportunities and the ecology of protest surrounding this movement, I detail how feminist fans have appropriated mainstream fandom practices to express their feminist fan identities.

While this political climate presented a political opportunity for feminist agenda-setting, the particular ecology of protests in K-pop fandom on Twitter presented unique challenges to the feminist fans. Unlike other social media movements where Twitter as a platform served as more or less a physically separate counterpublic and a self-autonomous enclave for the issues outside the platform, Twitter for feminist fans was not only the agent and window for a protest space, but a site where the majority of K-pop fandom activities take place. What many K-pop studies gloss over is that K-pop fandom is a highly networked community known for its scale and speed of mobilization. Even though K-pop fandom on Twitter is a primarily technology-enabled network that emerged from the local interactions of numerous individual actors that became connected over time and space, it demonstrates more characteristics of networked collectivism than networked individualism 33. According to Nancy Baym 34, her concept of networked collectivism and Barry Wellman's idea of networked individualism are two forces that shape the social media landscape. Networked collectivism is when groups organize and distribute themselves in a dispersed web of multiple platforms, creating what Baym refers to as

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26    Chun, "Chos-Bul-Hang-Jaeng i-Hu-Ui Si-Min-Jeong-Chi-Wa Gong-Lon-Jang-Ui Byeon-Hwa - t-Mun-Ppa-t Dae t-Han-Gyeong-o-t, Paen-Deom-Jeong-Chi-Wa Ban-Ji-Seong-Ju-u. [[Transformations in Public Sphere and Citizen Politics.]."

27    Bennett and Segerberg, The Logic of Connective Action.

28    Bennett and Segerberg., 753.

29    Bennett and Segerberg., 753

30    Dahlberg-Grundberg, "Technology as Movement"; Ferrari, "Social Media for the 99%?"; Toepfl, "From Connective to Collective Action"; Caraway, "OUR Walmart."

31    Gerbaudo and Treré, "In Search of the 'We' of Social Media Activism."

32    Bonilla and Rosa, "#Ferguson."

33    Wellman, "Physical Place and Cyberplace."

34    Baym, "Communities and Networks."

"a shared but distributed group identity"35. If networked collectivism posits group identity as the focus of a network formation, network individualism revolves around individual identities as the center of their own personal communities. In spite of the fact that K-pop fandom now revolves around Twitter 36, individual fans have approached Twitter as they would approach an online fan community, ritualizing normative fan practices such as compulsive voting, streaming, and hashtag promotion as centralizing mechanisms for controlling fandom discourse on Twitter.

*Public, Counterpublics, and Networked Counterpublics*

Brough and Shresthova explain that fans have traditionally been relegated to the sphere of audiences because they were not considered political and therefore does not constitute an active public. However, Daniel Dayan 37 observes that publics are often intertwined with "identity-seeking" or "text-oriented" audiences. He recognizes the fluidity between audience and public by pointing out two characteristics of a public that apply to the most basic forms of audiences: collective performance of spectatorship and imagination of others who join in the act of "audiencing." Indeed, K-pop fandom on Twitter can be characterized as an imagined community conceived by Benedict Anderson 38 who predicts that socio-cultural community will go beyond geographic boundaries as the main determinant of one's nationality. What makes K-pop fandom an imagined community is the fans' collective investment in their idols' success; community norms and regulations are structured around this fan identity.

In terms of entertainment and mass culture's possibility to function as a public sphere, there has been a longstanding tendency in public sphere research to discount the discussion on entertainment media and mass culture as insignificant for being too superfluous and devoid of

critical thought39. In order to remedy this gap in research, Ronald N. Jacobs40 and Paul Jones41 introduce the concept of an aesthetic public sphere as theoretical and analytical model for studying entertainment media. Several scholars have used the concept of an aesthetic public sphere to examine the civic potential of television criticism42 and game commentary43 to function as spaces of cultural criticism. Recently, there has been a wave of books published by humanities scholars on theorizing K-pop idols and idol fandom as a "mirror of social change"44. Publications such as *BTS Cultural Revolution, Philosophizing BTS, and Humanizing Idols* are attempts to turn K-pop into an aesthetic public, providing the audience with social commentary and important cultural scripts to make sense of themselves and the cultural text that surrounds them.

However, Bryan McKernan45 cautions scholars to refrain from blindly assuming that all types of the entertainment media serve the role of aesthetic public sphere. In his research examining the role of game commentary, McKernan found that forum debates on Resident Evil 5 (RE5) and its problematic racial imagery mainly prevailed upon the dominant principles of color-blind racism, supporting existing social hierarchies' attempts to leave the topic of racism out of the debate. Like forum debates on RE5, the majority of fandom discussion on K-pop tends to promote the dominant-hegemonic interpretation of K-pop star text. If K-pop fandom as a whole amplifies the dominant discourse on interpreting K-pop, the feminist identities of the critical fans place them in an oppositional position to this larger public. They become what Rita

35  Baym.,101.

36  Kim, "The dynamics of fandom in the age of social media"; Lee and Min, "A Research on Discriminations inside Fandom in Korea - Focusing on Fan Producers in Twitter Activities."

37  Dayan, "Mothers, Midwives and Abortionists."

38  Anderson, Imagined Communities.

39  Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry"; Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere; McKernan, "The Meaning of a Game."

40  Jacobs, "Entertainment Media and the Aesthetic Public Sphere."

41  Jones, "Beyond the Semantic 'Big Bang.'"

42  Jacobs, "Entertainment Media and the Aesthetic Public Sphere"; Jacobs and Wild, "A Cultural Sociology of <Emphasis Type="Italic">The Daily Show</Emphasis> and <Emphasis Type="Italic">The Colbert Report</Emphasis>."

43  McKernan, "The Meaning of a Game."

44  Kim and Lee, "In-mun-hak, a-i-do-re-ge-seo 'si-dae-ui pyo-jeong' eul ik-tta [Humaniities, reading the face of the era in idols]." 45

McKernan, "The Meaning of a Game."

Felski 46, Nancy Fraser 47, and Michael Warner 48, characterize as a counterpublic. This notion of a counterpublic is a critical response to Jürgen Habermas's 49 idea of a single, comprehensive public sphere. According to Habermas, the idea of a public sphere is that of theater in which individuals discuss matters of public concern outside of state or aristocratic control in order to reach a consensus about the common good. Since Habermas' conception of the public sphere, many revisionist scholars have pointed out the Habermasian public sphere contained exclusion of minority groups such as women and racial minorities, whose interests were relegated to the private spheres unworthy of public discussion 50. Habermas assumes that social inequalities can be bracketed, or set aside, for the sake of collective deliberation of common interests. Nancy Fraser 51 contends that Habermasian notion of the ideal public sphere renders invisible the social and cultural inequalities that exist in stratified societies by masking how the dominant group assumes a hegemonic control over the subordinate group. For her, a notion of a single public sphere has never been realizable because the public sphere has always been a contested site of counterpublics, which she describes as "discursive arenas of counterdiscourse by members of subordinate groups"52.

A counterpublic is a familiar concept in fandom research, especially in the area of slash Fiction 53. Andrea Wood54 raises the issue of counterpublics to describe BL (Boy's Love) fandom. She draws from Michael Warner's 55 notion of a counterpublic, which

46    Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics.
47    Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."
48    Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics."
49    Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.
50    Taylor and Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities."
51    Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."
52    Fraser.
53    Chou, "Exploring the Meaning of Yaoi in Taiwan for Female Readers: From the Perspective of Gender"; Martin, "Comics as Everyday Theory; McLelland, "The Love between 'beautiful Boys'' in Japanese Women's Comics'"; McLelland, "The World of Yaoi"; Wood, "'Straight' Women, Queer Texts."
54    Wood, "'Straight' Women, Queer Texts."
55    Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics."

stems from a mutual attention to and a circulation of fannish text. Wood views collective readership, authorship, and circulation of BL manga as a manifestation of resistance because these practices challenge mainstream "desirability of heteronormative constructs of masculinity"56. Chou57 also notes that the queerness in slash fandom gives female fans the freedom to challenge the social taboo against homosexuality and to position themselves as the subjects of explicit sexual desire.

Since Fraser's theorization of the feminist counterpublic, numerous scholars have applied the concept of counterpublic to study gender 58 and race-related hashtag activisms 59 . Recognizing Twitter's potential as a discursive space to "extend and pluralize public sphere"60, Sarah J. Jackson and Sonia Banaszczyk explain how the hashtags #YesAllWomen and #YesAllWhiteWomen have enabled negotiations and debates around race, identity, and inclusion. Danah Boyd 61 refers to hashtags as a type of network technology that facilitate construction of networked publics. Boyd62 defines networked publics as "the space constructed through network technologies and the imagined community that emerge as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice"63. While the fans' feminist interpretations of K-pop star texts made them a thematically driven counterpublic, the four properties of bit-based networked publics that Boyd lists—persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability—facilitated the connective action that turned this alternative networked public into a socio-technologically-driven counterpublic. Boyd uses the term, "socio-technological" to make a point that although the bits facilitate the aforementioned properties of a networked public,

56    Wood, "'Straight' Women, Queer Texts.," 401.
57    Chou, "Exploring the Meaning of Yaoi in Taiwan for Female Readers: From the Perspective of Gender."
58    Baer, "Redoing Feminism"; Dixon, "Feminist Online Identity: Analyzing the Presence of Hashtag Feminism"; Drüeke and Zobl, "Online Feminist Protest against Sexism"; Jackson and Banaszczyk, "Digital Standpoints."
59    Graham and Smith, "The Content of Our #Characters"; Jackson and Banaszczyk, "Digital Standpoints."
60    Jackson and Banaszczyk, "Digital Standpoints.," 395.
61    boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications."
62    boyd.
63    boyd., 39

technological systems are inevitably constructed by "the social structure underlying the networked publics"64. Boyd lists scalability as one of the properties of networked publics, emphasizing that scalability indicates a possibility for visibility, not a guarantee. With such a rigorous system of network collectivism already in place in Twitter K-pop fandom, it was very challenging for feminist K-pop fans to disseminate their message to other non-feminist fans, the public, and ultimately the idols and their entertainment agencies. This research does not purport to theorize a standardized frame for all social media activism, which runs the risk of a technologically "decisionist" narrative65. By mapping out the ideological as well as structural challenges that have shaped the movement, this research attempts to analyze the advantages, disadvantages, and complications of social media activism in the context of online networks, ever-changing trends, and popular culture in Korea.

## Background

*K-pop, K-pop Industry, and K-pop Fandom*

Five years after Psy's global success with "Gangnam Style," Bangtan Boys captured the global attention once again with their latest album "Love Yourself: Her", which debuted on the Billboard 100. They performed at the 2017 American Music Awards and appeared on the Late *Late Show with James Corden66, The Ellen DeGeneres Show67,* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live!68* to the roaring fan chants of global fandom.

Now that K-pop has become such a lucrative and successful business, it is hard to believe that it started out as an alternative to a struggling Korean music industry. According to the

64    boyd., 52
65    Hills, Fan Cultures., xiii.
66    BTS`s appearance on Late Late Show with James Corden aired on November 14, 2017
67    BTS`s appearance on The Ellen DeGeneres Show was aired on November 27, 2017
68    BTS' performance on Jimmy Kimmel Live! aired on November 29, 2017

International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), global digital revenues have surpassed physical format sales by 14% as of 201669. Korea was one of the first countries where digital music sales exceeded physical sales by 66% in 200470. The rise of the digital music industry brought significant changes to how music was produced, distributed, and consumed in Korea. In 2010, the total revenue by music distribution services in Korea equaled 7.519 trillion won ($6.982 billion), with retail and wholesale value of recorded music in Korea totaling to 1.298 trillion won ($1.205 billion) and online music distribution services generating 6.221 trillion won ($5.777 billion). This is about 8.8 times the total revenue of the 847 billion won ($786 million) made by music producers, agencies, and record labels71.

Even though the inequality of revenue distribution between distributor and producer has been reduced when the Music Industry Association of Korea (MIAK) released a regulation in 2013, allocating 60% of total revenue to music producers and 40% to distributors72, the low price of music downloading and streaming has been taking a toll on music producers and artists. Downloading and streaming are two major distribution channels for online music in Korea. MIAK reported that wholesale pricing for downloaded music averages 90 won ($0.084) per song and streamed music 6000 won ($5.6) per month or around 6 won ($0.005) per stream73. The low price might have been effective in reducing music piracy, but due to the rapid transition from physical to digital music markets and the continuously falling wholesale price for downloading and streaming music, artists and music producers have experienced a drastic decrease in revenue74.

The collapse of the music markets and extremely low pricing of digital music were the major

69    "Facts & Stats — IFPI — Representing the Recording Industry Worldwide."
70    Im, "What makes K-Pop so successful?"
71    Im.
72    Jung, "Han-Guk Sa-Hoe-e-Seo Eu-Ma-Gui Ga-Chi-Neun? Eu-Mwon Ga-Gyeok-Kkwa Eu-Mak Si-Jang-Ui Bul-Gyun-Hyeong [What Is the Value of Music in the Korean Society? Imbalance between the Price of Digital Music and the Music Industry]."
73    Im, "What makes K-Pop so successful?"
74    Im.

contributing factors to the establishment of today's idol management system. In order to make up for the loss in revenue, music agencies have adopted a "360-degree idol management system"75 geared at producing all-around entertainers, or the idols who achieved today's K-pop scene.

The majority of K-pop singers are idols and idol groups trained from an early age by Korean entertainment powerhouses like SM, JYP, and YG Entertainment. Popular music has become a stepping stone for these idols to become competitive and professional entertainers for not only music programs, but also TV shows, radio programs, advertisement, and films76.

The merging of music and entertainment industries coupled with the diversification of revenue streams called for a strong fan base in Korea. In this sense, the idol industry also trains fans who would be willing to invest time and resources to support the increasing commodification of the idol industry77. The management system enforces fandom norms even before the idols' debut. For example, official fan clubs create a hierarchy of fans from the start by instituting membership conditions and offering different benefits accordingly. In order to become regular members of official fan clubs, fans have to prove their devotion by passing tricky quizzes and show proofs of streaming and voting.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that K-pop fandom revolves around streaming and voting. Streaming and voting are deeply internalized K-pop fandom norms that one must abide by in order to prove oneself as an authentic fan. Both in the online community and on Twitter, fans are constantly reminded of their duties to vote for idols and stream their songs. Such fan responsibilities are vital because streaming revenues and popular votes are two major selection criteria for

75   Im., 335

76   Jung and Lee, "Fandom managing stars, entertainment industry managing fandom." 77 Jung and Lee.

most music awards such as Melon Music Award, Mnet Asian Music Award, Gaon Chart Music Award and chart-based music programs in Korea such as Music Bank, Show! Music Core, SBS *Inkigayo, M Countdown, Show Champion, and The Show, Simply K-Pop78.*

Regardless of their ratings that average between 1% to 2% and the lack of distinction in the artist line-up 79, music programs have increased over the years owing to the overlapping and interrelated interests of music agencies, streaming service providers, and broadcasting companies. The party with the most obvious reasons for the maintenance of such programs are the music agencies. Music programs are the first gateway of exposure for new idol groups.Correspondingly,  broadcasting stations keep these programs because they need idols to appear in their upcoming reality shows to boost their ratings80. However, there is a more complex relationship than the one between the broadcasting stations and the music agencies. M Countdown and Mnet Music Award are both broadcasted by Mnet, a music television channel in South Korea that is owned by CJ E&M, one of the biggest South Korean entertainment and media companies. This media company also owns a streaming service company with the same name, Mnet.com. Melon Music award is another example of an award show owned by a large media conglomerate. Loen Entertainment is an all-in-one music enterprise that owns Melon, the biggest streaming service in Korea that hosts the namesake music award show. In 2017, Soribada became the third media content distributor to host an award show, Soribada Best K-Music Awards. The reason why music programs can continue despite low ratings and streaming services can make profit despite low pricing is that the monopolization of the Korean music industry has created a system that heightens and profits from inter-fandom competition, aggravating fan labor to the extreme.

78   Lee, "Ga-yo su-nwi-je pye-ji wae pi-ryo-hal-kka [Why do we need to stop music program chart system]."

79   Choi, "[Yeo-nye-ui beop-chik] Eu-mak-ppang-song-eun eo-tteo-ke 1% si-cheong-nyu-re-do ga-bi dwaen-neun-ga [[Entertainment logic] How did music programs become so influential despite 1% ratings?]."

80   Park, "Su-nwi-je-ga jeong-dap? ga-yo peu-ro-ui keun chak-kkak [Is chart system the answer? music programs` huge oversight]."

*Social Media Feminism*

In "Gender War & 'Furio-suk': A Brief Review on the Popular Feminism in 2016 South Korea," Jay Sohn[81] states mass media is no longer a tool for feminism. Rather, mass media has become an active site and producer of the recent feminist wave in Korea, "SNS Feminism." Twitter has become a place where new interactions are possible between seemingly opposite political and personal values, as was the case with the hashtag feminism within K-pop fandom[82].

Characterizing the recently renewed attention on feminism as a "feminism reboot," Sohn explains that SNS feminism did not occur by accident. From 1990 to the early 2000s, a group of feminists called Young Feminists made first attempts to foster a counterpublic online by creating feminist webzines and magazines on different campus communities [83]. Feminist webzines like Dalara and Unninet were the first attempts to disrupt the material realities of Korea's deep-seated misogyny and hyper-masculinity prevalent online [84]. However, these feminist webzines did not last long, falling short of providing a secure space for women to communicate with one another about matters including but not limited to feminism. This situation led to the establishment of commerce-oriented sites and communities centered on beauty, marriage, cooking, child-caring, and fashion [85] . The co-optation of digital feminist counterpublic by the market-logics of capitalism has been criticized by some scholars as reinforcing gender roles by defining women solely by their consumptive powers[86]. However, as Kim[87] points out, content should not be the sole criterion for evaluating the value of these

81   Sohn, "Gender War & `Furio-suk`."
82   Sohn.
83   Choi, Steiner, and Kim, "Claiming Feminist Space in Korean Cyberterritory"; Kim, "Han-gug sa-hoe sa-i-beo-gong-gan- gwa jen-deo-jeong-chi [Cyberspace and gender politics in Korean society]"; Yoon, "Online Feminism."
84   Choi, Steiner, and Kim, "Claiming Feminist Space in Korean Cyberterritory."
85   Kim, "Han-gug sa-hoe sa-i-beo-gong-gan-gwa jen-deo-jeong-chi [Cyberspace and gender politics in Korean society]."
86   Jo, "A Contents Analysis on the Internet Sites for Women"; Kim and Joe, "A Study of Internet Site as a Cyber Community : An Exploratory Approach of Woman's Site."
87   Kim, "Han-gug sa-hoe sa-i-beo-gong-gan-gwa jen-deo-jeong-chi [Cyberspace and gender politics in Korean society]."

spaces; the fact that these women were able to contribute to the knowledge production online[88] and form a community based on shared interests is why Sohn[89] describes the recent feminist wave in Korea as "rebooted" from the early post-feminist attempts to turn spaces of popular culture into sites of conversation on women's daily struggles and resistance.

What differentiates the SNS feminism of 2016 from the popular feminism of the early 2000s is the increase in the scale and usage of social media as a medium for collective resistance. Sexual harassments in the form of cyber-terrorism have long threatened women's participation in the public sphere since the 1990s when the abolition of the compensation policy for men's mandatory military service caused an intense case of cyberbullying against women in support of the abolition [90]. In 2008, online incivility aggravated to an alarming point with the creation of Ilbe, an alt-right online community that has acted as an online breeding ground of hate against women and other minority groups for the years to come[91]. In 2015, #Iamfeminist hashtag marked the first instance in which social media became a medium for publicizing and exposing online harassment. The hashtag was a response to multiple attempts by mass media to silence and stigmatize feminist voices[92]. Later in the year, MERS gallery, a web forum that was created to share information on MERS-CoV, the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus, turned into a space of gendered vitriol when a false report on two South Korean women who refused to comply with the government's call for quarantine circulated online as the origin story of the virus infection in Korea. Several female members decided to break away from the gallery to create a site of their own—Megalia.com[93].

88   By 2005, the digital divide between women and men have narrowed down to less than 10% (Sooah Kim, 2011). 89 Sohn, "Feminism reboot."
90   Chung, "Internet misogyny in a post-feminist era."
91   They are known to refer women as "kimchi bitches," and "doenjang-girl" or "bean paste girl," Chinese people as "cockroaches," and homosexual men "gay bastards" Kasulis, "Inside South Korea's Terrifying New Alt-Right Movement"; Steger, "An Epic Battle between Feminism and Deep-Seated Misogyny Is under Way in South Korea.".
92   Park, "Na-neun pe-mi-ni-seu-teu-da-e tteu-geo-un ba-ra-mi bun-da [Heat wave around '#Iam Feminist']." 93 The name comes from 'MERS gallery' and 'Egalia', of Gerd Brantenberg's satiric novel, Egalia's Daughters (Sigh, 2016)

It is the first feminist online community to utilize the tactic of "mirroring" to fight back hate speech, which is an act of replacing gender pronouns in sexist remarks and directing them against men[94].

What Sohn refers to as "SNS feminism" gained momentum with the creation of Megalia in 2015 and exploded one year later when a woman was killed by a  male stranger at a unisex toilet near the Gangnam subway station in Seoul. The infamous hate crime served as a catalyst for a surge of online feminist movements focused on exposing instances of patriarchy and misogyny from various areas of social life, industry sectors, and communities [95]. The feminist hashtag movement in K-pop fandom is one of the various social media movements that has taken place in 2016 and has continued since then. The movement sits at the intersection of feminism and popular culture and is both a continuation and a re-authorization of the popular feminism of the early 2000s. Kim[96] describes the proliferation of women's websites in the early 2000s as contributing to women's "micro-resistance" online which is similar in meaning with Zakia Salime's[97] concept of "micro-rebellions." According to Salime, "micro-rebellions",or personal resistance, tends to work "in concert with neoliberal subjectivities and entrepreneurial forms of self-promotion, self-reliance, and self-governance"[98].

As a movement that revolves around popular culture text, K-pop fans' hashtag feminism is undoubtedly tied to the aforementioned neoliberal values of self-expression and individuality that form the basis of media fandoms. However, those values do not define the creative resistance of K-pop fans and their efforts to change how women and other minorities were previously imagined and portrayed in K-pop star texts. Compared with a significant

94   Sigh, "Megalia."
95   Sim, "Sso-da-ji-neun seong-pong-nyeo-gp-ssyeo-hyeom mun-je je-gi...'a-ka-i-bing' eu-ro it-jji an-to-rok [Pouring instances of sexism and misogyny...'archiving' to prevent forgetting]."
96   Kim, "Han-gug sa-hoe sa-i-beo-gong-gan-gwa jen-deo-jeong-chi [Cyberspace and gender politics in Korean society]."
97   Salime, "New Feminism as Personal Revolutions."
98   Salime., 16; Baer, "Redoing Feminism."

research on women's online communities and their role in challenging male dominance in Korean cyberspace[99], Twitter has yet to be studied as a serious field site for extended online feminism in Korea. My research re-conceptualizes Twitter as a site and tool for what Carol Hanisch phrased as, "the personal is political," in Kate Millet's[100] book, *Sexual Politics*—a space where "being" a feminist and "doing" feminism became indistinguishable as fans turned their affective engagement with K-pop text into a means for political activism.

**Method**

The main challenge of my research is to analyze the multiplicity of voices that have started, contributed, and contested the feminist hashtag movement within K-pop fandom. Considering that this movement is still ongoing under multiple hashtags and Twitter accounts, I  am aware of the difficulty to statistically generalize any certain patterns from the plurality of opinions that have shaped the discourse. Not only is finding a representative sample for the movement almost impossible, drawing inferences based on the properties of large data sets also cannot unpack the complex ways in which users interact, make meaning, and create a sense of identity and community on Twitter[101]. Thus, I chose three qualitative methods—virtual ethnography, discourse analysis, and in-depth interviews—to collect data and analyze findings for my research.

Virtual ethnography is a special kind of ethnography appropriate for studying the complex

99   Choi, Steiner, and Kim, "Claiming Feminist Space in Korean Cyberterritory"; Chung, "Ta-ja-hwa-reul neo-meo, seo-ro da-reun du ju-che-ui so-tong-eul jjeon-mang-handa: [Beyond objectification, predicting communication between two different subjects]; Chung, "Internet misogyny in a post-feminist era"; Jang, "Social movement strategy of digital native fe/male subject: Focused on 'Megalia'"; Kim, "The politics of cyber feminism through Korea on-line women`s movements"; Kim, "Misogynistic cyber hate speech in Korea"; Kim and Kim, "A study on gender discourse and gender characteristics in cyber public sphere"; Yoon, "Online Feminism."
100   Millett, Sexual Politics.
101   Marwick, "Ethnographic and Qualitative Research on Twitter."

web of interactions and communities in online environment102. Several media scholars103 have employed virtual ethnography to study the norms and practices of certain user groups that cannot be achieved by quantifying hashtags or follower accounts. Charles Horton Cooley104 views sympathetic introspection as a key to gaining an intimate familiarity with social actors in an empirical world. To achieve this understanding, I chose to immerse myself in the tight network of K-pop fandom on Twitter. I used a snowball sampling method to expand my following list of K-pop fans who were contributing to the discourse around the hashtag movement. Over the period of eleven months from May 2017 to March 2018, I tried to stay tuned to the daily conversations and agenda-setting taking place in my fandom network by practicing a mixed method of unobtrusive ("lurking") and participant observation. I set aside time every day to keep up with my Twitter feed, retweet, like a select set of tweets, and send direct messages on Twitter to the authors of tweets I had questions for.

In order to make sense of the complexity of interactions surrounding the feminist hashtag movement, I approached my field site as a network. Instead of attempting to draw boundaries around a single field site, I performed Christine M. Hine's105 multi-sited mobile ethnography on two online communities 106 and ten blogs, seeking for entry points throughout my observation. My first entry point to the online fandom network is the key hashtags surfaced throughout the movement such as #WeWantBTSFeedback, #Intrafandom_Cyberbullying_Out, and #BangtanBoys_Change_Lyrics 107 . Because the movement had already proceeded to some degree by the time I started my research in May

2017, I conducted additional hashtag searches108 on Twitter and textual analysis on twenty public fan activist accounts to collect archived data on the initial stages of the movement which I had missed. In addition to web-scraping and searching for tweets, I performed related keyword searches on Google to find and code a total of ten news and magazine articles on the topic. Throughout my observations, I have taken field notes and analytic memos as a code-generating method109 and have coded the data in an iterative manner according to an evolving list of conceptual categories using John W. Creswell's110 constant comparison method.

Following Norman K. Denzin's111 advice on using multiple methods to increase theoretical understanding of a field site, I engaged in a mix-method of virtual ethnography, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis in order to gain context of the tweets and also to check the coherence of the fans' arguments. Hine112 states partiality as one of the principles of virtual ethnography since it relies on our interpretations of lived experiences online. Thus, offline and online in-depth interviewing methods can provide context to individuals' personal narratives that cannot be fully developed with Twitter's 140-character limit. For the purpose of this research, I created a public researcher account on Twitter, introducing myself as a researcher from Berkeley studying feminism and K-pop fandom. I requested @femi_basun, a well-known fan activist account of 1,832 followers to post my recruitment message on their wall and since then, I have been able to interview five activist fans with an experience of creating or managing fan activist pages and five feminist fans who have responded to either my public recruitment message or my individual requests for interview113.

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102    Hine, Virtual Ethnography.
103    Baym and Burnett, "Amateur Experts"; Lee, "Developing Identities: Gossip Girl, Fan Activities, and Online Fan Community in Korea"; Wood and Baughman, "Glee Fandom and Twitter."
104    Cooley, Social Organization; a Study of the Larger Mind.
105    Hine, Virtual Ethnography.
106    In order to compare Twitter K-pop fandom with other online fan communities, I conducted participant observation on DCInside.com and NateOn, two most popular online Korean web forums that house different K-pop idol galleries with open membership access.
107    The three original hashtags are #BTS□□□□□□□□, #□□□_□□□□□_□□, #□□□□□_□□_□□□

108    Examples of keywords I looked up are: Misogynistic K-pop Lyrics, Fandom Cyberbullying, Feminist Book Support, etc. Examples of hashtags I looked up are: #Misogyny_In_Idol_Lyrics, #RelayTaldukDeclaration, #IamNot_Fluttered_Anymore, etc.
109    Saldaña, The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers.
110    Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design.
111    Denzin, The Research Act.
112    Hine, Virtual Ethnography.
113    According to the instructions from Institutional Review Board (IRB) to protect the privacy of my interviewees, I refer to fan activists as Fan Activist A, B, C, and etc. and feminist fans as Feminist Fan A, B, C, and etc. In order to minimize the risk of cyberbullying, I chose not to cite any tweets, blog entries, and photos except the ones from public activist accounts such as BTS Misogyny Awareness. Instead, I refer to authors of tweets and blog entries as Tweet or Blog A, B, C, and etc. All of the tweets, blog entries, and interview quotes were originally written in Korean and translated into English by the author.

Along with virtual ethnography, I have conducted a discourse analysis following the grounded theory method introduced by Corbin and Strauss. I used ATLAS.ti, a qualitative analysis research software, to look for emerging themes that surfaced from fans' discourse surrounding specific topics within K-pop fandom. The grounded theory allows researchers to generate theories through systematic data collection and analysis [114]. Unlike other qualitative approaches, the grounded theory is well suited to participant observation as it uses emerging theoretical categories to shape the data collection process, allowing the researcher to simultaneously experience and make sense of how the discourse is constructed in real time [115]. By continuously comparing the previously coded data with new information from ongoing virtual ethnography and in-depth interviews, I was able to identify the most prominent discursive frames and themes that characterized the different stages of the feminist hashtag movement that I have laid out in this paper.

**Data Analysis and Discussion**

*Deconstructing Hate in K-pop Star Texts*

Bangtan Boys Misogyny Awareness (@bts_female_fan1) was the first anonymous feminist fan activist account to request feedback from a K-pop idol group. It was created on May 22nd by a group of feminist fans who were frustrated with the lack of feedback from Bangtan Boys (BTS)[116] for their misogynistic actions and star texts. They released a statement on May 22nd, 2016, detailing the band members' controversial lyrics and tweets which has been retweeted 1,131 times and received 121 likes since then. The fans named the account, "Bangtan Boys Misogyny Awareness" and started the #WeWantBTSFeedback hashtag and tagged

114   Corbin and Strauss, Basics of Qualitative Research.
115   Lawrence and Tar, "The Use of Grounded Theory Technique as a Practical Tool for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis."
116   BTS (Bangtan Boys) is a seven-member South Korean boy band formed by BigHit Entertainment Co., LTD.

@bts_bighit[117], @BTS_twt[118], and @hitmanbto[119] to request feedback from BTS and their entertainment company, Big Hit Entertainment. Although releasing a statement in response to feedback requests has been a common way for Korean personalities to respond to issues and controversies with the Korean public [120], the movement served as a turning point within K-pop fandom because there has never been a female fan who openly criticized and requested feedback from a male idol for sexist lyrics or comments. According to the community norms of K-pop fandom requesting feedback was only supposed to be directed against rival fandoms upon united consensus.

Not long after the first #WeWantBTSFeedback hashtag, individual fan awareness accounts have sprung up to request feedback from different idols ranging from well-known groups like BigBang, Exo, and SHINee to lesser-known groups like Neo Culture Technology (NCT), VIXX, Astro, BtoB, and Block B. These accounts followed the format of Bangtan Boys' Band Misogyny Awareness account, and came up with a unique hashtag in the form of #WeWant(X Idol group)Feedback. The most prominent discursive framework for this stage of the movement was deconstructing hate in not only the song lyrics but also in other forms of star texts like celebrities' tweets or appearances in TV shows. The fans have outlined various types and intensities of misogyny in K-pop idol star texts. The type of misogyny that sparked the most outrage amongst fans was the derogatory sexualization of women in song lyrics. For example, one of the most drastic examples of sexualization is lyrics from "Joke," a mix-tape produced by RM, the leader of BTS. The lyrics read, "Yeah, you're the best women, gabjil (bossy). So you're so good at it gabjil. Oh, but I

117   BigHit`s official Twitter account dedicated to BTS news
118   BTS members' official Twitter account
119   BigHit CEO`s official Twitter account
120   The latest example of an idol apology that drew a global attention was Taiwanese K-pop idol`s public apology to Chinese fans for holding her national flag Buckley and Ramzy, "Singer's Apology for Waving Taiwan Flag Stirs Backlash of Its Own."

never thought of you as a gab (boss). Then I'll call you imjil (gonorrhea) instead"121. Authors of Bangtan Boys Misogyny Awareness account explain how the lyrics "bring up women out of nowhere to humiliate a targeted man"122 Here, the word, gabjil, could be interpreted in many ways. The authors gabjil as "an act of being rude or taking advantage of someone by using their power from their superior position"123. The woman this lyric is directed to could be considered superior for being successful, ambitious, popular, or just for breaking the heart of the male speaker. By pairing a "bossy girl" and "gonorrhea," the male speaker reveals his intention to humiliate and "slut-shame" women for being superior. Authors of Block B Hate Awareness 124 (@blockb_feedback) mention the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy prevalent in Block B P. O's song, "To Bitch": "Girl, grab a guy with lots of money. No, don't think about marrying. How fucking shitty must the guy that goes out with you feel? Just sell your body damn"125. Lyrics by RM and P.O that negatively sexualize women for being "unpossessive" and unyielding reveal the male speakers' desire to reinforce patriarchy and social dominance over women.

The aforementioned examples of Madonna-Whore Dichotomy which denote polarized conceptions of women as "either 'good,' chaste, and pure Madonnas or as "bad" promiscuous, and seductive whores"126 are a common form of objectification that numerous awareness accounts have identified in K-pop star texts. NCT's song, "Angel," is an archetype of such dichotomy that praises a woman for being pure and beautiful as an angel. One could argue that this song is mainly praising woman but the lyrics, "Sometimes, I'm afraid. Your smile

that's so beautiful. What if it's fake? Are you a fox wearing a mask of an angel?"127 reinforce the Madonna-whore frame that reduces women to simple binaries, idolizing women who fit the category of Madonna and punishing others who don't128.

Objectification of women in music videos, trailers, and highlight reels have also come under the radar of feminist fans. On August 18, 2017, BTS released a highlight reel titled "Love Yourself" that depicts each member's love story in a coming-of-age style. The reel was highly criticized by BTS fans for instrumentalizing women for the purpose of a male-centric narrative. The members take the center stage of a male savior narrative that positions girls as "damsels in distress," to be rescued by the BTS members129. More sexual objectification of women appears in Vixx Ravi's music video for his song "Bomb" where Ravi sits in the center of a room surrounded by women in lingerie. MilkyWay to equality is another awareness account created by VIXX fans who requested feedback for the movie's sexual objectification of women as "symbols of male ambition and confidence"130. Albeit different in theme and intensity, BTS's highlight reel and Ravi's music video both deny women their subjectivities, appropriating their images for the sake of highlighting the narrative and romance of heterosexual male idols.

Idols' appearances in TV shows provide a pair of lens for fans to gain familiarity with their thoughts and personalities offstage. In order to increase their fan base and brand recognition, K-pop idols take the role of all-around entertainers, making guest appearances in a variety of TV shows, radio, and internet broadcastings. The one common question that idols get asked often is to

121    Bangtan Boys Misogyny Awareness, "'Joke.'"

122    Bangtan Boys Misogyny Awareness.

123    Bangtan Boys Misogyny Awareness.

124    Block B Hate Awareness, "We want feedback for misogyny in Block B P.O`s mixtape, 'to bitcxx' and Block B, Bastarz`s 'Selfish Girl.' #BlockB_Hate_Awareness @kqent @blockb_officialpic.twitter.com/l9shmb1Ubr."

125    Pyocasso P.O Vietnamese Fanpage, { Engsub x Vietsub } P.O - To Bitch.

126    Bareket et al., "The Madonna-Whore Dichotomy."

127    Sandy, "NCT 127 - Angel."

128    NCT Phobic Comment Awareness, "NCT Misogyny."

129    BigHit BTS Misogyny Awareness, "Hi. We are the new Bangtan Band`s Misogyny account. We are here to raise awareness of misogyny and misfortune porno depicted in the Love Yourself released on 2017.08.16 @BTS_twt @hitmanb @ BigHitEntpic.twitter.com/I0XkYMPoAo."

130    MilkyWay to equality, "According to the official description, the title song BOMB has lyrics that express confidence and ambition. However, sexually objecifying women is not and should not be how one expresses confidence and ambition. @AceRavi @RealVIXXpic.twitter.com/uIBV3WsIlE."

describe their ideal type of man or woman. Even though idols like BTS131 and VIXX132 tried to distance their individual selves from their media-texts by apologizing for "unintentionally" making some fans feel uncomfortable with their songs, fans have pointed biased notions of gender role with which idols have approached these types of more personal questions. For example, in an interview with Harper's Bazaar China, EXO's Kai commented that he would like his future partner to be healthy because he likes and wants to have children. As for EXO's Se Hun, he replied, "I want my [future] partner to respect me and my parents and be a good homemaker"133. Idols should have the freedom to express their preferences; however, the authors of EXO Hate against Minority Awareness 134 situate this comment in the bigger discourse on misogyny and the history of gender bias that have consistently limited women`s role to mothers, nurturers, homemakers.

Dressing up like girl groups is one of the shticks that boy bands pull in TV shows and concerts. During Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS)'s 2016 Lunar Special My Boss is Watching, members of BtoB dressed up as a girl group (Red Velvet) and covered their song, "Dumb Dumb." The series of photos archived by BtoB Hate against Minority Awareness account 135 illustrate the pattern in which BtoB has repetitively consumed girl

131   Im, "Bang-tan-so-nyeon-dan o-ppa-deul, yeo-hyeom-i-e-yo?te-tss il-bu paen, ga-sa-teu-wi-teo geul hae-myeong yo-gu [Bangtan Boys oppas, are you misogynstic?"...Some fans request feedback for lyrics and tweets]."

132   Kang, "VIXX Rabi, yeo-hyeom myu-bi in-jeong-ha-go sa-gwa-haess-da [VIXX Rabi apologizes for misogyny in his music video]."

133   Hwang, "2016nyeon-Ui a-i-Dol Paen-Deom-Tig-Peod a-i-Dol-Gwa Gi-Hoeg-Sa-Ga Ju-Ui-Hae-Ya Hal a-Hob Ga-Ji [2016 Idol Fandom│2 Nine Things That Idols and Entertainment Companies Should Keep a Watch On]."

134   EXO Hate against Minority Awareness, "<What We Want to Publicize>."

135   BtoB Hate against Minority Awareness, "We want feedback for BtoB`s misogyny and queerphobia in SBS 2016 lunar special 'My Boss is Watching.' @OFFICIALBTOB @SBSNOW #BtoB_Misogyny_Awareness #BtoB_Misogyny_Feedback We have attached more information in the tweet thread below. pic.twitter.com/472ZOqgYLG."
Figure 1. BtoB Hate against Minority Awareness (2017). A photo with subtitles, "Girls of Pure Shock and Horror." Retrieved from pic. twitter.com/472ZOqgYLG

group covers as a means for humor. Treating these covers as a form of punishment136 and mocking femininity for laughs have all been longtime staples of K-pop boy bands that reinforce the fixed notions of gender binary and performativity.

Thematically, the movement became more intersectional as fans from different groups created their own personal action frames to address the most urgent issues facing the group such as xenophobia, racism, ableism, and homophobia. For example, publicizing and requesting feedback for xenophobic and racist speech was the top agenda for feminist fans of EXO, one of the most multicultural K-pop boy bands in Korea. The authors of EXO Hate against Minorities Awareness account have voiced concerns over Korean EXO members' xenophobic speech and their lack of respect for members from. Making fun of foreign members' Korean accent137 and making a caricature of members' skin color138 were the most common types of speech criticized on Twitter.

Through emphasizing the global influence that K-pop idols have all over the world, critical K-pop fans have problematized the racial double standards in the fandom's consumption of such star-text as cute and harmless. The authors of MilkyWay to Equality139 and EXO Hate against Minority Awareness account140 emphasize that racism and colorism are part of the same spectrum in order to raise the flag on the "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color"141 that often go unnoticed or ignored within K-pop fandom.

Homophobia and ableism are two other categories of hate that activist fans have delineated

136   During Choi Hwa-Jeong`s Power Time, a radio program in Korea, EXO`s Chen recalled that he got goosebumps when EXO`s Baekhyun dressed up as a woman. Baekhyun himself mentioned he really despised dressing up as a woman

137   Exo`s Chanyeol earned the nickname, "Tao Copy-Machine" for habitually copying Tao`s Korean accent on Korean TV programs. Tao is a Chinese singer who was a former member of EXO.

138   On November 19th, 2016, VIXX`s Rabi uploaded a photograph of six black toy eggs on his Instagram with a comment, "I was going to eat eggs but I got six Ns instead." N is a VIXX member with a darker skin tone than other members. The photograph has since been deleted.

139   MilkyWay to equality, "Positional Statement on VIXX`s Colorism."

140   MilkyWay to equality.

141   MilkyWay to equality; Tharps, "The Difference between Racism and Colorism."

in their definition and analysis of problematic star text. K-pop idol culture, characterized by androgynous fashion, boy love fan service, and eroticism of homosexuality, seems to be open to sexual diversity on the surface142. However, in reality, homosexuality a gimmick appropriated by the K-pop industry. When confronted by the media about his usage of a homophobic slur, "faggot bitch" in his song "Tough Cookie," Block B Zico replied that he used the slur in a musical sense and had no intention of "looking down on homosexuals"143. Homosexuality remains a taboo topic in reality TV shows where male idols are continuously seen using strong language to deny any signs or rumors of homosexuality 144. In a commercial for a school uniform brand, EXO's Baekhyun played a game of foosball with other celebrities during which he referred to losers as autistic145. The controversial video was re-uploaded with Baekhyun's commented muted, but no other feedback came from Baekhyun himself who later filmed a campaign for autistic children in China146.

Deconstructing hate was the first and the most common discourse I encountered while researching on topic. BTS Misogyny Awareness account retweeted a fan's tweet about feeling frustrated over a conflicted self: For a fan, every album released by a singer is really precious. But what if the song I like has misogynistic elements? Do I have to keep doubting myself every time I listen to the song and go 'am I the only one feeling uncomfortable? I must be really sensitive. Am I the one being weird?' Why do I have to feel like this? Do I have to be an advocate for everything and anything if I am fan? (Tweet A) This fan's frustration shows that the awareness accounts' call for action did not take place on a whim but is a product of a long-held outburst from fans who could no longer neglect the

142   "Is KPop as Queer as It Appears to Be?"

143   Wee, "Korea Rapper Apologizes for 'faggot' Lyric."

144   Block B Hate Awareness, "Block B Zico, stop your homophobic comments. #BlockB_Hate_Awareness @kqent @ blockb_official @ZICO92pic.twitter.com/fKQo6509il."

145   EXO Hate against Minority Awareness, "130326 During IVY club 13S making video-EXO-K & Kim Yoojung Part 1, Baekhyun refered to those who lost the game as 'autistic.' Calling someone 'autistic' for the purpose of slander is a clear act of hate gainst people who are autistic. #WeWantEXOFeedback #Bakehyun pic.twitter.com/eo8Yj5jvyu."

146   Yoo, "EXO Baekhyun, 'ja-pye-a bi-ha bal-eon' hu haeng-bo non-lan (yeong-sang) [EXO Baekhyun's action after his 'autistic comment' becomes controversial. (video)]."

problematic aspects of the content that they were consuming, burdened by the notion of an authentic fan enforced by the imagined community of K-pop fandom. Stanley Fish 147 introduces a different type of community that is less conceptual and more text-oriented—an interpretive community—which forms when a group of people who shares similar readings of a text. He says the interpretations of text differ from group to group because interpretive processes are socially situated and are impacted by microsocial and macrosocial factors such as class, ethnicity, age, and gender 148. This interpretive community was led by "soft leadership"149 of activist accounts that attributed a sense of accountability to idols by framing their anti-feminist lyrics and star text as a form of hate, providing "sedimentary structures" to anchor the fan activism in rigorous theoretical feminist knowledge and context.

*Renegotiating Fan and Fan Object Relationships*

The discourse around misogyny in idol star texts haveopened up another related but yet different discourse on fans' relationships with their idols. Instances of idols' direct communication with fans in the past like the term, "oppa", became a heated subject for debate. Oppa is a Korean term used by women to address an older man who can be an older brother, an older male friend, or an older romantic partner. Within the realms of K-pop fandom, a male idol has always been an oppa regardless of his age and it has been received by fans as a gesture of intimacy and affection. However, the term "oppa", as much as it signifies intimacy, comes in a package of gender and age hierarchy. It automatically tilts the scale of authority to the one as oppa because it gives one more authority as an older person. Korean is a highly hierarchical society where people are expected to use honorifics to show respect to others, especially elders150. "It all comes from their gender power.... Gender power is the only reason

147   Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? 148 Fish. 149 Gerbaudo, Tweets and the Streets.

150   According to Hofstede Center`s "What About South Korea?" assessment of South Korean culture, Korea scored 60 in the area of Power Distance. Power Distance is a measure of hierarchy in the society and Korea, with a score of 60, is perceived as

why male idols can skip honorifics when speaking to fans" (Blog A). As gender relations became an important topic for conversation within K-pop fandom on Twitter, fans began to re-evaluate the ways they had previously related with their idols, questioning the idols' usage of the reference "oppa" and the lack of respect in their communication.

In August 2016, Amnesty International and Ize Magazine151 started a series of hashtag campaigns for gender equality and one of the hashtags they came up with was #IamNot_Fluttered_Anymore152. The intention behind the hashtag was to direct the public's attention to the elements of dating violence in K-dramas. Hashtag #IamNot_Fluttered_Anymore was popular among many K-pop fans who were critical of some of the actions and gestures by K-pop idols that were meant to make fans feel "fluttered" but suggested of gender violence. In May 2016, BTS Suga's tweet from 2013 was brought to attention by BTS Misogyny Hate Awareness account. The tweet reads, "Hey you people, I am watching all of you and I will smash153 you with this camera if you cheat ^^ with the edge [of this camera] ^^ on the crown [of your heads] ^^" 154. Four years later, during a shooting for a show "Lucky 2", members of JBJ were asked to express the word, "lucky" as a gesture to stop fans from "talduk" or quit being fans. In response, JBJ's No Tae Hyun swung a fist at a camera with a comment, "For those of you who stop being fans, the moment you stop, you will get hit like this" (L. Kim, 2017) The two examples above are instances where idols implied or simulated physical violence as a means of persuasion and expression of desire. Using hashtags such as

a hierarchical society where people are used to observing a rigorous system of social hierarchy. Social hierarchy is determined by one`s age and sex and Korea remains a highly patriarchal society both at home and work. 151 Choi, "[Amnesty InternationalXIze] 02. #deo-i-Sang_seol-Le-Ji_an-Sseum-Ni-Da - Ize [[Amnesty InternationalXIze] 02. #IamNot_Fluttered_Anymore - Ize]." 152 The original hashtag in Korean is #□□□_□□□_□□□□

153   The Korean verb for smash or "jjik-tta" is a homonym for "taking a photograph." Suga may have being going for an ambiguous wordplay but the latter part of his tweet—the edge of the camera and the crown of your heads—is nonetheless a physical threat in a literal sense Bangtan Boys Misogyny Awareness, "[Full Text] We want feedback from Bangtan Boys and BigHit Entertainment.(1)pic.twitter.com/dwcpQ8BnCz."

154   Bangtan Boys, "Hey you people, I am watching all of you and I will smash you with this camera if you cheat ^^ with the edge ^^ on the top of your head ^^pic.twitter.com/kMGjQ5sKKU."

#IamNot_Fluttered_Anymore155, fans identifiedparallels between media romanticization of dating violence and the messages by K-pop idols which resonated with their own personal experiences of dating. Neither A tweet nor a hand gesture on TV directly poses physical threat on the fans.

However, in a country where nine out of ten women living in the capital city of Seoul have suffered either verbal or physical dating violence156, increasing number of fans are refusing to accept this type of speech from their idols regardless of what their original intentions were. The words most frequently used by fans in their discussion of the problematic star text was "gender relations," "gender power," and "gender hierarchy." Gender relations became the critical lens through which fans processed song lyrics, idols' communication with fans, and lastly, the social impact of songs' messages. Because the majority of fandom for male K-pop idols is comprised of female fans, songs by male idols tend to be directed to the female audience. Example of such a song is BTS's "Not Today" with lyrics, "Throw it up! Throw it up! Forget about the fear in your eyes. Break it up! Break it up! Break the glass ceiling that cages you"157. Immediately upon its release, "Not Today" created a turmoil on Twitter as female fans began to grapple what it meant for them to be told by a male idol group to break the unbreakable glass ceiling.

According to The Economist's yearly assessment of gender equality at work in countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Korea has consistently received the worst glass-ceiling index score of all the OECD countries158. Glass ceiling is a term that indicates "an invisible barrier to advancement" facing women and other minorities from obtaining upper-level positions in workplaces 159. The term was first printed

155   #IamNot_Fluttered_Anymore was later reappropriated by K-pop fans into #DatingViolence_In_idollyrics (#□□□□□_□_□□□□□) to expose elements of dating violence portrayed in song lyrics and movies

156   Kwak, "9 in 10 Women in Seoul Suffer from Dating Violence."

157   BTS – Not Today.

158   "The Economist Media Centre"; "The Glass-Ceiling Index."

159   "Definition of Glass Ceiling."

in Gay Bryant's 1984 book, The Working Woman Report and later in a 1986 The Wall Street Journal by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy D. Schelhardt that detailed "imperceptible obstacles faced by female managers" in the workplace160. Since then, glass ceiling has been more broadly used to refer to challenges facing minorities in general. Even though BTS could be considered as a minority in some respects, considering the structural gender inequality that separates men and women in the Korean society, many fans found BTS's message to break the glass ceiling patronizing.

There were fans who found the lyric patronizing for ignoring the fact that men are responsible for making the glass ceiling in the first place. "Break the glass ceiling that traps you. Glass ceiling was instituted by men and patriarchy. So why are you telling women to break it when the people who made it should be responsible?" (Tweet B). Other fans spoke about the absurdity of telling individual women to break the glass ceiling when it is a structural and systematic obstacle preventing women from advancing in their careers. "Glass ceiling cannot be broken by women. Can it be broken with a couple of women advancing to managerial positions? No. Other women starting out in the society will experience it too.... The society should be responsible, not the women" (Tweet C).

An activist fan I interviewed said the lyrics felt like a blow to the head especially because it was after BTS had given their feedback following the hashtag #WeWantBTSFeedback movement, apologizing for BTS's past misogynistic content. She said the least that BTS could have done was to respect the fans in their songs, let alone critically address the issue of gender inequality. She told me that fans were all the more frustrated with BTS's failure to recognize and criticize gender issues because BTS is well-known for self-writing politically engaging lyrics about social issues facing Korean youth as well as their own struggles as underdogs

160   Zimmer, "The Phrase 'Glass Ceiling' Stretches Back Decades."

trying to make it big in the Korean music industry161. "If you are approaching the minority problems from such a patronizing perspective, regardless of your intention, you are doing it incorrectly...If you really want to empower social minorities, you must contribute to the voices criticizing the privileged" (Tweet D). For this critical fan as well as other feminist fans who had raised their voices during the hashtag movement, being a fan was no longer just about strengthening their individual intimacy with the idols, but a means through which they could hold idols responsible for taking advantage of their gender hierarchy and social position to misrepresent and disrespect women and other minorities.

Refusing to accept idols' original intentions as their own interpretations marks a big step for K-pop fandom considering its strictly collectivist mindset. Lee and Min162 describe Korean fandom as strongly united in its collective nature but limited in its ability to serve as a counterpublic due to the hierarchical structure of K-pop industry that relies on the strict subordination of fans to the industry. A feminist fan I interviewed used the fandom lingo, "salted shrimp" to characterize what she thought was the default fandom mindset.

> "We call ourselves salted shrimps because just like how we don't make eye contacts with each of the shrimps we eat, the idols who watch us from the stage see only a lump [of salted shrimps] instead of individual human beings." (Feminist Fan A)

She said the self-imposing of such identity resulted from internalizing fandom stereotype and the almost coercive idolization and infantilization of idols. Another fan clarified for me that the infantilization comes from the personal ties that fans have with idols, and the idea that fans are responsible for making the idols successful, or "walk the flower road" in K-pop fandom lingo.

According to my interviews, identification with idols and their successes was the most common parasocial relationship163 that K-pop fans had with idols. This substantiates Kim and

161   Kelley, "BTS' 11 Most Socially Consciuos Songs before 'GO Go.'"
162   Lee and Min, "A Research on Discriminations inside Fandom in Korea - Focusing on Fan Producers in Twitter Activities."
163   Parasocial relationship is a relationship resulting from interactions between "users of mass media and representations of human beings appearing in the media ("media figures," such as presenters, actors, and celebrities)" Giles, "Parasocial

Park's164 found that the two most prominent parasocial relationships within K-pop are romanticization of idols and identification with idols, the latter of which is similar to Giles'165 notion of extended self, which is when "significant others become included in the self to the point they become an important part of our identity"166 Whereas romanticizing idols is an act of objectifying stars as virtual romantic partners, self-identifying with idols is an interaction where stars become a medium for fans to practice their agency as a fan and an individual. As an example, Kim and Park refer to Seo-Tai ji & Boys fandom's collective organization against the Korean Media Rating board's censorship against the band's song, "Sorry for the Era" for being too negative in its portrayal of the Korean society. Even though the protest by Seo Tai ji & Boys fans and the feminist hashtag movement are fan activisms deeply rooted in fans' affection toward and identification with idols, the defining difference between the two is that the feminist hashtag movement is deeply counter-hegemonic to the mainstream interpretation of K-pop star text and the dominant understanding of being an authentic fan.

**Figure 2. Conversation between two BTS fans. This conversation was extracted from a thread of comments posted under a viral tweet that criticized the lack of public attention given to BTS`s controversial star texts [Screen capture].** Interaction."

164   Kim and Park, "Ppa-sun-i, o-ppa-bu-dae, mun-hwa-un-dong-ga? - seo-tae-ji paen-deom i-ya-gi [Ppasuni, oppa Army, or cultural activist? Story of Seo Taeji fandom]."

165   Giles, "The Extended Self Strikes Back."

166   Giles., 125.

Several feminist fans I talked to said that the type of rhetoric in Figure 2167 was prevalently used by mainstream fans to criticize the protesting fans. "Even though a lot of fans showed support for feminism, when it concerns their idols, they would cut it off completely" (Feminist Fan B). Feminist Fan C explains that the mainstream fans' hostility against feminism's influence on fandom discourse comes from the "critical public versus shielding fan" binary with which fans have legitimized and defended their support of idols despite public criticism:

> "Fans could stand what people outside of fandom said about their idols. Even though the thought of it is painful, criticisms from the public are not considered as a big deal, because what the public says about BTS does not create a fissure in the fandom. However, the issue could no longer be ignored when the same fans started to criticize BTS.... There is a huge difference in terms of effect when the criticism comes from fans compared to when it comes from the public." (Feminist Fan C)

By publicly sharing their point-of-view with others in their affective community, the feminist fans broke this critical public versus passive audience binary, forming a counterpublic revolving around the formation and enactment of not only one but two social identities: feminist and fan.

One could question the critical-ness of this feminist counterpublic for remaining inside the market-driven structures of K-pop fandom. On the contrary, feminist fans found their agency as feminists and fans through consumer citizenship, practicing discretion on their consumption of K-pop star text and engaging in a consumerist discourse about their rights to criticize idols. An activist fan told me that when she first started studying about feminism, she felt very conflicted in her consumption of idols and their songs. However, as feminism became more important in her life, she concluded that K-pop is one of the many media contents that have misogynistic elements, and she should be able to criticize them as a consumer. "I am a consumer and because I am a consumer, I thought that I could voice my discomfort against misogynistic content and tell them not to produce this type of content anymore" (Activist Fan

167   * dukjil is equivalent to "fanning" in the literal sense. However, the term, "fan" is hardly used in a verb form in English so I decided against this translation. The only substitute I could think of was "fangirling." I also decided against this term because it is gendered and biased in meaning and tone.

A). Another fan said, "There is no content in this world that feminists can harmlessly enjoy. I just don't understand why women should be the ones giving up [their enjoyment] when it's not their fault that those contents are problematic" (Activist Fan B).

Whereas Habermas[168] criticized preoccupation with consumption culture as depoliticizing the public sphere, feminist fans' critical discourse around K-pop text is inherently political because it automatically places them in opposition to the mainstream fandom and the previously unquestioned dominant-hegemonic understanding of K-pop star text. Rather than depoliticizing the counterpublic, the feminist fans' effort to change the consumption and production of K-pop from the inside helped to destroy the critical public versus shielding fan binary and served as the wake-up call for idols and their agencies to keep up with the current discourse on identity politics within K-pop fandom.

*Opposition from the Mainstream Fandom*

Like any other social movements in the past, the feminist hashtag movement received criticism from those who did not agree with the movement. There were fans who argued that art should be judged for art's sake and others who expressed discomfort in interpreting K-pop lyrics through the lens of gender relations. However, criticism was not the only element that characterized the opposition to the movement, which quickly escalated to the level of intense cyberbullying against the protesting fans.

Despite the absence of a structural hierarchy that characterizes membership-based fan clubs and communities, K-pop fandom on Twitter emulates much of the exclusivist and collectivist culture of online fan communities. Feminist Fan D started Twitter before the social media platform became the main site for K-pop fandom and recalls that Twitter did not always

168    Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.

resemble online communities:

> "I remember Twitter posts used to be more private like people would post about what happened to them and upload photos of their daily lives. But now fandom [on Twitter] resembles a group and like a community, people are taking captures of tweets that they do not agree with and demanding apologies and just excluding people and treating them like they do not exist." (Feminist Fan D)

In some sense, fandom is a public seemingly united under a "shared identity" and a "consensus regarding the collective interest" [169]. The ambiguity of such consensus and the normative standards that dictate power structures in fan communities cause ongoing struggles between centripetal and centrifugal forces, "forces that seek some unified central 'command' versus those seeking to contest such unification from the margins"[170] To the majority of K-pop fans, the wave of feminist hashtag movements across K-pop fandom was a centrifugal force that challenged the network collectivism of Twitter K-pop fandom.

According to Fraser[171], in the process of deliberating a set of common goods, the dominant public sphere frames the discussion from "the stand point of a single, all encompassing 'we,'" thereby ruling any claims of self-interest as out of order"[172]. The most rigorously pursued fandom norm that all of the feminist fans I interviewed mentioned was the fandom's collective obsession with idols' successes. A feminist fan I interviewed told me that with the K-pop scene getting more competitive every year, the level of sacrifice that fandom imposes upon individual fans has been reinforced to the degree previously unseen. "The sense of unity and sacrifice are really strong in fandom because they are considered as essential to making an idol successful" (Feminist Fan E). She said fans "self-impose a corset of pressure and obsession" with keeping the fandom as "clean" as possible. She added that fans consider it their duty to maintain and manage the idol group's clan public image, and anyone who goes against that collective becomes a kk-ppa, which translates to "fans who criticize." The definition of kka-ppa,

169    Livingstone, "Introduction."
170    Baym, "Communities and Networks.," 90.
171    Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."
172    Fraser., 72.

as defined by a critical fan who was once accused of being a kka-ppa herself, is as follows: "people who do not follow the collectivist consumption patterns of the mainstream fandom but follow their own convictions to consume what can be consumed and criticize what needs to be criticized" (Blog B).

Fraser said the repressive mode of domination from the dominant group becomes hegemonic as the dominant group induces consent on their exclusionary norms. Labeling was one of the ways that the mainstream fandom "excoriated alternative voices"173 of the critical fans. "Twitter feminists," "meta fans," "Twitter criminals," and "evil accounts" were all labels used by mainstream fans against critical fans. On their own, terms like "Twitter Feminists," and "kka-ppa," sound neutral. However, by grouping them with terms like, "evil Figure 3. Sechs Kies Fan's tweet [Screen capture]. Accounts," and "Twitter Criminals," the mainstream fans have made them synonymous with anti-fans. Labels like Twitter feminists associate negative connotations with Twitter feminism, coercing a group consensus that feminism on Twitter is negative and therefore unwelcome in the boundaries of K-pop fandom.

Another way that K-pop fandom enforced  hegemonic control on the protesting fans was through delegitimizing their fan identities. As Feminist Fan C pointed out, the binary of the critical public versus the shielding fan has long been the K-pop fandom rationale for casting themselves as the oppressed minority, defending their idols from the criticism of the unforgiving public. In order to maintain this binary and their rights to defend themselves and their fan-objects, the mainstream fans tried to silence the critical voices by

173    Fraser., 61

invalidating protesting fans' fan identities. Figure 4 shows one of the ways that the feminist fans who participated in the movement were asked to prove their loyalty to the idols. Activist Fan A recalled feeling overwhelmed by the intensity with which fans reminded other fans of their duties and rules. "There are normative fandom practices that you must satisfy besides just liking a group. You must not support two groups. You need to stream their songs

**Figure 4. Retweeted conversation [Screen capture].**

a certain number of times and you can't criticize the group members" (Activist Fan A). Feminist fans were subject to a rigorous verification of ideology by opposing fans who demanded an explanation for going against any of these implicit fandom rules.

Fandom cyberbullying did not stop at a verbal level. The threats of cyberbullying continued offline as well. For example, there were attempts in the SHINee fandom in December 2016 to find the seat number of a fan who had criticized a SHINee member's caricature of Indian culture during a concert. Not only was the fan verbally threatened offline, but there were also anonymous Twitter accounts that popped up, asking fans' collaboration to track down the place where this fan was seated.

Surveillance was considered as a common fandom practice. One fan I interviewed told me she practices sseo-bang, an abbreviation for search prevention, purposely misspelling idol group names to avoid getting caught by fans who regularly surveil Twitter posts. Under a post of fan declaring talduk, a fan commented, "Why did you neglect to sseo-bang? Was it too hard for you keep this to yourself? What about the singer who could see your post and get hurt?" (Tweet E). The Backlash against the movement was not only limited to Twitter but spread to

**Figure 5. Offline Cyberbullying. A photo of the concert seating chart marked in green to indicate places already checked [Screen capture].**

other platforms, leading to a large-scale transmedia vigilance. Activist Fan C said someone spotted her telephone company information on a screen capture and started a conversation inside a fan gallery at DCInside.com to track down her whereabouts.

One of the most extreme ways in which containment worked within K-pop fandom was making a block list or chain block of fans categorized as the anti-fans. Chain block is a Google Chrome extension that lets a Twitter user block all the accounts that are either following or are followed by a specific account. Feminist Fan E told me that she was blocked by 250 people because mainstream fans used chain block on her. The block list of anti-fans would start either on Twitter or community and circulate to other platforms. For example, Sechs gallery inside DCInside.com became a headquarter for coordinating attacks against feminist fans after it was revealed that a fan had sent a member of Sechs Kies Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie`s book "We Should All Be Feminists." A blogger who recorded the happenings surrounding this event wrote that "mob lynching" took over Sechs Kies fandom:

> "Fans were subject to an indiscriminate torrent of ridicule, threat, and profanity via social network services like Twitter mentions, DM (direct message) and Ask.fm. There were times when cyberbullying victims used retweet function to mock the perpetrator but regarding the size and organization, they were incomparable to that coming from fandom." (Blog C)

She wrote that more than a hundred people gathered in open KakaoTalk chat room to discuss and spread action statements to set a time for mass mentions and create anonymous Twitter accounts titled, "Sechs Kies Evil Accounts Exhibition" and "Sechs Kies Kka-ppa Exhibition."

The intensity and the scale of the opposition against the feminist hashtag movement corroborate boyd's[174] assessment of networked publics as reproducing political divisions and amplifying already mainstream ideas. Individual acts of mentioning someone or sending a direct message on Twitter do not constitute cyberbullying. However, when they are coordinated into mass-scale attacks, they can feel traumatizing and stressful, leading to the withdrawal of feminist fans from the mainstream fandom network.

174   boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications."

*Withdrawal and Regroupment of Networked Counterpublics*

Several feminist fans I interviewed told me about the traumatizing effects that cyberbullying has had on them. After receiving non-stop messages from opposing fans for weeks and losing twenty Twitter followers for being labeled as a "Twitter feminist," Feminist Fan B was so tired of SHINee fandom that she gave up being a SHINee fan. An activist fan who co-created a fan activist page with Activist Fan C quit Twitter altogether because of the level of cyberbullying and cyberstalking that they faced. The exclusion and one-way severance communication led to an isolation of feminist fans from the mainstream K-pop fandom, meaning they were cut off from important sources of information, photos, and most importantly, community. "There are a lot of fans who keep their participation in the movement a secret because once it's out, you immediately become one of them and lose all your Twitter friends and face disadvantages in dukjil" (Feminist Fan B). As an example of a disadvantage, Feminist Fan B mentioned that she was blocked by a homma. Homma is an abbreviation for home master, a fan who regularly produces quality photos or videos of idols for other fans to consume. A homma usually has thousands of followers and is considered as having a higher position within fandom and a bigger leverage on fandom discourse. She also told me that even though hommas look like they have a lot of influence on fandom, they have no choice but to follow fandom sentiment when it comes to blocking anti-fans. The mechanisms of networked collectivism worked in the ways of threatening not only hommas but individual fans to block everyone labeled as kka-ppa. "Merely retweeting a victim's post would get one a warning message saying, 'this person is supposedly kka-ppa so block them' and one would get called as 'maid' or 'ass-sucker' for not severing relations with a cyberbullying victim" (Blog C).

Despite these efforts to totally isolate the feminist fans from the mainstream fandom

network, feminist fans could re-emerge as a networked counterpublic by forming their own community of like-minded critical fans. In the words of Fraser, "counterpublics function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (175). The feminist counterpublic on Twitter K-pop fandom did not happen overnight but is a result of a continuous process of withdrawal and regroupment by fans who found ways to form their enclave of resistance.

The hashtag #WeWantBTSFeedback was personalized by other fandoms and served as a "framing device" (176) that allowed a dispersed crowd of feminist fans to become a networked counterpublic. Upon threats of exclusion from the mainstream fandom, fans who were cyberbullied could reunite under hashtags such as #Intrafandom_Cyberbullying_Out and #Intrafandom_OnOffLynch_Out177. These hashtags served as conduits of personal but highly relatable stories of cyberbullying which were widely shared among fans to vocalize subjective experiences of isolation and exclusion. Connective mobilization through hashtags helped the feminist fans foster a collective form of intimacy with other fans and form an oppositional consciousness against the attacks they received. Feminist Fan E told me she did not know what cyberbullying and lynching meant and was not able to conceptualize the situation she was going through:

> "It was like I was surrounded by a circle of people punishing me for what I said but I had no words to conceptualize the situation. But one day I discovered the hashtag [#Intrafandom_Cyberbullying_Out] and I found myself relating to the stories of people using the hashtag." (Feminist Fan E)

Conceptualizing verbal attack and abuse as acts of cyberbullying gave the critical fans a sense of legitimacy for their actions and a chance to recognize and unite against the injustice of the attacks.

175    Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."
176    Papacharissi, "Affective Publics and Structures of Storytelling."
177    The original hashtag is #□□□_□□□_□□□□

What differentiates Twitter from the online community is the degree of networked individualism that lets users personalize their connections and narrativize their self-presentation online. Whereas withdrawal of one's community membership cannot lead to regroupment because it means termination of all social ties, regroupment of like-minded people is possible on Twitter. Several fans I interviewed chose accessibility as the most prominent structural affordance on Twitter that allowed them to customize their online presence using multiple accounts and reconnect with hommas that previously blocked them. "I have my main account and my subscription accounts where I follow hommas. I sometimes buy photos from hommas so I act carefully because if they discover that I am kka-ppa, that could really put me at a disadvantage (Activist Fan A).

Activist Fan C told me that the atmosphere in her Twitter network has become much freer since she moved over to "this side." Describing the mainstream fandom ambience as stoic and strict, she said the feminist movement has instilled a sense of respect in the fandom. "Now that it's okay for one to act as an individual and not bind oneself to the fandom identity, I think we have become more inclusive to others who might have different opinions than me about my idol." She added that she feels much at home in her current network where there is a mutual respect for a diversity of opinions, and she no longer has to fear being blocked by someone.

The high level of accessibility allowed on Twitter is one of the reasons why feminist and activist fans could remain as insiders in the secure space of their networked counterpublic. Although the concepts of "withdrawal" and "regroupment" may sound incompatible, the feminist fans could expand their network of critical K-pop fans while maintaining their positions as insiders because their isolation motivated them to unite forces and regroup under a personal but also collective political agenda of "doing" feminism within fandom.

*Maintaining Feminist Mediality through Visibility Online*

Since the initial #WeWantBTSFeedback hashtag, which was originally about requesting feedback from the idols, the movement panned into a much wider self-reflexive discourse on fandom, feminism, and idols. This is in sync with Stefania Milan's178 ideas of "politics of visibility," or "cloud protesting" replacing political identity in social media movements. The interplay of awareness hashtags such as #Misogyny_In_Idol_Lyrics, #IamNot_Fluttered_Anymore, and #Intra_Fandom_Cyberbullying_Out that offered a socially inclusive and individually resonant framework with more fandom specific action hashtags such as #WeWant00Feeback, #00Change_Lyrics, and #00_Hate_Awareness, was very important in raising collective awareness of the broad theme of misogyny within K-pop star text while maintaining focus and centralizing support for fandom-specific issues. As the emergence of these hashtags demonstrate, fans' customization of action hashtags created a web of connections amongst fans of diverse fandoms, uniting fans who might have different, even conflicting opinions on conducting feminist fan activism. While fan activist pages and the interplay of awareness and activist hashtags catapulted the first waves of feminist awareness within K-pop fandom, with time, the movement proceeded beyond hashtags to take the form of a "cloud,": an imagined space of feminist visibility, as more fans began to focus less on circling action statements and more on reconfiguring and internalizing personalized ideas of feminist fan identity.

For example, one of the labels that were reclaimed by feminist fans was "meta" in "meta fans" which later came to signify fans who critically engaged with their consumption of K-pop industry and their star text. One of the criticisms from the fandom against the hashtag awareness movement was that fans are also at fault when it comes to being ethical or politically correct,

178    Milan, "From Social Movements to Cloud Protesting."

especially in their consumption of idols179. Author of Blog C wrote that the criticisms against the movement and the efforts to dilute the movement's agenda served as the momentum for a more thorough and critical discussion about fandom practices including but not limited to consumption of idols' paparazzi photos and entertainment agencies' abuse of fan labor.

When I asked her whether there were efforts in the past to boycott paparazzi photos, Activist Fan B said there were efforts but they were different from the current meta-movement because it was more about proving fans' devotion to their idols. She tweeted, "I see a lot of tweets in my Timeline that goes in the line of, 'causing my idols pain by consuming their airport photos180 is not what an authentic fan should do.' This kind of approach is meaningless." (Activist Fan B). She saw this kind of discourse as a mere extension of the fake fan versus real fan binary so prevalent within K-pop fandom. She found the significance of this meta-movement in shifting the focus from a notion of authentic fan to a broader conversation about privacy and consumer citizenship.

179   The opposing fans accused feminist fans of misandry and called their sexualization of idols and consumption of Real Person Slash (RPS) fiction unethical. RPS is a genre of fan fiction that involves real people, which in this case are K-pop idols engaging in homosexual relationships. The discussion about RPS will be more thoroughly covered in the next section.

180   Photos of idols taken inside airports and photos of idols going to work were all considered as paparazzi photos.

Instead of following homma accounts that published polished photos of idols' paparazzi photos, meta fans started their own trend of "Wow accounts." "Wow accounts" are a type of fan account that started with fans who did not want to see idols' paparazzi photos. "I think it started with fans of SHINee member Kibum who created @wakibum_today. Apparently, they couldn't stop wowing at his photos so they named it like that" (Activist Fan B). Because the creators behind the first "Wow account" wanted to discourage consumption of paparazzi photos, the succeeding "Wow accounts" followed suit, turning consumer citizenship into a form of play culture.

With an increasing number of fans creating their own activist accounts and participating in the discussion about feminist activism within K-pop, the feminist counterpublic needed a hub account that could unite and connect feminist fans with one another. Femibasun181 Hub is a hub account that was created by a fan who wanted to encourage other fans to keep up the momentum by facilitating socializing amongst feminist fans. The account is mostly known for its Twitter lists and offline parties. They currently operate sixty-three Twitter lists under different idol groups so that feminist fans could socialize with other feminist fans of the same

181   Basun or ppa-sun is a derogatory slang used to refer fans. There is a movement within fandom to reclaim this slang.

**Figure 6. WaKibum (2016). A Screen capture of @wakibum_today [Scree capture]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/wakibum_ today?lang=ko**

idol group. Femibasun Hub also acts as a matching account which supports and promotes fans activist accounts by retweeting their posts. In an interview with a feminist webzine Monthly Yeogi 182, the creator of Femibasun Hub said she was motivated to host offline parties because she felt that the movement was losing its voice due to cyberbullying and wished to boost the fading sense of unity. One of the account managers of Femibasun Hub I interviewed echoed her sentiment, "Even though the feminist discourse did spread via the internet, the internet has its limitations and because of intense cyberbullying, people get tired of talking about feminism. That's why we decided to host offline events to continue that discourse. There are things you can only do offline" (Activist Fan B).

One of the games that Femibasun Hub prepared for their offline parties was "Idol Phobic Awards." Idol Phobic Awards was a game where fans voted for an idol whom they believed had the worst record of phobic speech in the areas of broadcast, song, and "fan love." By planning these feminist games, the creators of Femibasun Hub gave fans opportunities to find intimacy and comfort by being part of a community where affection and criticism were accepted and encouraged.

While this feminist movement focused on protesting the problematic aspects of K-pop star text and culture, fans went beyond the hashtag to turn the activism into a form of play, by both reclaiming conventional fandom practices (Ex. consumption of idol photos and hosting offline events) and transforming the hashtag into a creative tool for resistance. Feminist book support is a traditional fandom practice that gained popularity and eventually became one of the most

182 □□□□, "[□□□ □□."
183 □□□□.

**Figure 7. Femibasun Hub (2017). 2017 Idol phobic awards. Retrieved from http://weolganyeogi.tistory.com/58**

prominent ways for feminist fans to engage in collaborative storytelling. "Support" is a fandom lingo that refers to fans' fundraising to support idols' creative endeavors such as buying brand wallets and watches to directors of movies that have cast the idol184. Feminist book support was not always a collective endeavor within K-pop fandom. The practice was initially started by individual fans who mailed feminist books to their idols; However, as the voice for change within K-pop fandom grew louder, feminist book support gradually lost the sense of fan support and became a more of a project for fans.

Infinite Book Support Project was one of the successful feminist book support events. This project was especially effective because it relied heavily on fans' collective intelligence and collaborative storytelling. In addition to conducting an open survey for feminist book suggestions, Infinite Book Support Project also held offline feminist study groups and produced a booklet titled, FemiHa.Ja185 which consisted of essays written by Infinite fans. The activist fan behind the project wrote in her blog that the reason why she titled her project Infinite Book Support Project, instead of just Infinite Book Support, was because she wanted the process to feel like a group project. She stated, "Even if this doesn't end up directly influencing an artist's behavior, I think this project could serve as a message for fans, especially those who were doubtful of this project. It is our way of saying it is okay for fans to speak up and say this is wrong and should be criticized." (Activist Fan E)

The booklet consisted of three sections: "Feminism as told by Fans," where fans wrote their personal stories about how they became feminists "Book Introductions" where fans briefly introduced the feminist books they have chosen, and "Our Wish for Infinite" that contained letters from fans to Infinite. After sending the booklet to Infinite along with feminist books, activist Fan E uploaded all the essays on her blog and made them available to the public. Zizi Papacharissi186 said social media's role in activating and sustaining connections does

184 Blue Suede, "[Neo-hi jon-jae pa-i-ting! 3pyeon] Ppa-su-ni-ui ji-gap-ppu-sim - gu-mae [[Your Presence Rocks! Ep 3.] Ppa-suni`s wallet greed-pride in buying and consuming power]."
185 Femihaja translates to "Let`s femi" with "femi" as a verb form of feminism
186 Papacharissi, "Affective Publics and Structures of Storytelling."

not guarantee impact and depending on context, "affective attachments may entrap people in a loop of sustained spectatorship"187 As Activist Fan B mentioned, the initial momentum for affect that catapults action can die down on the internet. Organization of offline meetings, productive collaborations, fan magazine188, and fan fiction189 has provided the movement a more official and interactive platform for fans to break that mode of spectatorship and reconvene as members and agenda-setters of an interpretive community.

The last type of individual fan's public declaration of talduk and #RelayTaldukDeclaration, which was started by Bangtan Boys Misogyny Awareness account. In this paper, I categorize talduk as a type of affective mobilization because the act of publicizing one's talduk has a bigger significance than just declaring one's loss of affection. On the contrary, it is the mode by which fans can drawattention and visibility to why they were forced to drop their affection. A homma whose talduk declaration was retweeted 6,200 times wrote, "I really liked and supported Bangtan members including Jimin. To say the truth, I cannot say that I have no affection left for them. However, I am going to stop operating this account.... The reason why I stop this account is because a collection of individual voices can produce a bigger voice" (Tweet F). A talkduk declaration is affective in the sense that it is a cumulation of a fan's frustration and Anger. Often, a talduk declaration is created by female fans who decide they can no longer tolerate the misogynistic messages deeply embedded in K-pop content. A fan who declared her talduk wrote, "Please know that the reason I am writing this is to be crystal clear that my purpose here is that of defiance fueled by a sense of betrayal and anger...." (Tweet G).

187    Papacharissi.,311

188    Ppasun Magazine is a collaboration-based independent fan magazine which runs on fundraising. It introduces itself as a self-reflective writing project that records the history and the present of K-pop fandom from a critical perspective. (https://www.tumblbug.com/ppassn)

189    "Yoonji, Are You a Megal?" is an online-based fan fiction started by a namesake Twitter account. It surrounds "Yoonji" a virtual character that is a female version of BTS Suga whose Korean name is Yoongi. Megal refers to users of Megalia.com and the question, "Are you a megal?" has become a derisive way of asking if one is a feminist in Korea. Feminist fans have used this story setting as a medium to talk about their experiences of patriarchy, gender inequality, and violence, which are experiences that real-life Yoongi will never have to go through.

These talduk declarations are essentially communal because they invite participation by other fans to like, retweet, or reply to the statement. At the same time as the talduk declaration exposes fans to harsh criticism from mainstream fans, it also serves as a very vocal cue for community building and reinforcement of intimacy. Under a talduk statement that was retweeted 11,647 times and received 477 replies, a fan commented, "I think it is amazing that you are acting according to what you believe in! I support your future!" (Tweet H). The author of the statement later tweeted that there have been many messages from ex-BTS fans who said they regret not going official or public before they deleted their fan accounts. A feminist fan in my Twitter network received a similar reply to her talduuk post: "Wow congratulations on your talduk. I can't talduk right now because it hasn't been long since I started liking them but please still be my Twitter friend!" (Tweet I). As a pseudo-event190 that is based on affect, a series of talduk declarations made visible by #RelayTaldukDeclaration is transient yet powerful enough to spark an intense and wide diffusion of self-reflexive discourse throughout K-pop fandom.

According to Habermas, a public sphere should always adhere to the principles of rationality when it comes to the deliberation of common goods. However, the feminist counterpublic of K-pop feminist fans shows the importance of collaborative imagination when it comes to disrupting the narrative of the dominant public. Papacharissi said revolutions and changes of social institutions cannot occur unless we reimagine them first. In the context of K-pop, creating personal action frames through connective action and projecting feminist imagination into traditional fandom practices gives fans an opportunity to reimagine and renegotiate what K-pop and fandom means to them and their role as a fan and a feminist.

190    Pseudo-events are events that are planned in advance and staged primarily for the purpose of being reported or reproduced

## Conclusion

This research sits at the crossroads of scholarship on fandom, feminism, publics, and social media activism. What started out as a historiography of fan activism expanded into a critical analysis of the relationship between popular culture and feminism, affect and activism, and connective and collective forms of social media mobilization.

In my attempt to understand the breadth and depth of this movement, I have closely examined how networks of critical fans have formed affective couterpublics on Twitter. Thematically, this movement focused on deconstructing hate in K-pop star texts and established consensus on what constitutes hate. The counterpublic centered on self-reflexive discourse regarding fans' relationship with their idols, other fans, and conventional fandom practices. The hashtag movement, --combined with Twitter's structural affordance of accessibility, visibility, and scalability--helped feminist fans reconvene and regroup as a network and individually mobilize for a collective cause, thus blurring the lines between the personal and the political, and the public and the private.

While the creation of boundaries from opposing fans insulated the network of feminist fans from further excoriation by the dominant group, there was not a collective consensus amongst the feminist fans as to what constitutes a "meta fan." Whereas some fans argued talduk is the ultimate solution for all feminist fans because "the relationship between a fan and an idol is that of a consumer and a producer" (Tweet L), the majority of the fans I met offline and online were of the opinion that remaining as fans can help their idols change their mindset and spread feminism to other fans. The decentralized discourse on Twitter left many questions on consumer citizenship unanswered and there were fans who found the discourse to be slowing down and dissolving due to lack of consensus. Meta is not a group. It is a label that K-pop fandom has attached to those who voluntarily choose to be ethical consumers. Meta opinions can vary, however. There are "metas" who are feminists, those who support "Gong-chul-mok191," intersectional feminists, and radical feminists. It is pretty much divided among the "metas" as well. (Activist Fan B).

Activist Fan B, who is one of the account managers of Femibasun Hub, told me that the diversity of opinions on Twitter regarding feminism has prevented Femibasun Hub from moving beyond its role as a matching account, toadopting a firm political stance. Feminism is one of the most contested topics of debate, not only on Twitter, but throughout Korean society in general. Even within the feminist counterpublic on Twitter, there were fans who were divided on the idea of practicing feminist agency. There were fans who thought that the act of gift giving was a vestige of society`s enforcement of gender role on female fans. There were also fans who believed that mirroring was the right tactic to use against the idols and others who disagreed, saying slander and criticism should strictly be differentiated. For example, Activist Fan E--who operated the Infinite Book Support Project--chose to delete her account altogether because a fan had taken a screen shot of an Infinite fan`s essay in the booklet and used it as an excuse to call a member of Infinite a sex offender. There were several fans, including Activist Fan E,who expressed concern over the possibility of the movement turning into a toxic sport. With so many voices constantly pushing and pulling their different agendas in and out of view, one might wonder whether the voices are becoming a hindrance to reaching a group consensus. Will the community of critical K-pop fans be sustainable despite the vast diversity of opinions? Despite these issues, the movement has been successful in in eliciting a response from numerous idols and entertainment agencies. For example, BigHit, BTS`s entertainment agency, released a statement on July 6th 2016 apologizing for "defining the role and value of women from a male perspective"192. Additionally, BTS member RM, has been quite vocal

in acknowledging the feminist movement. He once told fans that he is reading a feminist book 193 and stated in an interview with The Chosun Ilbo 194 that he asks feminist scholars to review his song lyrics. Even though BTS did not officially change any lyrics 195, other idols such as Block B Zico changed the lyrics in his song, "Tough Cookie,"from "faggot bitch" to "freaky" on several music streaming sites196. Additionally, VIXX Ravi deleted portions of his music video depicting the sexualization of women197. Most recently, Adventure Calling Emotions (A.C.E.) established a feminist bulletin board inside their official fan community following a controversy surrounding their TV appearances198.Asides from feedback, I want to find the significance of the feminist hashtag movement in enabling imagination of a feminist community on Twitter that has not been realizable offline. This is especially important because K-pop fandom is a public that runs on the mediality of fandom discourse online. The connections that fans make with one another and the conversations they have lend shape and form to fandom discourse as they are immediately visible on the continuously shifting Twitter news feed. Dayan 199 sees dramaturgy and performance as important political forces that can provide scripts for action. By redefining and negotiating what K-pop represents,what is should represent, and what feminism means, feminist fans were able to immerse themselves in an affective performance of their feminist and fan identities, and thus propagate a semantic vision of a feminist community on Twitter200.

191    Paparazzi photos of idols on their way to airport and office

192    Goo, "Bang-tan-so-nyeon-dan, 'yeo-hyeom' nol-la-ne e-chae-gim tong-ga-me [Bangtan Boys' acknowledging the responsibiilty for 'misogyny' controversy]."

193    SBS PopAsia HQ, "BTS' RM Has Also Read the Feminist Book from Red Velvet Irene's Controversy."

194    Kang, "[Jeon-mun] T-tte-bwi-jeon chi-reun 'bang-tan-so-nyeon-dan' dan-dok in-teo-byu [Full interview] Exclusive interview with Bangtan Boys` Band who debuted in America."

195    Some BTS fans started #BangtanBoys_Change_Lyrics (#□□□□□_□□_□□□) to protest BTS`s inaction in changing their problematic lyrics.

196    Block B Hate Awareness, "There was feedback for Block B Zico`s 'Tough Cookie.' The homophobic slur, 'faggot' was changed to 'freaky' in both digital music and lyrics. #BlockB_ Hate_Awareness @kqent @blockb_official @ZICO92pic.twitter.com/K9NJ6atmyl."

197    Kang, "VIXX Rabi, yeo-hyeom myu-bi in-jeong-ha-go sa-gwa-haess-da [VIXX Rabi apologizes for misogyny in his music video]."

198    Yoon, "'Yeo-seong-hyeo-mo nol-lan?' A.C.E(e-i-seu), 'pe-mi-ni-jeum' bae-unda [Controversy around misogyny?' A.C.E studies feminism]."

199    Dayan, "Mothers, Midwives and Abortionists."

200    Several fans told me that feminism has become mainstream for newer fandoms such as NCT and VIXX. These are fandoms that started almost exclusively on Twitter.

Even though "Meta" fandom, like any other counterpublic, is not beyond the "remines of power and normativity"201, I believe this is where the potential of "Meta" fandom lies. The categorical identity of "Meta fans" is not a fixed group identity, but has the potential to serve as a fandom on its own that could transcend fandom rivalry and unite fans to fight for a cause. At the same time, I also want to bring attention the challenges of sustaining affect for a movement that has continued for a long period of time. The feminist fans have personalized the issue of feminism within K-pop fandom and turned it into a form of feminism at play. However, several fans have expressed their sense of fatigue over the movement`s loss of direction and the lack of consensus. In what contexts can "affective traces" persist? What sustains feelings of community and how does a movement break from a state of passive spectatorship after a long period of inaction?

The success of the feminist hashtag movement calls for an alternative and a more radical definition of critical fans than the one proposed by Giles,202 who defined critical fans as individuals "whose allegiance to the fan object is sufficiently powerful for them to remain involved in the fan community, but whose evaluation of the fan object is diminished by artistic or ideological reasons"203. The feminist hashtag movement in K-pop fandom is an instance in which ideological beliefs have compelled feminist fans to declare talduk and engage in a consumerist discourse about their rights as both consumers and fans. In this sense, critical K-pop fans did not allow their allegiance to their idols to get in the way of critically deconstructing K-pop star texts. Rather, they used allegiance as a form of leverage to induce feedback from the industry and kickstart conversation within fandom. The case of the feminist hashtag movement broadens the concept of a critical fan and undermines the sense of passivity, allegiance, and subordination commonly associated with fans and fandoms.

201    Klesse, The Spectre of Promiscuity.
202    Giles, "The Extended Self Strikes Back."
203    Giles., 127

This research also provides important insights on the role of fans and fan agency in influencing sociopolitical discussion in an aesthetic public. Although this research uncovers some promising developments, K-pop has a long way to go before it can fully function as an aesthetic public in its portrayal of gender and representation of minorities. While my research does not address female idol fandoms, several female idol fans made awareness accounts on Twitter to bring awareness to feminist issues such as infantilization and overt sexualization of female idols on screen. In contrast with male idols, who have been lauded by their female fans for their endorsement of feminism, , female idols have been subject to harsh backlash from their male fans for their public acknowledgement or endorsement of feminism 204. Further research needs to done on female idols and their role as both a representation and a victim of gender stereotypes in relation to the different ways that female and male fans make sense of K-pop girl groups and their image.

204    SBS PopAsia HQ, "#girlscandoanything Trends in Korea Supporting Apink's Naeun"; SBS PopAsia HQ, "BTS' RM Has Also Read the Feminist Book from Red Velvet Irene's Controversy."

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