

Causes and effects of the severe sexualization of the K-POP idol industry

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Abstract. The topic explored in this paper is the causes and effects of the heavy sexualization of the K-POP idol industry. This paper understands sexualization as engaging in behaviors in roles or things that make people aware of sex, especially in relation to men and women. Sexualization of idols in the K-POP industry has been numerous. This paper examines the various reasons for sexualization and the effects of sexualization on fans and on the marketplace. This article will delve into the reasons why K-POP is moving in the direction of a sexualized idol. It sees the current situation where the K-POP industry needs to transform. It analyzes the effects of sexualization and hopes to bring attention to the issue of sexualization of idols. Calls on all those involved to pay attention to the demands of idols and fans.

1 Introduction

In the age of new media, the K-POP industry is enjoying an unprecedented boom. K-POP culture is spreading rapidly through the Internet, attracting a large number of fans and a huge amount of attention worldwide. The image of a K-POP idol has an unprecedented influence, not only leading the fashion and changing the audience's aesthetics, but even influencing the audience's psychology and life. In recent years, Korean idols have been wearing more and more revealing and sexy costumes for their stage appearances. Both male and female idols are showing more and more skin in their stage outfits. Because of the great influence that K-POP idols have, more and more young people are following Korean pop culture and are influenced by the idols to dress in a way that exposes more and more skin. The phenomenon of K-POP idols being heavily sexualized is largely influenced by market demands and preferences, and fan behavior is largely influenced by the sexualization of idols.

This post will focus on the causes and effects of the severe sexualization of Kpop idols. The authors will use questionnaire analysis to find out the inducing factors that lead to the seriousness of idol sexualization from the audience market and analyze the impact of the idol sexualization phenomenon on the audience. Through this article, K-POP idol manufacturing factories may be able to find a more healthy and positive direction of development and diversification of idol appearance packaging styles. At the same time, this article also has the hope of helping fans and audiences to face and analyze the phenomenon and situation of

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sexualization of idols, and to reduce the negative impact of this situation on the fans themselves or increase the positive impact of the situation. The author also hopes that this article will help promote the formation of a better K-POP culture and a cleaner fanbase ecosystem, promoting a more positive and healthy development of K-POP.

2 Method

The data comes from WeChart moments and online WeChart groups. The questionnaire questions designed by the authors in this questionnaire are as Table 1 shows.

Table 1. Overview of questionnaire issues.

| Categorization | Concrete issue |
|------------------------|--|
| Background Information | 1. Do you know K-POP? |
| | 2. Are you a fan of K-POP? |
| | 3. Which type of idol do you prefer? |
| About sexualized idols | 4. Have your favorite groups ever performed in skimpy costumes? |
| | 5. How often do they perform in such clothes? |
| | 6. Do you like their looks? |
| | 7. Do you want their costumes to be more conservative or more revealing? |
| | 8. Do you think idols are obligated to do body management? |
| | 9. Of the content you've seen about idols, is there any content that sexualizes idols? |
| | 10. How often do you see sexualized idol content? |
| Effect | 11. Do you think idols are obligated to satisfy the sexual fantasies of their fans? |
| | 12. Whether and what impact do you think the sexualization of idols has had on you? |
| Personal Information | 13. What kind of fan you belong to? |
| | 14. age |
| | 15. gender |
| | 16. Level of education |

3 Result

48 questionnaires were collected from the questionnaire in this study (see Table 1), of which 91.67% were young people aged 19-25 years, 97.92% were female, and 95.83% had bachelor's degrees. The authors screened the subjects who were eligible for the study of this question by collecting their Background Information and finally obtained 41 valid questionnaires. Of these 41 people, 34 like boy bands, 2 like girl bands, and 5 have a wide range of favorites for Kpop idols.

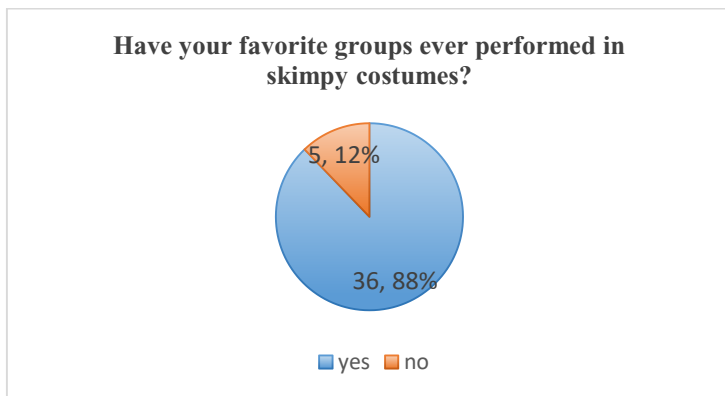


Fig. 1. Answers to have your favorite groups ever performed in skimpy costumes.

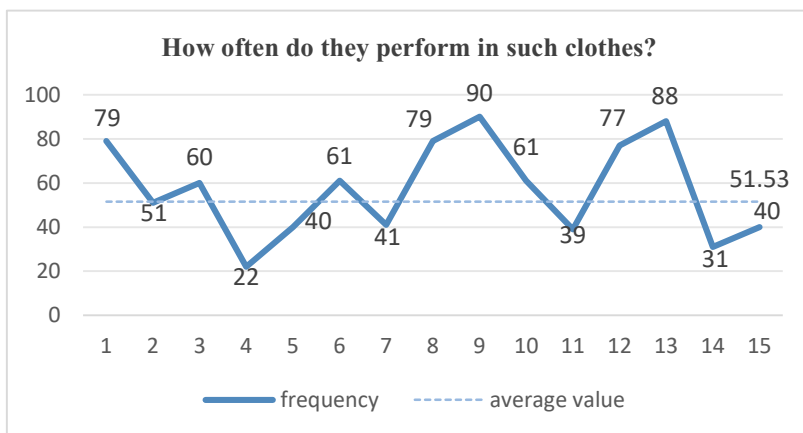


Fig. 2. Answer to how often they perform in such clothes.

The data presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 shows the prevalence of sexualized present in K-POP idols. Regardless of how often fans see idols wearing sexy costumes, there is no doubt that the subjects' favorite idols have more or less experienced wearing revealing costumes.

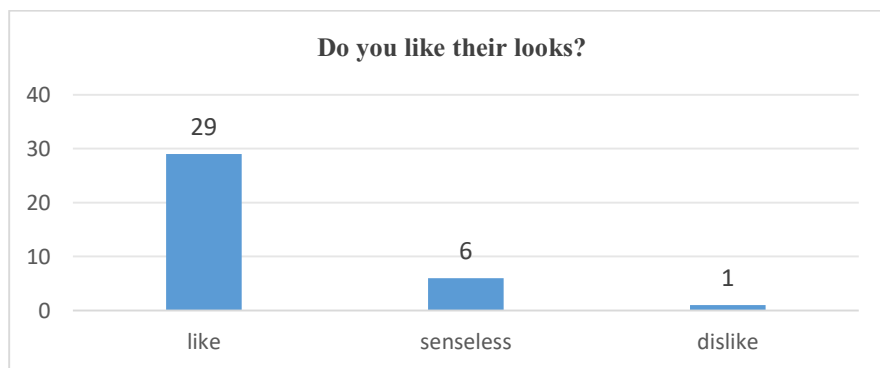


Fig. 3. Answer to do you like their looks.

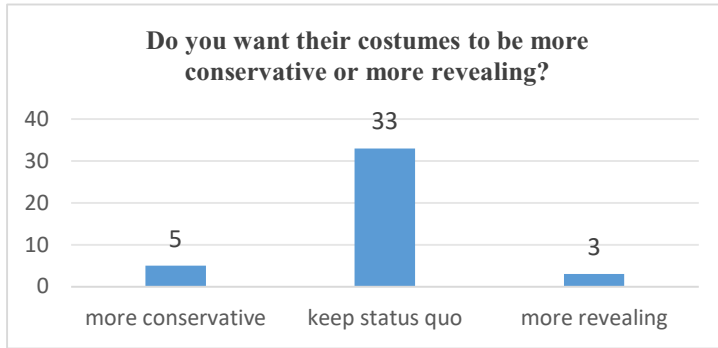


Fig. 4. Answer to do you want their costumes to be more conservative or more revealing.

These two charts (see Figure 3 and Figure 4) show that fans are generally more accepting of and even like some of idol's sexy outfits, but are relatively sensible when confronted with the matter of sexualizing. Fans like idol's sexiness but don't go overboard.

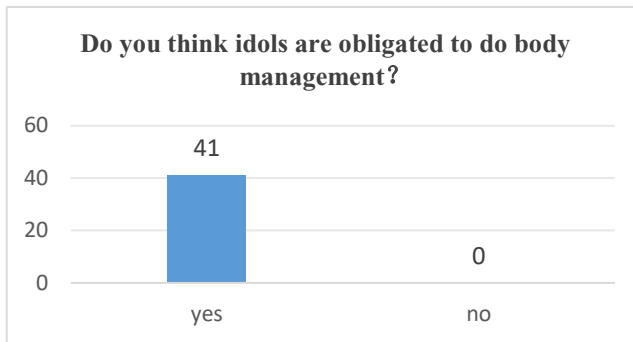


Fig. 5. Answer to do you think idols are obligated to do body management.

All subjects (see Figure 5) agreed that idols should manage their body image, and this data also points to the psychology of fans chasing stars and their demands on idols. Fans love and support idols with the hope of beauty, and idols need to respond to the hope of their fans.

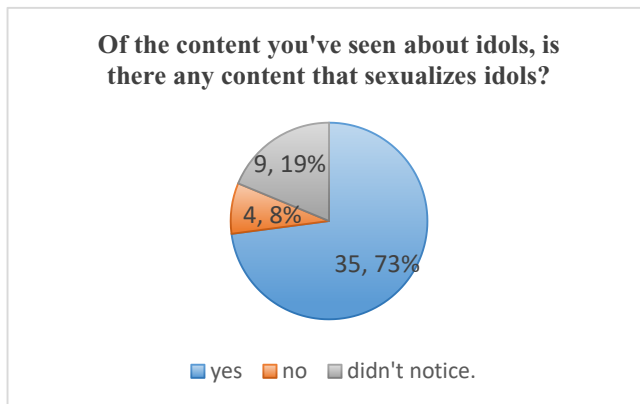


Fig. 6. Answer to of the content you've seen about idols, is there any content that sexualizes idols.

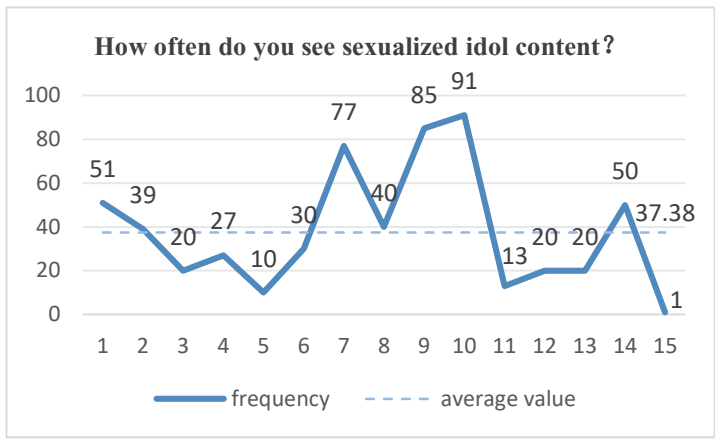


Fig. 7. Answer to how often do you see sexualized idol content.

The sexualization of idols is widespread (see Figure 6 and Figure 7), but there are still some fans who are subconsciously influenced by the direction of the market and modern aesthetics and don't realize that sexualization exists.

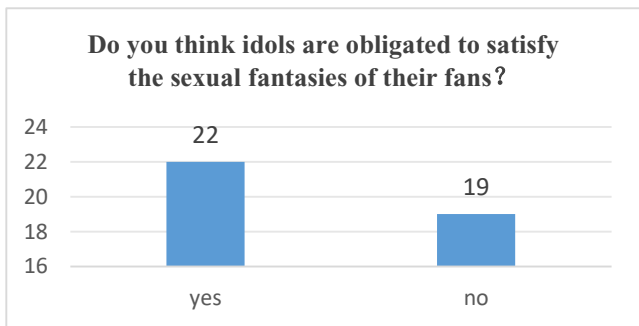


Fig. 8. Answer to do you think idols are obligated to satisfy the sexual fantasies of their fans.

On whether idols are obligated to fulfill their fans' sexual fantasies, the two answers couldn't be further apart (see figure 8). Many fans see idol as a love interest, hoping that idol will somehow fulfill their fantasies about their significant other.

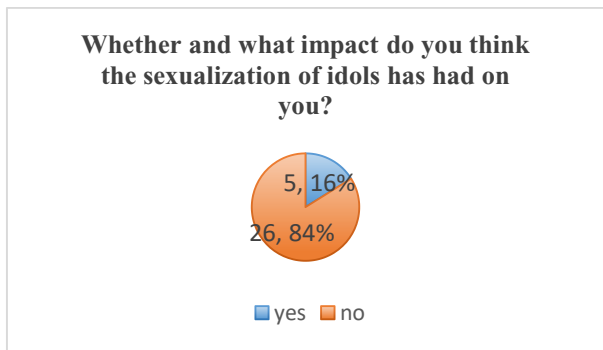


Fig. 9. Answer to whether and what impact do you think the sexualization of idols has had on you.

There is no doubt that most of the respondents felt that the sexualization of idols had an impact on them (see Figure 9).

In terms of sexualizing idol's influence on people, the subjects' responses fell into the following categories.

1. Influence aesthetics

Idol's face value is not low, the Korean entertainment company's packaging ability is also very strong, so in general, this in the appearance of idol packaging sexualization to a certain extent is able to improve the aesthetic. However to some extent this also tends to solidify the aesthetic. Fans will become more and more accustomed to the visual impact that the current idol brings, leading to less acceptance of changes in the idol.

2. Affect emotionally

When idol's image and dress fans' preferences and expectations, fans will be very happy and like it. When idol's image changes in a way that doesn't meet fans' expectations, such as working out too much, swelling up, gaining weight, etc., fans will dislike it very much and have negative emotions.

3. Impact on emotional relationships

Some fans will put themselves in the position of being the idol's partner and instead be unable to fall in love or even make friends in real life. Some fans will be so used to idol's perfect image that they can't appreciate the people around them.

4 Discussion

4.1 Phenomenon

Fans often have harsh demands on idol's body and appearance. Eunwoo, from the group Astro, has been slammed by fans for having acne due to the stress of his work schedule. Ningning from aspea, who was trolled by netizens when she first debuted because she looked more fleshy. Fans always pay special attention to idol's appearance, and those idol videos that look more be autiful and desirable are always favored by more fans. The development of fan culture has also given rise to the industry of fan art. There are two types of fan arts most widely circulated in the market: one is to create novels by envisioning oneself as the idol's companion. One is to envision one's favorite idols as couple and create stories for them. The development of fan art is a very graphic demonstration of how idols are sexualized.

4.2 Reason

The Korean government does not strictly control the development of the entertainment industry, so the popular music industry can produce anything possible to appeal to a wide audience [1]. According to the data presented in the questionnaire, there is no doubt that fans prefer pretty and sexy idols. Idol has money and status because of fan favorites and catering to fan preferences is one of the important jobs of idol. Fans like sexy styles, so idols start dressing sexy, and different sexy idols appear in the market, there in turn fueling fan favorites. In the richly varied world of the consumer, the commodification of idol provides a stable emotional value for the people [2]. Two aspects of sexualization will be discussed in the article, the sexualization of male idols on one hand and the sexualization of female idols on the other.

Of the various ways to sexualize male idols, the feminization of male idols is the most popular with fans. Jeonghan, from the group seventeen, kept his medium-length hair for about a year when he debuted and still keeps his hair longer today, and he is one of the most popular people in the group. Felix, from the group, Straykids, made the group popular with the release of their album thunderous because of their waist-length blonde hair style. Hyunjin, who is also from Straykids, has gained countless fans for his long hair style and is the most popular

member of the team along with Felix. Also gaining popularity for their long hair are Beomgyu from Tomorrow×Together, Heechul from Super Junior, Wonbin from Riize, and many more. Androgynous male idols provide space for sexual fantasies for some fans. Male idols weaken masculinity and reduce aggressiveness through a feminine look. Under the female gaze, male figures sometimes exhibit feminine elements and styles, combining femininity and masculinity to create gender-blurred images [3]. They put men and women on equal footing through this special way, or even put men below women, showing broken and weak images to arouse the desire of female fans. In a social environment where feminism is on the rise, this practice is able to gain women's favor and satisfy women's demand to show their strength and ability. At the same time, male idols can also expand their fan base by pleasing lesbians or bisexuals through a feminine look. In addition, there is another important way in which male idols are sexualized. Male idols can appeal to their audience by exposing their bodies by showing their waists and wearing see-through tops. although K-pop idols do not adhere to the norms of hegemonic masculinity, they do not automatically perform hyper-feminine traits. What ensues is the performance of a mixture: exhibiting masculine traits like "competitiveness" through conventionally childish or feminine activities [4].

Female idols can likewise attract fans by exposing their bodies, such as wearing super short skirts, waist-baring tight tops, and suspenders. For example, the Korean girl group Girl's Day, which was launched by Dream Tea Entertainment on July 9,2010, has a song called "Something", in which the artists wear a high-cut skirt that goes up to their thighs. In the dance moves, they lift up the skirt with their hands to reveal their bottoms inside. The expressions during the dance are always like squinting and biting their lips [5]. Female idols in the k-pop market nowadays can hardly be seen without idols wearing waist-baring short tops or short skirts.

Entertainment companies package idols for sale by sexualizing them to attract viewers and make money. Fans pay for a favorite look to satisfy their desires. The company in turn continues to package the idol in such a way because of the money it can make in this way, creating a closed loop. As soon as one idol succeeds in attracting fans to pay for it because of its sexualization, it will attract companies to follow suit.

4.3 Affect

The author will look at both the impact of sexualization on fans and the impact on the market for K-pop idols.

4.3.1 *The Impact of Sexualization on Fans*

Self-mapping. The requirement of idol's appearance in sexualization can be able to satisfy the aesthetic needs of fans [6]. Many fans take as their own psychological mapping. Fans like beauty, sexiness, in fact, their self-unattainable ideas onto, such as feeling that they are not beautiful enough, their body is not good enough or they are afraid to wear sexy clothes [7]. The mimetic media mirror replaces the primitive real mirror and becomes an important source of self-perception and identity for the fascinated individual [8]. The phenomenon of sexualized satisfies fans' appreciation and need for beauty.

Social study. The idol's style of dress will cause fans to imitate it. Fans will follow idol because they see idol wearing short skirts and short tops, and learn the style and thought process of how idol dresses. mass imitation by fans will develop idol's dressing style into a trend. The clever fusion of popular music and popular clothing can form a more distinctive popular style and lead to a wider range of popular trends [9]. For example, HyunA's style is widely pursued due to her gorgeous color scheme and colorful cute hair clips [7].

Fulfillment of sexual fantasies. Fans' love for idols has given rise to the fan art industry. Fan art creations are mainly divided into two types: fantasizing that their two favorite idols are partners and fantasizing that they are the partners of their favorite idols. Fans can fulfill their fantasies of love and sexual desire by creating fan art. Fans will post their creations on Weibo, AO3, LOFTER and other apps and websites. Some younger fans will even learn about sex through fan art.

The Three Viewpoints (Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism). For younger fans, early exposure to sex is not a very good thing. Being exposed to sexualized idols at a young age can affect the formation of their three views. The girl group ILLIT, which debuted on March 25th, 2024, made waves on the internet because the music video for their debut song contained pedophilia and sexual innuendo. If fans are infiltrated and influenced by unhealthy sexual culture at a young age, it can easily affect the formation of three views. They may develop sexual urges too early, which is not conducive to their physical and mental health. They may engage in sexual behavior at an age when they do not yet understand what responsibility is.

4.3.2 Impact on the K-POP idol market

There is no doubt that the practice of sexualizing idols can attract more fans and expand the influence of idols, and agencies are able to earn more money as a result. The media-constructed K-pop consumer space creates a postmodern consumer scenario that promotes consumption by satisfying consumers' needs for spatial context, identity-seeking, and meaning-making, and increases the commodity value of K-pop idols 10[10]. However, after years and years of sexualization, sexualization of idols has now become a common phenomenon in the industry. Sexualizing idols to take over the market share is not a healthy way to develop. Idols are first and foremost human beings before they become idols, and using the physical body to attract fans is not a solution, and the sustainability of the idol industry is still a problem. Currently, K-POP fans have become more or less settled, and the total number of fans in the entire K-POP market does not fluctuate much. Idols can no longer be more exposed to attract audiences, and the K-POP industry is facing a transition and new opportunities.

5 Conclusion

Through the research in this paper, Kpop idol manufacturing factories may be able to find a more healthy and positive development direction and realize the diversification of idol appearance and packaging styles. At the same time, this article also hopes to help fans and viewers face up to and analyze the phenomenon and status quo of idol sexualization, reduce the negative impact of this status quo on fans themselves, or increase the positive impact of this status quo. At the same time, the author also hopes that this article can help promote the formation of a better Kpop culture and a purer fan ecology and promote the more positive and healthy development of Kpop.

This article lacks the sample of female group fans in the collection of data from the questionnaire survey, which leads to the missing part of the article on the study of sexualized female idols, and it is unable to properly analyze the causes and effects of the phenomenon of sexualization of female idols. At the same time, the questionnaires collected in this study were basically from young people between the ages of 19 and 25, so the findings and survey results are more applicable to younger groups and lack comprehensiveness.

The author hopes that this article will give fans and economic companies a better understanding of the phenomenon of idol sexualization. To find a better direction in developing the K-POP industry. The author hopes that this article will save the K-POP

industry from its current rigidity, and at the same time, guide economic companies to face up to the demands of both idols and fans, and create a more prosperous environment for the K-POP industry. Fans are urged to respect the human rights of idols, not to be too hard on idols' appearance, and to give idols the respect they deserve.

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