

Social Media and K-pop, Shaping of Teenage Beauty Standards, and its Biases in South Korea

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Abstract

K-pop, short for Korean Pop, is a genre of music that originated in 1996 in South Korea and is currently known for its combined singing-choreography performance. K-pop was initially consumed as an auditory form of entertainment, but after the recent influence of social media platforms focusing on visual content, the genre has recently shifted to a visual media. This change accelerated during the COVID-19 lockdown, where South Korean teenagers turned to social media as a form of social interaction. K-pop idols and their content focusing on visual media caused fans to mimic their appearance, fashion, and lifestyle. Over time, this led to a new standard of beauty in South Korean teenage culture, where physical features and style associated with idols are typically thought of as ideal. K-pop has since become one of the most influential forces for South Korean teenagers, reshaping traditional gender norms. Its impact demonstrates how social media-based pop culture can challenge and reform long-standing societal expectations.

Keywords: K-pop, Social Media, Beauty Standards, Emotional Barriers, Gender Norms

Introduction

In 1996, a new genre emerged in South Korea: Korean Pop, or K-pop for short. Korean pop, infamously known as “K-pop,” consists of all-male and all-female musicians performing live on stage. An important asset of K-pop that brought its popularity lies in its visual aspects,

such as the group’s aesthetics, clothing, accessories, and physical beauty. Through the presentation of their surreal visuals at the time, idols introduced a new standard of beauty in South Korea’s clothing, make-up, and physical build. Consequently, this has influenced the teenagers in their fanbase to aspire to become like those on the stage. While this has been an

observable phenomenon since the early years of K-pop, the influence of K-pop idols has recently increased substantially and become a publicly agreed standard of teenage beauty in South Korea. This paper asks how the influence of idols on South Korean adolescents has changed so rapidly over just a few decades.

Professionals say that the exponential growth of the K-pop market came from the quick implication of social media as main content platform for the genre. During the COVID-19 lockdown, many South Korean teenagers increasingly used social media such as Instagram and TikTok to communicate with their peers. On the two platforms, one of the most prominent types of content created was 'dance challenge' videos, where teenagers followed short and simple dance movements to addictive background music. Coincidentally, K-pop music videos and performances consisted of choreography matching their music, making it a perfect source for teenagers to create dance challenge videos.

In the post-pandemic period, according to my self-produced survey of South Korean adolescents in Seoul, many fans see Korean pop as a visual media rather than an auditory one. Since most individuals engaged with K-pop via social media content, they focused heavily on the visual aspect rather than the music itself (Statista Research Department 2023). Due to this shift in focus, those who encountered the specific media began to idolize the physical looks and fashion of K-pop. K-pop's massive influence on the teenage population engendered and solidified the socially accepted

standard of beauty amongst South Korean teenagers.

In South Korea today, it is easily noticeable that the selection of clothes, make-up, and accessories of adolescents mimic those of popular K-pop members. Among the teenage population, it is notable that the female population is more heavily influenced by K-pop beauty.

Even under similar circumstances and exposure to content through social media, the female population is "expected to follow" the rapidly changing beauty standard. This expectation stems from South Korea's past, where its culture and society had a solid standard of how each gender, especially females, should adorn themselves. However, professionals say that the contemporary themes in K-pop could positively alter these gender stereotypes by propelling South Korean society to overcome the expectations of each gender (Interview of Kim, Seoul August 4, 2024).

K-pop's heavy influence and quick success is a popular research topic, with extensive research conducted on its reason for success (Lee 2022, 229-231), and its influence on fashion (Yang 2021, 1-24). However, there is not much research focused on the process in which K-pop has extreme influence over South Korean teenagers specifically. K-pop's influence in South Korea illustrates how the content of online media can deeply affect the social standards of the upcoming teenage generations.

This ethnographic research paper examines the shift of K-pop from auditory to visual media and

its influence on teenage beauty in South Korea. The paper will investigate the given theme by answering the following questions: Why did K-pop change to a visual media despite being a musical genre? What process did it take for K-pop to become a visual media? What influence does K-pop have on the teenage population? By using an in-depth analysis of self-conducted data and opinions from past scholarly writings. Ultimately, I argue that K-pop could make a change in the engraved gender barrier in South Korea.

Background

Data for this ethnographic research paper was collected via three methods: (1) online scholarly writings and published data sources, (2) interviews of an 18-year-old female referred to as “Yoo”, a female professional teenage clothing designer “Kim,” a male professional musician “Kwang,” and two other two preferably remained anonymous individuals, (3) three surveys referred to as “Survey1,” “Survey2,” “Survey3,” and “surveys” when all the collective surveys are referred. The surveys involved 57 respondents who reside in Seoul within the age range of 19 to 25, with a gender ratio of 24 men, 31 women, and 2 non-binary individuals. The total number of respondents may differ in the results throughout this paper, as none of the surveys had a requirement to answer all the questions asked. The results were collected as a free response from the respondents; if a group of eight or more respondents of the specific survey reached the same idea or used keywords, the collected answers are simplified when mentioned. In these cases, there would be a

note to recognize all the simplified responses and an example to delineate the answers that were categorized in singular form. In cases where direct translation from Korean to English is difficult, the original word is written with a near translation or explanation within parenthesis.

Some key terms that must be understood or clarified for clearer understanding...

- The term “K-pop” refers to the genre of Korean-pop and groups that originate from entertainment companies within South Korea. Typically, the members consist of mainly ethnic South Koreans but can occasionally include individuals from different countries (e.g. Southeast Asia, America, Europe, etc.).
- K-pop is a music genre where performers sing or rap while dancing with a group and generally consist of one gender in a group; based on the gender binary system.
- Members of K-pop bands are called “idols.” In this paper, the terms “member” and “idols” will be used synonymously.
- The terms “social media” and “SNS” (short for Social Networking Service) refer to online platforms where people socialize and watch various digital content. In this paper, the two terms can be used synonymously.
- K-pop groups are divided into ‘generations’ separated under different circumstances such as age, trend, popularity, industry shift, and aesthetics of idols. The first generation started in 1996 and as of 2024, the K-pop industry is moving on to its 5th generation.

- The term “fan” refers to a small group of people who admire a certain group(s) of K-pop idols. It is used plural in the Korean context.
- A “light fan” refers to a greater majority of individuals who enjoy the music, culture, and second-hand-produced content.
- The research focuses on data collected from social media via two platforms: Instagram and TikTok.
- The reason for this choice is that the most prominent source of K-pop content among respondents was Instagram and TikTok.
- Teenagers, young adolescents, adolescents, and students mentioned in this paper refer to the groups active in the urbanized areas of South Korea.
- The term choreography used in this paper refers to the dance style used in K-pop performances other known as street dancing. Street dancing consists of dance styles such as breakdancing, popping, locking, house dance, waacking, and voguing.

Introduction of K-pop to Korea’s Society

In 1996, the first K-pop group debuted with a live performance with singing that resembled American hip-hop with a mixture of street choreography. The introduction of a fresh genre of music with lyrics that involve storytelling captivated the ears of fans, creating a small fanbase in South Korea. One of the most important aspects that allowed K-pop to gain popularity was the looks and flamboyant clothing of the idols. These iconic fashion and makeup looks have become a standard of beauty

for teenage fans in South Korea. The fans of K-pop idealized the appearance of the idols as the “exemplary looks of a person,” often calling idols “범접할수없다” (unobtainable/untouchable) for reaching their level of beauty. A concept that will be referred to in the paper as the “emotional barrier.”

As generations of artists passed, the K-pop industry grew and so did the influence of K-pop among teenagers. The influence of K-pop on the standard of beauty affects not only the light fans of K-pop but the majority of the population aged 16 to 25 (Yang 2021). As of 2024, many students share certain physical appearances that originate from the imitation of idol appearance, such as their outfits by wearing clothing from the same brand/maker, or those of similar shades of color with decorations; make-up by using the same product used by idols or idol-promoted products; hairstyle by going to the same hair salon and asking for the same cut, letting their hair grow or cut short; and body shape which is generally slender with smooth skin for a female and slender muscular for males.

The Growth of K-pop’s Influence in South Korea

But just how did K-pop gain such influence from a minor culture to a major social norm over just a few decades? One of the survey questions was, “Where do you think the influence of K-pop comes from? As one respondent said, “...it’s definitely from social media, my friends started to watch a whole lot of K-pop...I feel that’s where the obsession comes from...” (Survey2 2024). Many other

individuals—a total of 16—answered that the influence of K-pop comes from the increased use of social media.

However, this is in contrast to early K-pop, where the influence came from content consumed through televisions or magazines. When did this shift happen? It is important to consider when the shift happened. The following excerpt comes from an interview with a peer who preferred to remain anonymous when asked the question “How did you feel about K-pop pre-pandemic?” They replied with quite the enthusiasm:

“Before COVID-19, none of my peers knew much about K-pop, it was irrelevant to our lives since it was a minor culture only for the ‘fans’. There was very minimal interaction with the media, the only time I heard the song was, I don’t know, the mere fraction of seconds scrolling down the TV channels. (Anonymous 1, Seoul, July 27, 2024)”

The excerpt shows the amount of influence K-pop had on a non-fan. The individual's response shows that K-pop content was only consumed by a minor group of fans and most people weren't as affected. The source from which non-fans can interact with K-pop was restricted to television, and the mention of the COVID-19 pandemic implies a change occurring during this time. When asked the question “When did you start using social media?” respondents answered, “I started social media during covid-19 cause my friends were all using it to chat on...” (Survey3 2024) and “I used to use social media back in 2016 for communication purposes...then Covid started

and I used a whole lot more after that...” (Survey3 2024). The majority of respondents stated that the point in time when they started to utilize social media was during the COVID-19 pandemic. During lockdown, teenagers were separated from the larger society and their peers. At the age where students crave social interaction and time spent with their peers, this group of people searched for an alternative source for ‘connection’ {simplified of 9 responses}. The source that the student body found was social media, more specifically, Instagram and TikTok (Survey 2024).

The major content created on the social media platform during the COVID-19 lockdown was ‘dance challenge’ videos, which became viral throughout the school community. Students would follow dance moves with background music—not necessarily K-pop or usually K-pop—and share it with friends to also follow along. As time passed, however, students started to lack new songs with ‘cool’ dance moves to follow and were looking for new sources: K-pop content was a perfect solution to the problem. K-pop performances included dancing and singing, allowing students to easily follow the dance moves in the music videos and share them with their peers. By posting such content on social media, it became viral, and the natural flow of mind “dance challenge equals K-pop” was created amongst the student body.

The following excerpt is an informal talk with a peer who uploads K-pop dance challenge videos on social media. Answering the questions “Why did you start to wear like idols” and “Do you think you can wear like that in public?”

J (asking with a joking voice): “Yo, why do you film and wear like idols?”

A 2 (chuckling): “Well, I guess it’s because everyone started to do the same thing? You know, at first, the challenge thing was all for fun, but at a certain point, I felt this obsession to make the content I produce as legit as possible. And one of the ways I attempted to do so was by wearing like one of them”

J: “Then do you think you can wear the costume you did outside?”

A 2 (answers with a loud voice): “Oh he** no, that would never happen, I wore it for the video because no one can see my face, there is no way I would wear it in public” (Informal conversation between Joseph Yoo and Anonymous Peer 2; July 2, 2024)

The excerpt above is a dialogue with one of the few individuals who started to wear outfits like an idol for dance challenge videos in the school community. This excerpt is important because it demonstrates that K-pop idol content during early 2020 was acknowledged on social media platforms under anonymity but not in public. A phenomenon called “cyber-aggression” by scholar Xinyu Pan, where social media users gain moral courage to make bolder choices in the online space (Pan 2023, 1-5). But as of 2024, the great majority of teenagers are affected by K-pop’s beauty standards. What gave K-pop the power to influence such a large group?

Scholarly researchers such as Inho Lee and Hae Joo Kim say that the reason for “K-pop’s sudden success during [the COVID-19 lockdown] was the decline of the live performances comes from

the quick adaptation of social media as a main content source” (Inho 2022, 229-232; Kim 2021, 96-98). The K-pop industry changed drastically after the active use of social media platforms. One way that the K-pop industry used social media platforms is by making the idols stream their personal lives off stage so that, as Yoo commented, “It allows idols to become more intimate with fans and connect with fans more readily and communicate with fans at like an everyday level...Kind of primes fans to think, ‘Oh, I know this idol at a personal level” (Interview of Yoo, Seoul July 30, 2024). Kim also agreed, “unlike the past where fans thought that idols are untouchable beings from another dimension, nowadays, people feel like they could attempt to become like the idols” (Interview of Kim, Seoul August 4, 2024). A concept proposed by scholar Jan Klostermann where live streams allow the fans to feel closer to the idols, and gain much popularity than “professionally produced” content (Klostermann 2023, 1-8). At first, teenagers and young adolescents thought that idols were celebrities on the other side of a television screen. However, after the implication of live streaming on social media, people gained a mental shift in thinking that they can also become like the people they idolize. Also, the concentration on social media content changed different aspects of K-pop music itself.

The following excerpt is from the interview with Kwang for the question “How did K-pop music change over time, especially social media?” In a mild tone of frustration, he said K-pop music changed a whole lot over the years, at first it originated from American hip-hop, and it had

some sort of story...After K-pop started to get really viral on Instagram and other social media, the songs began to become simplified, the main goal now is to make a catchy phrase that can be remembered by the listener and repeated for a longer portion of the song... the dances are made very specific for the audience to follow, you can notice that during the dance move in a [General Music Video] for the chorus, the cameras show a full shot of the idols. (Interview of Kwang, Seoul July 31, 2024)

After this, he covers up and wipes his face with exhaustion. The verbal and physical responses to the question are essential to see the change in K-pop over time. Kwang demonstrated frustration during the interview when speaking about the musical aspect of K-pop, mentioning its current lack of narrative in the music. In the interview, he mentions that the songs are now simplified and made catchier, focusing more on the choreography aspect for the audience to follow.

These aspects illustrate a strong relationship between the changes made to how K-pop interacts with its fans and the characteristics of K-pop content on social media. Content on Instagram and TikTok are short, within a thirty-second to one-minute range, and therefore so are dance challenge videos. K-pop music on SNS platforms is consumed in short videos where a narrative cannot fit, so the music developed to become simplified by repeating catchy phrases and emphasizing the choreography rather than the music itself. These adaptations made K-pop feel more friendly and fitting for social media content,

making it much more viral among South Korean teenagers, leading to surging search rates of K-pop-related content by nearly seventeen times by late 2020 compared to 2019 (Inho 2022, 230). This shows how K-pop gained its current popularity since the COVID-19 pandemic, becoming the origin of its immense influence today.

The Shift of K-pop From an Auditory to Visual Media

The adaptation of K-pop and the use of social media not only brought exponential growth to the genre but also paved the path to K-pop's influence on teenage beauty today. K-pop was, like other musical genres, producing auditory content, or simply music for the audience to listen to before COVID-19. However, the adaptation to SNS changed the genre to be consumed more focused on visual media rather than auditory media like before.

The shift first begins with the content produced on social media after K-pop's initial popularity during the lockdown. I uncovered four major types of content on social media. The listing of major K-pop content visible across Instagram and TikTok platforms are: Dance "challenges" where social media users mimic the choreography of a K-pop performance with the corresponding music in the background, related content includes tutorials showing how to execute each dance move/gesture. 아이돌 직캠 (idol fancams, pronounced jik-cam) which are videos filmed by fans of idols on a live stage during/after performances. Memes; clips of funny moments or mistakes made by idols on

stage or Livestream, and Fan-edited video content, generally a series of idol performances played in a row.

This light-fan and fan-produced content dominated the social media platforms where consumers were exposed to K-pop. The interesting relationship between the different types of content mentioned is that all of the above focuses on the physical performances such as the

choreography of the idols rather than the musical or lyrical content of the song. A characteristic uncommon throughout the modern music industry in South Korea, in other popular music

genres such as 트로트 (pronounced tro-t) or ballads.

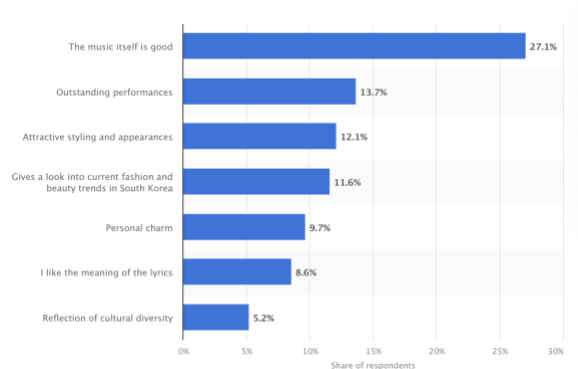


Figure 1 Survey result of “Main reasons for South Korean pop music's (K-pop) popularity worldwide as of November 2023” (Statista Research Department 2023)

According to Figure 1, the major reason for K-pop's popularity comes from the quality of the music itself. However, reasons two through five in this survey include outstanding performance; attractive styling, and appearances; looking into

current fashion and beauty trends in South Korea; and personal charm, all related to the physical appearance or aspect of K-pop. By combining these results, 47.1% of the respondents answered that the reason for K-pop's popularity is based on its visual aspects, which is greater than 35.7%, from reasons 1 and 6 combined that are related to the auditory aspects of K-pop. These results align with the social phenomenon named “visual communication” proposed by scholar Uta Russmann, where the user's attention shifts toward visual images to gain information due to the online ecology of social media platforms (Russmann 2017, 1-4). By connecting the characteristics of fan-created content on social media and Figure 1, it can be noticed that the load of fan-produced content causes the consuming population to recognize K-pop as a visual media.

After consumers began viewing K-pop as visual content first and foremost, Inho shows how the proportion of related search keywords on social media changed accordingly to beauty, choreography, handsome, make-up, style, dress code, etc. (Inho 2022, 236-238). K-pop entertainment corporations, in response, began to convert idol clothing, hairstyles, and accessories suitable to be worn in public rather than the adventurous style originating in 1996 (Interview of Kim, Seoul August 4, 2024).

Figure 2 (Left): Concept photo of “Candy” taken in 1996
December of K-pop Idol Group H.O.T



Photo Credit: Namu-wiki



Figure 3 (Right):
Concept photo
of “Butter” taken
in 2021 of K-pop
Idol Group BTS

Photo Credit:
Namu-wiki

K-pop changed from its adventurous styles to what Thomas Baudinette points out to be called “sexual appeals” to the opposing gender, making idol clothing the ideal looks of males and females (Baudinette 2023, 253-264). This new style of outfits and physical attributes aligned with the acceptable standard of beauty in South Korea and many idols started to work as models. As idols get involved in the beauty market, companies begin to cooperate, remodeling idols as brand ambassadors for clothing and make-up products.

The Growth of K-pop’s Influence on South Korean Teenagers

A professional teenage clothes designer Kim said that because of social media and daily encounters with promoted products, “people feel too close to them... The emotional distance [teenagers] feel between the idol is so much closer, so [teenagers] attempt to wear clothes like them” (interview of Ms. Kim 2024), unlike in the past where idol contents were shared through the television or when people had an “emotional barrier between idols and themselves”.

Combined with the frequent interaction, 75.4% of the respondents to the surveys said

that factors such as similar age decrease the emotional barrier between K-pop idols and teenagers (Survey 2024). The lowered emotional barrier makes the K-pop idol’s ideal look—bright and smooth skin, a small face, wide shoulders, a slender but muscular body, hairstyles, long legs, etc—feel possible to reach.

When asked the question “Do you buy idol-related products? If so, why?” the majority of the respondents answered that they feel like they could look like idols when they buy products that are promoted by them {simplified of 13 responses}. “Yeah, it feels like when I see idol-promoted products, I could be like one of them, it also looks a lot better so I tend to buy them.” (Survey2 2024), “You know, people started to buy idol-branded stuff, so why can’t I? I also want to look like the Idols on stage. They look pretty...it’s considered fashionable amongst people our age” (Survey2 2024). These results show that South Korean teenagers follow the ideal looks that are set by their idols, and in some cases even to the extent of getting plastic surgeries. “Idols debuted... the plastic surgery industry. Then Korea started to reflect the features...like hairstyle, hair color, make-up trends, plastic surgery trends” (Interview of Yoo, Seoul July 30, 2024). A conclusion proposed by the scholar Alanna McCrory (HVSM) or Highly Visual Social Media causes innate seeking for gratification by following what they view on SNS to feel contribution (McCrory 2022, 168-180; Kim 2021, 98-101).

As of 2024, South Korea has the highest plastic surgery rate globally with 13.5 cosmetic procedures per 1000 individuals (Rodrigues

2024). The report from Rodrigues also states that “Estimates suggest that 1 in 3 South Korean women between the age of 19 to 29 have had plastic surgery” (Rodrigues 2024). This proposes a question, are females more affected by beauty standards created by idols? And, if so, why?

The Biased Affects of K-pop Beauty Standards on South Korean Women

To find out if this inference was reasonable, I’ve re-interviewed professional Kim with the question “Do you think a certain gender or group of people are affected more by K-pop?”

Most definitely yes, I mean, it is quite obvious when you see how trends work around Idols. She answers with laughter and pulls up some photos of female K-pop idols on the internet. You see here? this (pointing at a long, braided hairstyle) is what was trending just a few weeks ago, but just in a few days, this (pointing at another short bob-cut hairstyle) is what’s trending right now...trends change way too quickly on the internet and one of the few things that people can follow along are make-up products and techniques since it can change every single day...teenage boys though, don’t put, let us say, ‘fashion make-up’ (Interview of Kim, Online August 20, 2024)

The excerpt concludes that the reason teenage boys aren’t affected as much is because trends change too often, why? This is because, in South Korea, it is considered unnatural for males to frequently take care of their appearance making it unreasonable to follow along the quickly changing trends of K-pop. Also, when asked the

questions “What do you think about idol makeup in public? Would you do it if you can?” and “In what ways does idol culture affect your appearance?” respondents answered “It feels weird for men to put on makeup like the idols do, and it also seems extremely difficult to do it anyways”, “probably the most I do is wear brand shirts or pants none of the fancy products” (Survey 2 2024) and “I follow the hairstyle because it genuinely looks good” (Survey 3 2024). As such, male respondents in near uniform answered that putting makeup on is difficult and time-consuming and it is off-putting to wear makeup in public. Men prefer to follow hairstyles from time to time or generic clothing in the long run.

However, the answers were vastly contrasting for the female respondents. When asked a similar question, the female respondents answered, “Well, most of my friends do it, and although it’s time-consuming and quite expensive, it feels like I’ve become prettier. If I get to get genuine idol makeup from an artist? I would be so happy to do so”, “most of the clothing I buy matches the trend since it feels like a 반쪽자리(missing pieces) when only having some portion” (Survey 2 2024), and “I think I do it for self-satisfaction, I normally don’t put on makeup when I’m alone but whenever do have to put it on, the first thing I do is look up idol trends and try to follow tutorials” (Survey 3 2024). This shows the majority of female teenage respondents put on idol makeup for self-satisfaction or when going out for public meetings with peers. The answers further demonstrate that putting on makeup is natural for females which is in contrast to the males who stated that it is

unfitting by the social standards in South Korea.

Another reason that may result in women being further affected by K-pop beauty is the popularity distribution of K-pop groups. When asked “Which idol group(s) are you interested in?” 91.7% of the males responded with a female K-pop group and 90.3% of the females responded with a mixture of male and female K-pop groups (Survey 2024). “Boys look at female idols, wouldn’t it be weird for them to wear or put on makeup like them?” (Interview of Kim, Seoul August 4, 2024). Teenage males aren’t as interested in idols that are the same gender in the ways that females are, and because of this distribution, South Korean males are affected considerably less than females are.

Change in South Korea’s Social Standards

These kinds of social constructs and interaction between gendered relationships originate from Korea’s history during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) where makeup, clothing, and accessories were associated with the daily life of upper-class women to signify beauty and wealth. Whereas for men, the physical build and clothing such as the Hanbok (clothing frequently worn by men of all classes) are what represented social status and dignity. This shows a clear connection where females follow idols via K-pop-specific makeup, clothing, and accessories while males tend to do so through items such as general clothes such as branded shirts. However, this social setting may change in South Korea over time. After the initial response to the question “Do you think a certain gender or group of people are affected

more by K-pop?” Kim added on by saying “There are a lot more teenage boys that put in basic makeup these days isn’t it?” (Interview of Kim, Seoul August 4, 2024). Explaining that the long-originating social construct is loosening in South Korean male teenagers. According to the research conducted by scholar Jang-Soon Park, South Korean males in their 20s show positive responses to the use of concealers, color lotion, and BB creme (Park 2022) and according to the survey responses, of those who put on basic makeup answers, the reason for such care is because of the increased beauty standards due to K-pop (Survey 3 2024). As such, K-pop’s influence on South Korean teenagers is growing – enough to change a long-standing gender barrier of beauty.

K-pop also affects the female social standard in South Korea. Like men, female gender roles in South Korea originate from the Confucian belief, so stay humble, dedicated to the family, and physically pure. This restricted South Korean females, especially teenagers, from wearing fancy clothing or those that showed a lot of skin and were generally expected to wear shirts and long skirts or pants in public. This is an example of the “embodiment of gender” as researcher Veronica Doubleday calls it, where objects are given gender and are expected to be used accordingly by social construct and tradition (Doubleday 2008, 1-13). However female K-pop groups in recent years say otherwise. Female K-pop groups began to wear clothing defiant to South Korea’s early-established social standards, showing a lot of skin with fancy accessories on the side. Kim answers that this influence “While female

teenagers didn't wear as open as the idols on stage, it most definitely influenced the group of people to wear more open out in public" (Interview of Kim, Seoul August 4, 2024). Explaining that K-pop's influence is also affecting the long-set gender expectations for female teenagers in South Korea. These effects are much like those by Ayben Özçalkan, a female Turkish rapper who overcame the gender barrier by succeeding in a traditionally 'masculine' rap scene (Thomas 2013, 73-91).

Conclusion

K-pop's popularity in South Korea was earned in less than half a decade, yet it has evolved into one of the most influential sources for teenagers. K-pop amplified its visual content to fit in social media platforms during COVID-19. Concurrently, teenagers during the lockdown used the performances to create fan-produced content which brought massive popularity to K-pop. Idols started to partake in the beauty industry, lowering the emotional barrier between celebrities and their fans, causing teenagers to adorn themselves like K-pop members. Today in Korea, K-pop is slowly changing the perception of gender barriers that originate from the Joseon Dynasty and Confucianism for teenagers in the form of beauty standards, influencing males to put on basic makeup and females to wear more fancy and liberal clothing. The influence that K-pop has on South Korean teenagers demonstrates how popular social media can overcome long-established gender barriers that exist in our society today.

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