

# K-pop as a genre ii



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Girls Generation? Gender, (Dis)Empowerment and K-pop This article by Stephen Epstein and James Turnbull examines the status of girls in Korea with specific attention to K-pop music. The authors are inspired by the growing trend of girl groups in Korea, which symbolize a cultural era that expels an authoritarian ideology. Gender disparity is a global concern, with females the most affected through various forms of disempowerment. The emergence of “ girl group” music patterns could be a new tiding in Korea aimed at empowering girls.

On the contrary, the authors cast doubt on the empowering nature of the “ girl group” phenomenon, which is taunted as a liberating pop movement. The authors particularly curious about the girl group fever after having examined the visual codes and lyrics of popular modern Korean girl groups’ music. The authors have closely analyzed the videos and music of groups such as Girls’ Generation, Wonder Girls, T-ara, KARA. They also paid attention to the discourse surrounding the rise of these groups to popularity in Korea. Their aim was to deconstruct the idea that contemporary consumer society makes a radical break from the traditional, deeply rooted power structures.

The authors argue that a set of repetitive tropes in the studied marketing and media presentation of the Korean girl groups undercuts progressive ethos claims. They advance this argument through the demonstration that girl group lyrics and videos fall into three categories. Firstly, while girl groups can express desire in a fashion that potentially empowers, the viewer is interpreted as male. This expression of desire is supported by a feigned and coyness innocence, which returns power to men as evident in Gee and Oh of Girls’ Generation, Like The First Time of T-ara, and Mister of KARA.

Secondly, some songs and videos point towards exertion of female power. However, influence is achieved through recourse to the mighty force of feminine sexuality, which either embarrasses (AH of After School that adds the ridicule of an illegal relationship between student and teacher) or makes male people helpless (So Hot of The Wonder Girls) thereby projecting the message that the route to redressing power imbalance is narcissistic desirability. Lastly, some songs have video and lyrical narratives, which depict female solidarity in threatening men revenging against callous boyfriends (I Don't Care of 2NE1, Irony and Tell Me of The Wonder Girls). However, in so doing, these songs and videos continue to foster the battle between sexes discourse.

The authors also contrast K-pop girl group videos and songs with Japanese J-pop girl group videos and songs from the popular Hello! Project entertainment group emphasizes the demonstration of youthful energy without referring to a polarizing or validating male presence. The contrast pushes the authors' argument that Korean popular music alignment to larger discursive structures should break away from ideologies pitting female and male against one another.

The authors seem to have rooted their research to early days' girl group music. Current trends show significant improvements that lean towards uniting the sexes rather than polarizing them. Moreover, the authors exhibit bias of a high degree by failing to compare across sexes and see if the boy groups are also furthering a polarization agenda. Centering on the girl groups alone is enough proof that the authors are also out to divide sexes. Almost all male groups sing at the mercy of their female counterparts, a trend that has swayed contemporary female groups to adopt a uniting

approach to their songs and videos.

Drawing a comparison to the J-pop girl groups is quite dumb. The J-pop agenda is to market their songs to the male population by playing nice to them. They do this by painting out the girls as innocent, approachable and average. The idea of the male consumer possibly dating the girls is advanced not only by the explicit videos but also through a series of live events where their approachability takes priority. The K-pop idol groups were ridiculed in Japanese shows as 'too strong' for Japanese men to manage.

Overall, the article is a revelation into the Korean music culture. The research, though constrained by the amount of time and volume as the authors later clarified, is a huge step towards reforming the Korean music industry and uniting the male and female sexes – gender equality.

#### Works Cited

Epstein, Stephen and Turnbull James. Girls Generation- Gender and (dis)empowerment, and K-pop. Sendspace, 2014. Accessed from <https://www.sendspace.com/file/y3v7np>