

Lifestyles of k-pop authors



Kpop or Prison?

South Korea is a sovereign state in East Asia, with many rules of etiquette and customs based on traditional Chinese ways, but moulded into a unique culture through industrialization, urbanization and westernization. The author, Sonja Vegdahl Hur stated that “ lurking behind the sometimes stoic Korean façade is a multitude of emotions.” However, in the Kpop industry idols are expected to show a profusion of emotions but have to refine them in order to create an image of complete perfection, this is to attract audiences and conform to the trends in their society. Kpop is a genre that originates from 1980s South Korea and is heavily based on audiovisual content and a fusion of foreign musical elements. They present idols in a “ debut showcase” which consists of television broadcast promotions and online marketing instead of radio. But to get to the stage, idols must go through a tough training period for sometimes many years.

Sixty years ago Korea was a war-torn country but is now flourishing. This has been achieved through hard work which has been transferred to education. But the globalisation of an already competitive system has caused too much stress from a young age. Is being diligent in Korea worth the cost of their mental health? These companies obviously use idol’s dreams against them as in order to be the best, entertainment industries put idols through gruelling periods of dance, vocal training, learning many languages and instruments. Granted, this method does have strengths; the ingrained idea that success is key to a good life, no matter the cost is a great motivator, but is living their dream worth the stiff price in health and happiness? I don’t think so. The proof is in the West. Many artists are extremely popular like

Beyoncé, yet they never had to learn difficult dance routines or another language to rise to the top. But, this also shows where culture differs, the image of perfection is not necessarily as important in the West as it is in Korea. Idols are mostly required to dye their hair, wear contacts and get double eye-lid surgery to remove the epicanthic fold in order to appear more “ perfect” and “ European”. All idols participate in music shows such as Inkigayo (like our MTV music charts) where all digital sales, physical album sales, streams and music video views are totalled up and the winner gains the trophy – this is vital for the group survival in the industry as if their popularity is in constant decline with hardly no wins the company will most likely drop them and this usually means they’ll lose their homes and source of income as it’s all provided by the company, yet they still have to pay a large proportion for it.

Trainees are constantly disciplined by the companies they’re signed under. An ex-SM Entertainment trainee revealed, “ If you don’t improve but you’re pretty they tell you to stay underwater and hold your breath for 5 minutes and make you sit in a ‘ V’ and drop basketballs on your stomach when you breathe.” This is apparently to encourage the trainee to work harder but it breaches human rights as Korean law prohibits such practices of inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. A famous law suit emerged in 2009. A popular group TVXQ, took their management to court over a 13 year contract which ended with success and the ruling prompted the Fair Trade Commission to bring a ‘ model contract’ in an attempt to improve standards. Another ex-trainee, Stella Kim was interviewed by ‘ Le Film Magazine’ and specified her ordeal during the period she trained under SM; “ If you were

deemed overweight, then you would be weighed in front of everybody and shamed for it.” Howbeit, the training affected her even after she quit, she went through a stage of anorexia and at her lowest point weighed 90lbs at 5ft 7 along with Korean students at her college in America recognising her and calling her ugly or fat. This shows that training in Korea needs to be reformed as the current method creates idols to develop feelings of self-worthlessness with a distorted set of social values.

Soloists and groups need fans in order to keep gaining popularity. However, some fans go overboard and develop a harmful fixation on idols. In Korea they’re called ‘ Sasaeng fans’. These people are notorious for engaging in actions that inaugurate an invasion of privacy. For example, a member of JYJ, Yoochun found that his home and parking lot had CCTV cameras installed by Saesangs. On the other hand is the opposite extreme, anti-fans. This refers to the torment of idols where people construct organisations to mentally and physically threaten idols. They have committed many crimes and go to extreme methods such as, Yoon Kye-Sang from the group G. O. D who received a drink adulterated with bleach and laundry chemicals which was drunk by his mother, who had to hospitalised. Idols are heavily criticised for appearance in Korea as there is a massive expectation of perfection. A case with girl group Red Velvet, included comments against their youngest member, Yeri who was only 17 at the time, where netizens – internet citizens – wrote derogatory sexually explicit comments about her on a live show.

In comparison to Western artists, Kpop idols work considerably harder for a little amount of freedom and profit. A comment on a website, Quora mentioned that, “ Kpop isn’t about selling music it’s about selling idols – <https://assignbuster.com/lifestyles-of-k-pop-authors/>

people that fans worship.” Furthermore, Kpop artists are overworked; F(x)’s Krystal collapsed on stage due to fatigue as sleeping only 2 hours a day became too much to handle, whilst forced to perform.

Even after training life for idols is still stressful and difficult. 9MUSES ex-member, Sera mentioned in the documentary, “ No one treats me as a human being.” But idols have to abide by the contracts and stick with the companies until it ends. The contracts allow the companies to take away human rights and basic freedoms which any ordinary person would have. For example, the right to contact family and under the Korean Labour Standards Act it says working hours per week should not exceed 40 hours. In the i-D Magazine (fashion culture magazine), 2NE1 member CL stated, “ You have to be perfect. You have to perform well, you shouldn’t date anyone and fans have a standard image, especially with girls because boys can date anyone.” This conveys the issue of sexism in Korea. Statistics from a picture on Instagram revealed that there was at least a 10 million Won (£6839. 32) pay gap between male and female idols. An actress, Jang Ja Yeon, age 29 committed suicide and explained in a letter that her former agency CEO, Kim Sung Hun had forced her to meet influential people at parties to provide sexual favours in order to keep her job.

In conclusion, Kpop life and training is far worse than artists from Europe. They have more freedom and aren’t always faced with the difficulty of being from a different nation. To improve conditions, I think companies could (and should) let their idols sleep more, eat, wear and sing what they want. To be more equal, both genders should be paid for doing the same thing and whilst training be allowed more free time to rest and be treated more like a human

being and not an object to gain the company more money and fame. Whilst netizens complain about idol's low health, they should in fact criticise their companies more in order to make a change and the industry must realise that the combination of extremely high standards and a lifestyle that makes those standards impossible to meet won't make idols happy or able produce content to the best of their ability. Therefore, they deserve better working conditions.

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