

## **Does K-pop Reinforce Gender Inequalities? Empirical Evidence from a New Data Set**

Xi Lin

*Korea University, Korea*

Robert Rudolf

*Korea University, Korea*

### **Abstract**

---

As K-pop has become a cultural ambassador for Korea, attracting millions of fans across the globe, the sexist portrayal of both female and male idols in K-pop products stands in conflict with the gender-mainstreaming policies to which the country has committed itself. Using a unique and newly collected data set of 6,317 K-pop fans from 100 countries around the world, this study examines the relationship between individual K-pop consumption and gender attitudes of K-pop fans. Findings suggest that a higher level of spending on K-pop related items and activities is related to less egalitarian gender attitudes. Interestingly, this correlation is stronger for fans from already less gender-equal nations. Results indicate that the industry that is actively promoted by the Korean government includes elements that might reinforce a sexist culture and traditional gender roles both within Korea and around the globe, further obstructing women's pursuit of equal opportunities.

### **Key words**

---

K-pop, sexism, sexual objectification, gender stereotypes, gender attitudes

## **Introduction**

Since the late-2000s, the Korean pop music industry (K-pop), as part of the larger Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) phenomenon, has experienced unprecedented international success. With K-pop fans as the mainstay of the increasing Hallyu fan base, which just reached 59.4 million in 2016 (The Korea Foundation, 2017), the rise of K-pop has not only brought in hundreds of millions of dollars in music export revenue for Korea (KOCCA, 2016; Yonhap, 2016) but has also contributed to the boom of Korea's cosmetic, fashion, tourism as well as plastic surgery industries. Korean govern-

ments, seeing the economic potential in K-pop, have since been promoting and supporting it in a top-down manner to facilitate its expansion (Howard, 2016; Leong, 2014; Na, 2013).

Nevertheless, as a cultural ambassador that helped increase the visibility of Korea in the world and acted as a form of soft power in Korea's foreign relations, K-pop's content conflicts with the gender-mainstreaming policies to which the Korean government has committed itself. K-pop's pervasively sexualized content and its emphasis on *lookism*<sup>1</sup> has become overt to many audiences. Revealing costumes and suggestive, often erotic choreography filled with sexual innuendo are common in mainstream K-pop girl idols' images, music videos, and live performances. Moreover, much of the lyrical content in girl groups' music reveals how K-pop organizes or *manipulates* young female idol's femininity in order to meet socially prescribed role expectations in a male-dominated society—either the Western stereotypes of Asian women as exotic sexual objects or the Korean patriarchic role as submissive, fragile, and innocent maidens. This practice in turn reinforces sexist attitudes against women as well as traditional gender roles.

Although most of the K-pop fandom is geared towards male idols, this paper focuses mainly on the sexual objectification, lookism, and sexism in girl idols' music and the potential influence on fans' (mostly young females) gender attitudes. It is important to study this particular element of K-pop because it is more problematic when considering the dim reality of gender issues in Korea: Although Korea has successfully modernized its economy, it lags far behind other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries in terms of gender equality (Bethmann & Rudolf, 2016; Rudolf & Kang, 2015). Featuring the widest gender pay gap and the worst working environment for women among rich countries, Korea's ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index was on par with Muslim-majority countries well-known for their discrimination against women and ranked well below the stubbornly patriarchal Japan (GGGR, 2015; PwC, 2017; The Economist, 2016).

Scholars have been analyzing and criticizing the overly sexualized, often sexist content, along with the propagation of lookism in K-pop and discus-

---

<sup>1</sup> Prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of a person's appearance.

sing their potential influence on K-pop fans. In line with these discussions and recognizing the lack of hard evidence in the debate, this paper proposes the following hypothesis: If K-pop indeed promotes sexist concepts and the objectification of women (as established in section II), its global success may have negative repercussions on the advancement of gender equality around the world. Thus, the research questions to be examined are as follows: 1) What is the relationship between the degree of K-pop fandom (measured by an individual's willingness to pay for K-pop items and activities) and individual gender attitudes?; and 2) What is the relationship between K-pop fandom and fans' attitudes towards the division of labor between men and women within and outside the household?

This study mainly contributes to the existing literature in the following two ways. First, by using a unique and newly collected data set of 6,317 observations from 100 countries, this study adds rare hard empirical evidence to the debate of how K-pop influences fans' gender attitudes. Second, the study shows how sexism, lookism, and sexualization might not just be soft cultural factors, but might actually influence individual attitudes on how paid and unpaid work should be divided between women and men. However, it should also be noted that this study does not intend to measure any causal effects. Given the limitations of a cross-sectional survey design, results need to be interpreted as correlations rather than causation.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. Section II discusses sexism in K-pop as well as the potential influence on audiences and societies as a whole. This will provide the conceptual basis for the research hypothesis and the empirical analysis. Section III introduces the survey design, data set and variables, and presents descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study. Section IV presents the empirical methodology used for analysis and empirical results. Section V concludes the article.

### **Sexism against Women in K-pop and Gender Attitudes**

Sexism, particularly sexist attitudes toward women, which largely stem from traditional stereotypes about gender roles, is one of the main culprits that stand in the way of gender equality. Past studies have investigated gender-role stereotyping in music videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Kalof, 1999; Kistler & Lee, 2009; Seidman, 1992) and other media forms (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008; Wood, 1994), and found that compared to men,

women are more likely to be sexually objectified and held to stricter appearance standards. Moreover, women are also often portrayed in ways that emphasizes traditional gender roles: men were more powerful, dominant, aggressive, and violent, while women were more likely to be presented as weak, dependent, submissive, and nurturing. While some K-pop groups and idols appear to challenge traditional gender roles through their androgynous or homoerotic imageries (for example, Amber from *f(x)*, Jo Kwon from *2AM*, and Lee Hong-gi from *F.T. Island*) and encourage more egalitarian gender attitudes, most of the mainstream K-pop artists, particularly girl groups, have been conforming to the common stereotypes.

A simple Google image search using the keywords “K-pop girl groups” could provide explanations for why K-pop often receives criticism from its own fans for sexually objectifying women. Revealing costumes, erotic choreographies, close-ups of female idols’ bare legs and waving crotches and hips, as well as depictions of sexual suggestiveness have become props of music videos and live performances of mainstream female idols.

Certainly, the decisions related to costumes, choreography, the *gaze* of the camera, are most likely not for the idols to make. Behind the making of girl groups are their management companies and the broadcasting oligarchs —industries driven by commercial interests. A documentary (*9 Muses of Star Empire*, 2012) about the girl group *Nine Muses* reveals how the senior executive of their management company requires the designer to shorten the group’s skirt length so the media will talk about their girls’ *honey thighs*. Unfortunately, girl idols can only express their embarrassment or shock over their sexualized costumes or racy choreographies as there is typically nothing they can change.<sup>2</sup> When the then top K-pop artists *BoA* and *Wonder Girls* tried to break into the U.S. market, they were both presented by their management companies in a way that merely conformed to the stereotype of Asian women as exotic sexual objects in Western media (Jung, 2010). Popular Korean music television programs owned by Korean broadcasting oligarchs, such as *Inkigayo* and *Music Core*, have also joined the sexual objectification of female idols “through the ways that emcees frame performances and the ways the camera draws attention to sexualized body parts” (Saeji, 2013, p. 329).

---

<sup>2</sup> See *T-ara* and *Gain*’s comments from an article on [extrakorea](https://extrakorea.wordpress.com/2010/03/25/how-k-pop-trainees-are-mistreated/): <https://extrakorea.wordpress.com/2010/03/25/how-k-pop-trainees-are-mistreated/>

There is no denying the sense of empowerment offered by some female idols' images and music, as some images and performances appear to promote a greater openness about sexuality and a freer expression of female sexual desires in a strict society. However, as Epstein and Turnbull (2014) argue, the viewer is generally constructed as male and their expression of desire is "accompanied by a coy and passivity that returns initiative (power) to men." (p. 318)

Sexually objectifying female artists may be the most overt way that K-pop reinforces sexist attitudes against women, however, K-pop also reinforces sexist attitudes in a more subvert way by organizing or manipulating young female idol's femininity to meet role expectations in the patriarchal society. It is not difficult to notice that most of the girl idols' performances are charged with sex appeal and *aegyo*,<sup>3</sup> with sexual suggestiveness often balanced with an innocent, fragile, and childlike *Lolita* concept that was designed mainly to satisfy *ajeossi* (middle-aged men's) fantasies.

Pužar (2011) uses *dollification* to describe this fantasy narrative of women being objectified into petty, sexy-yet-submissive, nonthreatening dolls in K-pop. By closely analyzing the lyrical content and choreography of the music videos of the most representative mainstream girl group, *Girls' Generation*, Oh (2014) argues that although they do not perform in a way that conforms to westernized sexiness, their *hypergirlish-femininity* reaffirms—on the global stage—the conventional femininity, which prioritizes submissiveness, fragility, pureness, and cuteness to conform to the patriarchal expectation of Korean womanhood, i.e., a good wife and a wise mother who serves and boosts the energy of men. In addition, as K-pop girl groups' success has helped Korea win the "global cultural war," sexualization of girl bodies and their femininities have been justified in the promotion of the "idol republic" of Korea (Kim, 2011, p. 342).

Along with sexual objectification and *dollification*, another issue regarding female artists in K-pop that scholars and fans are often concerned about is lookism. Subject to extremely narrow beauty standards set by the industry, K-pop idols, particularly female idols, have been struggling to create and maintain their facial and bodily perfection, which usually involves endless dieting, regular skincare, and plastic/cosmetic surgery. The fact that

---

<sup>3</sup> Pužar (2011) defines *aegyo* as a complex articulation of lovability and cuteness, which is often perceived as attractive and desirable beyond limits of intimate relations.

idols often undergo plastic surgery before their debut has long been an open secret for Koreans and K-pop fans (Fuhr, 2016). The expenses of plastic surgery have been listed by K-pop management companies as costs of cultivating their trainees into idols (Howard, 2016). Recently, a controversial music video from girl group *Six Bomb* has arguably further normalized this phenomenon by using their real-life before and after plastic surgery experiences and videos in their song *Becoming Prettier*.

Lee (2012) details how plastic surgery, which is shaped largely by this lookism in popular culture, has become normalized as economically necessary for success (e.g., in job and marriage markets) not only in Korean society but also transnationally vis-a-vis Hallyu's unsurpassed popularity. Indeed, in reality, boasting the highest number of surgeries performed per capita,<sup>4</sup> Korea has not only become the cosmetic surgery capital of the world<sup>5</sup> but also an important destination for cosmetic surgery tourism, particularly among Asian countries (Epstein & Joo, 2012; Lee, 2012).

Without a doubt, females are not the only ones being sexualized and subjected to lookism in K-pop as many male idols and groups are also often asked to show off their *chocolate abs* for the viewing pleasure of their female fans<sup>6</sup> and held to strict standards of an ideal body. However, as Epstein and Joo (2012) argue, in Korea's patriarchal structure, a muscular body featuring bulging pectorals and six-pack abs (which, in a sense, represents a typical stereotype of masculinity) represents an additional empowerment to men. In contrast, having an attractive appearance, particularly a pair of long, slender legs, seems to be a "must" for women, as "even extremely attractive ones, find that not meeting extraordinarily exacting standards exposes them to public censure" (p. 14).

What are the impacts of these messages about ideal bodies, sexuality, and gender ideologies, which are embedded in K-pop, on its fans (who are mostly young females<sup>7</sup>)? Pužar (2011) argues that young Korean women are

---

<sup>4</sup> Taking into account both non-invasive and invasive procedures.

<sup>5</sup> See articles from The New Yorker and The Washington Post: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/03/23/about-face>, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/05/16/sunning-photos-show-why-south-korea-is-the-plastic-surgery-capital-of-the-world/?utm\\_term=.a6bdd05e5b44](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/05/16/sunning-photos-show-why-south-korea-is-the-plastic-surgery-capital-of-the-world/?utm_term=.a6bdd05e5b44)

<sup>6</sup> A very vivid and illustrative example can be seen in the 2009 television commercial for Market O's *real brownie*, featuring shirtless members of the male group *2PM*

encouraged to become dolls, in terms of appearance, behavior, and expected social roles, and to develop a femininity that does not threaten the current neo-Confucian patriarchal social structure. Moreover, when “dollified” girls and women are considered the norm, there is a “problem of social and physical immobility of undollified girls and their feeling of being left behind” (p. 96).

From a broader perspective, K-pop’s narrow standards about women’s appearance, femininity, and behavior, which in part reflect Korea’s neo-Confucian patriarchal structures, can be expected to be associated with similarly narrow gender attitudes (as illustrated in the following empirical part of this paper) that hold women subordinate to men. Such subtle, yet powerful messages transported via the means of K-pop exports might seem for some young K-pop followers a justification of traditional gender roles. Consumption of K-pop contents might therefore reinforce the gendered division of tasks at home and the workplace, thus undermining international efforts to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls (e.g., the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979, the Millennium Development Goal 3, the Sustainable Development Goal 5).

## Method

In order to identify the relationship between K-pop consumption and gender attitudes, a unique survey has been conducted among K-pop fans/consumers from around the world.

### Survey Design and Data Collection

The questionnaire design was based largely on the *International Men and Gender Equality Survey*<sup>8</sup> and the cross-national *Survey of Family and Changing Gender Roles*,<sup>9</sup> while taking into account the gender-stereotypical behaviors

---

<sup>7</sup> See explanations under *Frequently Used Expressions* on an article about K-pop in The World Library <http://www.worldlibrary.org/articles/k-pop>

<sup>8</sup> Conducted by International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and Instituto Promundo in 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Conducted by International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) in 2012.

reviewed in the previous section and the particular influence of Neo-Confucianism, which plays an important role particularly in East Asia.

The questionnaire consists of three sections. Section one collects basic demographic information, such as age, sex, education level, and nationality of the respondent. Section two includes five questions measuring the level of K-pop consumption of the respondent, such as the time and money spent/ willing to spend on K-pop related activities and products. In section three, respondents' gender attitudes are measured using a set of eighteen statements. Most of these statements, gleaned from the above-mentioned surveys, contain gender stereotypical or sexist proclamations, for example, "In terms of housekeeping and taking care of children, women are naturally better than men." Respondents are instructed to state their levels of agreement with each statement by choosing from a five-point Likert response scale (Strongly agree/ Partially agree/ Neither agree nor disagree/ Partially disagree/ Strongly disagree). Statements on gender attitudes are divided into four themes: gender identity; family life; child-raising practices; and the workplace. The complete list of statements can be found in the appendix.

The survey was disseminated in English, Korean, and Chinese. It was distributed online through three social network sites (SNS), Twitter, Facebook, and Weibo,<sup>10</sup> for three weeks from October 21 to November 8, 2014. The distribution of the survey received major help from two K-pop idols whose images largely conform to mainstream concepts of masculinity and femininity in K-pop: Ok Taec-yeon from the boy group *2PM* and Fei from the girl group *Miss A*. The survey collected a total of 6,317 effective observations from 100 countries, of which 98% reported to be K-pop fans.

**Table 1.**  
***Descriptive Statistics (N=6,317)***

Variable	Description	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Gender attitudes</i>					
Gender attitudes index	Index of 18 statements each with a score of 1 to 5	52.1	13.4	18	90
Statement A	"In terms of housekeeping and taking care of children, women are naturally better than men."	2.66	1.21	1	5
Statement B	"It is embarrassing if husbands earn less than their wives."	3.28	1.27	1	5

<sup>10</sup> Weibo is a Chinese Twitter.



Statement C	“It is natural for men to occupy leading positions at work.”	2.97	1.3	1	5
<i>K-pop consumption</i>					
K-pop fan length	Answer to the question “How long have you been a fan of K-pop/ Hallyu? (coded from 0 to 6 as below)	3.83	1.27	0	6
	<i>Category</i>				<i>Percent</i>
	For 10 or more years (6)				6.5
	For 6 to 9 years (5)				22.0
	For 3 to 5 years (4)				41.1
	For 1 to 2 years (3)				17.8
	For less than one year (2)				6.2
	Since recently (1)				4.2
	I am not a K-pop fan (0)				2.2
K-pop fan expenditures	Willingness to spend in a month for K-pop (in USD; see response categories below; midpoint is used in calculations)	141	227	0	1250
	<i>Category</i>				<i>Percent</i>
	Not a K-pop fan				2.2
	0-50				40.4
	50-100\$				25.0
	100-200\$				17.5
	200-500\$				9.4
	500-1000\$				3.3
	Above 1000\$				2.3
K-pop fan exp./ Family income	Share of K-pop fan expenditure in family income				
	<i>Category</i>				<i>Percent</i>
	No K-pop expenses				2.2
	0 to 1 percent				14.1
	1 to 2 percent				15.8
	2 to 5 percent				26.9
	5 to 10 percent				22.6
	10 to 15 percent				2.6
	above 15 percent				15.8
K-pop fan activities	Frequency of listening/ watching/ following K-pop related music/ videos/ TV programs/ SNS (see response categories below)	6.44	1.34	0	7
	<i>Category</i>				<i>Percent</i>
	Multiple times per day (7)				76.2
	Once per day (6)				9.5
	Multiple times per week (5)				8.9
	Once per week (4)				1.5
	2-3 times per month (3)				0.8

	Once per month (2)	0.2			
	Rarely (1)	0.7			
	Not a K-pop fan (0)	2.2			
<i>Sociodemographics</i>					
Age	Age in years	23.1	6.91	12	70
Sex	<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent</i>			
	Female	96.5			
	Male	3.5			
Household size	Number of household members	4.35	1.71	1	30
Expected educ.	Years of schooling of highest degree attained (if still in education, then of highest expected degree).	17.29	1.45	9	18
M family income	Monthly family income	2606	2327	250	7000
Marital status	<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent</i>			
	Never married	92.5			
	Married or domestic partnership	6.3			
	Separated, divorced, or widowed	1.2			
<i>Nationality</i>					
	Korean	5.1			
	Chinese	27.5			
	Filipino	3.0			
	Indonesian	6.3			
	Japanese	4.4			
	Malaysian	4.2			
	Singaporean	2.1			
	Taiwanese	3.5			
	Thai	26.3			
	Vietnamese	2.0			
	European	2.3			
	North American	4.5			
	Latin American	2.4			
	Other (all other nationalities)	6.4			

---

### Gender Attitudes' Variables

This study uses several dependent variables to measure gender attitudes. First, a *Gender attitudes index* was constructed; it is a composite multi-item measure combining the eighteen attitude-related statements in the questionnaire with equal weights.<sup>11</sup> The level of agreement to each statement

has been coded between 1 and 5 according to the five-point Likert scale. The index, which is the simple sum of the 18 individual variables, is therefore bound between a minimum score of 18 and maximum score of 90 to which higher values correspond to more egalitarian gender attitudes. Besides the aggregate index, three specific statements have been selected to serve as dependent variables as they can be regarded as more illustrative than a combined index. These three statements are: (A) “In terms of housekeeping and taking care of children, women are naturally better than men”; (B) “It’s embarrassing if husbands earn less than their wives”; and (C) “It is natural for men to occupy leading positions at work.” The first statement captures attitudes towards division of labor within the household with a particular focus on unpaid work. The second statement, while also focusing on division of labor, emphasizes the role of earnings, which plays an important role in the intrahousehold bargaining processes (e.g., Bethmann & Rudolf, 2016) and, therefore, in marital outcomes. It refers to the traditional norm in which the man should be the main breadwinner. Finally, the third statement concentrates on issues related to gender segregation at the work place (see also Rudolf, 2014). The top of Table 1 indicates that the mean of the gender attitudes index for the entire sample of 6,317 respondents is 52.1 (SD = 13.4). Statements are coded such that higher numbers indicate stronger disagreement with the non-egalitarian statement. Thus, as for the aggregate index, for statements A to C higher values also correspond to more egalitarian gender attitudes. Simple sample means show that the disagreement is strongest with statement B (norm of man as main breadwinner, sample mean = 3.28) and lowest with statement A (traditional division of (unpaid) labor within the household; mean = 2.66) among the three statement.

### **K-pop Consumption Variables**

As described below, the independent variables are the respondents’ demographic characteristics and four variables reflecting the level of K-pop consumption.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> All 18 gender attitude-related statements can be found in the appendix.

<sup>12</sup> If the respondent stated that he or she is not a K-pop fan, all K-pop consumption variables will be coded 0.

First, *K-pop fan length* is measured by the question “How long have you been a fan of K-pop/ Hallyu?” Respondents can choose from the following answer categories: “For 10 or more years / For 6-9 years ago/ For 3-5 years ago/ For 1-2 years ago/ For less than a year/ Since recently/ Not a K-pop fan.” The responses were coded from 0 to 6, where a higher number reflects more time being a K-pop fan. According to Table 1, 41.1% of all respondents have been following K-pop for 3 to 5 years at the time of the survey, while another 22% report to being a K-pop fan for 6 to 9 years, and another 17.8% for 1 to 2 years.

Second, *K-pop fan expense* reflects fans’ willingness to pay and is measured by the question “How much per month are you willing to spend on your favorite K-pop stars related commodities/ activities? (in US\$)”;

response categories are: “Above 1000/ 500–1000/ 200–500/ 100–200/ 50–100/ 0–50.” The responses have been coded using the mid-point value of the respective expense category. Table 1 shows that 40.4% of all respondents are willing to spend between \$US 0 and 50 per month on K-pop related items; 25% are willing to spend between \$US 50 and 100 per month; while 32.5% of respondents are willing to expend more than \$US 100 a month on K-pop.

Third, *K-pop fan exp./ Family income* is the share of monthly family income that respondents are willing to spend on K-pop commodities and activities. Table 1 shows that about half of all respondents spend between 2 and 10% of their family budget on K-pop products, a non-negligible share.

Fourth, *K-pop fan activities* are measured via the question “How often do you listen to/ watch/ follow your favorite K-pop stars’ music/ video/ TV programs/ SNS?” Respondents can choose from the following response categories: “Multiple times per day/ Once per day/ Multiple times per week/ Once per week/ 2–3 times per month/ Once per month/ Rarely/ Not a K-pop fan.” Responses of this question were coded from 0 to 7 with a higher number indicating more frequent fan activities. Table 1 shows that most respondents (76.2%) are engaged in K-pop-related fan activities multiple times per day.

### **Sociodemographic Profile of Survey Participants**

Table 1 provides additional descriptive statistics on other sociodemographic characteristics of survey respondents that are typically expected to

affect gender attitudes and will be used as control variables in the regression analysis in the next section. The sample's average age is 23.1; 96% of the respondents are female and 93% have never married. Most of the respondents are from Asian countries, and Chinese account for the largest group (27% of the whole sample), followed by Thai (26%). This is driven in part by the K-pop idols that promoted the survey.<sup>13</sup> Average years of schooling are 17.3, indicating that the typical survey participant has graduated from college or is expecting to graduate from college.

### K-pop Fan Expenses and Gender Attitudes

How much survey participants are willing to spend in terms of money on K-pop related items is an important indicator for measuring K-pop consumption and fandom. Table 2 examines the relationship between different levels of *K-pop fan expense* and *K-pop fan exp./ Family income* and the *Gender attitudes index*.

Table 2.  
*K-pop Fan Expenses and Gender Attitudes (N=6,317)*

K-pop fan expense (\$)	Gender attitudes index (mean)	K-pop fan exp./ Family income (%)	Gender attitudes index (mean)
0	53.5	0	53.5
0-50	53	0-1%	56.8
50-100	52.6	1%-2%	54.1
100-200	52.3	2%-5%	52.7
200-500	50.3	5%-10%	50.0
500-1000	45.7	10%-15%	49.3
Above 1000	45.8	Above 15%	48.4

Table 2 suggests that both absolute and relative K-pop consumption are negatively related to egalitarian gender roles. In particular, we see that the gender attitudes index is lower for respondents who report higher expenses on K-pop related commodities and activities.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that Fei from *Miss A* has a Chinese background, while Ok Taec-yeon's bandmate Nickhun is Thai.

## Gender Attitudes by Country/ Region

Individual gender attitudes are a complex construct of cultural, historical, environmental, and religious factors that drive social norms and gender roles in a particular country. What is taken for granted in one country can be viewed as a taboo in another, particularly when it comes to the rights and freedoms of women (Nussbaum, 2001). For example, in Asia, we find that East Asian countries' gender roles are driven by Confucian beliefs of a clear family hierarchy of men above women. However, these Confucian gender norms have largely disappeared if countries experienced a communist system during the past century (e.g., China and Vietnam). On the other hand, majority-Muslim countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, are known to cultivate traditional gender roles imposed by their religion. Western and Latin American countries are known to have more egalitarian gender roles (GGGR, 2015).

Table 3 presents average gender attitudes by country or region of nationality. As expected, we find the most egalitarian gender attitudes in North America (the U.S. and Canada), followed by Latin America and Europe. Of the major Asian countries included in our survey, respondents from Singapore, Vietnam, and the Philippines have the highest scores on the aggregate index, while the lowest scores can be observed for Indonesians, Thai, Koreans, Malaysians, and Japanese. Interestingly, the Chinese scores are only slightly higher than that of Koreans and Japanese. One can also observe interesting heterogeneity when comparing individual statements across countries. For example, Europeans and Chinese do not differ significantly in how they view the gender division of housework and childcare as well as gender segregation at work. Yet, Europeans are more open than Chinese to the possibility that a wife can earn more than her husband.

**Table 3.**  
**Gender Attitudes by Nationality (N=6,317)**

	Korean	Chinese	Filipino	Indone- sian	Japanese	Malaysian	Singapo- rean	Taiwan- ese	Thai	Vietnam- ese	European	North American	Latin American	Other
Gender Attitudes Index	50.2 (12.5)	52.1 (10.4)	55.6 (13.1)	45.2 (10.6)	51.5 (12.2)	50.4 (11.0)	59.4 (13.3)	53.8 (12.4)	46.4 (11.1)	55.9 (13.8)	62.2 (16.3)	71.7 (12.9)	64.1 (13.4)	55.9 (15.0)
Statement A: division of housework/ childcare	2.47 (0.97)	3.08 (1.18)	2.38 (1.11)	2.08 (0.96)	2.57 (1.09)	2.34 (0.99)	2.89 (1.15)	2.96 (1.16)	2.22 (1.03)	2.64 (1.25)	3.01 (1.42)	3.54 (1.27)	3.06 (1.33)	2.48 (1.31)
Statement B: relative income husband-wife	2.97 (1.03)	3.37 (1.17)	3.48 (1.40)	2.74 (1.17)	3.15 (1.23)	3.27 (1.17)	3.76 (1.19)	3.42 (1.16)	2.84 (1.21)	3.53 (1.19)	3.97 (1.27)	4.47 (0.93)	4.03 (1.27)	3.64 (1.33)
Statement C: gender segregation at work	2.99 (1.17)	3.31 (1.21)	3.15 (1.28)	2.22 (1.11)	2.93 (1.24)	2.64 (1.23)	3.37 (1.27)	3.06 (1.27)	2.48 (1.14)	3.07 (1.29)	3.37 (1.50)	3.87 (1.27)	3.47 (1.31)	3.17 (1.46)
Observations	325	1737	190	396	276	266	131	219	1663	129	272	286	151	276

*Note.* Numbers are group means followed by standard deviations in parentheses. Higher group means indicate more egalitarian gender attitudes.

*Gender Attitudes Index* ranges from 18 (least egalitarian gender attitudes) to 90 (most egalitarian gender attitudes).

Statement A: “In terms of housekeeping and taking care of children, women are naturally better than men.”

Statement B: “It is embarrassing if husbands earn less than their wives.”

Statement C: “It is natural for men to occupy leading positions at work.”

All statements measure the level of disagreement with the statement (from 5=“Strongly disagree” to 1=“Strongly agree”); therefore, higher values indicate more egalitarian gender attitudes.

## Estimation Method

To test the hypothesis that a relationship exists between K-pop consumption and gender attitudes, this paper uses multivariate OLS regressions. Eq. (1) below summarizes the model, in which  $GA_i$  is the dependent variable and refers to gender attitudes of individual  $i$ .

$$GA_i = \beta + Kpop'\gamma + X'\delta + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

$Kpop$  refers to a vector containing a set of variables to account for individual  $i$ 's level of K-pop consumption, while  $X$  is a vector that contains variables related to individual  $i$ 's personal demographic and socioeconomic background.

## Results

### Regression of Gender Attitudes Index on K-pop Consumption

Table 4 presents the results of estimating equation (1) using the gender attitudes index as the dependent variable. Models (1) to (4) estimate over the entire sample, but each uses a different combination of the four K-pop consumption variables. All models control for a number of sociodemographic characteristics and the nationality of the respondent.

Models (1) to (3) include the three measures of K-pop fandom individually. Several observations can be made. The coefficient of K-pop fan length is positive, but not statistically significant in model (1).<sup>14</sup> In model (2), the willingness to pay (WTP) for K-pop items is expressed as a share of family income. Findings show that the more respondents spend on K-pop products (relative to family income), the lower they tend to score on the gender attitudes index. For example, compared to the reference group (with a K-pop WTP of 2–5% of family income (the most frequent category in the sample)), individuals with a WTP of 10–15% of their family income score on average 3.489 points lower on the index. Model (3) controls for the frequency of K-pop fan activities and suggests that more fre-

---

<sup>14</sup> Note that the asterisks in the regression tables indicate whether a coefficient is statistically significant or not. Non-significant coefficients suggest no relationship.  
\* $p < .1$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ .



quent activities are related to less egalitarian gender attitudes (coefficient = -0.277).

**Table 4.**  
***K-pop Consumption and Gender Attitudes (Aggregate Index)***

Dependent variable: Gender Attitudes Index						
	All	All	All	All	Less egalitarian nationals	More egalitarian nationals
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>K-pop consumption</i>						
K-pop fan length	0.155 (0.129)			0.438*** (0.138)	0.249 (0.204)	0.574*** (0.188)
K-pop fan exp./ Family income						
no K-pop expenses		1.834 (1.236)		2.886* (1.725)	4.983** (2.411)	0.820 (2.442)
0 to 1 percent		1.844*** (0.523)		1.855*** (0.523)	1.251 (0.766)	2.008*** (0.714)
1 to 2 percent		0.706 (0.478)		0.707 (0.478)	0.865 (0.692)	0.509 (0.654)
2 to 5 percent		Reference		Reference	Reference	Reference
5 to 10 percent		-1.223*** (0.438)		-1.272*** (0.437)	-1.062* (0.602)	-1.445** (0.631)
10 to 15 percent		-3.489*** (1.002)		-3.488*** (0.998)	-3.688*** (1.319)	-3.213** (1.513)
above 15 percent		-2.591*** (0.491)		-2.669*** (0.491)	-3.582*** (0.654)	-1.547** (0.742)
K-pop fan activities			-0.277** (0.125)	-0.103 (0.167)	0.00170 (0.218)	-0.275 (0.252)
<i>Sociodemographics</i>						
Age	0.0494* (0.0277)	0.0590** (0.0274)	0.0487* (0.0277)	0.0496* (0.0277)	0.157*** (0.0357)	-0.0941** (0.0432)
Sex	0.706 (0.962)	1.196 (0.958)	1.096 (0.967)	1.247 (0.961)	2.684* (1.371)	0.411 (1.343)
Household size	-0.575*** (0.0935)	-0.567*** (0.0929)	-0.578*** (0.0933)	-0.569*** (0.0932)	-0.235* (0.133)	-0.850*** (0.128)
Expected educ.	0.758*** (0.106)	0.735*** (0.104)	0.757*** (0.105)	0.725*** (0.104)	0.784*** (0.136)	0.572*** (0.164)
Ln M family income (natural log)	1.218*** (0.147)	0.549*** (0.189)	1.215*** (0.147)	0.515*** (0.189)	0.104 (0.248)	1.026*** (0.285)

Never married	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Married or domestic partnership	-3.696 <sup>***</sup> (0.704)	-3.859 <sup>***</sup> (0.699)	-3.807 <sup>***</sup> (0.703)	-3.736 <sup>***</sup> (0.701)	-3.589 <sup>***</sup> (1.028)	-3.523 <sup>***</sup> (0.944)
Separated, divorced, or widowed	-3.259 <sup>**</sup> (1.493)	-3.291 <sup>**</sup> (1.466)	-3.470 <sup>**</sup> (1.491)	-3.206 <sup>**</sup> (1.475)	-3.266 <sup>*</sup> (1.766)	-2.981 (2.574)
<i>Nationality</i>						
Korean	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	
Chinese	2.454 <sup>***</sup> (0.757)	2.329 <sup>***</sup> (0.726)	2.358 <sup>***</sup> (0.736)	2.871 <sup>***</sup> (0.751)		Reference
Filipino	5.617 <sup>***</sup> (1.171)	6.272 <sup>***</sup> (1.136)	5.620 <sup>***</sup> (1.166)	6.745 <sup>***</sup> (1.148)		3.856 <sup>***</sup> (0.986)
Indonesian	-4.199 <sup>***</sup> (0.885)	-4.089 <sup>***</sup> (0.872)	-4.218 <sup>***</sup> (0.878)	-3.734 <sup>***</sup> (0.881)	-4.257 <sup>***</sup> (0.915)	
Japanese	0.938 (1.035)	1.658 (1.027)	1.076 (1.037)	1.937 <sup>*</sup> (1.031)	1.111 (1.075)	
Malay	1.283 (0.993)	1.312 (0.977)	1.284 (0.987)	1.664 <sup>*</sup> (0.983)	0.891 (1.022)	
Singaporean	8.969 <sup>***</sup> (1.349)	9.301 <sup>***</sup> (1.328)	9.015 <sup>***</sup> (1.347)	9.667 <sup>***</sup> (1.330)		6.522 <sup>***</sup> (1.193)
Taiwanese	4.406 <sup>***</sup> (1.084)	4.205 <sup>***</sup> (1.056)	4.108 <sup>***</sup> (1.068)	4.803 <sup>***</sup> (1.072)		2.859 <sup>***</sup> (0.870)
Thai	-3.813 <sup>***</sup> (0.746)	-3.433 <sup>***</sup> (0.730)	-3.792 <sup>***</sup> (0.742)	-3.169 <sup>***</sup> (0.736)	-3.329 <sup>***</sup> (0.753)	
Vietnamese	6.557 <sup>***</sup> (1.359)	6.701 <sup>***</sup> (1.356)	6.555 <sup>***</sup> (1.353)	7.043 <sup>***</sup> (1.362)		4.132 <sup>***</sup> (1.200)
European	12.02 <sup>***</sup> (1.200)	11.70 <sup>***</sup> (1.178)	11.90 <sup>***</sup> (1.188)	12.19 <sup>***</sup> (1.187)		9.349 <sup>***</sup> (1.010)
North American	20.86 <sup>***</sup> (1.024)	20.63 <sup>***</sup> (1.016)	20.85 <sup>***</sup> (1.024)	21.03 <sup>***</sup> (1.021)		17.95 <sup>***</sup> (0.840)
Latin American	13.87 <sup>***</sup> (1.270)	14.13 <sup>***</sup> (1.247)	13.86 <sup>***</sup> (1.269)	14.56 <sup>***</sup> (1.249)		11.66 <sup>***</sup> (1.084)
Other	6.289 <sup>***</sup> (1.135)	6.439 <sup>***</sup> (1.122)	6.301 <sup>***</sup> (1.132)	6.824 <sup>***</sup> (1.131)		4.221 <sup>***</sup> (0.981)
Constant	28.21 <sup>***</sup> (2.463)	33.67 <sup>***</sup> (2.548)	30.31 <sup>***</sup> (2.536)	32.85 <sup>***</sup> (2.780)	29.94 <sup>***</sup> (3.537)	40.30 <sup>***</sup> (4.195)
Observations	6,317	6,317	6,317	6,317	2,926	3,391
Adj. R-squared	0.243	0.251	0.244	0.252	0.0787	0.230

*Note.* Robust standard errors in parentheses. Low-gender-equality nationals include Koreans, Indonesians, Japanese, Malay, and Thai and are used in model (5); all other nationals are included in model (6).  $p < .1$ ,  $**p < .05$ ,  $***p < .01$ .

Model (4) includes all K-pop consumption variables at the same time. It confirms the finding that K-pop expenses are negatively related to egalitarian gender attitudes. The more individuals spend on K-pop, the lower their score on the aggregate gender attitudes index. Compared to models (1) and (3), however, the coefficients for K-pop fan length and fan activities have changed. Fan length is now positive and significant, while the coefficient of fan activities has turned statistically insignificant. Given that model (4) has the highest value of R-squared, it is our preferred specification.

Regression results further suggest that respondents have more egalitarian gender attitudes (i.e., higher index scores) if they are older, better educated, if they live in smaller households, if they live in families with higher incomes, and if they have never married.

Regarding cultural differences across nations that were discussed in the last section, we find striking differences across nationalities. In line with the summary statistics in Table 3, regression results in Table 4 confirm that some nationalities have, on average, more egalitarian gender attitudes than others.<sup>15</sup> The most egalitarian nationalities in our sample are North Americans, followed by Latin Americans, Europeans, Singaporeans, Vietnamese, and Filipinos. On the other hand, the least egalitarian attitudes can be found among Indonesians, Thai, Malay, Koreans, and Japanese. In model (5), we take the respondents from these five less-egalitarian nations and run the regression over only this subsample of respondents. Respondents from more egalitarian nations are then used in model (6).

The positive coefficient of fan length in model (4) was puzzling. It actually indicates that, taking the negative effect of K-pop spending on gender attitudes aside, the longer an individual follows K-pop, the higher will be her gender attitudes index score. So, there seems to be a more complex relationship between being a K-pop fan and gender attitudes. To examine this further, we divided the sample into participants from less egalitarian

---

<sup>15</sup> In a multivariate regression model, a coefficient has to be interpreted *ceteris paribus*, meaning holding all other factors included in the regression constant. For example, for model (4) we can say that Chinese have on average a 2.871 points higher score on the gender attitudes index than Koreans (reference group), if we hold everything else constant. That is, for two individuals, one from China and one from Korea, with identical sociodemographic backgrounds and the same level of K-pop fandom, the Chinese respondent scores on average 2.871 points higher on the index compared to a Korean. This difference can be interpreted as differences in culture and social norms across these two countries.

nations and more egalitarian nations and estimate the regression over each subsample in models (5) and (6). This yields a very interesting finding: For participants from less egalitarian nations, fan length is no longer statistically significant and thus seems to play no role. At the same time, the negative effect of fan expenses has become stronger as compared to model (4). In contrast, for participants from more egalitarian nations, the negative effect of fan expenses has become weaker while fan length shows a significant, positive effect which is larger than in model (4). These findings suggest that K-pop indeed might have heterogeneous effects depending on who consumes it. On the one side, it appears to have a strong negative correlation with egalitarian gender attitudes among followers from nations with already high gender gaps. On the other side, negative effects of K-pop expenses seem to be moderate and might even be cancelled out by fan length for followers from more egalitarian nations.

### **Regression of Selected Gender Statements on K-pop Consumption**

Table 5 presents the results of estimating Eq. (1) using the three thematic statements about gender attitudes as dependent variables. All three statements are typical gender stereotypes, and refer to commonly observed gender discrimination in unpaid work, pay, and promotion. It should be noted that the dependent variables are measured as the level of *disagreement* with each statement. Thus, it is consistent with the coding of the gender attitudes index which means that a higher number indicates more egalitarian gender attitudes.

In column (1) the dependent variable is the level of disagreement with statement A—“In terms of housekeeping and taking care of children, women are naturally better than men.” K-pop fan length and the frequency of K-pop fan activities show statistically insignificant coefficients. The share of K-pop fan expense in family income, however, shows a negative and statistically significant correlation. This indicates that a respondent with higher K-pop expense is more likely to be in favor of a traditional division of labor in which women take care of the home and the family.

**Table 5.**  
***K-pop Consumption and Gender Attitudes (Thematic Statements)***

Dependent variable is the level of <i>disagreement with</i> the statement:			
	A: "In terms of housekeeping and taking care of children, women are naturally better than men."	B: "It is embarrassing if husbands earn less than their wives."	C: "It is natural for men to occupy leading positions at work."
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>K-pop consumption</i>			
K-pop fan length	0.0164 (0.0136)	0.0491*** (0.0143)	0.0350** (0.0144)
K-pop fan exp./ Family income			
no K-pop expenses	0.242 (0.159)	0.0702 (0.167)	0.287* (0.172)
0 to 1 percent	0.0124 (0.0495)	-0.0235 (0.0506)	0.146*** (0.0529)
1 to 2 percent	0.0142 (0.0458)	0.0266 (0.0464)	0.147*** (0.0491)
2 to 5 percent	Reference	Reference	Reference
5 to 10 percent	-0.0945** (0.0437)	-0.123*** (0.0459)	-0.128*** (0.0473)
10 to 15 percent	-0.180* (0.0937)	-0.217** (0.106)	-0.264*** (0.0976)
above 15 percent	-0.127*** (0.0478)	-0.268*** (0.0522)	-0.191*** (0.0520)
K-pop fan activities	0.00346 (0.0156)	-0.00584 (0.0162)	-0.00533 (0.0168)
<i>Sociodemographics</i>			
Age	0.00480* (0.00266)	0.00617** (0.00271)	0.0119*** (0.00279)
Sex	0.0489 (0.0850)	0.283*** (0.0900)	0.320*** (0.0875)
Household size	-0.0325*** (0.00894)	-0.0334*** (0.00972)	-0.0484*** (0.0102)
Expected educ.	0.0391*** (0.00952)	0.0570*** (0.0107)	0.0532*** (0.0108)
Ln M family income	0.00273	0.00432	-0.00661

	(0.0178)	(0.0191)	(0.0191)
Never married	Reference	Reference	Reference
Married or domestic partnership	-0.296*** (0.0695)	-0.160** (0.0730)	-0.282*** (0.0731)
Separated, divorced, or widowed	-0.322** (0.126)	-0.151 (0.130)	-0.258 (0.162)
<i>Nationality</i>			
Korean	Reference	Reference	Reference
Chinese	0.627*** (0.0643)	0.457*** (0.0671)	0.389*** (0.0731)
Filipino	-0.0411 (0.0998)	0.602*** (0.116)	0.290*** (0.111)
Indonesian	-0.364*** (0.0752)	-0.182** (0.0849)	-0.683*** (0.0873)
Japanese	0.127 (0.0886)	0.159 (0.0967)	-0.0834 (0.101)
Malay	-0.0759 (0.0853)	0.382*** (0.0949)	-0.237** (0.102)
Singaporean	0.449*** (0.114)	0.828*** (0.118)	0.446*** (0.128)
Taiwanese	0.541*** (0.0979)	0.518*** (0.0989)	0.131 (0.109)
Thai	-0.240*** (0.0609)	-0.111* (0.0653)	-0.469*** (0.0709)
Vietnamese	0.222* (0.123)	0.648*** (0.122)	0.198 (0.130)
European	0.540*** (0.102)	1.015*** (0.0974)	0.390*** (0.111)
North American	1.054*** (0.0937)	1.492*** (0.0798)	0.863*** (0.0992)
Latin American	0.610*** (0.121)	1.106*** (0.118)	0.560*** (0.124)
Other	0.0630 (0.0985)	0.750*** (0.0991)	0.294*** (0.110)
Constant	1.713***	1.579***	1.629***

	(0.253)	(0.275)	(0.279)
Observations	6,317	6,317	6,317
Adj. R-squared	0.130	0.133	0.135

*Note.* Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .1$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

With regard to statement B—“It is embarrassing if husbands earn less than their wives”—results again confirm the relationship between K-pop fan expenses and gender attitudes. K-pop fans are more likely to support the traditional view that the man should be the family’s main breadwinner. The effect found here is stronger in magnitude compared to the one in the previous regression. K-pop fan length is positive and significant; however, its coefficient is rather low, indicating that the length of being a fan does have, at most, a limited effect on gender attitudes.

Finally, results of regressing statement C—“It is natural for men to occupy leading positions at work”—are shown in column (3) of Table 4. Findings indicate that individuals with higher K-pop fan expenses are more likely to support gender segregation at work. Hence, K-pop fans appear to be more supportive of a gendered division of labor also within the work sphere.

With regard to the effects of demographic characteristics, the results from Table 5 are largely consistent with the findings in Table 4. Interestingly, while females do not differ from males in their attitudes towards housekeeping and childcare (statement A), they are more likely to disagree with men being the main breadwinner (statement B) and with gender segregation at work (statement C).

## Conclusions

It seems evident that there is a connection between gender stereotypes in the media and traditional gender attitudes. Thus, it is reasonable to suspect that the prevalence of sexual objectification and sexist portrayals in K-pop are reinforcing Korea’s “unfailing” patriarchal culture and are, therefore, obstructing the goal of gender equality. This paper provides empirical evidence for this argument by using a new data set to identify the relationship between the consumption of K-pop and the level of egalitarian gender

attitudes.

This study's findings indicate that a higher level of K-pop consumption is related to less egalitarian gender attitudes among K-pop fans across the world. The results hold true for both aggregate gender attitudes as well as for specific perceptions about the division of labor within the household and at the workplace. Survey results also reveal differences among demographic groups. Being a woman, being more educated, and living in a richer household are related to more open gender attitudes. This study further confirms the important role of culture in explaining gender roles. Most Asian countries are still lagging behind Western countries in terms of gender equality in the mindsets of the younger generation. We also find that K-pop reinforces traditional gender norms more strongly in countries already suffering from low gender equality, such as Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, and Korea.

This paper has provided rare evidence of an important phenomenon—pop culture—in the study of gender attitudes and their formation. While this constitutes a significant contribution to the feminist debate in Asia, there are two major limitations in the nature of the survey that call for additional research. First, as the data used in this study comes from an online survey that was mainly collected via the SNS profiles of two famous K-pop stars, the sample population is unlikely to be representative of the population of K-pop fans as a whole. However, this concern is partly mitigated by the fact that it is a large sample and that most K-pop fans are active on SNS. Controlling for observed characteristics related to gender attitudes should have further minimized the bias. Second, although the analysis has identified a correlation between consumption of K-pop and consumers' gender attitudes, it is not able to directly identify causality. It is reasonable to assume that this relationship is mutually reinforcing. On one hand, it is clear that what we consume shapes our ideas of how the world functions. On the other hand, it is likely that people with more traditional gender attitudes are more likely to be attracted to K-pop in the first place. Thus, while we believe that our results convey important new information, the coefficients must be interpreted with caution. Accordingly, further research is required.



## References

- Aubrey, J. S., & Frisby, C. M. (2011). Sexual objectification in music videos: A content analysis comparing gender and genre. *Mass Communication and Society, 14*(4), 475–501.
- Bethmann, D., & Rudolf, R. (2016). Happily ever after? Intrahousehold bargaining and the distribution of utility within marriage. *Review of Economics of the Household, 1*–30.
- Epstein, S., & Joo, R. M. (2012). Multiple exposures: Korean bodies and the transnational imagination. *The Asia-Pacific Journal, 10*(33), 1–17.
- Epstein, S., & Turnbull, J. (2014). Girls' Generation? Gender (Dis) Empowerment, and K-Pop. In K. H. Kim (Ed.), *The Korean popular culture reader* (pp. 314–336). Durham, NC; Duke University Press.
- Fuhr, M. (2016). K-Pop music and transnationalism. In Y. Kim (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of Korean culture and society* (pp. 283–296). New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR). (2015, November 19). Switzerland. *World Economic Forum*. Retrieved April 29, 2016, from <http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2015>
- Howard, K. (2016). Mapping K-Pop past and present: Shifting the modes of exchange. In I. Oh & G. S. Park (Eds.), *The political economy of business ethics in East Asia: A historical and comparative perspective* (pp. 95–111). London: Elsevier.
- Jung, E. Y. (2010). Playing the race and sexuality cards in the transnational pop game: Korean music videos for the US market. *Journal of Popular Music Studies, 22*(2), 219–236.
- Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA). (2016). 2016 statistics of Korea's creative content industry. Retrieved August 16, 2017, from <http://www.kocca.kr/cop/bbs/list/B0000148.do?menuNo=200907>
- Kalof, L. (1999). The effects of gender and music video imagery on sexual attitudes. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 139*(3), 378–385.
- Kistler, M. E., & Lee, M. J. (2009). Does exposure to sexual hip-hop music videos influence the sexual attitudes of college students? *Mass Communication and Society, 13*(1), 67–86.
- Kim, Y. (2011). Idol republic: The global emergence of girl industries and the commercialization of girl bodies. *Journal of Gender Studies, 20*(4), 333–345.
- Lauzen, M. M., Dozier, D. M., & Horan, N. (2008). Constructing gender stereotypes through social roles in prime-time television. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 52*(2), 200–214.
- Lee, S. H. (2012). *The (geo) politics of beauty: Race, transnationalism, and neoliberalism in South*

- Korean beauty culture* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan). Available from University of Michigan Library: Deep Blue.
- Leong, M. (2014, August 2). How Korea became the world's coolest brand. *Financial Post*. Retrieved July 10, 2015, from <http://business.financialpost.com/news/retail-marketing/how-korea-became-the-worlds-coolest-brand>
- Na, J. J. (2013, February 6). Eximbank to finance 'hallyu' businesses. *The Korea Times*. Retrieved July 10, 2015, from [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/biz/2013/02/602\\_130133.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/biz/2013/02/602_130133.html)
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2001). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach (Vol. 3)*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Oh, C. (2014). The politics of the dancing body: Racialized and gendered femininity in Korean pop. In Y. Kuwahara (Ed.), *The Korean Wave* (pp. 53–81). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). (2017, February). *PwC Women in Work Index. Closing the gender pay gap*. Retrieved March 7, 2017, from <https://www.pwc.co.uk/economic-services/WIWI-2017/pwc-women-in-work-2017-report-final.pdf>
- Pužar, A. (2011). Asian dolls and the westernized gaze: Notes on the female dollification in South Korea. *Asian Women*, 27(2), 81–111.
- Rudolf, R. (2014). Work shorter, be happier? Longitudinal evidence from the Korean five-day working policy. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 15(5), 1139–1163.
- Rudolf, R., & Kang, S. J. (2015). Lags and leads in life satisfaction in Korea: When gender matters. *Feminist Economics*, 21(1), 136–163.
- Saeji, C. T. (2013). Juvenile protection and sexual objectification: Analysis of the performance frame in Korean music television broadcasts. *Acta Koreana*, 16(2), 329–365.
- Seidman, S. A. (1992). Profile: An investigation of sex-role stereotyping in music videos. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 36(2), 209–216.
- The Economist. (2016, March 3). The best—and worst—places to be a working woman: The glass-ceiling index. *The Economist*. Retrieved July 10, 2016, from <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/03/daily-chart-0>
- The Korea Foundation. (2017). *Global Hallyu 2016* (Korean version), Retrieved February 23, 2017, from <http://ebook.kf.or.kr/>
- Wood, J. T. (1994). Gendered media: The influence of media on views of gender. In J. T. Wood (Ed.), *Gendered lives: Communication, gender and culture* (pp. 231–244). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Yonhap. (2016, January 26). Exports of Korea's content industry exceed US\$5 billion in 2014. *Yonhap News Agency*. Retrieved July 12, 2016, from <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/business/2016/01/26/6/0501000000AEN20160126006200315F.html>

## Appendix

### *Questionnaire, Section 3: Statements on Gender Attitudes*

#### Section 3: Gender attitudes - Statements

- 1 To be a man means you should possess the qualities of masculinity and assertiveness.
- 2 To be a woman means you should possess the qualities of femininity and submissiveness.
- 3 Men should be stronger than women physically and mentally.
- 4 A man should protect a woman from being hurt even when the woman is physically stronger than the man.
- 5 Economically, it is more beneficial for a woman to find a good marriage than working hard in the workplace.
- 6 Instead of focusing on climbing the career ladder, it's wiser for a woman to put in more time and energy towards her appearance (skin care, hair, keeping fit, fashion, etc.).
- 7 Men should pay as much attention to their physical appearance as women.
- 8 It's natural for a boyfriend to take care of all the expenses when dating his girlfriend.
- 9 In terms of housekeeping and taking care of children, women are naturally better than men.
- 10 It's embarrassing if husbands earn less than their wives.
- 11 It's not a problem for a husband to be a full-time housekeeper or a stay-at-home dad if his wife's income is sufficient.
- 12 Sons, not daughters, are financially responsible for their parents after retirement.
- 13 As a part of a child's development, young boys have to recognize the importance of cultivating a masculine identity.
- 14 As a part of a child's development, young girls have to realize the need to develop feminine characteristics.
- 15 It is natural for men to occupy leading positions at work.
- 16 It's natural for men to get promotions easier than women.
- 17 It's almost impossible for a woman to balance her career and her love life/ marriage/ children/ family, if she is aiming for the top in her career.
- 18 If a woman decided to keep working after getting married, she should try to find an "easier" job or part-time job.

*Note.* Response categories: Strongly agree/ Partially agree/ Neither agree nor disagree/ Partially disagree/ Strongly disagree. The five response categories have been coded on a scale from 1 to 5. All statements have been (re)coded so that a higher score indicates a more egalitarian gender attitude.

*Biographical Note:* **Xi Lin** is a Ph.D. student in Graduate School of International Studies at Korea University, Korea. Her academic interest is in gender studies, gender stereotypes in the media and women's rights.  
E-mail: xlin@korea.ac.kr

*Biographical Note:* **Robert Rudolf (Corresponding Author)** is an associate professor in the Division of International Studies at Korea University, Korea. His academic interest is in economics of development, gender, subjective well-being, poverty/inequality, rural development, East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Email: rrudolf@korea.ac.kr