'They Make Me Very Happy': Practices, Perceptions, And Affective Connections of K-pop Fans in Canada

by

Courtney McLaren

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Declaration of Committee

Name:	**Courtney McLaren**
Degree:	**Master of Arts**
Thesis title:	**'They Make Me Very Happy': Practices, Perceptions, And Affective Connections of K-pop Fans in Canada**
Committee:	**Chair:** Sun-ha Hong Assistant Professor, Communication
	Dal Yong Jin Supervisor Professor, Communication
	Ahmed Al-Rawi Committee Member Assistant Professor, Communication
	Kyong Yoon Examiner Professor, Creative and Critical Studies

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Abstract

As the expansion K-pop and the Korean Wave continues to develop in tandem with digital media technologies and the global fandoms that form around them, questions surrounding the flows of media, images, ideas, capital, and people as well as meaning and affect across borders continue to warrant investigation in order to further understandings of mediated globalized processes of cultural reception, negotiation, and exchange. Through a framework of transcultural fandom, parasocial relationships, and understandings of fan affect, this thesis undertakes an examination of the role affective identities and attachments of K-pop fans plays in the motivation of fan practices and the development of perceptions and understandings of cultural difference.

Keywords: K-pop; transcultural fandom; affect; parasocial relationships; Korean Wave;

Acknowledgements

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Glossary

SuperM	A seven-member boy group under SM Entertainment, made up of members from pre-existing groups including EXO, SHINee, and NCT
SHINee	A five-member boy group under SM Entertainment. Members: Onew, Jonghyun, Key, Minho, Taemin
Shawol	Short-form of SHINee World, the name given to SHINee fans
BTS	A seven-member boy group under Hybe Corporation's (formerly Big Hit Entertainment) Big Hit Music.
ARMY	'Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth'; the name given to BTS fans
Wonder Girls	A seven-member girl group under JYP Entertainment. Was active from 2007 to 2017, and has since disbanded.
Girl's Generation	Initially a nine-member girl group under SM Entertainment, they currently promote with 8 members.
EXO	Initially a twelve-member group under SM Entertainment split into two six-member subunits to concurrently promote in Korea and China, they currently promote with nine members.
Twice	A nine-member girl group under JYP Entertainment.
NCT	A sub-unit team consisting of 23 total members under SM Entertainment. An acronym for *Neo Culture Technology*, the members are organized into subgroups including NCT Dream, NCT-127, and NCT U as well as their localized Chinese subunit WayV.
Monsta X	Initially a six-member group under Starship Entertainment, they currently promote with five members.
VIXX	Initially a seven-member group under Jellyfish Entertainment, they currently promote with six members.
TVXQ	Initially a five-member group under SM Entertainment, they currently promote with two members.
Blackpink	A four-member girl group under YG Entertainment.
Bias	A fan term meaning 'favourite'. *e.g., "who is your bias?" "Leo from VIXX."*
Fancam	'Fan Camera'; videos taken by fans during performances including concerts and weekly awards shows. Often focuses on one specific member of a group.
MV	'Music Video'

Chapter 1.

1.1. Introduction

On February 6th 2020 my friends and I found ourselves at the Rogers Arena, lightsticks lit up and waving in anticipation for the lights to dim and the music to start. One friend's first Korean pop music (hereafter K-pop) concert and the other's third, I was excited to share my favourite K-pop group with my friends - or, well, one-seventh of my favourite group. We were at the newly debuted SuperM's concert in Vancouver, the last stop on their first North American tour. Made up of seven members from four pre-existing groups under the SM Entertainment label - including Taemin from SHINee, SuperM became the first group to have a U.S. debut prior to debuting in South Korea through a partnership between SM Entertainment and Capital Music Group. Despite trepidation from fans, SuperM became the first Korean act to debut at Number one on the US Billboard 200 albums chart and performed to packed arenas in Vancouver and the States. Since then, SuperM have released their first studio album and became the first group to hold a pay-per-view live-streamed online concert Beyond the Future, the inaugural live-streamed concert of SM Entertainment's Beyond LIVE concert series.

To not begin a thesis on K-pop with BTS (Korean: *Bangtan Seonyandan;* English: Beyond The Scene) may seem strange, especially considering their record-breaking music videos, chart topping albums, sold out concert tours, and awards too numerous to count. BTS' global appeal has thrust K-pop and South Korean (hereafter Korean) pop culture into more mainstream discourse, and since then groups such as Monsta X, Blackpink, and NCT alongside SuperM have forayed into the U.S. music market with notable success. The current moment of K-pop, backed by BTS' phenomenal popularity, is arguably the biggest yet following the mid-2010s *Gangnam Style* phenomenon. K-pop music and content is more accessible than ever thanks to YouTube, Spotify, and VLIVE[1] while fans congregate on various social media platforms

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[1] Vlive is a livestreaming/broadcast platform that creates a 'community where stars and fans connect' where fans can watch live broadcasts of idol content, including general livestreams, game shows, and full concerts, and leave comments and 'hearts' during broadcasts as a way of interacting with idols (*About V LIVE*, n.d.)

such as Twitter and Instagram to consume, create, and spread K-pop content as well as interact with each other and, increasingly, with idols. K-pop fandom is more visible than ever thanks to intense and effective organization and online coordination, particularly by ARMY, BTS' fandom, who regularly coordinate globally to view, listen, and promote BTS as well as fundraise, hold fan events, and recently organize global conferences such as the second *BTS: An Interdisciplinary Conference* held virtually this past May. K-pop fans, ARMY included, were also visible during the Black Lives Matter protests and presidential election during the summer and fall of 2020 as they circulated posts explaining U.S. racial issues on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok and raising funds for protestors such as ARMY's match a million goal to match the donation by BTS and Hybe (formerly Big Hit Entertainment) for Black Lives Matter. The trolling of Donald Trump by K-pop fans and other social media users was a popular conversation point as fans and TikTok users urged each other to register for Trump's presidential rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma and not attend, contributing to the supposed one million registered attendees bragged about by Trump leading up to the rally. Hilarity ensued when the venue was near vacant, with only 6200 out of 19,000 seats filled, and TikTok teens and K-pop fans were given partial credit for the low attendance by commentators, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (Chan, 2020b; Hollingsworth, 2020) Fans also spammed the Dallas Police reporting app with fancams [2]and photos of K-pop idols when the Department requested footage of 'illegal activity' during protests and hijacked the hashtag #MillionMAGAMarch promoting the white supremacist group Proud Boys' and other Trump supporters' march to Washington D.C. with photos of pancakes in an attempt to 'Make America Pancakes Again' with the phrase 'Million MAPA Brunch' (Chan, 2020a).

The current visibility of K-pop and other Korean Wave products such as the critically acclaimed Bong Joon-ho film *Parasite* and popular Netflix Korean dramas (stylized as K-dramas) as well as the fan audiences surrounding them in countries such as Canada, the U.S., the U.K., Europe, Latin America, and various countries in the middle east such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates signifies an increasing complexity of transnational flows during a mediated era of globalization as the

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[2] A portmanteau of 'fan' and 'camera', fancams are videos recorded by fans at weekly awards shows or concerts from a fan point-of-view perspective which are then uploaded online, and often focus on one specific idol within a group. A common means of promoting a group or an idol as well as a trolling tactic to annoy objects of fans' ire, clips of fancams are shared across a number of platforms including YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram.

consumption of non-local popular culture by audiences across the globe continues to raise questions surrounding the production, circulation and consumption of Korean popular culture. Various topics relating to the study of the Korean Wave include explorations of its development[3] (Howard, 2013; B. Kim, 2015; Y. Kim, 2013b; Shim, 2008); the role of the government and cultural policy (Jin, 2016; Jin & Ryoo, 2016; Kwon & Kim, 2014); textual analyses of K-pop and K-dramas through lenses of gender, race, and place (C. S. Anderson, 2020; E.-Y. Jung, 2009; T. K. Kim & Park, 2019; Y. Oh, 2018; H. Shin, 2009); audience reception (Ko et al., 2014; McLaren & Jin, 2020; Otmazgin & Lyan, 2014; K. Yoon, 2018, p. 201, 2019); the role of technology and the New Korean Wave (Jin, 2016, 2018; S.-Y. Kim, 2018; Sung, 2013); and theoretical interrogations of the flows and power relations influencing and influenced by the Korean Wave (Jin, 2017; H. Lee, 2017; Nye & Kim, 2013). As the expansion of the Korean Wave, particularly K-pop, and the global fandoms that form around them continues to develop in tandem with digital media technologies and global fandom, various questions surrounding the flows of media, images, ideas, capital, and people as well as meaning and affect across borders continue to warrant investigation in order to further understandings of mediated globalized processes of cultural reception, negotiation, and exchange. By investigating the ways in which K-pop fans in Canada participate in fandom and perceive K-pop, Korea, and Korean popular culture, this thesis explores how the various affective flows and identities constructed by fans serve to motivate their participation in fandom and their understandings of cultural difference.

1.2. Contextualizing K-pop

K-pop is one part of a broader collection of Korean popular culture known as the Korean Wave, which primarily emerged in the late 1990s with the importing of Korean TV dramas (K-dramas) by China, Japan, and Taiwan. The drama *What is Love All About* was so popular in China that it was re-aired in 1998, and in 1999 the Chinese media began using the term *Hanliu* (Hallyu) to describe the growing audience demand for

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[3] Works on the development of the Korean Wave have explored the rise of K-drama popularity in East Asia, particularly in Japan, Taiwan, and China, and the underlying mechanisms that contributed to the spread of Korean pop culture across borders, including the influence of neoliberal capitalism (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; G. Kim, 2019), government policy (Jin & Ryoo, 2016; Kwon & Kim, 2014; Shim, 2008), audience reception (E.-Y. Jung, 2009; S. Jung, 2011; Ko et al., 2014; Otmazgin & Lyan, 2014), etc.

Korean dramas in neighbouring East Asian countries (Howard, 2013; E.-Y. Jung, 2009; Shim, 2008), while the 2002 drama *Winter Sonata* was such a hit in Japan that it developed a mass fan following of its lead actor Bae Yong Joon (Jung, 2009). This early era of the Korean Wave, called Hallyu 1.0, was characterized by the consumption of K-dramas as well as video games and films in East Asia from 1997 to the late 2000s, with audiences primarily made up of women in their 30s and 40s (Jin, 2016). While K-pop was not a major driver of Hallyu 1.0, it was during this period of the late 1990s into the early 2000s the K-pop industry was developing as musicians experimented with western sounds and the first era of idol groups were established. Pioneered by Lee Soo Man[4], the K-pop industry is the outcome of an adapted form of the Japanese idol (*aidoru*) production industry (K. Yoon, 2017), influences from Motown era rhythmic styles and movements (C. S. Anderson, 2020), and experimentation with Western, primarily African-American musical styles, fashion, and dance (Howard, 2013; S. I. Shin & Kim, 2013). A significant example of pre-idol era influences on what became the K-pop industry can be seen in Seo Taiji and Boys, who debuted in 1991 and went on to popularize rap, hip-hop, reggae, and metal in mainstream Korean music, and also normalized the trend of pairing choreography with vocal performance through their signature style of 'rap dance' (Howard, 2013; E.-Y. Jung, 2015; Maliangkay, 2014). Seo Taiji and Boys disbanded in 1996, but their legacy could be seen in what Jung (2015) called the first wave of K-pop, with groups such as HOT, Baby Vox, and Shinhwa produced through SM Entertainment's in-house training system and gaining notable popularity among audiences in China and Japan. The second wave of K-pop saw soloists such as BoA, Rain, and Se7en sweep Asia and gain fan followings further abroad. Despite success in Japan on the parts of BoA and Rain as well as Rain's ground-breaking Hollywood role in the film *Ninja Assassin* in 2009, attempts to break into the American music market taken by each of these three idols fell flat[5], confirming the

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[4] SM Studio (rebranded as SM Entertainment in 1995) was founded in 1988 by Lee Soo Man with the hopes of developing the Korean music market in ways that replicated various practices Lee had seen during his time in the U.S. (S. I. Shin & Kim, 2013), and became the first idol entertainment company. Through trial and error, Lee developed a systematic in-house production method adapted from the Japanese *aidoru* (idol) production system to train and develop aspiring stars (S. I. Shin & Kim, 2013; K. Yoon, 2017).

[5] Localization strategies used in the promotion of BoA and Rain in Japan included intensive language training, westernized sounds and fashion styles, and partnerships with local music labels such as AVEX in order to appeal to Japanese audiences(Jin, 2016; E.-Y. Jung, 2015; Maliangkay, 2015; H. Shin, 2009). However, the same localization practices that were adopted during attempts to break into the American market, including English language songs and fashion

complicated uncertainty of transnational cultural flows (E.-Y. Jung, 2015; T. K. Kim & Park, 2019; H. Shin, 2009).

These early examples of idols are part of what Eun-Young Jung (2015) has categorized as the first and second waves of K-pop. A means of historicizing the rise of K-pop, Jung (2015). categorizes the first wave as boy and girl groups such as Shinhwa, H.O.T, Baby VOX, and S.E.S; the second group as male and female soloists including BoA and Rain; the third group marking a return to idol groups with TVXQ, Wonder Girls, and Super Junior; and the fourth wave of groups including Big Bang, Girl's Generation, SHINee, 2NE1 which emerged during the adoption and adaption of digital media technologies by fans and label companies. The first wave of K-pop was during the period of industry development as SM Entertainment and other companies such as JYP Entertainment (founded by Park Jin-Young) and YG Entertainment (founded by Yang Hyun-suk of Seo Taiji and Boys) were experimenting with systematic in-house production and western music forms to produce music groups (E.-Y. Jung, 2015; S. I. Shin & Kim, 2013). This wave of early idol music was characterized by "catchy melodies, simple harmonic progressions, group dance movements, English words and short phrases, and trendy fashion styles" that were consumed primarily by audiences across East Asia E.-Y. Jung, 2015, p. 77). The second wave of soloists including BoA, Rain, and Se7en saw phenomenal popularity in East Asia as localizing strategies were developed to appeal to local audiences, including language training, westernized musical sound, and mixing of western and Japanese fashion styles (Jin, 2016; E.-Y. Jung, 2015). The success of these strategies in East Asia, particularly Japan, prompted entertainment companies to try their hand at the U.S. market, further developing the globalization and glocalization strategies characteristic of the industry in spite of the eventual failures of Rain and BoA in the U.S. Glocalization refers to the mixing of various local characteristics with indigenized components as a means of easing consumption of foreign products for local audiences (Ju, 2014), while globalization influences included the need for a larger market of audiences due to the small size of the Korean music market as well as the shift in government policies that promoted culture as a tool for

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styles heavily borrowed from African-American cultures, as well as the over-sexualization and racialization of BoA evoked stereotypes of Asian bodies in Western culture while also alienating existing fanbases in the U.S. (G. Kim, 2019)

economic growth and soft power national promotion on the global stage (Jin, 2016; H. Lee, 2017; Nye & Kim, 2013).

Such globalizing attempts were once again attempted during the third wave of K-pop, which saw the return of idol groups such as TVXQ and Wonder Girls. This era of K-pop saw the standardization of upbeat, catchy songs with simple, easy to follow lyrics, earworm hooks, and synchronized choreography with moves specific to the song[6], as well as fashion specific to each song (E.-Y. Jung, 2015; Kang & Kouh, 2013; S.-Y. Kim, 2018). Another attempt to break into the music market was made by JYP with Wonder Girls, who toured with the Jonas Brothers and Jordan Sparks in 2009, and became the first Korean group to have a song on the Billboard Hot 100 chart (Ter Molen, 2014). However, the group did not maintain longstanding success in the States, and returned to Korea to continue their careers there. The characteristics that are recognizably 'K-pop' were continuing to develop during this period; along with the standardization of musical styles and fashion practices, the visual aspects of K-pop – physical attractiveness, performance, style, production value, were also becoming increasingly important as internet platforms were shifting the distribution and circulation of music globally (Fuhr, 2015; Ju, 2014; Y. Kim, 2013a). Additionally, export oriented management practices were developing as SM and other label companies began expanding production to include foreign composers, lyricists, and choreographers as well as trainees in order to maximize export potential (Jin, 2016; I. Oh, 2013).

Key to the emergence of the fourth wave of K-pop was the adoption and adaptation of digital technologies and social media platforms enabling transnational flow beyond the borders of Korea and neighbouring East Asian countries to audiences in Latin America, Europe, Britain, and North America (Jin, 2016; E.-Y. Jung, 2015; S.-Y. Kim, 2018; Y. Kim, 2013a). Facilitated by Web 2.0 technologies[7], access to K-pop and other Hallyu content by diverse audiences saw a resurgence in the popularity of Korean

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[6] The song *Sorry Sorry* by Super Junior is said to be the iconic start to the third wave of K-pop (E.Y. Jung, 2015), featuring an easy-to-follow choreography set to the repetitive hook/chorus 'sorry sorry sorry'. Wonder Girls' song *Tell Me's* fun choreography and catchy chorus sparked a dance craze in Korea, further reinforcing the standardization of simply choreography and memorable lyrics.

[7] Used to describe the 'new media' emerging in the early to mid-2000s that were characterized by interactive, many-to-many, participatory spaces of the internet familiar to us today (McArthur et al., 2018)

pop culture, sparking the emergence of a 'new Korean Wave' or Hallyu 2.0. Contrasting Hallyu 1.0, Hallyu 2.0 was characterized as being a phenomenon of the late 2000s and early 2010s, dominated by products including K-pop as well as digital games and animation that were consumed by a younger, more international audience and supported by more direct government policies (Jin, 2012, 2016). Defined by Jin (2015) as "the combination of social media, their techniques and practices, and the uses and affordances they provide, and this new stage has been made possible because Korea has advanced its digital technologies" (54), Hallyu 2.0 encompasses not only the shifts in digital technological affordances but also export-oriented policies, copyright and intellectual property (to combat digital piracy), and industry dynamics to account for the changing realm of cultural products and markets (Jin, 2015). The spread of K-pop, the main driver of Hallyu 2.0, was in part due to the adoption of YouTube by the entertainment industry who saw the platform as an opportunity to reach more global audiences while bypassing global music industry gatekeepers such as Sony and Time Warner (Ono & Kwon, 2013; Yecies & Shim, 2014). The shift from business to consumer (B2C) to business to business (B2B) strategies that accrued profits through royalties and advertisements was facilitated by the free-to-use access audiences had to content through YouTube, forcing entertainment companies to find new sources of revenue (I. Oh & Park, 2012). The niche that K-pop carved for itself despite low royalties from YouTube benefited its global reach as other industries such as J-pop (Japanese pop music) avoided the platform for more short-term profit generating strategies (Oh & Lee, 2013). Along with YouTube were other social media platforms that facilitated the growth of dedicated fans of K-pop, who were able to employ the characteristics of Web 2.0 to consume, (re)produce, and (re)circulate content from platform to platform (S. Choi & Park, 2014; Jin, 2016; S. Jung, 2014). Today K-pop and other Hallyu content such as films, dramas, and webtoons, as well as digital and mobile games are more accessible than ever thanks to information communication technologies (ICTs) such as smartphones and internet platforms. Music videos, performances, reality shows, documentaries and concerts are available through YouTube and VLIVE, while in-person concerts and conventions are occurring in more and more countries around the world. Fans are able to directly interact with each other and with idols through multiple

platforms including Twitter, Instagram[8], and company-specific fandom apps such as Lysn, Weverse, and Bubble[9]. Contemporary K-pop – specifically referring to idol groups produced and managed by entertainment companies - is now described as a multi-textual phenomenon, encompassing catchy, fast-paced music, easy to remember lyrics, complicated, synchronized choreography, and high production value aesthetics and performances (C. S. Anderson, 2020; Fuhr, 2015; G. Kim, 2019; S.-Y. Kim, 2018; Otmazgin & Lyan, 2014). An audiovisual spectacle, K-pop operates on and through various media, distributed both locally through terrestrial broadcasters in ways similar to the early days of idol music (Howard, 2013) and globally through digital platforms including YouTube, VLIVE, Instagram, and company-specific apps. Groups are made up of multiple members ranging from 5 to 15[10], and promote new music in 'eras' that involve multiple high production value promotional teasers, music videos, performances, and physical albums that are based around various themes or aesthetics – such as BTS' *Love Yourself* pink-themed trilogy era or EXO's comic superhero-themed *Power* era, which influences the fashion and styles that idols don during promotional performances and photoshoots. Music videos (MVs) usually have a movie-like storyline or loose plot, and features a mix of story scenes and dance breaks (E.-Y. Jung, 2013). Such characteristics are understood as being drawn from various influences that are mixed and recombined through the lens of Korean culture and experience to form hybridized products, a perspective that draws from the current theorizing of K-pop and the Korean Wave.

1.2.1. Contextualizing K-pop: Theorizing Hallyu

The spread of K-pop and other Hallyu content, while explored through a number of theoretical frameworks, has primarily been examined through the lens of cultural

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[8] As I was editing this chapter, Kai, a member of EXO, started a livestream on Instagram to update fans on his day, offering a well-timed example of the everyday access fans have to idols thanks to social media.

[9] Lysn and Weverse, owned by SM Ent. And Hybe respectively, house fan clubs for groups under each label, allowing fans to access various free and paid content including different chat areas and updates from idols. Similarly, Bubble is a paid chat feature that allows fans to receive mass direct messages from idols.

[10] Groups also often have members from various countries as a form of localization practice; members from groups such as NCT, Blackpink, Got7, Twice, and 2PM are from Japan, China, Thailand, Australia, and the U.S.

hybridization. A communicative process, hybridization is described as "a wide register of multiple identity, cross-over, pick n mix, boundary-crossing experiences and styles" (Pieterse, 2001, p. 221) that signified transgressive opportunities for cultural contact and emerging multiculturalism (Kraidy, 2002; Sayegh, 2008). Hybridity as it is used in Hallyu research stemmed from Bhabha's (1994) conceptualization of hybrid cultures as 'third spaces' that create the possibility of 'cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (4). Ashcroft et al., (2003) provide a clearer summary of Bhabha's conceptualization of hybridity as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (118) that transgress and counteract the dominant ideologies of the colonizer. Further developing Bhabha's understanding of Hybridity, Kraidy (2002), positioned hybridization as a process, a perspective which allows for the acknowledgement of the complexity and dynamic transcultural interactions that hybridized practices involve. This also served to reconfigure the critical abilities of hybridity in response to what, according to Kraidy (2002), were 'at best descriptive' and at worst non-critical celebrations of 'global multiculturalism' (317). A critical theory of hybridization, according to Kraidy, must acknowledge the potential for appropriation on the part of transnational capitalism that sees hybrid cultural products as effective generators of transnational profits (Kraidy, 2002, 2005), and counteract this potential by paying attention not only to media reception, but the structural processes and practices that occur in various contexts that result in the construction of various hybridities (Kraidy, 2002, 2005). In other words, a critical theory of hybridization (re)centers the balances and structures of power that play out at local, national and global levels during transnational and transcultural encounters.

For Hallyu scholars, hybridization was a more comprehensive alternative to theories such as cultural proximity or cultural imperialism that dominated understandings of both cross border cultural flows as well as the specific flows of the Korean Wave during Hallyu 1.0. Rather than a result of culturally similar characteristics that appeal to neighbouring countries and cultures, a theory that was inadequate to explain the expansion of Hallyu to Western audiences, the Korean Wave was seen as a transgressive form of counterflow that challenged the dominant, one-way flows of American culture (Jin, 2016; E.-Y. Jung, 2009; Shim, 2006). K-pop in particular is considered a hybridized product through its blending of styles, practices, sounds, genres, and people from Korea and Japan as well as Europe, Latin America, the U.S.,

and the U.K. The hybridized characteristics of K-pop have been located in the production and cultural processes of the industry (H. J. Lee & Jin, 2019); the recruiting of foreign talent into networks of lyricists, producers, choreographers, and stylists from various countries around the world (Fuhr, 2015; Jin, 2016), including, for example, the British producer-lyricist duo LDN Noise, who has worked with multiple groups and artists from SM Entertainment, and Bruno Mars, who penned the English version of Taemin's *Press Your Number*. BTS has also worked with American and British artists including the Chainsmokers and Ed Sheeran. K-pop's cultural hybridization is evident in the lyrics, which regularly mix English words and phrases to broaden appeal to both local Korean audiences who were interested in emerging American products during the early waves of K-pop and to broader global audiences as a means of improving the export potential of K-pop (Jin, 2015, 2016; Jin & Ryoo, 2014; H. J. Lee & Jin, 2019). While there is debate surrounding the extent to which Korean elements remain in K-pop due to globalizing and hybridizing strategies used to appeal to as broad an audience as possible (Jin & Ryoo, 2016; Lie, 2012; S. I. Shin & Kim, 2013), K-pop represents for many scholars a form of transgressive counterculture flow that acts as "an ambiguous yet highly exploited signifier for Koreans who have struggled to generate a cultural identity after their colonial histories" (K. Yoon, 2017, p. 113) where subaltern appropriation of hegemonic Western forms and cultures creates space for Koreans to challenge the dominant flows of popular culture (Ono & Kwon, 2013; Shim, 2006). In examining K-pop through a hybridity lens, Jin (2016) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the power dynamics and structures that make up the systems and processes of globalized flows in order to critically examine such flows in the context of both transgressive potential and hegemonic complicities.

As mentioned above, Hallyu, grounded in theories of hybridization, has been investigated through a variety of perspectives and cases. K-pop in particular has a fairly robust history of critical investigation, from such perspectives as industry development (Howard, 2013; Jin, 2017; I. Oh & Lee, 2014); the influence of nation-state policies and soft (Nye & Kim, 2013; Walsh, 2014); history and musical influences (Fuhr, 2015; Howard, 2006; Lie, 2012, 2015; I. Oh & Lee, 2014), racial influences and gender investigations (C. S. Anderson, 2020; Epstein & Turnbull, 2014; E.-Y. Jung, 2013; G. Kim, 2019; Song, 2019); and audience reception (Han, 2017; McLaren & Jin, 2020; Min et al., 2019; Otmazgin & Lyan, 2014; Sung, 2014, p. 20; K. Yoon, 2018, 2019), among

others. Audience reception research has focused extensively on fandoms from various places including Latin America, Austria, North America, Palestine, Israel, India, Singapore, and Indonesia in order to examine how and why K-pop has spread to various countries outside of Korea (T.-J. Yoon & Kang, 2017). Such studies have largely focused on the impacts and influences of social media, viewing fans through a technological lens to determine the ways in which K-pop content is consumed and circulated through mediated spaces (See for example (Han, 2017; E.-Y. Jung, 2015; S. Jung, 2014; Sung, 2014). Other studies have investigated fans' in the context of meaning making, identity formation, and understandings of Korean culture (see for example Jenol, 2020; Leung, 2017; McLaren & Jin, 2020; K. Yoon, 2018), however there remains a focus on descriptive, textual analysis of K-pop, as well as a transnational focus with respect to K-pop fandom in Hallyu scholarship, that limits investigation based on national identity and boundaries, where the question remains 'why is K-pop popular *there*?' rather than how and why fans construct affective identities and meaning through their consumption of K-pop (Malik 2019; McLaren & Jin 2020), and how this meaning-making acts as motivation for fandom participation. As global K-pop fans "actively construct and negotiate cultural meanings and identities on their own" (H. Jung, 2017, p. 238), it is important to consider both the hybridized characteristics of K-pop texts as well as the active interpretation, (re)circulation, and appropriation of such texts by fans in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of transnational and transcultural global flows through the framework of K-pop and global fandom (H. Jung, 2017).

1.3. An Interlude: Aca-fan Musings

'Aca-fan'[11] is an admittedly contested term within fan studies[12]. A short form for 'academic fan', it describes those who consider themselves to be 'scholar-fans', where the identities of both intertwine and influence each other. Matt Hills (2002) discusses the tensions of being both scholar and fan, where passion threatens to reinforce negative stereotypes of fan activity while critical examinations risk packaging fan cultures into neat deliverables for seminars. While such tensions exist and are regularly discussed

[11] Coined by Henry Jenkins to describe the dual position of fan researchers as often both academics and fans

[12] See for example Hansal & Gunderson, 2020; Hills, 2002a

among those who use the term aca-fan and those who do not, the reflexivity[13] the status requires remains constant. Thus, this brief interlude will be an examination of my positionality as both an academic and a fan of K-pop. As Hills (2002) points out, there is an expectation of objectivity within academia, where distance provides space for more thorough, accurate critical observation. The traditions of academic objectivity intertwine with value judgements of value when it comes to topics of research (Hills, 2002a; Jenson, 1992); however, my background is staunchly sociological in origin, and I position myself within an interpretivist framework. Lived experience of reality is varied, and true objectivity dismisses such varied realities when applied to the messy world of social inquiry. I am not suggesting that positivist frameworks do not have merit, as such perspectives necessarily compliment the subjective positions that interpretivism employs. Rather, 'true' objectivity often promotes the erasure of subjectivities, risking unconscious biases and assumptions colouring research from the point of inception. As Hansal and Gunderson (2020) poignantly discuss, acknowledging the double-position of both fan and researcher provides space to critically examine the fan-motivated emotions that not only influence research but motivate research, furthering the productive potential and inquiry of academic investigation while also accounting for affects and emotions that may underly biases or create discomfort throughout the research process. Therefore, positioning myself as a fan as well as an academic acknowledges the assumptions and biases that I bring to conversations with fans as well as those that I bring to the research process.

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[13] The idea of reflexivity stems from a response to positivist ideas of research as objective or depersonalized, where the researcher is detached from the object of study (MacFarlane, 2008). As bias and lived experience influence, consciously and unconsciously, our interpretations of the world, such pure objective or detached research is all but impossible, particularly when examining the messy world of human relations and relationships. Reflexivity is therefore defined as "the ability proactively to reflect, analyse, and self-critically vocalise our own reflections while maintaining a critical awareness of the nature of culture and society around us" (Hiller & Jameson, p. 26).

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My fandom has informed my academic career since my first sociology class in 2014, and SHINee was the catalyst that led me to where I am now. When you are a fan of something, that thing – the fannish object, the movie or TV show or book or singer, becomes a comfort in the sense that they will always be there, a constant that one can turn to and return to when needed, even as fandom waxes and wanes throughout one's life. This, of course, is a false comfort in some ways, one many do not need to consider, and are privileged for not having to think about it. I, along with SHINee fans around the world, lost that privilege the morning of December 18th, 2017, when Jonghyun, main vocalist of the five-member group, committed suicide. I vividly remember going to Costco with my mom, who was intent on distracting me from the trauma of waking up to find that my favourite idol was gone. I watched the bustle of people around me and wondered how life could go on when it felt like my world had stopped.

Life does go on. Sometimes too slowly, sometimes all too fast, time freezes into memories or blurs to incomprehensible blocks of nothingness. Right as I was beginning a new chapter of my life, one-fifth of my main motivation and comfort was gone. This loss has informed every step of this project, and while it was a terribly painful process, the outcome of my thesis and my overall abilities as a researcher were strengthened by it. The lack of direction that came from my grief allowed for lessons I may not have learned, and the findings of this research are in part a result of that lack of direction. As a result, I had the opportunity to let the words and stories fans across Canada so kindly shared with me to take a more central role in the direction and conclusion of my work these past four years, allowing me to provide greater voice to fans that are often talked *about*, rather than talked *to*. My status as a fan provided the opportunity for other fans to speak more candidly than they may have with non-fan researchers and gave me insight into the various ways fans spoke – or didn't speak, about their fan experiences, while my experience as a scholar has given me the tools to interpret and contextualize fans' experiences within the broader processes of hybridity, media consumption, and transcultural flows.

1.4. Methodology

As K-pop has become globally popular, studies that speak to fan reception and participation of K-pop has proliferated in recent years, focusing on various areas such as the role of technology in fan consumption (Han, 2017; Jin, 2018; S. Jung, 2014; S. Jung

& Shim, 2014; Sung, 2014), transnational flows (H. Jung, 2017; S. Jung, 2011; Min, 2017; K. Yoon, 2019), and identity formation (Jenol, 2020; Malik, 2019; McLaren & Jin, 2020; K. Yoon, 2018). Underlying the investigation into the spread of K-pop across borders is the question of *why*. Why K-pop? Why now? Why these fans, in these countries? Asking why, looking for explanations, reasons for the phenomena that make up life, is a fundamental form of research as we look for the causes and relationships between occurrences and actions in everyday life. Asking 'why' is a form of relational work itself, where reasons given in response connect people and ideas together in various ways in various social contexts (Tilly, 2006). The question of 'why' is also filtered between those in a conversation, where social belonging and contexts influence how a reason may be given in order to build, maintain, or reject the relationship between speakers (Tilly, 2006). While the numerous English-language works on K-pop seek to answer, in various ways, the reasons for human relationships between media, technology, culture, and globalizing processes, very rarely are fans themselves asked why, and rarer still are fans asked why by fellow fans. As has been pointed out by Hills (2002a) and McLaren and Jin (2020), the process of asking why risks reductive, *a priori* acceptance of fan knowledge as truthful, legitimate examples of fan experience, obscuring the subjective emotions and lived experiences that influence the construction and sharing of such knowledge. However, asking fans 'why' recenters fan knowledge and the underlying discursive practices of unique fandoms (Hills 2002a; Chin & Morimoto, 2013) as well as the affective identities, attachments, and affinities that fans carry and use as tools and motivations in their fannish pursuits. Additionally, aca-fan identity positions the investigator as an insider, creating not only the need for active critical reflection on the part if the researcher but also the potential on the part of participants to provide reasons based on perceived existing relationships grounded in shared identities. This project is built on and through these gaps in understanding of K-pop and its fandoms and is informed by my experiences and identity as both a fan and an academic in order to contribute a more nuanced understanding of what K-pop fans do and why.

Initially, this project set out with the aim to explore the experiences and activities of K-pop fans as well as their understandings of cultural difference, with the purpose of examining the extent that fandom can impact awareness, acknowledgement, and acceptance of different as well as the extent that such understandings could be translate

to non-fandom environments. Drawing from Jenkins (2006) concept of pop cosmopolitanism, which argues that cross-border fan consumption provides opportunity to better understand "the ways that transcultural flows of popular culture inspires new forms of global consciousness and cultural competency' (156) as well as the notion of transcultural fandom that posits that "fans become fans of border-crossing texts or objects not necessarily because of *where* they are produced but because they recognize a subjective moment of affinity regardless of origin" (Chin and Morimoto 2013, 9; emphasis in original), I developed the following research questions:

1. What types of fan practices occur within K-pop fandom both online (ex. on social media) and offline (ex. at concerts or conventions)?

2. How is fandom identity expressed through these practices?

3. Does belonging to K-pop fandom impact one's awareness, understanding, or acceptance of cultural differences?

4. What are some of the demographics of K-pop fans in Canada?

Based on these questions, I invited English-speaking K-pop fans in Canada to participate in either a survey or semi-structured interview asking questions about their fandom participation, favourite groups, and perceptions and understandings of cultural difference, as well as general demographic questions in order to gain a preliminary overview of who K-pop fans in Canada are, information that is currently lacking (K. Yoon, 2019). Both the survey and interviews were conducted concurrently during the months of May to August 2019 and recruited through the use of snowball sampling utilizing my own personal online network. Invitations to participate in either the survey or interview were posted in various Canada-Based Facebook groups including SHINee Vancouver and BTS Canada as well as on Twitter and Tumblr through my own personal accounts. Additionally, a flyer advertising the study was posted at a popular K-pop store in Vancouver, B.C. In total, 416 respondents participated in the survey and 17 participated in the interview, which averaged between 45 minutes to one hour in total.

Returning briefly to the discussion of reflexivity, it is important to acknowledge here the 'unbearable whiteness of fan studies' (Pande, 2018; Stanfill, 2018b; Wanzo, 2015; Woo, 2017). The traditions, interests, institutions, and foundational studies on fandom are filtered through a very narrow frame of reference, one that reinforces and normalizes particular perspectives and ideologies that marginalizes, excludes, and often

erases other ways of seeing and interpreting fandom. As Rukmini Pande (2018) states, there is an absence of 'any sustained examination of the racial make-up of these communities, both in terms of participants and in the choices of characters and texts that form the focus of media fandom's transformational activities" (p. xi). While I do not undertake a serious critical analysis of race and K-pop, as such an important and nuanced topic is beyond the scope of this study, I am influenced by the works of Pande as well as Rebecca Wanzo and Benjamin Woo in the process of developing the research methods this study employs. Additionally, I am particularly influenced by a Keynote presentation given by Lori Morimoto at the 2018 Fan Studies Network Conference. Addressing the concept of transcultural fandom, she criticized the ways in which fan studies often remains safely in particular lanes, keeping to 'what we know' in terms of language, culture, and even media texts. While staying in our lanes is more often than not a good thing, as one would not want to Columbus into a space they do not fully understand in the name of critical investigation, Lori pointed out that our lanes do not have to be barriers, and that collaboration and comradery are more beneficial to fan studies as a field as they can promote the very understandings that fan studies pursues. One way of addressing the glaring gap of racial analysis in fan studies, according to Lori, the practice of naming, which acknowledges who fans are as people and removes any opportunity for assumptions of whiteness that is reinforced by western fan studies traditions. In an attempt to acknowledge the fans I spoke with and to remove and assumption of the racial or ethnic background of interviewees, interview participants were invited to self-identify their age, gender, and ethnicity if they felt comfortable doing so. Of the 17 interview participants, 16 provided this information. While names have been changed in order to ensure anonymity of participants, the age, gender, province of residence, and self-identified ethnicity is included in order to recognize and acknowledged the various backgrounds interviewees brought to this study, and to challenge stereotypical assumptions surrounding fans and fandom of K-pop. In relation to this, while the scope of this study is limited to Canadian borders, the use of 'K-pop fans in Canada' as opposed to 'Canadian K-pop fans' serves to recenter individual identities away from that of Canadian nationality and create space for those who identify as fans, regardless of personal identification with the constructed national borders they reside in. While data gathered in the process of this study is transnational in scope, it employs transcultural fandom as a theoretical framework to explore the various ways fans come to be part of and do fandom, both within and without the context of the nation.

As it has been noted by K. Yoon (2019), there continues to be a lack of demographic data on K-pop fans located in Canada; as a preliminary response to this gap in understanding of K-pop fans general demographic make-up, participants in both the survey and interviews were asked about their age, gender, sexuality, race, and province of residence. Of the 416 survey respondents, the majority identified as female (85%), between the ages of 14-20 (39%), heterosexual (67%) Caucasian (30%, and were primarily located in British Columbia and Ontario. A comprehensive breakdown of these findings can be found in Appendix B. Semi-structured interviews were held in person in British Columbia and Ontario due to the vibrant K-pop communities in both provinces, as well as over Skype with participants from other provinces. Of the 17 interviewees, 10 were from B.C., four from Ontario, Two from Alberta, and one from Newfoundland. 16 of the interviewees identified as female, with one identifying as cisgender male, and all were between the ages of 18 and 73 years old. Seven of the interviewees identified as East Asian, four as Caucasian, three as South East Asian, two of Black/African descent, and one as Caucasian and of Indigenous descent. The findings of the survey reflect other survey findings of fans conducted online - for example Klink and Minkel's 2019 survey of shipping behaviour among English speaking media fans found that the majority of respondents were heterosexual Caucasian females. However, when accounting for the multicultural make-up of Canada, particularly in British Columbia (Vancouver) and Ontario (Toronto), the majority of respondents that identified as non-Caucasian totaled 267, or 64%, a trend that was also found amongst interview participants, 12 of which Identified as non-Caucasian. This suggests that while Caucasian fans are highly visible in media representations of K-pop fandom, such stereotypical representations do not accurately reflect the reality of K-pop fans. It is however also important to note that as the majority of respondents were located in two of the most populated provinces in Canada, such composition of fans may be skewed due to the various vibrant populations in these two provinces. Additionally, the majority of respondents reported being fans of BTS and SHINee, which is potentially due to the recruitment methods that included a number of Facebook fan pages dedicated to these two groups. A deeper investigation into the make up of individual fandom groups such as Shawol or ARMY as well as a more comprehensive investigation of other provinces in Canada, including francophone speakers in Quebec and the East coast, would complement these preliminary findings.

Information and stories gathered from respondents of the survey and interviews were intended to be used to answer the above research questions. However, grief changes a person. Developing this study, undergoing fieldwork and speaking with many amazing fans all across Canada, was and in some sense continues to be influenced by Jonghyun's absence. As all things do, the direction this thesis took changes and grew due to that influence, and informed the coding and analysis of data collected during the summer months of 2019. I approached my data analysis through an inductive perspective partially influenced by grounded theory. Both applicable as method and methodology, grounded theory involves the systematic collection and analysis of data to develop a theory from findings (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Glaser, 1967). The significance of grounded theory to this thesis is its inductive approach, which involves the building or discovery of key ideas, concepts, and themes from the data set (Hawkins, 2018) in order to identify the main trends or theories that emerge. While I did not employ grounded theory as it is described by Strauss and Glaser (1967), its inductive approach informed my methods of analysis, which involved 'letting the data speak for itself', as it were. I employed thematic analysis to code and analyze both survey and interview data. A means of analysis that "involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning" (Lapadat, 2012, p. 2), thematic analysis is a sensemaking approach to identifying patterns, relationships, and quantifying qualitative data (Lapadat, 2012). An inductive approach to thematic analysis involves systematic observant and re-readings, immersing oneself in the data in order to build themes from the resulting patterns (Charmaz, 2006; Hawkins, 2018; Lapadat, 2012). Thematic analysis therefore involves non-linear, flexible, systematic analysis that can be both inductive or deductive in order to code and sort text into "common line of understanding occurring within the data" (Hawkins, 2018, p. 2; Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2018; Lapadat, 2012).

As I took an inductive approach to data analysis, I used the initial research questions above as rough guides rather than direct questions in order to more freely examine the data I had collected. Coding initially involved systematically reviewing individual survey and interview responses through the use of NVIVO software for common phrases, words, and ideas, which were categorized based first on each separate question, then on common characteristics. For example, the open-ended survey question relating to social media use was initially coded for platform usage, and then recategorized based on activities fans identified as taking place online. Such fan

activities were then coded into a separate theme and broken down into overlapping sub-themes relating to consumption, production, online, and offline activities. Interview coding took a similar approach; after transcribing each interview, transcripts were reviewed by individual interviewees and then briefly by individual question to identify initial common patterns. Recurring phrases and concepts were collected and rereviewed in the context of each transcript as a text, rather than by individual question as common themes such as reasons for preferring a specific group or various fan activities were emerging throughout conversations with interviewees. Patterns for both the survey and interview data where then coded into preliminary main themes which are outlined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1   Preliminary themes coded from data collection through a survey and semi-structured interviews

Preliminary Codes – Survey	Preliminary Codes - Interviews
Bias Groups	Bias Groups
Fan Activities	Experiences in Fandom
Cultural Difference – Awareness	Reason Giving
Descriptions of K-pop	Online/Offline Fan Activities
Descriptions of Fandom	Cultural Difference
Fandom's Effect on Cultural Difference	'Falling Down the Rabbit Hole'
	Connection
	Perception of K-pop and Korea

As K-pop fandom is only recently being investigated with respect to affective identities, affinities, and the construction of meaning making, I looked for potential various themes that spoke to the affinity formation and meaning-making by fans. As Morimoto (2017) notes, fandoms that develop from non-local cultural texts "must account for how and why such media circulates outside of its own industrial and national contexts" (p. 283). Furthering this, Chin and Morimoto (2013) argue that transnational positionings of cross-border fandoms such as K-pop "ultimately tells us little about what actually attracts and motivates fans" (p.97). By taking a transcultural fandom lens with the intent of exploring the reasons and motivations behind participation K-pop fandom, the following guiding research questions were developed:

1. What reasons do fans give for liking K-pop?

2. How do these reasons and the underlying affinities, pleasures, and meaning serve to motivate fan practices and perceptions of difference?

Through the preliminary themes outlined above, three main themes were developed: Connections, Practices, and Perceptions. *Connections* encompasses the various reasons fans gave for their enjoyment of K-pop and fandom, focusing on the ways fans described the relationships, both parasocial and communal, formed with idols and other fans and explores the underlying affect affinities (Chin & Morimoto, 2013) that motivated such attachments, communities, and investments. *Practices* encompasses the various activities, on- and offline, that fans spoke about as participating in or wanting to participate in. Finally, *Perceptions* includes the various ways fans spoke about and described K-pop, Korea, Korean culture, and cultural difference more broadly.

1.5. Structure of the Thesis

The second chapter of my thesis undertakes an exploration of the study and definition of fandom. Drawing on cultural studies traditions, fans are positioned as active 'poachers' that reinterpret, reproduce, and recirculate favoured media texts through various lenses of lived experience (Gray et al., 2017; Jenkins, 1992). Central to various fan activities is the affect, pleasure, and meaning-making fans construction through their consumption and interaction with fan texts and spaces (Grossberg, 1992; Harrington & Bielby, 1995). I briefly historicize fandom and fan studies and discuss the ways in which fandom has been positioned as a participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992, 2006b), and how this positioning, while useful, marginalizes ways of 'doing' fandom that are not as visibly participatory (cite) and has been investigated in such ways that say little about the motivations behind fan behaviour (Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Harrington & Bielby, 1995). I then outline the ways in which fandom has been theorized and position the importance of digital media and platform technologies in contemporary fandom. Finally, the chapter concludes with a framing of this thesis through the theory of transcultural fandom (Chin & Morimoto, 2013), and discusses the ways in which transnational and transcultural fandom theories have been applied in both fan and Hallyu studies.

Chapter Three begins the findings and discussion section of this thesis with a brief reiteration of the methods used to collect and analyze the data being presented. It then undertakes an exploration of the various *connection's* fans spoke about and implied

in their responses to survey and interview questions. The discussion of connections is broken down into two subthemes: Fan-idol connections and fan-fan connections. Fan-idol connections discusses the various ways fans formed and spoke about their affective attachments with the idols they favoured, which is then examined in the context of parasocial interaction and relationships (Groszman, 2020; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Fan-fan connections then undertakes a discussion of the various ways fans formed interpersonal relationships with other fans and conceptualized the 'imagined community' (Morimoto & Chin, 2017) of K-pop fandom, which is also viewed through the concept of parasocial relationships.

Chapter Four introduces the second half of my findings and discussion section, which provides examples of the themes of *practices* and *perceptions*. *Practices* outlines the various activities fans spoke about participating in both online and offline, and discusses these practices in the context of general participatory fan practices. *Perceptions* discusses the different ways fans acknowledged, understood, and interpreted various aspects of K-pop fandom/K-pop, Korea, and Korean culture and positions these various perceptions in conversation with recent studies in Hallyu scholarship that discuss the role of K-pop fandom in impacting awareness of cultural differences (H. Lee, 2018; K. Yoon, 2018, 2019). Finally, the chapter contextualizes the various fan practices and understandings of cultural difference with respect to the fan-idol and fan-fan connections discussed in Chapter Three, and concludes with a discussion of the role of personal affect and meaning making in the formation, participation, and motivations of fandom. This structure of separating the findings and discussion into two chapters serves a twofold purpose: one, to highlight the extent to which the theme of connections was discussed by fans, both in fan-idol and fan-fan contexts, and to contextualize the findings and discussion of chapter Four. Second, this structure was chosen in order to place, if one can imagine, fences around the length of this manuscript, as I could go on for much longer than necessary for the scope of this particular project. Thus, both chapters Three and Four encompass my findings and discussion section.

Chapter Five opens with a summary of this thesis, outlining the key theories discussed and the contexts this research is placed in, then reviews the findings presented in Chapters three and four to situate them within the wider fields of fan and Hallyu studies. It then briefly discusses the limitations of my research, notably the

border-restricted limit of fans in Canada and the English-language focus of the study, and posits potential areas for further inquiry and investigation.

Chapter 2.   Fans, Fandom, Theory

2.1. Introduction

Scene: early summer, 2019, Burnaby campus. I was taking a short break to annoy a close friend before his lecture and happened to meet his TA for the summer semester. During introductions the topic of my research came up, and she asked me if I was really 'into' K-pop, or if it was just a research interest. Less than 10 minutes later we had exchanged favourite bands, members, and schedules. Less than a week later we went to see Rain (비) in concert at the Hard Rock Cafe.

Scene: September 2017, SFU Graduate orientation. A round of introductions during an afternoon workshop led to myself and another student locking eyes across the room: someone else in communications! We talked about our research topics, and the next semester we shared a methodology class. A few months later she begins lightheartedly blaming me for how much time she spends watching music videos of different bands; a year later we sat together during BTS' *Love Yourself: Speak Yourself* concert in LA.

Scene: fall 2018, downtown Vancouver, having just finished a welcome lunch for two new students who also happened to be researching K-pop. While lunch conversation had been a bit stilted and awkward, the three of us paused afterwards to talk about research plans. What was meant to be a brief street corner chat turned into a three-hour conversation, and yet felt like no time at all.

Scene, scene, scene. These are all fan moments, memories of meeting strangers who became friends and colleagues thanks to shared interest in K-pop. More moments: a friend excitedly writing down names of groups for me to listen to when I asked her if she had heard of SHINee; meeting an online-only friend for the first time in Wales after years of talking about BTS on Tumblr; singing, crying, and sharing hugs (and Timbits) with strangers on a cold December day in 2017; memories that extend as far back as 2011, snippets of time that have led to now.

How to explain these fan moments? What does it mean to define 'fan', to explain fandom? Such practices and behaviours are commonplace, normalized and

ubiquitous aspects of popular media and digital culture (Gray et al., 2017), and are ever present in popular discourse as cultural phenomena such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Game of Thrones, BTS, and MAGA/QAnon[14] foster global audiences of dedicated and variously participatory consumers. Yet, the concept of the fan is a fluid and dynamic one, difficult to pin down and applicable in various ways for various uses. Duffett (2013) defines a fan as "somebody who is obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, tv programme, band; somebody who can produce reams of information on the object of their fandom, can quote their favoured lines or lyrics, chapter and verse" (p. 49), while Jenson describes herself as a fan based on the definition of fandom as "an investment in, and attachment to, a particular figure or form" (1992, p. 22). Abercrombie & Longhurst (1998) draw on Jenkins' (1992) work to define a fan as an individual who is "Skilled or competent in different modes of production and consumption; active in their interaction with texts and in their production of new texts; and communal in that they construct different communities based on their links to the programmes they like" (p.127), echoes of which are evident in Fiesler and Dym's (2020) recent specific definition of transformative fandom[15], or "the community constructed around people who create, share, and discuss, fanworks based on existing media" (p.42). The most well-rounded definitional summary perhaps comes from Cavicchi (1998), who describes fans as:

> On the whole, it is used both descriptively and prescriptively to refer to diverse individuals and groups, including fanatics, spectators, groupies, enthusiasts, celebrity stalkers, collectors, consumers, members of subcultures, and entire audiences, and, depending on the context, to refer to complex relationships involving affinity, enthusiasm, identification, desire, obsession, possession, neurosis, hysteria, consumerism, political resistance, or a combination. (p.39)

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[14] "MAGA" (Make America Great Again) And QAnon are far-right reactionary movements and conspiracies that have developed over the duration of the 45th Trump presidency, and position Donald Trump as an individual object of fandom rather than representing a political position or ideology (Miller, 2020). As reactionary politics increasingly adopts fannish means of participation and fan participation increasingly adopts tactics from reactionary spaces (Stanfill, 2020), understandings of politically motivated groups are made more comprehensive through fan studies lenses (Jones, 2018; Stanfill 2020, Miller, 2020).

[15] The classification of fandom as transformative is contrasted with curative fandom, two categories that arise from a meta-analysis posted by *LordByronic* on the Doctor Who community on Reddit. *LordByronic* characterized curative fandom as being about knowledge: 'what is the Doctor Who canon? Who is the best Doctor? How do Weeping Angels work?", whereas transformative fandom is about change and is where the fic writers, fan artists, vidders, giffers, and cosplayers congregate (*Tumblr-bashing -why?*, n.d.).

Drawing on these definitions, as well as works from Storey (2009), Larsen and Zubernis (2013), and Brough and Shresthova (2011), I offer a grounding definition of 'fan' and 'fandom' that will guide the rest of this discussion. A fan, for the purposes of this research, is an individual who is deeply invested, intellectually and emotionally, in a particular popular culture object, and participates, either through consumption, production, or a mixture of both, in various activities relating to their fan object. Fandom, therefore, is a collection of individuals who form relationships or communities based on their shared investment in and active participation relating to the beloved fan object.

This chapter will explore a history of the study of fans and provide brief context into various fan practices. It will then undertake a discussion of the theoretical framework being employed in this thesis, drawing from traditions of cultural studies that sees audiences as active and engaged in the (re)production, (re)circulation, and (re)interpretation of media texts (de Certeau, 1984; Fiske, 1989; Hall, 1973; Jenkins, 1992). A discussion of the impacts of technological development on fandom will follow, exploring the concepts of participatory culture, convergence culture, and spreadability and how social media platforms and mobile digital technologies facilitate fan activity (Booth, 2010, p. 201; Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b; Jenkins et al., 2013). Following this will be a discussion of the role of affect and emotion in fandom, drawing on the works of Grossberg (1992) and Sara Ahmed (2004, 2010, 2014) to explore how the emotional investments of fans inform meaning-making and identity formation as well as motivates the various activities fans participate in. It will then conclude with a brief discussion of the area of cross-border fan studies research, exploring the ways in which fandom has been examined through a transnational lens (Iwabuchi, 2002; Morimoto, 2017) and juxtapose such perspectives with the theory of transcultural fandom (Annett, 2011; Chin & Morimoto, 2013) that will serve to contextualize the current literature on K-pop fandom.

2.2. Conceptualizing Fandom: A Historical Review

The most common definition of 'fan' is recognized as short for 'fanatic', from the Latin *fanaticus* referring to religious or political zealotry (Cavicchi, 2014; Jenkins, 1992). The use of the word fan has been traced to the realm of sports, with some records suggesting it was used in the early 1800s to refer to 'the fancy', a term describing audiences of particular athletes or preferred sports, from boxing to pigeon racing (Cavicchi, 2014). Later in the 1800s saw the use of 'fan' by baseball commentators to

lightheartedly mock avid followers of the sport (Cavicchi, 1998; Jenkins, 1992). While historical uses and meanings of the word fan are somewhat contested, the behaviours and practices of dedicated audience followings can be traced through various cultural icons and celebrities of history, from Lord Byron and his letter writing followers to the death and revival of Sherlock Holmes, to the riotous emotionally charged welcomes of the Beatles in international airports. Fandoms formed around celebrities of 19th century American theatre, popular authors benefiting from commercial publishing, classical music followings of the 19th century to dance crazes of the 20th; fandoms emerge from various historical and social contexts through which they derive and reproduce meaning (Cavicchi, 1998). Despite the historical and contextual differences, fandom can be broadly identified as having a number of unifying characteristics, notably involving aspects of performance or the 'process of interaction between the fan and the tan text before an audience' (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 45). Cavicchi (1998) provides an example of Bruce Springsteen fans who, during live concerts, are as much performers singing along with songs as the musician on stage. Fandom is also, according to Cavicchi, a product of industrial capitalism and the development of related technologies that changed economic and social norms and raised new ways of relating to the self and to others in a mediatizing world (Cavicchi, 1998, p.6).

Fandom can therefore be considered a historical phenomenon. However, such historical fan phenomena does not fully explain fandoms of today. A clearer picture of the roots of contemporary fans and their practices brings us to the 1960s and the generally agreed upon beginnings of media fandom. Currently an umbrella term that describes various fan communities that share practices, values, and history, media fandom was initially used to differentiate fans of science fiction television from earlier literary sci-fi fans (*Media Fandom*, 2018). I specify media fandom here to differentiate between the fan histories and practices of various cultural objects such as television, comics, music, books, and film, and sports fandom, which while a form of fandom with an equally long history and significance to our understandings of everyday social life, is not a realm of fandom that will be discussed here, as my focus lies solely on the interactions of fans and media texts.

The early days of media fandom are generally agreed upon to have started with Star Trek in the 1960s (Coppa, 2008), and has contributed to a broad range of behaviours that are used to classify fandom today. Two key worlds of early fan studies

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research, Jenkins' (1992) Textual Poachers and Bacon-Smith's (1991) Enterprising Women both undertook ethnographic explorations into Star Trek fandom with similar goals of discovering what then-dominant discourse classified as "strange new worlds". Media fandom in popular discourse as well as academic work was historically not treated kindly, with the image of fans as fanatics the popular stereotype of the time. Fans were often (and occasionally continue) to be cast as an imagined Other, evoking binaries that juxtaposed the 'normal', 'accepted', or 'expected' with the 'exotic' 'different', and 'deviant' Other (Hills, 2002a; Said, 1978). The othering of fans stemmed from what Jenson (1992) saw as fears of modernity as changes to technology and consumption gave rise to mass media and the mass audience, which was increasing alienation, atomization, and isolation of individuals to the detriment of society. Fan behaviours were categorized in popular discourse as pathological, either obsessed losers or hysterical crowds that used cultural objects to compensate for the lack of community, identity, and autonomy that resulted from mass society (Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Jenson, 1992). These depictions of fans as crazed, violent, delusional, and hysterical stemmed in part from the devaluation of particular cultural texts and consumption practices, where value judgements of taste informed the prioritizing of certain cultural forms and expressions as 'good' over those that were 'bad', with 'bad' forms and expressions regularly linked to marginalized, othered groups based on gender[16], race, class, age, and ethnicity (Bourdieu, 1984; Fiske, 1989; Jenson, 1992).[17] Attempts to reframe these views of fans came from theoretical and ethnographic investigations such as Jenkins' and Bacon-Smith's works on Star Trek, but also from others such as Ien Ang's (1991) and Liebes and Katz's (1990) works on *Dallas* fan audiences, Cavicchi's (1998) work with Bruce Springsteen fans, and Harrington and Bielby's (1995) work with Soap fandom, among others. These early works sought to position fans not as pathological, passive audiences

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[16] The connotations *fanaticus*, along with evoking political and religious zealotry, also referred to expressions of excessive emotion or hysteria, drawing on Freudian understandings of emotional expression and its association with (and devaluation of) femininity (Ahmed, 2014; T. Anderson, 2012; Jenkins, 1992), adding another binary of value judgements based on sexist ideals of rational/'masculine' versus irrational (or hysterical) and 'feminine'.

[17] These ways of distinguishing 'good' from 'bad' cultural products and forms of consumption stemmed from anxieties of cultural inclusion and exclusion based on, among other things, class, race, and gender (Hills 2002a) which are based around arbitrary notions of taste and ways of living that are legitimated into 'proper' or 'natural' ways of life (Storey 2009; Bourdieu 1984). The tastes and subsequent values they represent serve to reinforce various social differences and maintain social hierarchy (Storey 2009).

but passionately creative, productive, and distinguishing consumers, reframing the binary of good/bad cultural consumption to justify fans and fandom as legitimate phenomena warranting serious critical study (Gray et al., 2017; Hills, 2002a; Jenkins, 1992). Since then, fans have become a ubiquitous part of popular media culture, and their behaviours normalized as everyday digital media practices.

2.3. Theorizing fans: Active Audiences and Participatory Culture

Another fan moment: January 2020, Kingston, UK. A room full of scholars, marketing experts, students, and general curious attendees excitedly crowd around a projector screen to watch BTS perform at the 2020 Golden Disk Awards. Interspersed among the sing-alongs and fanchants were gasps of 'oh my god', 'UGH' and 'oh *fuck*' as well as gleeful laughter and cheers. This was a lunch break during the first BTS: An Interdisciplinary conference, a brief interlude in between panels and roundtables discussing everything related to BTS, from transmedia marketing tactics to the prevalence of racism within and amongst ARMY. There was no questioning why the conference was allowed to grind to a temporary halt; we *had* to watch. Before anyone asks, yes, it was worth it.

This audience evidently, was full of highly dedicated fans heavily invested - both emotionally and intellectually considering the majority of attendees were academics from various backgrounds - in BTS. This fan moment seems far different from historical ideas of fans; individuals from all around the world gathered just outside of London to watch a live performance directly from Seoul. And yet such gathering is not that different from friends holding weekly viewings of Star Trek or Dallas in one's living room. Such consumption and engagement is, according to Duffett (2013), 'the primary practice of media fandom' (276). However, as fan studies has sought to position fans as distinguishing active consumers rather than passive dupes, much of the work on fans during the early development of fan studies has explored the ways in which fans create through the appropriation or 'poaching' of texts (Hills, 2002a; Sandvoss & Kearns, 2014). This idea of poaching stems from Michel de Certeau's (1984) notion of appropriation, where pieces and parts of various texts are consumed as a means of meaning-making for readers' individual purposes. Jenkins (1988, 1992) employs this idea of poaching to describe fan reading as a culturally marginal appropriation to facilitate the process of

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meaning making through a particularly active and vocal form of consumption (1992. p. 28). Positioning fans as textual poachers positioned them as active audiences who created meaning through the (re)production and (re)interpretation of texts (Fiske, 1992; Storey, 2009). This perspective of active media consumption stemmed from the Birmingham School of London and the field of cultural studies that saw popular culture as a space for identity construction, taking seriously the various, oft-marginalized audiences that consumed pop culture products (Banash & Enns, 2002; Storey, 2009). Audiences, according to this perspective, actively engaged with media content through the lens of lived experience, where one's class, race, gender, sexuality, and personal identity as well as the everyday context in which they lived informed how one constructed, interpreted, and incorporated meaning into everyday life (Fiske, 1992; Grossberg, 1992; Hall, 2019; Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Storey, 2009).

This perspective served as a response to past dominant understandings of audience consumption that came out of the Frankfurt School. Interested in power structures, ideological formation and capitalist influences on culture, Frankfurt school scholars saw popular culture as a product of an industrial capitalist industry that threatened individual creativity and manipulated audiences toward more and more uniform, mass produced, predictable products (Ardorno & Horkheimer, 2002; Storey, 2009). Most recognizable of Frankfurt school concepts is Adorno and Horkheimer's (2002) notion of the culture industry, which describes the decline of art into industrialized business of standardized, mass-produced 'rubbish' (p.1). That serves the interests of capital over that of individual artistry or creativity. Such top-down production by the culture industry was, according to Adorno and Horkheimer (2002), reduced individuals to passive, uncritical masses with no need to interpret or predict the outcomes or messages of media as they are handed to them by the culture industries. This view of culture and media consumption stemmed from the idea of popular culture as maintaining authority where standardized, homogenized, and predictable mass media provided a minimal frame of references and retroactive needs that depoliticized the working class in ways that benefited dominant ideological structures and power holders (Storey, 2009). While the idea of the culture industry remains useful in examining power structures and ideological (re)production with respect to media systems, the assumed passivity of audiences served to dismiss their consumption as mere manipulation for the benefit of 'the powers that be'.

While fan studies scholarship is grounded in cultural studies perspectives of active audiences and meaning-making, it is important to acknowledge that these two schools of thought are not and should not be mutually exclusive or binary means of analysis, as the works of one inform the other and vice versa. An understanding of the cultural meaning-making processes in a given context is incomplete without an analysis of the systemic power structures and institutions that are embedded within said context. That being said, such a political economic discussion of fandom, K-pop or otherwise, is outside the scope of this project and will be left for future consideration.

As fans are understood as active poachers that (re)produce and (re)circulate media texts for their own meaning-making purposes, they have overwhelmingly been positioned as part of what Jenkins (1992, 2006a) called 'participatory culture'[18], which involves not just consumption but active cultural activity; production sparked by consumption (Jenkins, 2006b). Activities of the fan-producer included fanfiction, fan videos (fanvids or vidding), fan art, fan music ('filk'), fan magazines (fanzines), organizing conventions, etc. (Jenkins 1992; Duffett, 2013). Intertwined with the conceptualization of fandom as creative is the positioning of fandom as communal (Hills, 2014), where fandom is seen as a collective by fans who form a social identity based in and around belonging in a fan 'community' (Jenkins, 1992). Benedict Anderson's (2006) idea of the 'imagined community' has been applied to fandom, and in fan contexts has been defined as "comprising people from diverse locations and cultures" who formed imagined bonds with multitudes based on shared investment in media texts (Morimoto & Chin, 2017 p.347) Examining fandom as a type of community positioned within a framework of participatory culture allowed fan scholars to investigate the practices of fans as transgressive, bottom-up opposition to top-down capitalist industry and hegemonic ideology (Bacon-Smith, 1991; Hills, 2017; Jenkins, 1992; Linden & Linden, 2017). This notion of community-led democratization of popular culture is a view embedded in the first wave of fan studies (Linden & Linden, 2017) which, as discussed above, sought to reposition fans in the binary of media consumption as active,

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[18] Defined in greater detail as "1. relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, 2. strong support for creating and sharing creations with others, 3. some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices, 4. members who believe that their contributions matter, and 5. members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, they care what other people think about what they have created)." (Jenkins et al., 2009, pp. 5–6)

transgressive, and resistant creators of meaning (Gray et al., 2007, 2017). While this view of fandom as community remains useful and is used by both academics and fan scholars, the idea of fan communities has been questions for its applicability in current mediatized fan consumption. Additionally, the predication of fandom on a communal participatory culture framework serves to further divide fandom along binaries of participatory ('transgressive', and therefore 'good') fans and non-participatory, or not visibly participatory (complicit in hegemonic media structures, and therefor 'bad') fans (Gray et al., 2017; Hills, 2002a, 2002b). Such framing marginalizes ways of 'doing' fandom that are not as visibly participatory or vocally active (Bury, 2018; Hills, 2002a) and often involves investigation that reveals little about fan motivations and behaviour (Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Harrington & Bielby, 1995). It has also become increasingly difficult to characterize fandom as a community based around participation as the ubiquity of digital media necessitates and normalizes what were once distinctly fans modes of consumption and production into everyday means of interacting with media (Hills, 2014, 2018; Sandvoss & Kearns, 2014; Stanfill, 2019; The Janissary Collective, 2014). Rather than dismiss the idea of fandom as a creative community outright or sidelining more visibly participatory activities for less visible ones, it is more worthwhile to consider the various ways that fans participate in and engage with fandom and fan texts and the motivations behind such participation, particularly as fan practices have expanded into both online and offline spaces.

2.4. Fans and Technology: Mediated Fandom

The transformation of technology during the emergence of the internet significantly impacted the consumption, production, and participation involved in fandom, as well as broader media consumption. Instantaneous flows of information across increasingly global communication channels facilitated - and are facilitated by, shifts in geopolitics, labor divisions, and capitalist organization (L. Bennett, 2014; Castells, 2010). Early fan communities could be found on pre-internet spaces such as Usenet, a text-based message board system that allowed for closed forum discussion (Baym, 2000; Fiesler & Dym, 2020; Kompare et al., 2018), as well as email and news groups, but it was not until the late 1990s as the internet became accessible to wider audiences that online fan communities formed into distinct, structured groups with varying but common participatory practices (L. Bennett, 2014; Booth, 2010; Bourlai & Herring, 2014; Stein,

2015). The development of social media platforms and mobile technologies further facilitated the formation of online fan spaces and integrated fan practices into wider, normalized aspects of digital platform practices, shifting the ways in which fans as well as general audiences consumed and interacted with media (Gray et al., 2017; Hills, 2018). Lanier and Fowler (2013) describe the digital impact on fandom as 'the use of digital technology to engage in fannish activities and practices with respect to specific cultural texts' and 'refers to fannish behaviours mediated through digital technology (p. 287). As fans carved out spaces for themselves, the modes and means of communication, creativity, knowledge, and organizational power were intensified; fans could interact with larger groups from more places as well as with cultural creators and producers (L. Bennett, 2014; Booth, 2010). Fans could also accumulate and archive knowledge about favoured texts through the affordances of internet technology (L. Bennett 2014). One of the arguably largest impacts, although a normalized aspect of digital media today, was on fan participation and creativity. The affordances of what became known as Web 2.0 allowed for many-to-many, interactive, participatory spaces that facilitated the sharing of user generated content (UGC) (Choudhury, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2009; McArthur et al., 2018). Jenkins et al (2013) described these affordances and the technologies behind them as 'spreadable media', where audiences have the potential to 'share content for their own purposes' (3), creating opportunity for circulation of media texts and fan-created UGC rather than solely distribution. Digitally mediate participatory culture allows fans, as well as general media users, to share, shape, remix, and reframe content in various ways not possible prior to these internet platforms (Jenkins et al., 2009, 2013). The affordances of various online platforms have further impacted fan participation and creation as fans gather in various online spaces; the affordances and limitations of a given interface influence the norms, expectations, and limits of the community that develops (Busse & Stein, 2009; Stein, 2018). The microblogging site Tumblr has long been a key space of a fan activity (DeSouza, 2013; Fiesler & Dym, 2020; Hillman et al., 2014; Stein, 2018), where features include limitless scrolling and the ability to share or 'reblog' other's posts to one's own blog (Kohnen, 2018). Tumblr allows the posting and reblogging of various media forms; however visual content is the main form of media on Tumblr, where pictures and GIFs are circulated with or without commenting by users, often workings as a means of extending fan experience beyond that of the singular moment being captured (Kohnen, 2018; Stein, 2018). Twitter in contrast is used by fans a s a means to extend fannish experiences

through networked conversations, limited by set character restrictions and minimal ability to share visual media such as videos, images, or GIFS (Bruns, 2006; Highfield et al., 2013).

Spreadability is increasingly facilitated by platforms themselves, where 'share' buttons allow users to circulate posts from one platform to another, while more and more fan-organized circulation is being done by industries seeking to at once reach wide audiences and profit margins while also maintaining control over the products they distribute. Such facilitation and control are examples of what Jenkins (2006a) called 'convergence culture' defined as 'the flow of contact across multiple platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want' (p. 2). The ability to consume different types of media - music, genres, videos, text - on different devices is a form of technological convergence, as is the sharing of content across different platforms, which necessitates and requires the generation and participation on the part of users who 'are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed content" (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 3). Convergence and participatory cultures have facilitated complex ways of (re)producing, (re)consuming, and (re)circulating media as well as supported the organization and distinction of fandoms based around specific media texts across borders and time zones.

It is important however to acknowledge the tension within these cultures, as the idea of 'participation' can imply a much more democratic digital space than what it describes. Such utopian views stem in part from the business perspective of its [coinage], which saw the marketization and commodification of participatory aspects of the internet and the monetization of UGC, creating tensions between media users, platforms, and industry as the lines of 'fair' participation continue to be drawn (Jenkins et al., 2013; Madeley, 2015). Such tensions are visible in the copyrighting of music on YouTube, significantly restricting the ways in which users can employ music in videos uploaded to the platform (Jenkins et al., 2013). A more fan-related example is the emergence of licensed translations of manga and anime by Japanese and U.S. publishers, which fostered communities of 'scanlators' (fans who would scan issues of translated manga and upload them online) who would often release translated manga much faster than official licensees and for much, much cheaper (Madeley, 2015).

Acknowledging such tensions between media users, including fandoms, activists, religious groups, political groups, and general users, and various industry and production systems highlight the ways in which power works within and through media practices, and combats the tendency to lean either too far into utopian ideals of democratized collective networks or into technological deterministic pessimism. Considering the global reach media users are afforded through digital communication technologies, the ways in which media empower and disempower various groups is key to understanding media production, consumption, and circulation. Once again, however, such a line of inquiry is beyond the scope of this thesis and will be left for future investigation.

The ubiquity of the internet and mobile digital technologies as spaces for fan consumption, creativity, circulation, and interaction has increased the reach of fans and industry producers beyond local or regional contexts as the instantaneous flows of information and the compression of space and time seemingly render the limits of borders and time zones meaningless (Castells, 2010; Giddens, 1990). The facilitation of global consumption by digital media and ICTs allows fans to congregate in shared online spaces and engage with non-local cultural texts, increasing the global aspects and practices of media fandom (Morimoto 2017; Gray et al., 2017).

2.5. Investment and Connection: Affective Identities and Parasocial Relationships

2.5.1. 'I have so many feels!': Affect, Emotion, and Fandom

Thus far I have touched on what fans are, and what fans do. However, this leaves out the question of why? Why are fans fans? Why do they do what they do? The first wave of fand studies focused on positioning fans as a legitimate object of study, which resulted in an overfocus on fandom as resistant to versus complicit in culture industry practices and ideologies (De Kloet & van Zoonen, 2007; Gray et al., 2007, 2017). The second wave sought to correct the overfocus on resistance and empowerment to interrogate the extent of fandom's resistant capabilities, and began reflecting on questions of hegemonic practices and uneven distributions of power that work within fandoms and between fans and producers (De Kloet & van Zoonen, 2007; Gray et al., 2017). Fan participation was a key focal point in these perspectives on fandom as both significant forms of potential resistance to top-down culture industry

structures and as complicit in reproducing and normalizing the very hegemonic structures that are also being transgressed; underlying these viewpoints was the way of looking at fans and fan texts as objects to be studied 'in and for itself' (Gray et al., 2017, p. 21). However, as everyday life became increasingly mediated and fandom was thrust into the mainstream, less distinctly organized and spread out across various social media platforms that facilitated various different-yet-similar ways of doing fandom, such participatory practices have become commonplace (Booth, 2018; Click & Scott, 2018; Duffett, 2013; Gray et al., 2017). Thus, a third wave of fan studies began to examine the ways in which fans related to fan objects, placing greater attention on the intrapersonal motivations and emotions of fans (Gray et al., 2007, 2017; Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Hills, 2002a; Kohnen, 2018; Sandvoss, 2005), which also responding to the advancement of digital mobile technologies into everyday life by extending and connecting the pleasures, motivations, and practices of fans to broader political, economic, and cultural shifts (De Kloet & van Zoonen, 2007; K. Larsen & Zubernis, 2013; Morimoto & Chin, 2017, 2017). As fans have been characterized as 'intellectually and emotionally' attached to media texts, the interrogation of emotional attachments and resulting motivations of fans creates space for deeper understandings of how fans relate to media, technologies, and broader cultural contexts and objects.

Underlying this interest in emotional attachment from third wave studies is what could be considered an 'affective turn' that recentered emotion and affect as key aspects of fans' participation and meaning making processes. Both emotion and affect are messy, complicated terms; while an extended discussion of emotion and affect theory is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will provide a brief overview and workable definitions that have informed this project. To begin with, emotion has been described as "something that people express about the feelings they have, whether the feelings refer to a state of being or to physical conditions" (Garde-Hansen & Gorton, 2013, p. 30). These expressions of feeling can be shared through various forms of psychic physical, social, and technological contact, and can be understood as a means of boundary setting and connecting the individual to the social (Ahmed, 2004; Garde-Hansen & Gorton, 2013). In contrast to emotion, affect is more often located with respect to the body and its abilities and capacity to act or be acted upon, where affect occurs at the in-betweenness of action (Clough, 2007; Garde-Hansen & Gorton, 2013; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). However, the bodily distinction between affect and emotion is contested,

and various applications of affect take various lengths to differentiate the two depending on the context being applied (Garde-Hansen & Gorton, 2013). What affect does, regardless of its location, is raise thoughts of how the body and mind, rationality and irrationality, work in our "power to affect the world around us and be affected by it (Clough, 2007, p. x). The ways in which we experience the word, according to Grossberg (1992), is coloured and textured, made pleasurable and engaging, by affect (p.56).

For Ahmed (2014), while affect can be located in the body, the outside-in model of emotion that sees feelings beginning in the body then move outward reduces affect to physiological or psychological individual experiences rather than as products of social and cultural interaction. Emotions and the affect between them are therefore about movement between individuals and society and about attachment, the connections we form with various things and how these attachments ground us as 'objects of feeling' (Ahmed, 2014, p. 11). These attachments are what form as emotion works, where they 'align individuals with communities - or bodily space with social space - through the very intensity of their attachment' (Ahmed, 2004). One such way affect moves and works through attachments is through the accumulation of feelings 'around' objects (Ahmed, 2010, p. 44). These objects become sticky, retaining associations of feelings such as pleasure, disgust, happiness, fear, etc. (Ahmed, 2010, 2014). The stickiness of affect, particularly pleasure and happiness but also disgust, fear, and dislike, can be seen in fan objects, where associations of pleasure become attached to fan texts, metatexts, and experiences relating to the text, extending the pleasure of fandom beyond that of a single text and also through other fans as various affect forms in between the movement of emotion across relations.

The connection of affect to fandom and fan studies has been touched on by a number of researchers (Barnes, 2015; Grossberg, 1992; Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Kohnen, 2018). The 'emotional attachment' or pleasurable engagement fans have with their texts is a cornerstone of understanding fans and fandom, especially when considered within the context of devalued fan activity as associated with irrational, excessive expressions of emotion. Positioning fans as a legitimate object of study entailed a repositioning of fan practices within the binary of cultural value where fan practices are logical in their resistant, empowering potential. The distancing of fandom from stereotypical portrayals of excessive emotional irrationality saw a period of fan

studies works that placed greater attention to relationships between fans and producers, sidelining investigations of emotion and motivation (Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Malik, 2019). While fan affect has been investigated throughout the various waves of fan studies research, it is only in recent years has emotional attachment become a main focus of fan scholars. One of the earlier considerations of fan emotion, Grossberg (1992) places affect in a central role of fan pleasures and motivations, arguing that affect is formed through the 'relations of practices' (1992 p.83); however, as Hills (2002a) points out, Grossberg's conceptualization of affect as socially constructed leaves little room for playful potential or individual ownership over affective attachments and meanings. Harrington and Beilby (1995) do discuss the affective play employed by the soap fans they spoke with who took pleasure in knowingly negotiating the boundaries between reality and fantasy, but fall back on understandings of 'theoretical over-rationalization' that dismiss such playful affective readings (Hills, 2002a), and is woefully outdated with regards to fan practices and affective engagement (K. Yoon, 2019). Other ways that fan affect has been investigated includes through the formation of affective identities, where emotional investment informs and influences identity construction where fan texts and related objects are seen as "something to be invested in, something that *matters*" (Grossberg 1992, p. 57; emphasis added; Devereux & Hidalgo, 2015; McLaren & Jin, 2020). The emotional investment of fans in their fan object is a driving force behind both the connection one feels to the fannish object and the connection one feels to the broader fan community, where "affect connects fans to texts and to each other" (Kohnen, 2018, p. 339). Stein's idea of 'the culture of feels' is an effective way to describe fan affect, as fandom communities thrive "on the public celebration of emotion previously considered the realm of the private; emotions remain intimate but no longer private" (Stein, 2015, p. 156). This 'culture of feels' stems from the personal pleasure fans get from their fandom, pleasure that acts as motivation for various behaviours as well as a form of social glue through the understanding and sharing of such pleasures with other fans (Harrington and Bielby, 1995). However, fandom is at once personal and communal, private and public (Booth, 2010), as Stein's quote suggested. As Zubernis and Larsen (2018) point out, the emotional connections fans develop with other fans as an equally important, if not a more important, relationship within fandom as it is these relationships that create community practices and bonds that occur both in person and online. The emotion that fans feel is as integral to fandom as the varying levels of participation or engagement with a fan object, and it is this affective connection that

circulates as much as other objects amongst fans as they engage with fan texts and each other in on- and offline spaces.

2.5.2. 'I feel like I have these… friends I will never get to meet': Fandom and Parasocial Relationships

Additionally, fan attachment has also been theorized as a form of parasocial relationship, which describes a one-way, one-sided, subjective sense of connection and relationship with individuals, often celebrities or characters in media (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Hu, 2016). The concept derives from Horton and Wohl's (1956) notion of parasocial interaction (PSI) that describes the perceived reciprocal, social encounter viewers have with mediated individuals on screen. These perceived interactions can (although not always) lead to parasocial relationships (PSR) as an emotional connection with media figures is formed where audiences familiarize themselves with their "mannerisms, behaviours… and other personal details" (Kurtin et al., 2019, p. 33), and can continue to exist without the presence of a media figure, differing from parasocial interaction which requires the presence of a mediated other (Hartmann, 2016). Stemming from psychological theory, the idea of parasocial relationships has been contested within the realm of fan studies (Hills, 2015) as it has been associated with the pathological, stereotypical depictions of fans as having some kind of social, personal, or moral 'lack' or ineptness that needed to be compensated for (Jenson, 1992), and at worst could easily be characterized as "a series of successive illusions, which borders on the concept of delusion" (Groszman, 2020, para. 2.5). The perceived reciprocity and 'knowing' between the fan and the media figure is ultimately a one-sided illusion, mediated through screens and pixels, substituting for 'real' social relations (Hills, 2015, p. 2; Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Despite the pejorative connotations to parasocial relationships resulting in critique and avoidance of the theory in fan studies research, there have been attempts to revalue the concept (Hills, 2015), re-examining the ways Horton and Wohl (1956) presented the concepts of PSI and PSR. As Hills (2015) and Groszman (2020) note, while parasocial relationships can be pathological forms of compensation, Horton and Wohl (1956) believed that such illusionary relations were most often normative means of interacting with media and media figures. Ferris and Harris (date) describe the context of industry manufactured encounters between fans and stars which contains elements of

reciprocity, complicating Horton and Wohl's (1956) concepts of PSI and PSR as they did not consider the physical meeting between viewer and media figure, while Redmond (2014) argues that the notion of para-social absence is refuted by the mutual awareness on the part of celebrities and fans, where celebrities maintain awareness of fandom through the sensing of 'tracing/performances of fandom' (Redmond page ?) while fans 'experience celebrities as existentially presented even if mediated' (p. ?) through the material objects related to the celebrity which serve as tools of identity formation and identification on the part of the fan (Hills, 2015; Redmond, 2006; Rehak, 2013; Stacey, 1994). As the mass media gave away to new digital media technologies the extent of the imagined or illusionary reciprocity on the part of audiences towards mediated figures was questioned (Groszman, 2020; Hills, 2015; Kurtin et al., 2019); the interactive affordances of social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook or the various apps that K-pop label companies develop as fan-hubs specifically for mediated interaction between fans and idols all but demands reconsideration of the imagined or illusioned one-way reciprocity of Horton and Wohl's (1956) conceptualization of parasocial interaction and relations. Hills (2015) contends that 'parasocial' is inadequate in today's hypermediated society as theorizations of the concept have overwhelmingly operated from a binary, dyadic viewpoint of social/para-social, placing the assumed imagined or sensed parasocial relations and connections as secondary to more importantly valued 'real' social relationships. Rather than viewing parasocial as secondary or separate from the social, Hills (2015) argues that it is better to consider such mediated interactions as multi-social, where "para-social relationships are multiply performed and displayed within the communities of digital fandom" (p. 472). This multi-sociality steps away from the notion of interaction as one-way between an individual fan and an admired celebrity to account for the ways in which fan-celebrity interactions motivate and sustain fan-fan connections while also acting as a means of forming personal identities. In other words, "fans can simultaneously draw on celebrities as a resource within their self-narratives and share and perform these narratives with multiple fan others (both known and imagined)" (Hills, 2015, p. 471). This conceptualization of parasocial relationships sees mediated intimacy and connection as both a form of emotionally driven identification with media figures and a form of glue that bonds fans together in communities, providing a more contemporary means of theorizing the connections fans form with celebrities.

The concept of parasocial interaction and relationships is, according to Elfving-Hwang (2018) and Groszman (2020), increasingly relevant with respect to K-pop fandom. Elfving-Hwang (2018) discusses how industry-structured fan-idol interactions and the mystique of celebrity itself serve to foster parasocial identification through offering aspirational examples of social mobility and group belonging in the form of fan communities. However, Elfving-Hwang (2018) does not speak directly to fans about their affective identification with K-pop idols, instead focusing on a textual examination of the K-pop industry, viewing the narratives of idol stardom as an "aspirational ideal that anyone can become a celebrity if they are willing to put enough effort and self- sacrifice into the process" (p. 195). While her examination of the production process and profitability of parasocial relationships provides an effective framework for applying the notion of parasocial to K-pop, it is absent of fan voices explaining how and why such affective relations and connections are formed. Groszman (2020) takes a more centered approach as an aca-fan, explicitly positioning their EXO fandom as the motivation for examining parasocial relationships within the context of fan studies research. By positioning idols as service providers who interact with fans (provide a 'service') through meet-and-greets, hi-touch events,[19] and increasingly through livestreamed online concerts and 'personal message' video chats, they link the emotional connections fans have with idols to the connections they form with other fans. Drawing on Sandvoss, (2005), Hills (2002a), and Busse and Gray (2011), Groszman (2020) discusses how parasocial relationships contribute to not only identity formation but also social belonging as "the individual fan imagines other fans who are also enjoying this media" (para. 4.1). I have experienced this extended, imagined form of connection myself waiting for new SHINee MVs to 'drop', or be uploaded to YouTube. As a common 'communal' experience for fans is waiting 'together' to watch a new MV for the first time, countdowns are posted on various fan spaces as the hours and minutes tick by, and jokes are made about the video being 'on time' (most often targeted at SM Entertainment MVs, which are notorious for being released 'late'). The sense of group experience mediated through various platforms that foster fan interaction extends the enjoyment of the MV, where the feelings and affects one experiences while watching and listening to the new song are

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[19] Hi-touch is a form of fan-idol interaction often done at fanmeets (mini-concerts) in North America, the UK, and Europe as alternatives to the proper meet-and-greets/album signing events in Korea. Often part of a tiered ticket package, hi-touch refers to the opportunity for fans to hi-five group members, and potentially get in quick words of appreciation or adoration before being hurried away by staff.

'shared' with others through reactions posted online. As emotion and affect are driving forces underlying the formation of fan parasocial relationships, identities, and communities, examining the various ways affect informs attachments, relationships, and connections between fans and fan texts as well as fan communities, particularly as affect flows not just between bodies and social contexts but across borders, creates more comprehensive understandings of why fans do fandom, which furthers understandings of how affect impacts broader relations with media and culture in a highly mediatized world.

2.6. Global Fandom: Transnational and Transcultural

It is only within the last few years that fans of non-local pop culture have been moved from the periphery of fan studies, clearly evident from my conference experiences above. The questions of audiences consuming non-local popular culture is not new; Ang (1991) and Katz and Leibes (1990) *Dallas* studies sought to address assumptions of American cultural imperialism surrounding audience reception, and found that rather than uncritically accepting the message of *Dallas* at face value, audiences interpreted various parts of the show through the lens of personal cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. Works on anime and manga fans (often referred to as Otaku) in the U.S. remain fairly common as scholars, intrigued by Western consumption of Japanese cultural products, sought to examine the alleged reversal of Western cultural imperialism (Hills, 2002b), as well as the practices of Otaku in the US such as cosplay or fansubbing (M. R. Larsen, 2018). However, the examination of global fandoms has only recently become a central concern to fan studies as interrogations of assumptions, binaries, and moral dualisms were raised by aca-fans that were part of various global fandoms. As Chin & Morimoto 2013, Annett (2011, 2014), and Darling-Wolf, (2004) highlighted, the focus on fan consumption of non-local cultural objects in the 2000s and early 2010s remained staunchly on U.S. fans consuming non-American products, marginalizing both the study of non-local fandom consumption and fans based in other parts of the world also consuming non-local popular culture, access of which was, at the time, increasingly possible through the internet. Considering that the majority of global fan engagement takes place 'through mass mediated texts' (Darling-Wolf, 2014, p. 126), the social, cultural, and economic relationships that occur when audiences and texts interact was seen as a critical gap within fan studies when it came to understanding and theorizing global fandoms.

This critique is especially relevant with respect to K-pop fandom, as a popular category of English language scholarship on border-crossing fandoms stemmed from work in East Asia, which takes, and continues to take, a transnational approach to fan audiences that owes much to the influences of critical cultural and media globalization research perspectives (Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Malik, 2019; McLaren & Jin, 2020). The most influential of these studies is the work on Japanese transnational pop culture fandoms by Koichi Iwabuchi. Drawing on hybridization as a lens to view globalization processes, Iwabuchi employs the concept of transnationalism to explore the flows of various objects, people, and ideas across national boundaries (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 52). Transnational, described by Randolph Bourne who coined the term, as 'a weaving back and forth, with the other levels of many threads of all sizes and cultures (Bourne, 1916), became a favoured alternative to more generic terms such as international for many globalization scholars, including Appadurai, Beck, and Shiller (Jung, 2009). In his examination of Japanese pop culture, Iwabuchi draws on Watson's (1997) definition of transnational as 'a condition by which people. Commodities, and ideas literally cross - transgress -national boundaries and are not identified with a single place of origin (p. 11; cited in Iwabuchi, 2002). The underlying aim of such studies was uncovering the extent consuming transnational products impacted audiences "transnational imagination" and fostered more cosmopolitan global identities (Iwabuchi, 2004; Morimoto & Chin, 2017), and Iwabuchi applies the term as a means of more effectively interrogating local contexts impacted by mediated global flows and interconnections of images, information, and ideas (Iwabuchi, 2002). Chin and Morimoto (2013) point to his field work on Japanese female fans of Hong Kong popular culture as a foundational work in transnational fandom studies, where Iwabuchi examines the apparent cultural lack perceived by Japanese fans in Japanese popular culture, which prompts fans to turn to the more 'modern' and 'cosmopolitan' culture of Hong Kong as a means of gaining cultural capital and developing a sense of individuality (2002). While Iwabuchi's findings indicated that fans developed varying levels of reflexivity and critical awareness of their own country's history and development, he nonetheless positions these fans as 'dupes' regardless of their desire and attempts to differentiate themselves from consumers of Japanese popular culture, stating "...these fans are closer to those 'dupes' than they care to admit… for all their attempts, then, to distance themselves from the 'mindless' consumerism of the mainstream media, the interests of such fans have themselves been shaped to an extent by that media" (Iwabuchi, 2002, pp. 188–189). Such a critique falls

back on the moral dualism of 'good' vs 'bad' fan consumption (Hills 2002), where fandom that exhibits no clear opposition or resistance to capitalist, industry driven consumption is therefore complicit in mass mediated consumption (Chin & Morimoto 2013). In addition to this perspective being reductive and dismissive of fans, particularly female fans, that exhibit 'no explicit oppositionality' (Chin & Morimoto, 2013) to hegemonic corporate institutions and state practices, it misses how such corporate and state institutions related to culture and its industries are intricately intertwined with fandom as fans rely on industry to create the products they appropriate and industry relies on fans as major revenue sources. Indeed, the management of fans through appealing to and inviting their participation and engagement is an increasing area of focus as various pop culture products take on transmedia forms and brands develop ways to replicate fan investment (Stanfill, 2019).

Along with a dismissive, morally dualistic view of non-oppositional fandoms, such transnational works regularly conflate local and personal experiences of consumption with national identities (Annett, 2014; Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Hills, 2002b; Malik, 2019; Morimoto & Chin, 2017). Early works on Otaku fans often fell into this viewpoint, both in English language works as well as in Japanese, where understanding of 'them' can be discovered by 'us', forming a self-Other dialectic of identity that reduces individual identities to collective national identity (Annett, 2014), missing key opportunities to examine the frictions, negotiations, and flows of identities such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, class, and fannish identities as well as the meanings and emotions that arise from such friction and negotiation that occur within and among cross-border fandoms (Annett, 2014; Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Hills, 2002b). Once again intertwined with this is a historical divide between 'political economy' perspectives and 'cultural studies' perspectives, a binary that seemingly limits examination to one of these two choices, where top-down hegemonic complicit-ness is juxtaposed with bottom-up resistance, critique and celebration pitted against one another at the expense of holistic, thorough critical inquiry (Annett, 2011; Hills, 2002a). Challenging the dismissal of non-oppositional fans and the dualistic focus on the nation as a key identity marker is the concept of transcultural fandom, which distinguishes itself from transnational fandom by de-coupling the nation from its privileged position as the main lens fans are seen through and positioning it instead amongst other potential identities such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, and fannish identities, leaving space for both interrogation of the

nation in relation to fandom as well as creating space for the possibility of other means of negotiating and understanding non-local cultures (Annett, 2014; Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Malik, 2019). Chin and Morimoto (2013) propose transcultural fandom as an alternative to transnational fandom due to the overdetermination of national identity and socio-political focus that transnational theories take, which results in very minimal discussion of 'what actually attracts and motivates fans' (p.97). Such a repositioning allows for a more nuanced understanding of the flows of identity, meaning, and emotion as well as the products, ideas, and media across borders, accepting the messiness of affect and meaning making (Chin & Morimoto, 2013) and lessening the dialectic self-other identity that views fans of particular national identities as Other in relation to 'us' as a means of understanding non-local cultures (Annett, 2011). Transcultural fandom also provides opportunities to move away from 'good/bad' and complicit/resistive binaries still found in cross-border fandom research. Rather than becoming fans based on perceived cultural lack in local national contexts, fans become fans of particular cross-border products through what Hills (2002b) and Chin and Morimoto (2013) term 'affective affinities' that speak to various aspects of a fan's identity and lived experience, where "fans become fans of border-crossing texts or objects not necessarily because of where they are produced but because they recognize a subjective moment of affinity regardless of origin" (Chin and Morimoto 2013, 9; emphasis in original). Rather than a trans/national focus that positions borders as the foundation of identity, transcultural fandom theory allows for the analysis and acknowledgement of fans' various affective affinities and the ways in which they inform and are influenced by the multitude of identities and lived experiences fans carry with them.

The framework of transnational with respect to fandom has been and continues to be applied in Hallyu research as a means of encompassing and examining transnational cross-border flows of soft power, technology, capital, consumption practices, and fan audiences (J. Choi & Maliangkay, 2015; Jin, 2016; Jin & Ryoo, 2016; S. Jung, 2014; Y. Kim, 2013a; Nye & Kim, 2013). Choi and Maliangkay's (2015) book *K-Pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, focuses on - or, to paraphrase them, are fascinated by, the elements of K-pop that lends itself to vibrant global fandoms, examining its functionality for various stakeholders such as corporate brands, the nation-state, and fans. Despite acknowledging the importance of fan behaviour, context, and lived experiences, Choi and Maliangkay position fans through a

transnational lens, centering the 'local' in terms of various nations, giving examples of Australian fans, Malaysian fans, and Japanese fans (2015). Additionally, the emphasis placed on the role of commodity consumption, while significant and thorough considering the role of idol as commodity, slides into a 'complicit/resistive' binary that threatens to position fans as dupes happy to consume all things K-pop. While the role of consumption in the K-pop music industry should not be understated, political economic or critical analyses of fans' role in the reproduction and maintenance of mediated capitalist consumption and labor practices should be understood in tandem with the meanings, emotions, and lived experiences informing such consumption.

More recent accounts of K-pop fandom as well as Korean Wave audiences more broadly can be found in Yoon and Jin (2017)recent edited collection 'The Korean Wave: Evolution, Fandom, and Transnationality", which explores issues of digital fan labor (Zhang & Fung, 2017), participatory culture (Min, 2017), consumption practices (Lee 2017), and social media use (Leung, 2017). While some authors explicitly acknowledge the role that meaning and affect play in K-pop fandom (Leung, 2017; H. Jung, 2017) and the overall thorough and timely investigations each author brings through their chapters, the majority of the text takes a transnational lens as its main focus. While the purpose behind Yoon and Jin's edited collection was to examine the transnationality of Hallyu, it reinforces the constructing of national boundaries on fan practices and affect with respect to Korean Wave, particularly K-pop, consumption, and restricts understandings of fan motivations to ones based on national identity. For example, H. Jung's (2017) examination of American fans of K-pop and K-dramas as it relates to the construction of the Korean state's soft power reiterates ideas of nostalgic cultural lack, where fans employ Hallyu to fill in perceived gaps in American culture lost to capitalist modernization, echoing Iwabuchi's claim of nostalgic desire on the part of Japanese female fans of Hong Kong stars (2002). While H. Jung's (2017) linking of the appeal of togetherness ('*woori*-ness') in Korean culture to soft power production adds to understandings of the negotiations of nation-states and power exchanges inherent in global hybridized cultural interactions, the positioning of American fans as 'lacking' something from their local culture only speaks to one aspect of the motivations of K-pop fans, and serves to generalize fans in America despite attempts to avoid such statements.

Other works on transnational K-pop fans in countries such as Canada (Yoon, 2019; Yoon & Jin, 2016), the U.S. (Jin, 2016), Brazil (Ko, et al., 2014), Indonesia (S. Jung & Shim, 2014), and Israel and Palestine (Otmazgin & Lyan, 2014), similarly place national boundaries around fans' identities, and while such worlds have indeed furthered understandings of local consumption and digitally mediated fan practices, there continues to be a lack of investigation into K-pop fans' motivations and understandings of K-pop through non-nation centered frameworks. There are however a few studies that employ a transcultural fandom approach to examine Hallyu. Yue and Jung (2011) explores the transcultural constructions of shared mediated space and connection between audiences in Korea and Australia, while Malik (2019) investigates the affective affinities of Arab audiences of the Korean Wave, examining how these affinities work to develop cultural capital and identity within fan networks. S. Jung (2011) develops a transcultural framework to interrogate the 'soft masculinities' of Hallyu stars such as soloist Rain and Winter Sonata star Bae Yong Joon, however she dismisses analysis of the appeal of such soft masculinity to fans and the potential for connections between various other forms of soft masculinity in favour of examining the perceived 'cultural odorlessness' of such corporately produced transnational products (Chin & Morimoto, 2013).

Other transcultural works on Hallyu include Han's (2017) and Min et al's (2019) research on Latin American fandom. Han's investigation focused on the roles that digital mediation plays in how fans spread and legitimate K-pop within Latin American society, findings that the enjoyment of and identification with K-pop served as a means for fans to develop sub-cultural identity in order to counter mass Latin American popular culture. For Min et al., (2019), the focus is on Chilean fan consumption of K-pop and their use of social media to construct affinity spaces that foster fan bonding and communication. Despite the transcultural examination of fans' emotions and affect in the construction of various affinity spaces, it is however ironic that Min et al., (2019) fall back on a transnational positioning of Latin American, specifically Chilean, fans, sidelining discussion of various motivations and affinities in favour of discussing social media uses and affordances to compare against other Latin American fan communities.

It is interesting to note here that a wide range of English language research on K-pop and Hallyu is written by Korean scholars based outside of Korea, and as a result Korean Wave literature carries with it various forms of the self-Other dialectic identity

described by Annett (2011) in literature on Japanese pop culture. This dialectic lends itself to some levels of national pride as well as critical inquiry, as scholars seek to answer the question 'why Korea?' through attempts of uncovering how 'they' (non-Korean transnational audiences) understand 'us' (Koreans and Korean (popular) culture). An observation rather than a critique, as such national pride is valid and well warranted in a number of cases, nonetheless such positioning of 'us' and 'them' leads inquiry to lean into transnational frameworks as a means of interrogating the ways and extent Korean pop culture and Korea by extension have entered mainstream discourse in various countries as a form of counter-cultural flow. While not negative, such positioning should be complimented by inquiry into the flows of meaning, emotion, and identity through lenses not centered by the national in order to increase understanding of the flows of popular culture such as the Korean Wave across borders. It is in this context that transcultural fandom theory becomes the grounding framework through which to examine the motivations, identities, and affinities of K-pop fans in order to contribute to broader discussions of the appeal of K-pop across borders.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter opened with a definitional exploration of fans and fandom through a historical overview of the development of fan studies and brief discussion of the dualisms and binary assumptions embedded in fan studies that influence the privileging of various fans and fan practices over others. It then undertook a brief discussion of the theories of affect and meaning construction as well as the role of technology in fandom, describing the characteristics of Web 2.0 that benefit fan consumption and participation. It then undertakes a discussion of transnational and transcultural fandom theory, highlighting the gaps in the framing of the national as a main identity through which fandom is done and explains the ways transcultural fandom addresses these gaps. It concludes with a brief literature review of the ways transnational and transcultural fandom theories have been used in K-pop research in order to contextualize the ways in which K-pop fans have been discussed. The next chapter looks at the findings of field work conducted during the summer months of 2019 to explore the ways in which fans enjoy and understand K-pop as well as the affect and motivations behind such enjoyment.

Chapter 3.   Fan Connections, Connecting Fans

3.1. Introduction

In 2017 I flew from New Brunswick to Ontario for *SHINee World V*, SHINee's first world tour Canada stop. The energy leading up to the concert was palpable; the last SHINee concert in Canada was, by all accounts, all but a disaster[20], and fans were excited for a do-over in welcoming the members to Canada. This excitement quickly changed to panic after fans found out that, thanks to a manufacturing delay, there was going to be no merchandise sold at the Canadian concerts. The biggest concern for fans was the possibility of a black ocean; K-pop groups have specific fandom colours that represent given groups, and the most recognizable way to signify one's fandom is through lightsticks that light up with a group's colour, creating an 'ocean' of pink, red, purple, or pearl aqua. A black ocean is an audience with no lightsticks, or worse an audience who has turned their lightsticks off to signal displeasure with a group, and the concern surrounding the possibility had fans worried that SHINee would not be properly welcomed or feel the gratitude from fans. As fans in Toronto and Vancouver scrambled to organize alternatives, fans in Japan were getting ready for their concerts, and began collecting lightsticks from various stops across Japan to send to Canada. In total over 900 lightsticks were sent from Japanese fans to Canada, many with sticky notes in Japanese and English wishing us a good concert and bright pearl aqua ocean.

This goodwill and cooperation of fans on different sides of the world is an example that I used during my research methods course at Simon Fraser in order to explain some of the characteristics and practices of K-pop fandom. While this memory helps to contextualize particular practices undertaken by K-pop fandom, there is an absence in this story of the motivations and formations of affective identification underlying such organization. Thus far I have provided an overview of the ways in which fan studies has investigated cross-border fandoms and contextualized the role of digital media technologies in the production and maintenance of fandom. Theoretical foundations were laid through a discussion of transcultural fandom, and a brief literature review was conducted to explore the various ways K-pop fandom has been studied by

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[20] SHINee however performed amazingly, as expected.

Hallyu and fan scholars, outlining the main conversations and gaps this thesis seeks to contribute with respect to the practices, affective affinities, and meaning making by K-pop fans in Canada.

The following two chapters outline the findings of fieldwork conducted during the period of May-August 2019. As discussed above, this thesis employs a qualitative approach to thematic analysis influenced by the inductive practices of grounded theory (Hawkins, 2018; Strauss & Glaser, 1967). Preliminary codes were developed for both the survey data and transcribed interviews, details of which can be seen both in Table 3.1 and in Chapter One.

Table 3.1   Survey and interview preliminary codes developed during data analysis

Preliminary Codes – Survey	Preliminary Codes - Interviews
Bias Groups	Bias Groups
Fan Activities	Experiences in Fandom
Cultural Difference – Awareness	Reason Giving
Descriptions of K-pop	Online/Offline Fan Activities
Descriptions of Fandom	Cultural Difference
Fandom's Effect on Cultural Difference	'Falling Down the Rabbit Hole'
	Connection
	Perception of K-pop and Korea

As discussed in Chapter One, the coding process employed NVIVO software to systematically review individual survey and interview responses through an inductive thematic analysis approach. Preliminary codes for survey data included bias groups, fan activities, cultural difference, descriptions of fandom/K-pop, and the effect of fandom on cultural differences. Preliminary codes for interviews included reason giving, perceptions of K-pop, online and offline fan activities, and 'falling down the rabbit hole' or fan narratives of joining fandom. The final round of coding reviewed these initial categories and combined aspects of each to form three main themes: Practices, Perceptions, and Connections. This chapter explores the theme of *connection* through two subthemes: fan-idol connection and fan-fan connection, and discusses the ways in which fans spoke about the sense of connection, interaction, and relations with idols as well as the interactions and imagined sense of community shared with other fans.

3.2. Fan-Idol Connections

Asking fans why they liked something like something can result in different responses depending on the context the question is posed. For someone not a fan, or who does not know much about K-pop, I would say the musicality, the comraderies and professionalism of SHINee, the consistency of VIXX's discography, the candidness and relatable message of BTS. If I was talking to another fan, the question of why may not even come up, the assumption or understanding that we feel the same way removing the need to ask. Being asked why by other fans may prompt excited responses such as 'have you *seen* them?!' or 'have you *heard* them sing?!", answers which could mean anything from commenting on members' attractiveness, choreography, overall music style, or live performances. The question of why is not often asked directly to fans (Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Hills, 2002a). Hills (2002a) argues that such direct questions result in fans providing reasons that research accept *a priori* without further analysis (p. 37), and that such fan talk cannot be accepted as guaranteed fan knowledge as such justifications are filtered through the dominant discursive mantras of a given fandom. Additionally, fans responses have the potential to obscure "the overwhelmingly subjective constructions of said knowledge and can lead to justifications of their own pleasure that uphold hegemonic constructions of proper forms of enjoyment" (Hills, 2002, in McLaren & Jin, 2020 p. 116). However, the question of why embraces these subjective experiences and emotions of fans which has the potential to reveal discursive structures within a given fandom as well as recenters the role of affect that fan experiences are filtered through and motivated by (Harrington & Bielby, 1995; McLaren & Jin, 2020).

Considering that a grounding question in Hallyu studies is 'why K-pop?', the lack of studies that directly speak to fans about the various reasons they like K-pop is somewhat a surprise. Malik (2019) found that fans in Qatar formed affinities with K-pop and K-dramas through the appeal of both the similarities and differences from their own culture, while Min et al., (2019) found that Chilean fans' affinity for K-pop began with direct interaction with the music that led to further interest in K-pop. However, Min et al., (2019) take fans' statements of liking the music or a particular group at face value, leaving opportunities for a deeper exploration of Chilean fans' reasons for liking K-pop in favour of analysis of how superficial affinities are expressed through mediated online

spaces. McLaren and Jin (2020) draw on data from this project's fieldwork to discuss the reasons ARMY like BTS and how these reasons filtered through various fan discourses and persona lived experience translate into affective affinities that motivate fans' identity as ARMY.

In order to add to the understandings of why K-pop fans like K-pop, survey and interview participants were asked who their bias or favourite groups were and why. As can be seen in figure 3.1 and figure 3.2, the top 20 most popular groups included BTS, NCT, Blackpink, and Twice.
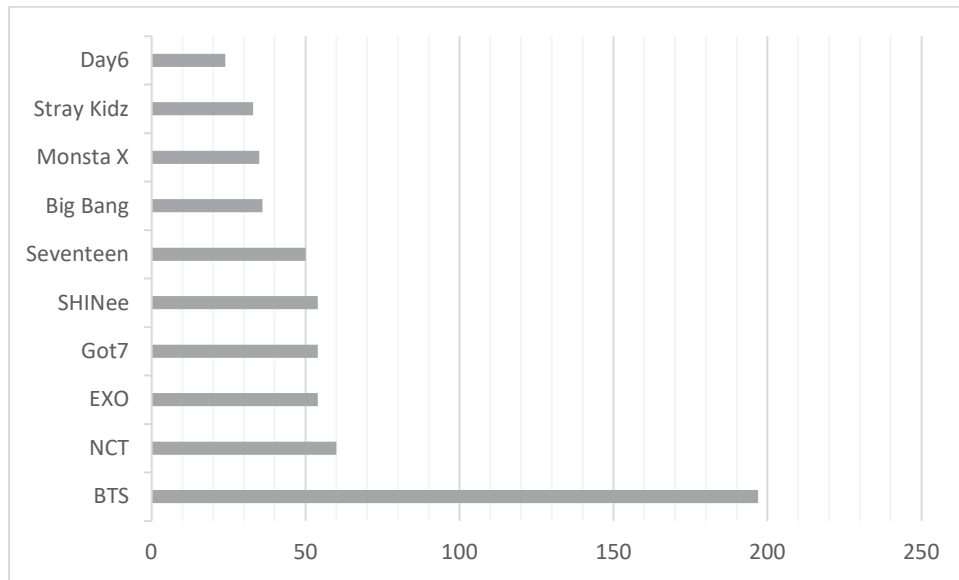

Figure 3.1   **Top 10 most popular male K-pop idol groups according to survey respondents.**
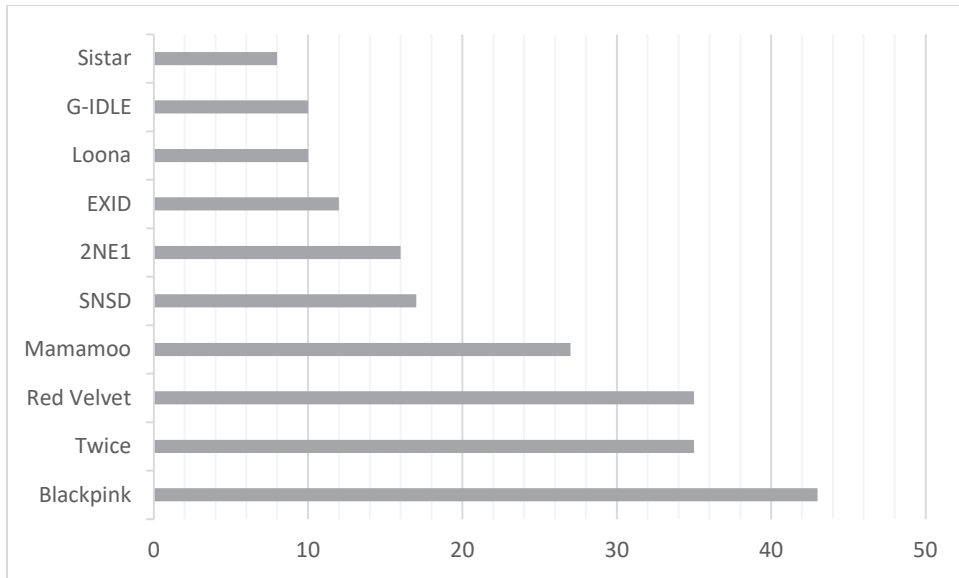
Figure 3.2 **Top 10 most popular female idol groups according to survey respondents.**

Figure 3.3 shows eight key themes derived from the reasons survey respondents gave for liking the groups in the figures above:
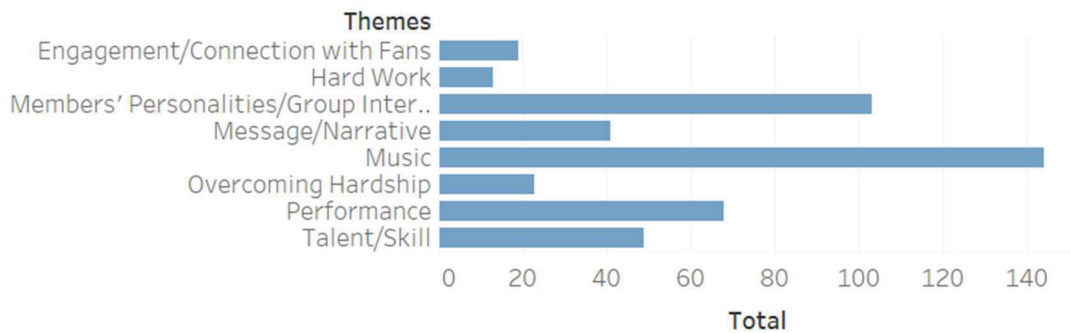
Figure 3.3 **Reasons for enjoying or liking K-pop according to survey respondents.**

While reasons fans gave for liking these groups included their music, idol's personalities and relationships with each other, performance, talent or skill, and the message or narrative of a group, survey respondents were unable to provide further details for these reasons. In contrast, interviewees were able to elaborate on the reasons why they liked a given group, as Ashley (18/female) from B.C. did when explaining why she was a fan of Super Junior:

> "OK my favorite, um, I would say, favourite would be Super Junior because you know, that would- they were the first band that I really

liked and also you know throughout all this time, I still I, I still stan them because, you know, like their personality. Their characters are really true to what they show on TV you know? after like 10, 11 years. So, then that's one of the groups... OK, so one of the reasons, I think, is that um, Super Junior actually debuted as like, kind of like the leftovers of all the other groups. I think, uh, there were a couple of members that were supposed debut in a group, like in separate groups. But they all end up, that all end up did not happen, and then they just all kind of, All the leftover you know, trainees like, male trainees I guess they put them together and then put them as a group and they were supposed to disband after a year right, but they actually worked so hard to... get together... and y- and also, I- I know they've been through some car accidents, you know? They really show that them as a group is really strong, like a strong bond together. So, I think, y-know it's - one is that their artistry and their music, but also, I think how they are as like, people you know, I think that's really inspiring." (Chinese)

The theme of hard work and struggle was echoed by other fans as well; Rin (21/female) from B.C. described struggle as a characteristic of K-pop's authenticity compared to western artists:

"I don't know I guess for, like you see like, western celebrities and its very... I don't know, I guess in like, maybe from what I see it's just like, the K-pop groups, they show like, their struggles, they show like, their actual like, people." (Southeast Asian)

As McLaren and Jin (2020) found, struggle or 'started from the bottom' narratives are considered signifiers of authenticity for BTS fans, who form affective bonds with the members based on the relatability of such underdog narratives, as two fans from their study explained:

"There's a lot more emphasis on like, hard work and merit, and...um... um...yeah like, hard work and merit in the K-pop industry, that I think is highly respected amongst certain people that isn't found in Western bands, like I think that Western bands or Western artists...even if they did work hard, or even if they were somewhat manufactured in the same way, the...the spin or the marketing or the emphasis is on like, how they got lucky or how they got really talent–how they're really talented, they're born with that talent, and that's why they're famous? Whereas in K-pop it's like, very openly said like "yeah we worked hard" like "we trained for years...we're like a manufactured group but like, that's the reason for our success," it was, it was a merit thing rather than like, being born with talent thing." (Male, Asian, 24, B.C.)[21]

"BTS because...they're overall like, their story is really good like, their come-up story. Their talent, how they, they're, they–how they work.

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[21] First quoted in McLaren and Jin (2020), derived from the dataset driving this thesis project.

Even their message throughout the last couple of years with their Love Yourself, um, albums…? Um, their, the fact that they went beyond that and um, had–have their campaign with UNICEF, that, I like their message. I've spent [CAD]$150 on their UNICEF merch[andise]." (Female, Jamaican Canadian, 25, Ontario)[22]

Along with the quotes above, Ashley's (18/female) and Rin's (21/female) comments suggest that such narratives and practices are not unique to BTS fandom, but an appealing aspect of K-pop for other fans as well. This narrative of struggle was found in survey responses which talked about fans' own hardships in relation to their idols as can be seen in figure 3.3, as well as by interview participants when referencing their own struggles, as Katrina (53/female) explained:

"…I think that's part of the reason I was drawn to BTS, is because the words, I can feel them. Um, they actually helped me get out of a 28-year toxic relationship. I, I uh, give them credit, and…I am just now learning to love myself. So, um, if they were not allowed to sing what they believe in, what they want, what's happening to them, even now the songs that we have, and they probably wouldn't be as popular as they are…I think it's, especially because I focus more on BTS than on the others I think might be part of the reason that I feel that way? It's because of, um…cuz of their words and cuz their…their expression…but yeah they're helping me learn to love myself." (Caucasian)[23]

The 'story' of idols' journey from trainee to star publicized by idols and management serves to position their success as the outcome of hard work and struggle in their trainee years rather than an innate talent that is then 'moulded' to suit market desires (Elfving-Hwang, 2018), creating the sense of authenticity or genuineness that, according to fans, act as relatable characteristics that fosters affective parasocial identification with idols based shared experiences of difficulty and struggle.

Other reasons fans gave for why they like their favourite groups involved relationships idols had with each other and their fans, as Carey (29/female) described:

"But I think also that there's, there's five members, and they are you know... just... the camaraderie there and everything and they just seem like genuinely good people? You know, just kind and interesting, and... you know? actually caring about their fans and everything. And I know like sometimes my friends who aren't really into K-Pop they're like oh they're just, you know, guys who are in it for the money or whatever' and I'm like 'no like I feel like, a genuine... I'm sure every fan girl says

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[22] First quoted in McLaren and Jin (2020), derived from the dataset driving this thesis project.

[23] First quoted in McLaren and Jin (2020), derived from the dataset driving this thesis project.

that but I feel like [laughter] you know, a genuine... um, kindness and love that comes from SHINee. Yeah. [laughter]" (Caucasian)

Similarly, Raven (24/female) very candidly explained how the relationships fostered by BTS and SF9 were a major reason why she was a fan:

"Their involvement and care for the fans. So, my two ultimate groups are BTS and SF9. And I love SF9 again cuz they're the underdog but they care so much for their fans they just did their unlimited tour and sadly I couldn't go to that because I'd already paid to go to BTS and then they announced their dates and I was like 'nooooo' [laughs]. Nooo!! [laughs]. But they have a song called *Dear Fantasy* that's literally written by them cuz they're another band and group as well that they write their own music… it's like a song that's just them loving and being supportive of us and like being there for us and like, BTS. Um, you know you, I mean you were there, like they're emotional goodbyes, and like, their hellos and just being there, like... my friend went to both nights and her like texting me like, 'they're crying now right like oh my god'" (Caucasian)

'Fantasy' is the fandom name for SF9, which according to the members represents how fans are fulfilling their hopes as fantasies encompass one's hopes and dreams. Raven's connection with the song written 'about' and 'for' fans by the group can be seen as an example of perceived reciprocity in the fan-idol relationship where idols 'give back' to fans by expressing their 'authentic emotions' via self-written lyrics. Despite the industry-manufactured aspects of such relationships, the connection felt by fans is deeply sensed, especially with regards to shared sense of struggle and hardship, elements of lived experience that influence fans' construction of affective identification with idols (McLaren & Jin, 2020). Speaking about BTS, Kelly (27/female) from said:

"So, I- I, as weird this sounds, like I feel like I have these seven friends that I will never actually meet but that's just, I mean, I, I guess friends with their online personas?" (Caucasian/Indigenous Descent)

The extent of the manufactured or artificialness of such relationships plays minimal role in fans' reasoning for enjoying a group, even when they are aware and acknowledge the one-sided aspects of such relationships. That fans form mediated, parasocial relationships with idols based on affective identification with their struggles, hard work, and perceived reciprocal care for fans suggests that the appeal of K-pop lies in part with the relatability and connection that fans sense from idols based on their own identities and lived experiences. In tandem with these affective connections with idols are the

ones formed between and among fans through similar parasocial interaction that fosters a sense of imagined community.

3.3. Fan-Fan Connections

While the perceived connections via affective parasocial relationships were given by fans as a key reason for why they liked K-pop, the connections between fans was also a reason given by participants when talking about why they liked K-pop. As Haven (73/female) described, the welcome she received from fans during a SHINee concert is Chicago reinforced her identity as a SHINee fan:

> "As a group, the Shawols are unreal. The kindness, and going up to everybody, giving them little Hershey kisses you know, while you're in line, or you know, just these little touches and it, I think more and even more so, given my age, that there wasn't any... 'oh my god look how old she is' there was none of that! It was just, you know, welcome. You know, there - there wasn't the judgment, anywhere, and I /loved/ that, that was my first introduction physically, to SHINee fans. Yeah." (Caucasian)

This sentiment was shared by Nitya (25/female) who also talked about one of her concert experiences:

> "I will say I was surrounded probably by the best people I could have ever had that experience with. And I think that's why the concert was amazing. Cuz I I've met like, obviously they were strangers. They were I think in pairs to set - like, two different groups of girls. One was two, one was two? And yeah, they were just amazing. And it was just such a good vibe. And we were jamming and dancing and screaming, and it was just like, what a concert experience should be." (Southeast Asian)

Survey responses also indicated that connection amongst fans was a key aspect of fandom, where words such as community, diversity, and family were commonly used as descriptors, as seen in figure 4.?.
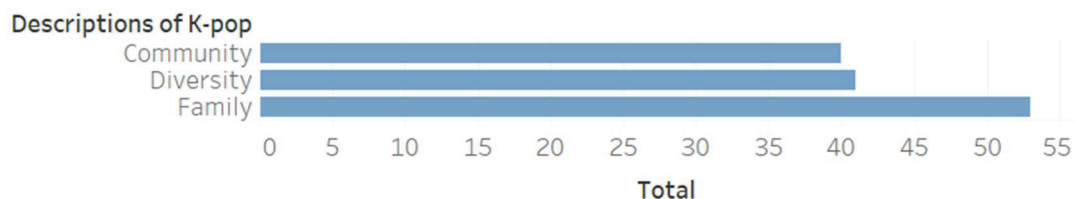

Figure 3.4 Descriptions by survey respondents that referenced communal aspects of K-pop fandom.

The idea of fandom as a form of community is often conceptualized through Anderson's (2006) idea of the imagined community. In fandom, imagined community is used to describe the mediated connections, both real/measurable and perceived, that fans hold with the collective of fandom. Identification with the imagined fan community fosters the creations of fan works which serve to maintain fandom ties (Stanfill, 2018) while also providing a sense of belonging and shared cultural experience (Morimoto & Chin, 2017). While the concept of imagined communities does serve to depoliticize and flatten difference within fandom, especially when applied to online communities where difference in gender and race is rendered invisible (Morimoto & Chin, 2017), the idea of community is also constructed through the multi-social aspects of parasocial interaction (Hills, 2015), where fan's sense of belonging to a community is formed through the creation of an "imaginary space… that is shared with others" (Sandvoss, 2005, quoted in Busse & Gray, 2011, p. 434). Today, the vast majority of these parasocial connections between fans are mediated through digital spaces such as social media. Katrina (53/female) briefly mentioned how her main sense of fan identity and connection with the social world occurred on such mediated spaces:

> "For me, personally, other than the learning to love myself, I think, being able to connect to people, it's allowed me because I'm off work. I've been off work now since February of last year. So, I literally can go weeks without talking to anyone. So, my outside contact is my BTS group chat, or going on Twitter or whatever, or going into the comments of a video. So, it's, it's kind of helping me stay connected to the world." (Caucasian)

The multi-social aspects involved in K-pop fandom fostered legitimate friendships as well as imagined communities both on and offline, as Emily (25/female) from Ontario described:

> "Yeah. I really like it. I mean I met some of my closest friends at like K-pop shows and like usually I go to K-pop concerts by myself like I'm so comfortable seeing a movie by myself going to see concerts and I always meet people […]" (Jamaican-Canadian)

Toni (29/female) also from Ontario similarly described her experiences of meeting new people through her belonging in K-pop fandom:

> "Plus, international fans of K-pop we're -we're like a big family. Once we find someone else that listens to K-pop oh my gosh we can go to this place together let's go this place together. We connected through a friend of mine who knows I love K-pop and he knows she loved K-pop

and he came to me a like there's another girl I know she loves K-pop even more than you […]" (Black/African-American descent)

As fandom is not only personal and private but also communal, the sense of belonging and identity fostered by multi-social imagined community and fandom-based friendships is as equally important, if not more important, as the relationships fans have with idols, as both of these sensed relationships overlap to create spaces for affective identification, identity formation, and meaning-making. The emotional investment in media figures such as idols provides a 'glue' that helps maintain fan communities, where "para-social interactions become a kind of currency for group affiliations and exchanges as well as underpinning individuals' self-identities" (Hills, 2015, p. 471). This space between fan-fan relationships and fan-idol relationships is intermediary because these imagined relationships and connections are not mutually exclusive but continuously inform each other, as Rin (21/female) described when she reflected on the comfort that 'belonging' to fandom brought, circled back to the affective identification she had with her favourite idols:

> "Hmm... I'd say it's been nice, its cuz its, I don't know. Like it's sort of like, you take *slightly hesitant* refuge? I don't know I guess for me it's like you take like refuge in like, a K-pop like, fandom... I don't know. it's weird to think that, it's like you see like, the... you see like, the, the shows with like, some of the groups and you see like, their friendship and it's like oh, I don't know, it just makes you feel nice, it's like you're, sort of like vicariously living through them, and it's like oh I like I can have a friendship like that or, I guess you can also hear the music and be like, wow they work so hard to get to that point it's like, its, it's kind of inspiring to see how hard they work in order to get to that point in their life." (Caucasian)

Such reasoning reflects the various mutually informing connections that fans form with idols as well as other fans, which are informed by affective affinities fans have with K-pop that contribute to the development of parasocial and multi-social relationships with K-pop idols and the fan community.

3.4. Conclusion

The reasons provided by fans in Canada for why they enjoyed K-pop and liked K-pop groups spoke directly to the notion of affectively formed parasocial relationships, where fans identified with idols through lived experience and perceptions of reciprocal care and attention. Such parasocial relationships informed and occurred between and

among fans as well, where the fostering of an imagined community was driven by mediated multi-social interactions and relationships between fans that had the potential to lead to online and offline friendships. Such fan-idol and fan-fan connections can be seen as providing opportunity for affective identification, identity formation, and meaning-making through perceived relatable, communal, and shared lived experiences. The next chapter will examine the findings of the themes *practices* and *perceptions*, and will discuss the ways in which the affective parasocial interactions and relationships of fans motivate fandom participation and inform understandings of cultural difference.

Chapter 4. Doing Fandom, Understanding Difference

This chapter will discuss the themes of *practices* and *perceptions*, opening with a discussion of various examples of fan activities and contextualizing findings within the broader literature on K-pop fandom. Following this will be a discussion of the various perceptions of K-pop, Korea, and Korean culture fans expressed, and will discuss the awareness of difference and self-reflexivity as well as the un/intentional reinforcements of negative stereotypes fans exhibited, and how these impacted understandings of cultural difference. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how the various affective affinities, identities, and connections of fans formed by perceived reciprocal relationships with idols as well as with other fans/an imagined fandom community serve to motivate the various practices and perceptions examined below.

4.1. Practices: Fan Activities and Participation

It is clear from previous discussion that digital media technologies are central to both the circulation and consumption of K-pop as well as the active participatory consumption of fandom (Gray et al., 2017; Jin, 2016, 2018; Jin & Yoon, 2016; Stein, 2015). The use of social media by fans to access Hallyu has been discussed by numerous scholars; Jin and Yoon's (2016) work on North American K-pop fans focused on how and where fans accessed K-pop content, positioning fan practices as mediated through platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, while Leung (2017) examined the practices of fan club organizers on Facebook in Hong Kong, where promotional material and mobilizing of fans were posted and conducted by dedicated fans of boy group VIXX. Leung highlighted the negotiations of capital - both monetary and fan capital, in the maintenance and organizing of fan pages, and often thankless and unseen task. Further work on social media as it relates to K-pop has been conducted by Ono and Kwon (2013), who provide a thorough exploration of the role of YouTube in the spread of K-pop content, while Yecies & Shim (2014) examined the connection between media platforms as distribution channels and K-pop industry practices.

Other studies have touched on various non-social media-based practices, such as Leung's (2017) brief overview of the various activities fan page organizers undertake

during events and performances, including organizing food, gifts, and in-person fan meet ups. K-pop cover dances are another offline/online activity, where dancers record covers of popular songs and upload them to YouTube for others to see and react to (Min, 2017; K. Yoon, 2017). Robson Square in Vancouver is a popular practice and filming spot for dance groups as well as the occasional Random Play Dance, a game from the variety show *Weekly Idol* that involves short clips (usually of opening verses or choruses) of various songs in random order that fans then have to dance to - if they know the choreography that is.

While there is some identification of fan activities both on and offline, there is minimal discussion of what fans do with their fandom, as well as a continuing assumption that K-pop fandom primarily occurs online. While social media is a key element in fostering and maintaining K-pop fandoms, fans do a variety of things with their fandom that occurs both on and offline. With respect to online practices, fans reported spending their time primarily watching, listening, or streaming, as can be seen in Figure 4.1.

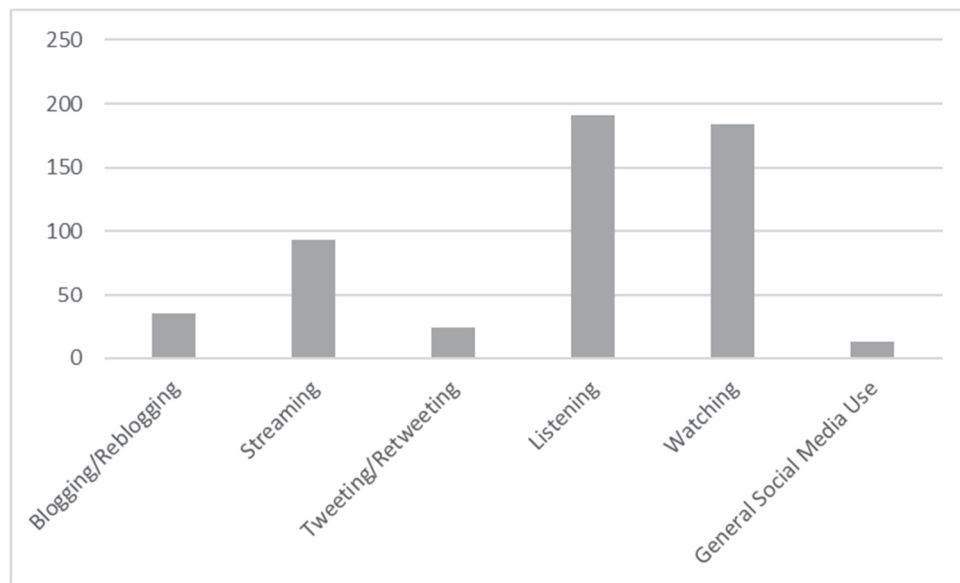**Figure 4.1   Most common online fan activities reported by survey respondents**

Streaming generally refers to continual playback of media content to various devices through the internet; for music fandoms this practice becomes a means of promoting artists and accruing fan capital by continually replaying a song or MV in order to increase the listener/view counts. The higher the count, especially if it breaks records or reaches

the top of various music charts, the more visible a group is and the more 'bragging rights' fans achieve for supporting 'the most popular group'. Streaming is a vastly coordinated effort, as Raven, a 24-year-old fan from British Columbia explained

> "Rotating and taking turns with time zones and streaming like, tagging off with my friends now that I have in Indonesia that I've, I'm now pen pals with on YouTube! Like, alright, your turn, let's do this!" (Caucasian).

Along with time zone coordination, fans also circulate rules and guidelines for various platforms in order to maximize streams without breaking platform rules, with different guides for Spotify, apple play, YouTube, and various Korean streaming services. In addition to listening/watching and streaming, other online fan practices included reading or writing fanfiction, creating fan art, video edits, or fancams, and sharing content posted by other fans on spaces including Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr.

Fans were also asked about offline activities that they had either taken part in or wanted to take part in, with the most common activity being attending local concerts or concert tours in neighbouring provinces or states. Other in-person activities included local fan events such as meet ups or group movie viewings, club nights hosted by local organizers such as Soju Sunday in Vancouver, and school clubs or dance groups. Nitya (25/female) from Ontario described a meet-up that was organized by BTS Canada she was interested in:

> "There was, if you've seen the Run episode, they were in Canada for a while, and somebody thought that it was really cool [to go to] the cottage and just chill and play games, they wanted to see [who would] be interested in organizing like, and, and offline meetup." (Southeast Asian).

Other fans expressed the desire to attend fan events in person, as Kelly (27/female) from Newfoundland explained:

> "My sister is also a fan, so we do talk a good bit about it, um, but yeah, there's really nothing offline, but that's also because I live in Newfoundland, so there's not really that big of a community here, but I'm trying to change that!" (Caucasian/Indigenous Descent)

The desire and enjoyment of participating in offline activities with other fans speaks to the local temporality of otherwise mediated K-pop fandom, especially as K-pop groups have increasingly been performing in the U.S. and Canada as well as the UK, Middle East, and Latin America. Opportunities for in-person activities have increased as more

fans have access to organized events and get togethers with other fans. It is important to note however that such in-person interaction is primarily, if not entirely, facilitated by digital technologies and online fan spaces, as fans must connect with each other and information sources in order to organize or attend an event in person.

The final most common fan practice identified is the process of collecting. Collecting is a staple fan practice regardless of the media object being consumed, as "things are the sine qua non of fandom, that without with it remains only potentiality, and not a realized capability" (Woo, 2014, para. 1.3). While there is still some avoidance of acknowledging the consumerism inherent in fandom, consumption is the main means that fans interact with fan texts, which includes main texts (such as idols and music) and meta-texts (such as albums, lightsticks, fan-made merchandise, etc.) (Stanfill, 2019). For Santo (2018), fan collecting is a means for fans to express identities and individuality within a consumerist society, while for (Geraghty, 2018), collecting serves as a form of fan cultural capital as well as signifiers of class. As collecting is a form of consumption, at the core of such consumptive practices is the personal pleasures of fans (Affuso, 2018). As K-pop involves the consumption of both texts and meta-texts (J. Choi & Maliangkay, 2015), collecting is an expected and unsurprising past time for fans. Outlined in Figure 3.2 are the main items identified as collectable by fans, the most popular being albums (n=114) and photocards (n=53).
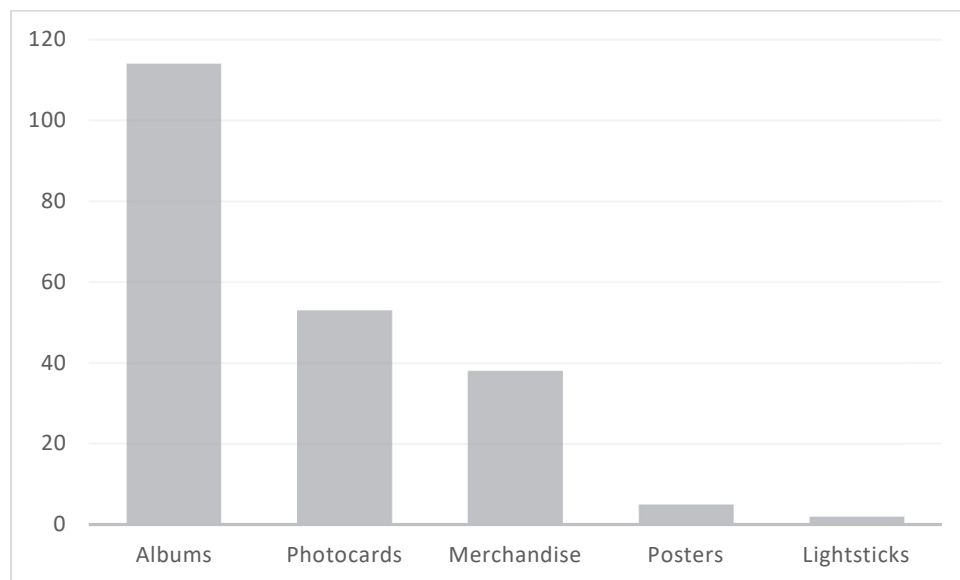

Figure 4.2   Most common collectable fan objects according to survey respondents

K-pop albums involve more than a CD for K-pop fans; opening an album is an experience on its own as they contain the CD, lyric book, photobook, and a signed photocard of one of the members. Depending on the company and the 'era' or promotion cycle a group is in, there may be additional group photocards, a limited-edition polaroid, a poster or postcard, stickers, and other extra content. Photobooks feature photos from promotional teasers and the photocard in a given album may be any one member of a group, creating an element of surprise and lottery in the hopes of getting a favourite member's photocard. In addition to this, there are often multiple versions of albums, each with their own cover art and design, as Raven (24/female) excitedly explained:

> "I am a photocard junkie, and I was explaining to [my husband] why we have, cuz, he was like 'why are there four different albums' and I was like well it's the same album, BUT' and he was like 'no no no' but [...] the photos are different, the photobooks are different, you get a different poster" (Caucasian)

The purpose of owning albums and photocards is more symbolic than functional, providing a sense of connection with idols groups as well as social capital within fandom (Maliangkay, 2013; Oliver, 2020), as 'shelfies' of album and other merchandise collections are a point of pride for fans able to participate in this form of fandom collecting. Additionally, albums and other K-pop merchandise, both official/legitimate and fan-made, act as 'happy objects' stemming from fans' affective connection with idols. The positive emotions associated with idols fans foster through their parasocial relationship become 'sticky', and make adjacent fan objects happy by association. The object thus "functions as intermediate spaces" (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 90) between the fan and the idol despite the idol's absence, and create an affective sense of "tangible materiality" (Hills, 2015, p. 466) to the perceived relationship fans have with idols.

It is important to note here that such activities - concerts, fan-meets, and adding to collections, varies by access. While the fans I spoke with in Canada discussed attending concerts, collecting albums, and meeting other fans, others spoke about the isolation and the lack of in-person community, as the quote from Kelly illustrated above. This access goes beyond Canadian borders as well; Latin American fans also have varying access to concerts and K-pop merchandise due to the limited attention paid by the general Latin American public to Korean Wave content, and as a result, fan activities in Latin American countries such as Chile occur primarily through social media (Min et

al., 2019). Another barrier to access is cost, as it is only in the past three-four years that merchandise from official sources such as label companies were available for purchase through non-Korean language sites. Even with the increased attention to consumers outside of Korea and East Asia, prohibitive costs limit access to those with expendable income (Herman & Rashid, 2020).

As fans talked about the various activities they participated in, some connected their participation to their connection or sensed relationships with their idols, as Raven (24/female) explained when talking about her experience at BTS' *Love Yourself: Speak Yourself* concert in 2019:

> "It was, super emotional and like they just they care so much about us which you don't really get in a lot of fandoms you don't really get that appreciation back. Which makes it feel like everything you do for them, you know like, I was on a streaming party when *Boy with Luv* came on, I had him [her husband] on his phone and his - and he hates the song now because like it was on repeat for like two days, because we're, I was like 'we gotta get the streams in babe c'mon let's do this!' [laughter] true. Yeah, yeah [laughter]. But, y'know, it makes everything worth it cuz you know like, we're breaking all of these records and […] like they just won their first, actual award that's not the Social 50, you know?" (Caucasian)

Similarly, other fans talked about various projects they had taken on as part of concert preparations, as Kyra (female, no age provided) mentioned:

> "I've handled three fan banner projects. One for Seventeen in two thousand and... I think Seventeen? yeah. Uh, when they came to Toronto. I did the two Got7 fan banners, uhm, 2018 and this year." (Chinese descent)

Fan banners are fan-made paper slogans used as concerts to send a message to idols, often during or between songs near the end of a concert that have significance to fans and idols. Banners are crowd funded, and the messages and designs are often voted on before being sent to the idol's management team for approval. As the message is from fans, every fan audience member is given a paper banner for free, while higher quality fabric or cloth banners are sold by fansites[24], often for specific group members (Sun,

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[24] Individual or groups of fans that take pictures of and produce content focused on one specific member of a given group, for example the fansite IDEALBOY took photos and made fabric banners for SHINee's Jonghyun, while MoNiJuNi (모니주니 in Korean) is a fansite based around BTS Member RM.

2020), allowing fans to identify themselves to their 'bias' (favourite member) and other fans as a fan of a specific member. As Leung (2017) noted, such activities are often driven by affective mobilization as well as a form of fan cultural capital and seen as a means of given back to idols by sharing messages of support and loyalty (Sun 2020), reinforcing the imagined or illusioned reciprocity of the fan-idol parasocial relationship. Haven (73/female) also described a fan activity she took part in at the 2016 SHINee fan meet in Chicago:

> "I remember they had sort of a contest, on, and you would do a video of yourself, you could either talk, or […] And, you could then enter, and then it would be decided whether or not they, […] would choose your video to put up on the screen! So, I, uh, practiced, and I practiced and, it was all crappy […] and my daughter was filming me, and I said 'Oh, that's, that's bad, but I know where I went wrong, so let me redo it', and she said 'look I have other things to do, we're done!' and I said 'then I don't want it sent, it, cuz it's terrible.' And, uh, made her promise, not to do this. She did. […] [happy bright embarrassed laugh] Yeah. So, when I heard the music, cuz the screen's big, and I heard the music and I thought 'oh my god no.', and I started to sort of slink down, and in, yes it was me […] But, when, when the members themselves were seemed to enjoyed this, uh, I didn't feel quite so badly, you know." (Caucasian)

Such opportunities to 'interact' with idols, even partially mediated, pre-staged interactions such as Haven's video message, and the opportunity to watch them react to the message, serves to create a shared moment between the fan and the idol that acts as a 'scripted encounter' where temporary "physical proximity combined with a bit of interactional mutuality" (Ferris & Harris, 2011, p. 19) which creates a form of 'distance through closeness' (Hills & Williams, 2005). These 'close' distance encounters reinforce the perceived connection with idols, and can further personalize them depending on how fans are able to 'interact' with their idols (such as 'personally' through a video message or a single-member banner or communally through concert banners and fundraising campaigns).

Such fan practices and activities also serve to create, maintain, and reinforce bonds with fans and the fandom community, as can be seen through Haven's (73/female) interactions with SHINee fans after her video message was shown:

> There doesn't seem to be the judgement and that's how I feel as, as part of that, uh, fandom. Is that it doesn't matter, and uh, if anything, I remember in Chicago when I - after the concert was done, and I got out of the elevator, and there were three gals there, coming in, and the

one gal said 'oh it's you!' how they can recognize is beyond me, but 'oh it's you!' and so we gave each other a hug and they had travelled all the way down from I think, Texas, to come and see […] and, so, you know, while I was maybe up on screen they might have thought 'oh whatever', I mean they - everybody really applauded so you think 'oh well yeah for this age' right? [slight teasing self-depreciating tone] But, there is this non-judging […] there is I think an, uh, appreciation and an enjoyment that somebody my age would love this the same way they do, yeah. (Caucasian)

The shared interaction between fans where Haven was at once recognized for her message to SHINee – a privileged opportunity – as well as the perceived lack of judgement and welcome feeling she sensed from other fans reinforced her affective identification with the fandom, as she explained that being a Shawol and seeing SHINee has 'made [her] very happy'. Other interviewees similarly shared their joyful interactions with other fans, as Carey (29/female) mentioned when speaking about her experience at the SHINee World V concert in Toronto:

"Um, but I definitely when I went to Toronto I had so much fun like, meeting up with um other fans and I got like, a special key fanlight with the dogs on it, and uh, you know the flags and stuff. Um... and even like, I didn't take one of the uh, the fanlights from the Japanese fans cuz I already had, I ordered on eBay like, you know? ...um, I found the diamond stick and whatever. But, there's just so much like, fan... you know, um, helping - helping out other fans and stuff, so that was awesome. Um... and I guess like, I have also I guess it's offline, but like, um, done things like video projects, and... and, ah, fan letter project type of stuff too." (Caucasian)

The fan lights Carey mentions refers to the fan project organized by Japanese and Canadian fans that introduced the previous chapter. The connections between Shawols and SHINee as well as the connections fostered between fans in Canada and Japan served as the motivation behind the fanlight project. Similar feelings of connection motivated fans to create and share gifts with other fans, an activity that is part of the fan gift economy, which operates both online and offline where fan labor and production is exchanged in the form of gifts rather than capital (Stanfill, 2018a). Such gift giving can serve to increase a fans status within fandom (Stanfill, 2018) but more importantly fosters and helps maintain fan community (Jones, 2014; Hills, 2015; Sandvoss, 2005).

As Raven (24/female) explained, such creative production was a major factor in her enjoyment of the DKDK[25] fan meet she attended:

> Everybody had like little freebies to give away! Even I made, for the DKDK fan meetup I made little acrylic charms…yeah, and live, gave them out free to people, like it took me hours and hours and money but I was just like this is for you and you and you, and other people were like 'oh I also made things this is for you and you and you!' and it's just this, giving, happy nature, right?" (Caucasian)

Just as the tangible materiality of banners, posters, and other products fans may be given or purchase at concerts reinforce the interaction and relationship between fans and idols, the gifting of fan-made merchandise reinforces the sense of community and relationship between fans as well, where affective identification with the imagined community motivates some to spend time, money, and effort to share their 'fandom' with other fans. As the various practices of fans in the form of participation was motivated by fans connections with idols and other fans, so too are the perceptions fans formed in relation to K-pop and Korean culture similarly informed by identification with idols and the fan community.

4.2. Perceptions: Fans Understandings of Cultural Difference

The question of the extent that audiences of non-local popular culture become more 'transnationally aware' (Chin & Morimoto, 2013) or 'cosmopolitan' (Jenkins, 2006b) is a recurring one in transnational fandom studies. Jenkins (2006b) proposal of 'pop cosmopolitans' is one seminal work that sought to understand the 'ways that transcultural flows of popular culture inspires new forms of global consciousness and cultural competency' (156), the idea of increased awareness and cultural competency has remained a theme in various cross-border fan studies research. Lee's (2018) investigation of Western fans of K-dramas found that fans exhibited critical awareness and shifts in perspectives on different cultures as well as self-reflectivity regarding their own culture. Min et al., (2019) and Yoon and Jin (2016) found that consumption of Hallyu increased the desire to learn more about Korean culture, while Otmazgin and Lyan (2014) suggested that belonging in K-pop fandom positively impacted fans acceptance

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[25] DKDK stands for David Kim and Daniel Kim, brothers and YouTubers who talk about various aspects of Korea and Korean culture

of cultural difference both in terms of Korean culture filtered through K-pop and in relation to their own local contexts, in this care in Israel and Palestine.

General survey findings indicated that fans believed that K-pop and K-pop fandom positively impacted their view of different cultures both abroad and at home, with the words 'awareness' and 'openness' commonly used terms to describe how fans felt in response to their perception of cultural differences. Interviewees echoed this sentiment as Carey (29/female) from Alberta stated:

> "Korean culture was kind of not on my radar before? Um, so, now I'm more familiar with Korean food, um, Korean language, and... even things like Korean history and dress [...] And I've read books about North Korea and the history and, and you know, um, refugees from North Korea and things like that." (Caucasian)

As with other studies on K-pop fans, participants indicated that K-pop placed Korea 'on their radar', leading to further interest and investigation into different aspects of Korean culture. This change in interest can be clearly seen in Figure 4.2; however, the minimal shifts with respect to politics and history compared to other more exportable Hallyu products such as K-dramas and beauty products suggests that awareness and interest varies amongst individual fans, with the majority undertaking more superficial interest into broader Korean culture.
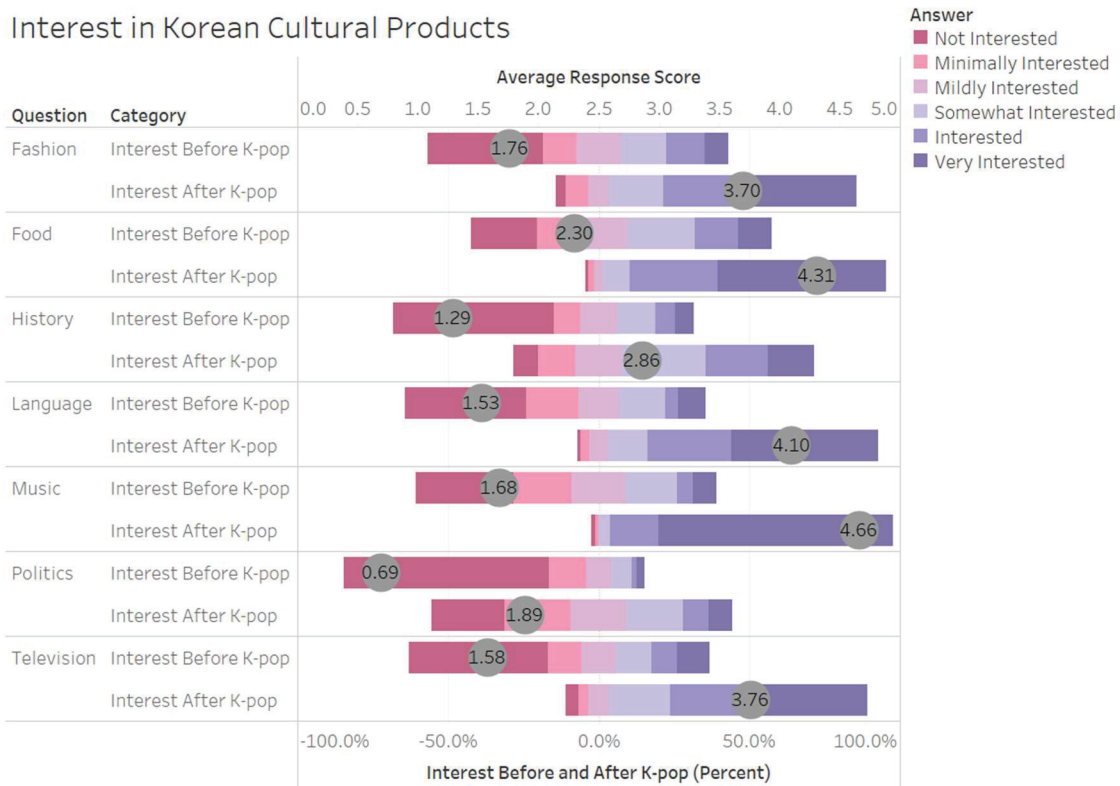
Interest in Korean Cultural Products

Average Response Score

Question	Category	
Fashion	Interest Before K-pop	1.76
	Interest After K-pop	3.70
Food	Interest Before K-pop	2.30
	Interest After K-pop	4.31
History	Interest Before K-pop	1.29
	Interest After K-pop	2.86
Language	Interest Before K-pop	1.53
	Interest After K-pop	4.10
Music	Interest Before K-pop	1.68
	Interest After K-pop	4.66
Politics	Interest Before K-pop	0.69
	Interest After K-pop	1.89
Television	Interest Before K-pop	1.58
	Interest After K-pop	3.76

Answer
- Not Interested
- Minimally Interested
- Mildly Interested
- Somewhat Interested
- Interested
- Very Interested

Interest Before and After K-pop (Percent)

Figure 4.3   Interest in Korean cultural products prior to K-pop fandom and after joining K-pop fandom.

Note: As K-pop has been considered a 'full package' that encompasses other aspects of Korean popular culture, this question was limited to the most common cultural products that are part of the package of K-pop and Hallyu, with history and politics included to generally assess if the interests of fans extends beyond popular culture.

Complimenting perceptions such as Carey's is Lorento's, a 24-year-old male fan from B.C. who spoke candidly about how K-pop was a means of constructing a shared Asian identity as a minority in Canada, and commented on how seeing non-Asian fans consuming K-pop introduced him to alternative perspectives and reasons for enjoying Korean culture:

> "So, for me like I said, listening to K-pop is, is part of being Asian Canadian. Um, and I guess in that sense, seeing the rise of Hallyu within the past five or so years? and seeing it, like there's always been non-Asian... fans in the west, but the past five years I think it's been an exponentially like, exponentially growing? and that in a sense was a bit of a cultural... like, learning experience for me? like understanding, what it means to not be Asian but still listen to K-pop? Like what are their motivations for doing that? um you know learning, that it's not, it isn't just need to be coming from a place of like, wanting to be closer to your culture, it's like actually coming from a place of like, appreciating the music or appreciating the... fandom structure" (Asian)

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For some fans, K-pop impacted awareness of Korean culture, while for others it created moments of self-reflexivity, which occurs as fans are exposed to others, which creates space for the ways that fans make sense of everyday life (Y. Kim, 2013a). Similar to K. Yoon's (2018) study, such reflexivity was also found in perceptions of the K-pop industry, where multiple interviewees acknowledged the consumerist goals behind the flashy performances and catchy music. Some referred to the 'manufactured' aspects of K-pop, as Kelly noted when describing K-pop's uniqueness:

> I guess kind of that they're also all groups that are made [...] So, all the companies like, they train - that are putting these trainees in these groups, Sometimes the cohesion isn't there. There are some groups where you can very visibly tell that some members aren't happy and tell that some members are you know, jealous of the spotlight that other members are getting. And things like that. I – I don't know if that makes it unique per say, but it does in the fact that any K-pop Idol Group is a manufactured group, which in North America is very frowned upon. [...] But. Um, and it's also unique in the sense - and one of the things that I do really enjoy is because Korea is such a small country and all of these groups are based in Seoul. They have the you know, the weekly music shows, so not only is a song released they're performing it multiple times in actual performance versus here

Others, meanwhile, brought up the hyper-consumption of the industry that's reinforced by fandom culture, as Rin (21/female) described:

> Also like, being super invested, like, like money-wise invested in the group, like, you have to buy like, like the, the lightsticks, you have to buy all the merch, you have to buy the banners, you just have to be so obsessed with them, and like, I d- I feel like you can't be like, casual you have to like, be like, super money-invested into them. (Southeast Asian)

Such experiences and descriptions are examples of what Y. Kim (2013a) describes as everyday reflexivity, which, according to her, is a requirement for move through the contemporary mediated environment of today. This reflexivity on the part of everyday audiences occurs unevenly as it is experienced "by different social subjects in different social locations" (p. 78) and in different contexts, as evident by how fans negotiated these acknowledgments they raised; some spoke of activities such as buying albums or streaming as negative or obsessive behaviour, while others were more comfortable with the tension between their enjoyment and the profit-driven exploitation of K-pop.

Speaking of the K-pop industry, drawing on the parasocial relationships fostered by industry practices was a means of explaining K-pop's appeal as well as its difference from Western music industries, as can be seen from Toni's (29/female) explanation:

"I feel like the whole K-pop industry itself is like its own thing and nothing can come close to it cause it's so like different and I've explained to a lot of people too like, when people ask me why I'm such a big fan of like K-pop idols and K-pop in general like American idols were never like what k-idols do. They would never do um live streams. They would never talk to their fans as much as they do. They don't post that much um, cause like literally idols live for their fans and it's like, American artists - their artists are nice but they don't go that extra mile" (Black/African-American descent)

While self-reflexivity is expressed by some fans, the affective affinities that fans form with idols and their music (as well as the secondary and meta-texts related to them) inform the various understandings that fans have surrounding the industry. Such affinities and identifications also informed how fans understood broader Korean culture, as Haven (73/female) candidly explained:

for SHINee, in particular - I don't know why, but the LGBTQ community, um, and okay, how does - how is that viewed there. And then looking at that culturally. And then my appreciation of, um, seeing, with SHINee that each member would have their uh, you know their own, um, bias - choose the word, for what they wanted to become involved with, and I was delighted to see that Jonghyun was [the] one that, you know, was very much backing with the - they all are […] but he, I think in particular […] it felt to me as though... he was always for somebody who really had it rougher, you know, you know, more, I- I think, it felt as though he was more connected with that, people who had difficulty. I - I think. I'll never know. But there was that feeling. And I - so I remember when he died, and I wanted to contribute because I know he did to that community in South Korea, and wanted to do that as a, uh, a remembrance, that, you know […] So it then got me looking into you know, what their views and norms of, of, of - what - how they felt about [the LGBTQ community] in South Korea. [Caucasian]

Such interest in broader aspects of Korean culture are clearly motivated here by affinity with a K-pop group, where mediated interaction fosters greater interest in 'what they do there' based on fan identity and consumption. As Y. Kim (2013a) acknowledges, it is "via the increased exposure to Others and reflexive capacities that people make sense of life conditions which differ from their own" (p. 79). The positioning of Koreans as a 'global Other' by fans occurs through their consumption of Hallyu texts, and can work as a means of multicultural learning (G. M. Kim, 2019), but can also construct and reinforce

generalized or stereotypical portrayals of Korea or 'Asian' culture, as was reflected by Katrina (53/female) when talking about her developing understanding of Korea:

> "So, I mean, I started to watch the - with the K-dramas and stuff too. Like there's this whole dating thing and this ring thing and like different presents every month and the 14th and I'm just like, whoa, it's a lot to date in Korea. And just like when you're going out with them it's like you're already engaged almost because here in this culture, like you don't give someone a ring unless you're actually going to marry that person. And it's very platonic, almost in relationships and that there's no or not readily public affection, I guess we would call it, like, maybe some holding hands and stuff like that, but not really, you know, here, it's like, kids are making out in the hallways, and, you know, people outside the bar, and whenever, and it's not something that you see in that culture." (Caucasian)

She then went on to say:

> "But there, they bring a lot of their culture into [K-pop]. The culture of the women being petite, and girly, and damsels is shown very much in their music" (53, female, Caucasian)

Here Katrina is employing a negative racial stereotype of Asian women as hyper-feminine, submissive, and non-threatening (C. Oh, 2014). Such interactions with the 'Other' - motivated by affinities with K-pop idols, through other mediated forms of Hallyu content, provides and example of the uneven and complex ways fans interpret Korea and Korean culture; while motivated by affinities with favoured idols, depends on an individual fans investment and lens they are looking through, which supports Y. Kim's (2013a) assertion that "the degrees of reflexivity and its particular character and content may differ – stronger and weaker, emotional and rational, positive and negative" (p.78) amongst individuals and across contexts.

Finally, fans also expressed impacts in awareness of cultural difference due to interactions with other fans; survey responses relating to fandoms' broad impact on understandings of cultural difference included mentions of fandom as a vehicle for encountering different cultures. Examples of such responses included "*People of European/American/Hispanic backgrounds also really enjoy K-pop, so its not that different. It brought us closer*" and "*Being on twitter a lot, I get to interact with a lot of K-pop fans around the world. I became more aware in subjects like what are their lives like, what people can and cannot say, and how to simply respect their culture*". Interviewees echoed this sentiment; Raven's pen pal in Indonesia mentioned earlier is one such

example, while Kelly (27/female) described how her awareness shifted through her experiences with K-pop and Korean culture:

> "But everyone has different backgrounds. So, whether that be, like, from being a K-pop fan interacting with people from around the world, who Like, maybe there's a translation issue or a language barrier between us, or maybe, you know, they're from India, I'm from here, so what's controversial to them is not controversial/personal to me or vice versa. It's, it has made me a lot more sensitive to that in mine, like normal like, real-life, life?" (Caucasian/Indigenous descent)

Echoing this, Yijun (20/female) from British Columbia similarly considered how K-pop and fandom impacted her awareness of not only Korean culture but different cultures more broadly:

> "I definitely think it made me more aware, in a sense, because also with the beauty standards and everything, it like, also made me more aware of how different cultures perceive things, especially with a lot of like, I guess, scandals and stuff, where it's like, 'oh like, these two are dating, why is it such a big deal', or um, or 'why are these people laughing, when it's such a big deal?' 'Oh, because people want to be polite' or whatever. I feel like, it just makes me more aware." (Chinese)

These examples suggest that being a K-pop fan or enjoying K-pop acts as a vehicle for impacting awareness and perception of Korean culture as well as general understandings of different cultures. Such impacts, while driven by affective affinities with idols through parasocial relationships and with fans through a shared sense of belonging in and mediated interaction through fandom, are uneven and complex as they are filtered through fans' levels of investment and lived experiences.

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter opened with an examination of the findings for the theme of practices, outlining the various ways fans described fandom activities both on and offline. Popular fan activities included streaming, attending concerts and events featuring idols as well as fan-organized events and meet ups, and collecting K-pop related merchandise. Such findings indicate that the access to K-pop continues to be mediated through social media, but is also increasing in the form of in-person events and meta-texts such as albums, lightsticks, and other merchandise. It was also noted that such access is uneven depending on location, as fans in more less densely populated

provinces or had less disposable income participated in more online activities compared to fans in more densely populated provinces or with more disposable income.

Following this discussion of practices was a discussion of the theme of perceptions, which outlined the various ways fans understood K-pop, Korea/Korean culture, and cultural difference. It was found that consuming K-pop and participating in fandom increased fans' interests and awareness in Korean culture, and prompted self-reflexive considerations of their own culture and background. This increased awareness, interest, and self-reflexivity varied among fans, with some expressing deep interest in Korean culture outside of the popular, while others viewed Korea and Korean culture through a lens of K-pop and K-dramas, indicating that while positive increases in awareness and understanding of difference occurs, it varies amongst fans based on their investment and lived experiences.

The chapter in full discusses the various ways in which the connections – in the form of affective affinity, identification, and parasocial/multi-social relationships – fans form with idols and other members of fandom motivate and inform the ways in which fans participate in fandom and develop awareness and understandings of cultural difference. The concluding chapter will provide a summary of my thesis, outlining the main takeaways of each chapter, then provide a brief discussion of limitations and potential areas for future research.

Chapter 5.   Conclusion

In an attempt to further understanding and contribute to conversations surrounding K-pop fandom, my thesis employs a theory of transcultural fandom and affect to explore the various practices that fans participate in, the perceptions of K-pop, Korea, and Korean culture they form, and the underlying affective identities and experiences that motivate fans' practices and perceptions to argue that the affective identities and attachments fans form with idols as well as the perceived communal relationships with other fans serves as motivation for the various fan practices and formation of understandings of cultural difference. Through a mixed-methods investigation, I invited fans in Canada to participate in a survey or interview to discuss their experiences in fandom, various fan practices they have participated or wanted to participate in, and their understandings and perceptions of Korean culture and broader cultural difference. Through these findings I have shown that the motivations, practices, and understandings of K-pop fans are nuanced and uneven, contributing to understandings of the reasons that K-pop appeals to and has spread across global audiences.

Chapter 2 undertakes a discussion of the history and theories of fan studies, drawing on works by Jenkins (1992), Fiske (1992), Hills (2002a), and Gray et al., (2007; 2017) as well as cultural studies traditions (de Certeau, 1984; Hall, 2019) to explain the ways in which fan consumption and participation has been understood through an active audience lens, where fans appropriate and reinterpret cultural texts for personal meaning making purposes. I also provided a brief discussion of the ways in which fans have been positioned as participatory and examined the ways in which internet platforms and digital media technologies have influenced and been influenced by fan practices, employing the concepts of participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992, 2006b), convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006a), and spreadable media (Jenkins et al., 2013) in tandem with the understanding of fans as active, invested audiences. The chapter then provides a discussion of the roles of affect and emotion in fandom, drawing on ideas of affect theory (Ahmed, 2004, 2010, 2014; Garde-Hansen & Gorton, 2013; Grossberg, 1992) to explore how affect has been used in fan studies to examine the ways in which emotional investment contributes to fan identity and participation. Finally, I conclude chapter two with a discussion of how fandom has been examined in Hallyu research, outlining the

ways in which transnational frameworks have been employed as a way to study K-pop fandom (Iwabuchi, 2004; Jin, 2018; Jin & Yoon, 2016; S. Jung & Shim, 2014; Ko et al., 2014; Otmazgin & Lyan, 2014) and providing the framework of transcultural fandom (Annett, 2011; Chin & Morimoto, 2015, 2013; Morimoto & Chin, 2017) as an alternative means of theorizing K-pop fandom, drawing on works by Han, 2017; McLaren and Jin 2020; Min et al., 2019; K. Yoon, 2018; and Yue and Jung, 2011 to contextualize the ways in which K-pop fandom has been understood through a transcultural lens and contextualize the gaps surrounding the roles of affective attachments and identity that inform transcultural K-pop fandom.

Chapter 3 begins with an overview of the methods employed in this thesis, outlining the coding process and development of three main themes: practices, perceptions, and connections. It then goes on to discuss the theme of connections, which was further categorized into fan-idol connections and fan-fan connections. The theme of fan-idol connections examined the ways in which fans formed imagined, parasocial relationships with idols (Chandler, 2011; Elfving-Hwang, 2018; Horton & Wohl, 1956) through the perceived feelings of connection and friendship that fans felt from, and with, idols. The subtheme of fan-fan connections was then discussed, examining the ways in which fans formed imagined communal relationships with other fans through the mediated affordances of digital media and in person. Drawing on the notion of imagined community (B. Anderson, 2006; Morimoto & Chin, 2017), it was found that fan identification with the K-pop community served as a form of motivation to participate in various fan activities such as streaming, creating, and gift giving. Such findings suggest that the practices and understandings of K-pop fans are influenced and motivated by underlying affective identification, attachment, and relationships that are filtered through lived experience, providing a more nuanced understanding of the reasons and ways K-pop fans do fandom.

Chapter 4 undertakes a discussion of the themes of practices and perceptions, first examining the various ways fans indicated they participated in K-pop. It was found that fan practices are still primarily mediated through social media and other digital technologies as some of the most popular past-times of fans included watching, listening, and streaming. However, fans indicated that they also enjoyed and looked forward to offline events including concerts, conventions, and occasions that allowed fans to get together, with or without the presence of idols or other official K-pop products.

The collection of merchandise was also a common offline practice, as the design of K-pop products extended the fan experience through the surprise of unboxing and sharing of collections, which acts as a form of fan social capital (Geraghty, 2018; Maliangkay, 2013). These activities and practices were then examined through the various connections discussed above, and found that fans' participation in fan activities is in part motivated by the affective parasocial relationships formed with idols as well as through the sense of belonging fostered by imagined fan communities. The chapter then went on to discuss the various perceptions that fans held about K-pop, Korea, and Korean culture, finding that fans exhibited various degrees of self-reflection and positive change with regards to their awareness of Korea and other cultures. I then discussed how such perceptions were influenced by the practices that fans participated in, where K-pop acted as a vehicle for deeper understandings of others' actions and motivations, as shared by Lorento, or as a means of introducing fans to other Korean pop culture products and different frames of reference for Korean culture, as Katrina indicated. Again, the theme of perceptions was then contextualized in relation to the theme of connections, where it was found that awareness and understandings of K-pop, Korea, and other cultures was informed by fans' affective affinities with K-pop idols and fandom. Such affinities influenced the levels of interest that fans developed in expanding their knowledge of Korean culture and awareness of cultural difference more broadly. It was also found that such interest was uneven and complex, depending on fans' investment and lived experience.

5.1. Study Limitations

While I have provided a nuanced example of transcultural K-pop fandom, the scope of the study is limited to the borders of Canada, as was noted in Chapter One. In particular, the majority of respondents were located in two of the most populated provinces in Canada, British Columbia and Ontario, and as such the personal and fand demographic findings may be skewed due to the various vibrant populations in these two provinces. Additionally, the majority of respondents reported being fans of BTS and SHINee, which may be due to the number of Facebook fan pages dedicated to these two groups that were included in recruitment protocols. A deeper investigation into the make up of individual fandom groups such as Shawol or ARMY as well as a more comprehensive investigation of other provinces in Canada, including francophone

speakers in Quebec and the East coast, would complement these preliminary findings. Additionally, the process of asking fans 'why' they liked K-pop as well as other reason-giving questions did result in some reinforcement of shared fan mantras and ideas[26] (Hills, 2002a), suggesting that a deeper investigation into the discursive practices and norms of K-pop fandom is warranted. Finally, the use of an online survey allowed for a wider net of potential participants, but was limited by the inability for fans to elaborate on their responses to closed-ended questions and was designed in a way that allowed for partially complete responses submitted. The English focus of both the survey and interview protocols may have also limited responses as survey findings suggest that a robust and growing K-pop community is developing in Quebec and other Francophone provinces.

5.2. Future Considerations

As I was finalizing my draft of this thesis, I took a much-needed break to have coffee with an old friend. We began talking about some of her masters' courses, and her interest in ways to foster critical thinking and awareness through adult education. I brought up the findings of my thesis, telling her how the fans I spoke with had all suggested various positive learning experiences thanks to K-pop and fandom, and how many of these experiences involved different levels self-reflection and cultural competency. The differences in how fans recognized the manufactured aspects of K-pop or the limited picture of Korean culture popular music and television provide hold the potential to be used in educational settings, although the question of how to go about realizing this potential eluded us. She did comment on how the manufactured aspects of K-pop are often used as a 'gotcha' moment; both being fans, we are used to value judgements from friends, journalists, and academic work that devalue K-pop and question our tastes. What was important, she argued, was that even though K-pop music is manufactured and fans will never really know how much of what our idols show is us real, it still *matters*.

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[26] Commonly discussed by fans was the idea of 'self-produced' idols as authentic, echoing conversations occurring within fandom as well as in fan-adjacent journalism surrounding the notion of authenticity as it related to BTS' position in the K-pop industry

Investigations into the transnational and transcultural flows of K-pop have taken a variety of perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and cases to examine, at the core, *why* Korean popular music has become a globally enjoyed cultural product. By examining the ways in which fan identities and connections with K-pop idols and the fandom community inform fan practices and understandings of cultural difference, the question of 'why' is both answered and asked again. As fandom is not a monolith (K. Larsen & Zubernis, 2012), the reasons and affect expressed by the fans in this study may not be the same as those expressed by fans from other social, cultural, personal, and national contexts. Additionally, transcultural fan theory provides not only space to explore the non-nation centered identities that inform and are informed by cross-border fannish media consumption, but also invites examination of the frictions and conflicts that arise as fans from different cultural contexts make contact (Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Morimoto, 2015; Tsing, 2011). Such conflicts were hinted at by participants, as some expressed discontent or other negative emotions toward fans of specific groups, particular fan practices, or the fan community as a whole. Deeper exploration into the ways in which conflicts happen within and between K-pop fandoms from various contextual backgrounds is an increasingly important area of potential investigation as the K-pop industry expands to acknowledge and include, in uneven ways, non-local, non-Korean fans outside of East Asia. The positive and negative sentiments expressed by fans is another area of potential investigation, as the varying ways in which fans spoke of and about fandom and the K-pop industry involved levels of both extreme positive and negative sentiment.

Further research into transcultural fandom practices in other parts of the world also warrants closer analysis, particularly as the importance of national identity varies from country to country. As this thesis and my perspective stem from a position of privilege, being a white woman from a middle-class family based in a country where my culture is the dominant one, national identity is of different importance to me than, say, those who have immigrated or are refuges in a new country, or those who live in countries that have very strong national pride and sense of national belonging. While this may seem to be a recentering of a nationalistic, transnational frame of examination, it is important to recognize that I am still employing transcultural in this suggestion of future areas of research, as national identity, while of varying importance to fans around the world, is not the only identity that fans bring to and do their fandom through. As

transcultural fan theory leaves space for both national identities and other various identities and lived experiences, employing transcultural frameworks to explore K-pop fandom allows for a more well-rounded picture of fan reason-giving and practices. Furthering this line of inquiry, comparative investigations into global K-pop fandom would benefit from transcultural fandom framing, which would lessen the invisible barrier of 'fan from *x* country compared to fan from *y* country. Fans are not a monolith, but decentering national borders allows for fans to be compared and contrasted along a variety of characteristics that extend beyond the country they are from or the borders they live within.

While there are a number of other areas of future research that my thesis potentially informs, I am taking the space here to touch on a conversation I had with Haven, who is an avid SHINee fan. She told me about how her journey into K-pop started as a way of connecting with her grandchild, and resulted in her becoming a fan herself. When asked why she liked SHINee, she spoke of their relationship, the family-like connection the members had with each other, as well as the connection and mutual respect they seemed to have with their fans. A little after providing this well thought out response, she then said 'it's made me very happy'. Happiness is a reason in and of itself to like something, one that can be investigated in depth but does not necessarily need to be. Happiness, positive affect, pleasurable emotion, is one of the many underlying ways that informs fans' attachment to cultural texts. However, it is not the only emotion that drives fans to do what they do. A little later on in my conversation, the question of Jonghyun's death came up. It was a difficult conversation, and it took both of us a few minutes to mentally prepare for it, but the experience Haven described fell into the themes discussed in this thesis. She spoke about how she felt, and how she turned to her fan spaces for guidance; how other fans were struggling, and how they began coming together to support each other. The collective grief of fans served as a form of motivation to support one another as well as come together remember Jonghyun, creating websites, trending global suicide hotlines on Twitter and Tumblr, and organizing memorials in cities around the world. The 'ending' of a fan text, be it a group disbanding, a TV show ending, or an artist passing away, represent moments of upheaval and transition as fans grapple with the fan aspect of their identities in response to such loss (Williams, 2018). Just as positive affect and joyful identification and attachment inform transnational and transcultural flows of cultural texts, so do negative emotions of grief,

disgust, fear, and pain, raising the question of how K-pop fans negotiate such endings, both symbolic in the form of disbandment or the expulsion of a member from a group, and more finite endings, where life at once stops and continues on, which is a potential area I am considering exploring further as I continue on in my academic career. Investigating the affective identities, motivations, and negotiations of cross-border fans consuming popular culture such as K-pop provides opportunities for greater understanding of how we relate to media, culture, and each other in the current globalized, mediatized world we live in, and contributes to the never-ending question of *why* that informs investigation of social relations.

Asking 'why' *matters.* They ways in which we ask 'why' also matter. Underlying the various macro-level processes of industry production, circulation, soft power construction, and related exchanges of power are the micro-level interactions between individuals with media, as well as the mediated interactions between people. The ways that individuals construct identities and meaning through such mediated interactions occurs within the macro-level processes and power imbalances, and are mutually influential in that such processes and power exchanges are reflected in, reinforced, and challenged on the micro-level. Comprehensive understandings of the ways various objects, images, ideas, feelings, identities, and people move across the globe requires examinations of not only the bigger picture, but also the more mundane moments that make up the fabric we call reality.

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Appendix A. Survey Protocol

Version 1: 2019-03-11

Survey Protocols

The following includes a guiding implied consent script and series of survey questions that will be transferred to SurveyMonkey, which will be shared via link and/or QR code in online fandom spaces during the recruitment phase.

K-Pop Fan Practices, Identity, and Understandings of Cultural Difference in Canada

Introduction: Study Description and Consent

Hello and thank you for wanting to participate in my study! The purpose of this study is to explore how K-Pop fans in Canada participate in fandom, and if being a part of K-Pop fandom effects fans' awareness, understanding, or acceptance of cultural differences.

The survey should take 15-20 minutes to complete. All of your responses will remain anonymous. However, there is always some risk with online surveys that data may be accessed. Data collected through FluidSurvey is stored in Canada and is compliant with British Columbia's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). In extraordinary circumstances, survey data may be accessed by FluidSurvey's parent company SurveyMonkey, which is based in the U.S.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You have the option to skip any question or stop taking the survey at any time. Choosing to participate or not participate will have no impact on your personal or professional reputation. If you decide to take part in this survey, you may leave it at any time. You have the right to skip or not respond to any question. If you decide to stop taking the survey, you have the right to have your responses deleted from record.

In current best practices in research, electronic data is to be preserved for future use in open access initiatives. Open access initiatives allow researchers from different universities to share their data upon completion of studies, in an effort to promote further use and exploration of existing data sets. Anonymous data from this study will be uploaded to an online repository.

If you have any questions about this survey, or about this study in general, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Courtney McLaren, at cnmclare@sfu.ca, or the faculty supervisor Dal Yong Jin at dal_jin@sfu.ca. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics jtoward@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593.

By clicking 'Next' you consent to participation in this research and the use of your anonymous data as described above.

Part One: General Demographics

1. Which group does your age fall under?
   o 14 – 20
   o 21 – 25
   o 26 – 30
   o 31 – 34
   o 35 – 39
   o 40+

2. What province/territory are you located in?
   o Alberta
   o British Columbia
   o Ontario
   o Prince Edward Island
   o Nova Scotia
   o New Brunswick
   o Manitoba
   o Newfoundland and Labrador
   o Saskatchewan
   o Quebec
   o Nunavut
   o Northwest Territories
   o Yukon

3. What gender do you most identify with?
   o Female
   o Male
   o Other (specify)
   o Prefer not to respond

4. What sexual orientation best describes you?
   o Asexual
   o Bisexual
   o Gay
   o Heterosexual
   o Lesbian
   o Pansexual
   o Queer
   o Other (specify)
   o Prefer not to respond

5. Please indicate your ethnicity
   o Black (e.g. African, African American, African Canadian, Caribbean)
   o East Asian (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Polynesian)
   o South Asian (e.g. Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi)

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     o Southeast Asian (e.g. Burmese, Cambodian, Filipino, Laotian, Malaysian, Thai, Vietnamese)
     o West Asian (e.g. Arabian, Armenian, Iranian, Israeli, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, Turkish)
     o Latin American (e.g. Mexican, indigenous Central and South American)
     o White (Caucasian)

6. Do you identify as Indigenous?
     o Yes, First Nations
     o Yes, Métis
     o Yes, Inuit/Inuk
     o Yes, other
     o No

Part Two: Fandom Demographics

7. How long have you been in K-Pop fandom?
     o Less than one year
     o 1-2 years
     o 2-4 years
     o 5+ years

8. What bands do you bias/stan? Why?

9. Were you a part of another fandom before becoming a K-Pop fan?
     o Yes (specify)
     o No

10. On what sites do you spend the most time doing fandom-related things on social media?
     o Twitter
     o Tumblr
     o Facebook
     o YouTube
     o VLive
     o Instagram
     o Other (specify)

11. What other types of fandom-related things have you participated in (concerts, conventions, school groups, club nights, etc.)?

12. What types of fandom-related activities do you do regularly (e.g. reblogging/retweeting posts, listening to music/watching MVs, streaming, reading/writing fanfiction, creating fanart, learning dances, collecting albums/photocards, etc.)?

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13. What other things from Korean popular culture do you like?
   o K-Dramas
   o K-beauty (make-up/skincare)
   o Fashion
   o Food
   o Non-K-pop music (Hip-hop, rap, indie, trot, traditional)
   o I only like K-Pop

Part 3: Cultural Awareness

14. How would you describe K-Pop?

15. How would you describe K-Pop fandom?

16. On a scale of 1 to 5, with zero being not interested at all and five being very interested, how interested were you in the following before becoming a K-Pop fan?
   o Korean food
   o Korean music
   o Korean television
   o Korean language
   o Korean fashion
   o Korean history
   o Korean politics

17. On a scale of 0 to 5, with zero being not interested at all and five being very interested, how interested were you in the following after becoming a K-Pop fan?
   o Korean food
   o Korean music
   o Korean television
   o Korean language
   o Korean fashion
   o Korean history
   o Korean politics

18. In your opinion, has K-Pop made you more aware of different cultures?
   o Yes
   o No

19. If yes, how?

20. How do you think being a K-Pop fan has changed how you see cultural differences?

Appendix B. Demographic Data: Survey Respondents
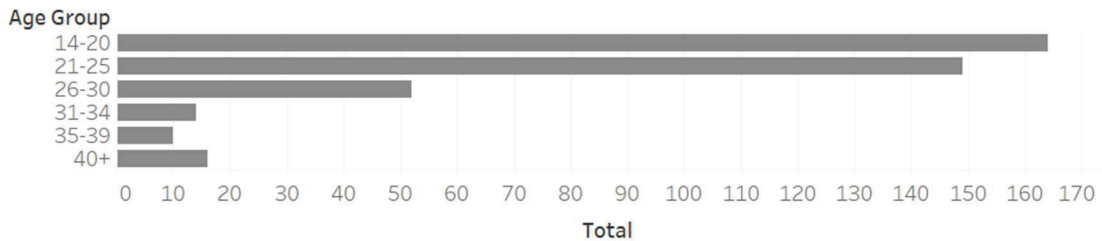

Figure A1. Age distribution of survey respondents

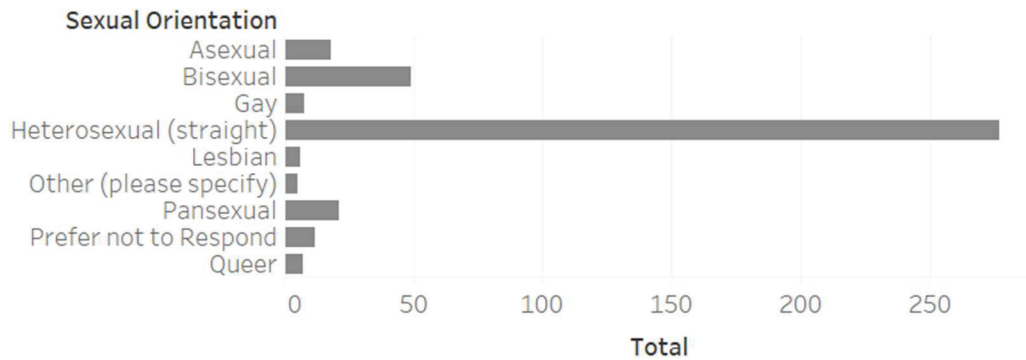**Figure A2. Gender distribution of survey respondents**

Figure A3. Sexual orientation of survey respondents
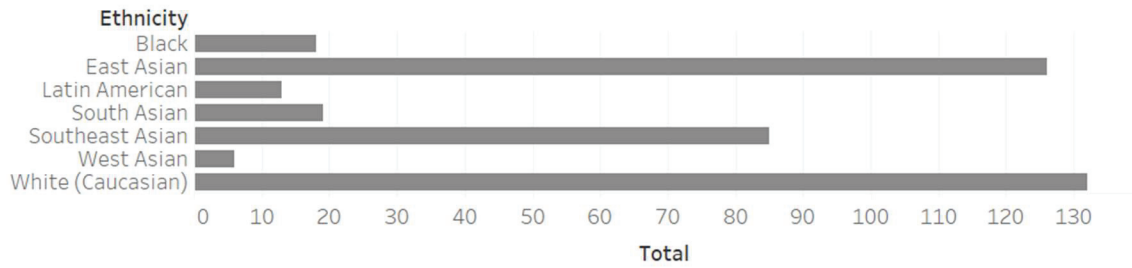
Ethnicity - Survey Respondents

Figure A3. Ethnicity of survey respondents

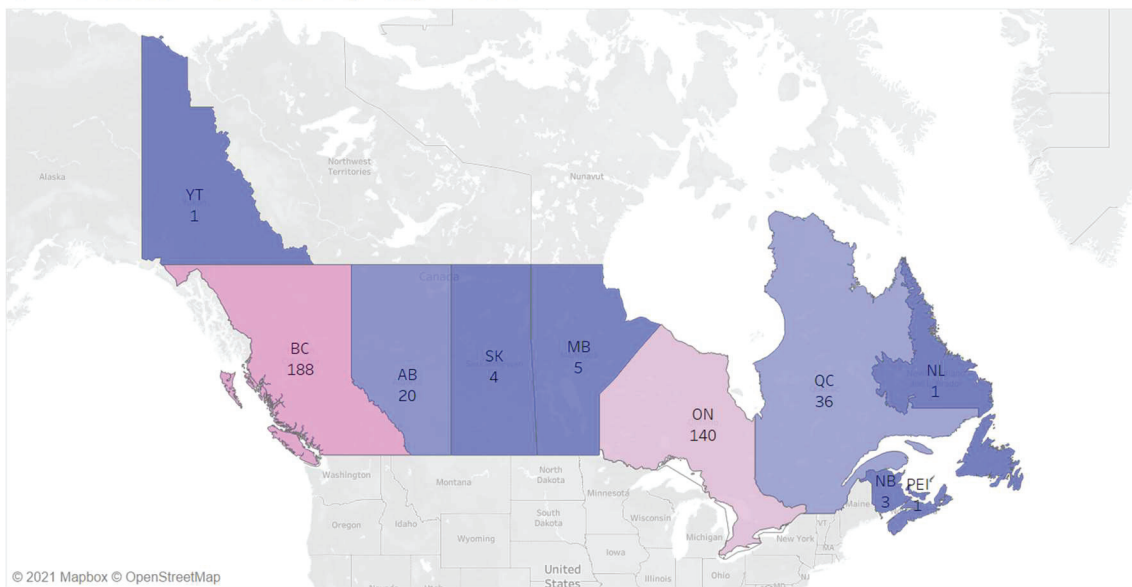## Location Distribution - Survey Respondents

Figure A4. Location of survey respondents by province or territory

Number of Years in Fandom - Survey Respondents
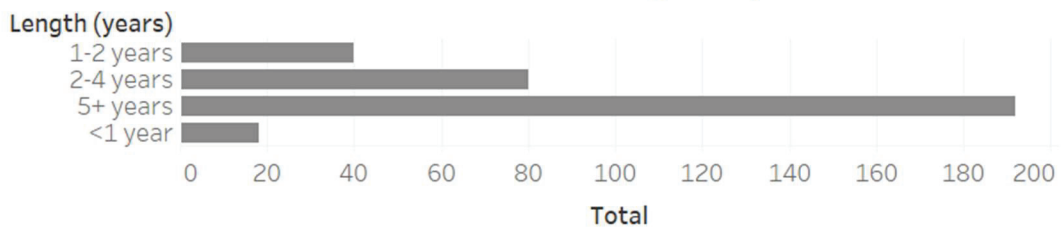

Figure A5. Length of time survey respondents have been in K-pop fandom, in years