

Too loud, too excited, and too passionate?
**The relationship between fan identity, feminist identity,
personal empowerment, and stereotypes of K-pop fangirls**

A quantitative analysis of feminist fandom

Student Name: Parnian Najma Chawarri
Student Number: 654879

Supervisor: Dr. Marlen Komorowski

Master Media Studies - Media & Creative Industries
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis
June 2023

Word Count: 13,672

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ABSTRACT

The present study sought to address the gender issues concerning the perception of female fans in the context of K-pop fangirls. In media portrayals and public discourses, female enthusiasm is often ridiculed and criticized for being too loud and too passionate. Fandoms of the non-Western music genre K-pop are known to be female-driven and experience various forms of sexist stereotyping and marginalization. Simultaneously, they display feminist awareness and feelings of empowerment. Consequently, the underlying factors of fans' feminist identity and empowerment were examined. To extend the previous research on feminist K-pop fandoms and to fill the gap in the feminist literature, the current study proposed the following research question: What is the relationship between fan identification, feminist identification, personal empowerment, and stereotypes of K-pop fangirls? A global online survey was conducted ($N = 483$) to investigate whether fan identity has intersections with feminist identity by building a second pathway to personal empowerment. Results supported the notion that many K-pop fans identify as feminists. Compared to feminist identification, fan identity was not a strong predictor of empowerment. However, the analysis contributes to recent studies on K-pop fans' increased well-being in relation to their fan identity. Furthermore, positive stereotypes of fangirls and feminists play an important role in fostering these identities. Notably, the exploratory approach to measuring fangirl stereotypes gives valuable insights for future research. Female K-pop fans are further challenging and changing the image of a "fangirl". The findings suggest that being a fangirl and being a feminist do not exclude each other. Social and practical implications for the fans and their social environment, as well as entertainment agencies, are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Fandom, Feminism, Empowerment, Stereotypes, K-pop*

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1. Introduction

When I talk about my favorite artists, I used to always clarify that also men listen to it, but I stopped at one point. Why? Because I don't need the validation of men when it comes to enjoying music. [...] When boys are passionate about sports, it's great, but when girls are passionate about music, it's hysterical. So let me tell you, young girls: Your enthusiasm is valid and beautiful! (Sarahjanecheeky, 2020, Instagram post)

There is a long history of fans being stereotyped as obsessive, irrational, or overtly emotional toward media texts and celebrities (see Jenkins, 1992; Jensen, 1992). Although more recent research (see Sandvoss, 2005) has shown that fandom has become acceptable, there are still significant differences between the perceptions of male fans and female fans. For instance, being a fangirl of a boyband tends to be negatively connotated in media portrayals and among netizens (Sharma, 2022). In public discourses, the interests of women are usually belittled as opposed to male fans. Female enthusiasm is often criticized for being too loud and too passionate (Hannell, 2020). These emotional responses are generally socially accepted for men, such as sports fans (Busse, 2013).

This binary notion has its roots in the history of the fangirl, which dates back to 1934 when the term was first used in a novel by A. P. Herbert (Tearle, 2013). While the term fangirl has described girls who were expressive with their love for a fan object, it also had a negative connotation and was used to degrade women (Madruga, 2022). In the mid-20th century, fangirl behavior became more extreme, with fans crying and fainting at concerts or invading venues. As explained by Madruga, these acts can be linked to the prolonged suppression of women's feelings as it was expected of girls to behave calmly and lady-like. Accordingly, their intense burst of enthusiasm can be considered as venting out long-suppressed frustrations and an act of female empowerment.

According to Madruga (2022), today's fangirls are experiencing less criticism due to having safe spaces in the form of social media or fan conventions where they can relate and connect with other fans. Nevertheless, the historically negative connotations of being a fangirl affect people's perceptions to this day. One example is the critical reactions to Disney Pixar's movie *Turning Red* (Shi, 2022), which depicts Mei – a young fangirl, openly displaying her obsession with the boyband 4*Town. Whereas some critics perceived the movie as “cringy”, specifically female writers emphasized its importance due to how it normalizes the teenage

girlhood experience (e.g., Madruga, 2022). As noted by Madruga, fan behaviors like creating fan art or wearing merch are usually outgrown as many fans feel ashamed of these “feminine” practices once they grow older. In the movie, however, Mei acknowledges her fangirl identity as an integral part of herself. She proudly expresses her passions and emotions despite people perceiving them as dramatic or out-of-control. This way, the character of Mei can serve as a positive example of representation and validation that turns out to be relatable and comforting for many women and girls (Madruga, 2022). Movies like *Turning Red* showcase the efforts of media producers to destigmatize the negative fangirl image that still exists in society.

This cultural shift in the concept of fangirl is further influenced by the rising popularity of a specific music genre and its fans. Korean pop music, also known as K-pop, is considered a transnational pop culture product that has changed the dynamics of fandom and its perceptions (Jeong, 2020). The Korean Wave has spread Korean pop culture “beyond geo-cultural proximities and without traditional gatekeepers” (Yoon, 2019, p. 176). The fanbases of Korean pop bands are known to be diverse in age, gender, and sexuality (Grover et al., 2022). Regardless of their diversity, K-pop fans are often stereotyped by their peers as young, immature, or fetishizing Asian culture (Yoon, 2019). Moreover, persistent fan stereotypes can affect fans’ own perceptions of fandom (Stanfill, 2013). While some fans accept misconceptions concerning other fans, they exclude themselves from controversial behavior. This contradiction may reveal an underlying cognitive balancing act of many fans. Stanfill (2013) pointed out that “being a fan means being pulled between personal and subcultural pleasure and desire, on the one hand, and the socially appropriate, on the other” (p. 118). However, prior research also emphasizes positive outcomes that may emerge from dealing with such stereotypes. Consequently, K-pop fans might develop a stronger sense of belonging and connection, which can further manifest their fan identity (Yoon, 2019). Hence, K-pop fans can experience personal and collective growth through fan practices (Napier, 2007; Sandvoss, 2005).

Being described as “the Beatles of the 21st century” in the Western media, BTS is known as the biggest K-pop band that has achieved global success (Jeong, 2020). Their fandom – the BTS ARMY – is regarded as socially engaged and empowered through BTS’ music and the fan community. The fandom, which mainly consists of female fans (Grover et al., 2022), actively responds to media portrayals that are negative toward BTS or the fandom (see Sarahjanecheeky, 2020). For example, British Comedian James Corden was called out by BTS fans on social media after referring to them as “15-year-old girls” (Ziwei, 2021). The ongoing stereotypical representations in media texts have increased fans’ awareness of sexist

or ageist connotations targeted at them. Some K-pop fan accounts (see Sarahjanecheeky) make use of their social media presence and specifically empower young female fans. They negotiate their role as fangirls against the backdrop of stereotypical perceptions and showcase feminist attitudes. In fact, a small but significant number of studies have highlighted the presence of feminist awareness among K-pop fans (see Lee, 2019; Sun & Lee, 2022). For example, Lee's (2019) findings indicate that K-pop fans display feminist consciousness by criticizing and calling out misogynistic elements in K-pop music, such as the sexual objectification of women.

The present study seeks to examine how the concepts of fandom, empowerment, stereotypes, and feminist identification intertwine in the scope of K-pop fans. While there is plenty of research on feminist identity, the combination with other identities, such as fan membership, is scarce. Only a few studies (see Lee, 2019; Sun & Lee, 2022) have investigated feminist attitudes in female K-pop fans. K-pop fangirls encounter various forms of marginalization (Yoon, 2019), including intersections with ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Still, they have not been considered in previous feminist studies on female representation in media. Feminist traits appear to play an essential role among female K-pop fans, which are used as a coping mechanism against experiences of sexism (see Lee, 2019).

Furthermore, the current study seeks to contribute to the notions of fan empowerment supported by prior fandom studies. According to Sandvoss (2005), fandom can create a sense of home by inducing emotions such as security and warmth. At the same time, it constitutes the idea of 'us' against 'them' to distinguish oneself from the 'Other' (Morley, 2000), which can empower fans (see Yoon, 2019). Therefore, the concept of fandom has a significant role in the formation of identity (Sandvoss, 2005). Numerous studies have indicated that fan membership comes with certain positive benefits. In their study, Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) found that being a fan community member generates positive affective responses. As such, it increases enjoyment and appreciation of the fan object. Accordingly, fans with high group identification experienced their fan engagement as exciting, meaningful, or thought-provoking. Their findings reveal that fandom goes beyond being just a "passive consumer of media" (p. 44) and includes the search for meaning. Additional positive psychological outcomes of self-categorizing as a fan can be connected to Social Identity Theory (SIT: Tajfel & Turner, 1979). By taking a SIT perspective, Laffan's (2021) findings revealed that K-pop fan identification was a significant predictor of increased happiness, self-esteem, and social connectedness. Specifically, happiness proved to be highly associated with fan identification. The results of recent K-pop studies imply that identification as a K-pop fan may positively

affect well-being (e.g., Laffan, 2021). These notions put emphasis on the social implications of K-pop fandoms and fangirling in particular. K-pop fangirls can benefit from their fan identity and fan engagement. However, pervasive stereotypes implying that being a fan is still something to be ashamed of overshadow the positive effects of fan identification on well-being. By analyzing the particular population of K-pop fandoms, a more nuanced image of fangirls may unfold, contributing to research on fandom, feminism, and the general destigmatization of fangirls in society. Exploring the positive factors of fan identity intersecting with feminist identity may contribute to the acceptance of fangirl behavior among fans themselves, fans' parents, and society at large. Instead of limiting women and girls within constructed boundaries by ridiculing and stigmatizing their fan practices, their ways of feeling and behaving could be further embraced and empowered by their social environment.

To extend the previous research on feminist K-pop fandoms and to fill the gap in the feminist literature, the present study proposes the following research question: *What is the relationship between fan identification, feminist identification, personal empowerment, and stereotypes of K-pop fangirls?*

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides a broad overview of the literature related to the fundamental concepts of this research, including fan identification, feminist consciousness, personal empowerment, and stereotypes. The research question, as well as the conceptual framework and hypotheses of this study, are presented.

2.1 *Fan Identification and K-pop Fandoms*

The concept of fandom refers to a subculture that is based on a shared identification among individuals who have similar interests (Jenkins, 1992). In addition, fans showcase high emotional investment and affect toward their object of fandom (Sandvoss, 2005). A sense of social identity that they develop over time ties members of fan communities together (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). This phenomenon can be observed in many contexts, ranging from sports (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Wann et al., 2000) to music (Baym, 2007; Brown & Schulze, 1990), literature (Lopes, 2006) or video games (Consalvo, 2003; Lowood, 2006). Fans heavily engage in media consumption, production, and collection, which goes against the idea of a passive audience (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Therefore, they can be considered knowledgeable producers of cultural capital (Fiske, 1992; Jancovich, 2002). According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), fan engagement has four key components. In their theory of ‘sense of community’, fans should perceive a sense of belonging to the group, believe they influence their group, feel appreciated for their community involvement, and have a shared history and emotional connection. Identification, in particular, is described as a crucial element for individuals to participate in fan culture, as stated by McMillan and Chavis (1986). Consuming media or engaging in fan practices, such as joining online communities on social media, can foster identification (Soukup, 2002). The mutual bonds between group members and the participation in ritualized fan practices can thus be strengthened among individuals in a fan community (Fraser & Brown, 2002).

A subculture that has gained public and scholarly attention in the past years with its unique fan engagement is K-pop fandom. The Korean Wave, also called *Hallyu*, describes the global popularity of Korean popular culture, mainly led by Korean pop music or K-pop, as well as other products, such as TV dramas and movies (Chang & Park, 2018). Chang and Park (2018) argue that K-pop fan clubs like the ARMY of BTS represent a global fandom that transcends the scope of a traditional fan club and has become a cultural movement. Specifically, BTS’ fandom is known to be a force for social activism and community engagement by, for instance, organizing charity projects and collectively supporting good

causes (Jeong, 2020). Interestingly, K-pop online fandoms showcase a highly collaborative and participatory nature (Jin & Hyangsoon, 2020; Sung, 2014; Yoon, 2018). The concept of *fancom*, an abbreviation for fan company, suggests that fandom has evolved from passive devotion to increased bottom-up fan activism (Jung, 2012). In her study, Jung (2012) analyzes the notions of fancom practices by addressing fan activities such as fund-raising and donating to charity, indicating that fan culture has shifted from sole consumerism to social awareness. Specifically, social media platforms have paved the way for fans to reproduce content and create global networks for interacting and collaborating with other community members to support their favorite bands (Lee, 2019; Kang et al., 2021). Previous research on K-pop fandoms has mostly revolved around transcultural fan experiences (Sung, 2014; Yoon, 2018), online fan activities and collaboration (Kang et al., 2021), or the implications of fan community (Kim & Kim, 2017; Laffan, 2021). For example, Kim and Kim (2017) empirically examined the effect of the fan community on the perception and behavior of fans. The authors found that fan community attributes, such as social interaction, can foster its members' identification and trust, which in turn increases fan loyalty and cooperation.

Another string of research that has not yet reached extensive analysis touches upon fans' engagement in societal and political issues, particularly feminism and feminist fandom. Sun and authors' (2022) findings suggest that K-pop fans showcase certain degrees of feminist consciousness by exposing internalized misogyny of some fans and within the K-pop industry concerning the representation of female K-pop singers. Their study partly draws on Lee (2019), who emphasized the various ways that "fans are negotiating the two seemingly contradictory identities of being a feminist and a K-pop fan" (p. 2). In her research, Lee examined feminist K-pop fans who started a hashtag campaign on Twitter to call out misogynistic elements in K-pop songs. As noted by the author, these findings challenge the notion of fans' unwavering support of the K-pop fandom and indicate a critical stance of fans.

The present study seeks to extend the existing research that connects feminism with K-pop fandom. While prior research intertwining both concepts has primarily focused on fans' perception of the representation of female K-pop artists (e.g., Sun et al., 2022) or the reaction to misogynistic elements in K-pop music, sexist assumptions regarding the fans themselves have not been considered yet. However, stereotypical representations of fandom, in particular female fans, are prevalent in media and society (Sharma, 2022). Female K-pop fans tend to utilize their social media presence and interconnectivity to advocate for better perceptions of fangirls, which contributes to the observed cultural shift to normalizing female obsession

(Sharma, 2022). Consequently, the new theoretical construct of feminist consciousness opens up, which will be introduced and further explained in the following section.

2.2 Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Self-Identification

Feminist studies “have emerged and grown under the inspiration of feminist movements and political activism” (Lykke, 2010, p. 14). From a broader perspective, the field has contested “gender-conservative discourses” that were dominating academic knowledge production (Lykke, p. 14). Feminist research deals with gender relations, gender representations, and intersections between, for instance, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. Defining feminism has proved to be challenging since it is not a monolithic construct but consists of diverse perspectives or ideologies (Szymanski, 2004). Feminist ideologies can include liberal (Donovan, 1985), lesbian (Brown, 1994), or radical (Enns, 1992, 1997), with each ideology having its respective ideas and beliefs. Nonetheless, the concept of feminism can be summarized as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (Hooks, 2000, p. 1). Thus, it primarily focuses on raising awareness of sexism and advocates for economic, political, and social gender equality (Hirsh et al., 2002; Worell & Remer, 2003). By adopting a feminist lens, the present research concentrates on the implications of sexist perceptions of a specific group of women, namely K-pop fangirls.

While sexism is still prevalent today, past feminist studies that have outlined the negative impact of sexist experiences on well-being (Swim et al., 2001; Zucker & Landry, 2007) are relevant to this day. Previous research on the negative outcomes for women highlights the need for strategies that can help to mitigate the harmful effects of sexism (Cunningham, 2012). Similarly, feminism and feminist theory have emphasized the development of feminist consciousness as an effective coping tool in the face of sexist discrimination (Landrine & Klonoff, 1997; Klonis et al., 1997). The concept of feminist consciousness includes any held values, beliefs, and attributes of a person that recognize the presence of sexist bias and its potential to affect women’s lives negatively (Cunningham, 2012). In addition, it is linked to having individual-based benefits. In numerous studies, feminist consciousness led to a reduction of psychological distress and an increase in well-being (e.g., Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006; Yakushko, 2007). The positive effects of feminist consciousness are characterized by a variety of coping mechanisms that foster resilience, self-confidence, and the ability to advocate for oneself (Worell, 2001).

An empirical instrument that has been widely applied in the research on feminist identity and traits is Downing and Roush’s (1985) model for feminist identity development. The authors proposed that the development of feminist identity involves a five-stage process,

starting with Passive Acceptance (unawareness of sexism) and continuing with Revelation (recognition of sexual discrimination and feelings of anger), Embeddedness-Emanation (support-seeking from women's communities), Synthesis (integration of group identification into personal identity), and lastly leading to Active Commitment (action on behalf of women). However, researchers have opted for approaching the different stages as identity *styles* as the stages do not follow a linear development but instead display different forms of experiencing feminist consciousness (e.g., Hyde, 2002; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010).

Further, a significant body of research has emphasized differentiating between the endorsement of feminist attributes and feminist social identity instead of conflating both concepts as implied by Downing and Roush's model (see Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Feminist self-identification is a trait that encompasses a woman's willingness to self-identify as a feminist (Cunningham, 2012). Self-labeling as a feminist has been associated with feminist consciousness, such as positive views of feminists, the awareness of sexism, or the endorsement of collective action to protect women (Cowan et al., 1992; Leaper & Arias, 2011; Liss et al., 2004). However, accepting the feminist label proved to be unrelated to attitudes, values, and behaviors (e.g., Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Many studies have revealed that women may have some form of feminist consciousness but do not claim the label (e.g., Burn et al., 2000; Liss et al., 2001; Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006). This tendency is also described as the "I'm not a feminist, but" phenomenon (Buschman & Lenart, 1996; Crossley, 2010; Seron et al., 2018). "I'm not a feminist, but I work to eradicate sexism in whatever ways I can" (p. 126) is one example that emerged from Crossley's (2010) study. This observed discrepancy has been explained by the impact of negative stereotypes of feminists (e.g., Roy et al., 2007; Twenge & Zucker, 1999). Previous studies have defined several variables that are related to feminist self-labeling. For example, the disapproval of negative stereotypes of feminists is connected to the tendency to self-identify as a feminist (Houvouras & Carter, 2008; Leaper & Arias, 2011; Roy et al., 2007). In conjunction with these findings, numerous studies have illustrated that a positive impression of feminism is essential for feminist self-identification (see Cowan et al., 1992; Liss et al., 2001; Williams & Wittig, 1997). More recent studies reflect similar notions and highlight the influence of positive stereotypes on feminist identification (see Moore & Stathi, 2020). In their study, Moore and Stathi found that exposure to positive feminist stereotypes significantly strengthened feminist self-identification irrespective of the participant's sexual orientation.

The present study focuses on self-identification as a feminist, which can be defined as claiming a feminist social identity (Cunningham, 2012). This conceptual framework of

feminist identity is generally shaped by Social Identity Theory, which underlines the influence of group belonging on an individual's self-concept (Deaux et al., 1999; Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 2000). Accordingly, adopting a social identity is linked to having positive perceptions of the ingroup, which impacts one's attitudes and behavior. For the current study, self-identifying as a feminist is indicative of reflecting a certain degree of feminist consciousness. However, as suggested by Szymanski (2004), feminist self-identification contains several dimensions. In her study, she developed a multi-item scale to improve the assessment of self-labeling as a feminist and further demonstrate the complexity of the construct. In addition to public and private feminist identification, the scale consists of the "importance of beliefs and values of feminism to the self, and support for the goals of the feminist movement" (Szymanski, 2004, p. 150).

To further extend prior research that outlines the impact of positive stereotypes on feminist self-identification, this study delves into the theoretical construct of stereotypes. In order to reflect a more nuanced picture of stereotypical perceptions of female K-pop fans, both fangirl and feminist stereotypes are examined, which will be presented next.

2.3 Stereotypes

According to Hamilton and Troler (1986), stereotypes are cognitive structures that contain an individual's beliefs, expectations, and knowledge about a group. Stereotypical expectations facilitate the processing and interpretation of information (Amodio, 2014). By categorizing such information, stereotypes function as a filter (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 2013). Consequently, people tend to overestimate differences between groups and disregard distinctions within one group (Ellemers, 2018). Unlearning stereotypes is challenging as counter-stereotypical observations are likely to be avoided or rejected, contributing to their resilience and pervasiveness (Wigboldus et al., 2013). Stereotypes are not necessarily negative, but they can be destructive when used by the dominant group to highlight majority-minority differences or to degrade particular groups (Berg, 1990). As argued by Fiske (1993), stereotyping is tied to the exertion of power and control. Prior research in this field distinguishes between two types of stereotypes, namely, descriptive and prescriptive beliefs (e.g., Terborg, 1977). Descriptive stereotypes refer to individuals' expectations concerning how members of a certain group usually are. A stereotyped person, consequently, has to deal with the expectations to move within these constructed boundaries (Fiske, 1993). Meanwhile, prescriptive stereotypes explicitly define how specific groups should be like, think, or act. As Fiske notes, they often contain beliefs that limit individuals' behaviors and serve as a tool of social control.

An extensive amount of research has particularly investigated the prevalence of gender stereotypes (e.g., Ellemers, 2018). Media representation plays a significant role in reinforcing gendered biases. Prior analyses have demonstrated that women, in particular, are subject to stereotypical media representations (e.g., Ward & Grover, 2020). As such, they are often characterized based on their looks or their social relationships, while the complexity of their personality and roles is reduced (Ward & Grover, 2020). However, pervasive gender stereotypes have a powerful influence on well-being, behavior, and conceptions (Ruble et al., 2006). For example, Ward and Harrison (2005) found that stereotypical views of women in media depictions significantly affected the perceptions of gender roles, body image, and sexual relationships of girls. In order to minimize the harmful effects of stereotyping by distinguishing and unlearning gender biases, individuals must recognize and accept the influence of gender stereotypes on their judgments (Ellemers, 2018). While these findings reflect the social implications of gendered notions in general, the next sections dig deeper into the constructs of feminist and fangirl stereotypes, which will be assessed in the current study.

2.3.1 Feminist Stereotypes

Prior research in the feminist field sought to examine the disconnection between holding feminist attitudes and the reluctance to self-identify as a feminist (e.g., Breen & Karpinski, 2008). Notably, negative stereotypes of feminism and feminists play a significant role. Negative connotations including “angry”, “man-hating”, “aggressive”, or “physically and sexually unattractive” have been prevalent in people’s perceptions (e.g., Breen & Karpinski, 2008; Twenge & Zucker, 1999). While a stigmatized view of feminists is described as the “status quo” (Roy et al., 2007, p. 153), researchers have also emphasized the presence of positive stereotypes concerning feminist women. These positive notions include “intelligent”, “independent”, “competent”, or “assertive” (Roy et al., 2007; Twenge & Zucker, 1999). However, contrary to expectations, positive views of feminists have not always led to feminist self-labeling. In their study, Breen and Karpinski (2008) discovered that despite having positive perceptions of feminists, the participants chose not to identify as feminists. According to the authors, this finding contradicts the concept of Social Identity Theory. Holding positive evaluations of a group often connects to individuals’ willingness to identify with such a group as it promotes a positive perception of the self. Nevertheless, despite having positive views of feminists, most participants refused to claim the feminist label (Breen & Karpinski, 2008). As Twenge and Zucker (1999) implied, one possible interpretation for this paradoxical outcome may be the misconception of other people’s attitudes towards feminists. Several studies have found that women believe other people view feminists negatively (see

Ramsey et al., 2007; Roy et al., 2007). For example, Anastasopoulos and Desmarais (2015) refer to the common assumption among women that men dislike feminists. In addition, the authors found that women who openly identified as feminists were prone to encountering bias and discrimination in specific social contexts. While negative stereotypes of feminists significantly influence women's unwillingness to identify as feminists publicly, researchers also highlight the role of positive feminist stereotypes (e.g., Roy et al., 2007). The findings of Roy et al. (2007) indicated that exposure to positive stereotypes of feminists led to increased self-identification as a feminist. More recent studies supported these notions. For example, Moore and Stathi (2020) examined the influence of feminist stereotypes and sexual identity on feminist self-identification and collective action. Participants were exposed to positive stereotypes by reading a paragraph with positively connotated adjectives of feminists. These included “strong”, “independent”, “intelligent”, “confident”, and “assertive”, which were derived from Roy et al. (2007). The authors found that participants were more likely to identify as feminists regardless of their sexual orientation. Meanwhile, negative stereotyping containing adjectives such as “angry”, “aggressive”, “overbearing”, “anti-male”, and “stubborn” significantly decreased feminist self-identification.

In the following section, the notion of fangirl stereotypes will be presented. While fandom is generally normalized in today’s society (Sandvoss, 2005), female fans are still faced with gendered bias and prejudice.

2.3.2 Fangirl Stereotypes

In the past, fans of pop culture have often been portrayed negatively in the media as being too emotional or lacking self-identity (Hills, 2007). According to Jenkins (1992) and Jensen (1992), fans were often stigmatized as the cultural “Others”. The classic set of stereotypes about fandom includes heavy media consumption, extreme obsession with the fan object, or emotional attachment that is irrational (Stanfill, 2013). While the concept of fan culture has evolved in the past years, and fandom has become an ordinary aspect of daily life (Sandvoss, 2005), there are still long-standing fan stereotypes that are not only reproduced in popular media but also exist within fandoms.

Specifically, the underlying gender issues play a significant role (Busse, 2013). In her essay, Busse (2013) argues that debates about fandom are affected by gender in terms of how fangirls are perceived. Moreover, problematic fan activities are primarily regarded as female or dismissed. Female fans are perceived as too obsessive, and their emotional investment is often critiqued as too girly or teen-like. Busse particularly notes the distinction between male and female fans when it comes to sexualizing stars. While male desire for female celebrities is

not frowned upon, female admiration tends to be associated with overinvestment or hysteria. According to Busse (2013), “gender discrimination occurs on the level of the fan, the fan activity, and the fannish investment” (p. 75). Accordingly, female interests and their fan engagement are disapproved quicker compared to male fans of, for instance, sports or music. Fans have internalized these gendered fan constructions, which impact their attitudes and behaviors. Nonetheless, fans still exhibit a sense of agency regarding their public perception. As argued by Busse, fans actively negotiate the image they prefer to present to others.

A discourse that often appears in the context of gendered fandom is that of the fangirl. Hannell (2020) defines the concept of a fangirl as “a youthful, (hyper)feminine, and performative act of cultural consumption marked by excessive displays of embodied affect” (p. 1). The findings of previous literature indicate that the discourse of fangirl is used to belittle fans, fandoms, and practices that are considered feminine (e.g., Busse, 2013; Cann, 2015; Hannell, 2020). Popular media often dismiss the behaviors of female fans by using gendered terms such as fever, hysteria, or madness to describe them (Click, 2009). According to Pande (2018), there is a “consistent trend that positions the fangirl as a marginal identity” (p. 27). As suggested by Gerrard (2022), many female fans reflect the notion of Stanfill’s (2013) intra-stereotyping dynamics. Reproducing fan stereotypes within a fandom can serve as a means to distance oneself from other fans who are perceived as controversial. Thus, fans measure their fan activities against fangirls who engage in excessive fan behavior to protect their own positions and normalize their fan identity. However, this further perpetuates sexist and ageist stereotypes.

The notions of gendered fandom create a multilayered and even more complex picture when it comes to K-pop fans, of which the majority identify as female (Grover et al., 2022). In his qualitative study, Yoon (2019) examined what it means to be a K-pop fan in a Western context. Among other results, he found how both fans and non-fans stereotype K-pop fans. Stereotypes directed at K-pop fans often imply that K-pop music “is popular among young, immature, and/or Asia-fetishizing audiences only” (Yoon, 2019, p. 183). Yoon’s findings are consistent with prior research on the marginalization of K-pop fans concerning racial stereotypes and cultural tastes (Mazana, 2014; Yoon, 2017). Accordingly, some fans refrain from publicly labeling themselves as K-pop fans because people question their music taste or react with racist remarks. However, Yoon (2019) highlights that many fans challenge and negotiate their image in the face of stereotypes. For K-pop fans of Asian heritage, for example, being a fan encouraged engagement with their Asian identity. While Yoon focused on the cultural and transnational aspects of K-pop fan perceptions, the present study aims to

highlight the underlying gender differences. Stereotypical views, such as fans being obsessive and focused on “appearance” rather than the “substance” of media texts, are usually associated with fangirls and femininity (Cann, 2015, pp. 166-167). By shifting the focus on K-pop fangirls, a multifaceted image of gender bias can be obtained in the specific context of K-pop fandoms.

2.4 Personal Empowerment

Research related to the construct of empowerment has been criticized for needing more consistency and conciseness concerning its definition, operationalization, and assessment (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Luthar et al., 2000). However, several recurring themes are found in the literature on empowerment (Boehm & Staples, 2004). As suggested by Boehm and Staples (2004), empowerment relates to processes and outcomes and affects both the individual and group levels. Additionally, empowerment is derived from the premise that individuals have the abilities and resources to attain positive change in situations where they feel powerless. While empowerment cannot be generated, it can be facilitated for individuals. Moreover, it concentrates on marginalized and stigmatized groups in society and unequal power relations. Researchers have developed a number of measures to assess empowerment among different social groups or in specific settings (Stern, 2017). For the current study, empowerment measures specifically centered around women are considered.

As previously indicated, having a certain degree of feminist consciousness has proved to lead to positive outcomes for women, such as personal empowerment (Worell & Remer, 2003). This construct is embedded in feminist therapy and at the core of many health interventions (Johnson et al., 2005). Empowerment in feminist therapy “is conceptualized as enabling women to access skills and resources to cope more effectively with current as well as future stress and trauma” (Johnson et al., 2005, p. 111). To further investigate significant attitudes and behaviors related to increased levels of engagement, Johnson et al. developed the Personal Progress Scale-Revised (PPS-R), which is derived from the Empowerment Model (Worell & Remer, 2003). The authors aimed to modify the original scale to better reflect the convergence of diverse identities. The original model by Worell and Remer (2003) consists of four general principles and their respective goals. The first principle highlights the interdependence of personal and social identities. Accordingly, a woman should become aware of her identity concerning her gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, etc. The next principle encompasses the political dimension. It covers issues relating to institutionalized sexism, gender stereotyping, and oppression. The third principle underlines equal relationships between women and men, in addition to minority and majority groups. The value of female

perspectives is emphasized in the last principle of the Empowerment Model. Among the objectives linked to this principle are valuing other women and being aware of one's own strengths. Moreover, this model measures the ten primary outcomes of feminist therapy (Worell, 1996). Some examples are positive self-evaluation, self-esteem, a sense of personal control, or gender-role awareness. With their altered PPS-R scale, Johnson et al. (2005) found that empowerment fosters resilience in women by offering them the tools they need to manage stress and psychological distress effectively. These findings are consistent with prior studies. According to Worell and Remer (2003), the concept of empowerment includes a feminist-informed mix of healthy coping mechanisms, resilience, and the willingness to recognize and combat personal and cultural types of oppression.

Previous research suggested that higher levels of feminist consciousness can empower individuals (e.g., Yakushko, 2007). For example, Yakushko (2007) investigated the personal benefits of feminism. The author examined participants' feminist attitudes and psychological well-being by measuring variables such as autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, or life satisfaction. Their results demonstrated that women with feminist beliefs had significantly higher scores on the well-being scale compared to women with conservative values. These outcomes imply that feminist traits foster a sense of agency in women, which connects to increased growth and psychological well-being (Cunningham, 2012). However, as argued by Cunningham, feminist consciousness may not act as a form of protection. Instead, it can be tied to how it affects women's perception and interpretation of sexist experiences. This notion can be embedded in the wider context of Social Identity Theory, which implies that the strength of a person's identification with a particular group changes how events are interpreted from the individual to the collective level (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Consequently, holding a strong group identification with feminists buffers the harmful impact of sexist discrimination by shifting the meaning of sexist experiences from a personal to a sociocultural context (Cunningham, 2012).

On another note, researchers have argued that the perceptions of feminism have changed since liberal feminist views, such as the basic belief in gender equality, are now widely accepted (Schnittker et al., 2003). As a consequence, it is common for women's equality to be taken for granted, and collective action against sexism may be perceived as redundant (Cunningham, 2012). In a similar vein, prior research has distinguished between an individualistic and a feminist perspective of empowerment (e.g., Eisele & Stake, 2008). While personal empowerment in feminist theory has a political component and requires a high group identification with feminists, the individualistic orientation is grounded in personal benefit

and meritocracy. For the latter, success is not influenced by systemic inequalities but results from one's capacities (Martnez et al., 2010; Rich, 2005; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Such capacities are reflected in attributes such as self-efficacy and a sense of competence or power (Liss et al., 2004).

The way in which potential benefits of feminist consciousness have been examined was considered to be limited as researchers investigated a rather broad definition of well-being (Cunningham, 2012). The previous literature lacks “outcome measures that are empowerment-related and/or based in feminist paradigm” (Cunningham, 2012, p. 62). Further exploring this concept would support the idea of feminist consciousness expressing itself in attitudes and behaviors and therefore support prior notions in the literature. Furthermore, applying this theoretical concept to a specific group of women where the identities of feminists and fans combine can give a diverse and refined picture to the research in this field.

In the following section, the research question, conceptual framework, and hypotheses of this study will be presented based on previous literature and the connection of the theoretical constructs mentioned above.

2.5 Hypotheses

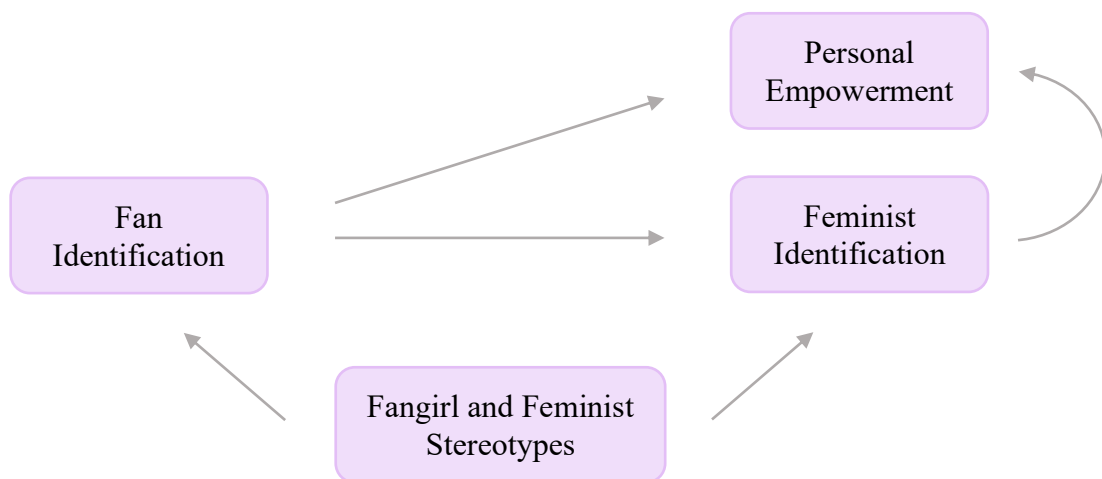
Prior K-pop studies indicate that K-pop fans showcase a certain degree of feminist awareness that has not been entirely unpacked yet (see Sun et al., 2022). In addition, feminist studies have yet to consider fandom in their application of theoretical feminist models. Female K-pop fans depict an interesting population due to the intersections of various dimensions, such as gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, against the background of a specific non-Western music genre (Grover et al., 2022). Fandoms of K-pop music are faced with numerous stereotypes relating to their fan behavior (Yoon, 2019). Hence, they are often portrayed as young, screaming teenage girls who lose their minds over their idolized celebrities. These perceptions are common for female media fans (Busse, 2013).

Cann's (2015) findings illustrate that femininity is widely devalued. The participants of her study distanced themselves from female fan behavior or mocked the practice of fangirling. As she states, fangirling, in particular, “draws on and emphasizes femininity and girliness in cultural consumption” (Cann, 2015, p. 169). Nonetheless, some female participants took pride in their fan identity and embraced the feminine aspect of their fangirl behavior. Cann argues that these notions undermine patriarchal values, which define what is considered valuable for adolescents. By negotiating their fangirl identity, female fans can assert power within a patriarchal system.

The present study draws on the previous literature that supports the concept of fan empowerment through one's fan identification. However, it is suggested that female fans' sense of agency and empowerment is connected to and fuels their feminist identity. By adopting a feminist perspective, the current research takes an exploratory approach. This study investigates whether fan identity is associated with feminist identity and can form a second pathway to personal empowerment (see Figure 1). Moreover, the impact of two sets of stereotypes will be assessed, namely fangirl and feminist stereotypes. To fill the gap in the field of feminist fandom and extend K-pop studies intertwining feminism and K-pop fandoms, the following overarching research question is proposed: *What is the relationship between fan identification, feminist identification, personal empowerment, and stereotypes of K-pop fangirls?*

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Previous literature has highlighted the positive impact of being a fan. For instance, Yoon (2019) argued that transnational fan practices of K-pop fans could serve as a way to feel empowered. Accordingly, this sense of empowerment is rooted in the imagination of alternate lives through media content that transcends one's local context (Han, 2017; Napier, 2007). This aligns with Thornton's (1995) notion, according to which fans gain cultural capital by participating and distinguishing themselves from others, which generates a feeling of empowerment. Other researchers like Laffan (2021) contribute to these findings. He found that K-pop fanship significantly predicted increased happiness, self-esteem, and social connectedness. While previous studies count the transnational fan context (see Yoon, 2019) or

a sense of belonging (see Laffan, 2021) as possible reasons for personal empowerment, the current study focuses on fan identity and feminist self-identification. According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), self-categorization can lead to positive psychological outcomes such as increased self-esteem. The positive impact of feminist identification on empowerment demonstrated in numerous studies (e.g., Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006; Yakushko, 2007) can be embedded in this theory. Therefore, holding a strong group identification with feminists can buffer the harmful effects of sexist discrimination and enhance well-being, personal growth, and a sense of agency (Cunningham, 2012). In line with these outcomes, the present study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Higher levels of fan identification result in higher levels of personal empowerment.

H2: Higher levels of feminist identification result in higher levels of personal empowerment.

Research on the relationship between K-pop fan identification and feminism is scarce. A limited number of studies have delved into the feminist attitudes of K-pop fans. In her study, Lee (2019) investigated how members of the K-pop fandom hold certain degrees of feminist consciousness by openly pointing out misogyny in K-pop lyrics through Twitter hashtag movements. By endorsing feminist activist behaviors, these fans negotiate their fan identity and may contradict the conventional image of devoted K-pop fandoms. Consequently, a significant relationship between fan identity and feminist identity for female K-pop fans is assumed. To further explore and expand notions of feminism in the context of K-pop fandoms, the following hypothesis is presented:

H3: Higher levels of fan identification result in higher levels of feminist identification.

In addition to the concept of group identification, this study seeks to further examine the influence of stereotypes. Based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982), individuals are more likely to adopt a group identity if the group identification positively affects their own identity. The present study addresses both fangirl and feminist stereotypes to analyze their respective effects on fan identification and feminist identification. Stereotypical perceptions of fangirls have mainly been explored through qualitative research, such as in-depth

interviews or social media observations (see Gerrard, 2022). To address this methodological gap, the present research created an exploratory measure based on qualitative findings to numerically assess fangirl stereotypes among female K-pop fans.

Numerous researchers have examined the discrepancy between endorsing feminist traits and the lack of feminist self-identification. A significant body of studies indicates that women may reject the feminist label due to internalized stereotypes and negative views of feminists (Williams & Wittig, 1997) or the assumption that others perceive feminists in a negative way (Twenge & Zucker, 1999; Williams & Wittig, 1997). This study aims to assess the existence of internalized stereotypes by measuring pervasive stereotypes of feminists observed in the literature. Common negative evaluations of feminists include adjectives such as stubborn, angry, anti-male, or radical (Twenge & Zucker, 1999). Meanwhile, Berryman-Fink and Verderber (1985) found that feminists were generally attributed neutral to slightly positive traits. As such, feminists were regarded as intelligent, knowledgeable, caring, or ambitious. More recent studies support the role of positive feminist stereotypes as a significant predictor of feminist identification (e.g., Liss et al., 2001; Moore & Stathi, 2020). The current study builds upon these notions and will test the following hypotheses:

H4: Higher levels of positive fangirl stereotypes are associated with higher levels of fan identification.

H5: Higher levels of positive feminist stereotypes are associated with higher levels of feminist identification.

3. Method

A quantitative online survey was conducted to test the hypotheses of the present study. K-pop fans showcase a high online activity as most of their fan practices involve social media platforms such as Twitter or Instagram (Whatman, 2018). Therefore, this methodological approach was expected to generate a high number of respondents and representativeness of the population of female K-pop fans.

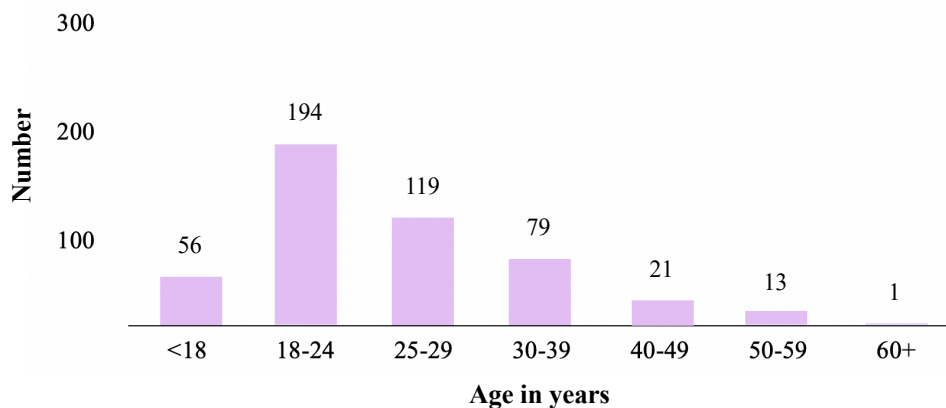
3.1 Sample

A total number of 656 participants filled out the survey. After data cleaning, the final sample included $N = 483$ respondents. Participants were filtered out based on the following criteria: consent, status (preview), completion rate, and gender. Respondents who did not consent to participate in the study were deleted. Also excluded were preview surveys filled out during the pretesting process and participants who did not complete the survey. Additionally, respondents who stated their gender as male ($n = 3$) were removed from the data set as the study was specifically targeted at K-pop fangirls. Furthermore, one respondent was deleted manually due to suspicious answers, which included stating their age as 647.

In the final sample, the percentage of women was 94.8% ($n = 458$), and the share of participants identifying as non-binary was 3.5% ($n = 17$). The respondent's average age was 26.00 ($SD = 8.60$). 40.2% ($n = 194$) of the participants were between 18 and 24 years old. However, age was distributed across a wide range of age groups (see Figure 2), which indicates that being a K-pop fangirl is not necessarily bound to age.

Figure 2

Age Distribution



The analysis of the education level shows a highly academic sample. The most named education level was a bachelor's degree (28.4%, $n = 137$), followed by having a high school diploma or the equivalent (22.8%, $n = 110$) and a master's degree (17.4%, $n = 84$). The majority of participants had a German nationality (67.3%, $n = 325$). Other nationalities included Austrian (7.0%, $n = 34$), American (3.7%, $n = 18$), and Dutch (2.5%, $n = 12$). Although with minimal percentages, non-Western origins such as Indian (1.2%, $n = 6$), Indonesian (1.2%, $n = 6$), or Vietnamese (0.4%, $n = 2$) were also represented in the sample.

To determine how representative the present sample is for the entirety of the K-pop fangirl population, the global fan study of Grover et al. (2022) can be used for comparison. In their ARMY Census, which is the largest fan-driven demographic analysis, the authors collected data from more than 500,000 BTS fans. The results are in line with the demographic patterns of the present sample. In their study, 53.6% ($n = 301,566$) of the participants were between 18 and 29. However, BTS' fandom was very diverse in age, with respondents ranging from young fans to those above 50 ($n = 10,316$) or 60 ($n = 2,416$). The gender demographics of the ARMY Census indicate that the majority of BTS fans are female (96.2%, $n = 541,096$), followed by non-binary fans (1.8%, $n = 9,998$). In addition, the fandom of BTS showcases a rather high education level. 28.0% ($n = 157,407$) have received a high school diploma, followed by a bachelor's degree (23.6%, $n = 132,528$). While the ARMY Census suggests that a high share of fans comes from South American and Asian countries, the present sample mostly consists of European K-pop fans, given the recruitment process of this study.

Participants were recruited through social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. Active K-pop fanbases with high numbers of followers were asked to share the link to the survey on their profiles. Specifically, BTS' fandom – the BTS ARMY – has its own fan accounts dedicated to empirical research on BTS and their fans (see @ResearchBTS and @BangtanScholars). It should be noted that particularly German-speaking fanbases accepted to share the survey due to personal connections with the German BTS/K-pop fanbase. The largest accounts willing to retweet the study on Twitter had the following reach: @BangtanScholars (46,713 followers), @BangtanGER_twt (26,719 followers), and @Bangtan_Austria (20,338 followers). In addition, the survey was shared privately with friends and acquaintances who identify as K-pop fans. The survey tool Qualtrics was applied to create the questionnaire, which was published on the 13th of April, 2023. After approximately two weeks in which the required number of participants was reached, the study was closed on the 29th of April, 2023. The optimal sample size was determined a priori with G*Power (Faul et al., 2007).

3.2 Procedure

The questionnaire consisted of five questions in total (excluding the demographic questions) which reflected the theoretical concepts of the present study. The respondents were asked to rate to which extent they would agree or disagree with various statements. The survey started with a question regarding *fan identification*: “Do you perceive yourself as a K-pop fan?”. This was followed by the question, “Do you perceive yourself as a feminist?” for evaluating *feminist identification*. After measuring the two different identifications, the section to assess *personal empowerment* continued: “The following statements present feelings or experiences that you can use to describe yourself. Please rate each statement in terms of any parts of your personal identity that are important to you, such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, family background, etc. There are no right or wrong answers”. Lastly, two separate questions were asked to analyze the existing *stereotypes* concerning *fangirls* and *feminists*: “How do you perceive K-pop fangirls in particular? To me, the ‘average’ K-pop fangirl is...” and “How do you perceive people who identify themselves as feminists? To me, the ‘average feminist’ is...”. The questionnaire ended with demographic questions measuring age, gender, nationality, and level of education.

3.3 Measures

To improve data quality, the survey was pretested by a small test group consisting of people who were familiar with K-pop. Their feedback was used to identify and fix issues concerning the content, structure, and formatting of the instructions, questions, and statements of the questionnaire. Measurement error and missing data can be reduced this way (Hu, 2014). In the following, the measures of the survey will be presented.

Fan Identification

Identification as a K-pop fan was measured with eight items, out of which four items were based on Postmes et al. (2013) and included “I feel committed to the K-pop fandom”, “Being a K-pop fan is an important part of how I see myself”, “I identify with K-pop fans”, and “I am glad to be part of the K-pop fandom”. Four additional items fell outside the scale and were specifically created for K-pop fans. The following items, which are partly based on Kim and Kim (2017), should reflect what particular fan practices can be associated with being a K-pop fan: “I regularly go to concerts of K-pop bands and/or buy their music”, “I regularly interact with other K-pop fans on social media and/or in person”, “I like to stay up-to-date when it comes to my favorite K-pop artists”, and “I like to dive deeper into the music and history of my favorite K-pop artists”. The statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale,

ranging from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”. A higher score indicated stronger self-identification as a K-pop fan. The reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .79$ for this scale.

Feminist Identification

The four-item Self-Identification as a Feminist scale (SIF; Szymanski, 2004) was applied to provide reliable information on participants’ feminist identification. The SIF scale contains items that cover a broader range of identification. Both private and public identification as a feminist are included. Additionally, the importance of the beliefs and values of feminism and the goals of the feminist movement are considered. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”, a higher score indicating stronger self-identification with being feminist. The four items were: “I consider myself a feminist”, “I identify myself as a feminist to other people”, “Feminist values and principles are important to me”, and “I support the goals of the feminist movement”. The Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .86$.

Personal Empowerment

This study measured personal empowerment by applying the Personal Progress Scale – Revised (PPS-R). Based on the Empowerment Model developed by Worell and Remer (2003), the scale was constructed to evaluate empowerment as it is conceptualized in feminist therapy. The PPS-R consists of 28 items. However, for this research, the number of items was reduced to the most relevant statements resulting in a total of ten items, such as: “In the relationships that I have with others (i.e., friends, significant others), we view and treat each other equally”, “I can set boundaries and listen to my needs instead of taking care of other people’s needs”, or “I feel prepared to deal with the discrimination I experience in today’s society”. Five out of ten items were reverse-coded in the data analysis process as they were negatively worded. Some examples were: “When making decisions about my life, I do not trust my own experience”, “I feel uncomfortable in confronting important others in my life when we see things differently”, or “I do not feel competent to handle challenging situations that arise in my everyday life”. Respondents rated the statements on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”. A high score on this scale indicated a higher level of personal empowerment. The reliability analysis for this study showed a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .76$.

Feminist Stereotypes

Feminist stereotypes were assessed by applying Reid and Purcell’s (2004) scale, which was adapted from Berryman-Fink and Verderber (1985). The original scale consists of nine

dimensions on which “the average feminist” can be rated. These dimensions include “attractiveness (undesirable–desirable, ugly–beautiful, plain–sexy, not concerned with appearance–very concerned with appearance), gender and sexuality (masculine–feminine, frigid–sexual, gay–straight), politics (radical–traditional) and attitudes toward men (hate men–like men)” (Reid & Purcell, 2004, p. 763). For this research, three items were taken out as they seemed unethical or not relevant which were “gay–straight”, “ugly–beautiful”, and “not concerned with appearance–very concerned with appearance”. As in the case of “gay–straight”, it was refrained from evaluating gay as negative in this study. In addition, the item “frigid–sexual” was changed to “frigid–sensual” as “sexual” seemed to be overlapping with “sexy” from the attractiveness dimension. The adapted scale contained six items. Participants rated their perception of an average feminist on a seven-point bipolar scale ranging from -3 to 3. High scores on this scale represented positive stereotypes of feminists (e.g., that feminists are desirable, sexy, feminine, and like men). However, Cronbach’s alpha for the six items ($\alpha = .68$) indicated that the internal consistency is not sufficient, being slightly below the threshold of $\alpha = .70$. Therefore, the item “radical–traditional,” representing the political dimension was eliminated, which resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .70$ (five items).

Fangirl Stereotypes

The scale for measuring fangirl stereotypes had a similar structure as the scale for feminist stereotypes and is, therefore, generally based on Reid and Purcell (2004). The present items were mainly derived from qualitative research examining stereotypes of fandom (Hills, 2007) and K-pop fans among fans and non-fans (see Yoon, 2019). They consisted of adjectives describing age or emotional investment. The six items included “obsessive–passionate”, “young–old”, “superficial–deep”, “indifferent–emotional”, “passive–active”, and “irrational–rational”. Respondents had to rate “the average K-pop fangirl” on a seven-point bipolar scale ranging from -3 to 3. A high score indicated positive stereotypes of fangirls (e.g., that fangirls are passionate, deep, active, and rational). The reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .54$, signaling that the items may not accurately measure the underlying construct. To increase the internal consistency, the items “indifferent–emotional” and “passive–active” were eliminated, resulting in a slightly improved Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .63$ (four items). It can be discussed whether this falls under an acceptable range of reliability. The items do not seem to correlate highly with each other. However, it should be noted that this type of scale for fangirl stereotypes is exploratory as it has not been developed yet in prior research. Therefore, the observation of the present study can be insightful for further analyses concerning the quantitative assessment of fangirl stereotypes.

4. Results

This chapter covers the data analysis strategy, descriptive data of all variables, results of the tests of the hypotheses, as well as findings of exploratory analyses.

4.1 Data Analysis Strategy

The statistical software program SPSS (Version 28) was applied for the analyses. The tests of the hypotheses are presented in terms of correlation- and regression-based analyses. Before testing the main effects, the assumptions of the correlation and regression analysis were considered. Consequently, the tests for normality and linearity were conducted for all the analyses. Additionally, the tests for multicollinearity and homoscedasticity demonstrated that the conditions were met for the regression analyses.

4.2 Variable Descriptive

Tables 1 and 2 display the descriptive statistics, illustrating the mean scores and standard deviations, as well as the intercorrelations of all variables. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the variables fan identification, feminist identification, and personal empowerment consisted of a Likert scale ranging from one to five. In contrast, fangirl stereotypes and feminist stereotypes ranged from one to seven. Here, the higher range should offer participants more choices to match their evaluation of stereotypes accurately. The mean scores shown in Table 1 indicate that the central constructs of this study are present in the sample except for the fangirl and feminist stereotypes, which mostly yielded neutral answers. Moreover, there are significant positive associations between several variables (see Table 2).

Table 1

Variable Descriptive

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Fan Identification	4.15	0.61	1.13	5.00
Feminist Identification	4.32	0.73	1.25	5.00
Personal Empowerment	3.31	0.59	1.40	4.90
Fangirl Stereotypes	4.47	0.84	1.25	7.00
Feminist Stereotypes	4.68	0.79	2.00	7.00

Table 2***Intercorrelations of Variables***

	Feminist Identification	Personal Empowerment	Fangirl Stereotypes	Feminist Stereotypes
Fan Identification	.18**	.06	.31**	.10*
Feminist Identification		.10*	.07	.42**
Personal Empowerment			.08	.05
Fangirl Stereotypes				.26**
Feminist Stereotypes				

Note. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

H1 suggested that there is an association between fan identification and personal empowerment. Higher levels of fan identification should result in higher levels of personal empowerment. Accordingly, a linear regression with the personal empowerment score as a criterium and fan identification as a predictor was conducted to test this hypothesis. Contrary to expectations, the model did not prove to be significant, $F(1, 481) = 1.62, p = .204, R^2 = .00$. Fan identification does not have a significant influence on personal empowerment ($\beta = .06, p = .204$). H1 is therefore rejected. This should not be surprising as the Pearson correlation coefficient (see Table 2) already indicated no significant correlation between the two variables, $r = .06, p = .204$.

Before testing H2, Table 2 suggested a significant positive correlation between the variables feminist identification and personal empowerment, $r = .10, p = .029$. Based on prior research, in H2, it was argued that higher levels of feminist identification result in an increased level of personal empowerment. In order to determine the direction of the effect, a linear regression analysis with the personal empowerment score as a criterium and feminist identification as a predictor was conducted. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 481) = 4.79, p = .029, R^2 = .01$. Feminist identification had a significant positive effect on personal empowerment ($\beta = .10, p = .029$). This aligns with prior research (e.g., Yakushko, 2007). However, the effect in this study is rather small. H2 is still supported and can therefore be accepted.

H3 predicted that the variables fan identification and feminist identification are positively associated. As indicated in Table 2, there is a significant positive correlation between the two identifications, $r = .18, p < .001$. H3 indicated that higher levels of fan identification lead to higher levels of feminist identification. To test the direction of the effect, a linear regression with the feminist identification score as a criterium and fan identification as a predictor was conducted. The model proved to be significant, $F(1, 481) = 16.28, p < .001, R^2 = .03$. Fan identification had a significant positive influence on feminist identification ($\beta = .18, p < .001$). Even though the effect seems rather weak, H3 is accepted.

Hypotheses H4 and H5 contained the construct of stereotypes. H4 suggested that higher levels of positive fangirl stereotypes are associated with higher levels of fan identification. According to the Pearson correlation coefficient, both variables have a significant positive association, $r = .31, p < .001$ (see Table 2). Consequently, a linear regression with the fan identification score as a criterium and fangirl stereotypes as a predictor was conducted to test H4. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 481) = 49.28, p < .001, R^2 = .09$. Positive fangirl stereotypes had a significant positive impact on fan identification ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). Based on this result, H4 is accepted.

In H5, higher levels of positive feminist stereotypes should lead to stronger feminist identification. The Pearson correlation already indicated a moderate positive correlation between the two variables, $r = .42, p < .001$ (see Table 2). To determine the direction of the effect, a linear regression with the feminist identification score as a criterium and feminist stereotypes as a predictor was conducted. The model proved to be significant, $F(1, 481) = 100.90, p < .001, R^2 = .17$. In fact, 17% of the variance of feminist identification can be explained by feminist stereotypes in this study. Positive feminist stereotypes had a significant positive influence on feminist identification ($\beta = .42, p < .001$), which is in line with prior research (e.g., Moore & Stathi, 2020). Therefore, H5 is also accepted.

4.4 Exploratory Analyses

The previous analyses only demonstrated weak associations of the variables with personal empowerment. In the next step, exploratory analyses were conducted to further examine the construct of personal empowerment for this study. The adapted scale for personal empowerment consisted of ten items, out of which five were worded in a negative way. A mix of positively and negatively worded items in a questionnaire is generally used to reduce acquiescence bias (Chyung et al., 2018). Acquiescence bias describes how participants are inclined to agree with survey statements regardless of the information they contain (Cronbach, 1942, as cited in Chyung et al., 2018). However, researchers also argue that the use of both

can decrease the validity and reliability of the survey instrument (e.g., Weijters & Baumgartner, 2012). Consequently, inattentive respondents could misunderstand the negatively worded statements and provide inaccurate data.

To counteract these potential issues, subscales were created for the empowerment variable by separating the positively and negatively worded items. These were *feelings of empowerment* ($\alpha = .66$, five items) and *feelings of disempowerment* ($\alpha = .69$, five items). It should be noted that it is arguable whether the internal consistency of both subscales lies in an acceptable range. Accordingly, the new subscales were applied instead of the original empowerment scale to conduct a Pearson correlation with the remaining variables. The subscale *feelings of empowerment* yielded significant positive intercorrelations with several variables (see Table 3), while the subscale *feelings of disempowerment* did not seem to have a significant influence (see Table 4). Whereas the previous analysis did not show a significant relationship between fan identification and personal empowerment, the new subscale feelings of empowerment was significantly correlated with fan identification, $r = .11, p = .012$. In the next step, a linear regression was conducted with the feelings of empowerment score as a criterium and fan identification as a predictor. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 481) = 6.37, p = .012, R^2 = .01$. Contrary to the results from the previous analysis, fan identification now had a significant positive influence on the empowerment subscale ($\beta = .11, p = .012$). Although the effect is rather small, H1 is supported and can be accepted.

Table 3

Intercorrelations with Feelings of Empowerment

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Fan Identification	4.15	0.61	.18**	.11*	.31**	.10*
2. Feminist Identification	4.32	0.73		.15**	.07	.42**
3. Feelings of Empowerment	3.64	0.63			.11*	.06
4. Fangirl Stereotypes	4.47	0.84				.26**
5. Feminist Stereotypes	4.68	0.79				

Note. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 4***Intercorrelations with Feelings of Disempowerment***

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Fan Identification	4.15	0.61	.18**	-.01	.31**	.10*
2. Feminist Identification	4.32	0.73		.03	.07	.42**
3. Feelings of Disempowerment	2.95	0.75			.04	.03
4. Fangirl Stereotypes	4.47	0.84				.26**
5. Feminist Stereotypes	4.68	0.79				

Note. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Another interesting result is that of feminist identification and feelings of empowerment, as it yielded a slightly stronger correlation, $r = .15, p < .001$ (see Table 3), compared to the preliminary analysis, $r = .10, p = .029$ (see Table 2). To test which of the identifications had a stronger effect on empowerment, a multiple linear regression was conducted with the feelings of empowerment score as a criterium (see Table 5). Predictors were fan identification and feminist identification. The model was found to be significant, $F(2, 481) = 7.57, p < .001, R^2 = .03$. Both fan identification ($\beta = .09, p = .050$) as well as feminist identification ($\beta = .14, p = .003$) proved to be significant predictors for empowerment. However, feminist identification had a slightly stronger effect.

Moreover, fangirl stereotypes and feelings of empowerment proved to have a significant positive association, $r = .11, p = .018$ (see Table 3). This correlation was not significant in the previous analysis (see Table 2).

To summarize the hypothesis testing, an overview of the hypotheses of this study is provided in Table 6.

Table 5***Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Feelings of Empowerment***

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.76	.24		.001
Fan Identification	.09	.05	.09	.050
Feminist Identification	.12	.04	.14	.003

Note. $F(2, 481) = 7.57, p < .001, R^2 = .03$

Table 6***Overview of the Hypotheses***

Hypotheses	Conclusion
H1: Higher levels of fan identification result in higher levels of personal empowerment.	Accepted
H2: Higher levels of feminist identification result in higher levels of personal empowerment.	Accepted
H3: Higher levels of fan identification result in higher levels of feminist identification.	Accepted
H4: Higher levels of positive fangirl stereotypes are associated with higher levels of fan identification.	Accepted
H5: Higher levels of positive feminist stereotypes are associated with higher levels of feminist identification.	Accepted

5. Conclusion

The present research examined the relationship between fan identification, feminist identification, personal empowerment, and stereotypes of fangirls and feminists in the scope of K-pop fangirls. This study sought to investigate whether fan identity has intersections with feminist identity by building a second pathway to personal empowerment. The current data support the assumption that many female K-pop fans identify as feminists. This result is consistent with prior studies connecting K-pop fandom and feminism (Lee, 2019; Sun et al., 2022). However, the results also suggest that their feminist identity is not necessarily driven by their fan identity. Additionally, fans' feelings of empowerment have proved to be a complex construct that may require a multifaceted approach. When compared to feminist identification, fan identity was not a strong predictor of empowerment. Therefore, the current findings contribute to previous research on the association of feminist self-identification with personal empowerment (e.g., Yakushko, 2007). Nonetheless, the analysis supports recent studies on K-pop fans' increased well-being in relation to their fan identity (Laffan, 2021). Hence, being a K-pop fan is, to some extent, connected with feelings of empowerment.

Furthermore, the significant influence of fangirl and feminist stereotypes on fan identity and feminist identity should be highlighted. It is noteworthy that most respondents did not display high degrees of stereotypical perceptions of K-pop fangirls or feminists. This observation indicates that K-pop fans may form a critical community and are aware of common stereotypes regarding their fangirl image. Moreover, many K-pop fans did not perceive feminists in a negative way but slightly positively. Overall, positive stereotypes fueled fans' identifications as fans and feminists. These results align with previous studies on positive feminist stereotypes increasing feminist self-identification (e.g., Moore & Stathi, 2020). Notably, positive fangirl stereotypes were also associated with feelings of empowerment. This notion suggests underlying intersections of fandom, stereotypes, and empowerment.

Summary of Results

In the following section, the findings of the present study will be further illustrated and put into a wider context by presenting social and practical implications.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 predicted that strong fan identification would result in higher levels of personal empowerment. The initial regression analysis could not support this assumption. However, exploratory analyses suggested a different outcome. After creating the new subscale

feelings of empowerment by taking out the negatively worded statements of the original variable, the relationship between fan identification and empowerment became significant. Although the association is rather weak, fan identification can be considered a predictor of personal empowerment. This observation contributes to previous research indicating that K-pop fans can feel empowered by identifying as part of the fandom (e.g., Yoon, 2019; Laffan, 2021).

Hypothesis 2

Based on prior research, Hypothesis 2 predicted that higher levels of feminist identification lead to increased personal empowerment. While the effect yielded in this study was rather small, the result still provides additional support for research on feminist identity and its implications. A multiple regression analysis implied that feminist identification is a stronger predictor of empowerment than fan identification. An alternative explanation may be the empowerment scale that was derived from feminist therapy and, therefore, more suitable and reliable for assessing connections to feminist identity rather than fan identity.

Hypothesis 3

In Hypothesis 3, it was suggested that higher levels of fan identification result in higher levels of feminist identification. The regression analysis indicated a rather small influence of fan identity on feminist identity. The respective mean scores indicate that both identifications were present in the current sample. However, there does not appear to be a strong connection between being a K-pop fan and a feminist, even though most participants showed high feminist self-identification. A possible explanation can be the participants' self-reports on identifying as K-pop fans, which may have been difficult to assess for some respondents. Although many fans may support K-pop artists, they do not necessarily identify as part of the K-pop fandom due to its negative connotations (Jung, 2012). BTS fans, in particular, refrain to perceive themselves as part of the general K-pop fandom, as BTS and their fandom tend to describe themselves as "outsiders" residing outside of the "mainstream bubble" of the K-pop industry (Korea Herald, 2018).

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 predicted that higher levels of positive fangirl stereotypes are associated with higher levels of fan identification. The results of the analyses supported this assumption. The present findings demonstrated a moderate association between the two constructs. Participants who perceived K-pop fangirls as passionate, deep, older in age, and rational displayed increased self-identification with being a K-pop fan.

Hypothesis 5

In Hypothesis 5, it was assumed that higher levels of positive feminist stereotypes lead to a stronger feminist identification. The results indicated a relationship with a moderate effect between both variables. Respondents who perceived feminists as desirable, sexy, feminine, and having an affinity to men showcased higher feminist self-identification. This finding is consistent with previous research on the importance of positive stereotypes as a driving factor for feminist self-labeling (e.g., Roy et al., 2007).

Implications for Research

Although the present research did not give sufficient evidence that fan identification can be considered a second pathway of significant importance to personal empowerment, it still offered valuable insights into the feminist realm of K-pop fangirls. Moreover, this study expanded existing research on fandom, feminist identity, stereotypes, and empowerment by applying the current theoretical constructs to the population of K-pop fans. Prior research in the feminist field often suffered from a lack of diversity in their samples (Cunningham, 2012). Future research would benefit from diversifying the subject of study and examining women intersecting various identities concerning ethnicity, sexual orientation, or ability status. To address this gap, the current study provided valuable observations into the feminist identity of K-pop fangirls, who reflect diverse backgrounds. Whereas prior research emphasized the reluctance of women to claim the feminist label (e.g., Breen & Karpinski, 2008), female K-pop fans do not hesitate to openly identify as feminists. Thus, the present findings offer a more nuanced image of the label fangirl, which seems to be associated with being a feminist. More research is needed to further investigate the underlying factors that drive female K-pop fans' feminist identification.

An additional domain for future research would be the optimization of the empowerment measure. The present study applied the Personal Progress Scale – Revised (PPS-R) developed by Worell and Remer (2003). The scale was constructed to evaluate empowerment as it is conceptualized in feminist therapy. However, the mix of positively and negatively worded statements possibly decreased the reliability of the measure. An alternative way of assessing empowerment may be the use of behaviorally-based items that do not depend on the participant's self-report (Cunningham, 2012). For instance, respondents could be questioned about their ways of responding to experiences of stress and anxiety. The current outcomes suggest that K-pop fangirls showcase feelings of empowerment to some degree. These notions should be considered in fandom studies to develop measures that are suitable for analyzing fan empowerment. Particularly, qualitative research may provide a deeper

understanding of K-pop fans' specific coping mechanisms related to their fan identity and fan engagement. Based on such findings, quantitative measures for assessing fan empowerment can be created. Thus, a mixed-method approach is necessary for further investigating fans' feelings of empowerment.

Moreover, it should be mentioned that including men seems essential for a more insightful analysis of feminism and fandom. For this study, fanboys were excluded as they constitute a minority group in many K-pop fandoms (see Grover et al., 2022). Nevertheless, their opinions matter, and future research should consider digging deeper into men's attitudes toward feminism as well as their perceptions of feminist and fangirl stereotypes.

Social and Practical Implications

A number of social and practical implications result from the current research. Negative media portrayals of female fans are still prevalent and affect people's perceptions. The present findings imply that specifically positive stereotypes foster fans' group identifications with K-pop fans and feminists, which in turn can contribute to feelings of empowerment. K-pop fans' attitudes indicate that stereotypes characterizing fangirls as irrational, superficial, or obsessive are outdated. These notions suggest a rather critical perception of fans, which may be fueled by the cultural shift of fangirl narratives. K-pop as a female-driven music genre (see Grover et al., 2022), and other media products, such as Disney Pixar's *Turning Red* (Shi, 2022), may contribute to these perceptual changes. Many K-pop fans hold both a feminist identity and a fan identity despite the seemingly contradictory relationship. Considering the growing K-pop fandom in Europe, local media organizations and public discourses should recognize a new wave of empowered fangirls with a rather nuanced and complex image. Addressing their needs and not stigmatizing their fan behaviors will contribute to a more accepting and empowering society for young women who should not be embarrassed about their female interests.

The findings of this study demonstrate that K-pop fangirls can benefit from their fan identity and fan engagement. Long-standing stereotypical views of female fans often overshadow positive notions of fangirling. Accordingly, female fans tend to distance themselves from feminine fan behavior (Cann, 2015). However, women of all ages should embrace and take pride in their fangirl identity, as it entails positive outcomes for their well-being. Normalizing fangirls can be further influenced by fans' parents. Openly supporting their daughters and perhaps even recognizing their own behaviors as fangirling can contribute to destigmatizing young fans. As argued by Cann (2015), embracing the highly feminine component of fangirling elevates the value of femininity and increases power in a patriarchal

context. Furthermore, the practice of fangirling can be described as an essential part of growing up (Sharma, 2022). As Sharma (2022) states, the female cultural consumption of pop culture is tied to creative self-expression and self-exploration that can manifest itself in feminine fan practices, such as the production of fan fiction or fan art. The immediate social environment of fans, such as family members, should therefore acknowledge the relevance and importance of passionate fangirl behavior and support its open expression.

From a more practical perspective, entertainment agencies need to address fan empowerment and fans' feminist awareness. Reproducing stereotypical perceptions does not resonate with fans anymore, as most K-pop fans tend to negotiate what their fan identity stands for (Yoon, 2019). Their critical tendencies enable them to combine both their fan identity and feminist identity (Lee, 2019). Consequently, fan devotion does not necessarily imply fans instinctively accepting everything that is connected to their fan object. In the context of K-pop or the wider music industry, this is relevant to the creative and visual production of pop music as well as marketing campaigns. A K-pop band that was successful in creating a meaningful bond with their fans and addressing their needs is BTS (Chang & Park, 2018). Accordingly, they emphasize the equal relationship between the band and the fandom by creating intimate dialogues with their fans on social media. They address their mostly female fanbase (Grover et al., 2022) as powerful and influential in contributing to their musical success (Chang & Park, 2018). Moreover, many of BTS' songs can be seen as empowering for young adults, as their lyrics carry universal themes of self-love, growth, and overcoming hardships (Low, 2019). These messages of empowerment resonate with BTS fans and are put into action by them. There are numerous fan collectives organizing projects and events for charity purposes (see One In An ARMY, n.d.) or providing an open-access journal for academic research on the impact of BTS and their fandom to empower fans (see The Rhizomatic Revolution Review, 2022). The critical, humanistic, and activist notions in fandoms like the BTS ARMY suggest that fandom goes beyond the obsession for a fan object and includes the search for deeper meaning (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Thus, music labels could benefit from learning more about their audience's needs, motivations, and different forms of fan engagement. Incorporating these aspects in the creation of fan personas could be useful for improving marketing strategies and strengthening the bond between artists and fans.

Strengths and Limitations

The present study has several strengths and limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the sample size was significantly larger compared to similar studies, improving the reliability and generalizability of the results. The sample also represented high levels of

participants identifying as feminists as well as diversity in age groups, indicating that K-pop fans are beyond the stereotype of being “screaming teenage girls”. Although the sample consisted mostly of European fans, the survey was conducted globally and reached respondents from all around the world.

Another notable aspect was the use of a multi-item measure of feminist self-identification (SIF; Szymanski, 2004), as previous studies tended to assess feminist self-labeling with a single-item measure (e.g., Roy et al., 2007). Similar to Moore and Stathi (2020), the current study strived to provide a nuanced and multilayered image of feminist identity. This included combining both private and public identification as a feminist, in addition to the importance of the beliefs and values of feminism and the goals of the feminist movement.

Despite these strengths, the present study also demonstrates some limitations that should be taken into consideration when evaluating the results. Although the sample represents diversity in age, it still lacks it in other aspects, such as ethnicity or sexuality. The majority of participants had a European/White background, given the recruitment process for the survey. Future research may specifically include minority groups such as the BIPOC or queer community to enable the generalization of these findings to more inclusive populations. Nevertheless, K-pop fandoms are highly global and represent a unique subject of study due to K-pop being a specific non-Western music genre that has dynamically shaped the fan landscape (Jeong, 2020). By including fandoms in feminist discourses, the present research sought to close a gap in previous feminist literature.

Other limitations of the study stem from methodological concerns. Respondents self-selected to participate in the research and may hold more intense or established attitudes and values about feminism than women who chose not to participate. In addition, a few of the current scales used in this study needed more internal consistency and reliability. The scale for fangirl and feminist stereotypes, as well as the subscales for personal empowerment, counted among them. Notably, the scale for feminist stereotypes reached an acceptable range of internal consistency after eliminating items that did not correlate well with the remaining items. Overall, it should be noted that the current study took an explorative approach and therefore provided valuable insights. Future research should focus on more consistent and reliable data to contribute to the present findings. Consequently, more research on the development of a scale for fangirl stereotypes is needed to measure them accurately. However, despite the reliability concerns, the present scale gives an exploratory observation into the quantitative measurement of fangirl stereotypes. Previous research on fangirl perceptions was

often conducted through in-depth interviews or social media observations (see Gerrard, 2022). The current study aimed to address this methodological gap.

Although these limitations must be considered, the present study has contributed in various ways to the research on fandom, feminist identification, stereotypes, and empowerment in the scope of K-pop fangirls. Moreover, several social and practical implications were presented. Female K-pop fans appear to be further challenging and changing the image of a “fangirl”. The findings suggest that being a fangirl and being a feminist do not exclude each other. Besides reflecting feminist awareness, K-pop fans also exhibit feelings of empowerment. This supports the notion that being a fan is connected to improving individuals’ well-being. Furthermore, positive stereotypes of fangirls and feminists play an important role in fostering these identities.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Start of Block: Welcome

Introduction:

Dear respondent,

Thank you for your interest in my research. I am a Master's student at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, and I am inviting you to fill in a questionnaire. This survey examines the relationship between fan identity, feminist traits, personal empowerment, and stereotypes of female K-pop fans. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether fan identity has intersections with feminist identity by building a second pathway to personal empowerment. The questionnaire will take approximately 8 minutes to fill in. Please answer each question carefully and honestly, I am sincerely interested in your personal opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. Thank you for your time and support!

CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

All research data remain completely confidential and are collected in anonymous form. We will not be able to identify you. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with participating in this research.

VOLUNTARY

If you now decide not to participate in this research, this will not affect you. If you decide to cease your cooperation while filling in the questionnaire, this will in no way affect you either. You can cease your cooperation without giving reasons.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have questions about this research, in advance or afterwards, you can contact me, Parnian Najma Chawarri, personally, email: 654879pc@eur.nl. This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam. If you want to invoke your rights or if you have a question concerning privacy about this study, you can contact Erasmus University's DPO (Data Protection Officer) at fg@eur.nl.

Consent If you understand the information above and freely consent to participate in this study, click on the “I agree” button below to start the survey.

I agree (1)

I do not agree (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If If you understand the information above and freely consent to participate in this study, click on... = I do not agree

End of Block: Welcome

Start of Block: Key measures

Instruction In the next step, I will ask you for some information on your identification with K-pop fans and feminists. To do this, I will show you a set of statements and ask you to rate each of the statements. Please select the most fitting answer option for each of the following statements.

Page Break

Q1: **FanID** Do you perceive yourself as a K-pop fan? Please answer how much you would agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I feel committed to the K-pop fandom. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I regularly go to concerts of K-pop bands and/or buy their music. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a K-pop fan is an important part of how I see myself. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I regularly interact with other K-pop fans on social media and/or in person. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I identify with K-pop fans. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to stay up-to-date when it comes to my favorite K-pop artists. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am glad to be part of the K-pop fandom. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to dive deeper into the music and history of my favorite K-pop artists. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

 Page Break _____

Q2: FemID Do you perceive yourself as a feminist? Please answer how much you would agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I consider myself a feminist. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I identify myself as a feminist to other people. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feminist values and principles are important to me (i.e., gender equality, recognizing the existence of sexist discrimination). (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I support the goals of the feminist movement (i.e., to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression). (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q3: Empowerment The following statements present feelings or experiences that you can use to describe yourself. Please rate each statement in terms of any parts of your personal identity that are important to you, such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, family background, etc. There are no right or wrong answers.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
In the relationships that I have with others (i.e., friends, significant others), we view and treat each other equally. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can set boundaries and listen to my needs instead of taking care of other people's needs. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel prepared to deal with the discrimination I experience in today's society. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel in control of my life. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am aware of my own strengths. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I give in to others so as not to displease or anger them. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When making decisions about my life, I do not trust my own experience. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is hard for me to ask for help or support from others when I need it. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel uncomfortable in confronting important others in my life when we see things differently. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not feel competent to handle challenging situations that arise in my everyday life. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4: FangirlST Lastly, I will ask you about your perceptions of fangirls and feminists.

How do you perceive K-pop fangirls in particular? To me, the “average” K-pop fangirl is...

	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	
	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Obsessive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Passionate
Young	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Old
Superficial	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Deep
Indifferent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Emotional
Passive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Active
Irrational	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Rational

Page Break

Q5: FemST How do you perceive people who identify themselves as feminists? To me, the “average feminist” is...

	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Undesirable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Desirable
Plain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Sexy
Masculine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Feminine
Frigid	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Sensual
Radical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Traditional
Hates men	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Likes men

End of Block: Key measures

Start of Block: Socio-demographics

Instruction Lastly, I would like to ask you for some information about yourself.

Gender: Please indicate your gender.

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Education level: What is the highest level of education you have completed up to this point?

▼ Some high school (1) ... Prefer not to say (8)

Age: How old are you? (Example: 24)

Nationality: What is your nationality? (Example: Dutch)

End of Block: Socio-demographics

Start of Block: Debriefing

Debriefing text:

Dear participant,

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey and participating in my research. The study you took part in examines the relationship between fan identification, feminist traits, personal empowerment, and stereotypes of female K-pop fans. Prior research has shown that feminist identification can lead to personal empowerment. I am interested to find out whether fan identity has intersections with feminist identity by building a second pathway to personal empowerment. Additionally, I want to investigate what role stereotypes, concerning both feminists and fangirls, play in this matter.

If you have further questions about the survey or the research do not hesitate to send me an

email at 654879pc@eur.nl. I wish you all the best!

End of Block: Debriefing
