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Title: "Of Unnies and Noonas" Unpacking TWICE as Portrayed in their Lyrical and Visual

Media

Chapter 1: Introductory Chapter

a. General Background:
In South Korea, gender inequality still continues to persist. The gender wage gap in South Korea

remains over two times the average of 14.3%, with a clear link to gender inequality. There also

continues to be gender gaps in representation in government, with the OECD even

metaphorically describing the South Korean situation to be an uphill battle when it comes to

fighting for the global goal of complete gender equality. (OECD, 2017)

In the entertainment sector, sexual assault scandals shocking fans worldwide continue to

unfold within the kpop industry, with the most recent of them allegedly involving circulation of

sexually obscene videos of women. This was perpetrated by males in the kpop industry. Seungri,

previously a member of Korean boy band BIGBANG, together with, Jung Joon-young, former

Korean singer-songwriter. This sheds light on a growing issue of gender inequality with such

cases being the most extreme of an inequality already present.

TWICE, a South Korean girl group is the third most popular kpop group of 2019

according to Forbes and Ranker and they will be the focus of my paper. This is despite a notable

contrast in concept that veers away from the kpop's "girl crush", a concept with sexy as well as

occasionally tomboyish concepts. Being a visual and lyrical descriptor of kpop, the opposite lies in cute, *aegyo* concepts which TWICE primarily embodies and is known for. Known for being the sole representation of the latter, TWICE remains immensely popular as it joins the ranks of Blackpink, Mamamoo and (G)-Idle, who worship and embody the "girl crush" concept.

b. Rationale:

Aside from my great interest in kPop, it cannot be denied that the popularity of Korean pop has been heightened in recent years, becoming a huge part of arts and entertainment in various societies. Therefore, any notions regarding gender presented in kpop has the potential to contribute to the perpetuation of gender roles in society, or the subversion of these roles, the phenomenon that Judith Butler (1998) theorised as an identity that is constructed, perpetuated and reconstructed by a repetition of acts, akin to a script that is created by society, for society which can possibly be subconscious. This heightens the importance of understanding the tone and stances behind art forms that we enjoy because of their implications toward gender equality, particularly with kpop's influence.

This project thus aims to uncover the different ways that the members of TWICE are presented in relation to their gender. TWICE was chosen because TWICE's unique yet successful visual concepts set them apart from other girl groups and offer a different perspective contrasting from the majority. Not just that, but TWICE have also won numerous accolades and awards and have the highest album sales than any other kpop girl group. While awards and album sales do not mean that TWICE is representative of the industry, but there is certainly increased significance due to the amount of people that the songs are able to reach.

Performativity as a theory is significant when studying a group who has such a wide sphere of influence because consumers enjoying their content will glean their insights about

gender and gender roles from their portrayals. To these viewers, kpop is the main writer of their "gender script", thus whatever TWICE portrays will affect what these people think and as a whole what society thinks about gender due to its large influence to a large audience of listeners.

Furthermore, most analysis done on kpop groups focus on breadth rather than depth, focusing more on the genre as a whole, or broadly analysing each gender's representation. There is also little study done on more modern groups that have recently emerged yet currently represent the industry. As such, I aim to zoom in and uncover femininity as represented in TWICE with regard to the relevant theories.

c. Research Questions

1. How are female identity and femininity portrayed in TWICE's music videos and lyrics?

2. How are the ideas and concepts within performativity presented in the various ideas identified in TWICE's music videos and lyrics?

Thesis Statement

Their portrayal is seen as extremely malleable, able to successful look or play many different parts to different effects. These include not just the subversion of gender norms but also the embrace of societal expectations such as for women to highly value their physical appearance, in a superficial way. These seemingly random, disjointed, starkly different and even conflicting portrayals could further show their unintentionality in subversion of gender roles. As a group working for a profiting entertainment company, another possible interpretation could be that TWICE's perpetuation of society's various idealisations of identity is for the purposes of increased spectatorship and revenue. This thus explains their conflicting and contrasting

portrayals across multiple videos as they sometimes subvert and sometimes perpetuate the societal expectation of gender identity.

d. Scope

In this project, I aim to selectively analyse kpop songs by TWICE. The mediums analysed will be further narrowed to only the visual portrayal in the music videos and the lyrics of the songs. Particularly, my research will be framed by my research questions and the analysis will focus on the portrayal of female identity and its relation to the theory of performativity in TWICE's music videos and lyrics

I will address both my research questions in tandem as they are extensions of one another and are highly interconnected.

e. Limitations

Regrettably, there are certain limitations to the scope of my project. A specific focus on TWICE is unable to accurately represent the kpop industry as a whole, while only one theory is used in relation to gender identity, which loses out on the breadth of insight that various theories can offer. In terms of mediums, 10 seasons of TWICE TV and their social media presence could be further studied, which can will give me additional material for analysis and offer more insights but due to time of constraints are left out of my study.

While a broad analysis of more groups can offer more collective insights about gender in kpop, focusing on TWICE not only presents a more unique perspective with little emphasis on "girl crush" concepts but can also allow for more accurate conclusions of TWICE's representation. Broad studies might overlook how specific groups have complex and even conflicting portrayals and classify and overgeneralise a group for the purposes of comparison

and generalisation. In contrast, my study hopes to flesh out the many different representations of TWICE across my scope and resolve any contrasting portrayals of themselves in their art to arrive at a deeper conclusion for this group.

Chapter 2: Lit Review

Primarily, my literature review will focus heavily on two large aspects of my research, namely performativity and dollification. Under these large ideas, I will discuss specific subsections that contribute to those ideas and explain them with reference to examples.

2.1 Performativity

Butler (1998, 519), suggests firstly that identity, is "instituted through a stylised repetition of acts" and likens it to a script that many different actors perform, which results in certain expectations on how we act , ever since you are born. Most actions are so subconscious that it is difficult to even be aware that we are being molded into such an identity and perpetuating its notions completely unknowingly. To illustrate this, she cites the example that transgender people undergo surgery believing that everyone of a certain gender is expected to have certain physical attributes as a result of performativity. (Butler 2011, 91).

Next, Butler admits that there is potential for "gender transformation" in the same way, with a different type of repetition. This is done through deliberate breaking or subversion of the earlier script, reconstructing it through actions instead. This applies for various spheres of identity, including gender identity. To illustrate this, Butler cites the example of drag culture as follows, suggesting that "drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (Butler 1999, 174). This subverts gender norms as associated with the biological sex, suggesting that there is not a stable gender identity. (Butler 1999, 179).

Fundamentally, Butler believes that "gender is real only to the extent that it is performed", accurately summarizing both aspects of her theory. (Butler, 1998) In essence, this means that society is largely responsible for gender roles yet hold the power to change what these roles consist of.

However, Llyod (1999) critiques how one cannot solely be deemed to act completely because of a certain script and performance and other factors such as how they might interpret or see said script, are all other factors that determine what constitutes one's identity how someone acts must be taken into account.

An example of performativity in relation to kpop, Manietta suggests that the performative nature of gender allows for something called "hybrid gender" to exist, where the lines between the concepts of masculinity and femininity are blurred and that such identities and gender roles perpetuated by the kpop groups can change over time and may even differ from idol to idol. Thus, kpop is experiencing a subversion of gender identity, where men who wear makeup, performing acts of soft masculinity in kpop, remain immensely popular, despite subverting gender norms, and agrees with the fact that gender identity is unstable, with kpop boy groups as an example. (Manietta, 2010)

2.2 Female Bodies and Dollification in the Korean Culture

This section explains the various processes that result in dollification, to better explain this term, by using various examples. In terms of physical gender identity, this could be one of the roles that women are expected to subsume under due to performativity. In terms of its significance with my paper, I would hypothesise that this duplicitous dollified form is a role that kpop idols are expected to perform.

Dollification is described as an "an ingredient of the already normalized enactment of gendered subjectivities". This is further manifested in kpop via "dollified female bodies" and the "language of dollification". (Puzar, 2011 p.91) This premise results in social issues such as the aesthetic surgery phenomenon and passive women. Dollification pervades kpop, perpetuating gender stereotypes and gender roles regarding beauty, offering a physical mould for South Korean women to shape themselves into, often setting extremely high standards. Such beauty is further attributed to prestige and class in South Korea, showing a dangerous over-emphasis on appearance, projecting the notion that the value of females lie primarily in their youth, beauty and sexual attractiveness. (Li et al, 2008)

Part of dollification includes sexualisation and objectification which often leads to portrayals that distort viewers' attitudes toward their own physical gender identity. (Lin, 2017). Lin's view could explain the media's focus on certain physical attributes in South Korea and kpop. Performativity here results in individuals being pressured to conform into such body types through means such as cosmetic surgery. This thus prompts all Korean women to strive to achieve long, slender legs in order to be beautiful, for example. (Epstein and Joo, 2012)

Another South Korean phenomenon of aesthetic surgery is renowned, likely as a result of physical gender identity stylised by the media. This is a negative effect Epstein and Joo warn of and is further studied by Holliday and Elfving-Hwang (2012). It being a "worthwhile" and "understandable investment" rather than "sign of vanity" is a notion commonly accepted and facing little opposition in Korea, due to "romanticisation, commercialisation and normalisation of practice" through media despite the undeniably negative implications of plastic surgery made clear. (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang, 2012 p.61,62). This issue is increasingly gendered. Furthermore, while the premise of this phenomenon is how women are valued based on appearance and on how successful they are at dollifying themselves to subsume into the desires of the male, Korean women see this as empowerment, being able to seek better employment and relationship opportunities through beauty. Primarily, ideals behind performativity shape this issue as well.

Rather, their set of ideals as influenced by performativity is to remain passive, a notion echoed by Kim (2017), who focused her study on the lyrics of kpop music and discovered that kpop portrayed women as passive and there was a worrying amount that portrayed women as submissive towards and reliant on men, "66.67%" of songs about gender identity. (Kim, 2017, p.16) This results in an extremely dangerous climate which normalises male dominance. Furthermore, passive women do contribute to the dollification phenomenon earlier mentioned outlining something that constitutes a part of dollification, which in extreme cases involves dollifying oneself to be passive and completely under the control of someone else in an almost lifeless state. Thus, TWICE can be examined in relation to their portrayal of passive women, offering insight on the larger concept of dollification.

In summary, this section offers context on kpop's sexualisation and objectification, and offers a glimpse into its effects on korean society, resulting in social issues such as the aesthetic surgery phenomenon. It also explores the perpetuation of a notion that women are to remain passive and how this is presented in kpop. All three ideas, of objectification, sexualisation and passiveness constitute the process of the dollifying someone. In essence, the dollification phenomenon consists of a sexualised physical appearance that is duplicitous and an emphasis on physical traits along with one's passive state where one further subsumes to the wishes and control of someone else.

Chapter 3 Methodology

I conducted close analysis on multiple music videos and lyrics of songs released by TWICE, songs that dealt with themes such as identity, relationships and love. That said, I recognise that these songs often appear to be completely unrelated to each other. As framed by my research questions, I flesh out TWICE's portrayals individually in these music videos and then attempt to draw links with these portrayals and the two key aspects of performativity, and with each other. As these portrayals may be contrasting and conflicting, I synthesise and resolve contrasting portrayal to arrive at a more nuanced conclusion in my thesis statement of TWICE as a group to answer my research questions.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis

In this discussion, I visit multiple different instances throughout a variety of TWICE songs and flesh out their physical gender identity in relation to performativity, their passivity in relationships and their self-inflicted dollification.

4.1 "Of Unnies and Noonas": Performativity and Physical Gender Identity

Fig. 1 Jeongyeon dresses up as a male

On the left, Jeongyeon looks convincingly male and is thus able to subvert the female role in this instance while parodying a Japanese film. The transgressive potential or the second idea behind performativity, allow the male kpop groups to change our perception of masculinity with their portrayals of soft masculinity, closing the gap between both genders' physical appearances. Now, this image of soft masculinity is now ingrained into our subconscious, which makes it so much easier to see Jeongyeon, a female as having subverted the gender norms, physically looking like a male. This effectively abides by Butler's theory, that the media holds much influencing society's perception of certain aspects of identity, such as physical gender identity.

Fig. 2 Dahyun dresses up as a male

On the right, this effort to look masculine here is less successful. This shoddier effort to look more masculine is quite unconvincing. But this is certainly intentional, with this scene often being used for comedic effect. There is thus a clear difference between the effect of the subversion in the previous instance and the effect of the subversion here. This is a case of TWICE's subconscious believing that the two scripts are so different it is impossible to imagine a female successfully performing the male script while looking good. As Butler believes, TWICE have succumbed to the subconscious notions that they are female and thus cannot portray a certain physical masculine identity well.

When contrasting the two instances, both concur in their attempt to subvert their physical gender identity as affiliated with their biological sex. However, the success of the first instance is also because of external factors, such as the rewritten gender script on the part of the male kpop boy groups. The second failing attempt show that TWICE feels insufficiently empowered to subvert the physical gender roles completely as of yet, and their ability to transgress is still limited.

Finally, while this instance might not be a recurring theme in all their videos and is instead a once off occasion where they attempt to subvert gender norms, while they maintain their femininity and portray the stereotypical female image in other imagesand it further contributes to their random and non-uniform portrayal in various instances. Thus, this subversion can either be perceived to be unintentional, or to appeal to a wider range of audiences instead.

4.2 "Of Unnies and Noonas" Dollified

"Inside the small screen, I wanna be the prettiest

Pose for the camera, aren't I pretty"

TWICE, Likey (2017)

Fig. 3 Jeongyeon purchasing clothes

Fig. 4 Momo doing her hair

These lyrics suggest the extent to which TWICE value their physical appearance. These attempts include visual references to purchasing clothes and doing their hair and make-up. While their attempts to dollify themselves to portray a certain level of physical attractiveness does not seem problematic, the next few quotes suggest the extent of the over-emphasis on physical appearance.

"I like it, even if I can't sleep

It takes so much effort to get the perfect look

But it is something I can never give up"

TWICE, Likey (2017)

The word "perfect" refers to unattainable standards that they set for themselves. "even if I cant sleep" and "something I can never give up" highlights again the extent of the emphasis of beauty over other matters such as rest and physical health. "never" refers to the unending duration to which this emphasis remains, signifying again its prioritisation by TWICE, a sentiment they bring across through the usage of such lyrics. Usage of "the" suggests that there is only a singular definition of beauty. This is linked to the duplicitous nature of dollification,

where individuals are seemingly carbon copies of each other, especially in terms of physical appearance. Whether subconsciously or not, *Likey* begins to appear to be a song that promotes and perform the process of dollification.

"I hide my feelings deep inside"

"Cheer me up I'm done dressing up Baby"
TWICE, Likey (2017)

The "hiding" of feelings repeats this passive outlook that TWICE appears to be portray. "Cheer me up" and "done dressing up" being in the same line also raises eyebrows. What it might seem to suggest is that emotional affirmation that comes in the form of "Cheer me up" is dependent on the physical appearance of the female partner in a relationship as represented by TWICE. There is further a sense of reliance on a relationship for emotional affirmation. This brings across an extremely stereotypical message where the female plays the dollified role: to look pretty in exchange for emotional validation from their male partner. This suggests that the female's worth come solely in the form of their physical appearance.

Fig. 5. TWICE in a camera lens

Fig. 6 TWICE filming themselves

Fig. 7 Jihyo filming herself

Fig. 8 Jihyo filiming herself pt. 2

In this video, there are many appearances of the camera and then the video also has this lens filter on it as if we are viewing the scenes through a lens of a camera. The significance of the camera lies in its ability to document moments and leaves the photographer much freedom to decide the portrayal of the subjects of photograph.

To TWICE, the most important thing to document is themselves and their physical appearance. Since it is up to the photographer to photograph the subject in any way to bring across a certain message, the message here is that TWICE wishes to portray themselves in a way that is physically appealing. Them being the possessors of the camera show how they are subjecting themselves to this objectification.

In this song, TWICE appear to actively and deliberately emphasise on their physical appearance, it being a recurring theme throughout the song. This emphasis is problematic because it is at the expense of other things and is seemingly the sole important aspect of their lives in this video, being associated to their romantic relationships as well. They are furthered

portrayed as passive and heavily reliant on men. This constitutes to dollification. Here, TWICE have dollified themselves as part of their gender identity.

Again, the camera being in the ownership of TWICE suggests that TWICE are blatantly aware of their capability and the potential to transgress and change the portrayal of femininity. Instead, they elect not to and instead deliberately confine themselves to a limited portrayal of themselves which dollifies and sexualises them. While they are not subjected to being forced to portray such roles by society, they instead subvert this normative by subjecting themselves to it instead. Here, this ability to be in control and choose completely juxtaposes against the passiveness they choose to exemplify, which ironically shows they have more freedom with regards to the way in which their conformity and dollification occurs.

4.3 "Of Unnies and Noonas": Portrayal of Passivity

From a more macro-perspective on the lyrical mediums, there is a recurring trend linked to the theme of identity in relationships, in that the TWICE members appear to play a more passive role at the start.

"I'll wait no matter how long it takes

I just wanna fall in love"

TWICE, Like Ooh-Aah (2016)

"This time for sure, I'll be the first to talk talk

But it's only in my head, always only in my head"

TWICE, TT (2016)

"Come again tomorrow and the day after

I will be ready and waiting"

TWICE, Knock-Knock (2017)

These three songs are the first few songs TWICE released, and their perspectives on romantic relationships. This concept of "waiting" connotes being passive and not being in control of their own romantic relationships. It is particularly interesting that in *TT,* the narrative has seemed to change slightly, with the thought of breaking out and subverting from the normative role of passiveness. However, this does not translate into any outward action, as TWICE continues to remain passive. They end up writing their own script and abiding by it, as this sense of passiveness and waiting is a recurring trend.

"Trying to let you know

I send you a sign, send you a signal

I must let you know"

TWICE, Signal (2017)

The narrative has altered in Signal. As the title suggest, the female role has not been able to fully play an active role in starting a relationship yet. While there seems to be more intentionality on the part of the female role in this area, as denoted by the usage of the word "must", there continues to be a sense of subtlety associated with "signal". "Trying" connotes this sense of futility where there is no guaranteed success. These three lines remain the main motif of the song, repeat sixteen times. However, the rest of the lyrics all have the same meaning, just that they are paraphrased. There is such an emphasis on these futile attempts to take a very subtle yet

failing approach. This that there is a change in the gender roles in this area, albeit an incomplete one.

"Should I hand a note and run

Yeah yeah yeah yeah

What should I do

No no no no"

"I won't wait like a fool

I'll say that I fell for you

That I like you,"

TWICE, Heartshaker (2017)

Heartshaker seems to be a turning point for TWICE, as they have truly departed from the gender roles they have repeatedly acted out in their first three songs. This song, much like *TT*, focuses on the internal dilemma of female TWICE members but unlike TT, the decision to express themselves and to no longer remain passive is one they arrive at. While the first set of lyrics detail the passive and subtle actions previously favoured, there is a clear rejection of these past ideals, as echoed by the line "I won't wait like a fool". This line uses "fool" condemns their previous actions in hope of ushering this new, more active stance instead. This attempt to transcend the existing gender roles in a relationship is now glorified, and expressions of their feelings are no longer subtle or passive.

"Hey boy

Look, I'm gonna make this simple for you

You got two choices…

Yes, or yes"

"I'd say this plan is perfect, quite satisfying, satisfying

I don't care, I don't care no matter what others say ooh ooh ooh ooh"

TWICE, Yes or Yes (2018)

The song starting with "hey boy" brings the theme of gender into the song immediately. This song is clearly addressed to a male love interest and yet the roles have now been completely reversed. From them "wait[ing] however long it takes" (presumably for a male love interest) in order to "fall in love" to the current situation where instead they are initiating this question to the male. Passiveness has also been substantially reduced as they effectively force this relationship with the boy, giving them only the options of "Yes or Yes", in other words no options. This brings out a sense of dominance. The second quote shows their nonchalant attitude as they have normalised this action of initiating the relationship. "I don't care" again emphasises how their attitude has changed completely and rather than feel afraid, shameful or sceptical as they do when they deliberate internally in *TT* and *Heartshaker*.

In summary, this sequence of events shows a change of TWICE's change in portrayal and how their initial attitudes toward relationships have changed gradually to their current one. In the areas of various aspects of gender identity, their portrayal has changed to mirror societal expectations. This is in line with current trends as there has been a wave of feminist movements in Korea such as #MeTooKorea. Women now play a more active role in relationship.

In direct response to my research questions, this subsection fleshes out TWICE as contributing to the blurring of gender identity and gender roles. Their non-physical gender identity can be seen

as an unconventionally active or even dominant one, a reversal from their initial passiveness, At the same time, this is in line with Butler's theory that as the roles change, the people who act it change, in turn performing a different script which affects mindsets regarding gender.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Indeed, TWICE's portrayal appears to be disjointed and unrelated with each other, with a lack of recurring trend or a uniform identity that they portray repeatedly. Rather, they appear fluid, able to fit into a variety of different roles across the videos, such as the dollified form in *Likey,* the subversion of physical appearance in *What is Love?*. Even within one specific aspect, TWICE is non-unilateral in their portrayal of passivity of women in relationships, instead they continue to be malleable to external factors and change as such. Such susceptibility to changes in the world highlight the extent to which TWICE is malleable. This is likely attributed to their burning desire to release songs that society wants to hear at a certain point of time, for increased viewership and revenue. Furthermore, such emphasis on producing songs that would be popular shows how there is little intentionality to bring across a certain message in their songs and there is a sense of detachment from their songs because they may not be writing something genuine for the purposes of viewership and revenue.

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