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### Symbolic Violence on Girls: Patriarchy against their love of Boy Bands

This paper will analyze how girls' taste is perceived and looked down upon, through the example of their love of boy bands, using concrete examples such as pop band One Direction, Korean-pop (K-pop) group BTS, The Beatles, and a commentary from one member of pop-punk band 5 Seconds of Summer. Here, boy bands will be used to describe a group of young men making music that mostly appeals to a female fanbase. This topic, while focusing on boy bands to prove a larger phenomenon of misogyny, will actually help illustrate how oppression of women is also achieved through taste, placing men as the neutral factor in society to enable the cultural hegemony and ensure that girls grow up needing validation from men. When this paper will be referring to girls it will mostly be pre-teens and teenagers from when they are no longer children capable to form an opinion and the ability to enjoy pop culture, to before adulthood when they are expected to mature.

Fans and their interest in boy bands are starting to be explored in general media, especially in relation to fangirls and why they have such a terrible reputation and why they are so misrepresented in media. The frame of this analysis is through a feminist lens and the discourse in media is to give power back to girls and let them express themselves without examining the structures of power at play. Here, the goal is to observe the mechanisms of symbolic violence through the mockery of anything that is feminine and that caters to women that are not yet considered adults.

The things that appeal to women in society are only defined by that, the fact that they are designed for women. Some hobbies or interests will be overlooked for the sole reason of them being 'girly' and a 'girl's thing', and thus deemed as less than something that is liked by boys.

In addition, women are expected to abandon their girly interests when they enter adulthood, whereas men often don't. Men are still allowed to enjoy sports, video games and it is perfectly acceptable for them to be passionate about those things, but women are not allowed to be passionate about music they used to like as a teenage girl, or anything else that they did as girls. Adult women still liking boy bands is not something considered acceptable, and they are expected to mature, and please men as they grow up. This perpetuates the way girls are socialized to need male validation and exemplifies that they are taught to please men and cannot enjoy anything of their own, if it has not been deemed acceptable by men.

In order to prove this, girls' interest will be studied through the lens of Bourdieu's theories of taste specifically how the hierarchy of taste operates, by whom it is put in place and why this cultural classism benefits men. His theory of symbolic violence will also be used to understand how men use taste to dominate women and keep the patriarchal system in place. This paper will cover the understanding that taste is carefully crafted according to men and that they made themselves curators of good taste, creating an imbalance between sexes. This will be proved using pop culture and bands such as BTS through the analysis of their fanbases using the concepts previously discussed.

In *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu presents his theory of taste that states taste is a result from a social division of classes, of sexes and other social differences. He explains the dominant class imposes taste on others and sets the norms of what it is acceptable to enjoy or viewed as a good taste. He also states that taste is a social construct and that it is shaped by where one comes from and one's place in society. It also means that one person expressing taste for something demonstrates their belonging to one specific group, as it determines the position one occupies in society, and if one fits in the dominant class:

The seemingly most formal oppositions within this social mythology always derive their ideological strength from the fact that they refer back, more or less discreetly,

to the most fundamental oppositions within the social order: the opposition between the dominant and the dominated, which is inscribed in the division of labour, and the opposition, rooted in the division of the labour of domination, between two principles of domination, two powers, dominant and dominated, temporal and spiritual, material and intellectual etc. It follows that the map of social space previously put forward can also be read as a strict table of the historically constituted and acquired categories which organize the idea of the social world in the minds of all the subjects belonging to that world and shaped by it. (Distinction, 333)

In this case, the dominant class is men, imposing on women (young girls) what they should like, or shaming them for liking what is geared towards them. This also joins Karl Marx's theory of cultural hegemony, in association with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which is the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class, in this case men, who manipulate the culture of that society the beliefs and explanations, perceptions, values so that the imposed ruling-class worldview becomes the accepted cultural norm. This is relevant in this context as it shows the mechanisms of oppression through interests, and how it positions men as the dominant group even in the area of leisure and interests.

Symbolic violence, a term originated by Pierre Bourdieu as a type of non-physical violence manifested in the power differential between social groups is used towards women in normalized expressions like "running like a girl", or doing anything "like a girl", implying girls are less capable of doing things than boys. It is also normalized to make fun of girls for their interests, as in our phallogocentric society, the man is the neutral starting point for everything, it ensures that they control every aspect of girls' lives. Just like boys who express interest in traditionally feminine things are seen as less manly and their value as men decreases. Often times, the worst thing a man can be associated with is homosexuality, because in popular

imagination a gay man is feminine and has womanly traits, which takes away from manhood and the way strong men are supposed to behave.

The idea that the man represents the neutrality and the standard is very clear when looking at boy bands, because until men put their stamp of approval over something that is considered girly, it is not seen as legitimate.

For example, pop band One Direction was adored by young girls back in the 2010s, and fans of One Direction - called 'directioners' - were mocked by the general public, often depicted as screaming, brainless, 'hysterical' teenagers, and were shamed for their love of the band, even though the band won many awards as they undeniably grew in popularity. RollingStones.com gave One Direction's album 'Up All Night' 2.5 stars out of 5 in 2012 and qualified them with the following terms: "But whereas Justin Bieber has charm, that telltale scratchy vocal tone and actual charisma, One Direction are simply five pretty guys with a few decent songs and not much personality. Call them One Dimension." In 2021 Harry Styles, a former member of One Direction received a Grammy for Best Pop Performance, and is a well acclaimed singer, praised for bending the rules of gender normativity, with fans mostly represented in a good light in the media. The review from RollingStones.com on his latest album 'Fine Lines' illustrates it well:

But as perfectly suited to binging on Spotify and dissecting on Twitter as the album may be (Styles streams even better than he does on radio), it's how consciously he uncouples here that truly sets him apart from the old testament rock gods. "I'm just an arrogant son of a bitch who can't admit when he's sorry," he confesses in the syncopated slow-burner "To Be So Lonely." In the otherwise forgettable ballad "Falling," he channels every woman hounded by a needy guy (or worse), asking, "What if I'm someone I don't want around?" If there's a nontoxic masculinity,

Harry Styles just might've found it. And that's the kind of magic mushrooms can't buy.

The fact that Harry Styles' music is now approved of by most men, that he is acclaimed for his personality and a Grammy winning artist while being a solo performer and that he was disregarded when he was in a boy band is very telling of how things young girls like are treated, and it becomes clear that the problem is not the content nor the music. Harry Styles wrote many songs when he was in One Direction. The fans of One Direction were so often mistreated and called names such as "hysterical", "crazy" or "toxic" in the media, when in fact, they actually had flair and popularized something that would be celebrated in the years to come. The argument here is that men, the dominant class use symbolic violence to determine if something is worth their attention and when they do decide it has some potential other than being marketed towards girl, it gains value.

When looking at the definition of 'boy bands' on the Urban Dictionary website, the scorn is very present as well. The first definition on the website is as follows:

I wouldn't even call these "bands" because they play no instruments and can barely sing. To make matters worse, every one follows the same formula: -- the good looking guy; the talented guy (the only one who can actually sing); the shy, quiet guy; the "older brother" type; and the "bad boy."

Example: Boy bands are creepy. Here's 5 guys in their late-twenties and early-thirties who sing love songs to 12- and 13-year-old girls! Boy bands make R. Kelly look like the Patrib<sup>1</sup> Saint of Chastity! (urbandictionary.com)

On Urban Dictionary, the most liked definition is the one that is offered as the main definition for the term, meaning what comes up first is the one that appeals to most people. If we take for

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<sup>1</sup> This spelling error comes from the author of the definition on the website.

example the band that started the boy bands format, the Beatles, they all played instruments. One Direction not only played instruments but wrote some of their own songs; K-pop band BTS write their songs, produce them, dance, and in addition some of them play instruments. The sheer hate of boy bands in these definitions, and the consensus that they are untalented and marketed for young women based on their physical appearance demonstrates how girls are viewed by the general public: members of the band are pretty and that is why teenage girls like them and enjoy them. This proves that the emotional capacities and critical thinking skills of young girls are overlooked, and confirms the narrative of the superficial teenage girl, whose taste is not to be taken seriously. On a larger scale, this ensures power for the dominant class, as they discredit a large part of the population and shame them for expressing interest and passion and overlook the emotional intelligence of young women.

If we look at one of the biggest fandoms of the recent years, the ARMY (BTS fans), rendered a massive community by this digital age, there is evidence that an engagement this big can be and is used to support charities and activism. Although BTS' fandom is comprised of people of all age and gender, they remain a group of seven attractive men under 30 years old, who evolve in an industry that mostly targets adolescents. It can be enough for western media to qualify them as a boy band and disregard their work, and enough for the media to rest on the stereotypes associated with fans of boy bands. This also stems from the fact that K-Pop is often misunderstood by the western music industry, especially in North America, as it is hard to popularize music not written in English. (It is also worth mentioning that since they are not white, they face a lot of xenophobia and racism).

While BTS' fans have been mistreated by the western media and called all sorts of derogatory terms, they use their power to support causes they believe in and demonstrate amazing organizational skills. They have raised 1 million dollars to match BTS' donation to the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020:

It is also widely known (at least within the fandom) that BTS have consistently inspired ARMY's (the fandom) through their personal acts of philanthropy. Over the years ARMY's have worked together in order to raise money for a variety of causes. Just recently after it was revealed that BTS and BigHit (their management company) had donated \$1 million towards the Black Lives Matter movement, fans on twitter assembled in order to start the #MatchAMillion project and donate the exact same amount towards the movement and they did successfully within 24 hours. (genzjournal.com)

For each of the members birthdays, fans also give to charities as a gift to their idols and they have created a collective that exclusively gives to charities, focusing on different philanthropic projects called One In An Army with the slogan: "Big Fandom, Big Difference" (oneinarmy.org).

Not only has girls' emotional complexity been completely overlooked when discussing their interests, they also have constantly been pushed towards a socialization that could not exist without men, and towards heteronormativity. And when they do, they face scorn and mockery by the very people who put this system in place.

. Not only does this reinforce the binary of gender roles and solidifies the patriarchal system, as well as heteronormativity, but it also indicates to girls that femininity is something shameful and not as appealing as masculinity which is the default and the desirable. Young girls have been taught and are constantly reminded that their opinions and interests are not as interesting as those of boys and men and it impacts their place later on in society and the way they view themselves. It leads to an internalized idea that their worth is based on men's validation and the male gaze. However, fangirls have often predicted the next big musical success, and will probably find themselves at the forefront of social changes given their dedication, their sense of community, their research skills and their organizational competences.

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