

K(Q)UEER-POP BODY: GENDER PERFORMATIVITY STRATEGY OF KOREAN BOY GROUP XLOV

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ABSTRACT. This study analyzes how the K-pop boy group XLOV's gender performativity strategies function within a hegemonic culture of masculinity. XLOV's emergence in contemporary popular culture challenges traditional masculine roles and identities, advancing a more performative model of masculinity. To examine this phenomenon, this study employs a qualitative methodology, using Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to investigate performativity strategies as a counter-discourse to heteronormative masculinity. Data were collected through observation and documentation from June 2025 to September 2025, focusing on XLOV's music videos published on YouTube, specifically "1&Only" and "I'mma Be," which emphasize dance performativity and dress style. The data were analyzed using the concepts of new masculinity and gender performativity theory. The findings indicate that XLOV's gender performativity strategies are evident in their fashion choices, choreographed movements, and symbolic elements within their music videos. The study concludes that these strategies do not constitute queerbaiting but instead represent a renegotiation of gender norms perpetuated by the K-pop industry. For XLOV, the body operates both as a commercial asset and as a means of resisting hegemonic masculinity in K-pop. The study suggests that consumers of popular culture can develop greater awareness of increasingly flexible gender roles and identities, particularly amid the rapid expansion of popular culture.

Keywords: performative male; transformative masculinity; k-pop; music videos; queer

ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana strategi performativitas gender boygroup Kpop XLOV beroperasi dalam konteks budaya maskulinitas yang hegemonik. Kemunculan XLOV di era budaya populer saat ini telah berusaha untuk mendekonstruksi peran dan identitas norma maskulinitas tradisional menuju bentuk baru maskulinitas yang lebih performatif. Dalam mengkaji fenomena ini, peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatakan analisis wacana kritis Norman Fairclough untuk membongkar strategi performativitas yang ditampilkan sebagai sebuah konter wacana terhadap nilai heteronormativitas maskulinitas. Data dikumpulkan melalui teknik observasi dan dokumentasi yang dilakukan selama Juni 2025 hingga September 2025 terhadap publikasi *music video* XLOV di platform Youtube yang memiliki konsentrasi penuh terhadap performativitas tarian hingga cara berpakaian, yakni berjudul "1&Only" and "I'mma Be,". Kemudian, data yang sudah didapat dianalisis dan diinterpretasikan dengan konsep maskulinitas baru yang dikombinasikan dengan teori performativitas gender. Hasil penelitian ini menemukan bahwa strategi performativitas gender XLOV terlihat jelas dalam gaya berpakaian mereka, gerakan yang teratur, dan simbol-simbol lain yang muncul dalam video musik mereka. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa strategi performativitas gender yang dilakukan oleh XLOV tidak mengindikasikan adanya upaya *queerbaiting*, melainkan sebagai bentuk negosiasi ulang terhadap norma gender yang telah lama direproduksi industri Kpop. Tubuh bagi XLOV dijadikan sebagai sebuah situs yang berfungsi sebagai alat komersial industri sekaligus resistensi terhadap budaya maskulinitas hegemonik pada budaya KPOP. Implikasi penelitian ini adalah bahwa konsumen budaya populer dapat mendidik diri mereka sendiri tentang peran dan identitas gender, yang semakin fleksibel, terutama di tengah pertumbuhan pesat budaya populer.

Kata kunci: laki-laki performative; maskulinitas tranformatif; k-pop; video music; queer

INTRODUCTION

The Korean pop music industry (K-pop) drives the Hallyu wave and global influence, as seen in increased use of the Korean language (Harris, Chen-Wu, Sue, & Lee, 2025), fashion trends (Kim, 2021), and increased consumption of Korean cuisine (F. Jin, Kim, Choi, & Yoo, 2024). K-pop is not just entertainment; it acts as cultural diplomacy, expands South Korea's influence, and symbolises a modern, progressive identity (Jin & Yi, 2020). Its influence introduces values like gender diversity, self-love, and intercultural solidarity. Boy groups such as BTS,

SEVENTEEN, EXO, and XLOV help K-pop dominate globally with internationally popular works, performances at global events, and a massive fanbase that strengthens K-pop's world presence (Ryoo, 2009).

The influence of K-pop boy groups in the global entertainment industry goes beyond music sales. Their unique body image affects perceptions of the ideal body and visual standards (Walisyahet al., 2025). This shift is marked by the rapid normalization of "soft masculinity," as evidenced by the growing trend of men adopting skincare and cosmetic routines, compounded by the appointment of K-pop idols as brand ambassadors for various

local and global beauty brands (Lee et al., 2020; Suhartatik, 2023). Boy groups blend body aesthetics with appearance, making their image a key part of branding and marketing (Unger, 2025). As a result, they shape global consumption patterns that focus not only on music quality but also on physical skills, appearance, and visual appeal (Hong & Kim, 2013; Suk, 2022; Jin, 2023).

In recent decades, studies on the K-pop phenomenon have focused on how K-pop shapes and negotiates non-heteronormative gender identities (Kwon, 2023; Mnietta, 2015; Oh, 2015; Oleszczuk & Waszkiewicz, 2020; Shin, 2018). This shows a robust discourse on how the global rise of K-pop has moved it beyond a music genre into a new arena that can shape political gender representation in dominant societies. In global culturalisation, K-pop has served as an agent for cultural exchange and the formation of consumer identity, especially among younger generations (Larasati, 2018). This becomes clearer as K-pop products enter cross-border markets, producing a new cultural-economic tool: the “visual economy,” which has altered the Eurocentric dominance of rigid, hegemonic masculinity. In this context, male K-pop idols are controversial figures whose aesthetics challenge traditional male or female and heterosexual or non-heterosexual binaries (Asriani, 2025; Kwon, 2023). Researchers argue that the K-pop industry is a transnational arena where local Confucian norms meet global neoliberal desires, creating new forms of gender expression that resonate with youth culture across various countries (Ryoo & Jin, 2020). K-pop is not just entertainment; the male body has become a site for complex gender negotiations.

Studies on K-pop masculinity often spotlight the concept of “soft masculinity,” emphasizing gentleness and non-aggression. Howard (2011) labels this *mugukjeok* (meaning “non-nationality”) and describes a hybrid masculinity. This merges global metrosexual trends (fashion-conscious, well-groomed men) with *kkonminam* aesthetics (the “beautiful” men typical of East Asia) to achieve cross-cultural appeal. Other researchers describe this “softness” as involving subtle emotions, soft facial features, and polite attitudes. These traits offer a safe alternative to aggressive patriarchal figures and attract female preferences without necessarily challenging heteronormative norms (Nara, 2024). These studies chart how idols navigate the tension between appearing as desirable “flower boys” and remaining compliant national subjects.

To highlight this distinction, this study employs an analytical approach that differs from previous

studies. Previous studies on soft masculinity (see Howard, 2011; Nara, 2024) largely treat gender presentation as a static aesthetic outcome—that is, a fixed constellation of facial features, clothing, behavioral patterns, and manners categorized at a single point in time. This study shifts that analysis by following Butler’s (1999) conception of gender as a “repeated, stylized action.” Consequently, this study will examine XLOV’s attire, body movements, and choreography not as static entities, but as the result of an ongoing performative process. Meaning emerges through repetition, variation, and references throughout the performance—it is not fixed within a specific costume or pose. This shift—from a static aesthetic inventory to a dynamic performative process—enables this research to transcend the descriptive boundaries of “soft masculinity” and move toward the more radical ambiguity embodied by fourth-generation groups such as XLOV.

However, the lens of “soft masculinity”—a performance of masculinity that incorporates traits traditionally coded as gentle or aesthetically pleasing—has limits with fourth-generation idols, whose gender performances are more radical and ambiguous. While the *kkonminam*, or “flower boy,” style explains facial aesthetics and clothing choices, it often fails to address how the body becomes a site of gender fluidity. Contemporary groups surpass this static “pretty boy” image by developing a strategy called “K(q)ueer”—a performance mode that blends aesthetics and movements, transcending gender boundaries. Examples include voguing, androgynous fashion, and physical intimacy. These elements serve not as expressions of identity but as industrial technologies for managing affect (Kwon, 2023).

This article shifts the analysis from the static “soft” image to the process of “queering” idols’ dynamic bodies. It asks how male bodies act as performative tools that create gender ambiguity—appealing to a progressive global audience while remaining acceptable in South Korea’s conservative context. The main question: How does the boy group XLOV employ performative body-image strategies to construct a “K(q)ueer” identity that challenges and nurtures gender norms?

To unravel this phenomenon, Butler (1999) theory of gender performativity is used. This theory sees gender not as an internal truth, but as “the repetition of stylized actions.” Through this lens, XLOV idols are analyzed as “performative surfaces” rather than stable male subjects. Masculinity and femininity are produced through repeated practices of quotation, constructed and deconstructed through choreography, styling, and fan interactions. Viewing

the idol's body as a canvas for these actions shows how K-pop produces a gender fluidity that is both subversive and highly commodified.

XLOV is the main case study. Representing the pinnacle of this strategy's evolution, XLOV consistently disrupts the "idol silhouette" through the use of fashion codes commonly associated with femininity, such as crop tops, skirts, and lace, as well as choreography that emphasises flexibility rather than strength and rigidity. Unlike its predecessors, XLOV's performance does not simply "soften" masculinity; it renders the performer's gender ambiguous, inviting queer readings that the industry implicitly encourages but often explicitly denies.

Therefore, this article argues that XLOV mobilises the "K(q)ueer pop body" as a dual strategy: first, to deconstruct rigid gender norms for a global market hungry for diverse representation; and second, to maintain a "safe ambiguity" that allows for plausible deniability within domestic boundaries. By examining XLOV, this study enriches our understanding of K-pop masculinity, shifting the discourse from mere "softness" to recognition of "queer performativity" as a pillar of the industry's neoliberal success. Furthermore, we aim to discuss in depth how the boy group XLOV employs gender-performativity strategies, both through stage performances and visual concepts, to construct its identity and image in the popular entertainment industry. This research will contribute to gender sociology and popular culture studies by showing how the new masculinity agenda has shifted men into a new object, replacing women through the appearance of their subjective bodies. Moreover, this research will represent the gender performativity displayed by XLOV through popular cultural practices aimed at providing significance to K-pop fans in understanding the gender dynamics of their idols.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive method. This approach was chosen because its main focus was to interpret the meaning conveyed by XLOV's gender performativity in depth and context, particularly through the music videos (MV) they produced.

Data collection was conducted through observation and documentation on the YouTube platform. K-POP music has become one of the main exponents of the current Korean wave, largely thanks to YouTube, a platform that allows the free distribution of videos created by various producers

(Diabah, 2023). Thus, the YouTube application can serve as the primary platform for displaying XLOV's authentic performative representations.

This study analyzed two music videos, "1&Only" and "I'mma Be," for two reasons. First, they are XLOV's most recent official title-track releases at the time of observation, so the analysis focuses on the group's current performance style rather than earlier, less developed choices. Second, initial viewing showed that these videos have the most visual and choreographic signs of gender-fluid styling, such as skirts over trousers, twerking, mannequin symbolism, and expressive makeup, compared to the group's other releases. This made them the best sources for studying XLOV's K(Q) ueer strategy. The observation and documentation took place over four months, from June to September 2025.

Observation allows researchers to directly examine the elements of gender performativity displayed by XLOV, including visual aspects such as costumes, facial expressions, and body gestures; verbal aspects such as song lyrics and text narratives; and interactions among members shown in the videos. In this way, researchers can capture the symbolic details XLOV uses to construct gender identity in popular culture.

Meanwhile, documentation is carried out by saving videos, transcribing lyrics, and taking screenshots of relevant scenes that illustrate the gender performativity with specific meanings as defined by XLOV. This technique is important because it provides an archive of data that can be analyzed repeatedly, verified, and used to support the researcher's views.

The data obtained through observation and YouTube documentation will be followed by analysis. The analysis is carried out using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which emphasizes the dialectical relationship between semiosis, namely the process of meaning-making through visual symbols, body language, and verbal language, and social praxis, which includes social group networks in cultural, social, and other aspects (Fairclough, 2013). With this framework, the study can show how XLOV's gender performativity is connected to broader social structures.

In addition, this study combines CDA with a data analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), which consists of three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. This model helps researchers filter relevant data fragments from MV, reveal patterns in the relationships among

text, discourse practices, and social context, and draw conclusions about the gender performativity displayed by XLOV.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

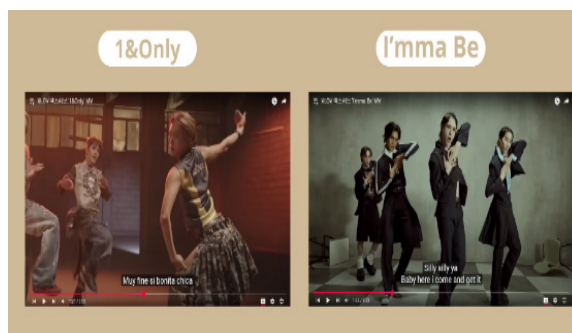
Using critical discourse analysis, we examined data from XLOV's YouTube music videos, "1&Only" and "I'mma Be". In this section, CDA was applied in several stages (see Manggong & Saleha, 2021). First, the CDA analysis described the main ideas identified in each scene of the XLOV music video. Next, the researcher identified the themes underlying these main ideas, noting how the themes in each section were interconnected—whether through repetition, juxtaposition, or contrast. Next, the researcher interpreted the identified themes and ideas. Finally, based on the description and interpretation, the researcher discussed the data analysis in relation to the concept of new masculinity and the theory of gender performativity. The researcher found several findings. These can be illustrated through screenshots.

1. XLOV's Strategy in Presenting a New Masculinity

In the "1&Only" MV, one of the XLOV members is seen wearing pants layered with a skirt with a pattern identical to feminine clothing. The use of skirts by male idols subverts the norm of masculine clothing, which typically allows only pants. This shows that XLOV reconstructs the meaning of clothing not merely as a marker of biological gender, but as a medium for artistic and performative expression.

Meanwhile, in the music video for "I'mma Be," the members appear in formal black suits, with a touch of design reminiscent of school skirts. These visual displays a masculine-feminine hybridity that, on the one hand, presents a strong, assertive, and authoritative image of formal suits (masculinity), while, on the other hand, still highlighting the skirt element associated with femininity. This contrast shows how XLOV blurs gender boundaries in clothing, while expanding the space for interpreting the beauty of the body and identity on stage.

Aesthetically, the costumes in both music videos as shown in Figure 1 can be interpreted as a form of gender performativity (Butler, 1990), namely, the way gender identity is expressed through repeated actions, gestures, and clothing styles. XLOV shows that gender in the world of K-pop is not fixed, but can be negotiated and re-enacted through costume choices that challenge the traditional male-female dichotomy.



(Source: researcher documentation, 2025)

Figure 1. XLOV's fashion style in the music videos for *1&Only* and *I'mma Be*

Figure 2 shows how XLOV uses feminine elements in its choreography, namely twerking. The XLOV members who perform twerking can be understood as a form of gender performativity. This is because, aesthetically, twerking provides choreographic dynamics that are energetic, contrasting, and bold. The movement shows that bodily expression is not rigid, so anyone has the right to use it without being bound by certain general rules.

Twerking is usually associated with women because the movements are considered sensual, emphasizing the hips and representing sensual femininity. Therefore, when these movements are performed by men, they challenge traditional norms of masculinity, giving it a broader layer of meaning. Thus, twerking by men can be seen not only as an artistic expression but also as a form of criticism against social views that limit gender mobility. From this, we can see that gender can transcend existing social norms and open up a new understanding of self-expression.



(Source: researcher documentation, 2025)

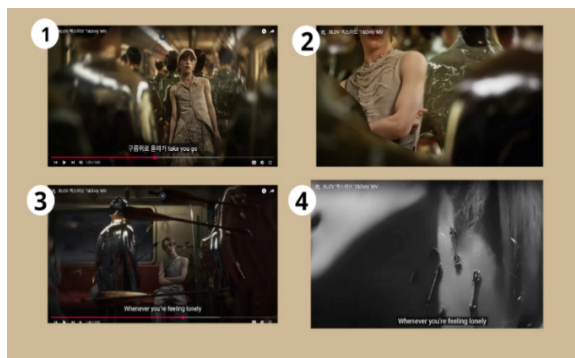
Figure 2. Twerking in XLOV choreography

Figure 3 shows how XLOV attempts to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity values as its strategy in distributing semiotic elements of non-heteronormative norms in the dominant society. In Figure 3.1, Haru (하루) is seen surrounded by a group of mannequins representing masculine men. This representation is shown through the visual of mannequins wearing suits and standing tall,

symbols synonymous with masculinity and power. Haru appears to be standing in the middle of a train carriage, where these mannequin figures dominate, creating an image of discomfort and alienation.

In Figure 3.2, Rui (루이) is seen being pushed by the mannequins around him. This scene illustrates how individuals who do not conform to the dominant norms of masculinity tend to be “removed” and “alienated” from their environment.

In Figure 3.3, the masculine mannequins are depicted as pierced by arrows, until finally one of them is able to sit freely. This scene can be interpreted as depicting members as “different” figures in an environment that views masculinity as the main standard for men. When they display identities that do not conform to these norms, for example, through feminine appearances such as wearing makeup and skirts, they are considered deviant and worthy of being ostracized by society. However, the visualization in the next image shows the opposite of this view. Instead of being overwhelmed by the stigma society imposes on them, the symbol of the arrow piercing the mannequin is interpreted as a source of strength to fight stigma and social pressure. This scene becomes a form of XLOV’s performativity, conveying the message that they can still live their own way without submitting to rules that limit men to a masculine image.



(Source: researcher documentation, 2025)

Figure 3. Deconstruction of heteronormative male values

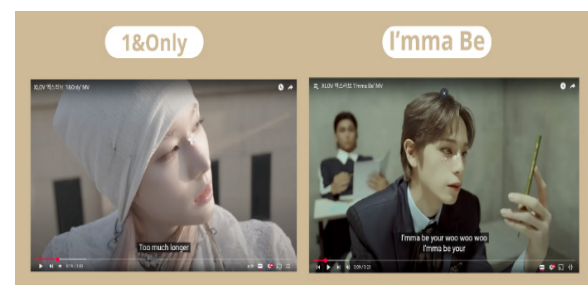
Using Fairclough’s (2013) three-dimensional model, this scene works on three levels: text (arrows piercing mannequins), discursive practice (a choreographed story of exclusion and defiance), and social practice (the wider stigma against men who break from dominant masculine norms). Earlier research on ‘soft masculinity’ often looked at male idols’ appearance as a fixed set of traits, focusing on facial features, styling, and demeanor separately (Asrina, 2022; Fortuna et al., 2025; Shinemil, 2025; Yusanta, 2019). In contrast, the arrow-and-mannequin sequence provides a new kind of evidence: it is a moving, narrative symbol of resistance, not just a

static marker. This is the main contribution of this finding: XLOV’s gender performance is shown not only through visual markers like clothing and makeup, but also through symbolic narrative action. This expands the discussion of K-pop masculinity from aesthetics to visual acts of resistance.

Not only was symbolization through mannequins and arrows evident, but researchers also found that this deconstruction effort was reflected in the makeup used by XLOV members. This can be clearly seen in Figure 4. Men who wear makeup in a style identical to that of women can also be understood as a form of gender performativity. Makeup in popular culture is generally associated with femininity, so when men choose to wear it, the meaning shifts in how gender identity is presented. This shows that makeup not only beautifies one’s appearance but also expresses oneself beyond rigid norms. In several XLOV music videos, makeup is not merely a visual complement but a performative strategy that builds a fluid artistic image that transcends conventional gender boundaries. The makeup worn by the members displays a spectrum of styles, ranging from sharp-colored eye shadow and thick eyeliner to soft lip tint, which are usually associated with femininity but are then worn on masculine bodies.

When XLOV performs with makeup that emphasises glamour and expressiveness, they show that makeup is no longer exclusive to women but can be a medium of creative expression for anyone.

Furthermore, this visual strategy is closely related to K-pop’s identity as a global culture. The use of makeup is not only a cosmetic ornament but also a performative practice that challenges heteronormative norms, opening up space for diverse representations of beauty while reinforcing the message of gender diversity in popular entertainment.



(Source: researcher documentation, 2025)

Figure 4. The Use of Makeup by Men as an Expression of Identity

2. Is XLOV Queerbaiting?

An analysis of the music videos for “1&Only” and “I’mma Be” by the group XLOV demonstrates

the group's deliberate use of 'genderless' and 'androgynous' aesthetics as central concepts. This raises the question: Does XLOV's use of these aesthetics constitute queerbaiting or a subversive challenge to gender and sexuality norms? In K-pop literature, queerbaiting is often defined as an industry strategy that commodifies same-sex aesthetics or interactions (skinship) to attract queer audiences without providing real LGBTQ+ representation or political support (Zhao, 2021). However, Kwon (2023) offers the term "K(Q)ueerness," which views this phenomenon not merely as bait but as an aesthetic mode and performative practice that transcends gender (masculine or feminine) and sexuality binaries, creating an imaginative space for fans to explore alternative identities. The researchers' findings show that the use of gender-fluid clothing (such as crop tops, heavy makeup, and feminine accessories) in these MVs is a classic example of "Soft Masculinity."

Previous studies have explained that soft masculinity in K-pop is a cultural hybridity that combines traditional aesthetic elegance (such as the *seonbi* or scholar aesthetic) with the global *bishonen* (beautiful boy) style (Lee et al., 2020; Louie, 2012; Nara, 2024). Oh (2015) states that the androgynous appearance of male dancers can open up space for "liminal masculinity" that challenges heteronormative norms. If XLOV uses the label "genderless" only for aesthetics without affirming the queer identities of its members or supporting the community, then, in a critical framework, this can be categorised as queerbaiting. Conversely, when viewed as a performative act, it is a subversive strategy to reject the hegemony of traditional masculinity. In my view, XLOV's approach represents a complex intersection: while elements align with typical queerbaiting, the performances also provide a platform for exploring non-traditional gender expressions, reflecting both subversive and commercial motives.

Studies show XLOV's sensual choreography and revealing clothing in music videos make male bodies objects of spectacle, with choreography challenging traditional gender roles. By adopting non-binary presentations in "I'mma Be," XLOV moves beyond simple queerbaiting to foster 'K(Q)ueerness.' The results of the study show that the identity represented by XLOV through their music videos is not a form of queerbaiting but rather a strategy to show how gender expression is not a biologically determined thing. This can be seen through choreography, clothing styles, makeup, and symbolic elements. These research results are novel compared to previous studies, which showed that

queerbaiting in K-pop is limited to homoerotic fan service performances. Bigbie (2023) study tends to view physical interaction or skinship between Stray Kids members as a deliberate marketing strategy (queerbaiting) by the agency (JYP Entertainment) to create an illusion of intimacy and commercial gain, where sexual ambiguity is used to attract fans without violating South Korea's conservative norms. On the other hand, Rammer (2025) challenges the view that Real-Person-Slash (RPS) is purely exploitative or merely a marketing strategy ("business gay performance"); he argues that for idols such as Zhang Hao and Sung Hanbin, RPS can function as a "safe space" to signal their queer identities in the midst of a homophobic industry. Baudinette & Santos (2024) bridge these two views with a paradoxical concept: they acknowledge that K-pop has heteropatriarchal tendencies, but emphasize that "queerness" itself is often "presented" by fans through their transformative practices, rather than being solely a latent quality of the idols.

3. Stylised Repetition in XLOV Aesthetics

Drawing on Butler's (1999) analytical framework in *Gender Trouble*, the gender identity of the research subjects, in this case XLOV members, is not viewed as an expression of a static internal essence but rather as an effect produced through a series of repetitive actions. The visual findings in the music videos "I&Only" and "I'mma Be," where XLOV members wear pants layered with skirts, crop tops, and heavy makeup, should be read as "stylised repetition of acts." Through the consistent repetition of fashion styles and makeup that cross binary boundaries in various visual content, XLOV is not expressing a hidden "feminine soul," but rather producing the illusion of a fluid gender identity on the surface of their bodies.

This discursive and corporeal action aligns with the concept of Soft Masculinity discussed by Jung (2011) and Oh (2015), in which male idols adopt a hybrid aesthetic that combines the elegance of *seonbi* (traditional Korean scholars) and *bishonen* (global beautiful men). However, unlike essentialist views that may label this as mere "style," Butlerian analysis shows that XLOV's act of wearing attributes historically coded as "feminine" (skirts, lip tint) performatively deconstructs the ontology that requires men to appear naturally masculine. Their appearance affirms that the male body is merely a blank canvas that only becomes gendered through repeated stylistic arrangements, thereby invalidating claims of biological gender truth.

The researcher also examines how the “heterosexual matrix” operates and how XLOV seeks to break it. This set of social rules expects biological sex (male), gender identity (masculine), and desire (for women) to match up. In the music video for “1&Only,” XLOV members’ twerking and sensual moves are important. In normal culture, sensual hip movements and passive erotic behaviour are seen as things women do, making them the objects looked at, while men are the ones who look.

When XLOV twerk and openly display their sensuality, they disrupt the coherence of this matrix. As Oh (2015) argues regarding liminal masculinity, this act positions the male body as a vulnerable and erotic object of desire, which genealogically challenges the political construction of the male body as always dominant and rigid. Furthermore, the scene in the “1&Only” MV, where XLOV members are surrounded by mannequins in suits (symbols of hegemonic masculinity) who are then pierced by arrows, visually represents the collapse of this “regulatory fiction.” The mannequins represent the rigid norms of masculinity produced by power discourse. By destroying these symbols, XLOV discursively rejects the coherence imposed by the heterosexual matrix, asserting that their identities are not subject to the rules of traditional gender norm reproduction.

We also focus on the location of agency and subversive strategies. In previous literature, the K-pop industry’s use of ambiguous gender aesthetics has often been criticised as queerbaiting—a marketing strategy to lure queer audiences without real political representation (Zhao, 2021). However, through Butler’s lens, what XLOV does can be interpreted as going beyond mere commodification. If gender is a fabrication maintained through repetition, then subversion occurs when that repetition is carried out with variations that distort the original norm.

XLOV’s blend of formal suits with school skirts in “I’mma Be” acts as a visible critique: this pastiche exposes masculinity as a construct that can be undone. This display is not total freedom from industry influence, but rather an example of agency within the boundaries of repeated norms, designed to destabilise them.

This supports Kwon’s (2023) idea of K(Q) ueerness. Rather than seeking the “truth” of whether XLOV members are truly queer (which would trap researchers back into essentialist assumptions), this analysis finds that their performative actions create a productive space of ambiguity. By continuously distorting norms of dress and behavior, XLOV engages in subversion that opens new possibilities

for male identity, no longer bound by a rigid binary between masculine and feminine, real and fake, but existing in a fluidity constantly negotiated.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the gender performativity strategy of the boy band XLOV in realizing a new form of masculinity that is more female-friendly. The strategy employed shows how XLOV uses their bodies as whole subjects to reject long-internalized heterosexual gender norms. The strategy also has the appeal of spreading the ideology of a new masculinity through popular cultural products in demand among large audiences. Not only that, but this study also shows how gender can effectively resist the hegemonic culture embedded in society’s socio-cultural system. Furthermore, in a more in-depth analysis, it was found that in his arena, XLOV has attempted to present a body that liberates dominant gender norms regardless of whether or not they are shackled by neocapitalism. The performances presented by XLOV have shown an explicit strategy of gender subversion on the part of men, which, when viewed from a patriarchal perspective, should not be allowed to present themselves in a way that is far from the rules that traditionally discipline male bodies.

This research still has limitations. It focuses only on music videos, so other researchers can broaden their scope to examine other objects, such as song lyrics. Furthermore, because this study uses critical discourse analysis, other researchers can further develop it by applying a semiotic analysis framework. In addition, cultural actors can also adopt the performativity strategy used by XLOV to transform the understanding of gender from hegemonic to inclusive.

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