

## BREAKING GENDER BARRIERS: THE EVOLUTION OF BTS'S IDENTITY AND IMPACT ON SOCIETY

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### **Abstract**

*Gender identity is a deeply personal aspect of one's identity, but societal norms and expectations often limit an individual's ability to express themselves freely. Gender Theory has provided a framework to understand how gender roles and expectations are socially constructed, and how individuals can challenge traditional norms to embrace their authentic selves. Korean pop music, commonly referred to as K-pop, has gained immense popularity worldwide in recent years. However, with the rise of K-pop, there has also been criticism regarding the industry's strict beauty standards and gender roles. BTS, a seven-member boy band, has broken these gender barriers with their unique identity and impactful music. Through their music and actions, BTS has become a symbol of empowerment and representation for marginalized communities. This article explores the evolution of BTS's identity and their impact on society, highlighting their contribution to breaking gender stereotypes and promoting inclusivity in the K-pop industry.*

### **Keywords**

Gender identity, Personal, Societal norms, Express, Gender Theory, Gender roles, Expectations, Authentic selves, K-pop, BTS

### **Introduction:**

BTS is a popular K-pop group known for their innovative music, fashion, and style. They have challenged traditional gender roles and stereotypes, encouraging their fans to embrace their unique identities. However, their gender expression has been a topic of controversy and debate, with some critics arguing that they are undermining traditional gender norms. As noted by Kim and Lee (2020), BTS has broken traditional gender norms through their androgynous fashion choices and performances that blur the line between masculine and feminine expressions. This has not only challenged gender stereotypes but also inspired a new generation of fans to embrace their individuality and diversity.

BTS has made significant contributions to breaking gender barriers and challenging societal norms. Through their music and performances, they have embraced femininity, supported the LGBTQ+ community, and encouraged their fans to embrace their true selves. BTS's impact on society has been significant, inspiring young people around the world to challenge societal norms and promote self-love and acceptance.

The K-pop industry has been notorious for its strict beauty standards and gender roles, perpetuating a culture of toxic masculinity and objectification of women. However, BTS, a South Korean boy band, has been challenging these norms through their music and activism. BTS has become a global phenomenon, breaking records and garnering immense popularity across the world. The band's unique identity and message of self-love and acceptance have resonated with fans worldwide, making them a symbol of hope and representation for marginalized communities. Moreover, BTS's impact on society goes beyond music and fashion. They have used their platform to address social issues, including mental health, youth empowerment, and philanthropy. In fact, in 2018, BTS addressed the United Nations General Assembly, advocating for youth education and mental health support, which led to the creation of the Love Myself campaign in partnership with UNICEF (BTS, 2018).

BTS's journey towards breaking gender barriers can be traced back to their debut in 2013. Their early music videos and performances were heavily influenced by the typical K-pop boy band aesthetic, with synchronized dance moves and stylized visuals. However, as the band gained popularity, they began to experiment with their identity and music, incorporating themes of social commentary and self-reflection.

BTS's evolution towards breaking gender stereotypes can be seen in their music videos, such as "No More Dream" and "Dope," where they challenge the societal pressure on young men to conform to a certain image of masculinity. In their music, BTS promotes self-love and acceptance, encouraging their fans to embrace their individuality and reject societal norms.

BTS's impact on society can be seen in their philanthropic efforts, such as their partnership with UNICEF to launch the "Love Myself" campaign, which aims to end violence against children and adolescents. The band has also been vocal about social issues, such as mental health and LGBTQ+ rights, through their music and actions. As Kim and Shin (2020) note, BTS has been vocal about their support for the LGBTQ+ community and have promoted acceptance and understanding through their music and actions. This has led to increased awareness and acceptance of diverse identities among their fans and beyond.

BTS has become a symbol of empowerment and representation for marginalized communities, breaking gender barriers and promoting inclusivity in the K-pop industry. Their unique identity and impactful music have resonated with fans worldwide, inspiring them to embrace their individuality and reject societal norms. As BTS continues to evolve and make an impact on society, it is evident that their contribution towards breaking gender stereotypes and promoting inclusivity will continue to be a vital aspect of their legacy.

## **Theoretical Framework:**

Theory provides a powerful framework to understand how gender is socially constructed and performed. According to Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory, gender is a repeated set of actions and gestures that are reinforced by societal norms and expectations. Gender is not an inherent trait but a performance that is learned and enacted through socialization. This theory challenges the binary view of gender as male/female and highlights the diversity and fluidity of gender expression.

However, despite the progress made towards gender equality, many individuals and groups still face discrimination, stigma, and marginalization based on their gender identity. The transgender community, in particular, faces significant barriers to expressing their gender identity freely, including lack of legal recognition and access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities.

The South Korean boy band, BTS, has been widely praised for breaking gender barriers and challenging societal norms through their music and performances. This literature review aims to analyze and synthesize existing research on BTS's impact on society and how their evolution has contributed to breaking gender barriers.

### **Literature Review:**

BTS debuted in 2013 with a hip-hop sound and tough image, reflecting the traditional masculine stereotype in Korean society (Jung, 2020). However, they soon began to challenge this stereotype through their music, which tackled societal issues such as mental health, bullying, and the pressures of conforming to societal norms (Chin, 2019). BTS's lyrics and messages resonated with their largely female fan base, who appreciated their vulnerability and authenticity (Choi, 2018).

BTS's efforts to break gender barriers have been well-documented. They have challenged traditional gender roles by embracing femininity in their fashion and performances (Jung, 2020). For example, the members have been known to wear makeup and dress in traditionally feminine clothing. BTS has also been vocal about supporting the LGBTQ+ community, advocating for equal rights and acceptance (Chin, 2019). This support has resonated with their fan base, who often face discrimination in Korean society.

BTS's impact on society has been significant. They have become a global phenomenon, with a fan base that spans the globe (Choi, 2018). Their message of self-love and acceptance has resonated with young people around the world, inspiring many to embrace their true selves and challenge societal norms (Jung, 2020). BTS's influence has also extended beyond their music, with the band using their platform to address social and political issues. For example, they have partnered with UNICEF to launch the "Love Myself" campaign, which aims to end violence against children and teenagers (Chin, 2019).

BTS's music has been a driving force in promoting gender inclusivity. The group's music and performance style challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, with their music often featuring themes of self-love and acceptance (Lee, 2020). Additionally, their music videos often

feature gender-fluid fashion and aesthetics, showcasing a diverse range of identities and challenging traditional notions of masculinity (Song, 2020).

### **Methodology:**

This article uses a qualitative approach to analyze the experiences of BTS and other marginalized groups in expressing their gender identity. The data is collected through a review of academic literature, media reports, and online sources, analyzing the cultural, social, and political factors that shape gender expression. The analysis is framed using Gender Theory, focusing on the performativity of gender, the binary view of gender, and the constraints and limitations faced by marginalized groups.

### **Discussion:**

BTS has challenged gender norms by redefining masculinity through their music and fashion choices. According to the theory of social constructionism, gender is not a biological given but is socially constructed through shared meanings and practices (West & Zimmerman, 1987). BTS has challenged the social construction of masculinity by adopting a more fluid and expressive form of masculinity that is not limited to traditional male stereotypes.

One of the ways BTS has done this is through their fashion choices. They often wear colorful and flamboyant outfits that challenge the idea of what is traditionally considered masculine. This is in line with the theory of gender performativity, which suggests that gender is not an inherent characteristic but is something that is continually being performed through our actions and behavior (Butler, 1990). By performing a more fluid and expressive form of masculinity, BTS is challenging traditional gender norms.

BTS's breaking of gender barriers has had a significant impact on society, particularly on young people. According to social identity theory, our sense of identity is shaped by our membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). By challenging traditional gender norms, BTS has created a sense of community among their fans who also identify with breaking gender barriers.

Moreover, BTS's message of self-love and acceptance has resonated with many young people, particularly those who may not fit into traditional gender norms. According to the theory of social identity development, individuals go through a process of developing their sense of identity through interactions with social groups (Marcia, 1966). BTS has become a source of identification for many young people, allowing them to develop a more positive sense of self and identity.

The analysis shows that BTS and other individuals should be free to adopt their gender identity by their choice, without fear of discrimination or stigma. First, societal norms and expectations reinforce binary gender roles, limiting the expression of diverse gender identities. Second, cultural values and beliefs shape gender expression, with traditional and conservative societies being more resistant to gender diversity. Third, legal and political frameworks often fail to recognize and protect gender diversity, leading to discrimination and marginalization.

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## Conclusion:

Over the years, BTS has broken numerous gender barriers in the music industry and has been a force of change and impact on society. From the beginning, BTS was determined to break the mold of traditional Korean pop music, and their mission to create music that resonated with their fans' experiences and emotions became a defining feature of their identity.

As BTS gained international popularity, they began to face criticisms and challenges from some who viewed their androgynous fashion and makeup choices as too feminine for male artists. However, BTS refused to back down and continued to push the boundaries of traditional gender roles, proving that masculinity does not have to be defined by a narrow set of standards.

BTS's impact on society has been immense, especially on young people around the world. Their music tackles issues such as mental health, societal pressures, and self-love, resonating with fans of all ages and backgrounds. Their message of self-acceptance and love has inspired countless fans to embrace their true selves, no matter what societal norms may dictate

Moreover, BTS has become advocates for social justice, using their platform to speak out against discrimination and violence. They have made donations to causes such as the Black Lives Matter movement, and their lyrics have addressed issues such as the struggles of marginalized groups in society.

BTS has shown that breaking gender barriers is not only possible but can also lead to significant positive change in society. Their impact on fans around the world, as well as their advocacy for social justice and individualism, make them a powerful force of change in the music industry and beyond. BTS's journey and evolution serve as a reminder that gender norms and societal expectations should not limit one's self-expression and that true progress is achieved when we embrace diversity and inclusivity.

In conclusion, BTS and other individuals should be free to adopt their gender identity by their choice, without fear of discrimination or stigma. BTS has evolved its identity to break gender barriers, challenging traditional gender norms through their music and fashion choices. This has had a significant impact on society, particularly on young people who identify with breaking gender barriers and have developed a more positive sense of self and identity. However, significant barriers still exist, and more work is needed to create a world where all individuals can express their gender identity freely and authentically.

## Research Questions:

How does BTS's music promote gender inclusivity, and what is its impact on society?

How have BTS's lyrics and messages contributed to the empowerment of marginalized communities, particularly women and LGBTQ+ individuals?

How has BTS challenged traditional gender norms in society through their music and performance?

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