

## Social Criticism on the Objectification of Women in the NXDE Music Video by (G)I-DLE: A Semiotic Analysis

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### Abstract

This study delves into the representation of social criticism on the objectification of women in the NXDE music video by (G) I-DLE. Utilizing Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis and Andrea Dworkins' indicators of female objectification, the study uncovers how specific scenes within the music video critique the stereotypical portrayal of women, including references to iconic figures like Marilyn Monroe, the 'dumb blonde' stereotype, and goddesses from Greek mythology. By analyzing the visual elements, such as hairstyles, clothing, and symbolic uses of color, the study reveals the underlying commentary on societal objectification. This study contributes to the discourse on gender representation in popular culture, highlighting the complex interplay between media, gender roles, and feminist ideologies in South Korea's K-pop industry.

**Keywords:** *Social Criticism; Female Objectification; Semiotics; Feminism; K-pop.*

## 1. Introduction

Feminism is not a new movement; rather, it has a long history, with roots that can be traced back to vocal advocacy in the West as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Western feminism was initially expressed with fervor, eventually spreading its influence on Asian countries. In Asia, however, feminism encountered significant opposition due to the region's traditional values, which often viewed men as naturally superior to women. This perspective clashed with feminist ideology, which posits that men and women are fundamentally equal, differing only in biological needs, while sharing the same rights and responsibilities (Yilmazçoban, 2020).

The debate over the differing rights and roles of men and women has been particularly intense, with feminist movements advocating for equality facing suppression in several Asian countries. In South Korea, for instance, deep-seated patriarchal norms have hindered progress toward gender equality. These norms are influenced by historical beliefs in the *Bakatyangban* system, which celebrated men as the societal leaders with responsibilities outside the home, while women, referred to as *Ansaram*, were expected to remain indoors, engaged solely in domestic tasks (Nelson & Haejoang, 2016).

Although recent global reports indicate some improvement in South Korea's gender equality ranking, rising from 104<sup>th</sup> to 99<sup>th</sup> in the world (weforum, 2023), the societal challenges remain significant. This progress contrasts with persistent issues in South Korean media and internet culture, where websites such as *Monosphere Jeosangso* and *Ible Jeosanso* display misogynistic advertisements and sexual harassment toward women. Additionally, communities like *Dang Dang We*, which support patriarchal values, exacerbate the issue by fostering an environment of gender bias, with a significant number of members actively promoting patriarchy and reinforcing discriminatory attitudes (Moon, 2024).

Despite incremental improvements in international gender equality rankings, South Korea's deep-rooted societal beliefs continue to pose substantial barriers to feminist ideals. Addressing these issues requires not only structural reforms but also a shift in societal perspectives that have historically marginalized women, confining their roles and limiting their potential. Only by confronting these ingrained biases can true gender equality be achieved, bridging the gap between tradition and modernity in Asia.

Furthermore, in response to persistent societal gender biases, many South Korean artists have increasingly used their platforms to promote women's empowerment and feminist values through their music, lyrics, and music videos. For instance, the popular group ITZY has been vocal in its advocacy for self-love and self-pride, with songs like '*DALLA DALLA*' emphasizing self-acceptance and confidence in the face of societal expectations. Similarly, IU's song '*Celebrity*' critiques stereotypes and objectification, highlighting how societal pressures for validation and approval can erode one's self-worth and individual identity (Oh et al., 2023).

The group (G)I-DLE, now at the forefront of promoting feminist ideas, has woven themes of empowerment throughout its discography. From their early tracks like '*D.C.L.M*' to recent singles like '*NXDE*', (G)I-DLE addresses the discomfort women often face due to stereotypes and objectification. Their music not only critiques the pressures of appearance but also emphasizes the struggles women endure in public spaces due to societal scrutiny. In '*NXDE*', they confront these issues head-on, boldly critiquing the objectification of women through a powerful blend of lyrics, visuals, and symbolism (Chang, 2020). Even though they aren't the first girlgroup from South Korea to promote the feminism, Gender equality and women's empowerment. Before them, there is solo female artist Hyuna who promotes the feminism to K-pop; this gives encouragement to other K-pop groups. Other K-pop groups include (G)I-DLE.

Other impactful songs by (G)I-DLE include '*Allergy*', which satirically addresses the internalized objectification and stereotypes that push individuals to compare themselves to others, ultimately eroding their self-identity. Tracks like '*Wife*' provide commentary on the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities, shedding light on the often-overlooked challenges women face within traditional family roles. These songs not only resonate with fans but also spark important conversations on feminist topics, encouraging listeners to reflect on gender equality and social justice. Through their music, South Korean artists contribute significantly to the discourse on gender equality, reflecting and amplifying the feminist movement in Asia. Their impact extends beyond entertainment, positioning them as influential voices in challenging entrenched stereotypes and promoting a culture of respect and equality.

'*NXDE*' serves as the lead single from (G)I-DLE's album *I LOVE*, released in 2022, a track that sparked both controversy and acclaim for its unapologetic embrace of women's empowerment. Within just three days of its music video release, the video amassed 17 million views, reflecting a strong public reaction to the group's bold thematic choices. In episode 445 of the show, *I Live Alone*, member Soyeon provided insight into her creative process, showcasing her daily life as she crafted the concept for '*NXDE*' (recorded while the song was still in its planning stages). Soyeon emphasized that the track would blend retro Western aesthetics with modern music elements, drawing inspiration from iconic figure Marilyn Monroe as a central theme in the video (Qiu, 2024).

Monroe, often remembered as a quintessential '*sex symbol*' who conformed to American beauty standards, is presented in '*NXDE*' as a powerful yet complex symbol. The video critiques the '*dumb blonde*' stereotype, a reductive myth that historically subjected blonde women, particularly in Western contexts, to negative stereotypes. By referencing Monroe, (G)I-DLE seeks to challenge these outdated notions, inviting listeners to reconsider the impact of such stereotypes on perceptions of women. This reinterpretation of Monroe not only subverts the '*sex symbols*' label but also draws attention to the deeper issues surrounding objections and the persistent pressures women face to meet societal expectations. Through '*NXDE*', (G)I-DLE contributes to a broader conversation on women's empowerment, blending feminist messages with a critique of cultural stereotypes. This track underscores the ways in which popular culture can serve as a vehicle for social commentary, challenging audiences to question established norms and fostering a more nuanced understanding of female identity and empowerment.

This article aims to explore how social criticism is conveyed through the symbolic and visual elements in (G)I-DLE '*NXDE*' music video. The video serves as a medium of expression where multiple forms of social critique, including the objectification and stereotyping of women, are embedded within the imagery and aesthetics. By employing symbolic representations, such as the iconic image of Marilyn Monroe, the video disrupts traditional perceptions and highlights the restrictive beauty standards and reductive gender roles imposed on women in society. Semiotic analysis of these elements provides insights into how the music video employs imagery, color, and symbolism to critique societal pressures and redefine femininity within a more empowering framework (Milestone & Meyer, 2020) (Harvey, 2019). The aim is to decode these semiotic cues to better understand how K-pop artists leverage visual storytelling as a form of resistance against entrenched patriarchal norms.

Additionally, this study seeks to analyze the connections between feminist ideologies and the semiotic elements in '*NXDE*'. Feminist theory argues that popular culture is a fertile ground for the dissemination of feminist values and that visual media can act as a powerful conduit for challenging societal expectations (Milestone & Meyer, 2020). This article intends to explore how feminist ideologies

are not only embedded but also actively promoted through the song's imagery, lyrics, and visual narrative. By focusing on how the video reinterprets the Monroe archetype, this study highlights how (G)I-DLE uses these semiotic tools to confront stereotypes while advocating for self-worth and authenticity, addressing issues central to feminist discourse. The analysis will draw on frameworks in feminist semiotics to elucidate the ways that (G)I-DLE visual language resonates with global audiences, bringing attention to themes of empowerment and resistance within a highly commercialized music industry (Hollows, 2024).

This article significantly contributes to the discourse on gender representation in popular culture by providing a focused, critical analysis of objectification within the K-pop industry through semiotic interpretation. By examining how (G)I-DLE employs visual and symbolic elements to communicate feminist critiques, the research offers insights into how popular media shape and potentially transform gender perceptions in East Asian and international societies. Gender representation in popular culture, especially within highly visual platforms like K-pop, plays a crucial role in reinforcing or contesting societal expectations around femininity in self-worth (Zhang et al., 2022). Through semiotic analysis, this study sheds light on how K-pop can subvert stereotypes, presenting a feminist discourse that resonates with both local and global audiences. Such contributions are essential in understanding the broader cultural implications of media in shaping contemporary gender identities, furthering the dialogue on how feminist ideals can be integrated into mainstream entertainment and challenge hegemonic representations in popular media (Whelehan, 2014).

## **2. Methods**

This study employs a qualitative interpretative research design, utilizing semiotic analysis to explore the representation of gender and objectification within the media content of (G)I-DLE's '*NXDE*' music video. Semiotic analysis, as an interpretative method, allows for an in-depth examination of the signs, symbols, and meanings embedded in visual media, providing insights into how popular culture narratives communicate social critiques and feminist values (Storey, 2021). Through this approach, the article aims to decode the underlying messages in '*NXDE*' that challenge traditional gender norms and objectification, analyzing how specific visual cues, symbolic representations, and aesthetic choices contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality within the K-pop industry. This interpretative lens aligns with the objective of understanding how media serves as both a reflection of and resistance to societal values, particularly in the context of feminist critiques (Barthes, 1968).

The primary data sources for this analysis is the music video for '*NXDE*', released by (G)I-DLE and available on YouTube, a platform that amplifies its reach to global audiences. By focusing on the visual and narrative elements of the music video, this study investigates the symbolic references that convey themes of women's empowerment and resistance to objectification. Drawing on Barthesian semiotics, the study decodes the visual language and cultural references within the music video, interpreting how iconic symbols like Marilyn Monroe are recontextualized to question established stereotypes and promote self-worth (Barthes, 1968) (Zhang et al., 2022). This analysis plays particular attention to the interaction of color, costume, and choreography as semiotic elements that contribute to the video's feminist messages.

Secondary data sources include scholarly articles, interview, and previous studies addressing gender objectification in media, with a focus on feminist theory, particularly radical feminism as proposed by Andrea Dworkin. Dworkin's work provides a critical lens for examining how objectification manifests in media and how feminist narratives in popular culture, such as those in K-pop, actively resist or subvert these tendencies (Brecher, 2015). Additionally, contemporary feminist scholarship enriches the semiotic interpretation by contextualizing how globalized media, especially K-pop, can influence and reshape perceptions of gender across different cultural contexts (Milestone & Meyer, 2020). By integrating these theoretical frameworks, this study provides a comprehensive interpretative analysis that situates '*NXDE*' within the ongoing conversation on feminist representation and gender politics in the digital age.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### a. Scene Analysis

##### Scene (00:10-00:18): Deconstructing the 'Dumb Blonde' Stereotype and Marilyn Monroe's Iconography



The scene from 00:10 to 00:18 in (G)I-DLE 'NXDE' music video draws a striking parallel to Marilyn Monroe, particularly referencing her role in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), where she famously performed *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend*. Monroe, an American icon, embodied the 'dumb blonde' stereotype with her sultry voice, glamorous appearance, and provocative performances, which cemented her as the quintessential 'sex symbol' of her era. In this video scene, she is adorned in a striking pink gown, surrounded by men bearing lavish gifts, portraying the character as a materialistic and coquettish figure whose power lies solely in her physical allure. This portrayal, along with Monroe's other roles, perpetuated the stereotype of blonde women as superficial, desirous of male attention, and dependent on their beauty for validation and success (Bolton, 2015). This stereotype, widely normalized in American media, reinforced gendered expectations and contributed to the objectification of women in Western culture (Karsay et al., 2018).

In the 'NXDE' video, member Minnie's portrayal of Monroe is subtly subversive. Although inspired by the iconic *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend* performance, Minnie diverges from the stereotype in significant ways. She rejects the offerings of paper heart cutouts from the surrounding men, symbolizing her refusal to accept superficial affection or material validation. Her attire, in contrast to Monroe's revealing pink gown, is notably modest, and her posture exudes self-assuredness, with her chin raised as the camera captures her at eye level, emphasizing her empowerment and autonomy. Through this reimagined portrayal, Minnie challenges the established narrative, presenting blonde women as dignified figures who demand respect rather than simply admiration. This reinterpretation critiques the reduction of women to their physical appearances, asserting that they can embody strength and self-worth independent of male validation (Zhang et al., 2022).

The 'dumb blonde' stereotype is deeply embedded in Western mythology, often drawing parallels to figure such as Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of beauty. Aphrodite, frequently depicted with flowing golden locks and sensuous features, embodies the allure and idealized femininity often associated with blonde beauty standards (Hughes, 2019). Despite her divine status, Aphrodite's character is marked by vanity and infidelity, qualities that contributed to a longstanding cultural association of blonde women with frivolity and moral ambiguity. In Ancient Greece, this idealization of beauty set a precedent that equated physical allure with value, while paradoxically diminishing the character of the individual, perpetuating standards that persist in contemporary media representations (Romer, 2020). By incorporating and challenging these historical stereotypes, (G)I-DLE's 'NXDE' offers a critique of the objectifying narratives that have shaped societal expectations, presenting a more empowered and nuanced view of femininity.

According to radical feminist theorist Andrea Dworkin, the film "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" critiques the objectification of women based solely on their appearance. The film portrays two female protagonists who are not simply "dumb blondes" as the stereotype suggests. While they may appear frivolous, they are intelligent and resourceful in navigating their circumstances. The song "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" exemplifies this critique. Minnie, a character reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe, performs an overtly sexualized dance while singing lyrics that highlight her beauty and physical attributes. These lyrics, such as "Hello, my name is beautiful, beautiful," and "The way I talk is a little stupid, but I have a sexy, sexy body," emphasize how a woman's value is primarily

associated with her physical attractiveness. This portrayal satirizes how society prioritizes a woman's physical appearance over her intellect, ultimately leading to her objectification and exploitation

**Scene (00:25-00:32): Sexualization, Stereotypes, and the Frustration of Objectification**



The scene from 00:25-00:32 in (G)I-DLE's 'NXDE' music video examines the effects of sexualization and the 'dumb blonde' stereotype, conveyed through revealing clothing and specific body language. Marilyn Monroe's influence on film media has significantly impacted portrayals of blonde women, embedding stereotypes that persist in contemporary media. This archetype of the 'dumb blonde', often shown as shallow and materialistic, has been repeatedly represented, as seen in characters like Regina George in *Mean Girls* (2004) and Elle Woods in *Legally Blonde* (2001). While Elle Woods ultimately defies the stereotype by providing her intelligence, her character is initially portrayed as superficial, relying on her appearance and flirtation to navigate her challenges. These portrayals reinforce a narrative where blonde women are objectified, often seen as objects of desire who use their sexuality as a tool, thus perpetuating a cycle of reductionist stereotypes (Handzo, 2019; Lee et al., 2024).

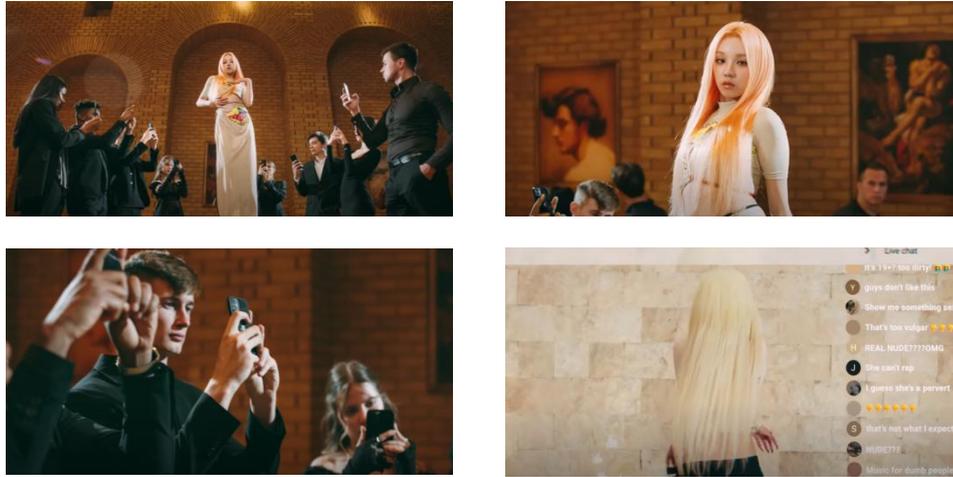
In the 'NXDE' scene, Soyeon expresses frustration with these narrow representations of blonde women. She interacts with newspapers featuring positive coverage about blonde women, only to tear them apart in exasperation, signifying her rejection of superficial portrayals and society's obsession with appearances. Intriguingly, an animated, provocatively dressed woman in red also appears in this scene, highlighting the historical connection between red attire and symbolic power. In Korean mythology, red is a sacred color often associated with royal attire, indicating authority and strength (Hall, 2018). The choice to feature red in this context may symbolize Soyeon's resistance to objectification and reclaiming of agency amidst societal pressures to conform to reductive gender roles.

Furthermore, the persistent 'dumb blonde' stereotype reflects misconceptions about intelligence, with theories historically suggesting that blonde individuals absorb Vitamin D less efficiently, thereby impacting cognitive development. However, recent studies, such as those written by (Corcos, 2016), debunk these claims, revealing that individuals with blonde hair have comparable IQ levels to those with darker hair colors. This scene, therefore, critiques the flawed scientific and cultural myths that have perpetuated these biases. By challenging these stereotypes, the 'NXDE' video not only confronts the problematic sexualization of women in media but also brings awareness to the normalization of gender-based objectification and its potential contributions to wider societal issues, such as gender-based violence.

Based on Andrea Dworkins point 6 about how women get erasure as individual The music video "NXDE" criticizes how society judges women solely on their looks, ignoring their personality, character, and achievements. This superficial judgment reduces women to mere objects and erases their individuality. Marilyn Monroe exemplifies this issue. Despite her acting talent, awards, and influence in Hollywood, she's primarily remembered for her looks – the "dumb blonde," "cheap," and "sexy" stereotype fueled by her characters and personal life. A good first impression is important, but true judgment should consider a person's whole self – their mind, personality, and nature. The stereotype that blondes are unintelligent and promiscuous is demonstrably false, as

studies like the one by "The Conversation" (<https://theconversation.com/are-blondes-actually-dumb56560>) have shown.

### Scene (02:13-02:22): Women as Commodities and Public Spectacles



In the scene from 02:13 to 02:22 of (G)I-DLE's music video, the portrayal of Shuhua atop a pedestal symbolizes the objectification of women as commodities and public spectacles. This imagery reflects how societal norms reduce women to mere objects of display, silencing their individuality and rendering them passive under the scrutiny of the public eye. Shuhua dances gracefully on a pillar, much like an artifact in a museum, while the crowd continuously photographs her without regard for her autonomy. Her stillness and lack of resistance to the endless attention underscore the feeling of helplessness that comes with objectification, where women are often expected to conform to external expectations without asserting their own agency (Zhang et al., 2022). This visual metaphor powerfully critiques the societal impulse to control and commodify women's identities, highlighting the damaging impact of being persistently positioned as objects for public consumption (Mikkola, 2016).

Adding depth to this commentary, the scene includes two paintings that further emphasize themes of objectification: *Daniel in the Lion's Den* and *Endymion*. In *Daniel in the Lion's Den*, Daniel, thrown into a den of lions' aggression. This narrative mirrors (G)I-DLE's message, suggesting that inner strength and self-assurance can serve as a defense against the predatory forces of objectification. Just as Daniel's faith keeps the lions at bay, the metaphor implies that self-confidence can act as a protective force, empowering women to uphold their principles and self-worth amid societal pressures (Canevaro, 2018).

Meanwhile, the *Endymion* painting, symbolizing eternal sleep and passive beauty, reflects the societal tendency to value women for their appearance alone, often neglecting their individuality and agency. In Greek mythology, Endymion was placed into a perpetual slumber by the goddess Selene, who wished to preserve his beauty untouched. By incorporating these classical references, (G)I-DLE 'NXDE' underscores the historical roots of objectification, critiquing how women, much like figures in these myths, are often idealized for their passivity and beauty, stripped of agency, and confined to roles that prioritize appearance over individuality. This scene thus confronts the viewer with a profound reflection on how the cultural fetishization of beauty transforms women into public property, illustrating the psychological and social toll of living under constant public scrutiny and objectification (Milestone & Meyer, 2020). After Shuhua's sequence, Soyeon started to open her clothes in front of the camera. This sequence is Soyeon's way of giving critics a hidden camera. In South Korea, the hidden camera is considered a very bad criminal act targeting women in South Korea.

### 3.2 Symbolism in the 'NXDE' Music Video: Color, Femininity, and Cultural Critique

The music video 'NXDE' by (G)I-DLE contains a variety of potent symbolic elements, including color, iconic images, and visual metaphors. These components come together to question deeply ingrained patriarchal stereotypes and to celebrate the complexities of womanhood. One of the most important symbols is the color red, which has a profound cultural importance in South Korea. It is especially connected with the concept of monarchy, aristocracy, and the holiness of legacy. Historically, during the Joseon Dynasty, the color red was designed for members of the royal family, particularly

queens. This was done since red was a hue that symbolized both power and majesty (Jang, 2024). (G)I-DLE emphasizes an image of women as dignified and deserving of respect by weaving red throughout the graphics. This suggests that women symbolize power and autonomy in a manner that is comparable to the cultural regard that is accorded to royalty. This choice of hue confronts the objectification that women often experience in the media. Instead, it asserts that women have intrinsic value and power, which is a direct criticism of the tendency of society to reduce women to mere symbols of desire and consumerism.

When considered in the larger context of K-pop, where female groups are often visually depicted in ways that appeal to a largely male gaze, the choice of red has multiple meanings that are worth considering. The color red is transformed into a statement of authority rather than an invitation in the film *'NXDE'*, which subverts the ideals of submissive femininity and instead aligns the women with a tradition of resiliency and self-worth. This visual decision not only appeals to consumers in South Korea, but it also engages viewers all over the world who are acquainted with the two-sided nature of the color red, which can be both attractive and powerful. Therefore, rather of presenting femininity as a feature that is exclusively characterized by exterior beauty, it displays femininity as a layered and complex trait, which challenges viewers all over the world to evaluate femininity beyond its surface appeal (Lee et al., 2024).

Marilyn Monroe, whose image is strongly ingrained in Western culture as an archetype of the *'sex symbol,'* is another classic reference that is used in the video. Monroe's image has been created throughout history around her blonde hair, beautiful style, and appeal, all of which led to her objectification in the media. Her accomplishments and acting abilities were eclipsed by the simplistic *'dumb blonde'* caricature, and she became a figure who was revered exclusively for her sexual attractiveness. This Marilyn-inspired persona is reinterpreted by Minnie in the song *'NXDE,'* where she emphasizes the importance of autonomy by rejecting the overtures that are represented by the red heart-shaped cutouts that are given by males around her. According to (Lee et al., 2024), this subtle rejection is a criticism of superficial depictions that reduce women to their physical features. It also highlights the dissatisfaction that many women have toward objectification of women for their physical attributes. This moment not only defies the stereotype, but it also questions the cultural assumption that women should embrace such attention. It offers a counter-narrative in which beauty and independence coexist without the need for affirmation from outside sources.

An examination of Western beauty standards, in particular the predilection for blonde hair as a symbol of desirability, is the focus of *'NXDE,'* which provides a more in-depth criticism of the *'dumb blonde'* stereotype. A precedent for the *'dumb blonde'* stereotype was set by Western society, which was historically inspired by the image of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, who was often represented as blonde and loved for her beauty despite her vanity and moral failings (Hughes, 2019). A misconception that has been very prevalent in media portrayals of blonde women is that they are shallow, innocent, and reliant on the attention of men. This archetype presents blonde women in this manner. The members of the group, on the other hand, reinterpret this archetype in *'NXDE'* in order to stress intellect and empowerment. This can be observed in sequences such as 00:10-00:18, 00:25-00:32, and 03:13-13:22. These sequences contradict the notion that blonde hair is synonymous with superficiality. Instead, they depict blonde hair as a sign of power and autonomy, which is a pushback against the simple narratives that usually undermine the identities of women. Through the use of symbolic gestures, the movie reframes blonde hair as an affirmation of uniqueness rather than conformity. It demonstrates that women with blonde hair may symbolize power, intelligence, and agency that goes beyond the labels that are often associated with them (Mikkola, 2016).

Additionally, the film makes frequent use of jewelry, which is another significant symbol that carries subtle signals about the importance of worth and autonomy. Scenes such as 00:10-00:18 and 03:13-03:22 include members who are adorned with diamond-like ornaments that convey elegance and exclusivity. These members utilize jewelry as a means of reasserting their independence rather than proving their dependence on others. The notion that diamonds represent materialistic demands and dependence on male validation is subverted by the film (G)I-DLE, which was based on the classic depiction of Marilyn Monroe in the film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. The group reclaims diamonds as personal symbols of worth and elegance, supporting the concept that women's value is self-defined rather than decided by external praise (Milestone & Meyer, 2020). Instead of exhibiting diamonds as symbols of male-driven validation, the group reclaims them as personal symbols of worth and beauty. The women position themselves as *'expensive'* in the sense of self-respect by selecting modest dress and rejecting overtures from males. This suggests that their dignity and feeling of self-worth cannot be simply acquired or commodified.

An effective criticism of the multiple standards that often pervade depictions of women in the media is provided by the cumulative impact of these visual aspects. *NXDE* is a forceful statement against

the reduction of women to simple aesthetic objects in South Korea, where conventional gender roles are firmly engrained, and beauty standards are very prescriptive. In this country, 'NXDE' acts as a statement against the reduction of women to appearances. In order to broaden the scope of feminist discourse in K-pop, (G)I-DLE makes use of symbols like as red, blonde hair, and jewelry. This allows them to address both the cultural and universal aspects of gender portrayal. The film not only appeals to audiences in South Korea who are acquainted with the rigorous ideals of femininity, but it also connects with viewers all around the world who have seen similar caricatures in Western media.

In essence, 'NXDE' utilizes the visual language of K-pop to initiate a conversation about gender and representation, so encouraging viewers to examine the ideals that are ingrained in popular media. By using this technique, the limitations of the conventional depictions of femininity in K-pop are pushed farther, and the genre is repositioned as a forum for feminist criticism. The music video urges viewers to go deeper than surface-level interpretations, to notice the social structures that are at play, and to think about the ways in which the media may either support or question the power dynamics that are already in place. (G)I-DLE provides a powerful criticism of the institutions that continue to define gender stereotypes all across the globe. It does this by strategically blending cultural symbols, iconic imagery, and critical visual storytelling. In doing so, it advocates for a more empowered and multifaceted understanding of femininity.

### **3.3 Interpreting the Social Critique in 'NXDE': Challenging Patriarchal Norms in South Korean Society**

The 'NXDE' music video by (G)I-DLE presents a complex and multi-layered critique of the objectification of women, deploying symbolic elements like clothing, makeup, and visual aesthetics to challenge patriarchal values. In South Korea, societal beauty standards continue to idealize traits such as slenderness, fair skin, and long hair, often perpetuated by the beauty industry, which profits from promoting products like skin-whitening creams. This fixation reduces women to their physical appearance, overshadowing their individuality and worth as holistic being (Chen & Zhang, 2023). through the visual motifs in 'NXDE,' (G)I-DLE subverts these standards by showcasing women in ways that go beyond surface-level beauty, positioning femininity as something multidimensional and self-defined.

The strategic incorporation of Western aesthetics, particularly the Marilyn Monroe-inspired imagery, serves as a bridge between South Korean and global audiences, offering a commentary on the universality of female objectification. Monroe's image, historically shaped by her status as a 'sex symbol,' reflects the persistent tendency to value women for their allure rather than their agency or intellect. By adopting and then subverting this iconography, (G)I-DLE appeals to a diverse audience while also critiquing global norms that equate femininity with desirability. This reimagining allows viewers across cultures to resonate with the critique, highlighting that objectification is not just a local issue but a shared, international concern (Venters & Rothenberg, 2022).

(G)I-DLE's consistent advocacy for empowerment, as seen in their past works like 'Queencard,' and 'D.C.L.M.,' reinforces their commitment to feminist ideals within a genre that often prioritizes compliance with male-centric views of beauty. Their aesthetic choices, including tomboyish clothing mixed with elegance, stand in stark contrast to the more traditionally feminine portrayals expected of K-pop girl groups. By embracing a style that integrates both masculine and feminine elements, they not only challenge gender norms but also question the rigid Bakatyangban and Ansaram ideals which historically positioned men as public figures and confined women to the private, domestic sphere. This visual metaphor posits that strength and grace can coexist within a single identity, advancing a concept of empowerment that is flexible and inclusive (Li, 2024).

In the broader K-pop industry, the male gaze often shapes how female idols are portrayed, creating an environment where beauty standards are reinforced through commercial and artistic expressions. These representations influence how women perceive themselves and their worth, often limiting their agency within the industry. 'NXDE' counters this trend by portraying femininity as a source of agency and resilience, suggesting that women's value is intrinsic rather than externally validated. Such a stance is particularly subversive within K-pop, where commercialization frequently aligns femininity with submissiveness (Oh & Kim, 2023).

The 'girl crush' genre, exemplified by songs like (G)I-DLE's 'Tomboy,' occupies a unique space within K-pop, where it both empowers and commodifies. While this genre ostensibly celebrates strength and independence, it also reveals the limitations of celebrity feminism, where empowerment can sometimes feel performative rather than transformative. This tension highlights the complexities within K-pop's portrayal of femininity, as the genre balances genuine feminist messages with commercial demands (Nandakumar, 2023). Nevertheless, 'NXDE' pushes the boundaries of this genre by presenting empowerment not as a marketing tool but as an intrinsic message that encourages women to reclaim control over their narratives.

Jewelry, another key symbol in 'NXDE,' is reinterpreted in the music video to signify autonomy and self-worth. Traditionally, diamonds have been used to imply wealth, status, and sometimes a form of dependency on male validation, especially in media portrayals. However, (G)I-DLE reclaims this symbol, using it to express dignity and strength rather than materialism or male approval. In this context, the diamond accessories serve as metaphors for resilience, suggesting that self-worth is self-defined and cannot be commodified or reduced to external validation (Milestone & Meyer, 2020).

Through these symbolic choices, (G)I-DLE's 'NXDE' establishes itself as more than a music video; it's a bold commentary on the objectification and stereotyping of women, both within and beyond K-pop. The use of familiar aesthetics, such as red for power and diamonds for intrinsic worth, challenges the viewer to reconsider the constructed narratives surrounding femininity. By doing so, (G)I-DLE addresses audiences directly, urging them to look beyond the surface and recognize the societal structures that contribute to these portrayals.

This critique of objectification transcends South Korea's cultural boundaries, engaging with international discourses on gender and empowerment. By integrating elements of both South Korean tradition and Western iconography, (G)I-DLE positions 'NXDE' as a work of cross-cultural relevance. In an era where K-pop is a global phenomenon, this blending of influences illustrates the universal nature of their message, resonating with audiences who may have witnessed similar objectification in Western media.

'NXDE' exemplifies how K-pop, often dismissed as adhering to formulaic representations of beauty, can evolve into a platform for feminist discourse. The video demonstrates that visual media within popular music can serve as a powerful vehicle for social critique, inspiring conversations about the complexities of femininity, agency, and the constraints imposed by traditional gender roles. This approach positions (G)I-DLE as artists who not only reflect but actively reshape the discourse on gender within K-pop, making a significant contribution to the genre's potential for cultural and social impact.

(G)I-DLE's 'NXDE' goes beyond entertainment, utilizing K-pop's global platform to engage in a critical discourse on gender norms and objectification. By embedding layered symbols within their visuals, they encourage viewers to look critically at the media they consume and to question the values that are often embedded within it. This video not only challenges traditional portrayals of women in K-pop but also advocates for a broader, more nuanced understanding of femininity -one that embraces complexity, autonomy, and self-worth across cultural divides.

This narrow to Andrea Dworkins Indicators to radical Feminism point five and six that talk about “women are getting ereased as individual” and “women are considered the property of men”

#### **4. Conclusions**

The 'NXDE' music video by (G)I-DLE functions as a potent medium for social critique, employing semiotic elements to confront the objectification of women pervasive in both Western and South Korean media. Through a rich combination of visual symbolism and feminist ideology, the video delivers a layered critique of patriarchal norms that restrict and commodify female identity. By subverting traditional symbols and reinterpreting historical stereotypes, (G)I-DLE challenges these restrictive narratives, offering an alternative view of femininity that is grounded in autonomy and dignity. This integration of semiotic analysis reveals how the group uses K-pop's influential platform to advocate for gender equality, suggesting that popular culture can be a transformative space for feminist discourse and resistance.

This study opens pathways for further investigation into gender representation within K-pop media and its role in global feminist movements. The cultural influence of K-pop's vast international reach suggests that its representations of gender have significant implications for audiences worldwide. Future research could explore how gender portrayals in K-pop are shaping perceptions of femininity and feminism on a global scale, examining the impact of these portrayals on both fans and broader social movements. Additionally, investigating audience reception and analyzing the real-world influence of feminist messages in K-pop and other popular media could provide insight into how media-driven activism translates into social attitudes and behaviors, particularly within youth demographics.

This study focuses on the visual and semiotic elements within a single music video, limiting the scope of analysis to this particular artifact. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of feminist representation in K-pop and its societal effects, future research should include a comparative analysis of multiple media forms within the industry, such as music videos, fan interactions, and interviews. Additionally, integrating public responses, including audience feedback and media critiques, would allow researchers to examine the broader cultural resonance and effectiveness of feminist messages in

K-pop. Expanding the study in these directions would yield a more nuanced view of how feminist ideologies are communicated and received within popular culture.

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