

Research Article

Reclaiming Nudity: Feminism, Commodification, and the Male Gaze in Nxde

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Abstract

With the growing popularity of the Girl Crush concept, an increasing number of K-pop productions incorporate feminist elements. This study examines the Girl Crush style through the lens of postfeminism and commodified feminism, analyzing how it navigates the tension between female empowerment and the male gaze within the highly commercialized K-pop industry. Existing studies rarely provide a detailed account of how feminist symbols in K-pop are constructed and deconstructed. This study fills this gap by conducting a systematic semiotic analysis to uncover the layered meanings of these symbols. Through a semiotic analysis of the visual elements in (G)I-DLE's Nxde music video, this study examines how symbols of nudity, performance, and objectification engage with feminist discourses. Findings indicate that while Nxde challenges media-driven sexualization by reframing nudity as a symbol of self-expression, it simultaneously conforms to mainstream beauty standards and commercialized aesthetics. This commercialization of feminist ideals paradoxically reinforces the male gaze, highlighting a core tension within postfeminist media culture. The MV oscillates between resisting objectification and reinforcing the very structures it seeks to critique, exemplifying the paradox of postfeminist media representation. This study contributes to the discourse on female representation in East Asian popular culture by emphasizing the performative nature of feminist imagery in K-pop.

Keywords

Girl Crush, Post Feminist, Semiotic Analysis, Commercial Aesthetics

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, K-pop has evolved into a global cultural phenomenon, with female idols playing a central role in shaping its aesthetics and narratives. For instance, BLACKPINK's total album sales surpassing six million copies exemplifies the genre's expanding international influence. However, K-pop's portrayal of femininity has undergone a striking transformation beyond commercial success. In the 1990s, female idols were largely framed as "submis-

sive," "passive," and "gentle"—stereotypes that aligned with broader gender norms associated with Asian women [12]. The emergence of the Girl Crush concept, popularized by groups such as 2NE1, 4Minute, and Brown Eyed Girls, signaled a shift in this landscape [4, 7]. Unlike earlier portrayals catering primarily to the male gaze [13], Girl Crush aesthetics championed images of women as "strong," "independent," and "confident", appealing directly to female audiences.

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(G)I-DLE is one of the girl groups with those remarkable characteristics. [1]

Despite its apparent departure from patriarchal gender norms, the Girl Crush phenomenon remains entangled in contradictions. Major entertainment companies have increasingly commodified feminist discourses, recognizing their market potential. While the style outwardly challenges conventional femininity, female idols are still expected to adhere to industry-driven beauty standards, perpetuating a controlled version of empowerment. This tension is especially evident in (G)I-DLE's *Nxde*, which explicitly critiques the hyper sexualization and commodification of women's bodies while simultaneously existing as a highly commercialized media product. Through self-referential performances and visual motifs, the MV raises questions about whether empowerment within the K-pop industry is a genuine act of subversion or a market-driven spectacle [8]. This study examines *Nxde* through semiotic analysis, interrogating how it both resists and reinforces gendered power structures. While postfeminist media culture has been extensively studied in Western contexts [10, 14], its manifestations in East Asian popular culture remain underexplored. By analyzing *Nxde* within K-pop's unique industrial and cultural framework, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how postfeminist ideas are both articulated and constrained in the globalized entertainment industry.

2. Literature Review

Existing studies suggest that the Girl Crush style in modern K-pop girl groups is a manifestation of female empowerment [5]. For example, groups like BLACKPINK, Mamamoo, and (G)I-DLE construct dominant female images through visual symbols in their music videos and lyrics [2]. These images manifest in various forms, including clothing choices, choreographed movements, lyrical assertions, and assertive attitudes, all of which contribute to a departure from traditional portrayals of femininity in K-pop. In addition to their musical performances, these girl groups actively construct narratives of confidence, strength, and self-sufficiency through various media, including documentaries and behind-the-scenes content [11]. This Girl Crush aesthetic stands in contrast to the earlier K-pop female idol archetype, which traditionally emphasized demure, delicate, and hyper-feminine traits to cater to the male gaze. For instance, early-generation girl groups such as Girls' Generation and Wonder Girls frequently embodied gentle and submissive personas, reinforcing conventional gender norms in the industry [7]. The emergence of the Girl Crush concept thus represents a significant shift in female idol representation, aligning more closely with themes of empowerment and self-determination.

While the Girl Crush style is frequently associated with female empowerment, its actual implications warrant deeper scrutiny. Beyond its perceived role as a tool for gender subversion, it simultaneously functions as a market-driven con-

sumer product shaped by the entertainment industry's commercial interests [15]. The commercialization of the Girl Crush aesthetic aligns with Banet-Weiser's (2018) theory of "Popular Feminism", which posits that the market co-opts feminist discourse for branding and commercial profit [9]. Within this framework, symbols of female empowerment are strategically deployed to enhance brand appeal, yet they often fail to challenge existing social structures in a meaningful way [16]. Feminist empowerment within K-pop has been absorbed into fan culture, yet its enactment remains heavily regulated by industry norms. The Girl Crush style, rather than existing purely as an authentic expression of female autonomy, operates within a highly controlled business model where companies capitalize on the commercial appeal of feminist discourse [6]. Despite projecting images of dominance and self-sufficiency, female idols must still conform to rigid aesthetic expectations, including hyper-feminized beauty standards such as slim physiques and flawless makeup [3, 17]. The public still judges and abuses women who break away from these images. At the same time, documentaries by women's groups also have elements of being controlled by companies. They still live under the camera, showing the side they or the company want the public to see, which may not be their most natural and authentic state.

In summary, while the image of the Girl Crush style is often seen as empowering women, it is still questionable whether it truly represents empowerment. The image of women after empowerment is still controlled by marketization and commodification and still needs to conform to mainstream aesthetics. Current research emphasizes how empowerment is controlled in the market, and the empowerment of women demonstrated in the performance process itself is rarely shown. This study contributes to the discourse by introducing the concept of "Performative Empowerment", which examines how K-pop girl group members enact female empowerment through visual symbols, including appearance, bodily gestures, and lyrical expression. By analyzing these performances, this research explores how female subjectivity is both constructed and mediated within the framework of commercialized empowerment.

3. Research Method

The research object of this study is the main title track, *Nxde* from (G)I-DLE's **I LOVE** album. This song was chosen because it has gained immense popularity and sparked widespread discussions since its release. With over 100 million views on YouTube and trending across various social media platforms, *Nxde* is a viral hit and an influential piece in the Girl Crush genre. Its bold and provocative theme, which combines elements of self-expression and the rejection of traditional visions of beauty standards, makes it an ideal example to explore if and how the Girl Crush concept challenges conventional gender norms and presents a modern image of empowered femininity in K-pop. This study uses

two types of research materials to analyze the Girl Crush image presented in (G)I-DLE's song Nxde. The lyrics of Nxde were obtained from the official lyric booklet provided with the album I LOVE, ensuring accuracy in the language used. The translations of Korean parts of genius were used for reference. The music video is sourced from (G)I-DLE's official YouTube channel, guaranteeing that the visual elements analyzed are consistent with the group's official image.

This study employs the semiotic theory proposed by Roland Barthes, focusing on the concepts of signifier and signified. The visual and linguistic elements in the Nxde MV will be analyzed to uncover whether and how (G)I-DLE constructs a new image of femininity through symbolic representations, such as the use of red colors, bold makeup, and confident body movements. The analysis will follow three steps. The first step is the identification of key symbols, which involves identifying key visual and linguistic symbols in the Nxde MV, such as using red dresses to pay tribute to Marilyn Monroe [18], eye-catching makeup styles, and the word “nude” in the lyrics. The second step is the interpretation of symbolic meanings mentioned in the first step. Each symbol will be analyzed to uncover its denotative and connotative meanings. For instance, red dresses may signify strength and boldness, while the use of “nude” in the lyrics redefines the female body as a form of self-expression rather than objectification. The last step is the analysis of underlying Ideologies. The study will then examine the underlying ideologies communicated through these symbols. The analysis will explore whether these symbols challenge traditional gender roles and express a new form of female autonomy.

4. Deconstructing Nxde

The title track is titled Nxde, which is a mosaic version of the word “nude”, revealing the theme of the song for the first time. By naming the song Nxde, the creator intended that when individuals with inappropriate intentions search for related keywords, they are directed to this music video rather than explicit content featuring nudity. The members of (G)I-DLE have utilized their artistry and popularity to combat inappropriate behaviors.

The music video begins with member Soyeon wearing a stunning black and red dress accessorized with black gloves and beautiful rings. She sits at a grand piano with a feather in her hair. This bold outfit suggests her confidence and aesthetic appeal. Soyeon's hair is golden, and she wears bright red lipstick. Blonde women with red lips usually represent sexy and charming women. With the sound of the piano, her lyrics are: Why you think that 'bout nude 'Cause your view's so rude. Think outside the box. Then you'll like it. This sentence is addressed to viewers, asking why these people with vulgar thoughts think of nude as a term with malicious intentions, breaking people's conventional view of nudity and allowing people to view the word nude from another perspective, setting the stage for the entire music video.

At the same time, the piano sound she plays here originates from the opera “Carmen”, in which the protagonist Carmen is an independent woman who pursues freedom but is ultimately killed by the male lead she once loved, ending in tragedy [19]. This sampling choice serves to enhance the auditory experience and connect historical feminist themes with contemporary artistic expressions, creating a dialogue that highlights women's independence. As the camera shifts, Soyeon is revealed performing on stage, further amplifying the visual narrative.

As the curtain unfolded, member Minnie waved to the audience and sang: My name is Yeppi Yeppi, the word “yeppi” is composed of “yeppeo” and “happy”. The word Yeppeo means beautiful in Korean, and Minnie said she is beautiful and happy, indicating the importance of appearance to women. Her next lyrics are: Slightly dumb the way I talk, but I've got sexy sexy figures. This sentence highlights the stereotype of sexy and beautiful women, who are often perceived as uneducated and lagging behind others in terms of knowledge and culture. This kind of lyrics directly points out this point, making people aware of the existence of this phenomenon through Minnie's self-introduction.

Minnie was dressed in a striking pink dress adorned with a large bow and was surrounded by men expressing their admiration. She then sings, “Well, for a tiara with a diamond.”, The makeup and lyrics here pay tribute to the scene of Marilyn Monroe singing “Diamonds are a Girl's best friend” in her movie “Gentleman Prefer Blondes”. Marilyn Monroe herself was a talented woman who loved reading. She rose from the bottom to become a big star through her efforts, but in the end, she was bound by Hollywood and the stereotype of people staring at her, and she committed suicide. This is another place to incorporate famous feminist stars into Nude's works. People can only see the girl's appearance and hear her singing, but such tribute implies that she has her independent thinking but is controlled by capital and can only show the side of her that people want to see.

In the next shot, member Yuqi comes out, with the man on the right holding cosmetics and the woman on the left holding perfume. Their actions suggest that Yuqi is portraying a celebrity preparing backstage. Yuqi is singing here: Did you think I'd just laugh as if. This sentence indicates that she does not believe that people's thoughts about actresses like Minnie in the previous text are correct. She counters the stereotype of sexy girls. Meanwhile, Yuqi's smoky voice contrasts with Minnie's sweeter voice. She was wearing a black suit with a pearl necklace, which also contrasted with Minnie's previous attire. This difference in makeup and style showcases the diversity of women. The black and white poster of Marilyn Monroe behind Yuqi once again pays tribute to her, and the large letters NUDE on the poster also indicate the song title.

Yuqi was holding a book with “Nude” written on it, and at the next moment, Soyeon threw away the book in Yuqi's hand, showing her dissatisfaction with the word. The camera shifts to her dressing room. Here, Soyeon is wearing a bullet corset,

paying tribute to Madonna's classic style, and the bullet corset was also a popular clothing among women at that time. She sang: Twisted Lorelei that don't need no man. Lorelei is the character played by Marilyn Monroe in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." The character "Lorelei," famously portrayed by Marilyn Monroe in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes", is a comparison to the idol. While Lorelei seeks the affection of men, idols seek the love of the public. The use of twisted and don't need no man here highlights the contrast of facts. They all started from scratch through their efforts, and even if they are no longer loved by gentlemen or the public, they can still live well. The lyrics also reflect this: A bookworm observed with philosophy, a self-made woman. Soyeon tells the story of women's thoughts and self-achievement, using this method to expose the true and rich thoughts of women.

Soyeon flipped through the book "Leaves of Grass" in her hand, which Marilyn Monroe had read. Author Walt Whitman published this poetry collection in 1855 and claimed, "Leaves of GRASS IS ESSENTIALLY A WOMAN'S BOOK." (Whitley, n.d.) In the poetry collection, he hopes to treat gender equally and fairly, emphasizing that women and men have the same ability to write poetry. It emphasizes the sexual desire of women and points out that men and women are equal and that women are not subordinate to men. [20]

As the scene progresses, Soyeon examines a newspaper featuring sensational headlines such as "HOLLYWOOD TROUBLE MAKER," "She's a Liar," and "HER RUMOR." While focusing on Marilyn Monroe's private life, these stories reflect the perpetuation of negative publicity by Hollywood news outlets aimed at Monroe. Soyeon tore apart these newspapers one by one, expressing her disgust towards the incident and standing up for Marilyn Monroe. At this moment, another newspaper emerged, with Soyeon's photo at the center, mentioning I-DLE, indicating that the content was about her. The newspaper wrote, "SHES SO SEXY BUT STUID!" "YES, I AM A NUDE" and "HER NEWEST MOVIE IS TITLED 'NUDE'". The word "NUDE" can be seen everywhere in newspapers, emphasizing it to attract people to buy newspapers and discuss Soyeon. This kind of wording and layout reflects the media's malicious amplification of the concept of nudity, presenting the language harm suffered by female celebrities in front of people.

The content of Soyeon's singing is that people are stunned by fashionable stories and frantically blame female celebrities for deceiving them. People's malicious behaviour and insults once again showcase the unfair treatment that female celebrities have received in front of the audience. Even if female celebrities showcase their unique thoughts and works, people are unwilling to believe them or even use them to attack them. Soyeon emphasized the error and unfairness of this fact in this way. Towards the end of the scene, a newspaper is seen flying towards Soyeon. At this moment, Soyeon showed a panicked expression and action. This reaction poignantly illustrates her fear and aversion to the media's reproachful commentary.

Soyeon turned her head and pushed open the door, and the

camera turned to Miyeon opening the curtain. We can tell from the microphone on the table, the "WELCOME NUDE MOVIE PREMIERE" under the table, and the white spotlight aimed at Miyeon that this is a press conference. The word "NUDE" is displayed in large red font, which is very eye-catching. People can see this word at first glance, just like the way "nude" was treated in newspapers earlier. Miyeon's lyrics are: Ah, an undressed movie star, once again emphasizing the concept of nudity. The bold display of the word "NUDE" reflects the public's obsession with this concept, which often carries negative connotations. Audiences usually absorb such images and indulge in their viewing habits. The constantly flashing light and the men taking photos immerse the audience in the perspective of the female star, surrounded by the lens and flash. These layers of stacked white light leave the female celebrity on stage with nowhere to hide, exposing everything about her to the camera and reflecting the camera's strict control over the female celebrity.

As the camera switched, Yuki gracefully walked forward backstage, wearing the black suit she wore earlier. The camera then shows Yuqi wearing a white dress in a concave shape, dressing up. This ensemble pays homage to Marilyn Monroe's iconic white dress, famously worn in "The Seven Year Itch." As she walked out of the cinema, a gentle breeze from the subway passing below lifted her skirt. Unlike other women of that era who hurriedly covered their legs, Marilyn Monroe loudly said, "Isn't it delicious?" This way, the display of women's bodies is advanced and independent, demonstrating women's confidence and self-appreciation of their bodies. Meanwhile, Yuqi's two outfits are completely different styles, reflecting the diversity of women. Her lyrics here are: Even if I look tacky or fall apart, even if I'm not loved more. This indicates that even if she doesn't have a glamorous appearance, even if she is not being loved by people. The sentence is then fulfilled by Shuhua.

At this moment, Yuqi's lyrics were paused by Shuhua's voice, "Shhh" and silence gesture while she said, "Yes I'm a nude." Her movement was to unzip. The word "nude" is mentioned again, indicating that even if people did not see their favorite appearance or thoughts, once a woman is associated with nudity, she is attractive. The background of the chorus is composed of circles of red hearts, with girls singing and dancing in front as if they were performing a drama play. They were wearing bright red dresses decorated with feathers and diamonds and wearing stockings. The stunning scenery and exquisite costumes enhance the overall presentation, showcasing the performers beautifully. The members skillfully transitioned through various poses, elegantly highlighting both their grace and confidence. With the gesture of farewell, the stage play was pulled up.

In the next scene, Soyeon stands in a rectangular display cabinet made of glass, shrouded in light. The people around her looked at her under a microscope as if she were an exhibit, reflecting the objectification of the girl by people. Treating her like an object without thoughts is disrespectful

to the girl. In this scene, we can see banknotes dancing and people holding up bidding cards one by one. This behaviour indicates that they evaluate girls based on the amount of money they have and demonstrates their objectification of women.

The camera captures an admission ticket lying on the floor, branded with the word “NUDE” and a “SOLD OUT” stamp, indicating the high demand for this performance. While the audience’s eagerness to purchase tickets suggests a fascination with the notion of nudity, it also implies an expectation of vulgarity. At this moment, Soyeon said to these people: If you are expecting some rated R show. Oh I’m sorry, but that’s not what we are showing. R show It is a show that includes nude displays, usually with a pornographic connotation, and here, Soyeon rejects the notion of this display, breaking people’s expectations. By challenging these expectations, Soyeon subverts preconceived notions of her role. She also emphasizes her independence through her rap, revealing that if anyone wants a refund, they should go that way, and she doesn’t care about other people’s views. The lyrics here are a further counterattack against vulgar ideas, leaving malicious people frustrated. At the same time, she said that rating is the inverse of bliss. She hates these biases they have created themselves. This lyric showcases the ideas that people impose on girls, reflecting Soyeon’s independent thinking and incorporating a spirit of female empowerment, boldly challenging social norms of female representation.

After the transition, we can see Shuhua standing in the middle of four Venus statues. Venus is the goddess of love and beauty in ancient Roman mythology. Venus represents the highest symbol of female physical beauty. Shuhua standing in the middle of the Venus statue also represents the beauty of the female body, which is not influenced by prejudice and is a symbol of women’s self-expression.

In the second chorus, the members changed into a new outfit consisting of a black suit and skirt, creating a contrast with the bold and individualistic dress from the first chorus. This clothing change once again showcases the diversity of women’s appearance and self-expression. The camera turns to Minnie, who changes her posture and looks at herself in the mirror while saying: How do I look? The interpretation of such actions and language demonstrates her emphasis on appearance, reflecting that appearance is traditionally important to women.

The footage then goes to a mobile phone on the ground, and live game information is displayed. The letters in the lower left corner reads “(G)I-DLE - ‘Nxde’”, accompanied by a series of bullet comments. The hostile emojis and hostile language appear in sight. This scene illustrates the prevalence of online harassment and the detrimental effects of such comments on the performer’s mental health. This depiction serves to highlight the harsh realities of digital interactions and the impact of toxic narratives in contemporary discussions about women’s representation.

A hand-drawn shot flashed by, depicting Disney princesses

such the Little Mermaid’s Scales. Disney princesses are a symbol of beauty, and the portrayal of Disney princesses is becoming increasingly independent. We can see increasingly diverse and independent princess characters in Disney works, some of whom are full of adventure spirit, while others have strong judgment and problem-solving abilities. Finally, the depictions of these princesses were transformed into nude female portraits facing away from the audience.

The shift of scene here is in line with the Dadaist art movement, which advocates rejecting traditional artistic values and embracing new expressions [21]. This kind of thinking is also a rejection of conventional standards and a yearning for innovation. At this moment, the members danced hand in hand and broke through the portrait, wearing different costumes and presenting different faces, once again echoing the diversity of women. As they assemble in a gallery setting, multiple female portraits hang in the background, showcasing a wide array of feminine identities to the audience. Together, they sing the empowering lyrics: My beautiful self. I’m born nude. You’ve got a dirty mind. This sentence is about girls’ self-appreciation. This message promotes self-appreciation among girls, emphasizing that life begins in a natural state. Girls appreciate themselves and have positive and confident thoughts, while people’s dirty thoughts are their problems. This sentence echoes the previous text and is the girls’ counterattack against malice.

Next, we can see that the portrait of the naked woman has been damaged into strips by the frame. The behaviour here pays tribute to Banksy’s actions towards his painting “Girl With Balloon”. Banksy opposed the commodification of art, created this installation within the frame, and destroyed the artwork after it was auctioned off. Banksy’s actions criticized the commodification of art, highlighting the tension between artistry and market value. In this music video, combined with the previous tendency towards the commodification of women, we can see that the producer also advocates against the commodification of art, and the artwork here is a girl expressing opposition to the commodification of women.

5. Findings

5.1. Reframing Nudity: The Tension Between Agency and the Male Gaze in Nxde

(G)I-DLE’s Nxde constructs its narrative around the recclamation of nudity, aiming to dismantle conventional associations that equate nudity with objectification and hypersexualization. The MV begins with Soyeon’s pointed question, “Why you think ‘bout nude? ‘Cause your view’s so rude,” which directly challenges prevailing societal stigmas against nudity. This line encapsulates the MV’s central critique: the way cultural and media representations reinforce the conflation of nudity with indecency while simultaneously urging viewers to reconsider these entrenched perceptions by

“thinking outside the box.” The MV’s visual narrative repeatedly references Marilyn Monroe, a cultural icon whose legacy is often framed through the lens of beauty and sensuality yet overshadowed by her historical objectification. In a pivotal scene, Soyeon is shown flipping through *Leaves of Grass*, a poetry collection closely associated with Monroe’s private intellectual pursuits, symbolizing an attempt to reclaim Monroe’s identity beyond her sexualized image. Through these intertextual references, the MV presents itself as a critique of both historical and contemporary modes of female objectification. However, the aesthetic choices used to evoke Monroe—platinum blonde hair, bold red lips, and opulent costumes—remain deeply embedded in conventional beauty standards shaped by the male gaze. This paradoxical interplay between subversion and conformity reflects a broader postfeminist tension: the simultaneous embrace and contestation of commercialized femininity.

The recurring motif of “NUDE”, prominently displayed in newspaper headlines and integrated into the members’ performances, serves as a contested symbol of self-expression and defiance. While it ostensibly reclaims nudity as an act of agency, its repeated visual framing within sensationalized media contexts complicates its function, raising questions about whether the term remains commodified rather than fully emancipatory. The MV *Nxde* by (G)I-DLE challenges the conventional stigmatization of nudity by redefining it as an act of personal agency and cultural critique. Through lyrics and visual symbols, the MV directly confronts societal perceptions that equate nudity with vulgarity or immorality. However, while *Nxde* seeks to position nudity as a form of cultural expression and empowerment, it cannot fully escape the influence of mainstream aesthetic norms and the male gaze. As Gill (2007) notes, postfeminist sensibilities often encourage women to embrace their sexuality and autonomy, but these expressions frequently operate within commercialized and patriarchal frameworks. This tension is evident in the MV’s visual language, which combines hyperfeminine elements, such as form-fitting clothing and glamorous makeup, with bold performances. While these choices assert agency, they also align with traditional beauty standards, risking perpetuation of the same norms they aim to critique.

The cinematographic choices in *Nxde* further reinforce this paradox. Upward camera angles, lingering close-ups, and fragmented shots of the performers’ bodies create a visual language that aligns with the male gaze, positioning the idols as subjects of aesthetic consumption. As Mulvey (1975) theorizes, such framing techniques reproduce patriarchal media conventions where female performers, regardless of their agency, are rendered as spectacles for voyeuristic pleasure. In this sense, the MV’s attempt to reclaim nudity as empowerment is mediated through a visual discourse that remains entrenched in traditional gendered optics. Ultimately, *Nxde* presents a multifaceted narrative on nudity and agency, simultaneously advocating for cultural reclamation while exposing the structural constraints imposed by the K-pop in-

dustry and global media. This paradox epitomizes a central dilemma in postfeminist media: the convergence of empowerment and constraint, where expressions of defiance remain inextricably linked to the commercial and aesthetic logics they seek to disrupt.

5.2. Performing Resistance: *Nxde*’s Self-Reflexive Critique of Media Objectification

Nxde explicitly critiques the commodification of women’s bodies while simultaneously grappling with its paradoxical existence as a commercial media product. The MV presents a series of direct critiques of media sensationalism and the hyper sexualization of women. One example is the newspaper *Soyeon* holds, which features phrases like “She’s so sexy but stupid,” explicitly referencing the media’s tendency to reduce women to aesthetic appeal while dismissing their intelligence. Another striking scene presents the members confined within glass display cases or sculpted as statues, visually reinforcing their position as commodified objects under public scrutiny. These visual motifs illustrate the group’s oscillation between objectification and agency, highlighting their resistance to both media objectification and the male gaze. The MV employs a self-reflexive approach as the members actively engage in the process of reclaiming their image while simultaneously confronting the gaze imposed upon them.

The members enact this resistance through performative gestures. For instance, Soyeon’s act of tearing up the newspaper symbolically dismantles the media’s power to frame and degrade women. Likewise, her discarding of books labeled “NUDE” and other markers of conventional femininity signifies an attempt to reject imposed narratives and reclaim autonomy. However, the MV simultaneously acknowledges the inescapability of commodification within the entertainment industry, revealing its own contradictions. In the final sequence, the members perform while staged as auctioned objects, directly visualizing the paradox of female agency within a system that continually commodifies their image. This juxtaposition underscores the inherent tension between resisting objectification and remaining complicit in a commercial framework that thrives on aestheticized representations of femininity.

These symbolic elements recur throughout the MV, reinforced by cinematographic techniques that emphasize the members’ bodies. The frequent use of fragmented close-ups, lingering shots, and low-angle perspectives aligns with Mulvey’s (1975) Male Gaze Theory, which argues that women in media are often framed as passive objects of male visual pleasure. The MV oscillates between catering to these conventions and subtly subverting them, as it simultaneously engages with the expectations of a voyeuristic audience while embedding a critique of the mechanisms that sustain such representations. At the same time, these viewpoints in the MV have increased the popularity, while resisting the media and

being consumed by the entertainment industry, compounding the concept of commodified feminism. The ideas of MV align with the thoughts of the female community, promoting women's independent consciousness, and these ideas are transformed into media hype and material wealth, satisfying groups that were originally unrelated to women's thoughts. These groups may also be opposed to women's independent thinking. The MV presents a contradictory state.

In conclusion, the MV presents a bold critique of media-driven sexualization, and the commodification of women yet remains constrained by its position within the entertainment industry. While it explicitly challenges objectification, its reliance on established aesthetic conventions and commercial viability creates an inherent contradiction, exemplifying the paradox of postfeminist media where empowerment and commodification are inextricably linked.

6. Conclusions

This study examines how Girl Crush groups in the K-pop industry negotiate the tension between female empowerment and the commodification of the female body within the framework of post feminism and the male gaze in the larger context. By semiotic analyzing the visual and lyrical elements in (G)I-DLE's *Nxde*, this study demonstrates how *Nxde* both challenges and reinforces traditional gender norms through a performative display of agency and resistance.

By situating *Nxde* within the discourse of post feminism and commodified feminism, this study contributes to the growing scholarship on female representation in East Asian popular culture. While previous research has explored Girl Crush as a site of empowerment, this study highlights its performative and commercialized dimensions, especially how it achieves in process. Furthermore, this research underscores the need to critically examine how entertainment industries co-opt feminist narratives, shaping them into marketable products rather than instruments of structural change.

Future research could expand this discussion by examining multiple MVs across different groups and entertainment agencies, providing a more comparative perspective. Additionally, audience reception studies could offer valuable insights into how different demographic groups interpret the messages conveyed in such MVs, further complicating the discourse on agency and objectification in K-pop media.

Abbreviations

MV Music Video

Author Contributions

Wanqing Zhao is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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