



Fan Reception of Soft Masculinity in Enhypen “Bite Me” Music Video

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ABSTRACT

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This research aims to analyze the reception of K-Pop fans and ENGENE (Fans name of Enhypen) toward Soft Masculinity in the music video “Bite Me.” The study examines how fans perceive and respond to the masculine image portrayed by Enhypen members regarding Soft Masculinity. Soft Masculinity refers to male characters who possess charming appearances without losing their masculine impression, demonstrating a gentle side, and exhibiting subtle charisma toward women. This research seeks to explore how K-Pop fans and ENGENE (Fans name of Enhypen) receive the portrayal of soft masculinity by Enhypen members in the “Bite Me” music video. The theories applied in this research are Reception Theory and Soft Masculinity. The method used is encoding-decoding along with three reading positions: Dominant, Negotiated, and Oppositional. The researcher involved four informants with different backgrounds. Data collection techniques used include interviews and documentation. This study found that there are three characteristics of soft masculinity in men: Tender Charisma, Purity, and Politeness, where the four informants had different views on the Soft masculinity they experienced and perceived, which were then analyzed in this study using the “Bite Me” music video as the object.

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1. Introduction

The global appeal of K-Pop is evidenced by the popularity of the visuals of K-Pop idols. They undergo a significant transformation through the use of appealing makeup, which allows them to present a composition with proportions that are nearly identical. Similarly, the majority of Korean boyband idols adhere to this standard, which has the effect of rendering their faces indistinguishable from one another. This is a key aspect of the visual benchmark for boybands, which are characterised by a high degree of similarity in their appearance. The advent of K-pop has prompted a re-evaluation of several concepts, including the notion of masculinity (Daulay, H., 2019).

Masculinity is a topic that is consistently addressed in discussions about the characteristics typically attributed to men. In Webster's New World Dictionary, masculinity is defined as a Term Denoting Characteristics typically associated with males. Masculinity can be defined as a form of social construction of maleness among men. The notion that men are born with innate masculine traits is a fallacy; rather, masculinity is a construct shaped by cultural norms. The majority of men are subjected to pressure to conform to traditional masculine norms. The perception of weakness, emotionality, or sexual inadequacy represents a significant threat to male self-confidence. The prevailing social norm dictates that men should refrain from displaying emotional vulnerability and should instead present themselves as stoic, robust, courageous, fierce, and physically formidable.

One form of masculinity that has gained considerable traction in the context of Korean popular culture is what is known as "soft masculinity." Soft masculinity is a male character who possesses a beautiful face but does not convey the impression of traditional maleness. Instead, he exhibits a soft side and displays gentle charisma towards women (Daulay, H., 2019). In the research, "Bae Yong Joon, Soft Masculinity and Japanese Fans," Sun Jung identifies three characteristics that define the soft masculine figure: tender charisma, politeness, and purity. Tender Charisma is a neutral male character, neither macho nor feminine. He is also weak and gentle, as well as polite in behavior. Politeness is a kind and wise male character. Finally, Purity is an innocent male character. In Sun Jung's research, she stated that Bae Yong Joon is innocent and patient in pursuing his first love (Astuti, 2016). In South Korea, the concept of "soft masculinity" is exemplified by the term *kkotminam*, a portmanteau of the Words "flower" and "pretty boy." This term emerged in response to the image of Japanese men who exhibited a feminized male appearance, reminiscent of a male character in comics. South Korean audiences have a particular perception of Japanese bishonen masculinity. Bishonen is a term used to describe a male with a thin face, long wavy hair, long legs, and a sweet smile. In South Korea, a similar term exists for men who are described as having a sweet and beautiful face that has a soft, innocent, and pure nature, this term is "*khotminam*". (Jung, 2011: 59 in Astuti, P. T., 2016:4).

Subsequently, researchers are inclined to contribute to the discourse on the subject of soft masculinity. In this context, the focus is on one of the prominent South Korean boy bands, Enhypen. Enhypen is an idol group under the Belift Lab agency, which is under Hybe Entertainment. The group consists of seven men who are relatively young. They were formed from a survival show by BigHit Entertainment called I-LAND. They debuted with the title track "Given-Taken" on November 30, 2020. One of Enhypen's music videos has been observed to elicit a particular response from fans, particularly male fans, in regard to the masculinity presented by Enhypen in the form of soft masculinity. In the music video "Bite Me" by Enhypen, the group presents a representation of a soft masculine character. This character is depicted with thick makeup that evokes a masculine beauty, dressed in a prominent manner with jewelry, and displaying a soft side through dancing with female dancers who embody the concept of soft masculinity. The background imagery employs a dark concept and a firm side, while the lyrics convey a profound love for a woman. The concept of a story about a vampire who is loyal to the end of their life for the person they love and pursues it to the end of the world illustrates the overall characteristics of masculinity that have shifted meaning to soft masculinity. The Bite Me music video represents one of the ongoing phenomena of the shifting meaning of masculinity (Octaningtyas, 2017).



Figure 1. The Members Dancing With Women Dancers

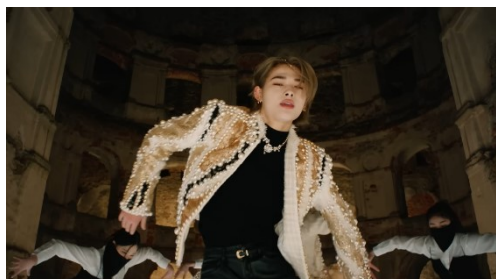


Figure 2. The Members Outfit

Previous research on masculinity has been conducted by Pratiwi Try Astuti, with the title "Acceptance of K-Pop Fans of the Soft Masculine Male Image of Boyband EXO in the Music Video

'Miracle in December' (2016)." The findings of the study corroborate the informants' observations regarding the soft masculine presentation exhibited by the EXO members. They are characterized by gentleness, kindness, and a tender love for their partners, while still maintaining a sense of strength and masculinity. Moreover, previous research conducted by Qonitah Az-zahra Fatoni, entitled "Masculinity Reception In K-Pop Boyband Music Videos (Audience Reception Analysis Study on the Music Videos of NCT U: BOSS and Make a Wish)", was published in 2022. The results indicate that the visual presentation of the subjects in the media will influence the audience's perception of the concept of masculinity. The informants concurred that the BOSS music video depicted all members of NCT U as exhibiting a masculine, assertive, and virile demeanor. In contrast, the results for the Make a Wish music video are more varied. Some informants agree that the NCT U members appear very masculine, while others disagree, stating that the members still display feminine traits.

Reception analysis is employed by researchers to ascertain how fans accept Enhypen's soft masculinity in the recently released "Bite Me" music video. This analysis is based on Stuart Hall's reception theory and groups message meanings into three categories: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. The informants are students from Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta University who indicate a preference for K-Pop, follow all Enhypen social media, and have viewed the Bite Me music video at least three times. The informants were selected from students at the Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta because the university is open to a variety of art and cultural forms, including K-Pop. The informants' backgrounds and experiences align with the research problem, allowing them to provide valuable insights.

2. Method

This type of research is descriptive qualitative to examine the fan reception on Enhypen Music Video "Bite Me" and use method of Encoding and Decoding. In this study, the encoding process (Enhypen in Music Video "Bite Me") will give a message to reveal a specific code verbally/non-verbally. Then the decoding (fan) process will receive the code embedded and will provide a response as an active audience. The active audience is a public who has the power to create meaning from a media he witnesses. Then the audience will study and interpret media messages with circumstances and personal social experiences. This is because the code given to be encoded with the decode will never be the same forever because the audience must have their respective perspective. Encode is a message created by the media text maker while decode is an audience perception of media text they see. The result is a proposition to the audience. From the proposal, the public will perform decoding of the media message with the possibility of three positions:

- 1) Dominant: Dominant is the position where the situation accepts the delivery of the message and coincidentally what is delivered by the message is preferred by the audience.
- 2) Negotiated: Negotiated is a position where a public receives the message but has not necessarily implemented it in his personal life or the public has its own opinion but does not mind with what is told by the media because the audience has considerations in embracing the message, may have refused but there is a certain reason.
- 3) Oppositional: The oppositional is a position in which the audience rejects the meaning of the message delivered. Public will do a rejection and then change the message and replace it with their own way of thinking about what the media communicates.

Subjects in this study are four informants, two men and two women who are students of Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta consisting of Arif, Diphda, Mulia, and Rara, indicated like K-Pop, followed all social media Enhypen and watched music video Bite Me at least 3 times. The election on the location of Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah University because Muhammadiyah is an Islamic organization that is not anti-culture, they do not shut themselves off from the development of art and the differences in the background of the experience of the informant becomes a deterrent of the selection of informants. The background of the informant's experience was once bullied for loving K-Pop (Arif, Diphda), having parents who oppose K-pop (Rara), loving k-pop but rejecting soft masculinity. (Mulia). Informants was chosen as an informant with such backgrounds because it could help solve the problems in this research because the soft masculinity shown by Enhypen has a pro-contradiction to the problem of masculinity, so it is considered representative as the subject of the

research. Informer with background differences according to their experience to see how fans respond to soft masculinity in accordance with the reception analysis by Stuart Hall.

The data collection techniques used in this study are: (a) The interview: Interview is conducted to give questions to the informant and will obtain a specific and detailed information through informal dialogue in order to dig into the perspective of the informan. (b) Documentation: Documentation is performed with the playback of the Music Video "Bite Me" by Enhypen as the documentation material that is analyzed by the informants. In data processing, informants as audiences perform encoding and decoding processes that interpret the process of receiving the production meaning of media messages through 3 positions namely: Dominant-Hegemonic, Negotiated, Oppositional of the data asked and media messages presented.

3. Result and Discussion

In accordance with the preferred reading of personal opinions by the four informants through the results of in-depth interviews, the encoding of informants stated that the attitudes of men regarding soft masculinity are certainly based on personal experience and form their own meaning. Informant Arif posited that men may be regarded as exhibiting Tender Charisma through their interactions with their surroundings. He offered the example of the members of Enhypen engaging with fans on the Weverse social media platform and greeting them in real time. Additionally, in the Enhypen music video "Bite Me," Informant Arif contended that the members of Enhypen exemplified the attitude of Tender Charisma through their portrayal of lyrics that showcased a charismatic demeanor. With regard to Purity, informant Arif posits that men are inherently truthful. In the Enhypen music video "Bite Me," he asserts that the attitude of Purity is exemplified by Enhypen members who are devoted and passionate in their romantic relationships. Finally, politeness is defined by informant Arif as the ability to communicate effectively and respectfully. In the Enhypen music video "Bite Me," this is demonstrated by the group's interactions with female dancers, which showcase a high level of mutual respect and chemistry. In conclusion, Informant Arif is situated within the Dominant Code position, as he aligns with Jung's conceptualization of Tender Charisma as a man who exhibits a robust character and a sensitive side. In the South Korean television drama *Winter Sonata*, played by Bae Yong Joon, the male characters are depicted as having a neutral appearance, neither overly masculine nor effeminate. He is described as gentle, charming, and polite. Purity can be defined as a man who is innocent and straightforward. In the drama *Winter Sonata*, played by Bae Yong Joon, the character of Yoon Jin represents the archetype of a young man facing his first love. Their relationship is depicted as a pure and innocent first love. The concept of purity is further explored in the context of sincerity and the nature of love itself. Politeness is defined as a man who exhibits good manners and is attentive to the opposite sex. In the drama *Winter Sonata*, Bae Yong Joon portrays a character who is polite and attentive to his partner. He exhibits commendable conduct and discretion when interacting with the opposite sex, which earns him the reputation of being polite in his dealings with those he holds dear. (Fauzi, E. P., 2021).

The Diphda informant posited that a man with tender charisma is one who desires interaction with others. The informant then proceeded to cite the example of Enhypen member Jake, who is known for consistently looking out for and safeguarding his fellow members. This, according to the informant, exemplifies the manifestation of Tender Charisma in the case of Diphda. In the music video "Bite Me," Diphda informant posits that the narrative of the video represents the tender charisma exhibited by the Enhypen members. In contrast, informant Diphda posits that an innocent man is not inherently virtuous, as he may be susceptible to exploitation. In the music video "Bite Me," Diphda asserts that the members are willing to sacrifice their lives for their lovers, despite the inherent risks, including death. With regard to politeness, informant Diphda posits that polite men are those who possess good speech and do not engage in discourteous behavior. In the music video "Bite Me," informant Diphda asserts that the politeness of the members is exemplified by their respectful interaction with female dancers, particularly through the act of holding their waists. In conclusion, informant Diphda occupies a position of negotiated compromise, as evidenced by the divergence of his views on the Tender Charisma and Purity aspects. In Jung's (2011) conceptualization, Tender Charisma is a trait characterized by assertive behavior coupled with a soft or neutral demeanor. Purity, on the other hand, represents the nature of men who are innocent and naive, leading them to reveal their authentic selves in their romantic relationships.

In her personal experience, Informant Mulia asserts that men who possess Tender Charisma are characterized by firmness and resilience. Conversely, in the music video "Bite Me," Informant Mulia posits that the members of Enhypen exemplify Tender Charisma through their portrayal of the lyrics, which depict a state of romantic infatuation. In contrast, Mulia's informant asserts that a man with purity is inherently untrustworthy. She posits that a man with an innocent demeanor is challenging to collaborate with and prone to taking sides. In the music video "Bite Me," Mulia's informant suggests that the members of Enhypen exemplify purity through their lyrics, portraying them as willing to do anything for the woman they love. With regard to politeness, Mulia's informant asserts that a man with a polite attitude is one who treats others with consideration and respect. In the music video "Bite Me," Mulia's informant observes that the members demonstrate politeness when they dance with female dancers. In conclusion, Mulia's informant occupies an oppositional position with regard to the concept of soft masculinity as postulated by Jung. This is evidenced by the informant's divergent views on the presence of men with tender charisma, purity, and politeness, both in the real world and in the context of the music video "Bite Me."

In her personal experience, Informant Rara asserts that men who exhibit Tender Charisma are inclined to interact with the opposite sex. In the Music Video "Bite Me," Informant Rara posits that the members of Enhypen exemplified Tender Charisma through their portrayal of falling in love with someone they desire. In terms of purity, informant Rara posits that an innocent man is one who desires to collaborate or interact within a group setting. In the music video "Bite Me," she asserts that the members exemplify this quality in their portrayal of the lyrics, as if they are exerting their utmost efforts to be with their partner. With regard to politeness, informant Rara's opinion is that a man who wishes to embrace others is a man who is polite. In the music video "Bite Me," informant Rara argues that the members of Enhypen demonstrate their politeness when they dance with female dancers. In conclusion, Informant Rara is the dominant code, as the majority of her personal descriptors align with Jung's perspective on the soft masculinity aspect of music video "Bite Me," particularly in regard to men who possess tender charisma, purity, and politeness.

Table 1. The Informant Position Code

3 Characteristic of Soft Masculinity	Tender Charisma	Purity	Politeness	Position Code
Arif	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant Code
Diphda	Negotiated	Negotiated	Dominant	Negotiated Code
Mulia	Oppositional	Oppositional	Oppositional	Oppositional Code
Rara	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant Code

The results of the questions that have been asked in the interview session to the four informants, the researcher found that there are fans who accept very well the soft masculinity displayed by Enhypen members in the Music Video "Bite Me" and there are also those who reject it because of the reasons behind their social environment, they have not been able to accept several things in the soft masculinity inherent in men, especially regarding the use of make-up to support appearance, neutral appearance is better for them. The traits contained in soft masculinity are not feminine traits but natural traits of a man that will arise when a man is dealing with the opposite sex. This has been stated and agreed by the informants as the table data that has been presented.

4. Conclusion

This research was conducted to find out and see how K-Pop fans' acceptance of soft masculinity displayed by Enhypen in the Music Video "Bite Me". Based on the data that has been obtained, the researcher will categorize the informants' acceptance of soft masculinity based on the characteristics of soft masculinity, namely Tender Charisma, Purity, and Politeness, then the informants' acceptance will be categorized in the encoding-decoding paradigm process, namely dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. In the interviews regarding the informants' perspectives on the 3 sides of Soft Masculinity, namely Tender Charisma, Purity and Politeness, the informants produced different opinions. In accordance with the personal experience of the informants, the results of interviews regarding the reasons for attracting informants in the Music Video "Bite Me" found various results in accordance with individual views, namely Arif and Diphda argued that Soft Masculinity is a natural trait of men and they give opinions as men themselves, Informant Rara also has the same opinion in accordance with what is expressed by Jung (2011) regarding Soft Masculinity while Informant Mulia has his own point of view regarding men both in personal life and about K-Pop, especially in the Music Video "Bite Me". This shows that the way fans perceive boy band performances must be different, which is certainly motivated by their own personal experiences so that they have their own arguments. From the results of this study it can be concluded that Soft Masculinity is not a form of male traits that look like women, but men who have a soft character towards the opposite sex, men who are polite and caring and innocent, innocent when dealing with someone they love. The appearance displayed by all Enhypen members in the Bite Me Music Video includes all the characteristics of Soft Masculinity and indirectly becomes one of the constructions of shifting meanings about masculinity where men must look muscular, big, brown skin and rational. Soft Masculinity is the softer side of men in treating the opposite sex and shifting views of men who look tall, white, clean, fragrant, beautiful faces can also attract audiences, especially K-Pop fans.

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