

Unveiling Female Agency in *K-pop Demon Hunters*: A Postfeminist Perspective

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Abstract: *This study examines the construction of female agency in K-Pop Demon Hunters through a postfeminist perspective, focusing on the character of Rumi as she negotiates identity amid idol culture, familial expectations, and interpersonal relationships. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of voice and representation, the study employs thematic analysis to examine key scenes depicting Rumi's silence, speech, and bodily performances. The findings demonstrate that Rumi's identity is not autonomous but continually produced through repeated performances regulated by dominant social discourses. Her constrained voice reflects structural limitations, while her gradual transformation illustrates agency as a negotiated process rather than an inherent quality. From a postfeminist perspective, the study reveals the paradox of empowerment, in which Rumi appears confident and capable yet remains disciplined by expectations of perfection, emotional restraint, and self-control. These findings contribute to understanding the complex representation of female agency in contemporary popular culture.*

PENDAHULUAN

In contemporary popular culture, the South Korean entertainment industry has emerged as a global force that not only produces cultural content but also shapes representations of identity, particularly for women. Through the highly structured idol system, female figure are often portrayed as talented, successful, and empowered individuals. However, these representations are simultaneously governed by strict expectations of perfection, emotional control, and self-discipline. This condition reflects a contradiction in the portrayal of women, where they appear to possess agency and autonomy while remaining constrained by dominant social and cultural norms. Such a paradox makes the concept of female agency an important subject of analysis, as it reveals that agency is not always freely exercised but often negotiated within existing power structures.

The film K-Pop Demon Hunters offers a compelling representation of this issue through the character of Rumi, who embodies a dual identity as both an idol and a demon hunter. As an idol, Rumi is required to maintain a flawless public image, while as a demon hunter, she carries a moral responsibility to protect others. These dual roles place her under constant pressure from multiple sources, including her family, her manager, and her peers. At the same time, Rumi experiences internal conflict, particularly as she conceals her true condition and suppresses her emotions in

order to meet these expectations. This situation illustrates that her identity is not naturally formed but constructed through the interaction between external demands and internal struggle.

The primary problem addressed in this study is how female agency is constructed and represented within a context of complex social and cultural pressures. While previous studies have examined female representation in popular media or gender dynamics within K-pop culture, many of them tend to focus on empowerment as a fixed outcome rather than as a dynamic process. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how agency is negotiated through internal conflict and performative expression, especially by integrating postfeminist perspectives with theories of performativity and voice. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how female agency is not only represented but also constructed through processes of constraint, negotiation, and transformation in K-Pop Demon Hunters.

To address this issue, this study employs a qualitative approach using textual analysis of the film *K-Pop Demon Hunters*. The analysis focuses on selected scenes that highlight Rumi's performative expressions, including silence, speech, and bodily behavior, as representations of her internal conflict. By examining these elements, the study aims to interpret how meaning is constructed through both verbal and nonverbal expressions, and how these expressions relate to the broader social expectations imposed on the character. Theoretically, this study draws on postfeminist perspectives, which emphasize the coexistence of empowerment and regulation in media representations of women (Gill, 2007). In addition, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990) is used to explain how identity is constructed through repeated acts shaped by social norms. Meanwhile, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of voice and silence (1988) is applied to examine the limitations placed on a subject's ability to articulate their experiences within dominant discourse. By combining these theoretical frameworks, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how female agency is shaped within conditions of constraint and expectation.

Based on this framework, the objectives of this study are to reveal how external social expectations and dominant discourses shape Rumi's identity and behavior, and to analyze how her internal conflict, as expressed through performative actions, contributes to the development of her female agency. Rather than treating agency as a fixed attribute, this study conceptualizes it as a process that emerges through negotiation and transformation. This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches literary and cultural studies by integrating postfeminist perspectives with performativity and voice theories in the analysis of popular media. Practically, it offers insights into how female representation in contemporary culture often involves complex negotiations between autonomy and constraint. By highlighting these dynamics, the study encourages a more critical understanding of how women's identities and agency are constructed in popular cultural narrative.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a feminist approach using textual analysis to examine the construction of female agency in *K-Pop Demon Hunters*. A feminist approach is considered appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting meanings, representations, and character development, which cannot be measured quantitatively but require in-depth analysis of narrative, dialogue, and visual elements. The research is designed to explore how external expectations and internal conflict shape the identity and agency of the main character, Rumi, within the context of contemporary popular culture.

The subject of this study is the animated film *K-Pop Demon Hunters* (2025), which serves as the primary data source. The unit of analysis consists of selected scenes that involve the character

Rumi, particularly those that depict external pressures, internal conflict, and moments of transformation. Rather than using a population and sample in a statistical sense, this study applies purposive sampling by selecting scenes that are most relevant to the research objectives. These include scenes that highlight Rumi's interactions with her family, manager, and peers, as well as scenes that illustrate her performative expressions, such as silence, speech, and bodily behavior.

The data collection technique is conducted through several systematic steps. First, the film is watched repeatedly to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative and character development. Second, relevant scenes are identified and selected based on their connection to the research questions. Third, important dialogues, visual expressions, and contextual elements are transcribed and documented. These data are then categorized according to themes, including external expectations, internal conflict, and forms of performative expression. As the primary instrument of the study, the researcher functions as the main analytical tool, supported by note-taking and documentation techniques to ensure accuracy and consistency in data collection.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Rumi's External Pressure

This section analyzes how external social expectations and dominant discourses shape Rumi's identity and behavior in *K-Pop Demon Hunters*. As a central character positioned within multiple social environments, Rumi is subjected to various forms of pressure that influence how she acts, speaks, and presents herself. These pressures do not originate from a single source but emerge through different domains, including familial expectations, institutional demands within idol culture, and interpersonal relationships with her peers. By examining these layers of influence, this section demonstrates that Rumi's identity is not independently formed but constructed through continuous interaction with external norms and expectations.

1. Family's Expectation

One of the most significant external forces shaping Rumi's identity in *K-Pop Demon Hunters* emerges from her familial relationship, particularly through the expectations expressed by her adoptive mother. In a key scene, her adoptive mother emphasizes that Rumi and her group are "chosen" to become heroes, framing their role not as a matter of personal choice but as a predetermined responsibility. "A new trio of Hunters is chosen to fulfill our ultimate duty. And now, that duty falls to you."

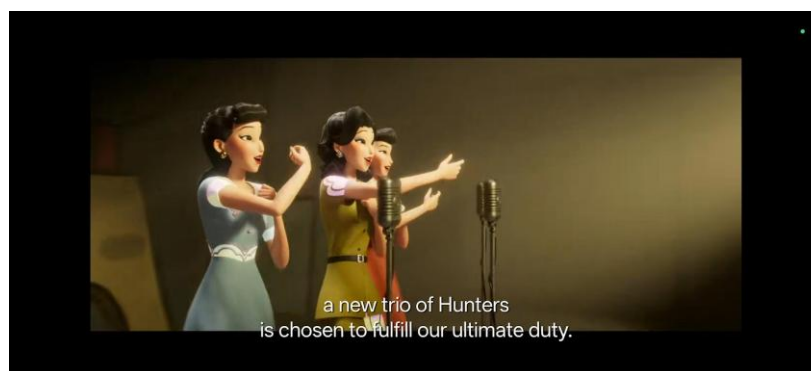


Figure 1. *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, 2025, timecode: 00:01:50–00:02:20.

This statement carries a strong ideological weight, as it positions heroism as an obligation that must be fulfilled regardless of individual emotional conditions or personal struggles. The use

of the word “chosen” implies a form of destiny or moral duty, which removes space for hesitation, refusal, or vulnerability. As a result, Rumi is not recognized as an individual with complex emotions, but rather as a subject expected to embody an idealized role.



Figure 2. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, timecode: 00:18:20–00:18:28.

In one scene, when Rumi attempts to express concern about her condition and the pattern related to her mark, she is interrupted by her friend Celine, who responds, “Nothing’s can change until your patters are gone”. This statement, although not explicitly confrontational, functions as a form of discouragement that minimizes Rumi’s attempt to open up about her struggle. Instead of creating space for discussion, the response redirects the focus toward an ideal condition in which the problem is already resolved.

This expectation plays a crucial role in shaping Rumi’s behavior and self-perception. Instead of acting based on her own feelings, Rumi is compelled to align herself with the identity imposed upon her. The pressure to fulfill the role of a “true hero” leads her to suppress doubt, fear, and insecurity, as these emotions are incompatible with the heroic image constructed by her family.

Identity is not a fixed or inherent essence but is constructed through repeated acts performed under the pressure of social norms (Butler, 1990). In this context, Rumi’s role as a hero can be understood as a performative identity that she must repeatedly enact. The expectation from her sister functions as a regulatory norm, guiding how Rumi should behave and what she should represent. By continuously performing strength, courage, and emotional stability, Rumi reproduces the image of the “ideal hero,” even when this performance does not align with her internal state. Therefore, her identity is not something she naturally possesses, but something she is compelled to perform in response to external expectations.

The concept of voice and representation further illuminates the constraints imposed on Rumi within this familial context. Marginalized subjects are often denied the ability to fully articulate their own experiences, as their voices are shaped or overwritten by dominant discourses (Spivak, 1988). In this scene, Rumi’s sister effectively speaks for her by defining what Rumi is supposed to be—a chosen hero—without acknowledging her internal conflict. This dynamic limits Rumi’s capacity to express doubt or resistance, as doing so would contradict the role assigned to her. Her silence or compliance, therefore, should not be interpreted as agreement, but rather as an indication of the structural limitations placed on her voice.

This situation reflects a broader cultural contradiction in the representation of female empowerment. On the surface, Rumi is positioned as a strong and capable figure, entrusted with the responsibility of protecting others. However, this empowerment is accompanied by an expectation of self-regulation, emotional control, and unwavering commitment to her role. She is expected to be strong without expressing vulnerability, to fulfill her duty without questioning it,

and to maintain composure regardless of her internal struggles. This aligns with postfeminist discourse, which often presents women as empowered individuals while simultaneously subjecting them to strict standards of behavior and self-discipline (Gill, 2007). Therefore, Rumi's position as a "chosen hero" does not grant her full agency, but instead situates her within a framework where her identity is continuously shaped and constrained by external expectations.

2. Agency Expectation

Another significant form of external pressure that shapes Rumi's identity and behavior emerge from the expectations imposed by the entertainment industry, particularly through her agency. In a crucial scene, when Rumi is unable to perform due to her mark becoming stronger, the manager reacts with confusion and concern primarily directed toward the performance itself rather than Rumi's condition. Instead of asking about her well-being, the manager emphasizes the consequences of her absence, such as audience dissatisfaction and potential public protest.



Figure 3. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, timecode: 00:16:45–00:16:55.



Figure 4. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, timecode: 00:34:50–00:35:00.

This moment highlights how Rumi is positioned not as an individual with physical and emotional limitations, but as a performer whose value is measured by her ability to meet public expectations. The manager's reaction reflects the logic of idol culture, where maintaining a flawless public image and consistent performance is prioritized above personal well-being. Rumi's inability to perform is treated as a disruption to the system rather than a legitimate personal struggle. As a result, she is implicitly pressured to suppress her condition and continue fulfilling her role. This demonstrates that her behavior is shaped by institutional expectations that demand discipline, control, and reliability. The absence of concern for her condition suggests that her identity is reduced to her function as an idol, reinforcing the idea that she must continuously meet external

standards regardless of her internal state.

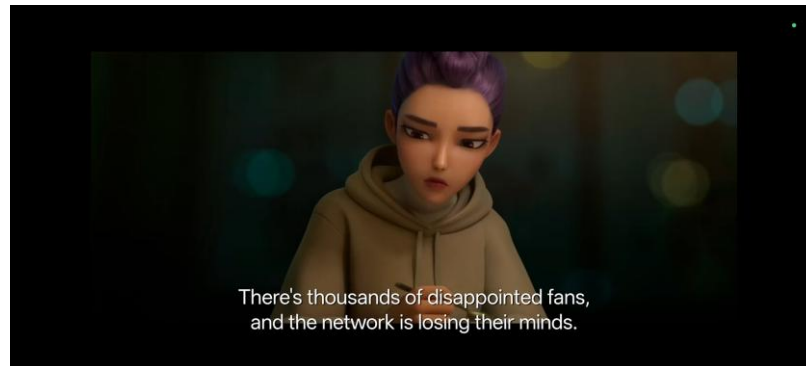


Figure 5. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, timecode: 00:19:53–00:19:57.

This situation illustrates how Rumi's identity is constructed through repeated acts that align with socially regulated norms (Butler, 1990). The manager's expectations function as a regulatory force that dictates how Rumi should behave, particularly in maintaining composure and professionalism even under distress. Rumi is expected to perform not only as an entertainer but also as an idealized feminine figure who embodies control, resilience, and emotional restraint. Her repeated compliance with these expectations reinforces the performative nature of her identity, as she must continuously enact a version of herself that conforms to industry standards.

Rumi's condition—her inability to perform due to the intensification of her mark—is not given space to be expressed or acknowledged. Instead, the manager's focus on public reaction effectively silences Rumi's personal experience, as her voice is overshadowed by the demands of the industry. Her silence in this context does not indicate acceptance but rather reflects the structural limitations that prevent her from prioritizing her own needs over institutional expectations.

The manager's response exemplifies the contradiction between empowerment and regulation in contemporary media culture. Rumi is presented as a successful and capable idol, suggesting a form of empowerment and achievement. However, this empowerment is conditional upon her ability to maintain perfection, emotional control, and uninterrupted productivity. Postfeminist media culture often frames women as autonomous and self-managing subjects while simultaneously imposing strict standards of self-regulation (Gill, 2007). In this case, Rumi is expected to manage her own limitations privately while continuing to perform publicly, reinforcing the idea that her value lies in her ability to sustain an ideal image.

Therefore, the manager's reaction to Rumi's inability to perform reveals how institutional pressures within idol culture actively shape and constrain her identity. Rather than being recognized as an individual with agency over her own body and condition, Rumi is positioned within a system that prioritizes performance, audience satisfaction, and public perception. This dynamic can be understood as the enforcement of repeated behaviors aligned with normative expectations. Combined with the postfeminist emphasis on self-regulated empowerment, this scene demonstrates that Rumi's identity is continuously constructed and controlled by external forces that limit her ability to act freely.

3. Friend's Expectation

In addition to familial and institutional expectations, Rumi's identity is also shaped by peer pressure from her close friends, which operates through emotional bonds and shared responsibility.

In one scene, after noticing Rumi's interaction with Jinu, her friend reminds her that they have come too far to make any mistakes, emphasizing the importance of maintaining their collective image and mission.



Figure 6. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, timecode: 00:48:13–00:48:20.



Figure 7. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, timecode: 00:53:55–00:53:58.

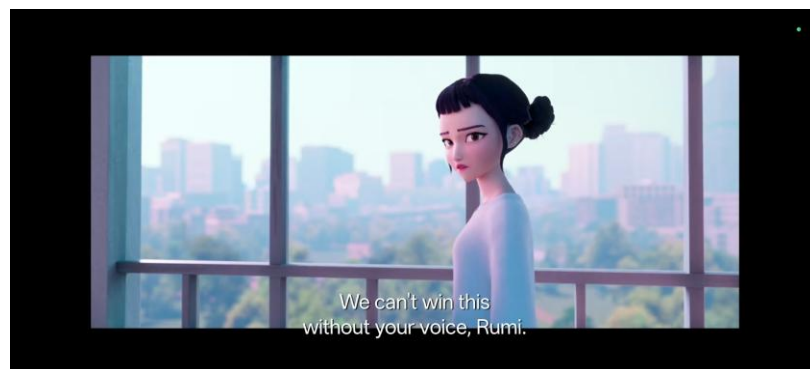


Figure 8. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, timecode: 00:55:10–00:55:15.

This statement reflects a form of social regulation that is less overtly authoritative than that of the manager or family, yet equally influential in shaping Rumi's behavior. Rather than directly controlling her, her friend appeals to loyalty, trust, and shared sacrifice, which creates an internalized pressure for Rumi to conform.

This moment illustrates how Rumi's actions are influenced not only by external authority but also by interpersonal expectations that she values deeply. The reminder that they “cannot afford to make mistakes” frames deviation—such as forming a personal connection with Jinu—as a potential

threat to the group's success and stability. As a result, Rumi is positioned within a moral framework where her individual desires must be subordinated to collective responsibility. This reinforces her tendency to suppress personal feelings and maintain a controlled, disciplined persona. Her decision to conceal her true emotions and continue presenting herself as composed suggests that her identity is shaped by the need to preserve trust and avoid disappointing those around her.

This dynamic can be understood as part of the performative construction of identity, where social norms are reinforced through repeated interactions (Butler, 1990). Unlike formal institutional rules, peer expectations operate through internalization, meaning that Rumi adopts and reproduces these expectations as part of her own behavior. Her performance of responsibility, loyalty, and emotional restraint is therefore not only imposed externally but also sustained through her relationships. This demonstrates that performativity is not limited to public or institutional spaces but is also embedded in intimate social contexts.

Although her friends do not explicitly silence her, their emphasis on responsibility and trust creates a context in which open expression becomes difficult. Rumi's silence about her personal struggles and her relationship with Jinu indicates that she prioritizes group harmony over self-expression. In this sense, her voice is not entirely absent but is strategically withheld due to the pressure to conform to shared expectations. This highlights how silencing can occur not only through direct oppression but also through relational dynamics that discourage deviation.

This scene further demonstrates the internalization of discipline and self-regulation characteristic of contemporary media representations of women. Postfeminist culture often constructs women as self-managing subjects who are responsible for maintaining their own success, relationships, and image. In this context, Rumi is expected to regulate her own behavior to uphold the group's reputation and cohesion. The pressure from her friend does not enforce control externally but encourages Rumi to monitor and adjust herself internally. This reflects a shift from external control to internalized self-surveillance, where Rumi becomes responsible for ensuring that she does not deviate from expected norms.

Therefore, the expectations imposed by Rumi's friends contribute significantly to the construction of her identity as a disciplined and self-regulating subject. Through emotional appeals to trust and shared responsibility, her peers reinforce norms that limit her ability to act freely according to her own desires. Butler's concept of performativity explains how these expectations are reproduced through repeated behavior, while Spivak's framework highlights the subtle constraints on Rumi's voice within relational contexts. Combined with the postfeminist emphasis on self-regulation, this scene demonstrates that Rumi's identity is shaped not only by overt authority but also by internalized social expectations that influence her choices and behavior.

Identity Confusion

Identity confusion in *K-pop Demon Hunters* can be understood as a manifestation of postfeminist subjectivity, in which identity is not fixed but continuously constructed through the negotiation between autonomy and external expectations. Within postfeminist discourse, women are positioned as active agents who are free to shape their identities; however, this freedom is often embedded within regulatory frameworks that dictate acceptable forms of femininity. Postfeminist culture constructs women as autonomous subjects while simultaneously shaping their choices through normative ideals (Gill, 2007). This contradiction produces instability in identity formation, where the self becomes fragmented between authenticity and performance.

This condition is clearly reflected in Celine's statement, "When the honmoon is sealed, all demons will be gone from this world. And so will your patterns." This line symbolically suggests that achieving an ideal state requires the elimination of "patterns," which can be interpreted as

aspects of individuality, imperfection, or authentic identity. Rather than representing a purely external threat, this moment reveals how identity is regulated through processes of refinement and control. In a postfeminist context, such transformation is often framed as a form of self-improvement, where women are encouraged to modify themselves in order to align with dominant standards of beauty, behavior, and success.



Figure 9. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, 00:17:55–00:18:03.

Neoliberal feminism constructs women as responsible for continuously working on themselves, emphasizing self-surveillance and self-discipline as markers of empowerment (Rottenberg, 2014). In this sense, the removal of Rumi's "patterns" reflects the expectation that she must refine herself to become an ideal subject, even if it means erasing parts of her identity. Contemporary media culture celebrates empowerment while simultaneously narrowing the range of acceptable identities, thereby limiting genuine self-expression (Banet-Weiser, 2021). This suggests that what appears as transformation is, in fact, a process of normalization.

Postfeminism operates as a transnational discourse that standardizes femininity across cultural contexts, encouraging women to embody globally recognizable ideals (Dosekun, 2015). Within the K-pop industry, this is particularly evident in the construction of idols, whose identities are carefully curated to meet market expectations. As such, the notion that Rumi must lose her "patterns" reflects the pressure to conform to a homogenized version of femininity that prioritizes perfection over authenticity. Postfeminist sensibility emphasizes choice and individuality while simultaneously reinforcing disciplinary norms that regulate women's bodies and identities (Gill, 2016).

Postfeminist subjectivity is characterized by a continuous process of self-monitoring, in which women internalize external expectations and regulate themselves accordingly (Gill and Scharff, 2011). This internalization makes power less visible, as control is exercised not through direct coercion but through the individual's desire to improve herself. Therefore, Celine's statement can be understood as a representation of this internalized regulation, where the transformation of the self is framed as necessary and desirable, even though it results in the loss of identity.

Thus, identity confusion in this context does not emerge as a psychological condition, but as a structural and cultural phenomenon shaped by postfeminist discourse. The demand to eliminate "patterns" illustrates the tension between individuality and conformity, revealing how the construction of female identity is inherently unstable. Women are encouraged to become the best version of themselves, yet this "best version" is already predefined by societal expectations. As a result, identity becomes fragmented, caught between the desire for authenticity and the pressure to conform, ultimately reflecting the contradictory nature of postfeminist identity construction.

In addition to the pressure to transform and eliminate aspects of the self, identity confusion

is further intensified through the restriction of voice, as reflected in Rumi's statement, "How am I supposed to fix the world, fix me, when I don't have my voice?" This line highlights a critical paradox within postfeminist discourse: while women are constructed as empowered subjects capable of self-determination, their ability to express and define themselves remains constrained. In this context, voice becomes central to identity formation, as it represents the capacity to articulate one's subjectivity. The absence of voice, therefore, signifies not only a loss of expression but also a disruption in the construction of the self.



Figure 10. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, timecode: 00:19:00–00:19:11.

This condition reflects the broader cultural expectation that women must continuously work on themselves while simultaneously navigating structural limitations. Media representations often frame women as responsible for solving both personal and social problems, reinforcing the idea that self-transformation is an individual obligation (Orgad, 2009). This is clearly reflected in Rumi's question, where she internalizes the responsibility to "fix" both the world and herself. However, this expectation becomes contradictory when she lacks the fundamental means—her voice—to enact such change, revealing the limits of her agency.

Furthermore, contemporary postfeminist culture promotes a "confidence culture," in which women are encouraged to be self-assured, resilient, and expressive, yet are rarely given the structural freedom to fully embody these ideals (Gill et al, 2018). In Rumi's case, the demand for empowerment is present, but the conditions necessary for its realization are absent. This creates a fragmented subjectivity, where she is positioned as both responsible and powerless at the same time.

Similarly, postfeminist subjectivity is deeply rooted in self-regulation and self-surveillance, where women are expected to continuously monitor and adjust themselves according to dominant norms (Elias et al, 2017). The loss of voice in this context can be interpreted as a form of regulation, in which certain expressions of identity are silenced in favor of more acceptable or marketable forms. This is particularly relevant within the K-pop industry, where idols are often required to maintain a controlled public image, limiting their ability to express authentic emotions or identities.

Moreover, visibility and voice in contemporary media are closely tied to marketability, meaning that not all voices are equally valued or heard (Banet-Weiser, 2018). This suggests that Rumi's inability to "have a voice" may also reflect the selective nature of representation, where only certain forms of femininity are amplified, while others are suppressed. As a result, her identity becomes unstable, shaped not by her own desires, but by the boundaries imposed upon her expression.

Thus, Rumi's experience illustrates that identity confusion within *K-pop Demon Hunters* is not merely an internal struggle, but a condition produced by postfeminist contradictions. She is

expected to be both self-determining and self-correcting yet is denied the agency necessary to fulfill these expectations. This reveals that postfeminist empowerment is inherently limited, as it relies on the appearance of freedom while maintaining underlying structures of control. Consequently, identity emerges as fragmented and unstable, reflecting the ongoing negotiation between voice and silence, autonomy and constraint.

Development Of Female Agency

Female agency in *K-pop Demon Hunters* is not presented as an immediate or absolute form of empowerment, but rather as a gradual process that emerges from within the constraints of postfeminist expectations. In postfeminist discourse, agency is often framed as the ability to make choices and assert individuality; however, such choices are frequently shaped by pre-existing norms that define what is considered acceptable femininity. As a result, agency becomes a negotiated process rather than a fully autonomous act.



Figure 11. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, timecode: 00:15:29–00:16:00.

This is evident in Rumi's declaration, "No more hiding, I'll be shining," which marks an initial step toward reclaiming her sense of self. The phrase "no more hiding" suggests a rejection of suppression, while "shining" indicates a desire for visibility and recognition. At first glance, this moment appears to reflect empowerment, as Rumi begins to assert her presence and identity. However, within a postfeminist framework, this form of agency can be understood as what scholars describe as "regulated empowerment," where expressions of confidence and self-realization remain aligned with socially acceptable ideals.

Postfeminist media culture promotes a shift from objectification to subjectification, where women are encouraged to actively participate in their own visibility and self-presentation (Gill, 2007). In this sense, Rumi's decision to "shine" reflects her movement toward subjectivity; however, it also suggests that her visibility must still conform to desirable norms. Similarly, contemporary media encourages women to cultivate confidence and positivity as forms of agency, even when structural limitations remain unchanged (Gill et al, 2018). This aligns with Rumi's belief that she can overcome her struggles "smoothly" and according to plan, reflecting an internalization of the expectation that success is achievable through self-belief alone.

Furthermore, neoliberal feminism as emphasizing individual responsibility, where women are expected to solve their own problems through self-management and resilience (Rottenberg, 2014). Rumi's growing confidence can thus be interpreted as part of this neoliberal logic, where agency is framed as the ability to control one's circumstances, even when those circumstances are shaped by external pressures. This suggests that her sense of agency is not entirely free, but rather embedded within a system that values self-discipline and personal optimization.

In addition, postfeminist culture celebrates empowerment while simultaneously constraining

it, producing a form of agency that is visible but limited (Banet-Weiser et al., 2021). Rumi's transformation reflects this tension, as her emerging confidence signals empowerment, yet remains tied to the expectation that she must ultimately become an ideal version of herself. Young women's agency in postfeminist contexts is often characterized by self-surveillance and the continuous negotiation of identity within normative boundaries (Scharff, 2016)

Therefore, Rumi's statement represents not the culmination of agency, but its beginning—a moment of transition from silence to expression. Her belief that she can overcome her struggles without obstacles reflects the postfeminist ideal of seamless self-transformation, where success is imagined as a result of individual effort rather than structural change. However, this optimism also reveals the limitations of her agency, as it remains shaped by expectations that define how she should “shine.” Thus, female agency in *K-pop Demon Hunters* is constructed as both empowering and restrictive, illustrating the complex and contradictory nature of postfeminist subjectivity.



Figure 12. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, timecode: 00:51:12–00:51:18.

Rumi's statement, “that choice belongs to you,” represents a significant articulation of female agency within a postfeminist framework. Although the line is directed toward Jinu, it can also be interpreted as a form of internalized dialogue, reflecting Rumi's own negotiation of autonomy and self-determination. In postfeminist discourse, the concept of “choice” is central to the construction of female subjectivity, where women are positioned as active agents responsible for shaping their own lives. However, this emphasis on choice is often embedded within cultural norms that subtly guide and limit what kinds of choices are considered acceptable.

This interpretation is supported by previous studies that examine the role of choice in postfeminist culture. For instance, postfeminist media culture constructs women as “choosing subjects,” emphasizing autonomy while simultaneously shaping their decisions through normative expectations (Gill, 2007). In this context, Rumi's statement reflects her attempt to internalize this discourse, positioning herself—and others—as responsible for their own paths. Feminism reframes agency as individual responsibility, where women are expected to take control of their circumstances regardless of structural limitations (Rottenberg, 2014). This aligns with Rumi's emphasis on choice, suggesting that agency is understood as the ability to decide, even when those decisions are constrained.

Furthermore, contemporary postfeminist culture celebrates empowerment through visibility and self-expression yet often limits the conditions under which such empowerment can be exercised (Banet-Weiser et al., 2021). This indicates that while Rumi's statement appears empowering, it also reflects a broader system in which agency is shaped by external expectations. In addition, the “confidence culture” encourages women to believe in their capacity to make the right choices, reinforcing the idea that success and self-realization depend on individual mindset

(Gill et al, 2018). Rumi's assertion that "the choice belongs to you" can therefore be seen as part of this internalized belief system, where agency is framed as a matter of personal conviction.

Thus, Rumi's statement illustrates that female agency in *K-pop Demon Hunters* is not merely about having freedom but about adopting the language of choice as a way of navigating constraints. Her words signify both empowerment and limitation, revealing that agency operates as a form of self-regulation shaped by postfeminist ideals. Rather than representing complete autonomy, this moment reflects the complexity of postfeminist agency, where the ability to choose is emphasized, even as the range of possible choices remains structured by broader cultural forces.

Rumi's female agency ultimately emerges through a series of critical decisions that transform her from a subject constrained by external expectations into one who actively negotiates and redefines her identity. A significant turning point occurs when Rumi chooses to collaborate with Jinu, despite his position as an enemy, as reflected in the lyric "We could be free, free".



Figure 13. *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, 2025, timecode: 00:59:01–00:59:08.

This moment signifies her willingness to take a risk and act beyond imposed boundaries, demonstrating a shift from hesitation to decisive action. Her choice to trust Jinu reflects not only a strategic decision but also an internal transformation, as she begins to trust herself and her judgment. As a result, her voice—previously constrained by fear and self-doubt—returns, symbolizing the recovery of her expressive capacity. This aligns with Judith Butler's notion that agency emerges through the reconfiguration of performative acts, where repetition can lead to transformation rather than mere reproduction of norms (Butler, 1990).



Figure 14. *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, 2025, timecode: 01:14:16–01:14:30.

However, this process of agency is not linear. The narrative complicates Rumi's development when Jinu ultimately chooses to align with Gwi-Ma, leading to the failure of their plan and Rumi's transformation into a demon. This moment intensifies her internal conflict, as she is forced to confront her identity in its most vulnerable and stigmatized form. When she approaches Celine, hoping for acceptance, she is met with hesitation, as Celine responds, "I try to accept you".

This statement implies conditional acceptance and underlying fear, revealing that Rumi is not fully recognized as she truly is. In response, Rumi asserts, "This is what I am", marking a crucial moment of self-recognition. This declaration reflects her refusal to continue concealing her identity, signaling a shift toward authenticity. From the perspective of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), this moment can be interpreted as an attempt to reclaim voice within a structure that has historically constrained it, even if that voice is only partially acknowledged.

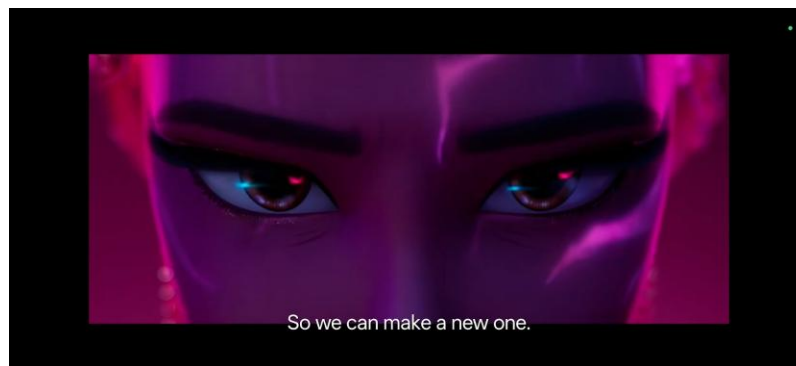


Figure 15. *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, 2025, timecode: 01:18:17.

Rumi's agency becomes more evident in her subsequent decision to confront Gwi-Ma (make a new Honmoon to replace the broken one) and take responsibility for protecting the world, despite her transformed state. Rather than rejecting her identity as a half-demon, she embraces it, demonstrating what scholars describe as a form of "negotiated agency," where individuals operate within constraints while redefining their position (Mahmood, 2005).



Figure 16. *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, 2025, timecode: 01:19:12–01:19:17.

Her determination is further expressed through her final song, which includes the line "This is what it sounds like" and "All the beauty in a broken glass". These lyrics symbolize her acceptance of imperfection and her willingness to reveal her true self without concealment. By transforming her vulnerability into strength, Rumi challenges dominant ideals of perfection and redefines what it means to be powerful. This resonates with postfeminist discourse, where empowerment is often linked to self-awareness and self-transformation, albeit within existing structures of regulation

(Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009).



Figure 17. K-Pop Demon Hunters, 2025, 01:20:15–01:20:27.

Furthermore, Rumi's actions illustrate that agency is not the absence of constraint but the ability to act meaningfully within it. Her decision to risk failure, trust herself, and embrace her identity reflects what Anthony Giddens (1991) describes as reflexive self-identity, where individuals actively construct and reconstruct their sense of self. Similarly, postfeminist subjects are expected to continuously manage and redefine themselves (Gill, 2007). In this sense, Rumi's final victory is not merely the result of physical power, but of her ability to reconcile her internal conflict and assert her identity despite external judgment. Her acceptance by her friends, following her honest self-expression, further reinforces that authenticity and vulnerability can serve as foundations for agency.

Therefore, Rumi's development of female agency is characterized by a process of transformation that involves risk, self-acceptance, and the redefinition of identity. Through her decisions, speech, and actions, she moves from concealment and self-doubt toward a more authentic and self-determined position. Drawing on Butler's concept of performativity and Spivak's notion of constrained voice, this study demonstrates that Rumi's agency is not innate but emerges through continuous negotiation between constraint and self-definition. Her journey ultimately illustrates that embracing one's fragmented or "broken" self can become a powerful source of agency, challenge dominant expectations and enabling new forms of empowerment.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the construction of female agency in *K-Pop Demon Hunters* through the character of Rumi, focusing on the interaction between external expectations and internal conflict. The findings demonstrate that Rumi's identity is not formed autonomously but is shaped by multiple layers of social pressure, including familial expectations, institutional demands within idol culture, and interpersonal relationships with her peers. These external forces construct her behavior and regulate how she presents herself, positioning her within a framework that prioritizes performance, discipline, and emotional control. At the same time, Rumi's internal conflict is revealed through her performative expressions, particularly through silence, controlled speech, and bodily behavior. Her silence reflects the suppression of her true condition, her speech demonstrates the maintenance of a socially acceptable persona, and her bodily performance exposes the tension between her internal state and external expectations. These expressions indicate that her struggle is not only personal but also shaped by broader social and cultural discourses that limit her ability to fully articulate herself.

Importantly, the study finds that Rumi's female agency emerges as a gradual and negotiated process rather than a fixed or inherent quality. Through the accumulation of internal conflict, Rumi

begins to reconfigure her identity and shift from passive compliance toward more active self-definition. This transformation can be understood as a re-signification of repeated acts, also highlights the partial recovery of voice within structural constraints. Rumi's agency reflects a form of empowerment that is achieved through self-regulation and adaptation rather than complete liberation from external control. In conclusion, this study argues that female agency in *K-Pop Demon Hunters* is dynamically constructed through the tension between constraint and self-negotiation. The character of Rumi illustrates that empowerment in contemporary popular culture is often complex and conditional, shaped by the need to navigate and reinterpret dominant expectations. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how female identity and agency are represented in popular media, and they invite further research on the negotiation of agency within similar cultural contexts.

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